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Thinking, Childhood, and Time  
*Contemporary Perspectives on the  
Politics of Education*

Edited by  
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and Barbara Weber

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## *Chapter Ten*

# **Posthuman Child**

*De(con)structing Western Notions of Child Agency*

Karin Murriss

**[10.0]**

### VENTURING OF THE BEATEN (UNILINEAR) PATH OF PROGRESS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

**[10.1]**

In 2016, artist Maarten Baas created a clock in Amsterdam airport in which a workman can be seen painting the time minute by minute, accurate time, ‘real’ time.<sup>1</sup> This is the time we teach in schools. Clock time. A human construction that treats time as “determinate and singular,” “tuned to a succession of discrete moments,” “homogeneous empty time,” where “each successive moment replaces the one before it” (Barad 2018). According to feminist philosopher and quantum physicist, Karen Barad (2018, 210), clock time is “the time of capitalism, colonialism, and militarism,” but clock time is also the time of schooling, and prepares children for a neo-liberal, individually competitive workplace. It produces particular knowledges about education and what it means to be both educator and educated (Pacini-Ketchabaw 2012, 155). Elsewhere (cf Murriss and Kohan, ~~in review~~), school as chronological institution is explored with a particular focus on how schools are regulated and organized by *chronos*. Students are divided, grouped and classified on the basis of age, from curriculum construction, to assessment, to progression through an educational system that is organized chronologically from pre-school to university. Clock time shapes how we structure our school, day by day, minute by minute, second by second. We divide up the school year chronologically in months and weeks. But clock time is not universal. Some cultures express time spatially (Barad 2018, 210). As Indigenous philosopher Vine Deloria explains (cited in Barad 2010, 210):



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Once history-as-time is universalised and human beings are, so to speak, all put on the same clock, it is inevitable that in the big picture of human history some peoples will be viewed as “on time,” “ahead of time,” or “running late.” It makes little difference that the clock hands rotate in circles, for they are thought of and acted on as if they were wheels moving down a single road called progress.

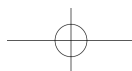
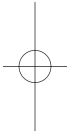
**[10.2]**

Karen Barad offers a political and material vision of history outside the temporality of this “single road called progress” (in the quote above) through her philosophy of agential realism. In this paper, Barad’s diffractive reading<sup>2</sup> of Walter Benjamin’s concepts of destruction and construction is at the heart of the agential realist methodology adopted to reconfigure child agency. Now why might this be significant for scholarship in the Global South?

**[10.3]**

Dominant developmental discourses about education in the Global South assume that education in these ‘developing’ countries needs to ‘catch up’ with the Global North on its linear path of progress. But also an alternative verb is doing the rounds. With the help of enabling technologies, it has been suggested that guided by educational experts (adults) children living in poverty can ‘leapfrog’<sup>3</sup> development. But whether catching up or leapfrogging, these particular ways of accelerating progress, either by increasing speed on a continuum or by skipping certain stages, still suggest a universal linear path that *all* individuals should follow: the universal “single road called progress” (Vine Deloria, cited in Barad 2010, 210). What is proposed in this chapter de(con)structs this single road to progress, that children supposedly have to travel. Hence, this chapter is *not* an expansion of the boundaries of a chronological perspective to child/hood as development, which as invited authors to this book we were asked in our contributions to consider. It was recommended we should do this without romanticizing (as in the case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau), but also without diminishing its existence (as in the case of Jean Piaget). However, the invitation and the overall humanist conceptualization of this book that materially envelopes this chapter is philosophically incommensurable with the posthuman subjectivity argued for as it disrupts Western notions of agency. It pushes at the boundaries of this book’s aims by ‘stirring up trouble’ in the way Donna Haraway suggests. She reminds us of our task “to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds” and “to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (Haraway 2016, 1). In this chapter, this notion of the “thick present” is a crystal picked up by Haraway’s friend and colleague, Karen Barad and the diffracted play of light inside this nonhuman body flashes up the potential to think time anew. This chapter revolves around the latter’s profound engagement with Walter Benjamin’s concept of *Jetztzeit* (now-time) in her complex and deeply inspiring

**[10.4]**





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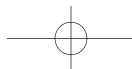
article *What Flashes Up: Theological-Political-Scientific Fragments* (2017). Thinking with/in<sup>4</sup> the concept of thick-now embraces the multiple temporalities of a relational ontology that puts our own selves as humans (of any age) at stake through a relationality that involves the nonhuman. Venturing off the beaten (unilinear) path of progress and child development, the figuration of posthuman child de(con)structs Western notions of child agency as individualized, as attributing exceptional qualities to the human through its advanced symbolic capacity and as transcending its environment (*cf.* Bandura 2008). My figuration of posthuman child (Murriss, 2016) disrupts the pervasive conception of temporality that takes development and progress as inevitable and thrives on the Culture/Nature binary. The figuration of posthuman child as natureculture phenomenon relocates agency from inside the body to relational mutual agency, from thinking contained in a mind (or brain) to thinking in movement, from individualised actions to ‘messy’ entanglements in worldly relations and invites us all to be fully present in the thick ‘now-time’ (Barad, 2017) and ‘ongoing presence’ of *kainos* (Haraway 2016, 2). Posthuman child is an opportunity to make a *quantum leap*,<sup>5</sup> rather than trying to catch up with the West or leapfrog development.

