

Phillips, L. G. (2016). Walking in indeterminate spaces: Possibilities for political coexistence. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 16(4). doi: 10.1108/QRJ-09-2015-0084

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to discuss how being led by a young child to unknown destinations without shared language offers an experience of indeterminacy that opens up (re)thinking of political co-existence.

Design/methodology/approach - The relational arts project *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by children* challenges the social practice of adults chaperoning children through public streets by inviting children to curate and lead unknown adults on walks of local neighbourhoods. This paper focusses on sensory ethnographic research of one encounter of a child-curated walk when this project took place in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The experience is relayed through multilayered sensorial storytelling inter-woven with diffractive analysis informed from a post-humanist agential realist position (Barad, 2007, 2012).

Findings - Perceptions, knowings, imaginings, memories and connections are read as explanations of intra-actions in the child-led walk to produce new meaning in the phenomena of political co-existence. Emergent, embodied, sensorial listening produces new awareness and understandings of intra-acting beings in an urban space regardless of age or form.

Social implications - Application of ethical ontological epistemological practice through emergent, embodied, sensorial listening to others opens affectual ethical ways of being and knowing for justice-to-come in political co-existence.

Originality/value - The concept of child-led walks is innovative as a political act by shifting from vertical adult-child relations to horizontal relations. Post-humanist agential realism is a new and emerging theory that offers possibilities to reconceptualise co-existence with others in public spaces.

Keywords Children, Storytelling, Walking, Intra-actions, Political coexistence, Sensory ethnography

Paper type Research paper

Author: Louise Gwenneth Phillips, The University of Queensland

Since 2012, I have been researching a relational arts project titled *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by children*^[1] (see Hickey and Phillips, 2013; Phillips and Hickey, 2013; Phillips and Willis, 2014). The concept of relational arts defined by Bourriaud (2002) sees everyday practices manipulated by artists to provoke (re)thinking about these practices, so that the everyday is engaged with not as pre-determined but rather as indeterminate. Such works place emphasis on social relationships, though not all relational art actively address social conditions. *The Walking Neighbourhood* project sought a place for politics in relational participatory art, as Bishop (2006) argued for, through relational antagonism that highlights social inequities, by disrupting social conventions, inviting audience members to rethink taken for granted practices and attitudes.

Conceptualisation of *The Walking Neighbourhood* commenced with Lenine Bourke (Artistic Director) late in 2010 to provoke rethinking of the geographies of fear (Valentine, 2004) that control children's limited access to the public sphere (e.g. see Gill, 2007; Malone and Rudner, 2011), and perpetuate commonly held perceptions of children as incompetent beings (e.g. Coady, 2008). Though many sociologists of childhood across the last couple of decades have theorised and documented children as competent and capable social actors (e.g. Corsaro, 2005; James *et al*, 1998), public discourses, policies and practices continue to block and hinder children's participation in the public sphere (Phillips, 2010, 2011a, b). *The Walking Neighbourhood* arts project confronts the public imaginary through public performance of child-led neighbourhood walks that foreground children's visibility and independence in public spaces. The project aspires to support the inclusion of children and children's perspectives in urban participation, design, policy and debate, as argued for in the ground-breaking ethnographic book *Children in the city* (Christensen and O'Brien, 2003). Children's lived experiences and perspectives of villages, neighbourhoods and cities have been

explored by a number of ethnographers (e.g. Phillips, 2005; Rasmussen and Smidt, 2003; Hackett, 2014) in recent years, though the research of children's participation in child-led tours of neighbourhoods as relational art is emergent territory contributing further perspectives (from artists, adult audience members, in addition to child and researcher) to sociology of children, childhood, walking and urban studies.

The method and arts practice of walking was purposefully chosen as an everyday practice (Phillips, 2005) which could readily welcome children's participation as experts and agents (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). The relational and corporeal qualities of walking offer accessibility and familiarity for children and embodied connection to matter and space (Ingold, 2011; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008) to (re)negotiate co-existence in public spaces.

On one child-led walk I experienced when the *Walking Neighbourhood* project took place in Chiang Mai, Thailand in May 2013, I was particularly awakened to how openness to indeterminacy can open up (re)thinking of political co-existence. To explain the awakening in this encounter, I draw from Karen Barad's (2007, 2010, 2012) post-humanist ethico-onto-epistemological theory of agential realism.

