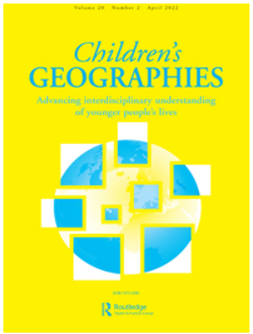
Feminist ethicality in child-animal research: worlding through complex stories



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Feminist ethicality in child-animal research: worlding through complex stories

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ABSTRACT

Thinking with feminist scholarship on ethicality, this article draws from two ethnographies with animal and young children to outline new questions for doing research in children's geographies. Specifically, the article discusses how feminist ethicality within multispecies research challenges the masculinist idea that ethical research should focus on children's story-making and ability to make meaning of the world. Instead, the authors call for an ethical focus on *worlding* processes or the making of worlds, and to seek possibilities for recuperation in the midst of children and more-than-human relations. The article concludes by reconfiguring the relations between ethics and research with young children, asking for a focus on what might be possible in the shaping of the present and future.

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Doing multispecies ethnographies

Conducting multispecies ethnographic work with young children is tricky. Attempting to shift the focus of our research from the researcher and child as the central becoming-knowable subjects about the world and refocus on complex, entangled, mutually affecting and co-shaping child-world relations takes effort. With our colleague Affrica Taylor, we have written about how we attempt to resist the child-centred focus that dominates our early childhood research (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, and Blaise 2016). In that work, we share the experimental shifts we make in our multispecies ethnographic practices that set out to decentre the human and show how fraught and risky it is to reposition our focus away from the child. These experimental shifts include: following multispecies relations, engaging with more-than-human others as active research subjects, learning to be affected as researchers, attending to awkward encounters, and risking thinking collectively. Framed within common worlding concepts and practices (Taylor 2017), these shifts recognize that human beings (researchers, educators, children) and other beings (plants and animals) co-inhabit and co-shape each other and worlds. This commitment radically expands the social to include worlds (or sociality with animals and plants, and animal and plants' sociality with us).

To continue experimenting with following, engaging, learning to be affected, attending and risking human – more-than-human relations, in this article we think through ethicality and ethos. We draw on the work of science technology studies scholars (Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Isabelle Stengers, and Donna Haraway), environmental studies theorists (Thom van Dooren, Astrida Neimanis, and Jennifer Hamilton), and anthropologists (Anna Tsing and Deborah Bird Rose) to argue for new conversations on ethics and research in children's geographies. Responding to this special issue's

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call to renew questions of ethics in the field, we argue that doing multispecies ethnographies at a time of ecological crisis demands a shift in what is ethically required from researchers. Climate change, species extinction, loss of biodiversity and ocean acidification amongst other catastrophes requires different kinds of thought and attention that works across all kinds of difference.

We contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations on ethics in research with young children (e.g. Farrell 2005; Schulte 2020; Soto and Swadener 2005). However, for us, arguing for the inclusion of children in different aspects of research processes is not enough at a time of ecological crisis. We call for an ethical focus on *worlding* processes or the making of worlds. Worlds, van Dooren (2019) writes, 'are becomings that must be put together – from the inside – by, through, as the embodied imaginings, presences, and intra-actions of innumerable beings and forces' (8). We are interested in the ethicality of making more livable worlds (or, in van Dooren's words, in worlding well) in our research encounters. In other words, for us, it is not only about listening to children's or animals' voices and including their points of view in our research, but to seek possibilities for recuperation in the midst of the children and more-than-human relations that we research. And it is here, in the midst, where we draw upon our embodied and accumulated on-the-ground research practices of noticing, paying attention, and responding to craft and tell worlding stories. We are curious about what we might learn by noticing what is already going on in children-animals' shared worlds, and what might be possible in the shaping of the present and the future.

