

Children:

Global Posthumanist Perspectives and Materialist Theories

Series Editors: Karen Malone · Marek Tesar · Sonja Arndt

Pauliina Rautio

Elina Stenvall *Editors*

Social, Material and Political Constructs of Arctic Childhoods

An Everyday Life Perspective

 Springer

Children: Global Posthumanist Perspectives and Materialist Theories

Series editors

Karen Malone, Western Sydney University, Penrith, NSW, Australia

Marek Tesar, The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

Sonja Arndt, The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

This book series presents original and cutting edge knowledge for a growing field of scholarship about children. Its focus is on the interface of children being in the everyday spaces and places of contemporary childhoods, and how different theoretical approaches influence ways of knowing the future lives of children. The authors explore and analyse children's lived embodied everyday experiences and encounters with tangible objects and materials such as artefacts, toys, homes, landscapes, animals, food, and the broader intangible materiality of representational objects, such as popular culture, air, weather, bodies, relations, identities and sexualities. Monographs and edited collections in this series are attentive to the mundane everyday relationships, in-between 'what is' and 'what could be', with matters and materials. The series is unique because it challenges traditional western-centric views of children and childhood by drawing on a range of perspectives including Indigenous, Pacifica, Asian and those from the Global South. The book series is also unique as it provides a shift from developmental, social constructivists, structuralist approaches to understanding and theorising about childhood. These dominant paradigms will be challenged through a variety of post-positivist/postqualitative/posthumanist theories of being children and childhood.

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Editors

Pauliina Rautio
University of Oulu
Oulu, Finland

Elina Stenvall
University of Tampere
Tampere, Finland

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Introduction

On the Material Manifestations of Childhoods in the Arctic

Introduction

The chapters in this edited volume address the geopolitical notion of the arctic through lived everyday lives of children. The arctic will be explored as various materializations that matter to condition and define childhoods in the Nordic countries.

In the chapters, arctic childhoods are defined and discussed as grounded in everyday life matters/materials. Woolen mittens, dark winters, subzero temperatures, fluorescent streetlights, Christmas traditions, war tales, mobile phone apps, short light summers, sparse population, swimming, wolves, frozen toes and many more highlight the agency of matters/materials in the making of arctic childhoods.

The mundane everyday interdependencies of human children and their nonhuman surroundings—natural and manmade, but also political, cultural and historical—give rise to a new rendering of the arctic. A rendering beyond geopolitics and climate. One *inclusive of the experienced everyday life of the youngest of arctic citizens and their nonhuman matterings*.

The authors share an approach to understanding childhoods in which linear, developmental reasoning is not the only option. In which children or childhoods are not only delineated by age or developmental phase of an individual but explored also via lived realities which are always more complex and overlapping.

Arctic Childhoods

The arctic as a geopolitical notion can be thought of as mapping of the resources and rules of international politics but a mapping written by a select few (Chaturvedi 2000). Plate movements, glaciers, cryotic and frozen zones, temperature and

salinity profiles, or the projected northward movement of the treeline are all mappings, measures and materializations of the notion of the arctic (Nuttall and Callaghan 2000). Following the much cited passage from Haraway (2016), we urge that ‘It matters what stories...’ What gets picked up, measured and distributed as information is what lives on as stories that count. And stories that count keep creating and shaping our actions.

In this book, the story of the arctic is one mapped out of everyday life events of children. As such it produces different things in the world than temperature and salinity profiles or the market development of oil prices. The political and societal contribution is nevertheless pertinent. Not as just another list of things to consider but as a story of emergence: of how ‘the arctic’ both shapes its citizens from childhood, and is then further shaped by them. In all of its diverse meanings. So rather than just stories about the relations of children and the materials in their lives, the authors of this book are storying the conditions of these relations. In doing so, we follow Weheliye’s (2014, 12–13) suggestion to focus on the processes which enable and/or sustain the studied relation in the first place. Weheliye advocates for the latter as more productive for critical and political inquiry:

