



# Thinking Critically With Children of the Anthropocene (Un)Learning the Subject in Qualitative and Postqualitative Inquiry

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**Abstract** In her Deleuzian analysis of advanced capitalism, Braidotti notes that all previous emancipatory positions have been co-opted by the market-place and that even our earth others – animals, seeds, plants, and the Earth as a whole – have been subsumed by advanced capitalism. This article addresses the need for a reconceptualised critical qualitative inquiry within the context of advanced capitalism and increasing recognition of human-induced changes in the planet’s biosphere. Justice is understood in relation to the more-than-human world and its entangled children born into the 21st century. Stenger’s recommendation of thinking with the more-than-human is adapted to thinking methodologically with children in an experiment designed to explore intra-action. The article concludes that following children in their playful encounters opens a space where matter and meaning, time and space, and the being of the adult researcher is reshaped into an entangled material world.

*Keywords: advanced capitalism, Anthropocene, more-than-human, entangled children*

This blue circle is my world. The green part is Australia where I live. The anchors are holding onto the world 'cause there is rubbish on Australia. The world is supposed to move slowly, but it is moving really fast to get rid of all the rubbish so the anchors have to hold it in place and only the rubbish will fly off.

(Clayton Cole, Kurri Kurri Preschool)

## Beginning With Children

Clayton is 4 years old and goes to Kurri Kurri Preschool in a rural coal mining area outside of the industrial town of Newcastle, about two hours north of Sydney on the

east coast of Australia. Kurri Kurri is surrounded by coal mines that deliver coal to Newcastle Harbour's massive coal loading docks. In the sea off the coast of Newcastle, sleeping barges wait to enter the harbor and receive their load of black coal to carry over the sea to the seaports of coal buyers in Asia. Clayton is inevitably and irreversibly connected to their worlds. Clayton's words helped me foreground children in writing the book *Children, Place and Sustainability* (Somerville & Green, 2015). In this article I attend to his words again, taking off in different lines of flight along which this thought process leads.

## A Deleuzian Analysis of Advanced Capitalism

One way of thinking critically with Clayton is to consider critical theories of globalized capital and consumption to help understand the forces that destabilise his world and produce such a dire need for the anchors to hold it in place. In her Deleuzian analysis, Rosi Braidotti announces the loss of all previous emancipatory positions. She describes advanced capitalism as a process ontology that codes and recodes the existing rules that construct our socioeconomic sphere (Braidotti & Mura, 2014). Advanced capitalism produces subjectivities in which difference is capitalised upon and highly valued, only in terms of creating new markets. Difference itself is subsumed into the market economy, disconnected from the liberatory potential of making a difference in the world.

Braidotti argues that we can no longer use the existing language of universities based in logic and a linear sequence of cause and effect because advanced capitalism does not work like that (Braidotti & Mura, 2014). It contradicts itself, changes the rules with perfect ease and panache, and does not care for anything other than immediate profit. Advanced capitalism has sucked in, assimilated, and transformed the very subject that would have been expected to be the factor of difference. Not only has advanced capitalism subsumed human subjectivities, but it has crossed all kinds of borders, absorbing 'animals, seeds, plants, and the Earth as a whole' into the market. 'Seeds, cells and genetic codes', all of our basic earth others, everything that lives, has become controlled, commercialised, and commodified.

Braidotti says the 'transformative gesture is seldom the spectacular and it is never the individual solitary gesture, it is a collective activity' (Braidotti & Mura, 2014). Epistemologically Braidotti recommends that we rethink the Lacanian notion of desire as lack, to instead conceive of desire as positivity, informed by Deleuze and Spinoza. Desire could be understood as plenitude, as giving and sharing, for instance sadness or happiness, desiring in the mode of sharing and not acquiring.

We could desire clean air, clean water, things that are not coded as a commodity that we only need to confirm our place in a social order that is striated along lines of captivity.

While many education theorists, and others, have critiqued neoliberalism as the basis of advanced capitalism (Davies & Bansel, 2007), Braidotti's analysis abandons these more typical critical paradigm approaches. The importance of indigenous epistemologies and environmental action is acknowledged, but the main focus of Braidotti's analysis is on the possibilities of Western philosophic thought for addressing the complex self-perpetuating loop of advanced capitalism. In claiming that we cannot use the conventional language of universities, of logic, of cause and effect, Braidotti's challenge is to seek different approaches to transformative thought and action.