Telling complex stories in situated places is a way of doing ethics and has the potential of shaping alternative futures, Haraway (2016) says. But, as van Dooren (2019) puts it, 'doing ethics, attending to worldings, is not simply about which claims should take priority.' Rather, he continues, doing ethics is 'about exploring the histories and imagined futures that have given rise to contestation and that will circumscribe the crafting of alternatives' (12). Tsing (2015) offers the importance of noticing and paying attention to 'the divergent, layered, conjoined projects that make up [human and nonhuman] worlds' (22). These world-making projects, she claims, are happenings that 'emerge from practical activities of making lives' without following 'progress rhythms' (21). Tsing (2015), together with Haraway (2016) and Stengers (2015), cautions us that the making of more livable worlds cannot be cultivated from the arrogant belief that we humans are an exceptional species (as some Anthropocene conversations insinuate). Making more livable worlds, these scholars offer, cannot be coupled with techno-fixes to address ecological devastation (see Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2015). Making more livable worlds through storytelling requires that we notice what has been out of view because it does not fit the dominant story of the anthropos. It demands slowing down, hesitating, and asking new questions (Stengers 2015). It involves accepting that precarity is the condition of our lives (Tsing 2015). It necessitates the vulnerability of 'staying with the trouble' of what we might notice (Haraway 2016).

We begin with an overview of how we think with the concepts of ethos and ethicality within the context of feminist environmental humanities scholarship. We then illustrate our attempts to tell complex stories from our multispecies research as a way of crafting more livable worlds for all. We focus on a series of minor events and encounters with silver gulls in Perth in Western Australia, and mosquitos in Southwestern Ontario in Canada. We conclude with a brief discussion of what might be required to renew questions of ethics at a time of climate catastrophe.

Ethos and ethicality

Nurturing multispecies relations that counter current ecological challenges demands that ethical responses are situated (*of the world*) and without guarantees, as Haraway (2007, 2016) aptly puts it. She insists that, precisely because there are no guarantees, we take seriously how we craft worlds with other beings and species. Put a different way, Rose and van Dooren (2017) insist that we attend to 'ethos' or 'way of life.' An attention to ethos, they highlight, requires involvement with the world, openness to uncertain encounters, and sharing a willingness to make better worlds, or flourishing worlds, with other species in increasingly unpredictable ecological futures. In this regard, we turn to

Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) concept of ethicality. For her, ethicality reconfigures masculinist traditional relations between ethics and research by refusing the 'realm of normative moral obligations that drive hegemonic ethics' (6). These dominant masculinist forms of ethics follow altruistic and utilitarian principles. They not only assume a normative morality that independent subjects need to abide to, but also respond through a risk management approach. Puig de la Bellacasa offers ways in which ethicality might challenge these technical approaches to ethics.

First, she argues, ethicality is a doing and practice 'embedded in concrete mundane relationalities' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 127) that require the 'thick, impure, involvement in a world' (6). There are no ethical obligations generated in advance outside of the doings of the research events. Ethical obligations are generated and recreated on an ongoing basis and in everyday doings. Ethicality invites researchers to think of research practices 'as a necessary activity to the maintenance of every world' because they are recreated through everyday doings (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 160–164). Second, and critical for our own research, ethicality makes room for multispecies encounters where the human researcher or human subject is a participant in ongoing world relations. By decentring human ethical subjectivity, ethicality becomes 'a collective affair' that interferes with the idea that 'human survival and well-being' are independent from the happenings within the rest of the world (Puig de la Bellacasa, p. 140). Encounters and events are always relational and interdependent in that they cannot be separated into distinct categories that preserve individuality (mostly of humans), but rather always involve inter- and intra-actions that inevitably lead to obligations to care.

Because ethicality is a doing in relations of mutual care through collectives, it involves speculative openings – Puig de la Bellacasa's third point. She emphasizes the importance of 'a speculative commitment to think about how things could be different if they generate care' (60). In her words, ethicality is a commitment 'because it is indeed attached to situated and positioned visions of what a livable and caring world could be' (60). Such speculation needs to remain open 'by not letting a situation or a position – or even acute awareness of pervasive domination – define in advance what is or could be,' and by ensuring that whatever thing is introduced is done carefully and in the name of care (60). Importantly, this is not an 'everything goes approach' and it is never about a 'feeling good attitude' (61). Ethicality demands that researchers engage in speculative openings 'that maintain and repair a world so that humans and nonhumans can live in it as well as possible in a complex life-sustaining web' (62). Thus, ethicality requires an intervention from the researcher 'in the articulation of … politically demanding issues' (57). It is within these speculative commitments and openings that ethicality has the potential to be transformative, non-innocent, and disruptive.

