

## Chapter 3

### The ‘Missing Peoples’ of Critical Posthumanism and New Materialism

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#### Abstract

This chapter responds to arguments claiming that posthumanists are unaware of their own location and make universalising claims about ‘the’ human while silent about past and present non-western or Indigenous scholarship, children’s philosophising and their way of life. They are thereby perpetuating coloniality and ontoepistemic injustice. Focusing on the implications for research practices, three examples from practice are woven through, making existing connections explicit between the so-called ‘missing peoples’ of posthumanism: Indigenous peoples and young children. This chapter’s multilayered text investigates posthuman relationality and the ‘missing peoples’ of critical posthumanism in the context of ontoepistemic injustice. My proposal is that young children’s animistic philosophising helps to disrupt the western humanist colonising binaries such as those between science and religion, matter and meaning, heaven and earth, alive and dead, human and nonhuman. Doing justice to age-less animistic thinking has unsettling implications for postqualitative research, not only in education and the critical posthumanities, but across disciplines in higher education.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Indigenous peoples; child; childhood studies; decolonisation; postqualitative research; diffractive methodology; ontoepistemic injustice

#### The ‘missing peoples’ on Braidotti’s list

Rosi Braidotti (2018) writes about the “missing peoples” of humanism, the “real-life subjects whose knowledge never made it into any of the official cartographies” (p.21). The liberating ethical task *we* face, she urges, is to help turn painful experiences of missing peoples’ “inexistence into generative relational encounters and knowledge production” (p.21).

But who or what is included in Braidotti's 'we'? Who or what is the 'we' of postqualitative research that draws on posthumanism and new materialism? And how can childhood studies play a part in the future(s) of the humanities?

Carol Taylor in chapter one, refers to the critique by Black, antiracist and Indigenous scholars about the Whiteness of much postqualitative, new materialist and posthumanist scholarship and the need for White academics to engage with "the geopolitical materialisation of racialised modes of knowledge production as an ethical and political imperative". Simone Fullagar in chapter six, argues that "feminists have long pursued alternatives to dominant ways of knowing that have excluded women (and nature), especially the embodied knowledge of women of colour and Indigenous peoples whose cosmologies do not rest upon the binary thinking of western imperialism". Hackett, MacLure and Pahl (2020) summarise concerns expressed by feminist and decolonial scholars about posthuman theory. It includes the oft-heard and important argument in the South that "the category of the human is being dissolved at a time when many are still struggling to have their humanity recognised" (p.6). Indeed, the posthuman critique of what counts as 'human' and who, and what, is excluded, is critical when navigating the postqualitative turn in higher education. Braidotti (2018, p.8) observes how a "critical posthumanities" has emerged that is critical of the "human implicitly upheld by the academic humanities". The posthuman has positively generated "a number of creative trans-disciplinary hubs, which have generated their own extra-disciplinary offspring" (p.8). On Braidotti's list are: "Women's, gay and lesbian, gender, feminist and queer studies; race, postcolonial and subaltern studies, alongside cultural studies, film, television and media studies...science and technology studies...health and disability studies...media studies" (p.8). But omitted from her list is childhood studies – "a multidisciplinary academic field focused on childhood and the everyday lives of children" (Rosen, 2020, p.2). And this omission is the focus of this chapter. Even when posthumanists refer to the phrase 'human exceptionalism' as something to be disrupted, they tend to assume adult humans of a particular age and their claim to knowledge, but they do not include young children and their knowledge claims.

Since it emerged in the late 1980s, scholars in childhood studies have argued that the norm of the 'fully-human' by which child is measured is also assumed to be of a particular (adult) *age* (Burman, 1994; Cannella and Viruru, 2004; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999/2013; Fendler, 1998; Jenks, 1996; Walkerdine, 1988). But there is a troublesome silence about age as

category of exclusion in the general posthumanism literature. Despite the fact that the posthumanist movement in early childhood has been a leader in the posthuman theorising of educational theory and practice (Somerville, 2020), child as category of exclusion and positioned as not fully-human is hardly ever mentioned by the key theorists that have inspired posthuman, new materialist and postqualitative research.

The posthuman movement in early childhood started in the Nordic Countries, Australia and New Zealand. It is no coincidence that these countries are also most active in pursuing research on outdoor education and sustainable development (Ritchie, 2012). The figure of the child is often theorised as a lever to reconfigure the humanist notion of “human” and reconnect “the broken bond with the more-than-human world (including, among other things, nature)” (Lindgren & Oehrfelt, 2020, p. 24). The ground-breaking role of childhood studies and the intricate connection (as I argue in this chapter) some childhood scholars make between race and childhood should be part of the critical posthumanities. Like many of the other chapters in different ways, this chapter also centres around the ontological turn, or better put, the ontological *re*-turn and how critical posthumanist, new materialist and postqualitative research runs the risk of including ‘some’ more than ‘others’. The following insights arise:

- Posthuman child(hood) scholars critically insert ‘child’ as still missing in Braidotti’s list of ‘missing peoples’
- Decolonisation has at least a double meaning: race and childhood are intricately entangled and research across higher education benefits from (Indigenous) children’s animistic philosophising
- To exclude childhood studies from the critical posthumanities is a matter of ontoepistemic injustice

### **The human of Western metaphysics**

In various publications and open access YouTube videos, Braidotti argues in her passionate presentation style, that the question ‘What is the human?’ should be of concern to humanities scholars. The question is a critical one, she says, and should not be left only to scientists who

study life, such as biologists and anthropologists. What humanities researchers need to expose, she continues, is how this normative concept is socio-culturally specific, not universal, and “indexes access to power”<sup>1</sup>. The concept human is far from neutral, Braidotti points out, and is intrinsically racialised, sexualised and genderised<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, what it means to be human (identity) tends to be put in terms of criteria of difference – often by contrasting humans with animals. What sets humans apart? Rationality? Play? Humour? Self-reflection?