Relation is not a waste product of established components; rather, it epitomizes the constitutive potentiality of a totality that is structured in dominance and composed of the *particular processes of bringing-into-relation* [...] (Weheliye 2014, pp. 12–13)

The authors of the book share an interest in discussing the relations that children have to and with their surrounding human and more than human elements as constitutive and not only anthropocentric. This is to say that in addition to the intentions of human children, also the capacities of materials and other beings to change and shape the course of things are considered. This approach has most often been labelled as (new)materialist (Coole and Frost 2010), sometimes more broadly post-anthropocentric (e.g. Koro-Ljungberg et al. 2017) or posthuman(ist) (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018). With each respective theoretical labeling what this approach quite simply means in this book is attention towards the things and beings that are present in children’s lives, particularly because of their global geographical, societal and political context.

To be attentive, according to Masschelein (2010, 47) is to expose one’s limits and to expose one at the limits. Rather than aiming to make us more conscious or aware, attentiveness is about paying attention and opening oneself up to the world with a lack of intention and a suspension of judgement (see also Shimada *forthcoming*).

Attention is precisely to be present in the present, to be there—in the present—in such a way that the present can present itself to me (that it becomes visible, that it can come to me and I can come to see) and that I am exposed to it in such a way that I can be changed or ‘cut’ or contaminated, that my gaze can be liberated (through the ‘command’ of what is present) (Masschelein 2010, p. 48)

In this spirit, the book is both a critical and a political project in that it seeks to bring forward aspects in children’s lives which do not often get noticed or considered of significance but which nevertheless participate in and shape children’s

lived realities. Furthermore, the children discussed in the chapters are citizens or residents of the Nordic countries. A part of the world in which children's rights and positions in societies are considered of high quality, even exemplary globally. To keep ourselves—the adult societal agents—attentive nevertheless is an ongoing project.

Chapters

The nine chapters in the book emerge and revolve around a chosen material or aspect ranging from trees and mold to malls and child–adult temporalities. In the spirit of Haraway (2016), the chapters create a series of informed stories that matter; stories that highlight everyday life processes of *bringing-into-relation* (Weheliye 2014) children and their more than human surroundings.

Trees

Sofia Cele's chapter *A Tale of Two Trees: How Children Make Space in the City* opens the book by focusing on children's play in places and on how places play with children. She stories a world in which children's play in everyday life has important role on the ways in which they construct spaces. Cele explores this by looking at relationships between children and trees and shows how the bond between them is embodied. Climbing and sitting in trees is not only children's play but also a place-making activity. In Cele's words, tree becomes 'a mental space, something that is a promise of other worlds'. Trees give children friendship, hope and comfort. Cele concludes by saying that even in restricted and supervised use of outdoor spaces children still find the ways in which they make space for themselves. From this point of view, trees can be seen as agents with which children have relationships.

Mold

Breathing Well at the Wastelands? Indoor Climate Change in Schools and the Daily Lives of Arctic Children is a chapter by Tuure Tammi. In his chapter, he creates a vision about the indoors, and especially indoor-air, as a natural-cultural entanglement. He does this by looking at 'mold schools' as an example of entanglement where indoor-air materializes as an issue of environmental health. When concerning children, healthy indoor-air becomes even more important. Tammi discusses how adults take children into consideration and how the children are and can be agents in the matter at hand. He points out that children in many ways are considered as 'generalized subjects' even though they are seen to 'practice their environment'. Tammi shows different ways in which humans are tangled with

microbes and how this entanglement is changed through technologies. He concludes by stating how the phenomenon of ‘mold schools’ shows the ways in which nature remains inside buildings and how this materialization matters to children in different ways.