Puig de la Bellacasa's three offerings are grounded in feminist thought as they critique and rewrite masculinist origin stories on ethics that do not account for their immanent patriarchal roots. These offerings state political goals and commitments in order to acknowledge the gender, racial, sexual, colonial, class, species (amongst other) violences and silences within masculinist conceptions of ethics; as well as overcome the dualisms always already embedded in white, colonial and patriarchal conceptions of ethics (nature/culture, human/nonhuman, men/women) (Hamilton and Neimanis 2018, 2020).

Like Puig de la Bellacasa (2010) and Rose and van Dooren (2017), we are hopeful that there may be something about the doings in our everyday relations (including those that involve children) with other living beings that offers new ethical possibilities. Particularly, because these are relations of obligation and thus consequential (van Dooren, 2019). We believe that 'something' can be found in the small achievements of certain kinds of child-more-than-human exchanges and interactions. We intentionally ask questions such as: How might we create more livable futures within the relations children encounter in their immediate lifeworlds? What other kinds of political subjectivities for both humans and more-than-humans might be possible? How might our research shift taken-for-granted relations between humans and more-than-humans? Thus, where, when and with whom we conduct our research are important considerations on our part. As we wrote

elsewhere, 'the micro-affects of … everyday child–animal encounters are part of the macro-politics of mortal ecological entanglements' (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2018, 5).

Multispecies ethnography and common wordling methods

In the next section, we think with moments from our multispecies ethnographies. Veronica's research takes place in London in Canada and Mindy's in Perth in Australia. Our ethnographies use common worlding methods, complimenting Puig de la Bellacasa's concept of ethicality. 'Common worlding methods' is a term we borrow from Affrica Taylor (2013), who speaks about the necessity to recompose worlds against the human-centric impulse to divide ourselves off from the rest of the world and re-enact the self-perpetuating nature/culture divide. She insists that children live in not just exclusively human societies but in common worlds with other species – including nonhuman life forms, forces and entities. Taylor invites researchers to notice 'how children's world-making with more-than-human others can contribute to the collective task of refiguring our place in an anthropogenically-damaged world without recourse to the conceits of the Anthropos' (Taylor 2020, p. 15). We approach our research practice, then, as a political act of 'common worlding' (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2018), as a collective and compositional practice that not only accounts for the other species with whom we live but acknowledges that these dynamic, entangled multispecies relations gestate our common worlds and bring them into being (Taylor and Blaise 2014).

The inquiries that we draw from are part of a larger international collaborative project (Climate Action Childhood Network 2019) that sets out to understand how young children might engage creatively to address climate change-related impacts within their own specific contexts. Because we are conducting multispecies ethnographies, the common worlding methods we use include a variety of traditional ethnographic methods (field notes, audio and video recordings, photographic documentation), combined with practices of listening with attentiveness, being called into connection, and responding to create opportunities for worldings (Blaise, Hamm, and Iorio 2017; Rose 2012). As active and engaged participant observers we are sensitive and attentive to children's interests in their lifeworlds with plants, animals, water, air and other forces. However, this attentiveness is different from a progressive child-centred approach that involves 'following the child and her interests' to further extend learning and development. At times our approach might look as though we are merely observing, following, and raising questions. But they are not. Instead, we have been cultivating research skills for both paying attention to others and meaningfully responding, or what Anna Tsing (2015) calls 'arts of noticing' (p.9).

For a year Mindy walked with a small group of preschool-aged children, a graduate student, and three educators to explore and experiment with different ways children might walk-with, learn-with, and become-with a local river (see Walking-with Derbarl Yerrigan 2019). This involves Mindy, children, a graduate student, and educators being open and curious to multispecies worldings. For two years, Veronica and a group of graduate students walked weekly to a forest with 16 preschool children and two educators. This inquiry in Southwestern Ontario, Canada witnesses the ruins of the expansion of the city (see Witnessing the Ruins of Progress, 2018). Both inquiries used field notes, drawings, audio and video recordings, and photographic documentation to generate data.