Unfortunately, overly simplified conceptions of what counts as animal, as well as human, tend to be used to define the human. For postqualitative researchers the human materialises, over time, through continuous and repetitive processes of enacting specific norms that become internalised. However, these specific norms of what makes a human (set against what constitutes an animal) brings structurally into existence the less-than-fully-human (Snaza, 2013, p.41). Indeed, the critical question in terms of power seems to be ‘Am I human enough?’, which is of particular importance for research with children.

As Western philosophers from Plato to Kant have argued, a conception of the human is both an ontological starting point as well as the *telos* of all phases of education and the reason for its existence. And as Nathan Snaza (2013, p.41; my italics) points out: the “structural gap between the not yet fully human animal and the human that is education’s *telos* allows for *dehumanization* to become a fundamental political fact of modernity”. But it is Canadian Toby Rollo who makes the connection explicit between colonialism and childhood (access Figure 2 below). The idea of a *telos* of progress from animal child to human adult is both a historical and conceptual antecedent of the idea of European civilization, prefiguring its stories about maturation and progress from cultural ignorance to enlightenment. Childhood, time and multiple temporalities are intricately connected (Murriss & Kohan, 2020). The ancient conception of the degraded, not fully human, child – ‘misopedy’ – is the internal logic that has made colonial superiority (the colonial denial of full humanity) and the notion of the ontological ‘other’ possible (Rollo, 2018, p. 61). Misopedy denotes “a non-clinical sense of antipathy towards children and childhood” (Rollo, 2018, 16ftn 2), which might explain the way in which childhood research is listened to and often not taken seriously in other disciplines in higher education<sup>3</sup>. But misopedy also includes “all feral children of civilization, including white European ancestors” (Rollo, 2018, p. 61). The lesser-human is seen as a nonhuman animal: primitive, irrational and immature – like a child in fact (misopedy). The binary logic and substance ontology of Western metaphysics underpins

colonialism and colonising notions of relationships between humans, and between humans and more-than-humans (Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 here]

**Table 1. Western colonising relationships**

<b>Colonising relationships</b>			
Relationships between individuals	<b>humans and ‘lesser’ humans</b>	<b>humans and other animals</b>	<b>humans and the material world</b>
Binary logic  Power-producing binary opposites	Man/woman  Able/disabled  Middle class/working class; Rich/poor  White/black  Adult/child	Culture/Nature  Rational Man/irrational woman  Sophisticated/primitive human  Mature/immature young human	Subject/object;  Alive/dead;  Animate/inanimate;  Body/spirit (e.g. ancestors)

Colonialism has instilled a non-relational ontology and competitive, individualised subjectivity that continue to regard people, land and knowledge as property (Patel, 2016). Coloniality remains when colonial administrations have left but continue to dictate long-

standing everyday hierarchical patterns of power. Moreover, “superiority is premised on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.244). What it means to be ‘human’ is defined in relation to what it means to be ‘animal’: ‘rational’, sophisticated (‘tamed’), and mature (see: Table 1). The Culture/Nature binary provides the logic for the exclusion of the irrational, wild and immature (see, for example, how children tend to be referred to and understood theoretically; access Figure 3.1). The power differentials are expressed through binary logic where the human on the left hand side of the forward slash has power over the human on the right hand side: Man/woman, Able/disabled, Middle class/working class, Rich/poor, White/black and argued for in this chapter, also Adult/child.

Decolonising research involves an examination of the various ways in which coloniality manifests itself in the production and communication of knowledge and meaning-making (Patel, 2016). Sundberg (2014, p.34) argues that ‘decolonisation’ means “exposing the ontological violence authorised by Eurocentric epistemologies both in scholarship and everyday life”. In the seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwah Smith argues that research through “imperial eyes” assumes that Western rationality is the only legitimate way of making sense of the world, including human beings. Decolonisation tends to be mainly about (adult) humans, with its almost exclusive focus on racism, sexism, classism, and ableism. When decolonisation is about the nonhuman, it tends to be about human’s relationship with the nonhuman (e.g., White settlers), as in the case with land and place education (see e.g. Tuck, et al., 2014). Decolonisation tends not to include childism or ageism, despite the fact that the logic of childhood is the logic of colonialism. The logic of childhood makes it possible to treat other ‘subhumans’ *as* children.

### **A diffractive thread: the *Posthuman Child Manifesto***

The first embedded text is the *Posthuman Child Manifesto*, co-created with editorial cartoonist Brandan Reynolds. This chapter makes regular references to the animated cartoon and includes a link to a Google.doc with the academic text. But the text also stands on its own and can be skipped. It is a geopolitical reading of theories of child and childhood making a passionate visual argument for a reconfiguration of colonising notions of child and

childhood. Always already entangled with this chapter, it adds and distracts, interrupts and disrupts a unilinear reading of this chapter. Accessible on YouTube, it is on the QR code in Figure 3.1 or the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikN-LGhBawQ>

[Insert here Figure 3.1 *The Posthuman Child Manifesto*: animated cartoon with text]

