

BOOK REVIEW

Taylor, C. A, & Bayley, A. (Eds.) (2019). *Posthumanism and higher education: Reimagining pedagogy, practice and research*. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-14672-6.

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This lively, innovative book makes a strong case for how we might, and must, engage multi-modally with more-than-human co-students/researchers/pedagogues in Higher Education (HE) in ways that attend to urgent matters of social justice and sustainability. It builds capacity for ethical responses to neocolonial HE systems where human exceptionalism is taken for granted. It explores posthuman creative research and pedagogical practices that “push-back against the panopoly of neoliberal measurement technologies” (2). Carol A. Taylor and Annouchka Bayley have carefully edited this collection to take readers on a provocative wander with posthuman education practices that embrace the material world as affective and inseparable from knowledge-making, deploying diffractive methodologies that widen ideas about what data are and how data are produced. The 21 chapters investigate novel ways of attending to and valuing material-discursive learning with posthumanist frameworks to advocate for responsible, affirmative pedagogy and research.

The contributors’ work responds to the gaps between “instructor and instructed” (130); and “between the abstract knowledge to be transferred, acquired and increasingly measured, and the practical, performative knowledge which students are expected to use” (166). It attends to the “mismatch between knowledge and action in response to the environmental crisis” (167); and to the “missing voices in... what it means to be ‘human’ in the world today” (232). The authors work implicitly, and often explicitly, with Donna Haraway’s notion of “staying with the trouble”—not dismissively clearing away the difficult present and pasts but “learning to be truly present” (2016, 1). Many of the authors take up the ideas of Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, Deleuze and Guattari and numerous others, to enact a radical critique of HE pedagogy, practice, and research.

Koro-Llungberg’s “Forward-ing” (not Foreword) mobilises us to embrace the productive, generative, dynamic work of the book, in which, “the authors have taken on the (im)possible task of de/re/unworking humanism in Higher Education... [with] a variety of techniques to... illustrate how posthumanism could be lived and assembled” (viii).

In the first chapter, Taylor resists a linear act of “introducing” and instead invokes an “unfolding” of the hard work the authors have done against “performative reductiveness... in their attempts at reconfiguring pedagogy, practice and research” (4) as part of “an ongoing and questioning struggle animated by practices of hope and difficulty” (18). She deftly

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choreographs the treasures of each chapter and invites us to dive in and explore the dance from where and however we wish.

Part I: Entangled Pedagogic Provocations

Chapter 2 - Ulla et al. proffer a glimpse into what can happen when attention is paid to how more-than-human bodies leak and intermingle with “memories, expectations, dreams and desires” (45) within and beyond the classroom. In a learning event of “twisting the classroom into a creative research laboratory” (50), which embraces an ontology of immanence and the instability of knowledge, students and tutors experiment with how cutting into a body outline drawn around a student provokes speculative storytelling, not to find a specific answer to a predetermined question, but to “remain open to possibilities and hook onto what arose” (39).

Chapter 3 - O'Malley uses extracts of her autoethnographic writing which co-emerged with teaching theatre and performance modules to explore diffractively how pedagogy produces a continual “(re) (con) figuring” (60) of the lecturer by attending to patterns of difference co-emerging through entanglements with weather and climate conditions. She speculates that “perhaps pedagogy that embraces posthumanism is less about losing a sense of the human altogether but finding a better sense of the human entangled with the rest of the world” (68).

Chapter 4 - Kuby and Aguayo conceptualize qualitative inquiry (QI) as “an uncertain process of thinking” instead of pre-set methods or a “methods first” approach (74). Employing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) writing, they explore how “reading-with-and-thinking-with art, science and philosophy” (74) reorients their pedagogy on a QI course to challenge normative science approaches.

Chapter 5 - Arndt and Tesar employ Braidotti’s (2013) ideas of subjects as nomadic to explore potentialities of Kristeva’s human-centric theory of the “subject in process” as a “productive and destabilizing investigation of the human subject” (91-92). This investigation reimagines how early childhood teacher education might remain “open, always in flux and evolving” (96) in relation with bicultural curricula in New Zealand.

Chapter 6 - Strom and Lupinacci explore how, in their pedagogy with doctoral students, human researchers can be decentred yet kept in the conversation. They work with Braidotti’s notion of humans as part of “collective enunciations of the assemblages of *zoe-techno-geo* (human-non-human, technology, and earth-bound elements)” (104) to recognise indigenous non-western wisdom that is often unjustly overlooked in rational neoliberal educational agendas and to disrupt reductionist views of educational leadership as quantitatively defined, objective and linear.

Chapter 7 - Geerts experiments with diffractive, intra-active pedagogies that resist pressures to teach philosophy didactically. Traditional power hierarchies of knowledge are disrupted by means of a syllabus that was co- and continually re-designed to incorporate articles that resonated with the student participants from diverse cultures and academic disciplines. Students produced a collaborative creative essay through Google Docs instead of the usual mid-term exam assessment; and subversive philosophy memes were created to affirmatively critique and re-configure Western philosophical canons.