An imperfect précis of post-humanist agential realism

In post-humanism, there is no binary, between human and non-human, or between culture and nature, entities are not seen and understood as distinctly separate (Barad, 2007).

Privileging no form (human, animal, plant, object) over another, there is no hierarchy. Post-humanism argues that all matter matters. Relationships are flattened and inter-connected, as opposed to vertical and hierarchical. A child-led walk challenges the conventional hierarchy of adult over child.

Agential realism is a highly complex theory developed by Barad (2007) based on quantum physics. As an early childhood educator, storyteller and sensory ethnographer (with no background in quantum physics), I by no means assert to be all knowing of agential realism, hence the apologetic title: "an imperfect precis". Rather, I assert that elements of agential realism spark my wonderings about children and public spaces and so I have sensorially woven Barad's ideas into storytelling of a child-led walk in Chiang Mai. In particular, I welcome Barad's proposal of "an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing and being" (p. 185) with all matter, based on understandings that we come to know in being and that "becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter" (p. 185). I see attention to the triad of ethics, ontology and epistemology offering potential movement forward in (re)negotiation of political co-existence.

In agential realism, matter is an active participant in the world. "Matter is a dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still" (Barad, 2007, p. 170). So to understand the tensions, possibilities and dynamics of children's political co-existence I look to materiality at play to broaden understanding and insight. More specifically, I look at what Barad refers to as intra-actions of a child-led walk in Chiang-Mai that took place in a *Walking Neighbourhood* rehearsal walk.

To examine the intra-actions of a child-led walk involved attending to what emerges from and what happens within actions. Contrary to the concept of interactions, intra-actions do not assume prior existence of independent entities. Emphasis instead is on what emerges from the actions of the walk, not on the pre-existence of child and adult, and all pre-determined meanings ascribed to these social constructs. Intra-actions involve all types of matter: natural, synthetic, corporeal or incorporeal. When examining intra-actions the primary ontological units are not things but "phenomena – topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world" (Barad, 2007, p.141). Through

intra-actions “the boundaries and properties of components of phenomena become determinate and particular concepts (that is, particular material articulations) become meaningful” (p.139). An ontology that focusses attention on intra-actions reads distinct entities, agencies and events as emerging or materialising through or from the intra-action, rather than existing in their own right prior to the intra-action (Barad, 2010). Agencies are only defined in relation to their reciprocal inter-connection. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of individuals within phenomena become determinate and specific articulations of the world become meaningful. Readings of intra-actions in a child-led walk open differing meanings regarding children, public spaces, inter-generational and inter-material political co-existence to emerge.

Focussing on specific intra-actions in a child-led walk, acknowledge and make *relata* visible. Barad (2010) explains that relations define responsibility as the ability to respond, that is, a matter of inviting, welcoming and enabling the response of the Other. “‘Responsibility is not an obligation’ and ‘is not a calculation to be performed [...] It is an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling of responsiveness’” (p. 265). Irreducible relations of responsibility are seen as entanglements with others: not as just a connection but rather as indebtedness to difference and how such debt permeates our sense of self.

In agential realist ontology, neither materiality nor discursivity take priority, welcoming both material and discursive readings of phenomena. The primary units of analysis are thus material/discursive practices (e.g. walking, touching), not words. Outside of agential intra-actions – things are indeterminate. Entities do not pre-exist, they are agentially enacted and become determinately bounded and propertied within phenomena. “Phenomena are forever being reunfolded and reformed” as “intra-actions iteratively reconfigure what is

possible and what is impossible” (Barad, 2007, p. 177). Possibilities are reconfigured and reconfiguring – they are possibilities at a point in time and do not exclude new possibilities emerging.

Discussed next is how I take these imperfect explanations of matter mattering, intra-actions, relata and responsibility into analysis of a child-led walk. Further understanding of these concepts is garnered when applied through sensorial ethnographic storytelling of my walk with Seemie.