Because our research is pedagogical (Vintimilla and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2020), children are actively involved in the noticings and questions that we include in the next section. In other words, our questions are not simply rhetorical nor reflective. Every weekly meeting with children involves revisiting previous encounters, thinking together about our collective responses to these encounters, and emphasizing our engagements with and responses to the animals we meet in our walks. Our pedagogical research is part of a process of curriculum making with children. As we have written elsewhere, for us curriculum making 'becomes a formative process marked by rhythms, temporalities, relationality, collaboration, experimentation, kinships, ecologies and living

knowledges … a way of investigating, thinking, and being together, not just a series of activities' (Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory 2020, 6). With this in mind, we story the two series of multispecies encounters as a way of *doing ethics* on the grounds of children's and animals' common worlds. This has required us to try out the slow and attentive kind of research that Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) proposes through her concept of ethicality. To do this we have had to immerse ourselves in/with the place as well as in the multispecies worlds we encounter, to attend to the kinds of stories we include and exclude, and to remain open to unknown futures while being reshaped during and beyond our fieldwork.

Finally, inspired by the provocation of feminist environmental scholars Hamilton and Neimanis (2018), our use of 'we' in the next section is inclusive in various ways. First, 'we' often includes children and/or educators; second, 'we' involves an 'always-multispecies self'; and third, 'we' resists 'political struggles as bounded or discrete' (Hamilton and Neimanis, 504). Our use of 'we' invokes 'permeability' within a multispecies world, as well as 'solidarity with intrahuman struggles,' 'while also respecting important differences (permeability is not sameness)' (504). Yet, it is important to note that our attempts to inclusivity (and decentring ourselves) is (and can only be) done through our own anthropocentric lens.

Ethicality in encounters with gulls

> It's Djilba, the coldest part of the year in Whadjuk Noongar boodja, in what is now called Perth, Western Australia. Days and nights are clear and cool, with warmer rainy and windy periods. Wind is briskly blowing this morning as we walk with a small group of preschool aged children and educators, and Derbarl Yerrigan (now called the Swan River). Derbarl Yerrigan is not far from the preschool, it takes us about 10 minutes to reach the river. We travel the same route each week - which involves walking on concrete winding paths, crossing busy roads, and finding our way through a shady and overgrown Indigenous garden and then across a manicured park before arriving at Derbarl Yerrigan.
>
> "Swoosh", Margaret and I hear coming from the sky, just as something brushes my shoulder. This swooping movement makes me alert. I stop walking, and touch my shoulder while mumbling, "Oh, I wonder what that was?" Quickly, we both turn to see what made that noise, that movement, that touch. It must have been a bird. I wonder if it was Djenark, which means Australian Silver Gull in Noongar language, coming for a visit. (Figure 1)

Djenark is a type of gull and belongs to the Family *Laridaeare* and is also a member of the Order *Charadriiformes*, meaning 'having the form of the Eurasian stone curlew.' They are Australian native birds, the most common gull of Australia, and found throughout the country, particularly at or near coastal areas and beside many inland lakes. So it is no surprise to encounter them on our walks. They have white bodies and as adults, all of their soft parts (beak and legs) are red. Their iris is white in colour. The area below the nape of a bird's neck is called a mantle and this is grey for Djenark. The two wings that flap in the wind include an underwing and upperwing, and there are many different parts to the wings (axilleries, bend of wing, underwing coverts, lesser covertis, median coverts, etc.). The upperwings and inner primaries of Djenark are grey (Simpson and Day 1984). We see and hear these gulls on every single walk. We are paying attention to these markings and their movements. Our encounters with Djenark are becoming more interesting and more intimate. We are beginning to notice how Djenark greets us, waits for us, wanders with us, watches us, and cares for us.

> Djenark greets us every time we arrive at Derbarl Yerrigan. Every time! While sitting, listening and watching Derbarl Yerrigan, Djenark, always at least one, sometimes two or three, arrive and land next to us. While walking along the path, we notice how Margaret pauses, turns her head, and looks up towards a tree branch, but then continues walking. A few seconds later she pauses, looks back, and again resumes walking. Then, another look back. But something is different this time. Something causes her to linger, a little bit longer, and then stop. Ah ha! Djenark! This bird has been flying with us, following us, and staying just near enough. Sometimes stopping on a tree branch, flapping her wings, or swooping down and landing on the grass. Djenark is keeping an eye on us and Margaret is keeping an eye on her. Djenark and Margaret are looking, noticing, and watching each other. Djenark is special to the place where we walk.