Ice/Water

Simon Ceder’s chapter *Giant’s Kettles and Arctic Childhood*, Ceder uses the geological formations of Giant’s kettles as a way to explore education and learning through movement. He shows how humans affect nature but discusses also how nature in a way affects itself. In this ongoing movement, human knowledge is only one way to make sense of the world. With the concept of intelligibility, Ceder shows how we learn by making ourselves intelligible to each other. This involves humans as well as the more than human surroundings and beings. Ceder points out that representational theory that is widely used in education is only one way to see the world and he presents that in education we should consider experiment, in itself, important rather than focus on the results of experiments. To Ceder intelligibility is about learning of materiality. He concludes by stating how we should see learning in a post-anthropocentric perspective.

Skates and Skis

‘Arctic Childhoods’ and Mobilized Differences—The Mattering of Skis and Skates is a chapter by Zsuzsa Millei, Riikka Korkiamäki, and Mervi Kaukko. The focus is on the role of skating and skiing, especially through the role they play as material in Finnish schools. In their chapter Millei, Korkiamäki and Kaukko engage the idea of ethnopoetry where they combine their own memories and Finnish storybook in dialogue with two research projects focusing on children who have recently arrived in Finland as refugees. In the processes of children negotiating their belonging to a new nation, everyday objects, such as skates or skis, have an important role. Because skating and skiing is so central in Finnish schools, newly arrived children must negotiate part of their belonging through this equipment—to figure out how to be a child in the Arctic.

Clothes

Niina Rutanen, Raija Raittila and Mari Vuorisalo write about *Clothes and Clothing Practices in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care*. The adopted approach combines relational sociology and geography and addresses the different kinds of spaces clothing practises create in ECEC. Clothing and clothing practises play an important role in the everyday life of ECEC but often have a different meaning to educators, to the children and to parents. Rutanen, Raittila and Vuorisalo show how these different spaces collide with each other and create one possible story of Arctic childhood. In their understanding, space is a social construction and changes in

action. They state how ‘the ‘ideal’ Nordic child is the one that is able to dress independently three different layers of clothes and boots, and to plan her/his play with peers and, finally, engage with them actively outdoors’.

Smartphones

Child—Smart Phone Entanglements: Examining Digital Natural Cultural Complexity Among Finnish Children and Young People is written by Riikka Hohti, Antti Paakkari and Kristiina Stenberg. In the chapter, they look at young people’s engagements with smartphones especially in a school context. They show us how phones become companions in everyday life and how intimate this relationship can be. In their point of view, this challenges also the way in which schools are connected to everyday life outside school. To show this complexity Hohti, Paakkari and Stenberg focus on material and relational ontology and the concept of entanglement, with which they examine different combinations and gatherings. They do this by looking at smartphones as things, bodies, affect, time and space. Their chapter highlights ‘the need of complexity-sensitive conceptual understanding when approaching young people’s digital use’.

The Mall

Noora Pyry and Inka Kaakinen write about *More-Than-Human Politics in the New Arctic Landscape: Shifts in Atmospheres at the Shopping Mall*. They focus on shopping malls as ‘journey through landscape, which has become axial in the everyday geographies of contemporary arctic youth’. With a ‘more-than-human’—approach, it is possible for them to show encounters of the mall without dichotomizing young people. In their analyses, they study politics at the mall by looking at practices of hanging out. They do this using the theorizations of dwelling with and affective atmospheres where more-than-human-politics can be felt in changes of rhythms. Hanging out at malls shows different rhythms in play where young people encounter more-than-human subjects. They conclude by stating how politics of the shopping mall can be seen as playful contestation of rules or eviction where politics is connected with landscape and actions. Shopping malls are new city centres and public places that should be open to everyone.

Crows

Nina Odegard offers an aesthetic exploration of crows. She studies encounters between children and aesthetic explorations of crows. As the data, she uses photos of entanglements where children created crows. With her study, Odegard wishes to employ what new aesthetic explorations can bring to the concepts of play. She does this by rethinking children’s encounters with crows through the new materialist theory and a hypermodal lens.