### **Building your own intelligence on the stupidity of others**

The human (including child) tends to be defined in comparison with animals. In an interview, Vinciane Despret suggests one should not attempt to pinpoint an essence of animal through definitions, but to follow animal *practices* instead. She explains that philosophers speak about the animal in its absence, while scientists work on, or with, real animals (Despret, 2015, p.91). The use of binary logic and the teaching of binaries might make one feel intelligent, but it is not lead by real curiosity, she says, “[so] you just make a constant operation of separating and separating and separating, which is kind of philosophical...And so you build your own intelligence on the stupidity of others” (Interview with Despret in Buchanan, Chrulew & Bussolini, 2015, pp.170-171). Despret speaks about animals, but her comments are strikingly relevant for child(hood) research. And indeed, child and animality as concepts often go hand in hand, although not often in an affirmative way (access Figure 3.1). Child is equated with the uncivilised ‘savage’ in need of cultivation. The Culture/Nature, Rational/irrational woman and Sophisticated/ primitive adult are the core binaries that structure prejudice and the colonising relationships between humans and other animals (Table 1). These binaries also work, for example, to be dismissive about the existence of “spirits, gods and other subtle bodies”, such as ancestors (Keller & Rubenstein, 2017, p. 4).

This chapter investigates with the reader (as a ‘doing’ and a ‘making’, not just ‘reading’) the ontoepistemological injustices involved in how we listen to and think-with the ‘missing peoples’ of posthumanism: Indigenous children in research practices. Epistemology and ontology are always entangled because the who and what involved in knowing, depends on assumptions about what exists (*onto*). The colonising relationships between humans and the material world are Subject/object and the scientific distinctions between the animate and inanimate with its assumptions about what is alive and what is dead (Table 1). The concept of animism offers fresh decolonising openings to bring together fields of enquiry often kept separate because of the adult/child binary.

The idea of this chapter is not to speak about child in her absence, but to work with real children by offering opportunities to listen to young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children philosophising about being alive and dead. The teaching of such concepts tend to be through binary logic and scientific knowledge (definitions and hierarchical categorisations). The analysis is supported by transcripts, videos and a short film clip. The chapter is multi-layered; other texts are diffracted through and can be used separately. Following Hunt's suggestion, engaging with texts as a non-Indigenous person and "interested in engaging with Indigenous ontologies, may involve becoming unhinged, uncomfortable, or stepping beyond the position of 'expert' in order to also be a witness or listener" (Hunt, 2014, p.31).

### **The de/colonising 'iii': Indigeneity and the human as phenomenon**

The conceptual Cartesian breaking apart – dicho-tomising – of adult and child produces unequal power differentials in all research practices involving children and childhood. Nevertheless, the aim of this chapter is not to install another (decolonising) truth about children – in particular *Indigenous* children – as the missing peoples of posthumanism. Barad (2007, p.466) explains that "even a cut that breaks things apart does not cause a separation but furthers the entanglement". Decolonisation is not a linear project towards an end point, a product, a decolonised state of being. Each person has to find his or her own way in thinking, which cannot be imitated or reproduced or transmitted by a teacher or lecturer, hence the forward slash<sup>4</sup> in 'de/colonisation'. De/colonisation is about inhabiting a particular non-exploitative relationship to other earth-dwellers, knowledge and truth (Murriss & Haynes, 2018).

This chapter does not prescribe a romantic path to be followed for children's liberation or emancipation. Nor does it set out to reinvent the human subject through the figure of child as a site of possibility and potential for more sustainable futures, as suggested by Lindgren (2019, p.9). Although, resonating with concerns about climate change and sustainability, the figure of posthuman child (Murriss, 2016; access Figure 3.1) offers a different relationality that disrupts the colonising binary logic of Western science and metaphysics.

As a still largely forgotten opportunity to reconfigure what counts as fully-human, new insights about researching with Indigenous children are offered, not only for quantitative or



qualitative researchers to consider, but also postqualitative. The figure of posthuman child is not just about *a* child – a fleshy ‘thing’ or body in the world, but is a ‘phenomenon’, hence troubles the idea altogether of child as a subject, because phenomena are not located in Newtonian space and time (Murriss, 2016; Murriss, Semeneć & Diaz-Diaz, 2020; access Figure 3.1). As a gesture towards decentring the human, I have introduced the neologism ‘iii’ elsewhere (Murriss, 2016, 2018). The ‘gesture’ as a method bypasses the Cartesian divide between mind and body, subject and object, and is both a response and an active contributor to the world – a dynamic worlding process (Haraway, 2016; Jarvis & Van Nort, 2018). Inspired by Karen Barad’s diffractive reading of queer theory through quantum field theory, the ‘iii’ as phenomenon is a quantum entanglement and, like waves in the sea, troubles the very nature of one-ness, two-ness, three-ness. The ‘iii’ is not a ‘new’ unity that represents (i.e., stands for) a subject (the human), a thing in the world in Newtonian space and time. Printed in grey, ‘iii’ express instead living without bodily boundaries. “Boundaries do not sit still” (Barad, 2003, p.817). The posthuman subject as ‘iii’ is *performative*, not static (see below). The subject always already includes the object (nonhuman) in its iterative becoming. Similar to Barad’s posthumanism, for Braidotti (2018, p.3) subjectivity “takes place transversally, in-between nature/technology; male/female; black/white; local/global; present/past – in assemblages that flow across and displace the binaries”.

De/colonisation in postqualitative research involves focusing on *difference* that does not already assume *identity*. It is not bodies in space and time that are ontologically prior, but dynamic relationships and connections. Difference is not about an absolute boundary between ‘object’ and ‘subject’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘now’ and ‘then’, ‘this’ and ‘that’, but rather it is the effect of the enacted agential cuts by the human. In other words, binary opposites are human-made and do not exist in reality (Barad, 2014). Of course, the human is real, but reality is much more complex than we give credit for, whether animal, matter and the (young) human herself! Barad’s multilayered and complex posthumanism shows the simplification involved in imposing human structure on reality through colonising binary thinking (Barad, 2007, p.354; 2014). Quantum field theory suggests that ‘even’ something as small as an atom can be manipulated and ‘misbehave’, that is, do contradictory things human observers do not expect or anticipate (Barad, 2007).