Figure 1. Djenark watching and waiting. Author's photograph.

According to Dr Noel Nannup, a Noongar Elder, Djenark, like the nginyarn (echidna) and kaarda (goanna) have a special role to play in the story, 'When the Sea Level Rose.' In this story, Djenark

> … care for the Spirit Children and the spirits of those who have passed on who are buried in the land that is being flooded. They convince mamang (whale) and kwilana (dolphin) to bring spirits to rivers and beaches with freshwater springs and release the spirits so they can reach land. Djenark (sea gull) offered to fly out and sit on the ocean above where anyone had been buried, to connect with their spirit, then come back to land, bathe in fresh sweet water and release the spirit. (Nannup, Ugle, and Swan Catchment Council 2006)

So, when we see Djenark washing their beak in Derbarl Yerrigan, which we often do, something special is happening. Spirit Children are being released and Djenark has a generative role of renewal to play.

> Standing on the concrete wall, we notice Djenark's strength both when flying through the wind and while sitting in the rough water, as waves hit the wall over and over again. Two Djenarks fly above, circling wide and landing behind us. "Kwarwh! Kwarwh! Kwarwh!" we hear them call. Margaret points, saying, "Look!" The pair don't stay there for long. They come closer to us as they fly towards the water. Landing on the shore, they stand in the sand, with waves lapping against their red legs. "Kwarwh! Kwarwh! Kwarwh!" Margaret excitedly points, leaning towards the gulls, mimicking their call back, "Kwarwh! Kwarwh!" For the slightest moment,

these Djenarks don't move and together they utter, "Kwarwh! Kwarwh!" It is in this moment where new connections are in the making. Djenarks are greeting us, and inviting us to respond.

At a time when Silver Gulls are reported to be changing their ways of life as their habitats change, we are interested in how our research can attend to the gulls' ethos. In other words, might there be possibilities for children to encounter ways of life other than their own during our walks. Because what we notice and who we meet is unpredictable, the ethicality in our research is always open. We never intended to carry out a project about Silver Gulls. And when we began noticing them on our walks, we did not immediately try to teach children about them and their habitats. We did learn more about this local bird, including their markings, calls, and behavioural postures. But we did not stop there. This knowledge helped us develop different kinds of noticing practices that shifted from knowing about Djenark as a solitary avian species, towards recognizing Djenarks' relations with water, wind, sand, each other, and how they were relating to and with us. We are invited and provoked by who we encounter and intentionally make and remake connections in all sorts of ways. In doing so, we are creating an ethos in our research that is grounded in this idea of ethicality. As researchers, we are curious about the ways in which children are in relation with other species, but also how they might establish new ones during this time of climate crisis.

Minutes after we saw the gull, a quick movement near the grass catches my eye. I turn and see Djenark looking up at me and then shifting her attention towards Margaret. Just when we thought Djenark had left, here she is, waiting and watching. Looking out towards Derbarl Yerrigan my mind wanders. However, Djenark persists, moving forward, closer towards Margaret. Again, I turn, noticing her orangy-red beak. This must be a middle-aged Djenark - a darker red beak indicates an older bird. I wonder out loud, "Hum, what kind of life do you think Djenark has had? … ..A good one, an easy one, hard one … .Is her life full of adventure or do you think there might be days when she is bored, tired, or scared?" Then, Djenark hops backwards. Pointing at Djenark, Margaret smiles, while saying, "Look! Birdy!" Silver Gull hops backwards, waits, and then hops forward again. Backwards, forwards, backwards, forwards. Outloud I ask, "Is this a game she is playing with us?" Margaret waves her hands quickly, startling Djenark away, but only for a moment. Again, Djenark persists, taking one hop towards us, two hops backwards and waits. I quietly laugh at the bird's cheekiness. "Hi Birdy," Margaret calls out again. She waves, Djenark waits. This is a speculative opening, shaping new relations. Later, as we are heading back to the preschool, we re-encounter Djenark. I ask, "I wonder if Djenark has been watching us?" Margaret answers, "She's been waiting."