Child–Adult

The concluding chapter of the book is written by Tuija Huuki and Maija Lanas. It addresses *Arctic Child–Adult/Past–Present Entanglements in a Painful Past–Present Lecture at University*. Tuija and Maija create a chapter where they approach childhood with post-individual and non-anthropocentric theories of subjectivity. They point out how experiences are seen beyond subject–object and past–present distinction by exploring how affectivity operates through and with these binary oppositions. To illustrate their understanding, they use Huuki’s memories about her Sami childhood and present adulthood as a university lecturer. They show how the past as part of the present, when ‘past jumps into the present’ and childhood memories take over the adult present. Different elements work together and become constitutive forces through which affectivity operates. Through their chapter, Huuki and Lanas point out the importance of understanding ‘child as emerging within intersections of past events and an adult as emerging at an intersection of past events’.

Pauliina Rautio
Elina Stenvall

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Chapter 1

Trees



A Tale of Two Trees: How Children Make Space in the City

Sofia Cele

Introduction

This is a tale of a lilac and a linden tree. It is a tale of how children play with places, and how places play with children. It is a tale about a city that is increasingly hostile towards children's play, and how children find ways of overcoming the boundaries of their environment.

Noah and the Lilac Tree

He takes my hand and leads the way. We leave the busy street and enter a courtyard through an iron gate in one of the buildings. We cross the courtyard, round a couple of shrubs. I can see by the way he moves, the things he touches, and the shortcuts he takes that this is a place he knows inside-out. We stop next to a lilac tree. It is old and knotty, and has grown tall with wide branches, which makes it easy to climb. He stands by the trunk of the tree and touches the bark with his hand. It is a gentle touch. He looks at me, and then glances up at the canopy. It is as if he is judging whether or not he should reveal more to me. But we have gotten this far, and he decides to continue. He looks at me again.

“This is the one, the best tree. It's perfect for climbing. Easy, but it is also good because when you get up there”. He interrupts himself and points. “When you get up there... no one can see you”.

He turns to the trunk again. With a few silent moves he climbs the tree. Hands and feet know exactly where to step, where to hold. Knowledge collected through repetition and carefully stored in the body. He finds his seat in the canopy, sitting on

S. Cele (✉)
Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
e-mail: sofia.cele@kultgeog.uu.se

two parallel branches and leaning towards the trunk. He is only barely visible behind the lushness of green leaves that surrounds him.

“It’s like this”, he says. “I can sit up here on my own and I can observe and eavesdrop, and no one knows it. But it’s also my space here, and I feel I belong. I can be here. This is my tree. It’s my friend. Sometimes there are birds here too. If you sit very silent, they can get close. And when it’s windy I close my eyes and pretend I’m part of the tree. Because it feels like that when it’s swaying. And sometimes there are flowers, lilac flowers, and you can smell them when you sit here. But when the leaves fall off it’s different because people can see you. And also; if it’s dark it’s different, because I can’t go outside as easily, but the fun thing is if I do, I can see people in the houses because they have the lights on. But still it’s not the same. During winter, I climb with my friend instead, because you can’t sit here then. We climb all the trees really fast, like a competition. But I don’t like it when other children climb my tree, they can break it. I like it best when I sit here on my own and think”.

Vita and the Linden Tree

I notice her body language first; the way she changes her movement pattern as she crosses the grass field in the park. The ground is covered with spring flowers and she treads lightly among the blue shades of Scillas and Chinodoxas. Careful as to not break any stems. She stops in front of a Linden tree and put her palms on the bark. She just stands there and faces the tree. Her back is towards me. I get the impression that she has closed her eyes. It’s like she greets the tree, breathes with it. Honours it. I remain silent, standing a few meters behind her to be able to observe but not disturb. She turns around. “This is the tree”, she says. She leans her back towards it, rests her head on the bark. The tree is huge, and there is no way she would ever be able to climb it or even reach the leaves. But as I watch the careful ways she moves, the way she touches the tree, how she keeps her voice down and then becomes silent—I understand that in all of this rests what she told me earlier. This tree is her friend. She goes here to visit it. It reminds her of all the magical trees she has read about in books, heard stories of or seen on film. How there might live something, or someone, in the tree or below its roots, or perhaps in the canopy carefully hidden among the leaves. Or how the tree itself might wake up and walk away as they did in “The Lord of the Rings”.