Researchers need to be alert to how the concept ‘human’ (hence, ‘child’) works in knowledge practices. For Barad, these are *performances*. The human is neither a biological, nor an

ontological given, but a political concept and a material-discursive *doing*, not a *thing*. Barad's and Braidotti's posthumanism does justice to the multiplicity and differences 'within' a human: both black *and* white, female *and* male (Barad, 2014), but also young *and* old. Moreover, and crucial for postqualitative research, is that the transindividual 'iii' is not only the researcher, that is, the subject who is doing the research. But also already entangled is the *what* or *who* the researcher is researching: the 'object' – land, camera, structure, language etc., or the 'other subject' – human, child, etc.). Research data emerges, but this entangled emergence does not happen once and for all according to some external measure of space and of time, but as Barad (2007, p.iv) puts it: "time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future."

The ontological turn from 'I' to 'iii' reconfigures the human subject, but not through the introduction of another signifier. Such a philosophical linguistic move would reinstall the western word-thing, word-world, culture-nature dichotomies that put the researcher at an ontological distance from the world she is researching. Of course, such an ontology is not new in the sense that for millennia, Indigenous peoples have foregrounded human's "connectedness and kinship with ancestors, future generations, spiritual beings, waterways, skyways, and animal and plant life" (Nxumalo, 2020, p. 543). As anti-colonial and Black feminist early childhood scholar, Fikile Nxumalo (2020), points out, "Indigenous conceptions of relationality have never bifurcated humans from the more-than-human world and have always taken seriously the agency and sociality of the more-than-human world" (p.543). Thinking-with the data from a South-African classroom later in this chapter, I now turn to African Indigenous conceptions as a way of re-turning again and again to data generated with/in my practices as mother, teacher, teacher educator, PhD supervisor and and and...

### **African ontoepistemologies**

By putting the human on a nature-culture continuum – that is, 'naturecultural' and 'humanimal' (Braidotti, 2018, p.2), and troubling research that is human-centred and assumes species exceptionalism, the ontological turn is indeed not new at all. Sundberg (2014), Todd (2016) and several others have pointed out that posthumanists are (politically) unaware of their own location when they make universalising claims about 'the' human. They are silent about past and present non-western or Indigenous scholarship and ways of living, thereby

perpetuating coloniality and ontoepistemic injustice. As written about elsewhere (Murriss, 2018), the Indigenous peoples of sub-Saharan Africa had ancestral ties and claims to the land prior to colonisation by European nations, and have a particular ontoepistemic relationship to that land (as well as to each other and ancestors).

South African researcher, Lesley Le Grange (2012, p.61) argues for re-appropriation of *Ubuntu* (humanness) and in particular *ukama*, which means “relatedness to the entire cosmos”. At first glance, the ontology described seems anthropocentric, but Kayiri (2015, p.111) claims that *Ubuntu*’s interdependence and community involve the natural world as well as human networks: “Nature and persons are one, woven by creation into one texture or fabric of life” (Sindima 1995 cited by Kayiri, 2015, p.111). Zimbabwean Amasa Ndoferipi explains that “*Ukama*, in its etymological roots, is a Shona adjective from the stem *hama*, meaning ‘relative’. While *U* is the adjectival prefix, *kama* is the adjectival stem and *kama* on its own means ‘to milk’ an animal”. The idea of milking an animal suggests “closeness and affection” and Ndoferipi (2015) adds that *ukama* points at a relational ethic – relationships that come first and form us. Quoting De Quincey, Ndoferipi argues that “we emerge as subjects from intricate networks of interrelatedness, from webs of inter-subjectivity”. *Ukama* expresses a relationality between people that also extends beyond death. Indeed, the ontological turn is an ontological *re*-turn.

The ontological *re*-turn involves moving towards a relational ontology, but how this works in practice is often misunderstood, also theoretically. A relational ontology is more than just acknowledging that things are always in relation. The ontological *re*-turn is also literally about *movement*. Critical posthumanism changes the meaning of ‘ontology’ from the philosophical study of ‘being’ (*onto*) to ‘becoming’ (see also the Introduction to this volume). A relational ontology is about worlds that do not stagnate and about perpetual relations of responsibility to other humans and nonhumans (Barad, 2007, p.391).

My writing and pedagogical practices mutually inspire each other. Similar to what Despret says about animals (see beginning of this chapter), I don’t want to speak about children in their absence. Avoiding ‘on behalfness’, I prefer to think-with real children, either through recordings or in classroom settings. The first example, from my work with pre-service teachers, introduces the concept of ontoepistemic injustice. In the second example, I respond

to young children’s philosophical engagement as I was about to read a picturebook out aloud. The third example analyses a film clip created as part of this pilot project.

