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Children who carry stones in their pockets: on autotelic material practices in everyday life

Pauliina Rautio*

Department of Teacher Education, Siltavuorenpenger 5, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

This paper is based on an ongoing empirical journey into the materiality of children's everyday life environments. The theoretical framework relies on post-humanism relational/new materialism as influenced by Deleuze and Guattari. An inherently rewarding practice, often undertaken by children as if by default – the carrying of stones – is discussed as blurring the unfortunate and artificially produced nature-culture divide.

Keywords: children's everyday life; new materialism; posthumanism; autotelic practices

Introduction

Humans are often claimed to have lost connection with nature. We are urged to (re)learn and to (re)connect. To reconnect, we tend to be pointed towards worldviews and practices currently not ours, and in particular towards indigenous cultures (e.g. Abram 1997; Basso 1996). We are asked to change our ways of being human. As I think that we have not lost or must relearn anything – this would imply that we as humans are capable of becoming distant or separate from nature – I nevertheless contend that we need to be more aware of the diversity of ways in which we are nature already. To do this, we do not always need to look far to find practices worthy of cultivation. This paper discusses one particular kind of practice that, potentially, helps to reconceptualize as complex and blurry the unfortunate and artificially produced nature-culture divide (see also Jones 2009): the carrying of stones.

Autotelic practices of humans such as picking up and carrying stones are potentially relevant in further understanding and conceptualizing the ways in which humans are nature in relation to and constituted by all other animate or non-animate co-existing entities. By autotelic practices, I understand activities that we repeatedly engage with for no external reward or motivation such as money or outside recognition. Autotelic practices are internally motivating in that the activity is the goal and the reward in itself. Such practices are often discussed through individual traits that are claimed to enable them (see, e.g. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002 on 'autotelic personality'). In this paper, attention is shifted from the characteristics of the human subject to the autotelic practice *per se*. In doing so, it is not only the humans, with their personality traits, but also other material entities that can be seen to play a role in autotelic activity.

While I was writing on a computer one evening, my son, age 6, wandered into the den, spent a few minutes doing something behind my back and disappeared again. As I got up a little later, I noticed my pin cushion on the table behind me, next to a sewing machine. The pins had been rearranged to randomly shaped groups according to colours. I realized what among others Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) mean when they apply a relational materialist

*Email: pauliina.rautio@helsinki.fi

reading to children's behaviour: it was as much my son playing with the pins as it was the pins playing with my son, as if asking to be played with (see also Lenz-Taguchi 2011).

Without wishing to enforce the Rousseauian myth of innocent and authentic children who are corrupted through being brought up I nevertheless suggest that we as academics and adults consider seriously what takes place in practices that children usually find inherently rewarding and spend considerable time engaging in. I urge children's geographers to engage in 'banal geographies' (Horton and Kraftl 2006; also Philo and Swanson 2008) and to consider that some of children's autotelic everyday practices, while most likely not all, might be worth cultivating instead of being considered trivial or even harmful. This paper is a serious attempt to consider one such practice through asking: *What is it that takes place when children carry stones in their pockets?*

It seems safe to assume that most humans, regardless of cultural or geographical determinants, if physically able to do so, pick up stones every now and then. Of these stone-carrying humans, it is, usually, more often the children that engage in prolonged carrying, arranging and what we as adults construct as 'playing' with stones (Burke 2007, 363; Hart 1979). Moreover, children either tend to, or are allowed to, more easily than adults in a society, express attachment to and to anthropomorphize or humanize their non-human surroundings (Nieuwenhuys 2011). Children, by virtue of their both biophysical and socially/culturally constructed existence, often seem to apply what Bennett (2010) describes as *aesthetic-affective openness* towards material surroundings: an attentiveness to and sensuous enchantment by non-human forces, an openness to be surprised and to grant agency to non-human entities (see also Harker 2005). Perhaps too often this openness is mistaken for naiveté and proceeded to be outdone by education (Gebhardt, Nevers, and Billman-Mahecha 2003). In doing so, it is overlooked that while children as young human beings are in certain ways different from older people they are in many ways also the same: they, for one, have bodies that function and encounter the world much in the same sensory way than adults' bodies (Colls and Hörschelmann 2009; Horton and Kraftl 2006, 78).