This tree is special to her; it is part of what binds her to this place, this park, and this neighbourhood. She tries to go to this park to visit the tree as often as she is able. But there are also moments when she passes the tree in the company of family or friends and then she might just greet it silently, a silent whisper of “hello”. She might just cast a glance at it from the bus when she passes on the street next to the park. If she’s not alone she can’t acknowledge the tree. Mum knows and that is okay, but no one else. It’s a secret but she always greets it as she passes it.

She leans even closer to the trunk, and I realize that she protects it with her body. She looks at me, suddenly weary:

“Promise you won’t tell...”

In this chapter, I explore the relationships between children and trees. I do this because trees, together with pets, are the most reoccurring non-humans that feature in the narratives children have provided me with about their lives and everyday environments. By exploring the relationship to trees, my intention is to bring forth how seemingly trivial ‘things’ in everyday life can play an important role in how children construct spaces for play, exploration and calm, as well as find meaning in their everyday lives.

During the last 15 years, I have researched children’s relationships to the places and spaces of their everyday life in various ways. I am interested in how they relate to and create meaning in and through their outdoor environment. In the many narratives, I have received from urban children it has been evident that they are very active in creating physical and mental spaces where they ‘fit in’ when the surrounding environment is restrictive and controlling, and that these spaces often involve relationships with non-human subjects (Cele 2006, 2013). What has become evident is that seemingly pointless activities (hugging a tree, carrying stones, fiddling with sticks on the ground...) can be deeply rewarding for those who engage with it (Rautio 2013) and that this is an important but overlooked aspect of geographical research about place.

The aim of this chapter is to focus on two individual, but also representative, examples of how children relate to trees, and from these narratives to explore how children create meaning and make both physical and mental space through relationships with non-humans in their everyday lives. I engage with the idea that the ‘natural world’ is agential and that play and affective relationship to place means that all kinds of human and non-human agents are entangled (Änggård 2016, p. 87) in intra-action (Barad 2003). This means that there is a relationship between the child and the tree, in which both are involved as agents.

We know that children’s access to outdoor environments is decreasing throughout the western world, and Stockholm, which is where the research for this chapter has been carried out, is no exception to this development (Cele 2006, 2015, Cele and van der Burgt 2015). Changes in sociocultural conceptions about outdoor play and independent mobility, in combination with a rapidly on-going densification of the built environment such as exploitation of school playgrounds and green space, have a severe negative effect on children’s outdoor play and access to everyday outdoor environments (van der Burgt and Cele 2014).

Researching What Lies in Between the Tangible and the Intangible

How humans attach themselves to places, and become affected, think, and create meaning is related to how we physically interact with places and objects. But simultaneous with the interaction between the human body and environment is also the

processes that take place within the body; thoughts and feelings and associations. The meaning we create while experiencing places, as well as the memories that places awaken within us. As a researcher focusing on how humans relate to places, I find that the greatest challenge is to understand the relationship between the inner and the outer experiences without losing either one of them. To be able to focus both on that which is visual and possible to express in words, and to focus on that which is neither visual nor verbal. My earlier research experiences have shown how methods that allow for movement and place interaction make it possible for the participants to express their thoughts more nuanced while simultaneously being in the place than would be the case during an indoor interview. This is the reason why walks and auto-photography are particularly useful for this purpose due to their place interactive character (Cele 2006).

