

Book review

Murriss, K. 2016. *The Posthuman Child: Educational transformation through philosophy with picturebooks*. London and New York: Routledge.

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Karen Barad, a theorist to whom Karin Murriss makes extensive reference in her recently published book *The Posthuman Child*, writes about the concept of the apparatus, based on Niels Bohr's work. This is a different way of thinking about apparatus than we are normally used to - here it is not seen as an instrument for observation, not as a *thing*, but rather as a *doing*. Karen Barad describes *apparatuses* as open-ended practices which create boundaries. More particularly, she sees apparatuses as 'specific material arrangements and material-discursive practices, which provide determinate meanings for concepts and things, entailing exclusions to make them intelligible', in this way 'enacting what matters and what is excluded from mattering' (Barad, 2007: 148).

If we engage with Karin's new book as an apparatus, 'a material-discursive formation or assemblage which enacts cuts' (Adema, 2015: 258) we may see the book as coming into being through our intra-actions¹ with it. Janneke Adema (2015) from Coventry University sees the apparatus of the book as 'consisting of an entanglement of relationships between - amongst others - authors, books, the outside world, readers, the material production and political economy of book publishing and the discursive formation of scholarship' (p. 263) and draws attention to the 'the processual and unstable nature of the book' (p. 259).

The enacted cut of the book as apparatus is the posthuman child, the examination of how education may be transformed through philosophy with picturebooks and more generally, the implications that this may have for education. Coming from higher education, for me this is incredibly useful, because as Peter Moss, the *Contesting Early Childhoods* series editor, notes in the introduction, the strength of this book is how it connects critical posthumanism with actual ways of enacting pedagogical practice. This has largely been missing in higher education, as people have taught in higher education about Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Braidotti, Haraway and Karen Barad, but they have not considered much how these philosophical positions and insights can be applied to pedagogies in higher education.

¹ The notion of intra-action, a neologism created by Karen Barad (2007), is different from interaction. Intra-action assumes that entities are co-constituted through their mutual entanglement and that entities come into being through their relationship. Interaction, on the other hand, presumes that individual entities precede their interaction.

The book takes forward what the series, *Contesting Early Childhoods*, does more generally: it firstly makes accessible the ideas of these theorists, and secondly, puts their ideas to work in pedagogical practices. For example, Glenda MacNaughton's (2004) book *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies*, and Hillevi Lenz Taguchi's (2010) book *Going Beyond the Theory/Practice Divide in Early Childhood Education. Introducing an intra-active pedagogy* are two of many examples where theorists' work is made comprehensible and their ideas are then applied to how to do pedagogy. This is the contribution Karin Murriss's book makes, as it straddles alternate figurations of the child and how these may be put to work in pedagogical practice in higher education. The book, although it hasn't been out that long, has already been acclaimed by others in this field, and it has reached various parts of South Africa and other parts of the globe.

Generally I am in agreement with most of Karin's ideas in the book, differing slightly from her in how she constructs psychology as a monolithic discipline; critical psychologists, feminist psychologists and poststructural psychologists have also made major contributions to critiquing the notion of child and childhood, although she does use critical psychologists such as Erica Burman to support her views. It is also contentious for me that poststructuralism is often presented as problematic as I regard poststructuralist and feminist philosophers as making a major contribution to posthumanism - Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have been considered as poststructuralists for example.

Looking at the book as 'a fluid apparatus and a process of becoming involving human and non-human agencies which cannot be discerned beforehand' (Adema, 2015: 265-66) and which may incorporate collaborations, updates, and so on, I would be interested in how the readings of Brian Massumi and perhaps also Erin Manning may intra-act with Murriss' ideas and either produce new writings or change her thoughts in this book. The ways in which the book is put to work in Murriss' classrooms will also undoubtedly change the ideas expressed in the book. Karin Murriss is well known internationally as the president of the International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children, as well as other organisations. Her interactions in organisations and research projects nationally and internationally will make the book travel in various directions and work in various ways.

Karin Murriss's creativity clearly shines through in the book - she has gathered together her knowledges of philosophy, and philosophy with children, particularly the use of picturebooks as a philosophical tool, the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, and critical posthumanism. She has brought these into conversation with each other in ways that build insights through diffractive readings, as well as providing convincing arguments which can be used to critique established educational practices. But she doesn't stop there; she provides a number of excellent examples of teaching in ways which accommodate difference as she says 'in being, knowing and doing' (p. 121), and importantly in relational pedagogical practices. Some of the innovative ideas she offers in her book which really stood out were the following: the way in which she uses the labyrinth - she sees this book as well as her classes as walking a labyrinth, a physical and transformative 'unambiguous path' (p. 31) which leaves marks on our bodyminds. Her creation of new concepts such as the neologism 'iii' (by which she means bodymind matter) is also inspiring, as is her ontoepistemic injustice, building on Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice. Further inspiration comes from her concept of the pregnant stingray, which involves the

educator numbing herself and assisting learners to give birth to new ideas through provocations (expressing a subjectivity that is unbounded and multiple), her diffractive pauses in the book which are generally aspects of her relational pedagogical practice giving lucid examples of what she calls rhizomatic intra-active pedagogy, and her weaving in of her work with her students. All of these make the book special and create a liveliness for the reader. This book will be useful for educators working in different sectors and contexts – from early childhood education to higher education, in southern to northern contexts and in variably resourced institutions. It is also a text which can be put to work in courses on philosophy of education, childhood studies and critical posthuman perspectives on pedagogy.

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Reference

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Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.



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