Diffraction analysis through sensorial ethnographic storytelling

I relay analysis of intra-actions of matter in the child-led walk through storytelling: a performative account of material bodies (human and non-human). Barad (2007) explains that performative accounts place our “thinking, observing and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being” (p. 133) as opposed to above or outside in a representational view. A performative account advocates for *“relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties and meanings are differentially enacted (i.e. discursive practices in my post-humanist sense) and specific material phenomena (i.e. differentiating patterns of mattering)”* (p. 139 – italics as per original). Phenomena are thus read as an ontological entanglement of intra-acting agencies, with openness to indeterminacy so that differing ways of seeing and understanding can emerge pushing aside or muffling pre-conceived notions through attention to being. Knowing through being is studied, that is, the “onto-epistemology” (p. 185) that Barad (2007) refers to. With these understandings in mind a performative account of my sensory readings of observed intra-actions of a child-led walk in Chiang Mai is diffractively analysed.

My readings are sensorially informed to foreground attention to matter in examination of intra-actions, but also as a researcher examining walking as method and arts practice I am interested in corporeality, embodiment and emplacement, all which steer me to sensory ethnography. In addition, I could only speak a few survival words of Thai; so to read the data I was solely reliant on sensory input. I drew from Pink's (2009) principles for sensory ethnography (perception, place, knowing, memory, imagination) as a framework for engaging with sensory data gathered through walking. My sensory *perceptions* were read as interconnected in alignment with the ontology of agential realism, with no one sensory modality dominating, and multiple socially, culturally and biographically specified meanings intersecting. These sensory perceptions defined *places*. We walked through spaces that became places of meaning (*knowing*) (Creswell, 2004). Further to make meaning, I drew on my sensory memories of previous visits to Thailand, of previous walks with children, and of previous walks in general. Pink also proposes that "imagination is implicated in everyday place making practices" (p. 39), not just visual imagining but multisensory imagining. I imagined the child's experience of the walk, and her previous experiences of the walk, imagining what she was interested in, thinking and feeling. Collectively, these principles guided my attendance to the sensoriality and materiality of another's way of being in the world, by aligning my body and rhythms and ways of seeing and listening with hers so that I could become similarly emplaced to understand how she remembers and imagines. Sensory ethnography, brought attention to embodied and situated inter-relationality, that excited anticipation of a fuller, deeper and richer story of participant experience, as multisensoriality and mobility fed in data from all directions.

Application of agential realism and diffractive analysis is woven into the multi-sensorial story that I next share of a walk that six-year old Seemie^[2] led me (with accompanying others)

on. Ideas are viewed from multiple perspectives: turning them over and inside out, and upside-down, and re-read through other ideas, queering their received meanings. The voice of Barad enters at moments of emergent knowing to echo insight, thinking and feeling. Moving on from the qualitative research practice of reflexivity of simply representing what is already there; diffraction enacts the ongoing production of the phenomena of inquiry (Davies, 2014a) – “an emergent process of coming to know something differently” (Davies, 2014b, p. 734). Just like Davies, in her application of diffractive analysis of emergent listening with young children, I too came to see “who and what came to matter” (p. 740) through these open and emergent processes for being and becoming in the world.

Walking with Seemie

It was a steamy summer morning in Chiang Mai. I had only flown in from Brisbane late the evening before with my partner and twin sons to research *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by children*. A group of 26 children had been working with Thai and Australian arts workers for three days already, walking and mapping the neighbourhood of Old Chiang Mai City. The concept of the project had been promoted through local schools and the Thai arts workers’ children’s theatre groups. It was school holiday time, so most parents brought their children for activity in the absence of school. The arts workers led workshops of drama games for the children to build rapport with each other and then lead group walks of the neighbourhood surrounding the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Center, where the project workshops were based. During these walks the children shared what piqued their interest, in order to develop a walk to a self-selected destination/s for the public performances scheduled for the forthcoming Sunday. By the time I arrived, the children had formed collaborative groups of three to five, selected destinations and names for their guided walks, but they had not yet lead

their planned walk. It was time to test-drive their walks. In my sleep-deprived state, my family and I were invited to accompany a group of five children ranging from 6 to 12 years of age on their walk called *Mong Mong* (an onomatopoeia for the sound of the temple bell).

With a sparkling smile, Seemie dressed in a pink dress topped with a crocheted white bolero and wide koala shaped thongs (bemusing how symbols of Australia are appropriated and appear where you least expect them) held her hand out to accompany me. I entered the walk with a post-humanist ontology of openness—letting go of pre-existing conceptions of Seemie as child and me as adult, rather we were beings engaging with the streets of Old Chiang Mai. Seemie wrapped her hand in mine to take me on the walk:

When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer... So much happens in a touch: an infinity of others—other beings, other spaces, other times—are aroused (Barad, 2012, p. 206).