The theoretical framework of this attempt relies on post-humanism and/or post-structuralism as influenced by Deleuze, and in specific on the more recent (new) materialism (e.g. Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010) as an 'after-ANT' (actor-network theory) development (Fenwick and Edwards 2011). Within the social sciences, this paper inevitably belongs to the vein of research on 'everydayness' (de Certeau 1984; Highmore 2002; Horton and Kraftl 2006; Lefebvre 2004). And further within trajectories of the new sociology of childhood, this paper, albeit not strictly a sociological one, takes up 're-attending the excluded middle' as called for by Prout (2011) in illustrating the prevailing dualisms of childhood sociology. One of these dualisms, the age-old nature-culture divide, the poles of which exemplify but biological reductionism and social reductionism (see also Jones 2009), is where this paper strives to arrive in the middle. Children, in this paper, are viewed as simultaneously and complexly both nature and culture. The practices through which not only children but humans in general continually work and live out this interface are taken as diverse and ever proliferating – and until recently to an overlooked extent relational-material (see Fenwick and Edwards 2011; Lenz-Taguchi 2011; Nieuwenhuys 2011; Prout 2000, 2005; Woodyer 2008) as well as non-linear and 'messy' (Horton and Kraftl 2008; Law 2003).

As academics influential in conceptualizing the relations between children and their environments, were we to ask *why* children carry stones we could proceed in trying to find out a clear rationale from any such child in question – or a number of developmental psychologists for that matter. Explanations would surely surface and lend themselves to be neatly categorized. However, following the ideas of new materialism (e.g. Barad 2007, 2008; Bennett 2010; Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010; Phillips Kalmbach and Larson Legard 2012), recent reflections within and of the new sociology of childhood (Prout 2011), and in relation to children's embodied and 'socio-material' geographies (e.g. Horton and Kraftl 2008; Woodyer 2008), all to varying degrees influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we would do well to let go of

insistence on causality, linearity and ‘neatness’ in our conceptualizations. The child-with-stones could be approached as if horizontally, as a momentary event produced by a mesh of related bodies (human and non-human). This would allow us to reconsider the seeming simplicity of the observation that children seem to carry stones (or sticks, corks or any other item) for the sake of carrying them.

The methodological implications of this paper touch perhaps most pertinently on the so-called participatory methods. Participatory research with children sets out to appreciate the autonomous and independent ‘view of the child’ (Burke 2007; Gallagher 2009, 36) and often proposes that children’s autonomy, their expression – or ‘voice’ – and participation needs to be supported via child-appropriate methods and means (Fusco et al. 2012). This is often done by providing children with the right kinds of equipment to express their views (most often cameras or pencils and paper) and constructing or allocating specific spaces and a particular time for the voices of children to sound through. The critical factors here, however, are the views held by those constructing the means for supporting children – the adults (Clark and Percy-Smith 2006). It is quite possible to consider, however, that children, like any beings, might not need support in encountering the world and expressing to others something of these encounters – this takes place anyway, all the time. Children might not need adults to provide them with equipment and allocate special spaces and time for participation.¹ They might need an adult to take seriously the things and actions with which they encounter their worlds anyway: say, things called toys (Woodyer 2008), or stones.

To appreciate children as whole beings and not just waiting to become something is not to consider or treat children as autonomous and independent in the sense that their material surroundings, human and non-human, would not play any part in the kind of beings they are. A new materialist approach to children’s geographies would direct attention to the ways in which children constitute their material – human and non-human – surroundings *and vice versa*. Agency would be allocated space *in between* children and their environments, arising in complex encounters rather than located only in the human individuals.

