

Exploring possibilities for gender to become otherwise: what do child-snail relations make possible?

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Abstract

Through a series of tentacular provocations this chapter contemplates how gender might be reimagined from child-snail relationalities. Further, it invites attunement to how else gender coalesces through a young child's non-verbal, not-quite-literate, bodily encounters with the everyday. Whilst dominant ideas about how children are and become in the world tend to be framed by linear, anthropocentric logic characterised by certainty and knowability, how might odd-kin relationalities (Haraway, 2016) complicate such logic and open possibilities for gender to e/merge in surprising ways? Tracing the slime trails of a four-year-old child's encounters with snails, this chapter wonders whether making-odd-kin might hold the potential to dwell upon often unnoticed and unappreciated capacities for deep immersion in now-time, and with that a persistent refusal to be contained and bound by normative ideas about what it is to be(come) gendered. Making odd-kin refuses the limits, codifications and meanings about gender and childhood that are imposed by adults on the developing child bodymind. Ultimately, with the help of Haraway's SF praxis, this chapter explores the capacious possibilities inherent in being open to un/re-learning how to be in the world – always in relation.

Introduction

To illustrate how gender becomes otherwise through odd-kin relationalities I draw upon fleeting encounters from a current research study undertaken with four-year-old children in two Reception Classes in London. The project's primary concern is to explore multispecies flourishing on a dying planet (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015) through a series of arts-based methods (see www.minibeasts.org) where the emphasis is placed upon flattening both age and species hierarchies. Children were invited to attune and sense, make connections, and focus on relationalities as they e/merge through everyday encounters with tiny non- and-more-than human companions, i.e. insects and microbes. The project has an explicit objective to explore environmental justice with young children and foster deepened connections to 'nature' as it is experienced in urban contexts. The project does not explicitly address issues of gender, but as a feminist researcher it is almost impossible not to be affected by gendered forces as they circulate through the everyday ebb and flow in the lives of young children. Therefore, rich, and provoking data were generated that sparked a series of curious lines of enquiry which I pursue in this chapter. I was especially struck by one young child's encounters with gastropods (slugs and snails) throughout the life of the project, leading me to ask: 'what do child-snail relations make possible?' and 'how can making odd kin generate alternative stories about gender in childhood?'

To address these questions, I turn to Haraway's (2008) concern to tell stories within troubled contact zones, and to Tsing's (2015) imperative to cultivate the arts of living and dying well together on a damaged planet. With the figuration of *Cornu Aspersum* or the common garden snail, I follow slime trails as a practice of serious worlding that holds capacities to reach

beyond normative ideas about what it is to become gendered through making odd-kin relationalities.

Unbounding Mauni

Fieldwork visits to Hedgehog classroom over the early Spring term were frenetic, loud and often chaotic. Such is the atmosphere generated from 30 wriggly child bodyminds endlessly regulated in time and space through clocking practices, predictable routines, and the organisation of classroom space. A sea of faces peering up at us from the gridded carpet space frequently melded into one. But as we grew more familiar with the children, we noticed the idiosyncrasies and special characteristics of individual children. Mauni was conspicuous by her inconspicuousness. Camouflaging into the general milieu, not troublesome or overly energetic, quietly engaged but rarely verbally articulating her thoughts. She never raised her hand to answer questions and rarely deviated from her designated square on the carpet (see Fig. 1). Quiet, compliant, seemingly shy, and self-effacing. The sort of girl that is easily overlooked, overshadowed, routinely becoming invisible. Her girl-ness was read through these feminine characteristics. Whilst she spoke very little she consistently and enthusiastically engaged in the arts-based activities we introduced (collage, mark-making, nature trails, dance, poetry), clearly understood the task at hand, and appeared to enjoy them.