**[10.5]**

#### MULTIPLE LINEAR COEXISTING TEMPORALITIES

**[10.6]**

Dominant conceptions of time in education assume that time is like an arrow, pointing towards a future that is more progressed, further developed and extinguishing childhood (Kennedy and Kohan 2017, 49). There is no time to be intensely immersed in an event. This holds both for nations as it does for children (Burman 2008). In education, we talk about ‘school readiness’ and Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP), which is a still-dominant developmental orientation informed in particular by Piaget’s theory of cognitive development that claims to be descriptive, “natural” and “universal” (Jenks 2005, 21), but is in fact normative. It assumes that humans develop individually and innately, according to general laws, through clearly identifiable irreversible stages until the child is capable of abstract, rational, logical thought and is ‘mature’ psychologically, socially and biologically. As an adult-in-the-making, the child is supposed to leave the realm of childhood behind as she enters the realm of adulthood. This deferred hope of an adult world that awaits once grown up and out of childhood, is filled with adult projections of “memories and fantasies of a past which perhaps never was the way the adult remembers and imagines it to have been” (Bohlmann 2019, 179). Nevertheless, the child needs to live up to adults’ expectations about how she *should* grow up and develop, including how as an individual body she should *recapitulate* the development of the species from a ‘savage’ to a mature, experienced, civilised (enculturated) and rational individual (Nandy



1987; Matthews 1993). This Western process of “racial differentiation” underlies our modern understanding of child (Oswell 2013, 24) and is used as justification to treat children as savages (Rollo 2016) and “intellectual and emotional primitives” (Matthews 1993, 160).

In terms of temporality, the problem with this developmental, teleological framework is not necessarily that time is assumed to be linear. Cyclical time, for example, associated with ‘natural’ cycles and feminism, is also linear. But the concern in childhood studies is with the claimed universality, objectivity, causal sequencing, irreversibility and quantitative measurability of chronological temporality (*cf.* Honkanen 2007). Sedimented in the very core of the educational system is chronological time as a *unilinear* maturation process with its normative goal for children to grow up as quickly as they can to become an adult who think and behave according to the Western norm of adulthood: White, middle-class, male, hetero-sexual and able-bodied. According to poststructuralists and critical posthumanists, this Western norm is the root cause of structural exploitation, dehumanization of womxn, sexualized, racialized and naturalized ‘others’ (Braidotti 2013) and asymmetrical violence (Snaza and Weaver 2015). The ‘human’ is clearly a *political* category, although interestingly and of concern, *age* is not often included as a category of discrimination—only race, gender, ability and class (Murriss 2016; Jokinen and Murriss, *in review*).<sup>6</sup>

[10.7]

Barad (2018, 220) states clearly that the current notion of the linearity of time is salvageable, but requires a “radical reworking from within” and cannot, or should not, be replaced with perhaps a superior, notion of time. Barad does *not* suggest we should replace one temporality (e.g., linear) with another (e.g., circular), but what is at stake is “the undoing of time, of universal time, of the notion that moments exist one at a time, everywhere the same, and replace one another in succession” (Barad 2018, 223). Rather than replacing one for the other, which ironically, would be like falling into the trap of the logic of progress, she points out that ‘new’ and ‘old’ temporalities are already threaded through one another and cannot be separated (Barad 2018, 221). Each history, Barad argues, “coexists with the others” (Barad, 2018, 220). So, what is at stake is a disruption of *unilinear* time, not linear time per se. After all, Barad’s methodology of diffraction is also based on linearity: “not a linearity of moments or events evenly distributed *in* time, but a linear combination *of* (different) times” (Barad 2018, 220). The creation of diffraction patterns is also at the heart of her methodology of de(con)struction.

[10.8]



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**[10.9]**

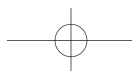
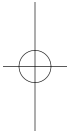
## DE(CON)STRUCTION: DIFFRACTIVELY READING QUANTUM FIELD THEORY THROUGH QUEER THEORY