New materialism

Agency is one of the core notions that receive a new understanding within new materialism. Newness itself, both literally in the name ‘new materialism’ and in the neologisms or re-workings of existing notions has not fared without critique. Ahmed (2008), for one, claims that the prefix ‘new’ in (feminist) new materialism is without ground in relation to the already existing non- or anti-materialism in cultural and social theories. As if to highlight this, Deleuze and Guattari are also famous for utilizing, stealing even, ideas from other disciplines (Massumi 1987; St Pierre 2004), Deleuze being a self-confessed philosophic ‘collage artist’ (Deleuze 2004; Drohan 2010). However, the ‘new’ in new materialism does not have to refer to the alleged culmination in a theoretical understanding. Rather ‘new’ is said to refer both to the newness of the challenges and problems we face due to the complexities of twenty-first-century biopolitics and to the novelty and variety of approaches that these challenges call for (Coole and Frost 2010; Tiainen and Parikka 2010).

Yet another, to me the most engaging angle of conceiving the ‘new’ in new materialism as an approach, is to take it to refer to the very objective of philosophy as set by Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994, 5): ‘to create concepts that are always new’ (St. Pierre 2004) and in doing so to resist closure and celebrate open-ended complexity (MacLure 2006). We are urged time and again, by the followers of Deleuze, to quit thinking about what Deleuze might have intended (St Pierre 2004), to avoid applying a ‘deleuze-guattarian’ framework to our research (Leander and Wells Rowe 2006), and rather concentrate on *thinking with* Deleuzian (or any) concepts – to experiment with them, rather than illustrate them, in order to produce, possibly, ways of thinking and being that keep generating novel and endless possibilities (Mazzei and McCoy 2010).

I offered the event of the pins in my pincushion as if playing with my son to my partner who shrugged and replied 'Well, how does one walk about in the forest if there is no particular place to go to?' He had always felt it is not himself, rather the forest that has agency in his walking. He just moves his muscles, the forest does the rest. That pins can have agency in playing with my son, or that a forest has agency in my partner's walk, is a result of a flattened-out and non-hierarchical thinking that is characteristic of, even if not limited to (Jones and Cloke 2008), new materialism. And it is not the agents or actants only as isolated poles, rather also the overlaps and diffractions produced by a variety of agents in criss-crossing relations to each other in an event that holds the interest of new materialism. Not the pins or my son alone, but also the becoming that is generated in this event.

The vocabulary entailed in any work with a new materialist approach is vast and specialized, continuously reworked and filled with neologisms. To stay true to the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari, it would make little sense to try and provide a fixed or exhaustive glossary here. For the sake of a reader unfamiliar with the work of scholars in new materialism, I will however work through the main ideas that loom behind the proliferating vocabulary.

All matter is vibrant, has agency

Material is vibrant inasmuch as it has the capacity to not just impede the courses and wills of other material entities, such as humans, but also to act as a 'quasi-agent' with tendencies of its own (Bennett 2010, viii). Much writing on agency within new materialism owes to Latour's (2005) actor-network theory and his notion of 'actants'.² An actant is neither an object nor a subject but an 'intervener' that makes a difference by virtue of existing, illustrates Bennett (2010, 9), connecting the notion with the Deleuzian 'quasi-causal operator' and further to the more subjectively oriented notion of an 'agent'. Barad (2007), trained in theoretical physics and applying the notions thereof, suggests that agency is not something a body (human or non-human) or an entity has, but that it is a relationship brought about by 'intra-action'. Bennett (2010, 20–21), similarly, advocates for a 'congregational understanding' of agency in an attempt to overcome the individualistic associations the term brings forth. Whether thought of as a capacity or a relationship, the 'agential' is distributed across a range of ontological types with the objective of questioning the binaries human/non-human, nature/culture (etc.), as well as approaching the force of things less anthropocentrically and more laterally.