## Children of the Anthropocene

Clayton can also be understood as a child of the Anthropocene, the new epoch of human entanglement in the fate of the planet (Zalasiewicz, Williams, Steffen, & Crutzen, 2010, p. 2231). While the strategy of thinking with children by placing children's words first informed the writing of the book *Children, Place and Sustainability* (Somerville & Green, 2015), the concept of children of the Anthropocene only really became refined when I reflected on a recorded conversation with Mirabelle and Kelly at the end. I started the book with Clayton, who was only 4, and finished the book with teenage girls who had a lot to say about children, place, and sustainability. Like Clayton, the girls described themselves as growing up in the shadow of a 'crumbling' world, with the sense that the world is on the brink of collapse. For Clayton, this is manifest in the tension between a world going faster and faster to fling off all the rubbish and the anchors that are necessary to hold his world in place. For the older children, this tension is held in their perception of a world that is only just still functioning in the face of a lack of will to forestall its disintegration. Through this apocalyptic storyline, the teenage girls inherit a sense of failed responsibility to future generations of humans and to the animals destined for extinction.

Mirabelle's and Kelly's relationship to the environment is described as both intimately personal and distantly global. Mirabelle defined the environment as 'the world in which we live, like everything, the trees, the plants, the rocks, the cars, the fences, everything is part of the environment and everything contributes to its well-being'. When trying to distinguish 'nature' and 'environment', she said:

I differentiate them by the way that the words make me feel, like nature's sort of happy, beautiful, laughter, love filled, like with life and stuff, and environment is just completely everything, all of the notions mashed into a word, and like anger, but love as well.

Kelly responded saying that 'as the only intelligent species, we're part of the environment and we impact it in a really big way all the time and that can be a negative thing, but it also can be a positive thing'. Mirabelle challenged her idea that humans are the only intelligent species, pointing out that 'there is a lot of intelligence in animals, and we just can't necessarily see it, or they show it in different ways'.

The teenage girls' understandings are affective, imbued with deep emotions of love, anger, loss, grief, happiness, and worry, informing how they relate to the world at large and to the immediate relations of their everyday lives. The ways that Mirabelle and Kelly negotiate the impact and meaning of these storylines was threaded throughout our conversations in the play of light and dark, spoken and unspoken, and what lies in between. A remarkable difference between theirs and Clayton's generation, however, became evident in their belief that the impact of the disintegrating world will only be felt by future generations:

I worry about things a lot. I find it really awful the way that we're treating our environment, a lot of people are just so dismissive of the problems that are in the environment. I mean you look around and they're like 'Oh we're fine, look the sky is still blue, the trees are still green, everything's still functioning', and they don't see that it's only just still functioning, it's on the brink of, it may not be in our lifetime but it's all going to come crumbling down. Do you really want to ruin it for other generations? (Mirabelle, recorded conversation)

It's something that as humans we have the responsibility to be doing more towards preventing climate change from worsening. I feel like we could be doing a lot more than what we are already doing, and it's worrying that the environment that we know today might not be the same for our future generations, so my grandkids or my great grandkids might not experience the environment in the same ways that I have, there might not be the same animals. And that's really sad. (Kelly, recorded conversation)

In this sense action, for the teenage girls, as with the adults of today, is infinitely deferrable. In contrast, Clayton's story is not about future generations but about his immediate present. Intensified recognition of global warming and stories of its multiple complex attendant effects circulate globally alongside patterns of

ever-increasing global consumption. 'Children of the Anthropocene' are born into a different understanding of the stability of the world, into a storied future of inevitable entanglement in the fate of the planet. Because of this different and inevitable positioning, it is important to seek a critical position that honours our ethical and moral responsibilities to these children growing into a world we will never know. What methodologies, concepts, and theories might help us to think with these children for an entangled future that is always only in a process of becoming?