Fig 1. Boxing child bodyminds: carpet time

Inspired by Haraway, central to the project were practices of multiple storytelling, much of it was through material art and movement practices, but we were also interested to hear stories through the spoken word. When I asked the class teacher to suggest some children that I might engage in one-to-one storytelling (with the child as teller) it was invariably the most boisterous, vocal, and opinionated children she suggested. As anticipated, these children provided lively and fantastical stories that unsettled common-sense narratives about insect and microbial life (e.g. space travel, purple beaches, fantasy football, etc). I was keen to include a diversity of children, not only in terms of gender, ethnicity, and social class, but also in respect of size, confidence, and timidity. Therefore, I approached Mauni to share her

stories of multispecies relationalities, she nodded enthusiastically and took me by the hand. We ventured outside with a piece of her recently created minibeast artwork of microbes with the intention of sitting at a table outside and engaging in an open ended, meandering conversation. Mauni led the way, darting across the grassed area of the playground and pointing to various sites. I asked questions along the way, but she was mostly verbally unresponsive. We stumbled upon a lump of chalk which she took up and proceeded to draw a spider and a snail on the pavement. Again, I asked questions, ‘were these her favourite minibeasts?’ But again, no verbal response. She skipped off again, this time to an area of the playground that had been cordoned off. I asked more questions: ‘why was this area out of bounds?’ With her pointing in response, it became clear that this patch was waterlogged from the unprecedented rainfall that had blighted some of our nature trails throughout the month of February. As we moved from location to location under Mauni’s direction, I realised that she had barely spoken. But multi-layered, situated, and curious storytelling was unfolding, nevertheless.

Eventually we settled down at the picnic table in the middle of the playground. I invited her to tell a story, in any way she liked about minibeasts. She smiled but didn’t speak. I have long argued that research with very young children is best done through a commitment to attuning, sensing, and encountering atmospheric and capacious possibilities to grapple with life as encountered by them. Although I admit to feeling a little anxious that her storytelling might be entirely non-verbal, I could sense that she had much to tell me if only I could listen with all my senses. Whilst not in search of authenticity, representation, or evidence that learning had taken place I was curious to hear what the past weeks engaged in arts-based activities centred around minibeasts might have generated for her. I remembered during our nature trails she had been especially interested in snails; whilst some children recoiled at gastropod texture and movement, Mauni had grown more curious with each encounter.



Fig. 2: child-snail-encounter

On several occasions her teacher requested that she empty her pockets (which had become home to a small colony of snails) and return them to their habitats. At parents' evening her

father had asked whether there was a special curriculum focus on snails at school, having noticed his daughter's surprising new obsession with them. In Mauni's white-British working-class family, snails were generally regarded as unhygienic pests and so her recent interest in them had been met with consternation. At the picnic table Mauni eventually began recounting snail facts, and offered a haphazard, multi-layered, speculative fabulation about snails. It was clear that she had developed a special affinity with them, and they held profound capacities to ignite intrigue. As Haraway (2016, p.127) stresses:

“Politeness does the energetic work of holding open the possibility that surprises are in store, that something *interesting* is about to happen, but only if one cultivates the virtue of letting those one visits intra-actively shape what occurs. They are not who/what we expected to visit, and we are not who/what were anticipated either.”

Making space for the surprises in store involved patience and curiosity, for Mauni, for the snails she encountered, and for me as researcher. I was later advised by a Teaching Assistant who had spotted us at the picnic table, that Mauni had not spoken a single word whilst in Nursery. She was astounded that Mauni had volunteered stories to me, a relative stranger, during the life of the research project. It appeared that attuning to the affects that insect and microbial encounters generated through arts-based activities offered Mauni an alternative mode of encountering the world, and in turn alternative ways for Mauni to experience herself. Child-snail relations created space and opportunity for Mauni to defy discursive constructions of her as timid, quiet, mild. Her ‘bravery’ at handling the mucus ridden invertebrate attracted adulation from her peers who swarmed around to take a closer look. Being ‘brave’ also offered opportunities for her to become otherwise - these encounters were proof that snails were not only for boys with an interest in ‘frogs and puppy dog tails’. It was through practices of visiting that Mauni's special interest in snails came to light, as Haraway explains (2016, p.127):

“Visiting is a subject- and-object-making dance, and the choreographer a trickster. Asking questions comes to mean both asking what another finds intriguing and also how learning to engage *that* changes everybody in unforeseeable ways.”

Such visiting raised important matters of concern about how children are read, what child-snail relations might have to teach us, and how research might be undertaken in ways that celebrate and recognise the validity of odd-kin-methodologies as a space for adult re/un-learning. Adults (researchers, teachers, teaching assistants, parents) were required to question taken for granted assumptions about gendered childhoods and to take seriously the transformative potential of encounters with the non-human.