### **Example 1: Ontoepistemic injustice**

Ontoepistemic injustice is a kind of injustice that is inflicted on children – even more so when they are also Black<sup>5</sup>, female and live in poverty. The injustice is the result of adult claims of what counts as reason, rationality and true knowledge, and therefore what counts as ‘worthwhile’ knowledge (Murriss, 2013; Murriss, 2016, Ch 6). Zoe Todd (2016) argues powerfully how Indigenous scholars are not referenced, listened to or taken seriously in posthumanism. The following video-clip from the internet has been a generative resource for exploring the concept of ontoepistemic injustice with my students. It can be accessed in Figure 3.2 and on the following YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko5nuKZ1DKU>

[Insert Figure 3.2 about here]

Figure 3.2 Mangaliso Nxesi (10), asks “a very difficult question” to the South African Parliament

Cape Town. 11 July 2018. A journalist reports on an event earlier in the week. The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund hosts a Youth Summit where young people intra-act with Members of Parliament. Mangaliso Nxesi (10), who attends a school in Johannesburg, asks why children do not have the vote:

So my question, which is not really so much of a question...well it is kind of like a statement, so...let’s say we are in let’s say we are in 2019 and it is the elections and a child wants to vote, but they don’t have that opportunity to vote because they are under age...what if...we make this change...what if...the child studies and studies all the things that different political parties want to change in the country and they understand the depth of what they are doing and they go through one or two assessments and they have like the voting intelligence of an adult,...

Mangaliso has (up to a point) internalised the dominant adult discourse about children's capabilities. In order to be intelligent enough to vote (like adults), one needs to study politics in depth. Nevertheless, he puts forward his powerful key argument:

**...coz just because somebody has a different age than another person does not necessarily mean that they should have less access to things because of their age or anything like that.**

Helpful for analysing this clip with students is the notion of *epistemic injustice*, a term coined by feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007). This kind injustice is woven into the fabric of social injustice and is done when people are wronged specifically in their capacity as a *knower*. But Fricker does not refer to children as a marginalised social group. She refers only to class, gender and race. Moreover, epistemic injustice is not only *social*, it is also *ontoepistemic* (Murrin, 2016). In the case of Indigenous child, *epistemic* injustice is done on the basis of structural prejudices surrounding their *ontological* identity. The diffractive coining of the 'two' terms (always already entangled) indicates the fact that the shift to a relational ontology is at the very same time an epistemological shift: knowing subjects are always already part of the world.

Mangaliso continues:

Many adults expect children to be...to not have as much intelligence as adults, but if the child has surprisingly high intelligence...

The audience laughs<sup>6</sup>. Mangaliso hesitates for a split second and then continues. Figure 3.3 shows his facial expression as he hesitates.

[Insert Figure 3.3 here]

Figure 3.3 The adult audience in Parliament of the Republic of South Africa laughs

Prejudice runs deep. It operates “beneath the radar of our ordinary doxastic self-scrutiny” (Fricker, 2007, p.40). Structural prejudice is particularly damaging, but hard to detect, when power relations undermine Mangaliso’s faith in his own ability to make sense of the world – a case of what Fricker calls ‘hermeneutic injustice’ (2007, 2017).

Mangaliso continues:

...but they are still not allowed that just because of their age. It’s not because of what’s on the outside, it’s because of what’s on the inside.

The audience claps. Deputy President Nqabayomzi Kwankwa from the United Democratic Movement (UDM) responds to him as follows:

I respond to that. I think you are ready to vote for the next year. No on a serious note, I think it is very pertinent, it is a very important question. But I think there would only be a few exceptional cases where young people would be to be ready to vote at a very young age. I think that is also intended to protect young people until they are at the right age to be able to make those decisions. You see, in your case I think you must work closely with me so that I can continue to give you further preparations for the future, but it is a very very very good question. And I think you are saying we should not tar everyone with the same brush...levels of development would be actually be different for different people. And they differ from person to the next person. I think you are quite correct, but I think you must come and and and and work with the UDM closely, so that we can work with you to 2025 and 2030. Thank you.

Nqabayomzi winks, patronisingly. Mangaliso’s argument is not heard by the adult, because of identity prejudice. Ageist prejudices are directly related to the Culture/Nature binary, which separates child from adult epistemically and positions child as an ontological, colonised “other” (access Figure 3.1). Apparently Mangaliso is in need of cultural formation (“further preparations for the future”) by an adult before he can vote. Such institutionalised generalisations about children inform unjustified stereotyping. According to Nqabayomzi, Magaliso needs “further preparations for the future” despite Nqabayomzi’s admission that “levels of development” can be “different for different people”. When exploring this clip with students, they often comment that he does not answer Mangaliso’s question.

The example is a clear case of identity prejudice. And Mangaliso's profound question, what some people (of all ages) might need in order to be able to vote, is avoided. What is indeed "the right age" to be able to vote? Instead, Nqabayomzi deliberately manipulates Mangaliso's question by drawing the attention to his own political party. As Fricker argues, many attributes assigned to historically powerless groups are often associated with a lack of "competence or sincerity or both" (Fricker, 2007, p. 32). And the attributes she mentions also apply to child historically: "over-emotionality, illogicality, inferior intelligence,...being on the make, etc." (Fricker, 2007, p. 32). Of course, the posthuman subject as explored earlier troubles the idea of attaching attributes to individual people, whether young or older. Identity-formation is an ongoing material and discursive process that includes the nonhuman (Barad, 2007, p. 240).

Ontoepistemic injustice does not only apply when listening to children, but also in the context of childhood studies and the missing peoples of the critical posthumanities. In the next example, a picturebook is explored in a Grade 1 class that offers particularly rich opportunities for philosophical enquiries that disrupt western binary logic. Working with materials pedagogically has always been an integrated part in early childhood education (ECE) and is now taken up in higher education, often without benefiting from research in ECE.