### **Thinking Critically With Children of the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene requires methodologies, concepts, and theories that are distinctively different from critical paradigm approaches linked to the children's rights movements of the 1980s. Their critical theory approaches focused on the power dynamics between adult researcher and child, arguing for children's equal participation in the research process (Alderson, 2000; Christensen & James, 2008; Kellett, 2011; Malone, 2013). They are linked to United Nations rights conventions, referencing their quasi legal status as a guide to ethical practice in research (Alderson, 2000, p. 241). Researchers following this tradition developed methodologies based in the critical paradigm with its emancipatory intentions (Lather, 1991), approaches that are no longer viable at the intersection of advanced capitalism and the Anthropocene. They assume an enlightenment ontology of an autonomous rational human being in control of his or her world and include children as adult-style researchers. A philosophical position of entanglement, of decentering the human, requires different modes of research from those that critical methodology approaches with children has previously practised.

The article takes up the challenge to think critically into methodology with children of the Anthropocene. Methodology is understood as ontological, epistemological, and action-oriented, incorporating being, knowing, and doing as inseparable. It takes up Stengers's proposal that we think collectively with more-than-human worlds and applies it through thinking methodologically with children of the Anthropocene (2005, 2012). It contributes to a strong and growing body of research applying posthuman approaches in early childhood (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2015; Taylor, 2013). While research within the posthuman is criticised for its lack of political edge, the relation between the human species with the more-than-human world is a fundamental question of justice for the planet and justice for the children born into the 21st century (Barad, 2007). Thinking these two

together enables a consideration of our ethical responsibilities in the process of developing different approaches to research:

My daughter, Mikaela, in many ways has been my closest collaborator. The way she meets the universe each day with an open and loving heart-mind has taught me a great deal. Her insatiable sense of curiosity, unabated ability to experience pure joy in learning, wide open sense of caring for other beings, and loving attentiveness to life (taking in the tiniest details and textures of the world, which she recreates through poetry, drawings, paintings, sculpture, stories, dance and song) are key ingredients to making possible futures worth remembering. (Barad, 2007, p. xiii)

The article explores these ideas through children's 'sense of curiosity, unabated ability to experience pure joy in learning, wide open sense of caring for other beings, and loving attentiveness to life' in the context of growing up within a very different world.

### **Children Unsettling Method**

Of all the data produced in the planning day for the 'Love Your Lagoons' project, two small videos were the only data that did not feature humans. The project was conducted with children from 10 schools in Sydney's water catchment. The overall approach was that teachers from two classes in each school were invited to walk to a nearby wetland (creek, lagoon, lake, river) with their students and to incorporate the wetland into their curriculum. The planning day was held at the university's campus to introduce the project to 300 participating children and 20 school and community educators. After a series of workshops with community educators, the students were introduced to 'the project approach' (Katz & Chard, 2000) in which they were to conduct their own project with the support of adult facilitators. The lagoons in the campus grounds offered a perfect place for practicing their approach, working as individuals with their worksheet and each with their appointed mode of engagement – counting birds, writing a poem, drawing, mapping, and so on. They were divided into small groups led by an adult facilitator, and the small groups were to complete their activity and then meet with the rest of the class to present their work so it could be compiled into a meaningful whole. I was appointed the facilitator for a group of six children who came with their worksheets and particular tasks that required them to engage with the lagoon in their different sensory and representational modes.

## Agency of Mud, Water, and Stones

The children in my allocated group were simply unable to stay on task. First they ran through the mud on the edges of the water, calling out excitedly and revelling in the mud's imprint on their shoes: 'Look I have mud on my new shoes!' Next, despite my attempts at persuading them to complete their allocated individual tasks, three children joined together and asked me if they could borrow my iPhone to record stones being thrown into the water. While I hovered uncertainly, worrying about my failure to keep them on task and the thought of my iPhone landing in the lagoon, they patiently recorded their first video. First they recorded a single large stone thrown into the water and then a handful of smaller ones. They played back the short (2.57 minute) video that records the image and sound of the first stone's plop as ripples spread out on the still surface of the water, overlaid by the sound of breathless children's voices as they execute the next step alongside the image as well as the sound of a handful of smaller stones dropping into the water. They reviewed their small video and decided to reject it because of the overlay of their voices. They made a second video, even shorter this time (1.62 minutes), trying very hard to be completely silent so that the video recorded only the light tinkle of a handful of small stones falling into the water. They were satisfied.