I felt the delicate nature of Seemie's small hand in mine. My senses alerted to the weight, texture and warmth of her hand, that is neither a subject (that is, to be used for a purpose e.g., guide me in direction of walk) nor an object of observation. Her hand is matter intertwined with the matter of my hand, engaged in the intra-activity of hand holding producing the meaning of connectivity. The affect of connection to another created. My embodiment was integrally entangled with Seemie's. This is not to say that I necessarily experience this when I hold hands with anyone or that the act of holding hands automatically produces such, that is too simplistic an application of agential

realism. I am sharing my perceptions and sensations of the moment of being with participant and with data. My pre-defined identities as mother and an early childhood teacher that would be readily socially welcomed in the action of adult woman holding young girl's hand are not foregrounded in my perceptions. The moral panic of adult and child touch that has risen in recent decades (Tobin, 2004) was not present in the moment, rather, I, like Tobin, am willing to state publicly that I appreciated being affectionately touched by a child. By examining intra-actions, our entities were not pre-determined; they emerged from the action. Instead I am attending to the wave of sensations: warmth, softness, tenderness, and delicate. In that moment of my hand being taken in Seemie's I had an epiphany – an ethico-onto-epistemological awakening that opened up corporeal awareness of connectivity and entanglement: entanglement of alterity, generations, of child and adult, of inter-culturalism.

Seemie was leading the walk; she was responsible for me. Or as an adult does the default for responsibility always defer to me? In post-humanist agential realism, I am embodied, I am with Seemie, I am not an outsider observing in, I am in the moment with Seemie, I am engaged in walking along streets of Old Chiang Mai with Seemie. I am adult and child at the same time; adult-child binary blurs.

Our only shared words were greetings (sawatdee-ka) and gratitude (korp-kun-ka). By not sharing a language – the emphasis on words diminished; materiality and performativity claimed more space. My senses heightened to the new urban landscape. All I knew from an adult's explanation before we set off on the walk was that Seemie was taking us to a mermaid house. Fresh to a foreign city with sensory ethnographic sensibilities I existed in the indeterminacy of quantum causality at the heart of Barad's (2007, 2010) concept of intra-actions. With openness to instability and impossibility, I

searched for some threads of stability and possibility in my sensory memories for balance, for meaning. A mermaid house, what could that be? I imagined what a mermaid house might be. A museum where Thai folklore of mermaids was stored and documented? Was it someone's home inspired in design by mermaids? A building with a mermaid painted on it? Images floated in and out of my mind as Seemie led us onwards.

We walked out to the front of the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Center to cross the first road. There were faint zebra crossing markings, like they had been bitumened over, so was it really crossing site or not? Cars, taxis, tuk-tuks, scooters and motorbikes buzzed passed in muddled ongoing groups. There was not the order I was used to, like lanes, traffic lights, and pedestrian crossings. I wondered how we would get across, then one of the boys in the group, Sai, embraced his role as walk leader and stepped onto the road and held his hand up to stop the traffic. The traffic yielded to his hand command, reminding me of Max taming the wild things in "Where the wild things are" (Sendak, 1963). And so Seemie led me across the road with the rest of our group. We then crossed the next adjacent road—there was not even a distant memory of a zebra crossing there—but Sai seamlessly stopped the traffic again. As we walked down the narrow footpath frequently obstructed by obstacles, such as electricity poles, trees, rubbish I wanted to engage with Seemie to make conversation, such as "how much further?" "where is the mermaid house?", I guess driven by previous patterns of perambulating with another: you converse. Without Thai, all I could do was point and Seemie smiled and nodded. Committed to holding my hand Seemie lead the way. With the anticipation of the unknown and unfamiliar and the rising temperature and humidity, sweat slipped between our hands, yet Seemie continued to carefully attend to holding my hand. Beads of sweat developed on her petite forehead:

In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of “us” is constituted in response-ability. Each of “us” is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other (Barad, 2012, p. 215).

