

New Images of Thought in the Study of Childhood Drawing: Afterword

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This book has occupied my thoughts for several months. Knowing that the deadline for this piece of writing has passed (several times) I was unable to speed up my engagements with what this treasure trove has to offer the childhood scholar. I tried to get through the book with as much efficiency as the task demanded but persistently found myself foraging, returning, gestating, turning over the richness that each chapter and visual essay had to offer. Making connections, tracing threads, revisiting QR codes that took me to videos of children in action, and thumbing back through to find images that arrested my attention the first time but offered something else the next. This is indeed a rich, intricate, and generative collection of provoking and enlivening contributions from young children and a range of great thinkers. This book matters.

What has gripped me the most in my on-going engagements with this volume though, is the centrality of the child. The editors promised new images of thought in the study of childhood drawing, and whilst this collection achieves that, I would argue that it offers much more. Posthumanist approaches to the study of childhood invite us (that is researchers, parents, artists, practitioners – adults) to let go of our sense of being all-knowing experts and instead embrace the surprises that deep hanging out with children can (and usually does) generate. We are offered beautifully theorised, and carefully articulated (multi-modal) accounts of the delicate social dance that occurs whilst children navigate the worlds of which they form a part, and actively produce through everyday encounters. What the reader is also invited to wrestle with is the profoundly important work that the contributors to this book undertake by recognising and valuing the force of the material and the more-than-human - and what this means for ethics, social justice and children's ongoing entanglements with the world.

Upturning and disrupting the prevailing images of drawing in early childhood is a core thread that courses through the entire volume. This matters if we are to break free from the confines and limitations of anthropocentric, logocentric, rationalist logic that stifles what else might be possible. Another logic is needed, one that makes space for a reconceptualization of the child that celebrates worldly entanglements and the unanticipated and unasked for. For too long a developmentalist logic has provided the dominant lens through which early childhood art is understood, with profound implications for the ways in which children's artful practices are

routinely devalued and often dismissed when they disrupt linear trajectories that demand some form of mastery towards adulthood. The ages and stages notion of child development characterised by predictable milestones provides the basis for most arts curricula and pedagogical approaches to art-making in neo-liberal contexts, with devastating effects when children fall outside normative expectations. This logic also limits educators' worldviews and expectations; frequently they become narrowly preoccupied with what children's mark-making means, or how it denotes school readiness against a predetermined set of developmental milestones. As a consequence, space and opportunity for playful improvisation and experimentation are lost. Not only this though, when adults become preoccupied with measuring and assessing in order to determine a child's normative development, processes of marginalisation and othering are set in motion. These processes have lifelong consequences and need to be called to account – this book does important work in this respect. Taking up a collective commitment to social justice involves being concerned with the everyday lived experiences of the marginalised, the silenced, lost and forgotten - sadly children too frequently fall into these categories when developmentalist logic shapes how we view and encounter them.

Each chapter and visual essay in this book powerfully illustrate that other ways to imagine the child are entirely possible, and further, such processes of reimagining open up vital opportunities to take seriously what children say, do, draw and think. It is by de-familiarising received wisdom about children that the pursuit of another logic becomes available. But as Schulte (2019:92) has asked previously: is the field of art education ready to think about children's drawings in ways that work against the seductiveness of the humanist frameworks, categories, classifications and thematizations that currently define it?

This volume provides a convincing case that the field should be ready to work against humanist frameworks because what becomes available when that happens is extraordinary. In various ways the authors in this book illustrate that when children are given access to, and are celebrated for engaging in spontaneous art, the messy, the untamed, the carnivalesque is permitted to unfurl. It is through these emergent processes that there is much to be learnt from eventful intensities that refuse to be pinned down.

When children's drawings are viewed as something other than representations of the world, as something other than an output to be decoded, classified and given value, then pedagogical

work can become more playful and open. Throughout this volume drawings are understood as emerging from and being embedded within more-than-human processes, this is significant for many reasons chief among them the possibilities that are created to attune to the ethics of encounter that permit oddness, strangeness, and wildness to find expressions without fear of inciting judgement. The freedom that posthumanist approaches make possible in children's artistic encounters, and the endless avenues that open up for adults to explore and experiment with the child, are powerfully conveyed throughout this book. Providing a timely reminder to the fields of art education and childhood studies, to ask what else and what if when contemplating what children's drawings make possible.

A process ontology frames the arguments put forward by contributors to this book, and this framing underscores a shared commitment to view children's artful practices as emergent, as disruptive, as subversive, as situated and ultimately, as lively. By focussing on processes rather than outcomes research with children becomes inherently more nuanced, complex, and fundamentally more political. It is by taking children and their artful experimentations seriously that another, posthumanist logic, that attends to matter, affect, movement, stories, relationalities and temporalities – finds expression and works to offer other accounts of why and how childhood art matters.

The windows that are so generously opened into family homes and unlikely spaces for art to unfold provides a texture and quality to the writings in this volume that lingers long after the reading is done. The care with which authors articulate ideas through their close attunement to children's artistic practices is a dynamic and affective project. I have returned to entries in this volume on numerous occasions; the story-telling and passionate engagements (that span times, places, generational relationships) persistently agitate, haunt, and provoke some form of sensory response. This feltness does not typically find expression in writings about childhood drawing but, in this book, it takes on an effervescent quality that demands the reader respond to the vitality as it is theorised and crafted through images, video extracts and playfully serious lines of argument. This lively project has capacities to draw the reader in time and again, and invites us to sit with fresh optics and new ways to navigate through what childhood art has to teach us; to consider the baggage that needs to be set aside; recognise the value in un-learning, and to fully embrace what a posthumanist sensibility has to offer our conceptualisations of the child.

In summary, this collection has left an indelible impression that is at once unsettling and hopeful. Engaging with the stories, ideas, provocations and musings presented throughout this book has left residues and resonated in ways I could not have anticipated. It is by offering possibilities to re-imagine children's drawings as more-than-human ecologies made up of entangled bodies, materialities, times, memories and spaces that habitual thoughts and practices become displaced.

This volume is a manifesto of sorts, it invites the reader to fully grapple with why and how children's drawings matter; and it underscores an imperative to embrace uncertainty and speculative not-knowing. Children's drawings, and the embodied, haptic, relational processes involved in their coming into being, matters. As lively becomings, children's art is generative of other ways to be in the world. This book insists that we take children's drawings seriously and recognise the capacities inherent within them as an invitation to dwell upon discomforts, recognitions, injustices, and uncertainties. Such a shift in focus emphasises precisely what another logic makes possible. *New Images of Thought in the Study of Childhood Drawing* makes visible what becomes possible when the child is afforded space for playful experimentation and offers an insightful guide that can assist researchers, parents, artists, and educators to challenge the limitations of dominant approaches to childhood art and instead find joy in exploring what else is unfolding through lively, everyday unfurlings.