### **Example 2: *Me and My Bellybutton***

Elsewhere (Haynes & Murriss, 2019), ontoepistemic injustice is explored in the context of children's animistic philosophising. Animism in humans of all ages tends to be (mis)understood as 'magical', pre-rational and mere fantasy, a form of thinking to be left behind in the process of growing up, maturation or civilisation<sup>7</sup>. In this example, South African Indigenous and non-Indigenous children are philosophising about a picturebook created by my son Liam Geschwindt, then a five-year old, his family and an Iranian visual artist. The picturebook *Me and My Bellybutton* is partly autobiographical, I wrote the story when Liam was around five years old. Although many of the ideas are drawn from my own experiences of living with Liam, his three brothers and sister are also entangled with/in the story. It was left on the shelf for well over a decade. When Iranian illustrator Kaveh Seify got in touch about a year ago and asked whether I had a story for him to illustrate, our co-creation started in close consultation with Liam, who had already left home by then. It is not

published as yet. Further research with the picturebook, which disrupts adult binary logic, is planned, including its publication.

I was trying out the picturebook in a local South African government primary school before I moved to Finland. It is a school where we regularly do research with the teachers and the children. The example focuses on what happened before I start reading the story as a teacher-researcher. The children have just started Grade 1 and are six or seven years old. The transcripts are not unilinear in the sense that they do not represent chronologically the order of what the children said. The objective here of bringing in the ‘field work’ (co-constructed entangled data) is not to *represent*, but to *experience* and to become affected by children’s theoretical speculations through technological manipulation of sounds and images in the third example. Drawing on philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, Maggie MacLure argues how qualitative research is committed to revealing patterns and regularities, but that this is “a retroactive, knowledge-producing operation that makes things stand still, and the price of the knowledge gained is the risk of closure and stasis” (2013, p.662). She suggests researchers should resist representation and “expose the limits of rationality’s reductive explanation” (MacLure, 2013, p.663). The idea is to ‘surf’ the intensity of the event “in order to arrive somewhere else” (p.662).

Re-turning to the early years classroom video data. 11 March 2020. My idea was to hang up the enlarged laminated pages of the picturebook on a string around the room, but as it happens when I walk in there are no hooks or anything else to attach the string to in the walls. Unplanned, a circle is created with tables, string, pegs, illustrations in the middle of a large piece of carpet. Especially because of the weight of the pages from the picturebook, the material (which is always also discursive) works to create an enclosed, circular space the children enter into through an imaginary door (Figure 3.4). The ‘door’ is a cloth over a table. People of all ages have to crawl under as there are no other openings to access the space.

Figure 3.4 Re-turning to the video data: going through ‘the door’

[Insert Figure 3.4. here]

Some children respond with surprise after having gone through ‘the door’.



Karin: Make yourself- find a space where you would like to sit.

Owl Protector<sup>8</sup>: What are we doing?

Karin: Let's guess in a minute. Let us wait till everyone is in a circle. [Smiling.] Is anyone going to close the door or is that not happening?

Owl Protector: I will do it!

Other child: How do you even close the door?

Karin: I don't know, let us see. [Everyone looks at Owl Protector closing the 'door'.]

They can decide where they would like to sit. The 'door' was not planned beforehand, but the materiality of the arrangement creates a playful pedagogical opportunity – much of this 'decision' of mine was not conscious, somewhere between thinking and not-thinking, intuitive, and only noticed afterwards.

Re-turning to the transcript. 20 May 2020.

Karin: [Turned towards Owl Protector who has just 'closed the door'] I like it closed like that. Thank you! Hi! [Personally greeting Owl Protector] I am Karin.

Other child 1: Hello Karin.

Karin: Good Morning, thanks for being here! Ah, you have all your names on there (on stickers) that is fantastic! I am Karin. So it might be an idea for everyone to spread out, so that we can see each other's faces.

Owl Protector: What are we doing?

Karin: Have a guess! What do you think we might be doing?

Other child 2: We are going to be learning how to colour in the lines?

Karin: Not today, not today.

Re-turning to the transcript. 21 May 2020.

Other child 1: It is about life.

Karin: Yes, it is also about life. What does that mean?

Other child 2: And about being clean.

Karin: Hang on [Karin shifts focus back to Child 1]

What does it mean for something to be about life? What is life?

Other child 1: Life is about live- where we live. And you see all these stuff. I will feed Zozo in life and that is life.

Karin: Okay, so when something is 'life', does it mean it is not dead?

Owl Protector<sup>9</sup>: I know! [Raises hand]

Karin: Can you help?

Owl Protector: Yes. I can. Something's in life- like [my dad] does not have a life because- he is my dad and he died, but my mom hasn't died. So that means she still has a life.

Karin: Mm... Okay.

Owl Protector: Um, yes.

Karin: That is an amazing idea. So, when you say that someone is dead, what is that like?

Owl Protector: It doesn't have a life, but when you go to heaven you get a new body, but you have the same life.

Karin: Oh. What do other people think of that idea? That's amazing. So, what is it like when you are dead? Is it like being alive because you say you get another life? [Karin gestures in Owl Protector's direction]

Owl Protector: You don't get another life, it is the *same* life.

Karin: The same life, but in heaven?

Owl Protector: Yes.

Karin: Wow.

Other child 2: My papa has also passed away.

Karin: Your papa has?

Other child 2: But I have another one.

Karin: Okay. So, you have a lot of experience here and a lot of knowledge here. I would love to hear more.

I was struck by my own question: "Okay, so when something is 'life', does it mean it is not dead?". I notice the subtle ontoepistemic injustice involved in how I listened to the children in my habituated efforts to educate the children into a binary way of thinking about being alive and dead that was resisted, or at least ignored, by the children. I am asking for criteria in order to define 'life' and encourage the children to think in binaries. Although intrigued by the Owl Protector's interest in worlds that exist simultaneously, I simply asked the wrong question.