Chapter 8 - Hepler et al.’s work pushes against *and* enmeshes with humanist and posthumanist practices of reading groups. The authors work with metaphors of weaving tentacular fibres to



articulate diffractive patterns of a more-than-human reading group of texts, technologies, and PhD students to explore what else can become visible beyond traditional reading group practices.

Part II: Inventive Practice Intra-ventions

Chapter 9 - Higgins et al. employ the concept of nature as continual co-construction of space, time and matter with other-than-humans and more-than-humans in order to reimagine science education as possibility thinking. They propose pedagogies that think *with* nature “spiritually, politically, and ecologically” (162) to disrupt science education’s often dogmatic orientation towards valuing repeatable knowledge (re)production that reinforces and reaffirms dominant discourses.

Chapter 10 - Cooke and Colucci-Gray use experimental pedagogies that attend to multi-sensorial aspects of a listening walk and an observational walk as entangled material practices with trainee music and science teachers. Diffractive patterns emerging through students’ dialogue, drawings and maps of the walks are explored to destabilise assumptions about what counts as worthwhile knowledge in education.

Chapter 11 - rossi navigates challenging circumstances using his playwrighting practice as a research methodology in a “playper” (189), in which inseparably entangled characters are diffractions of rossi’s “(P)Artistic Researcher-self” (189). His practice of slowing down to make space for perspective shifting disrupts the de-humanizing pace of corporate academia.

Chapter 12 - Hatton recounts an example of a pedagogical assemblage which explores research methods as “doing and experiencing” (214) rather than a means to fixing meaning. Childhood Studies students engaged with a multi-sensory affective seminar activity, which troubles expectations of data production with children.

Chapter 13 - Sidebottom’s pedagogy with trainee teachers on a Reflective Practice module works with art to reframe and reach beyond egocentricities of reflection. This practice challenges fixed notions of teacher identity and explores non-linear embodied affective experiences of becoming teachers within multi-species assemblages.

Chapter 14 - Gourlay explores tensions in humanist models of digital literacy in universities, which regard “devices... as ‘tools’ at the command of the idealised ‘user’, who is stripped of markers of identity such as gender, race and social class” (238). Her work recognises nuanced relationships in entangled assemblages of material writing practices and meaning-making.

Chapter 15 - Murriss and Borchers engage with decentring the human to disrupt binaries that position children as being in deficit—less than fully human. Their account of affirming yet difficult, sometimes painful, activities with diffractive more-than-human bodymind map-making, reimagines a “more ethical, egalitarian lecturer-student relationality” (275).

Part III: Experimental Research Engagements

Chapter 16 - Hammor’s relational entanglements with a surprising and dramatic water bottle spillage provoke an autoethnographical essay, which accounts for the playful pedagogic powers of more-than-human assemblages of vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010), to explore “an equality of being(s) in the classroom” (290).

Chapter 17 - Higgins and Madden work “towards recognizing the ways in which the land is alive, agentic, and relating through a plurality of ‘voices’” (294) in their engagement with Indigenous storying pedagogies of place and spirituality, thus troubling Western nature/culture binaries and (neo)colonial erasures.

Chapter 18 - Kerr explores new materialist pedagogical possibilities for countering assumptions and practices that create material inequalities for Indigenous peoples in Canada. These pedagogies enable predominantly settler students to recognize relational responsibilities in colonial entanglement by “materially engaging with Indigenous peoples in community-based settings” (321).

Chapter 19 - Charteris and Nye explore affective intensities produced in choreographing data in “an uneasy assemblage” (331), which emerged from an incident in which non-consensual sexually explicit images of young women were published online. Their posthuman performative methodologies create possibilities for making the unknowable felt.

Chapter 20 - Bozalek et al. engage with the question of how peer reviewing might become a dialogic, affirmative, diffractive process of relational conversation. They argue for ethically response-able peer reviewing practice to counter the competitive academic culture of “publish or perish”, and to support the scholarly development of writers whilst “giving back to the reviewer” (350) for their unpaid time-consuming academic labour.

Chapter 21 - Bayley concludes this volume with a “call-to-arms” (365) to do the vital, “beautiful and painful, challenging, uplifting and grotesque” work (360) of engaging with critical pedagogies that challenge notions of Vitruvian Man as the measure of excellence, to make new stories of what it means to be human—stories that make everyone matter.

These carefully assembled writings generate inspiration for researchers and pedagogues who want to work with ideas and practices that reimagine HE as an affirmative posthuman performative practice. This is risky work—we do not know how it will unfold, but what is the risk of not doing it? Experimenting playfully, carefully, sometimes tortuously, generates diffractive patterns of fissures that crack open and (e)merge to forge unexpected ways of knowing, never merely reproducing the same. And why would we want to just reproduce the same world that is troubled with inequality and ecological crises? This book imbues courage to stay with the trouble, to invent and create spaces for thinking with more-than-human participants in research and pedagogy, and to respond to the call to do HE differently.

References

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