I felt for Seemie, diligently committed to holding my hand and leading the walk to her desired Mermaid house. I wondered if she was perspiring from the heat alone or was she anxious about leading the walk and having responsibility for a *farang* (foreigner). She continued to smile sweetly at me and carefully hold my hand.

The entire group of 11 followed Seemie’s lead. I had no idea where we were going, yet was comfortable in the adventure of being led to the unknown by a young child. Well, aside from the heat. We crossed the road and turned into another road where Seemie stopped across from a carpentry workshop and spoke something in Thai, which the translator, Kimmim, relayed as “It’s not there!!” (Plate 1)



Plate 1. *Mistaken mermaid house*

Not there?!! Our willing curiosity to see the mermaid house was stumped. Could this, what appeared to be a manufacturing workshop, differently materialised as a mermaid house at another point in time. Spacetime mattering, that is, the differential patterns of mattering across different times and spaces (Barad, 2010), rearticulated this workshop as the mistaken mermaid house. A few of us took photos to archive this puzzle.

I responded with empathy to Seemie's disappointment, through a convivial offer of a grimace. She shyly smiled seemingly un-phased by not locating her mermaid house. The workshop to which Seemie had led us, had a panel near the roof, with a shadowed mark suggesting a previously adhered decorative piece, but it was dirty and well-worn and looked like a well-established workshop for construction. It was puzzling that it could have changed from a young girl's perception of a mermaid house within two days. The accompanying translator and Australian arts worker (Nathan) talked about what to do. Nathan suggested they talk about it at the group debrief on return.

Sai then led the group onto his destination. Seemie retrieved a camera from her cloth shoulder bag. We then shared intra-activity between human and non-human apparatuses (i.e. cameras). This became our new way of interacting, a shift from the physical connection of hand holding to sharing visions of interest. Seemie photographed lotus flowers in a decorative pond on the footpath, sparkly signs, gates, and many various flowers all within two blocks. Like Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) who diffractively read photos of pre-school children in an outdoor playground using a relational materialist methodology to enable shifts in habits of seeing children, I too focussed on visual data with a view to glean insight to Seemie's interests; to know her connections with matter in public spaces. I photographed her photographing (Plate 2) and what she aimed her camera (Plate 3) at noticing her connections with places, to

build understanding of the phenomena of inquiry: children in public spaces.

I regarded matter that I would have otherwise passed. Seemie taking photos of matter in the urban environment physicalised her connection to the neighbourhood, and I taking photos of Seemie connecting to matter drew me in as another thread in a web of entangled connections, so that we become with the data (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 534). I visually honoured with Seemie what she deemed worthy of archiving.



Plate 2. *Seemie taking photo of flowers*

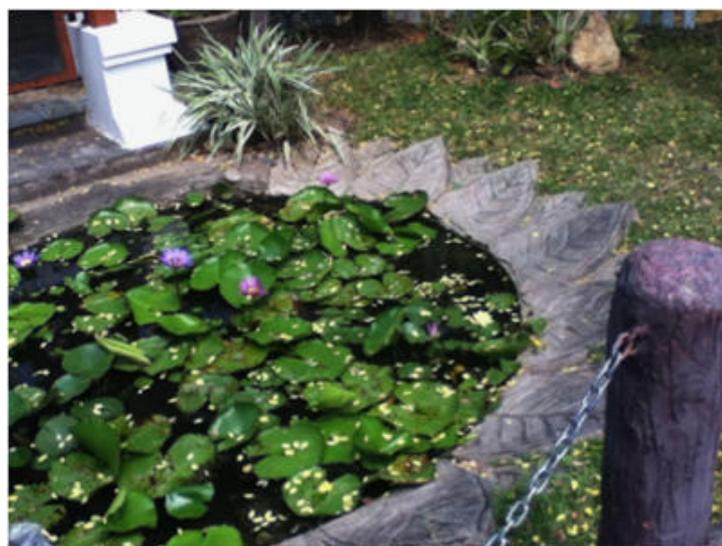


Plate 3. *The lotus flower pond that Seemie took a photo of*

Then we crossed the road and turned up a narrow road and Seemie suddenly stopped. I saw her looking at – a large copper mermaid painting on a black wall behind a gate. “Is this the mermaid house?” I asked and she nodded affirmatively (Plate 4).



