

REVIEW

A review of “*Posthuman Research Playspaces: Climate Child Imaginaries*”

Rousell, D., & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, A. (2022). *Posthuman research playspaces: Climate child imaginaries*. NY, OX: Routledge.

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Today’s children and young people are the focus of many hopes, fears and tensions arising within the current state of environmental emergency. Young people suffer from the material aspects of climate change in varying and unequal ways. Their lives are lived within affective atmospheres that include complex sets of climate facts, values, and concerns that play out through heated public debate. Their education is shaped by a range of protective, demanding, moralizing and politicizing discourses that are often conflicting. The positions that young people can look at as available for them range from rebellious politics to a reactory politics of denial.

David Rousell and Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles say that in the midst of these confusing messages, climate change tends to become an abstract amorphous, ideologically driven issue rather than a material-discursive reality. In their book *Posthuman Research Playspaces: Climate Child Imaginaries*, they respond to the need for new forms of climate change education by taking ordinary everyday intimacies as their starting point. It is the contention of the authors that education should pay attention to the affective investments, beliefs, orientations, and situational contexts of young people and specific communities rather than focusing on what people know or don’t know.

The book offers a thorough presentation of a large-scale participatory project conducted in Australia called “Climate Change and Me.” The writers tell us that in 2014 when they started their research, climate change was just a minor topic in the Australian school science curriculum — a factual knowledge issue rather than a topic that should be sensed or explored. Working against this, the authors have opened up new, creative spaces for considering the everyday experiences of young people and the more widely distributed youth climate movement within the frame of education. The work they present is shaped and interwoven with a rich array of theoretical and conceptual influences.

The amount of collaborative research activities done in the project “Climate Change and Me” is impressive: producing and working with photos, videos, interviews, sound recordings, poems, stories, imaginings, games (and the young people are presented as poets, authors, artists in their own right) — and analyzing, curating, and theorizing these. These processes composed what the writers call “playspaces” — spaces for thinking and conceptual and artistic creation. The project engaged 135 young people across Australia and eventually led to co-designing a climate change curriculum, taken up in 25 schools in Australia.

For this reader, the main ambition in the book seems to be located in its conceptual-creative and methodological levels. Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles contribute to ongoing work happening in children's geographies and environmental education (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Malone, 2016; Somerville, 2017), drawing on ideas such as the cultures of the minor (Manning, 2016), the critical posthuman (Braidotti, 2013), the nomadic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the micropolitical (Rolnik, 2017) and the decolonial (Yusoff, 2018). The conceptual ambition is evident, especially in how the book engages with Alfred Russell Whitehead's speculative thought and process philosophy. The spaces for inquiry are open, fluid and less controlled than usual, and there is resistance to pedagogies understood as prescriptions. Instead, the authors forefront educational propositions, that is, pedagogical spaces that are more open-ended and generative of new encounters and creations. Thus, the term playspaces seems apt.

The imaginary of "climate child" offers us yet another interesting open-ended figuration. It refers to the entanglement of embodied and incorporeal forces while being a composition of "what is" and "what may be." As a speculative concept, this imaginary is not a rejection of science but an affirmation that many other sciences are possible, and, according to the authors, an opening to diverse cosmologies and ecologies of practices. As methodology, climate child imaginary directs attention to the ways in which any field is shifting continuously, which means that there never is a universal or transcendent model. Therefore, the writers state that each experiential encounter with the world matters, as "a mutating confluence of ecological fact, value, care, feeling, thought, and concern" (p. 7). Rather than depicting young people's environmental education or activism against a backdrop of nature or societal-discursive processes, this book opens up "a non-anthropocentric ecology which grants all things and events the capacity to affect" (p. 8).

With its emphasis on experience, arts, esthetics and affect in participatory work with children and young people, the book leads me to think and wonder how this kind of work could be developed in even more non-anthropocentric directions. What kind of collaborative experimentation would be required to rethink climate change education from multispecies justice and more than human perspectives, reconsidering experience and subjecthood as multiple and emergent across animals, plants, people and things (Ogden et al., 2013)? Among the openings that *Posthuman Research Playspaces* allows, I find this direction most intriguing — a direction where expansive inclusion in relation to subjects of climate justice is not enough, and instead a profound shift to thinking in terms of multiplicity is needed (Chao & Celermajer, 2023).

For researchers and educators wishing to engage with these and other pressing environmental questions, *Posthuman Research Playspaces* offers tools, ideas, propositions, and openings. It is particularly useful as an example of how to combine conceptual and artistic work across the dimensions of philosophy, empirical research, educational practice and societal outreach. It presents a well-justified open-ended alternative to the more clear-cut solution-driven approaches within environmental education and pedagogies. For those planning participatory research, it is a reminder of not to sideline theory when working with children and young people around complex issues because these times require good thinking more than ever.

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