**[10.10]**

For Walter Benjamin, *destruction* is the condition of the possibility of *construction*. He speaks of the methodological need to “blast open the continuum of history,” a kind of destruction from an explosive device that is an essential ingredient for the possibility of “construction” (Barad 2017, 22). Barad’s diffractive reading of the Kabbalah, quantum physics and Benjamin (in particular, Judy Butler’s commentary on his philosophy (Barad 2017, 38) generates her methodology of *de(con)struction* as the ‘superposition’ or ‘interference pattern’. In order to understand the de(con)structed meanings of terms like ‘superposition’, ‘interference pattern’, ‘diffraction’ and de(con)struction as methodology, it is necessary to pay attention to Barad’s methodology of diffractively reading texts through one another as a feminist alternative to critique (*cf.* Murriss and Bozalek, 2019). Hence, diffraction is both the methodology in Barad’s scholarship as the content or focus of the philosophical inquiry. Diffraction was introduced by Haraway (1988), and then developed further by Barad (2007, 2014) as a methodology through an intra-active reading of poststructuralism and quantum physics through one another. The methodology enacts new patterns of engagement and attends to exclusions that matter (Barad 2010, 243). The Baradian point is not to simply include matters of race, gender, sexuality, disability or age in one’s reading of quantum physics, but to take seriously how power is understood in science studies (Barad, 2007, 58). Social variables such as age, gender, class and so on, are not properties of individual people, but they discursively and materially constitute the subject ontologically. Barad’s significant contribution<sup>7</sup> to transdisciplinary theory as well as practice is to see the *ontological* implications of what Haraway and quantum physicist Niels Bohr thought were mainly *epistemological* issues.

**[10.11]**

Diffraction patterns, which are formed when waves overlap, hold for water waves, as well as sound waves, or light waves (Barad 2007, 74), but importantly, also for *matter*—“a queer experimental finding” (Barad 2014, 173). Bohr’s famous two-slit diffraction experiment (Barad 2007, 81–84) made evident that under certain conditions light behaves like a particle (as Newton thought) and under other conditions it behaves like a wave, described by Bohr’s influential complementarity theory. In other words, electrons are neither particles nor waves, that is, wave and particle are not inherent attributes of objects, but the “nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the apparatus” that measures it (Barad 2007, 106). Electrons and the differences ‘between’ them are neither here nor there, this or that, one or the other or any other binary type of difference. And what holds for an electron also holds for a human animal (Barad 2014, 174–175), because “‘macro’ and ‘micro’ worlds . . . are concepts that already





presume a given spatial scale” (Barad 2010, 240).<sup>8</sup> Instead of judging Barad’s agential realism through the apparatus of modern science, it is salient to do justice to the fact that Barad’s influential theorypractice is ‘meeting the universe halfway’—the title of her generative book from 2007 (see below and endnote 6). For example, Barad’s ‘agential realism’ is not like a Western realism that presupposes the subject/object and therefore culture/nature binary (see, e.g. Pinch 2011, and Barad 2011 [her response to Pinch]). The book itself is her diffractive reading of quantum physics through the social sciences and in particular queer theory. Unlike mainstream traditional physicist, science studies scholars are interested in investigating how laboratory practices produce the objects of their practices and how knowledge-discourse-power practices play a constitutive role in the production of phenomena (Barad 2007, 56–57).

Intrinsic to Barad’s agential realism, is her claim that epistemological indeterminacy is at the very same time ontological. Instead of things<sup>9</sup> and substances, “the fundamental constituents that make up the world” (Barad 2007, 72) are diffraction patterns, that is, patterns of difference that make a difference. The term “diffraction” here is a feminist materialist term and should not be confused with the classical physics term of ‘diffraction’. In an interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012, 52), Barad explains that:

[10.12]

Diffraction, understood using quantum physics, is not just a matter of interference, but of *entanglement*, an ethico-on-epistemological matter. This difference is very important. It underlines the fact that *knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart*, where [agential] cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility. There is not this knowing from a distance. Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the “*phenomenon*.” Objectivity, instead of being about offering an undistorted mirror image of the world, is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglement of which we are a part.

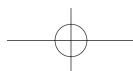
[10.13]

In a relational ontology, a body is not different to something outside itself. Barad argues that the idea that quantum mechanics needs the existence of an outside observer is a misconception (Barad 2007, 351). Any scientific description already occurs from within, because there is no outside to the universe. She explains: “*only part of the world can be made intelligible to itself at a time, because the other part of the world has to be the part that it makes a difference to*” (Barad 2007, 351; italics in the original).

[10.14]

In other words, not individual entities (as in a substance ontology), but phenomena (as in a relational ontology) populate the world. This is an important insight for de(con)structing child subjectivity and agency—the aim of this chapter. The key idea here is that the ontological ‘furniture of the world’

[10.15]







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does not comprise of *things* but of *diffraction patterns, entanglements and phenomena*. Hence, words and concepts denote entangled relationships (‘intra-actions’), rather than individual objects or bodies (that interact with one another). Jumping ahead in writing, the concept ‘child’ also denotes a phenomenon, that includes, but is not limited to, the young fleshy human body moving around in a Newtonian space/time container. In other words, posthuman child is a *phenomenon* that includes the actual child, but with/in the ‘thick present’.