The absence of humans in these videos continued to command my attention. The five researchers working on the project had recorded the day with photographs, which were uploaded into a shared Dropbox folder. I had uploaded the children's nondata into the folder and noticed that other photos taken by the adult researchers featured humans as the focus of interest. Other children had filled out their individual worksheets with the required text, maps, or drawings. The children in my group had acted collectively, and in refusing the set task, they decentred the human in their desire to produce a representation of stones and water. In this they recorded their inevitable affective attraction to mud, stones, and water. This desire was further accentuated by their wish to record the sense of water and stones coming together without the sound of their human voices.

The actions of these children in relation to this research project raised the possibility of thinking about a posthuman methodology in which humans are not the only focus of attention. What would this mean for methods of data collection and interpretation? How can these children's videos help us to think about human entanglement in the more-than-human world? The questions raised by the children's videos take me to the sand-and-girl assemblage in 'Challenging Anthropocentric Analysis of Visual Data' (Hultman & Lenz-Taguchi, 2010). Using Deleuze's concept

of assemblage and Barad's intra-action, the article analyses two photos of children's play in an early childhood education centre. In their discussion of a photo of a young child filtering sand through her hands into a bucket, they suggest that sand and girl are doing something to each other simultaneously. Each of the bodies of matter, girl and sand, transform as an effect of the intra-actions that emerge in between them. They propose that all bodies in the event can be understood as causes in relation to each other and that the sand offers certain possibilities in its relations with the girl. In the intra-action between the girl and the sand, new problems to be solved emerge as an effect of their mutual engagement (Hultman & Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p. 530).

In this understanding based on intra-action, there is no prior existence for the individual subject; subjects emerge only through their intrarelatedness. Time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action (Barad, 2003). Intra-action is the basic concept of a new understanding of entanglement, the central theme of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: 'To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another as in the joining of two separate entities, but to lack an independent self-contained existence' (Barad, 2007, p. x). I was so taken by the resonance with what I had seen with the stones-in-water videos that I decided to engage two young children to explore what might emerge if Barad's concept of intra-action informed the design of the research rather than only the analysis.

## Experiments With Entanglement and Intra-Action

Charmaine, 3, and her sister Lulu, 4, were invited to collaborate with me in an experiment about entanglement and intra-action. We agreed that I would join their activities once a month over a 12-month period and on each occasion they would choose the place where this could happen. They readily agreed that I would bring my iPhone to take photos or videos, being more familiar with iPhones than me. The most common place they chose for our experiment was the nearby river, although they also chose places in their back yard. In the following I select three of these occasions which I have called 'events of place', in which place is understood as a temporary coalition constituted through negotiations between human and more-than-human worlds (Massey, 2005).

### Event of Place 1: Stones and River

The first event was a walk from the girls' house to the nearby river, about half a kilometre away. As we began our walk, I already realised that for me as researcher

this walking with the girls was a different configuration of time and space. To observe how they choose to intra-act with the world takes as much time as it takes, and the spaces and places of our walk were shaped by their stoppings. As we walked down to the river, the girls stopped at each stone along the track, some loose, some half buried in the pathway. Charmaine tried to pick up the stones from where they were embedded in the dirt and asked me to help her wrench them from their place in the ground. 'Let's pick up the small loose ones', I said. Lulu sorted her stones into goodies and baddies, and a collection of these built up in my pocket. As soon as we arrived at the small beach of dirt/sand on the river's edge, both girls spontaneously picked up stones and threw them into the water, watching them plop, plop, plop as ripples spread out over the surface. I took a photo of the stone-throwing girls on my iPhone, bodies leaning, arms outstretched, legs bracing, hands holding and releasing, stone falling, ripples forming – a moment of motion captured by the camera with a press of a button.

This story as a particular spatiotemporal event began by requiring a shift in orientation to time and space that challenged my adult researcher being. Birthing and dying are the only other times I have experienced such a shift in the relationship of space and time as an adult, yet for these children this is the mundane, the everyday. The girls move through space in an extraordinarily slow way, the purpose not to get somewhere but the going itself, even though they want to be at the river. The stopping places were provoked by the materiality that presented itself, the softened dirt in a driveway that was ready for play, the stones embedded in the path that needed to be levered out, and the loose stones that gathered in my pocket. My pocket became a necessary adjunct to the walk, and I felt the weight of stones against my leg as we continued on.