Plate 4. *Seemie with her sought after mermaid house*

The open arms and curving body of the mermaid were alluring. Seemie smiled delightedly, yet she dutifully did not pass the gate. Seemie knew the boundaries of space; even the tantalising enticement of her object of desire (the mermaid) did not intercept her compliance with the public/private space divide.

By now we were tailing the group, so I quickly called Kimmim to come back. She talked with Seemie and confirmed that this was the mermaid house. Seemie smiled with delight. I smiled and nodded and offered one of my few Thai words: *dee*

(good), with an accompanying thumbs up. I asked Kimmim what the place was. “A yoga centre”, she replied. Not what I had expected. The rest of the group had moved on so we needed to catch up with them. Perhaps Seemie’s memory of the directions to the mermaid house had become muddled. An experience many of us can relate to.

The group continued along to Sai’s destination, Wat Umong Mahathen Chan, an ancient weathered brick stupa and monastery. We circled the grounds with Seemie taking photos of flowers, a large mound of sand (for the Thai Buddhist practice of making sand pagodas), Sai, then cheekily taking photos of myself, then corralling my two sons and partner into photos. I then reciprocated – taking photos of her, then we offered the images to each other to view, smiling and laughing. We became with camera lenses: to frame our perceptions and sensations as we traversed through the grounds of the Wat (Plate 5).



Plate 5. *Seemie photographing me photographing her*

Our inter-action through imagery exchanges continued for the remainder of the walk. On the return leg to the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Center, Seemie held my hand again, when we reached the front of the centre Sai handed her his bag and walked on. Seemie compliantly accepted it. Such presumptive behaviour shocked my feminist sensibilities, and I surmised that such familiarity and expectation would only come from a sibling. I asked Kimmim – yes Sai was Seemie’s older brother:

[...] living compassionately requires recognizing and facing our responsibility to the infinitude of the other (Barad, 2012, p. 219).

In this moment, feminist discourse foregrounded my ontology and so I sympathised with Seemie that her brother saw her as an object (i.e. a bag carrier); that she was being taken for granted by her brother. Perhaps it is culturally accepted or perhaps it was simply pragmatics and familiarity and I did not hear or understand any inter-personal communication offered. But in the moment, I did not see ethicality as Barad describes it: responsibility to all others. I did not see “responsibility to the infinitude of the other” in this intra-action. Well at least in how I understand such, that the other is not a distinct different entity separate from self, but rather that the boundaries are blurred, so we do not see the other as less than but as part of and connected to self. I offered to take her bag; she smiled sweetly and led me back to the centre.

By reading the above action both discursively and materially I come to wonder about the exchange differently: Seemie’s labour being exploited, and as the potential seamless passing on of bag carrying as bodies being in tune and inter-connected. Seemie was not phased, so perhaps it didn’t matter. Through diffractive analysis I am not reading data to “unfold ‘what actually happened’” (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 537), but rather noting the affect on me as researcher being part of a data event: I was unsettled.

Emergent ways of being and knowing in walking with Seemie

The sensory and embodied experience of being led by a young child on a walk through the streets of Chiang Mai, brought attention to sensations (e.g. touch, sweat), visuals (e.g. street-markings, signage, workshops, flowers, gates), wonderings (e.g. how to cross a road, mistaken mermaid house) and imaginings (e.g. mermaid house) of features that would in other circumstances have passed unnoticed. I experienced many different features of this neighbourhood than if I was walking on my own. And I learnt dismissiveness or acceptance of features that would usually startle (e.g. crossing heavily trafficked roads) or irritate me (e.g. obstructed footpaths, and a brother's expectation of bag holding). Without words to share, Seemie and I built a connection, through physical touch and the sharing of sights that caught our attention (including each other). By opening my perceptions through post-humanist agential realism, I came to see the intra-actions between Seemie and I, as connectivity of wonder, disappointment, confusion, and acceptance; cultivating openness to friendly engagement with an unknown other. My memories of previous visits to Thailand resurfaced and my imagination activated as I wondered about the mermaid house and the meanings of mermaids in Thai folklore and Seemie's interest in mermaids. By walking with Seemie and the sharing of various sights across a few blocks of Old Chiang Mai city, the spaces we walked through transformed into places of meaning. The workshop was now the mistaken mermaid house. The footpaths framed with a montage of varying flowers, signage and gates. Wat Umong Mahathen Chan was now the setting of Seemie and our playful image capturing of each other. I came to know and appreciate Seemie and the local streetscape, building cultural understandings through sensory exchanges in intra-actions.