2345AD
A once blue planet glows red
Endless warnings unheeded
HuMans banished
Hermaphrodites rule
Self sufficient, curious and wild

Troubled Contact Zone

Pratt (2008) proposes that contact zones draw attention to spaces where ‘cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power (p.8). Haraway (2008) extends contact zones to spaces and practices in which humans interact with non-human others, as she explains: ‘subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other (...) it treats the relations...in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices’ (p.102). For Haraway, knowing within a troubled contact zone is inseparable from the environment in which inquiry occurs and includes specific non-humans who are either present or whose lives are at stake. As this chapter unfolds, I mobilise troubled contact zones as a means of analysis that raises questions about human-child-snail relations and gendered becomings.

Taking our cue from the force relations agitated from child-snail encounters I dwelled upon where else this might take our curiosity. Haraway’s (2016) SF praxis was extended by weaving *Snail Facts* and *Snail Fabulations* together with *Science Fact*, *String Figures*, *Speculative Feminism*, *Science Fact* and *So Far*. As she explains (p.3): ‘I try to follow threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times’. Putting Haraway’s SF praxis to work agitated myriad surprises in the pursuit of considering multispecies flourishing where possibilities for gender to become otherwise e/merged.

Throughout the research project the young children were endlessly fixated on the ‘superpowers’ that various insects and microbes might possess. Thought to be especially impressive were creatures that were super-fast, super-poisonous, super-lithe and/or super-strong. The snail by comparison was routinely overlooked when it came to these cataloguing exercises; written off by most children who were unimpressed and underwhelmed by the slow moving, slime-ridden and seemingly shy circular mass that is the *Cornu Aspersum*.

Aligned with Haraway’s SF praxis that insists upon visiting, polite attentiveness and artful questioning, Mauni’s fixation with snails provoked a deeper engagement with a species that, like her, is conspicuous by its inconspicuousness. Camouflaging into the general milieu, never overly energetic, quietly engaged and silently going about its business. Snail is the sort of ‘insect’ that is easily overlooked, overshadowed, routinely becoming invisible. From embarking upon polite inquiry (Despret, 2016) with the pursuit of ‘good questions’, a method alert to off-the-beaten-path practices emerged that became an onto-epistemology for learning what can be unearthed in a troubled contact zone. Refusing to dismiss the humble snail as devoid of superpowers was crucial in deepening our inquiries into multispecies flourishing. Taking relations with snails seriously allowed important matters of concern to be unearthed and taken to the heart of our research.

*Big hearted and free
Adapting and evolving
Among geothermals at the depths of the sea
Heat intensifying as magma rivers flow*

Snail Superpowers

Activating our string figuring with *Snail Facts* we learnt that snails are frequently mistaken to be insects, but they belong to the Phylum Mollusca, and are more closely related to octopi and squid than insects. Molluscs are a large and diverse group of animals populating the entire globe (with the exception of Antarctica - so far). Snails and slugs form a subgroup called the Gastropoda, the members of which have a head, a ventral muscular foot, and a shell (internal in slugs and external on snails). According to Cameron (2016) snails feature as model organisms in ecological and evolutionary studies. Whilst notorious as pests, snails are hailed ‘the canary in the cage’ warning of the ways in which humans are reducing biodiversity through habitat destruction and ill-advised introductions (such as non-native plants and increased use of pesticides). The distribution of snails in space and time has radically altered as the effects of the Anthropocene have intensified, with complete eradication of some and the emergence of entirely new species better adapted to the threats of extinction. Snails are one of the most successful animal species to adapt to the ravages of human-induced damage to planet earth.

Cameron (2016) goes on to argue that land snails are vital to forest decomposition processes by contributing to the nutrification of soils through their decaying bodies, shells and faeces. Dead shells form an important source of calcium for other animals in calcium-poor habitats. Land snails recycle forest nutrients and are prey for a number of vertebrate animals as well as other invertebrates including carnivorous snails. And their dietary preference for fungi is a factor in fungal spore dispersal. Snails then, are vital to enriching environments and acting as biodiversity predictors, playing a crucial role in monitoring climate change.