Stones were featured in many of the other river events, slippery and wobbly for walking on, placed in spirals on smoothed-out dirt for patterns, or becoming a family of mother, father, and cousins in imaginative play. Water, sand, leaves, and sticks shaped these river events too. We were all subtly altered through these encounters. For me it was the slowing down, a relinquishing of self to a seemingly purposeless occupation of space and time with its emergent materialities, which in turn led to a radical openness to Barad's 'aliveness of the universe'. The stones in my pocket were symbolic of this slowing down with the material of the Earth. They literally weighed me down. I wore them as part of my clothes, and they jingled against my leg as I walked. The children became stone-throwing-with stones in the momentary event at the river, produced by a mesh of related human and nonhuman bodies (Rautio, 2014). In this way of thinking, all matter, including human children and

stones, are constantly in a state of becoming through these encounters between diverse bodies. It is the immanent and continuously emergent relation that is the focus of attention.

The children displaced the autonomous researcher self in their co-option by the materiality of stones, dirt, water, sand in our first event of place. This literally changed my researcher body, adding stones to its movement, changing its temporalities and spatialities. My researcher body moved through space differently, attended to different things, heartbeat and breathing slowed, body moving differently. Attention changed from producing research data to data being produced by the research process and its emergent materialities. It was an invitation to affective becoming-other with bodies of things rather than a self-directed cognitive process of inquiry.

### Event of Place | I: Jacaranda Birthday Cake

For the second event the children chose an excursion up the back yard to a little tin shed that had been turned into their cubby house under a jacaranda tree. They invited me to look at their artwork on the walls of the cubby house, so I crawled through the low door and sat facing them in their cubby house yard. Lulu began by breaking off leaves one by one from the succulent plant growing in one of the pots, breaking them into small pieces and placing the pale green pieces against the dark dirt litter in a flat mosaic pattern. Charmaine busied herself emptying the dirt from the pot plant on the other side of the cubby. Lulu then moved a little away and started to shape the dirt with the edge of her hands into a raised flat circle, patting the top. Fine dried leaf stalks from the jacaranda tree littered on the dirt around her were broken into short lengths and placed upright around the edge of the raised circle: 'I'm making a birthday cake'. One by one she picked up fallen jacaranda flowers and slipped her finger into the throat of the flower to prepare it for placing delicately over the stalk. An upside-down purple jacaranda flower sat on the top of each of the dried leaf stalks forming a perfect circle of purple flower-petal candles.

By the time I got my phone from my pocket and turned on the video function, I was only able to record the dismantling of the cake, flower petal by flower petal. 'Why are you taking the flowers out?' I asked. 'Because, they need to come out, you can't eat them'. Charmaine sang 'I am making a castle, I am making a castle' over and over in rhythm with her actions. Once all the candles were gone and the remains of the cake swept away, with a deft movement of body and swift sleight of hand, Lulu swooped up the empty flower pot from Charmaine and began to fill it with the dirt and leaves: 'I'm making a big building with dirt and fuel'.

The two-minute video segment captured the end of the children's movements and talk of the jacaranda birthday cake event. By watching the video, I can return and review each of their actions, the intertwined movement of hands and limbs, flowers, leaf stalks, dirt, and voices. It is interesting to contemplate the elements of this event in a back yard rather than any kind of wild place. The elements of place are all present in the intricacy of the very intimate, embodied materiality of this making. The exquisite lavender blue of flower petals, so bright and delicate against the dark twiggy dirt. The slightly limp quality of each fleshy flower having lost its aliveness and become flat, hence the finger in the deep throat of the petal to make it round again. Each leaf stalk has become brittle, too, allowing it to be an upright candle poked into the pile of dirt-becoming-cake, all engaged in this process of becoming-other. Then the sudden demolition as the elements of cake are transformed again to become a big building.

I am fascinated by this kind of very quick imaginative making in response to the materiality of this very mundane place, and the rapid shift of becoming something else. It is as if the actions themselves explicate the theory of infinite moment-by-moment becomings. The event itself could only have happened with those materials in that place at that particular moment. The materials structured the time, place, and potential becomings of those moments, but they were also part of larger cycles and seasons. It was late spring when the lavender jacaranda flowers fell, the dirt was dry from the lack of rain, the fallen flowers and brittle leaf stalks were in the process of transforming from the state of being alive, and the bees gathered the last of the nectar from the dying flowers to make honey. 'Be careful, you might tread on the bees', the children said as we returned to their house.