Tim Ingold (2006, p.10) argues beautifully that:

people do not always agree about what is alive and what is not, and that even when they do agree, it might be for entirely different reasons. I am also sure, again because we know it from ethnography, that people do not universally discriminate between the categories of living and non-living things. This is because for many people, life is not an attribute of things at all. That is to say, it does not emanate from a world that already exists, populated by objects-as-such, but is rather immanent in the very process of that world's continual generation or coming-into-being.

Vanessa Watts (2013, p.29) also argues for an Indigenous understanding of nonhuman agency where there is no line between “flesh” and “things” and “where the plane of action is equalized amongst all elements.” She suggests that “if we think of agency as being tied to spirit, and spirit exists in all things, then all things possess agency.” (p.30). Such a natureculture position disrupts adult western binary logic that keeps nature (child, ‘savage’, animal) apart from culture (the mature fully developed adult; access Figure 3.1).

Another temporal jump. The story *Me and My Bellybutton* has been read. A shopping basket with a variety of fabrics, wool, glue, large felt tip pens, playdough, scissors, and a selection of ‘waste’ materials is on ‘stand by’ just outside the circle in case the conversation ‘dries up’. These materials have been borrowed from the university classroom where they are used extensively by three lecturers in creative arts, life skills and childhood studies to teach ‘content knowledge’. Collected over the years and partly purchased by the university, the art materials in the very broad sense serve to develop concepts further by ‘switching languages’ in case good pedagogical opportunities arise to use the materials to develop the conceptual knowledge that is co-created further. Early childhood education pedagogies and other interventions more commonly used in professional educational practice profoundly enrich pedagogies and research in higher education. I have written extensively about our transdisciplinary, border-crossing teaching in higher education elsewhere (e.g., Murriss, Reynolds, Peers, 2018).

Karin: Okay. Then say more [Owl Protector], how does it work then?

How do you get to heaven? What goes to heaven?

...

Owl Protector: I will tell you all the stuff that goes [to heaven], your hearts, your friendship and your soul- no not your soul... Something that makes you- I would say your 'self' goes to heaven, but you cannot see it go to heaven. It is invisible. They glide like that [showing with her hands], but you cannot see it go up.

Karin: Interesting, what do you make of that idea? [looking around to the other children inviting them to take the enquiry further]...

Owl Protector hesitates, carefully finding, creating, choosing her words as if she is thinking them for the very first time, articulating something not-yet-articulated, but nevertheless present. Her thoughtfulness is striking when you hear her speak. It is COVID-19 'lockdown' and Liam is back at home with us for a few months. As first author of the picturebook *Me and My Bellybutton* and now fourteen years later, he creates a short film clip after a brief conversation with me about postqualitative research (Figure 3.5 below; Example 3).

It is a good idea to watch the clip before even starting with the reading of the second example and to re-turn to it after my analysis, which should not be seen as authoritative, but an invitation for further enquiry and to be agreed and disagreed with. Not in a dialectical, but diffractive manner: "cutting together-apart", not "cutting apart" (Barad, 2014). Not critical, but affirmative and relational. Enquiry is a doing with members of the community, and these members include the 'missing peoples' of both humanism and posthumanism. A community of enquiry is like a construction site with human and nonhuman members paying attention to the complexity of reality, rather than simplifying theories by using colonising binary logic. The de/colonising effort to resist complexity reduction *matters* ontologically, epistemically, ethically and politically.

Binary opposites are social constructions that do not correspond to any actually existing polarities in the world but intervene in it theoretically and practically. Tim Ingold explains animism as a condition of being in the world rather than a belief about the world. He writes that "[t]he animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation" (Ingold, 2011, p. 68). Both animism and a posthuman relationality that returns to animism, make room for a re-evaluation of young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's animistic thinking and taking their philosophical wonderings seriously.

### **Example 3: Me and My Bellybutton in the Classroom**

The third, and last example is Liam's film clip – an experimentation with/in the classroom data. Now a 19-year old, Liam shows how manipulating moving images and sound can be a gesture towards de/colonising child-centred research practices in higher education. The music could be understood as holding the various non-chronological parts of the sequence together and expresses the idea of life and death as a continuum (rather than binaries or opposites). The music deliberately continues after the visual and ends abruptly. Importantly, it was a choice that emerged out of our conversations and intense engagement with the data during complete 'lockdown' in South Africa. For two months, as a family, we had to stay in our house in order to slow down the spread of COVID 19. As the youngest, hence less at risk because of his age, only a masked Liam went into the shops to buy food and medicine. The context of indeterminate and uncertain futures is felt in the clip.

Figure 3.5 *Me and My Bellybutton* with/in the Classroom

<https://youtu.be/YYdKdqOddZA>

[Insert Figure 3.5 here]

In the film clip, diffracted<sup>10</sup> through one another, are videos and audios of children engaging in a philosophical enquiry provoked by the images and ideas in the picturebook *Me and My Bellybutton*, audio-tapes, photos, children's drawings, artefacts created by the children (e.g., a bellybutton wand) and music: *The Magical Box* by Daniel Teper.

Re-turning to the early years classroom. 11 March 2020. Many conversations between the humans entangle themselves with/in the material as the children are cutting, kneading, sticking, drawing and making. One girl<sup>11</sup> looking for some material that caught her eye, gently walks over the paper. To be allowed to move in class like that is rare and important for who and what matters in class when exploring stories together with humans and nonhumans. Her movement is repeated in slow-motion three times. The machine enables the repetition of her movements. It makes it easier to notice that she hops over the adult teacher who is lying on the floor with the children, documenting their-her learning. The repetition disrupts unilinear time and increases its power to affect. In chapter eight, the authors argue

“it is the *relationships* that can be made visible through technology as they allow us to postpone human-centred interpretations of movement.”