There is a funny-strangeness to the ways in which Djenark follows us, watches us, and engages with us. Instead of ignoring these birds or responding in disgust, the children in turn are caring for Djenark's attentive presence. Part of our ethical multispecies research involves storying encounters, to ensure that they do not reinstate worlds that are destructive. In doing so, we are attempting to disrupt Djenark's reputation as a pest and hardy scavenger, as well as the centring of the human as a saviour or disruptor. During these walks, Djenark and Margaret are involved with the world and both seem to be open to uncertain encounters.

Ethicality in encounters with mosquitos

The small forest behind the early childhood centre has been the central source of shared inspiration for a group of preschoolers, educators and us (researchers) in London in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Our regular encounters with the forest, and the many beings contained within it, remind us that there are no clear divides between nature and culture. Each foray into the wooded area offers unexpected mergers between the natural and human constructed spheres, revealing to us that there are only the comingled space that Haraway (2007) calls 'naturecultures.' As we walk through this urban forest, we notice life, death, playfulness, garbage, patterns and textures, sounds (of wind, squirrels, sticks and leaves under our feet, a plane flying above us, a train passing by), human-made and organic structures, levels and heights, animals, a wide variety of trees and plants, strength and resiliency. The forest is alive, the forest thinks, the forest reverberates (despite our human presence). Mosquitos are one of the many species that remind children of the forest liveliness.

We have been visiting the forest all winter and learning to walk through deep snow banks. Now that the days are getting longer and the snow is melting, we are excited to encounter the forest anew: trees budding, wild leeks emerging from the ground, busy rabbits and squirrels foraging for fresh food, deer seeking food with their new fawns, and birds incessantly chirping. We also found the remnants of a makeshift camp that the children became fascinated with. Although we never found out how the camp came to be here, it is likely that it once was a homeless camp, given its proximity to the railroads. The camp remnants became children's focus of attention for several weeks during the month of April. Appropriately, they called it 'the living room in the forest.' Every visit, the children reorganized 'the furniture' before starting to enact different play scenarios: the retractable plastic lawn chair became the king's throne, the large blue tarp was transformed into a carpet where trees started to grow; the fluffy black blanket was pulled out from the soil and used to collect stones; the pots and pans as well as a large quantity of plastic beverage containers were constantly placed in and out of a middle sized canvas black suitcase that was starting to disintegrate. However, come mid-May, our visits to the forest quickly changed. With record amounts of precipitation in April, followed by record heat levels in May, the makeshift camp became the perfect breeding spot for undesirable mosquitos. (Figures 2 and 3)

On a Thursday morning we entered the forest not knowing that we will encounter hungry mosquitoes. Even though children were wearing long sleeves and long pants, huge dark clouds of mosquitoes and a constant buzz engulfed the group. 'Mosquitoes are eating me,' 'I hate mosquitoes,' 'I don't like the sound and they bite me,' 'mosquitoes are everywhere, I need help!' were some of the comments children related, accompanied with desperate gestures and cries. No matter how thick our clothes were, the pesky insects went through them. Not even the fact that we were covered on mosquito repellant helped us. Mosquitoes bit children, leaving sore spots on their skin. Unexpectedly, we became their diet. We killed as many of them as we could with forceful slapping. Exiting the forest was not an easy task.

Mosquitoes had found the makeshift camp as appealing as the children had. While the children used it for their play, the mosquitoes used it for breeding.

This was the last time that this group of children spent time in the makeshift camp. After this encounter we tried, week after week, to enter the forest again. We were unsuccessful as the mosquitoes remained there for the rest of the summer months. Instead, we continued to think with (through reading, drawing, performing) the makeship camp as well as mosquitoes encounters within the safe confines of the early childhood centre.

This challenging encounter with mosquitoes is not entirely surprising given that, as environmentalists Hall and Tamir (2019) forcefully comment, 'global warming is ushering us into a new mosquito epoch.' Mosquitoes, which 'have been on Earth for more than 100 million years,' continue to

Figure 2. Remnants of a makeshift camp. Author's photograph.