Stanisic (2023) notes that conchologists have long been fascinated by snail biology and in particular reproductive practices. Most terrestrial gastropod molluscs are hermaphrodites having both male and female reproductive organs with the capability to produce both eggs and spermatozoa. Of further intrigue is the fact that some species of snail change sex during their lifetime. Some are mobile males at the beginning of their life changing into sessile females at a later life stage. These snail facts begin to make visible an array of hidden ‘superpowers’ that snails possess. Also of interest are their nocturnal sleeping behaviours that can last several days to several years; with environmental changes snails are opting to sleep through extended drought periods which adversely impacts upon snail populations. Extreme changes to weather systems as a consequence of global warming has resulted in gastropods hibernating through summer, burrowing deep into the ground in search of moisture.

As well as seasonal absenteeism due to rising temperatures, snail populations more generally are declining. With an official status of ‘pest’ bestowed upon them by the Royal Horticultural Society snails are held accountable for eating both agricultural crops and ornamental plants in

domestic and commercial settings. There is a wealth of advice to farmers and gardeners on how best to deter, repel, and ultimately exterminate snails, which has profound repercussions for entire ecosystems. For example, there has been a 50 per cent decline in bird populations from consuming gastropods poisoned by pesticide. Hetherington (2023) summarises the current plight of snails:

“The majority are very beneficial in the garden because they break down dead plant matter and turn it back into compost...there’s also the knock-on effect on things that eat slugs and snails: song thrushes, amphibians, hedgehogs – all of these creatures are in decline at the moment.”

This snail storytelling, rich with biological facts, ecological trauma, and prophetic warnings from living together in the Anthropocene, underscores how human, non-human and more-than-human relationalities in troubled contact zones render each other capable through actual encounters (Despret, 2016). Through the arts practice introduced throughout the project children were invited to move away from representational and ‘correct’ accounts of insect life towards more speculative and playful experimentation. Considering the ‘superpowers’ that snails have - how the labour that they expend improves the nutritional value of soil; that the well-being of entire forests relies upon their capacities to compost; and that their fleshy bodies provide calcium rich sustenance to small mammals elevated the humble, overlooked snail in the eyes of the children participating in the research. For example, a hybrid gastropod was formed from drawings that Mauni and I created (see Fig. 3). A half-and-half image is made by drawing a full creature, cutting it in half and finding a humorous mismatch with someone else's, in the style of 'Flip Flap Minibeasts' (Scheffler, 2020). This hybrid snail has the tentacles and house readily associated with ‘being snail’ but is also adorned with muscular feet and a blue wetness that unsettles normative expectations of what a snail should be. Mauni’s other artwork (Fig. 4) conjures the importance of multispecies co-dependencies.



Fig. 3 ‘Supersnail’ co-created by Mauni & Jayne

For Mauni, her early recognition of the extraordinariness of the snail translated into a series of artworks and seemed to provide her with capacities to imagine herself as something other, something more than the painfully shy, mute girl-child that so easily melded into the

background of a noisy classroom and sat so compliantly on her designated square on the carpet.