Elsewhere (Murriss & Kohan, 2020), the methodology of ‘travel hopping’, or temporal diffraction, is explored in the context of childhood, time, developmental theories of child development and decolonisation. Kyoko Hayashi’s travel hopping is a transindividual commitment to undo the injustices committed to those who are (also) no longer there (as well as our ‘own’ childhood ‘selves’), without any pretense that the past can be made undone (Barad, 2018). Slowing down the girl’s movement over the paper helps in noticing multiple temporalities. It is a good example of experiencing time in school more aligned with the embodied lived experience of a non-chronological, multilinear childhood (Murriss & Kohan, 2020).

Re-turning to the film-clip. 23 May 2020. Phones are filming, dictaphones are audiotaping and two GoPros are made available to the children to experiment with. No explicit instructions are given. The children simply know (and don’t know) what to do from previous dis/embodied<sup>12</sup> educational experiences. The children seem very comfortable to work with/in this uncertainty and their ideas in this rhizomatic<sup>13</sup> unprescribed manner. Two boys work closely together during this entire episode, talking and drawing on a corner of the large piece of paper. The Grade R class in this school is inspired by the Reggio-Emilia approach to early childhood education – also a key feature of my teaching and research in higher education.

The children intra-act with/in the different worlds they are discussing: graves under the ground where worms eat (or don’t eat) human corpses and the different worlds (e.g. heaven) where the same person can be alive, but with a different body. These worlds are subsequently diffracted through the classroom topic ‘natural disasters’ they had worked with in reception class the year before. Different temporalities diffract through one another. However, adults tend to evaluate a child’s abilities and competencies by what is happening ‘here’ and ‘now’, and assume a child is the location of agency, consciousness and intentionality (in developmental orientations of child development in terms of *lack* and what is missing). Zuko starts whirling through the different worlds drawn earlier with a large felt tip pen, expressing the energy of natural disasters. These worlds are co-existing with one another diffracted through space and time – ‘spacetimemattering’ (Barad, 2014).

Intra-acting with Owl Protector's philosophising, bodies in graves are drawn underground with bodies drawn high up in the sky. The atmosphere (that includes sound) in the room affects the idea generated. Owl Protector's voice happens to take centre stage. Posthuman research does not imply that voice, or the human, does not matter. On the contrary, the human is always already part of the entanglement. Other children listen with interest in preparation to connect with the new ideas that are emerging. Some respond in words, others draw or construct objects. It is impossible to know what is causing what. The *making* of philosophical enquiry is transmodal (Murriss, 2017). Also, the crows of a cockerel have been inserted, but much louder than it is in the data. This agential cut brings to the attention that animals are kept in the school grounds and play an active role in what happens in the classroom and counts as research data.

Understanding child as a human/nonhuman entangled phenomenon ('iii') helps to move away from deficit discourses about child and childhood as it decentres child as a being (with a stable personality, characteristics and essence) whose age determines her abilities. 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. This *specific* use of nonhuman and human bodies helps to create an atmosphere of post-age human-nonhuman equality – thinking-with one another, the space and the picturebook and and and.... *ad infinitum*. The details *matter* as they disrupt matters of scale: size and age! For Barad, objectivity is about the specific materialisations of which we are a part. For researchers, this requires a methodology that “is attentive to, and responsive/responsible to the *specificity* of material entanglements in their agential becoming” (Barad, 2007, p.91).

My proposal is that young children's philosophising and in particular their animism, helps to disrupt the western humanist colonising binaries between science and religion, matter and meaning, heaven and earth, alive and dead, human and nonhuman. Doing justice to ageless animistic thinking has unsettling implications for (postqualitative) research, not only in education, or the critical posthumanities, but across disciplines in higher education. It asks profound questions about what counts as science and how the dominant discourses based on binary logic in higher education colonise Braidotti's 'missing peoples', including matter, Indigenous peoples and child. This chapter gives a flavour of how can childhood studies as a

“minor science” (Braidotti, 2018) can play a part in the knowledge production of the critical posthumanities.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CewnVzOg5w>

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEMLBSRh5Dk>

<sup>3</sup> For example, the pedagogies used in early childhood education (e.g., Reggio Emilia) and their potential use in higher education with students.

<sup>4</sup> The forward slash expresses indeterminacy. Something is not either colonised or decolonised, as this would imply binary logic.

<sup>5</sup> To write 'black' with a capital 'B' gives power to the idea of being Black in opposition to and defiance of white supremacy and a white-dominated society.

<sup>6</sup> When adults laugh in this manner when children speak, it often avoids any re-examination of their beliefs and assumptions. This kind of laughter is an example of adult distancing from child. Children's speculations are seen as unusual, sweet, perhaps foolish, but ultimately harmless.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Mereweather (2019) refers to the Western abnegation of animism's origins in nineteenth century anthropology which categorised human cultures as either 'primitive' or 'cultured' and she describes how the highly influential psychologist Jean Piaget also associated animism with young children's pre-rational and primitive thought, a view that has dominated discourses of child development and early education.

<sup>8</sup> The pseudonym was self-chosen when extra permission was sought to publish the video clip. She loves owls and would like to be known as someone who protects them.

<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of the diffractive methodology, see the Introduction of this book.

<sup>11</sup> Gender (and age) *matters* and have been made explicit without assuming a binary that indicates essences in the world.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>13</sup> A rhizomatic curriculum is not unilinear and multi-directional, like a rhizome (see also Introduction).