**[10.16]**

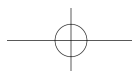
DE(CON)STRUCTION UNILINEAR TIME

**[10.17]**

Barad’s diffractive reading of Walter Benjamin’s concept of *Jetztzeit*, generates a “thick sense of multiple historicities and temporalities that exist in any given moment (Barad 2017, 76, fn 1). De(con)structing unilinear time blasts open dualisms and dichotomies involving child and childhood. Barad explains that “the quantum understanding of diffraction troubles the very notion of *dicho-tomy*—cutting into two—as a singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then” (Barad 2014, 168). Dichotomies (from the Greek διχοτομία) derive from particular ‘agential cuts’,<sup>10</sup> therefore differences are not found, but made and their production needs to be queered (Barad 2012, 77–78). Barad proposes diffraction as a ‘cutting together-apart’,<sup>11</sup> as one move, to trouble and queer dichotomies. To queer is not a fixed, determinate term with a stable meaning and referential context (Barad 2012, 81), but it is the ethico-political practice of radically questioning identity and binaries (Barad 2012, 81). As a research methodology, diffraction moves beyond power-producing binaries, such as mind/body, culture/nature, subject/object, animate/inanimate, social/physical, White/Black, settler/colonizer, and of particular importance here, adult/child. Diffraction means “to break apart in different directions” (Barad 2014, 168). Especially relevant for this paper is how her responsible reading of texts,<sup>12</sup> by putting Butler, Bohr, Benjamin and the Kabbalah in conversation with one another, creates the theorypractice of de(con)structing unilinear time by *quantum leaping*. Unlike common usage, a quantum leap is not a “large leap forward,” but “very small,” although importantly (as a matter of fact) size is irrelevant: “The important point about a quantum leap is not its size but the fact that an object disappears from one place and winds up in another without being at any point in between” (Barad 2007, 432 fn45). Barad (2007, 182) explains that:

**[10.18]**

Quantum leaps aren’t jumps (large or small) through space and time [. . .] What makes a quantum leap unlike any other is that there is no determinate answer to the question of where and when they happen [. . .] if the indeterminate nature of existence by its nature teeters on the cusp of stability and instability,





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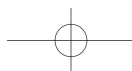
of determinacy and indeterminacy, of possibility and impossibility, then the dynamic relationality between continuity and discontinuity is crucial to the open-ended becoming of the world which resists acausality as much as determinism.

In agential realism, quantum leaping means a radical break in continuity—so profound that there is no break between continuity and discontinuity at all (Barad 2017, 43). Quantum dis/continuity, Barad stipulates, “troubles the very notion of dichotomy—the cutting into two—itsself (including the notion of ‘itself!’)” (Barad 2010, 246). The in ‘between’ is neither temporal, nor spatial. In agential realism, bodies are not located in Newtonian space and move through time, but time is “unmoored,” anchorless and brought into existence through relational material-discursive practices (Barad 2017, 44). Bodies are unbounded phenomena, not locatable ‘containers’ with insides and outsides in space and time.<sup>13</sup> Epistemologically, the challenge for human bodies (subjects) is to sense prelinguistic realities and not start with time and space as ontological givens from the outset to categorise an objectified world (and this includes the common distinction between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ worlds as “flat-footed analogies” [Barad 2010, 240]). Knowledge production involves making agential cuts that are part of the world we always already find ourselves in with other nonhuman critters (Haraway 1988, 2016)—a ‘cutting together apart’. Differentiating and entangling are one move as part of worlding processes. This involves a radical rethinking of causality and agency through multiple unilinear temporalities that also make postdevelopmental notions of child development possible (*cf.* Murriss 2019; Haynes and Murriss 2019).

**[10.19]**

De(con)struction involves a radical rethinking of the kind of intentionality and agency that is celebrated in Western thought. Quantum leaping opens up possibilities to de(con)struct agency as also including nonhuman matter—the indeterminacies open up a space of possibilities entailed in exclusions (Barad 2007, 182). Our ability as humans to ‘look forward’ has become entangled with what it means to be human: a superior species with ‘agency’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘intentionality’, setting us ontologically apart from and above nonhumans in the order of things (Tsing 2015, 21). At the same time, Barad admits<sup>14</sup> that posthumanism is not a ‘post’—humanism, in the sense of a leaving of humanism behind with all its achievements in terms of rights, gained by previously (and still) marginalised groups of people, or on behalf of nonhuman animals.

**[10.20]**





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**[10.21]**

THE 'POST' IN POSTHUMANISM,  
LANGUAGE AND ADULT EXCEPTIONALISM

**[10.22]**

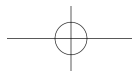
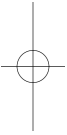
Barad (2017, 78 fn 26) writes that she first used the term 'posthumanist' in 2002 to indicate that posthumanism is "*not* about moving beyond the human," so in that sense the 'post' in posthumanism is not a 'post' in the sense of 'after' at all (chronologically speaking). Similarly, Nicholas Burbules' suggests that postmodernism is not an '-ism' at all, but a *condition*, a critical attitude and "an ambivalent and ambiguous internal relation to modernity, not outgrowing or surpassing it" (Burbules 2009, 525). The postmodern condition is famously defined by Jean Francois Lyotard (1984, xxiv) and simplified as an ". . . incredulity toward metanarratives." Incredulity refers to the inability to put one's faith in grand or 'master' narratives. Instead, a field of contending smaller narratives is proposed by postmodernists who accept the incommensurability of differences, challenge fixed and stable identities, focus on the power-producing binaries that characterize human interactions and accept the limits of language and discourses in understanding the world.