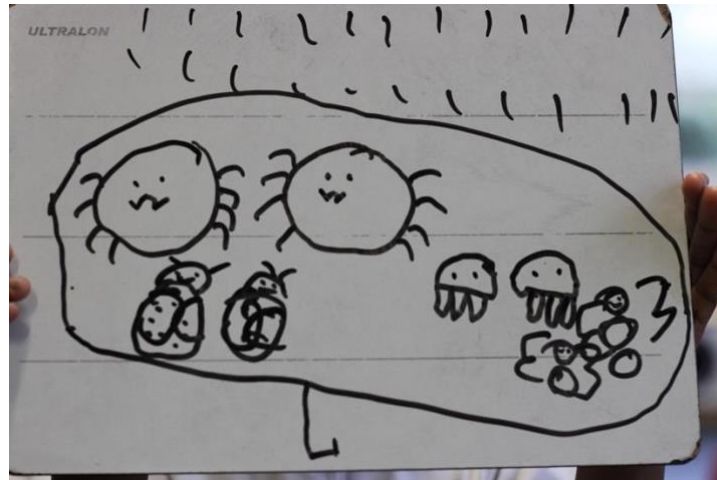


Fig 3. Rendering each other capable: sympoiesis

Mauni's intrigue with snails generates a worlding practice that is hungry for discovery of what must be known and built together, with and for earthly beings - living, dead and yet to come (Haraway, 2016). The queerness and otherworldliness of mollusc gastropods and their relationalities to the human and more-than-human within troubled contact zones has capacities to set in motion a raft of difficult questions, and other ways for considering how to be in the world. Mauni's deep connection to gastropods almost imperceptibly shifted how she viewed herself, and how others viewed her. From a child so shy that she barely spoke, becoming-with snails enabled her to become a storyteller (through physical gesture, artistic expression, and verbally articulated tales of fantasy) of what mattered to her in her everyday life at school, in the playground and how that spilled over into her life at home, and whenever she happened upon a snail.

The threat of extinction or at least snail population decline was a matter of concern that was taken up in Hedgehog classroom. There was lengthy debate about which and whether minibeasts could bite, poison, or kill humans. There was also discussion about our ethical response-abilities to learn as much as we could about all life forms and how unexceptional humans are when we consider the extraordinary capacities that other-than-human creatures have. We arrived at some sort of consensus about the urgency to prioritise multispecies flourishing on a dying planet (although not in those precise terms!). Through dance, collage and nonsense poetry we aerated our co-dependencies and lingered upon the imperative to slow down, with curiosity and care to consider what it might be like to live life as a spider, or a centipede, a mushroom, a bacterium or a gastropod. Mauni was especially troubled by the prevalence of pesticide that is commonly practised by many people living in her neighbourhood in the interests of preserving plant life. She recounted how her granny did not share her love and fascination with snails, and frequently sprayed 'Slug Stop' to extinguish them and preserve her flower beds from the 20 thousand teeth of the average *Cornu*

Aspersum. It seemed that Mauni's grandma had not heeded the latest advice issued by the Royal Horticultural Society:

“UK gardeners have recently been warned to set aside the sprays, pause the pellets, and even ban the boot when it comes to slugs and snails. In other words, don't kill the slimy invaders at all”.
(Glover, 2023)

2345AD

*What they always sensed
Through bodily exploration
Was that slow time is thick now time
Queer out-of-time time
Time that is free
From rules, procedures, expectations, outcomes*

Snail becoming human

Weaving the thread of these entangled and troubling *Snail Facts* through a knot of *Speculative Fabulation* we arrive at Margaret Atwood's (2024) fantastical essay entitled: '*Metempsychosis: or, the Journey of the Soul*' which offers the story of a snail trapped inside the body of a woman. After dying from a human attack with homemade, environmentally friendly pesticide a snail narrates how they find themselves reincarnated from gastropod mollusc to human. After only a short time living in a human body the snail craves a return to their previous form. The essay humorously recounts the horrors of human behaviour from the lived experience of a snail. Reading Atwood's essay through the troubled contact zone of child-snail relations outlined earlier in this chapter assists in exploring further the questions 'what do child-snail relations make possible?' and 'how can making odd kin generate alternative stories about gender in childhood?'

Metempsychosis, offered by Atwood, and narrated by a snail, draws into sharp focus many of the same concerns that surfaced when considering our research project with four-year-old children and the objective to flatten species hierarchies. It consciously called to account the ways in which human exceptionalism is so thoroughly embedded in education in the broadest sense, and even more so in 'Environmental Education' intended for very young children. As I have argued elsewhere (Osgood & Odegard, 2022), the ready conflation of childhood with nature which rests upon simplistic readings of both, as somehow innocent and in need of protection, is unhelpful. Within this logic rests inherent ageism and speciesism - that adult huMan (Wynter, 2003) knows what is best for both child and nature. Or as Atwood (2024, p.137) proclaims with savage irony: '- the soul of the well-behaved snail finally arrives at the pinnacle of creation, and - oh joy! - is reborn as a human being. So goes the story.'