This very ordinary, everyday event in the children's back yard has further unsettled my researcher self and preconceptions about children in their entangled more-than-human worlds. I was crouched uncomfortably in the tiny dark cramped space of a makeshift cubby house while the children engaged with dirt, jacaranda stalks, and flowers outside – thoroughly decentred from the main action of this event. It was not a wild place like the river where stones, mud, and water were featured but a very ordinary place in the back yard, a place that could be found in any built environment. It was initially the aesthetic and imaginative qualities of the children's play that commanded my attention, what they made of the litter outside of their cubby. Then it was the shock that by the time I started to record with the iPhone, the beautiful installation was already in a process of dismantling, the materials about to become a building. My thinking stammers with the complexity of the moment-by-moment nature of this encounter set within the seasonality of the jacaranda, its well-known

purple beauty in springtime coming to an end with fast approaching summer. It is how the materials at hand again command the actions that took place there; it could only have happened at that time and place with those materials. And it is my total erasure from the event, crouched uncomfortably in the dark cramped space of the cubby; I could not have been less significant to its undertaking. Recalling this helps me dwell in the space of the materiality of bodies and things without any real sense of knowing what it means but an extraordinary appreciation of its gift of grace.

### Event of Place | | | : Land of Do Anything You Want

The children selected an even more mundane common world event for this third event of place, a very ordinary concrete path outside the laundry door. This path was in full sun on a cold winter's morning, a favourite place for the girls to play. Lulu began by making an installation with the old rubber doormat, a grid of black rubber forming a pattern of square spaces, a doormat version of graph paper. Beside the concrete path, there was a garden mulched with wood chips and at the other end of the path, there was a garden with flowers. With careful precise movements, Lulu's fingers lifted pieces of wood chip and placed them in upright positions within the grid. Then others were placed lying flat in rows. The upright wood chips, she said, are the trees and the lying down ones are houses. At one corner of the rubber mat she placed flowers for a garden.

Charmaine fetched flowers for Lulu's garden until she was captured by a beetle on the ground. Turning herself upside down, she leaned to the beetle so that her nose was almost touching its body, 'Go away', she said loudly, 'this is our house'. She picked some flowers, and Lulu placed a creamy grevillea with spidery curls of stamen into the grid of the doormat, spilling over the small square spaces. Two pale mauve daisies were carefully positioned side by side taking up several grid spaces, and rows of tiny white flowers were placed methodically, one within each grid square. The flowered grid expanded as Lulu continued to work in silent absorption, adding more flowers to the squares – a lavender sprig, pink daisies, purple petunias, a leaf, and a gumnut, all carefully inserted into the square grid spaces. 'What are you making?' I asked Lulu as she neared the end of her work. 'I am making the land of do anything you want', she replied. Then, pointing to the nearby house, she continued emphatically, 'and that is the house of rules'.

The children's deep immersion in this making offered their representation of the intense nature of intra-action directed by the materials at hand – the rubber doormat with its grid, the bark chips, and the flowers. The grid of the doormat became a frame

for Lulu to create a different world that she described as ‘the land of do anything you want’. Her little sister, similarly to the jacaranda birthday cake story, was alternatively co-opted and distracted by other materialities in these sites. She enacted a parallel relation to the adult world of a mulched garden with its flowers and bugs, a laundry path with its winter sun, immersed in her own ‘land of do anything you want’. This land was always a place of imaginatively becoming-other to oneself through different sensory and serendipitous assemblages of its materialities. The frame of the grid allowed Lulu to create a temporary representation, borrowing from the chaos of the world, ‘the whirling, unpredictable movement of forces, vibratory oscillations that constitute the universe’ (Grosz, 2008, p. 5).

This third event of place expanded the children’s ephemeral material assemblages to a different level of articulation in Lulu’s differentiation between ‘the land of do anything you want’ and ‘the house of rules’. This articulation created different sets of relations and assemblages that joined and departed as new meanings emerged. In doing so, Lulu consciously delineated her momentarily created world from the world of adults, positioning my researcher self in context. In becoming-other with the materials at hand, the land of doing anything you want comes into momentary existence as distinct from ‘the house of rules’, a world of adults perceived as fixed and immutable.