**[10.23]**

Posthumanism resonates in important ways with postmodernism, but Barad makes a radical claim about the need 'to meet the universe halfway' (also see above). Language, she says, has been granted too much power and puts humans above other matter in reality and thereby limits agency to the domain of human social practices. It not only neglects all other non-human forces that are at play, but also the 'The Hundred Languages' of children.

**[10.24]**

Loris Malaguzzi's poem of 'The Hundred Languages'<sup>15</sup> came out of a political discussion in the 1970s in Italy when a group of formal and informal educators (mainly women) collaboratively set up the now famous Reggio Emilia preschools. The poem is a provocation to bring to public attention the need to investigate the reasons for, and consequences, of privileging only two languages in education: reading and writing. The metaphor refers at one (practical) level to the introduction of material-discursive tools for learning in schools, such as visual arts, physical movement, video, digital cameras, augmented realities and computers. At a symbolic level, the hundred languages are, as Carla Rinaldi (2006, 175) puts it: a "metaphor for crediting children and adults with a hundred, a thousand creative and communicative potentials." Resistance to including the other languages are not just issues of power, they are metaphysical (and the two are entangled). Language has been too substantializing, bringing into existence figurations of child as substance with essence, as if the subject-predicate structure of language reflects an ontology: independently existing child *with* competencies or attributes. But language has been granted excessive power in determining what is real, and has instilled a deep mistrust of matter, figuring it as mute, passive, immutable (Barad 2007, 133). Language and discourse have positioned us, human animals, as thinkers above or outside the (material) world, and with that same





move have distanced us, ‘fully-human’ adults, from both matter *and* child (and other so-called ‘illiterates’).

Philosopher of childhood David Kennedy (1989) compares child with the historical Fool—both are marginal to the adult hegemonic scientific Cartesian world-picture that favours language and literacy and a particular kind of rationality and subject/world relationship (one that is mediated through literacy). The oral, aural and the visual is the domain of child or the artist, where no real knowledge is located. What once was a fairly universal cognitive style has become peculiar to young children (Kennedy 1989, 374).

**[10.25]**

Meeting the universe halfway involves complexifying knowledge construction by acknowledging the role of The Hundred Languages, hence matter, as part of a de(con)structed notion of agency as relational and mutually entangled. Barad’s ‘*Meeting the Universe Halfway*’ book (2007) is itself a good example of a bringing together and a creating something radically new in terms of subjectivity through a diffractive reading of queer studies (social sciences) and quantum physics (natural sciences). This entanglement in between the social and the natural is clear through the opening sentences in the preface:

**[10.26]**

This book is about entanglements. To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. (Barad 2007, ix)

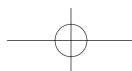
**[10.27]**

For Barad, quantum entanglements are not about the intertwining of two (or more) things or events, but far more “ghostly”: “a calling into question of the very nature of two-ness, and ultimately of one-ness as well” (Barad 2010, 251). One of the refreshing, non-anthropocentric insight that emerges is the idea that nonhuman bodies are not inherently different from human bodies—unlike most theories about the human in the social sciences and humanities. After all, as *a matter of fact* human bodies are constituted by nonhuman bodies: cells, water, blood, molecules, atoms etc. (Barad 2007, 153). Indeed, what does set a human body apart from a nonhuman body?

**[10.28]**

Barad (2007, 153) points out that what constitutes the human is neither fixed, nor pre-given. She explains that “distinguishing cuts must enter into the frame of analysis rather than beginning the analysis *after* these divisions are made” (Barad 2017, 78 fn 26). If indeed researchers would avoid already assuming what it means to be human in theory construction, political praxis and scientific practices, human exceptionalism would become more obvious. In the case of childhood studies and the focus of this chapter, adults also need to resist assuming what it means to be child *before* their analyses. It is then that *human adult* exceptionalism also becomes visible! What it means to be child (as a philosophical concept) is assumed in most teacher education pro-

**[10.29]**





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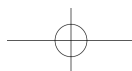
grammes that prepare students for the profession. These higher education curricula tend to focus on inducting students into the subject areas that they will need to teach when qualified. They do not explicitly work with the notions of child and childhood student teachers already bring to their studies. However, the concepts of child and childhood are not only historically contingent, they are also culturally and philosophically problematic (Matthews, 1994). In order to de(con)struct the concept ‘child’, we return to the question above and phrase it slightly differently: ‘What sets a child body apart from a nonhuman body?’