Mauni's odd-kin visitations and relations with gastropods within a troubled contact zone directly call human exceptionalism to account. Co-dependencies and relationalities, as enacted through Despret (2016) and Haraway's (2016) curious, worldly practice of polite attentiveness and visiting is further intensified when Mauni (and the snail perhaps) activate the 'arts of noticing' (Tsing, 2015) by attuning to the minutiae of life as it e/merges through

routine everyday encounters at school. Our concern was to create possibilities for children to tap into ethico-onto-response-abilities towards multispecies flourishing. This is markedly, yet subtly distinct from more conventional ‘Environmental Education’ programmes that tend to take up a moralising stance that unwittingly reinforces anthropocentrism (i.e. that huMan will be the saviour of our dying planet).

Through making, crafting, moving, dancing, and playing with words, the conventions of mainstream education - with its preoccupation to perform against a set of normative standards, to get it right, to compete and excel - were actively refused (see Osgood et al, 2024 for further discussion of this in relation to this specific research). The regulation of squiggly child bodyminds in time and space was partially achieved in Hedgehog classroom through clocking practices, predictable routines, organisation of classroom space, and the designation of a square on which to sit at carpet time, which actively work to produce certain sorts of gendered subjects i.e. quiet, compliant Mauni. Through reincarnation from a humble garden snail, Atwood’s protagonist becomes acutely aware of the regulation and containment that goes with being human: ‘at last the clock said five. My human brain - the thinking-meat part of this foreign body...knew about clocks’ (p.140) And is it any wonder brains know about clocks? In the interests of school-readiness and to avert possible outbreaks of chaos, clocking practices determine rhythms for child bodyminds pretty much from birth and only become further intensified through each stage of schooling.

Pulling on another thread offered by Atwood’s reincarnated snail, we are reminded to: ‘live in the moment, humans are often told, but snails don’t need to be told. We’re in the moment all the time, and the moment is in us’ (p.138). Celebrating ‘snail superpowers’ has much to offer a critical reappraisal of the becoming child in contemporary reception classrooms. Providing the conditions of possibility for children to get lost in the moment, in the thick now (Barad, 2012) is generative of other ways to become in the world. To encounter the world ‘as a snail’ rests upon activating a whole host of capacities. Trapped inside the body of a human, Atwood’s snail is troubled by the endless limitations and curtailments. Exploring what a body can do, they: ‘put the face through its motions to see what sort of range was available. I stuck out its tongue. At last, I thought, a body part that I could identify with: moist, flexible, retractable, with chemical sensors on it. Very much like a snail... ... Although snails do not have eyes, our vision is limited: we examine our surroundings through touch and smell’ (p.141).

What the snail’s narrative underlines are the affordances of different ways to encounter the world, with all our senses activated and curious, through bodily registers and atmospheric forces. Generally, though, young children’s bodies are endlessly tamed and contained, no more so than during carpet time where teachers read stories and children raise their hands in anticipation that their questions can be asked, and an answer given. Children’s books intended to introduce them to other species tend to filter through an anthropomorphic lens; rarely are creatures introduced on their own terms, in all their complex sensorial queerness. Throughout our project we consciously shared images and accounts of insects, molluscs and microbes that were from ‘real life’ sources (e.g. from Attenborough documentaries). We

shunned cartoons or picture books that (perhaps unconsciously) colonised them into an anthropocentric apparatus of understanding. As far as possible, we wanted children to imagine ‘snailness’ from the perspective and embodied state of a snail. This proposition appeared surprisingly available to young children - for example an afternoon moving across the floor as a worm was particularly memorable - but the adults involved in the project struggled, as was evident in their persistent gendering of insects; stubborn heteronormative ideas about family formations; and regular assumptions about what constitutes a ‘home’.

It transpires that ‘snails are notoriously mute’ (Atwood, p.138), which might be considered one of their many superpowers. For Mauni, though, her mutism in Nursery was considered a problem, requiring the intensive support of a Teaching Assistant. Whilst I do not know the details surrounding the refusal to verbally articulate herself, during the life of our project the shift in tempo, the emphasis upon open ended exploration, on activating all the senses, and the freedom to articulate in ways not verbal, appeared to open up possibilities for Mauni to refuse her ‘human casement’. As Atwood’s snail explains: ‘my human casement has been extensively trained to soothe, to mollify, to reassure. It ran on autopilot, like a flesh robot’ (p. 139).