Through attention to intra-actions and diffractive readings I inquired as to who and what matters in this moment. Seemie mattered to me and I to her, which was

affectively materialised through our hand holding. Through the touch of Seemie's hand in mine I felt her openness to me and her commitment to attending to the task of navigating me through streets of Chiang Mai. "All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the Other is touching all Others, including the 'self,' and touching the 'self' entails touching the strangers within" (Barad, p. 214). Through Seemie's touch I felt more connected to the group and to the locality, rapidly evoking sensations of belonging—remarkable given I had only arrived in the country less than 12 hours earlier. Seemie's ongoing touch also (re)awakened my curiosity and playful imaginings, a part of me that had become dormant and muted by the incessant responsibilities of adulthood.

Ongoing responsibility to the entangled other: Imaginings for justice-to-come

When Seemie took my hand to hold, it was a welcoming offer to a stranger that I responded to with open acceptance. We both were open to responsibility to the other:

[...] welcoming the stranger whose very existence is the possibility of touching and being touched, who gifts us with both the ability to respond and the longing for justice-to-come (Barad, 2012, p. 219).

And Barad advocates that, "only in this ongoing responsibility to the entangled other, without dismissal (without 'enough already!'), is there the possibility of justice-to-come" (p. 264-265) through openness "to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly" (Barad, 2007, p. x). In the intra-action that Seemie and I shared, our open responses to each other supported each other's agency. I then wonder and hope that the justice-to-come is the spread of possibilities for child and adult to mutually engage in public spaces as welcomed agential entities. The opportunity to be

led by a child through an unfamiliar neighbourhood is in itself a profound exercise in being open to emergent possibilities; the addition of touch further accentuated the affect and awakenings. Adults typically walk with purpose to get somewhere within a set timeframe (Solnit, 2000), and treat young children as baggage dragged along by the hand (Wolff, 1973). Being led by a child in an unknown neighbourhood in an unknown country without knowledge of time restraints created space to see and experience inter-generational and inter-material political co-existence differently.

The search for a mermaid house introduced a non-human entity that I imagined and Seemie knew about. Barad (2012) asserts we need to trouble and face the non-human “the liminality of no/thingness—in all its liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility” before “participating with, feeling with, being moved by—can be lived” (p. 216). The kind of non-human and inhuman entities that Barad imagines in her theorising are probably more confrontational than a quest for a “mermaid house”. However, the intra-action with a mermaid house did provoke moments of indeterminacy, impossibility and possibility, that Seemie and I participated in together. I felt compassion for her when she declared: “it’s not there”. I was hooked into her pursuit of locating the mermaid house that I then eagerly followed her gaze upon the surrounding neighbourhood as we perambulated. It was through the pursuit of the mermaid house that I came to care and respond for Seemie’s interests. As Barad suggests “it may well be the inhuman, the insensible, the irrational, the unfathomable, and the incalculable that will help us face the depths of what responsibility entails” (p. 218), along with listening intently with all of our senses to the multidirectional minutely detailed patterns of interference.

The diffractive readings of intra-actions in the indeterminacy of a child-led walk produced emergent onto-epistemology drawing attention to, as Lee (2001) suggests, the

perspectives, experiences, values that children connect with in different ways, a shift away from debating pre-conceived perceptions of children such as incomplete becomings (informed by developmentalism) or as competent social actors (informed by sociology of childhood). Embodied sensorial awareness enables affect of the ongoing responsibility to the entangled other: to care because I am entangled with others, I am not separate from, but rather blurred with. I therefore imagine the potential of justice-to-come for inter-generational and inter-material political co-existence through the indeterminacy of child-led walks to unknown destinations in unfamiliar surroundings, to hear, see and feel the child's perceptions, knowings, memories, imaginings and place making.

Notes

1. To date Walking Neighbourhood hosted by children (thewalkingneighbourhood.com.au) has taken place in Brisbane, Darwin and Sydney in Australia, Chiang Mai in Thailand, Seoul in Korea and Kuopio in Finland.
2. Child participants referred to by nicknames chosen and approved for publication by parent.