**[10.30]** DE(CON)STRUCTING CHILD WITH/IN TIME

**[10.31]** Not only does physics tell us that bodies are porous with indeterminate boundaries, visually it is also impossible to tell where, for example, a child hand ends and the ~~Leg~~o brick they are holding starts (especially at micro-level). This is even more complicated in the case of a technological object, such as a phone, iPad or GoPro I am holding or wearing (for an in-depth discussion about the identity of Stephen Hawking’s as an example, see Murrin 2016, 55–56). So how can we construct other, more ethical, less human adult-centric ways of relating to one another that takes account of multiple linear coexisting temporalities and also includes the agentic role of the non-human? How can the methodology of de(con)struction assist us with that endeavor?

**[10.32]** As we have seen, for Benjamin, *destruction* is the condition of the possibility of *construction*. What *flashes up*, crystallizes, in the breaking up of the continuum of history as a political act is “a material de(con)struction of the continuum of history” (Barad 2017, 23)—a powerful methodology in the context of childhood as a blasting open of the linear continuum of personal histories! Such de(con)struction brings the “energetics of the past into the present and vice versa” (Barad 2017, 23). In the case of child/hood, the explosive nature of such an entanglement of past, present and future offers exciting possibilities because it brings the potential for justice to the fore.<sup>16</sup> Breaking down ideologies of progress and the unilinear direction of history, justice is not about human-centered hope projected into an imagined future (cf Marxism), but “the potential for justice [that] exists in the thick-now of the present moment—Benjamin’s “now-time” (Barad 2017, 21). Barad (2017, p. 22) explains the political, philosophical and methodological implications:

**[10.33]** The radical political potential that exists in the thick-now of this moment requires thinking time anew—diffracting the past through the present moment, like the play of light inside a crystal.



Barad's use of a crystal is not merely metaphorical, a figurative way of speaking, but thinking is a material-discursive activity that is non-representational and sediments the world, *literally*. A worlding practice in fact. Theory and experimentation are dynamic practices of material engagement with/in the world (Barad, 2007, 55). So, if this is true, how does de(con)struction work in the case of child with/in time?

[10.34]

As part of her agential realism, Barad (2007, 91) argues for an *objectivity* that is accountable to the "specific materializations of which we are a part," and that the diffractive methodology is *attentive to the finest details* and "makes manifest the extraordinarily liveliness of the world," that includes, but is not limited to, the psychological, the biological or the social and includes the material.

[10.35]

De(con)struction ruptures and blasts open the temporality of a continuous and unilinear unfolding of children's abilities and capacities in terms of universal stages and sequential age-bound phases they supposedly have to develop through. Unlike the clock time of developmentalism, in the thick-now of each moment and threaded through each person *is* already their situated childhood as well as their future and the present—"times are bleeding through one another" (Barad 2018, 220). De(con)struction brings forth a posthuman reconfiguration of child subjectivity and involves a radical rethinking of the kind of intentionality, memory and agency that is celebrated in Western thought. It might be helpful to briefly look at an example of an agentic theory of self to ground this enquiry.

[10.36]

Bandura (2008, 16) puts forward the idea that "to be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances." The core properties of human agency he puts forward show clearly the anthropocentric and human exceptionalism of his Enlightenment notion of the subject. The agent has the following properties: it has intentionality, can project itself into the future, can self-regulate and self-reflect. The meta-cognitive ability of the human subject is enabled through the use of symbolic languages that make it possible for an agent to be self-conscious and transcend its immediate environment (Bandura 2008, 15–17).

[10.37]

Bandura's very popular and oft-cited conception of agency postulates the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life as the essence of humanness. It assumes that the world consists of autonomous, intentional and rational human actors against *the backdrop* of the natural environment. Children's rights discourses are also based on this Western individualised and developmental notion of agency. As Hayles (1999) explains it strikingly, information has lost its body, that is, ideas are now conceptualised as disembodied and separate from the human and nonhuman bodies that carry it. And as we have already seen, Barad's diffractive reading of quantum physics (so not using the *human eye* as a paradigm for knowing) shows that there is an "inherent ambiguity of bodily boundaries." Hence, it is

[10.38]



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impossible to say that a (human) body *has* agency (Barad 2007, 155). This unsettling of agency with/in Western thinking itself as not something subjects ‘have’, invites us to de(con)struct who and what a young human is and how she relates to ‘the’ world.

**[10.39]**

CHILD AS PHENOMENON AND KAINOS

**[10.40]**

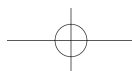
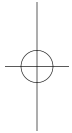
What ‘flashes up’ through the figure of posthuman child is what Benjamin would regard as a release of ‘the enormous energy of history’ as it blasts away developmentalism by doing justice to the crystallization of past-present-future in ‘now-time’. Rupturing unilinear time and the Newtonian notion of space-as-container, the explosive methodology of de(con)struction expresses the subject as an unbounded phenomenon. Understanding child as a human/nonhuman entanglement helps to move away from deficit discourses about child and childhood as it *decenters* child as a *being* (with a stable personality, characteristics and essence) whose *age* determines her abilities.