The research presented here draws on fieldwork carried out with children between 8 and 11 years in the Stockholm area. The methodological approach has been qualitative and participatory, and a combination of different methods was used to explore children's relationships to their places. A total of 125 children have participated in the research, which has taken place over a period of four years and covered two different research projects. The methodological approach of the project involved interviews, auto-photography, walks, drawing and observation. This paper draws mainly on the walks and the combination of auto-photography and interviews.

Auto-photography was used, as it is a place interactive method that actively involves children, on their own, in the places they are to talk about. The children were asked to take photographs during one week and document places that they liked, disliked or just wanted to talk about. The children took in average 27 photographs, and these images were developed into paper copies. The photographs were of places, objects and people that the children interact with in their everyday life. The children had also photographed 'invisible things' such as places where there used to be a house or a tree, thoughts and a variety of feelings. I interviewed the children individually about their images and we used each picture as a starting point for conversation. This meant that the topics covered varied widely but for all children the images made it much easier to focus on personal experience and perception than what would be the case during a regular interview (Pyyry 2015; Änggård 2015; Cook and Hess 2007; Cele 2006, 2013; Rasmussen 1999). The photographs have been used as research material and are not included as illustrations to the text.

Walks were used as a straightforward approach to understand how children use environments, which places they were referring to in the previous methods as well as to be able gain knowledge on experiences that are triggered by the environment itself through perception and sensual impressions (De Laval 1997, 2014; Kusenbach 2003). The walks also enabled the children to show me in person places that were important to them and to explain more carefully what they thought of the things we encountered during our walks. The walks were in most cases carried out with a group of children, between 3 and 5 children in each group. On some occasions, if the child wanted to or for practical reasons, I walked with only one child. Although most of the walks were carried out in groups, the informal atmosphere enabled the children to show me things individually during the walks that the other children did not hear.

The walks were documented with a research journal I wrote in during and after each walk, and sometimes also with photographs and sound recordings.

The walks included the ability to observe but also participate in how the children used their places. This helped me to understand how their body language changed as they visited different places, and in what ways they played with places and how places in turn played with the children. A large amount of how places are experienced and used are non-verbal, the participants might not even be fully conscious of how they are affected by places. Therefore, participation and careful observation of how interaction between child, place and matter take shape was necessary to fully understand. As I wrote in my field diary: *I watch the careful ways she moves, the way she touches the tree, how she keeps her voice down and then becomes silent—I understand that in all of this rests what she told me earlier (...).*

The analysis of the research includes the material gathered through all the applied methods. The material contains comprehensive information about children's relationships to urban outdoor environments. The analysis has been carried out thematically to focus on specific topics, but the aim has also been to see larger structures and patterns in the material without losing focus on the small-scale and everyday thoughts and interactions the children revealed. Throughout the chapter, I have chosen to illustrate the text with excerpts from my field diary, which includes both my own observations and quotations from the children. I chose to present a longer excerpt from the field diary in the introduction and then intertwine shorter quotes from the excerpts throughout the chapter to highlight what I write. The accuracy of the quotes has been checked against the sound recordings made during the walks.

I use the narratives of two children, whom I call Vita and Noah, to exemplify how the children talked about their relationship to trees. This means that although these narratives are those of individual children they were chosen because they exemplify grander narratives that the children revealed in the research, through language or behaviour.

Setting the Scene

The children who are part of the research presented here all live in central Stockholm. They live in stone buildings that reach five to seven floors; and that are built during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The city structure is a gridiron street pattern but with some exceptions to this as to confirm the rule. There are some parks in the area, even if these are not easily accessible due to major roads and traffic. Most of the children were not allowed to visit parks by themselves but many of them were allowed to walk on their own to school or to visit friends.

Many of the houses in this part of Stockholm are built around courtyards that are available to the residents. These courtyards vary in size but many of them are made into residential gardens with some planting, seating, barbeque and sometimes also play spaces. Although the courtyards are available to all residents, disagreements about use, sound levels and maintenance are common. This is particularly true in