**Book Review: Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods – Generative Entanglements**

**Edited by Jayne Osgood and Kerry H. Robinson**

Bloomsbury Academic – ISBN 978-1-4742-8578-0

Dr. Nikki Fairchild, University of Chichester (Orcid ID - 0000-0001-8640-2710)

This is the first book in Jayne Osgood and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw’s new book series ‘Feminist Thought in Early Childhood’. The series has been designed to provide opportunities for scholars to work with ways to explore ‘experimental and creative modes of researching and practicing childhood studies’ (series editors’ introduction). In this book Jayne Osgood and Kerry H. Robinson provide a cartography of the potential for generative relationships between feminist poststructuralism and feminist new materialism. Part of this mapping poses two pertinent questions concerning the rise of feminist new materialist research and writing in early childhood, these being ‘is it new?’, and ‘what is particularly feminist about it?’ The important thread in the book is the need to pay attention to the work undertaken with feminist poststructural theory which reconfigured conceptualisation of gender and sexuality, not only in early childhood, but as a cornerstone of feminist research practices. The book attends to these histories by employing Karen Barad’s concept of dis/continuity noting that it ‘is a cutting together-apart (one move) that doesn’t deny creativity or innovation but understands its indebtedness and entanglements to the past and the future’ (Barad, cited in Juelskjær and Schwennesen, 2012: 16).

The first chapter considers what might be ‘new’ about feminist new materialism and how this might build on the critical work taken up by feminist poststructural scholars. The debates on newness ask us to move beyond what Donna Haraway (1988) entitled the ‘god trick’ of objectivity, to more situated knowledges where research becomes entangled in epistemology, ontology, ethics and politics as it aims to break binary dualisms and pay heed to the mattering of both human and other-than-human bodies. In this way working with feminist new materialism can offer different speculative enactments of feminist politics which can provide methodological approaches to hold onto issues of ‘gender, class, race and disability’ (Osgood and Robinson, 2019: 8) and allay the fear that these concerns become erased when the human subject is dissolved. This brings to mind N. Katheryn Hayles thinking on the posthuman subject where posthumanism and feminist new materialisms do not signal ‘the end of humanity. It signals the end of a certain conception of the human’ (Hayles, 1999: 286).

Chapter two foregrounds an indebtedness to the histories of feminist scholarship from the 1980’s and the impact these have had on the development of critical feminist thinking. This chapter is key as it charts the work done by scholars, including Judith Butler, and notes how feminist poststructural work influenced the move beyond biological determinisms in early childhood to a more fluid, dynamic account of social construction, relations of power and their impact on gendered subjectivities. These discussions consider the intersectional nature of Black, Indigenous and Queer scholars and the ways in which they have influenced thinking around gender and sexuality in early childhood. Dis/continuities continue in chapter three which are enacted via collective conversations with a group of feminist researchers. These conversations and theoretical ‘shifts’ act as a string figure (Haraway, 2016) where tensions, politics, enactments and connections are made within and through gender and early childhood research. The conclusion of this chapter was ‘#Gender still matters’ (Osgood and Robinson, 2019: 58) and that feminist research is imperative to address ever-present gendered inequalities.

In the next three chapters the generative connections to both feminist poststructural and feminist new materialist/posthuman theories are put to work. These three chapters help to instantiate the ways in which gender in early childhood can be explored empirically, theoretically and methodologically. All chapters analyse different gendered entanglements considering both feminist poststructural and feminist new materialist mode of thought, and explore the ways in which these differing theoretical positions connect relationally to allow nuances to the analysis of events. Jen Lyttleton-Smith and Kerry H. Robinson consider the power of dressing up and its influence on gendered subjectivities; Jayne Osgood maps the connection between Lego, gender, environmental issues and serious play and what these produce in ECEC; Mindy Blaise and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw work with feminist material movement pedagogies to challenge normalized gender categories. What all three chapters accomplish is to reveal the diversity of feminist new materialist/posthuman research and how there are synergies and generative links with feminist poststructural readings. These chapters are concerned with the debates set up earlier in the book and the theory inflected analysis takes into consideration how both human and other-than-human bodies become part of gendering processes and practices. The research detailed in these chapters is more than a ‘how-to’ of feminist new materialist methodology/methods, it considers how webs of connections can explore what these theoretical positions make possible for gender research in early childhood.

The final chapter is entitled (In)conclusion(s) and as such offers a series of propositions for those who wish to employ feminist new materialist thinking to consider. The authors argue that knowledge does not exist in a vacuum and that attention to previous feminist theorising is imperative to reveal ‘the importance of traces and entanglements, threads and knots that bind our feminist projects’ (Osgood and Robinson, 2019: 122). In answering the initial questions ‘is it new?’, and ‘what is particularly feminist about it?’ the authors acknowledge that there is no clear set of conclusions or clear cut answers. There is, however, the theoretical and conceptual potential to consider new possibilities for research practices and that by foregrounding feminism and its wider lineages it becomes possible to explore different and diffractive (Barad, 2007) ways of gendered productions in early childhood. I particularly liked the way in which the authors were able to make those generative links between feminist theory. This helps resolve some of the tensions and critiques of new materialist claims to ‘newness’, the empirical examples highlight that new materialism is ‘feminist’ when it is put to work in feminist ways. Overall this book makes an important contribution to the emerging field of feminist new materialisms in ECEC and the respectful mapping of the connections with feminist poststructuralist work will be of interest to all students and scholars who are researching gender in ECEC and are looking for ways to put these two theoretical positions in dialogue with each other.

References

Barad, K. (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Haraway, D. J. (1988) ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14 (3), 575-599.

Haraway, D. J. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Hayles, N. K. (1999) *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics.* Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

Juelskjær, M. and Schwennesen, N. (2012). Intra-active entanglements—An interview with Karen Barad. *Kvinder, Kon & Forskning,* 1-2(2012), 10-23.

Osgood, J. and Robinson, K. (2019) (eds) *Feminists Researching Gendered Childhoods: Generative Entanglements.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.