Figure 3. The suitcase. Author's photograph.

co-evolve with other species, including humans (Fang 2010, 432). As historian Winegard (2019) writes, 'in the closing decades of the twentieth century,' the mosquito 'underwent a renaissance of sort,' flourishing with 'evolutionary creativity' (388). The problem is that through this co-evolution process, mosquitoes have been picking up 'a few new deadly zoonotic hitchhikers along the way' (388). In fact, mosquitoes have been declared the most dangerous animal in the world, carrying diseases that kill one million people a year, from yellow fever, dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis, to Rift Valley fever, Chikungunya virus and West Nile (Fang 2010, 432). The year we encountered the mosquitoes in the forest, 'local public health officials' urged London 'residents to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites after a trap in London turned up West Nile virus-carrying bugs' (London Free Press 2018).

For these very reasons, mosquitoes are largely undesirable creatures and considered a substantial 'medical and financial burden' in our society (Nading 2014). Many commentators suggest that the majority of the planet is currently at war with mosquitoes, ignoring the fact that there are not clear boundaries between humans and animals. For instance, Hall and Tamir (2019) enact this war metaphor as they question: 'Are we able to control, or locally exterminate them, and with what side effects? Or is it more realistic to admit that Aedes, Anopheles, and Culex are really controlling us?' (1). In the early childhood centre, we instead take the encounters with mosquitoes as opportunities to speculate and wonder: Might these child-mosquito events provide possibilities for transformative action that goes beyond war and control? How might children learn to live with mosquitoes in ways that acknowledge our own human vulnerability and inseparability with the

world? How might early childhood think with these encounters to enable 'the flourishing of life rather than its exploitation and destruction' (Tickin 2019, 138)?

This complicated story of children-mosquitoes encounters puts forward a feminist ethicality account: narrating partial and situated events, making room for multispecies encounters, and engaging in speculative openings that do not necessarily provide answers. What the story does not do is to question the ethics of children visiting a forest with mosquitoes, or children killing mosquitoes, or educators deciding to think with the mosquitoes from the safety of the early childhood centre. For us, the ethicality in this encounter is about narrating it in a way that highlights the entanglement between children and mosquitoes, the partiality and imperfection of the responses from both the children and adults, children's non-innocence in relation to and implications within the encounter, and the ongoing difficult (even life-threatening) relationships that these children have with mosquitoes at a time of climate crisis. A feminist approach to ethics moves us towards opening up to the world's imperfect relations. It forces us to challenge masculinist notions of ethics that maintain commitments to humanism: the forest as an idyllic place for innocent children to inhabit, the romantic notion that child bodies can be fully separated from other animal bodies, the possibility of a risk-free pedagogy (Taylor 2013). Instead, we think ethically through this encounter by narrating it in a way that 'might help create the conditions for the emergence of different ways of being, ways both open to and respectful of the vitality of life' (Tickin 2019, 137), even when these conditions are partial.

The ethicality of storytelling in multispecies research

If feminist ethicality happens in the doings, then the stories we tell and how we tell stories matter. Therefore, in this paper, we carefully crafted our narratives – in the same way that we carefully crafted pedagogical decisions with the educators we collaborated with. We did that, for instance, by not including events or moments that shut down relations and connections; intentionally not sharing stories that might quickly return to a normative perspective of moral obligation, focussing on human individual intentionality; deliberately choosing to exclude stories that are altruistic, moralistic, or that take a risk management approach; resisting the initial desire to include all of the facts about a place, animals, and the ecosystems that might close down new relations; and ensuring that our stories do not offer generalizable and applicable solutions. This requires certain decisions and a holding back at times. We are not, of course, advocating for the dismissal of 'data.' Our intentions are to enact and generate feminist ethicality.

These unconventional decisions activate different, more hesitant, more nuanced, more situated, more immersive engagement with places, the more-than-human, as well as knowledges that children are part of. Following feminist commitments, they invite thick accounts of relations, uncertainties, and in-the-midst moments that are often impossible to pin down. They go against the clean, clear, and certain academic masculinist writings that we have been trained to enact. Yet, importantly, they unhinge us from the binary logic of goodies vs. baddies or right vs. wrong that, on the one hand, closes down speculative openings and commitments and, on the other, denies gulls' or mosquitos' agency and ethos. For us, these decisions propose feminist-inspired and ethical movements for childhood studies that might shift our troubling circumstances, and allow us to think about what might be possible in the shaping of the present and future. Remaining open to unknown futures is key in ethicality, and knowing when they are happening while being reshaped during and beyond our fieldwork is where worlding is happening.

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