References

- Alderson, P & Morrow, V 2011, *The ethics of research with children and young people: A practical handbook*, London, Sage.
- Barad, K 2007, *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- Barad, K 2010, Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come. *Derrida Today*, 3, 240–68.
- Barad, K 2012, On touching— The inhuman that therefore I am. *Differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies*, 23, 206-223.
- Bishop, C (ed.) 2006. *Participation*, Whitechapel, London: MIT Press.
- Bourriaud, N 2002, *Relational aesthetics*, Dijon, Les presses du réel.
- Christensen, P & O'Brien, M 2003, *Children in the city*, London, RoutledgeFalmer.
- Coady, M 2008, Beings and becomings: Historical and philosophical considerations of the child as citizen. In: Macnaughton, G, Hughes, P & Smith, K (eds.) *Young children as active citizens*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Corsaro, W 2005, *The sociology of childhood*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Pine Forge Press.
- Creswell, T 2004, *Place: A short introduction*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing.
- Davies, B 2014a, *Listening to children: Being and becoming*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge.
- Davies, B 2014b, Reading anger in early childhood intra-actions: A diffractive analysis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20, 734-741.

Author: Louise Gwenneth Phillips, The University of Queensland

- Gill, T 2007, *No fear: Growing up in a risk adverse society*, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Hackett, A 2014, Zigging and zooming all over the place: Young children's meaning making and movement in the museum. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 14, 5-27.
- Hickey, A & Phillips, L 2013, New kids on the block: Young people, the city and public pedagogies. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 3, 115-128.
- Hultman, K & Lenz Taguchi, H 2010, Challenging anthropocentric analysis of visual data: A relational materialist methodological approach to educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23, 525-542.
- Ingold, T 2011, *Being alive: Essays on movement, knowledge and description*, Abingdon, OX, Routledge.
- Ingold, T & Vergunst, J 2008, Introduction. In: Ingold, T & Vergunst, J (eds.) *Ways of walking: Ethnography and practice on foot*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.
- James, A, Jencks, C & Prout, A 1998, *Theorizing childhood*, Oxford, Polity Press.
- Lee, N 2001, *Childhood and society: Growing up in an age of uncertainty*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- Malone, K & Rudner, J 2011, Global perspectives on children's independent mobility: A socio-cultural comparison and theoretical discussion of children's lives in four countries in Asia and Africa. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 1, 243-259.
- Phillips, A 2005, Cultural geographies in practice: Walking and looking. *Cultural Geographies*, 12, 507-513.
- Phillips, LG 2010, Social justice storytelling and young children's active citizenship. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 31, 363-376.
- Phillips, LG 2011a, Children as citizens: Not on campus. *Australian Universities' Review*, 53, 5-10.
- Phillips, LG 2011b, Possibilities and quandaries for young children's active citizenship. *Early Education and Development*, 22, 778-794.
- Phillips, LG & Hickey, A 2013, Child led tours of Brisbane's Fortitude Valley as public pedagogy. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 8, 242-253.
- Phillips, LG & Willis, L-D 2014, Walking and talking with living texts: Breathing life against static standardisation. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 13, 76-94.
- Pink, S 2009, *Doing sensory ethnography*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- Rasmussen, K & Smidt, S 2003, Children in the neighbourhood: The neighbourhood in the children. In: Christensen, P & O'brien, M (eds.) *Children in the city*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Sendak, M 1963, *Where the wild things are*, New York, Harper and Row.
- Solnit, R 2000, *Wanderlust: A history of walking*, New York, Penguin.
- Tobin, J 2004, The disappearance of the body in early childhood education. In: Bresler, L (ed.) *Knowing bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning* Dordrecht: Springer.
- Valentine, G 2004, *Public space and the culture of childhood*, Aldershot, Hants, England, Ashgate.
- Wolff, M 1973, Notes on the behavior of pedestrians. In: Birenbaum, A & Sagarin, E (eds.) *People in Places: The Sociology of the Familiar*. New York: Praeger.

[1] To date *Walking Neighbourhood hosted by children* has taken place in Brisbane, Darwin and Sydney in Australia, Chiang-Mai in Thailand, Seoul in Korea and Kuopio in Finland.

[2] Child participants referred to by nicknames chosen and approved for publication by parent.