**[10.41]**

Posthuman child<sup>17</sup> is always in a process of becoming *with/in* others and *with/in* the world. Decentering the child unsettles voice and identity as something humans ‘have’ with agency as something inside and outside the acting human body at the very same time. Posthuman child does not exist as a distinct entity prior to her intra-actions but emerges through material and discursive intra-actions: cells, atoms, wind, fibers, dust, metal, skin, ant legs, soil, paper, government, concepts, policies, language, touch, atmosphere, and so forth.<sup>18</sup> The figuration of posthuman child resists erasures between past and futures. Understanding child-adult as an entanglement helps to move away from deficit discourses about child and childhood as it decenters the child as a *being*. Instead, posthumanists regard child as a dis/embodyed and dis/embedded *becoming*.<sup>19</sup> The shift in subjectivity is not a denial that there are individual children who exist but the reconfiguration resists erasures between past and futures. The past and the future are always already threaded through the present. Childhood is not something adults leave behind. We thus focus on all the *relations* child is part of, material and social, and not on the ‘individual’ child only. Moreover, posthuman child is also the *actual* child, that is, an entity in the making (not just a potentiality or abstraction), but also *fleshy* and *real*.

**[10.42]**

The point of the de(con)struction has not been to include the category of children in what it means to be ‘fully-human’, but to disrupt inside/outside binaries altogether and to think subjectivity with/in the vital force of life and as not limited to the subjectivity of the socio-cultural subject with language and intentions, but through sense and empathy with/in others (Rolnik, 2017). This post-Cartesian position relocates agency from inside the body to mutual







agency, from thinking contained in a mind (or brain) to thinking in movement, from individualised actions to ‘messy’ entanglements in worldly relations.

Donna Haraway (2016, 1) insists that staying with the trouble does not require a particular relationship to times called the future, but requires “to be truly present” in *kainos*. She explains, that *kainos* means ‘now’, in the Benjamin sense of “‘thick’, ongoing presence” (Haraway 2016, 2). This is radically different from empty homogeneous theories of time that are imposed on children when we think about their (unilinear) development from the outside and as something that happens to them. *Kainos* is not empty, but “full of inheritances, of remembering, and full of comings, of nurturing what might still be” (Haraway 2016, 2).

[10.43]

### THINKING WITH/IN THE INHUMAN

[10.44]

The developmental framework with child at its centre is clearly far from innocent. Child-centredness camouflages human adult-centrism in that it makes sure “that children grow up to the status quo of the adult” (Bohlmann and Hickey-Moody 2019, 1). The teleology of growing up points at child’s successful passage through developmental stages in chronological time acquiring an adult mind-set.

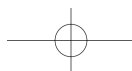
[10.45]

Barad (2012, 8) insists that the “really hard work” of researchers is to take account of, and become sensitive to, the “inhuman—the liminality of no/thingness—in all its aliveness/liveliness[. . .].” The inhuman, she writes, “is threaded through and lived through us” and that is what we must face when living responsibly and justly (Barad 2012, 10). Importantly, embracing the inhuman is not an erasure of difference between adult and child, or a flattening of boundaries between human and the more-than-human, or extending the boundaries of the human and letting child ‘in’, but signals “a transformation of humanism from within” (Truman 2019, 5). Thinking with/in the inhuman “points to the violence that the category of the human contains within itself” (Luciano and Chen quoted in Truman 2019, 5).

[10.46]

The inclusion of the material world in what *matters*, ontologically, epistemically and ethically problematizes the idea that agency is generated from within the human as, for example, in child-centered education. De(con)structing the humanist subject proposes *relational ontologies*, reconfiguring subjectivity and more akin to Indigenous scholarship and ways of living, the mutual entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds as sites of complex, messy relations with in/determinate openings to *affectivity*. This requires from the human a different kind of ‘listening’, not only with the organ ear, but also by focussing on what is invisible and perhaps cannot be

[10.47]







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articulated and a response-ability for what is included and excluded (e.g., ancestors, land)(*cf.* Murriss and Haynes, 2018).

**[10.48]**

By adopting de(con)struction as methodology, space is made for postdevelopmental perspectives on child/hood that do not separate nature ontologically from culture (see also Murriss 2018; Haynes and Murriss 2019). Since the major challenge of our contemporary planet is that “progress stopped making sense,” there is an urgent need to unravel our deeply embedded notions of mastery over nature and a need to learn to “look around rather than ahead” (Tsing 2015, 25). We also need to resist mastery over a future as unilinear, universal and singular (Jokinen and Murriss, ~~in print~~). Barad (2007, x-xi) writes beautifully about the passionate yearning for justice enfolded in the core of her being—a yearning that is also larger than any set of individuals. Justice is about doing justice to our entanglements, that is the connections we always already find ourselves in ontologically and the responsibilities we have to one another (including the nonhuman). For Barad (2007, x), ‘meetings’ also include the more-than-human, the ‘social’ *and* the ‘natural’, humans as well as rocks, plastic and computers:

**[10.49]**

There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting.