Mauni found her ‘voice’ through non-verbal storytelling that was made possible from child-snail relations, she was enabled to find other ways to be that defied (gendered) expectations. Gendered forces circulate within reception classrooms and family homes, and just about everywhere in between to persistently, and often imperceptibly, work upon bodyminds as a mode of ‘training’. Mauni’s autopilot was to be quiet, to not take up too much space, to not defy expectations, but - becoming-snail; making odd kin - held capacities to generate other ideas about gender in childhood, and to create spaces for her to transgress and play with how else to do girl, to do human-child. Atwood’s essay once more offers further insight: ‘back before she’d had snail move in on her: she’d been limp, flaccid, a flimsy pushover. Was that why she’d been available to my soul? No inner strength?’ (p.145) and again later, trapped in human form they lament: ‘I knew what was expected of me in this disguise; I mouthed the phrases, I performed the rituals, but I remained convinced that I was really a terrestrial gastropod’. This illuminates what gets agitated through child-snail odd kin methodologies. Abundant possibilities to wrestle with the scripts that are provided surface. Rather than performing unquestioned rituals and practices that produce narrow, binarised ideas about gender, children can be gifted other options.

Towards the end of her essay, Atwood wonders whether in fact it was the human who was reincarnated into a snail: ‘in order to learn something of deep importance to my soul. But what could that be? To pay homage to the immediate?...to appreciate the simple joys of the universe, such as congress with a fellow snail, or snails? ... The ultimate puzzle. That is what it is to be human, I suppose: to question the terms of existence’. (p.152). Reading odd-kin relations through *Snail Fact* and *Speculative Fabulation* has unearthed an appreciation for living life differently by accessing alternative embodied and fantastical possibilities. To a certain degree, Mauni’s experiences of becoming-with snails questioned her terms of existence, and generated possibilities for gender otherwise to find expression.

*A life in 2345AD
Privileges modes of encounter
Uncertain, emergent, free
Refusing time's killing-arrow mode
Colonialist claims to own
Learning from trouble that bubbles
In memories of the future*

Snail Fiction - So Far

Re-turning *Snail Facts* outlined earlier in this chapter, we are reminded that gastropods are the most adaptable species on planet earth. As the storytelling throughout this chapter has explored, gastropod capacities to transmogryfy provides inspiration for persistent questioning of the apparatuses that fix young child bodyminds into boxes - be that material boxes on the carpet or narrow ideas about who and what they are permitted to be/come. Taking inspiration from making odd-kin through speculative arts-based methodologies underscores the value in being open to surprises when research is permitted to venture off the beaten path.

This chapter has alluded to the bountiful surprises that are unearthed when inquiry begins in unconventional places and pursues unanticipated lines. Le Guin (2004) proposes that poetry has capacities to relate the quality of human relationships to a thing, a rock, a river, a tree - so also to a snail. For Le Guin, science describes accurately from outside, whilst poetry describes accurately from inside. Science explicates, poetry implicates; but both celebrate what they describe. She urges that we need languages of both science and poetry to avoid merely amassing endless information that fails to inform our ignorance or our irresponsibility to planet earth. With the help of Haraway's SF praxis, the string figuring that has unfurled in this chapter has attempted to address these concerns, and with it arrive at some sort of response to the questions that were posed and revisited along the journey: 'what do child-snail relations make possible?' and 'how can making odd-kin generate alternative stories about gender in childhood?' By way of tying up the SF threads that have formed this chapter I conclude with one final knot that entangles *So Far* with *Science Fiction* through *Speculative Fabulation*.

*2345AD
A once blue planet glows red
Endless warnings unheeded
HuMans banished
Hermaphrodites rule
Self-sufficient, curious and wild*

*Iron-clad Gastropods
Big hearted and free
Adapting and evolving
Among geothermals at the depths of the sea*

Heat intensifying as magma rivers flow

*What they always sensed
Through bodily exploration
Was that slow time is thick now time
Queer out-of-time time
Time that is free
From rules, procedures, expectations, outcomes*

*A life in 2345AD
Privileges modes of encounter
Uncertain, emergent and free
Refusing time's killing-arrow mode
And colonialist claims to own
Learning from the trouble that bubbles
In memories of the future*

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