## **Thinking Critically With Children of the Anthropocene**

This article begins with the words of a 4-year-old child who draws, and then describes, a world held in place by anchors as it threatens to veer completely off course in its attempt to get rid of the rubbish that overwhelms its very existence. The child’s drawing and words are situated within two parallel social processes, those of advanced capitalism and the movement(s) of Anthropocene scholarship and activism. A Deleuzian analysis of advanced capitalism proposes that all previous emancipatory positions have been co-opted by the market economy, and the transformative gesture, seldom spectacular, requires a reconceptualised politics of location, and of desire as lack to desire as plenitude (Braidotti & Mura, 2014). The movement of Anthropocene scholarship and activism offers the possibility of rethinking critical approaches through the central concept of ‘human entanglement in the fate of the planet’, a move to decentre the human in recognition of the human species’ embeddedness in the more-than-human world. This is presented as a critical question of justice for both the planet and for children born into the 21st century (Barad, 2007). The experience and horizons of these children are different from any

previous generation, necessarily evolving 'new ways of understanding the human and new modes of thought' (Colebrook, 2010).

The methodology of thinking collectively with the more-than-human world (Stengers, 2005, 2012) is adapted to explore thinking critically with children of the Anthropocene. This approach is first explored as a response to two small videos made by children who failed to stay on task in the 'Love Your Lagoons' project. Their videos stood out from hundreds of examples of data collected on the planning day by adult researchers as the only ones which did not feature humans. Their efforts to completely erase human presence, as evident in the sound of their excited voices, raised questions about how to think and represent the posthuman 'I': What do these children's videos reveal about entanglement if they want to remove human presence? What would data look like that intentionally recorded children's intra-actions in such events of place? How might we think collectively with children in their more-than-human entanglements in an intentionally designed research project?

Two young children (3 and 4 years old) were invited to collaborate in a series of experiments over a 12-month period to record their everyday activities in places of their choice. These activities were recorded on an iPhone in brief fieldnotes, still photos, and short (3 minute) videos. Three examples of these activities are examined in this article from the 'data' produced by these recordings. In the first event, 'Stones at the River', the children displace the autonomous researcher self in their co-option by the materiality of stones, dirt, water, and sand. My researcher body inhabits space differently, attends to different things, heartbeat and breathing slows, body becomes more sensory, more porous. The children-with-stones literally change my researcher body-being, adding stones to my pockets, changing its movements, temporalities, and spatialities. Attention changes from producing research data to being produced by the research process and its emergent materialities.

The second very ordinary, everyday event of the 'Jacaranda Birthday Cake' in the children's back yard further unsettles the researcher self and preconceptions about children in their entangled more-than-human worlds. The researcher body is positioned uncomfortably in the tiny, dark cramped space of a makeshift cubby house while the children engage with dirt, jacaranda stalks, and flowers outside. The researcher body is thoroughly decentred from the main action of this event. Thinking-with stammers in the complexity of the moment-by-moment nature of this encounter simultaneously set within the rhythms and seasons of the jacaranda, its well-known purple blossom in springtime coming to an end with fast-approaching summer. Again, time, space, and meaning are reconfigured within the research act directed by children fully embedded within their more-than-human worlds.

The 'Land of Do Anything You Want' as the third event of place expands the children's ephemeral material assemblages to a different level of articulation in Lulu's differentiation between 'the land of do anything you want' and 'the house of rules'. This articulation creates different sets of relations that merge and depart as new meanings emerge. In her articulation, Lulu consciously delineates her momentarily created world from the world of adults, positioning my researcher self in the context of her world. In becoming-other with the materials at hand, the 'land of doing anything you want' comes into momentary existence as emergent and mobile, distinct from 'the house of rules', a world of adults perceived as fixed and immutable.

Once tuned into these possibilities, opportunities to think collectively with children in the presence of human, more-than-human, and inanimate others present themselves. In this way being with, and paying close attention to children of the Anthropocene, enables 'new figures of the human, new figures of life, and new relations among life and perception' to emerge (Colebrook, 2010). These understandings are different ontologically and epistemologically from the critical methodologies of the children's rights approaches which focus on children becoming adult-style researchers. In these experiments children disrupt the sense of control, rationality, and autonomous self of both children and adult researcher. Both are positioned as embedded within entangled more-than-human worlds where the researcher is not the only agent, and often the least important in the focus of attention.

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## About the Author

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