**[10.50]**

FUNDING

**[10.51]**

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**[10.52]**

NOTES

**[10n1]**

1. See: <http://maartenbaas.com/real-time/schiphol-clock/>Maarten Baas combines art, theatre, and film in his clock designs.

**[10n2]**

2. What is involved in a diffractive reading of texts is explained below.

**[10n3]**

3. See:<https://www.brookings.edu/research/learning-to-leapfrog/>

**[10n4]**

4. The forward slash ‘/’ is a linguistic way of expressing in/determinacy. Something is neither here, not there. It is a ‘cutting together-apart’ from within a relational ontology (see in particular: Barad 2014 and also in the text below).

**[10n5]**

5. For a further exploration of this idea, see below.

**[10n6]**

6. Posthumanists tend to focus more on the nonhuman animal (Donna Haraway), gender, race and class (Rosi Braidotti), and matter (Karen Barad). For example, youth is understood by Braidotti (2009, 526) as an ideal, like health, whiteness, masculinity and normality on which the metaphysics of otherness rests. But she must have meant with ‘young’, ‘young people in their teens’, because since orality was replaced by literacy and the printed word, child has become (like Indigenous peoples) an outsider to western adult culture—an ontological ‘other’ (Kennedy 2010, 6). Braidotti is a strong voice in the so-called ontological, affective or posthu-





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man turn and the invisibility of age as category of exclusion positions child as outsider to the posthuman project. But rather than writing child into the posthuman project, I propose that the figuration of posthuman child is an open invitation to de(con)struct the ideal of the fully-human and explore in many of my writings the implications of what counts as knowledge (cf. Murriss 2016; Murriss 2017; Murriss 2019; Murriss and Haynes, 2018; Haynes and Murriss, 2019).

7. One way of measuring impact is to track Google scholar citations. To date, Karen Barad’s influential book *Meeting the Universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (2007) has already been cited 8330 times.

8. See endnote 13.

9. Unless with ‘things’ is meant not a discrete object, but assemblages of humans and nonhumans as, for example, Actor Network Theorists (ANT) argue as being essential for the efficacy of scientific practices (Barad, 2007, 56).

10. All research is what Barad (2007, 183) calls “an apparatus”—a *doing*, not a thing and involves *agential cuts*. Agential cuts are specific intra-actions and therefore boundary-making practices. Barad (2007, 148) explains: “apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering.” Apparatuses enact *agential cuts* that produce determinate boundaries and properties of “entities” within phenomena. Agential cuts are about matter and meaning at the very same time. Boundaries become determinate through the agential cuts.

11. See also endnote 4.

12. A diffractive reading of texts is philosophically (ontologically, epistemologically and ethically) very different from ‘critique’ with the latter’s assumptions about bounded individualism and competitiveness between humans. For a detailed discussion, see: Murriss and Bozalek, 2019.

13. The quantum distinguishes Newtonian physics from quantum physics. For agential realists it is not the case that the way the quantum world ‘behaves’ with all its leaps and indeterminacy only holds for the world at micro-level and not for normal events. Barad (2017, 44) points out that “The attempts to safeguard the everyday from the queerness of quantum phenomena is merely an instance of queerphobia, not an empirical fact.”

14. In personal conversation with Karen Barad at a seminar organised by my *Decolonising Early Childhood Discourses: Critical Posthumanism in Higher Education* (DECD) research project ([www.decolonizingchildhood.org](http://www.decolonizingchildhood.org)) in Cape Town in June 2017.

15. The poem read out in Italian with subtitles by Carla Rinaldi, can be found on <https://vimeo.com/124748961>

16. Karen Barad (2007, p.438 fn 84) explicitly refers to Jacques Derrida’s notion of ‘historiality’ as a more appropriate term than ‘historicity’ to indicate that time is an ‘operator, not a parameter’. Barad’s idea that identity is performed, rather than given builds on Derrida’s notion of performativity and after him Judith Butler’s (see Barad, 2007, p.413 fn39).

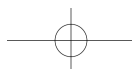
17. The figuration of posthuman child is a shift from thinking about children as smaller and younger bodies in space and time (the Newtonian container), but without discarding the human subject altogether. I previously published on the reconfiguration of the posthuman child through a series of neologisms, linguistic expressions of important ontological shifts (see Murriss 2016; Chapter 4).

18. See this further explained in my Posthuman Child Manifesto (2018) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikN-LGhBawQ>).

19. The ‘dis/’ expresses the entanglement between past, present and future as the past and the future are always already threaded through the present.

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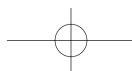




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