In the case of my partner wandering in a forest, a congregational understanding of agency would open up or deconstruct the event beyond a central male human being and a backdrop of an X number of trees. A wealth of agential entities would surface: the sticks and pinecones, the boots, the trees, the human, the drooping branches that hit his face (birch giving way easily, spruce resisting with its needles stinging), the squirrels, the moss, the bacteria inside the human's mouth, the scent of ripe lingonberries being crushed under boots – all contributing to the unfolding of the event, all constitutive of each other. A complexly relational understanding of the event would force us to pause were we to make any hasty conclusions of who is doing what or dependent on whom during this walk. A new materialistic approach would aid us in understanding also how among the others the 'male human being' and 'tree' as 'discursive-material' entities (Barad 2007) are brought to existence only because of their momentual congregation and 'intra-action' as agents.

Bodies (human and non-human, organic and inorganic entities) exist as a consequence of the world

Much obliged to Karen Barad and Gilles Deleuze, new materialism views 'diffraction' and 'difference' to be central notions in the understanding of phenomena in our discursive-material

world (e.g. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010). Diffraction, a notion of physics, refers to phenomena that occur with waves of any kind as they encounter obstacles. The resulting bending, spreading and overlapping of the waves is what is seen to take place more generally in the world: things, entities of any kind, do not precede their intra-action or exist as clearly separate agents rather always thoroughly interconnected and dependent on their intra-activity as constituting them. And as waves travel, merge, bend, change form and direction, any other thing in the world is also in constant state of becoming something new. It is intra-action – the active relationship between any organisms that do not have clear and inherent boundaries – that yields us to consider ourselves, and any other thing in the world, as a consequence of the world (Barad 2007, 28–29; Lenz-Taguchi 2011; Phillips Kalmbach and Larson Legard 2012).

Difference as a Deleuzian (Deleuze 1994) notion applied in new materialism is essentially generative. Difference is the condition of our existence rather than a product of our existence as some kind of individuals (see also Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010). Difference generates beings in continuous, unique and unpredictable encounters. As I rely on the other to generate me, the difference of the other then, becomes positive. Both diffraction and difference, as used in new materialism, highlight the focus of attention to the in-between as a space that ceaselessly proliferates material-discursive reality (Barad 2007, 140; Phillips Kalmbach and Larson Legard 2012).

Life is about constant encounters that produce non-linear differentiation

Attention, in new materialist thinking, is directed to the in-betweens, to the ‘assemblages’ – ad hoc groupings of diverse agential elements (Bennett 2010, 23–24) – and ‘encounters’ rather than to individual agents. This is to say that relationality (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010), horizontality, non-linearity (Braidotti 2010) and non-hierarchical thinking is applied in examining phenomena. In this paper thus, children are not interviewed as agents who carry stones and the stones are not discussed *per se*, as unrelated and in the absence of children. Rather than causalities the interest is on the present and rather than hierarchies of being the interest is on the co-existence of two kinds of material entities.

As new materialism has it, all matter – including human children and stones – is constantly in the state of ‘becoming’, through ‘differentiation’ (Deleuze 1994). It is thus this becoming, the encounters between diverse bodies, the immanent and continuously emergent relationality that receives attention. The differentiation that takes place in each encounter, over and over again, is itself life (Deleuze 1994). As the amount of encounters that comprise life is exhaustive both in numbers and in kind, the visual metaphor used is classically that of a rhizome without a beginning or an end, void of a fixed shape, continuously rearranging. There are also always ‘lines of flight’, unforeseen paths of escape and mutation produced in encounters (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Due to an ‘open-ended view of subjects’ (Braidotti 2010) as always in the state of becoming, scholars of new materialism urge that there is a need for an ‘ethics of immanence and potentiality’, especially so in relation to education and policies applied therein (Lenz-Taguchi 2011).

Material is political

Matter is never mere ‘things’ and a focus on momentary encounters that produce material-discursive reality is hardly apolitical – as something takes form, other things are necessarily excluded (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010). This is what new materialism stresses: the complexity that is revealed in thinking about the world in new materialist terms cannot be but with political implications. The flourishing of new materialism is indeed evident within feminist theory, being overtly political in its agenda to question the western binaries such as man/woman, discourse/matter (e.g.

Alaimo and Hekman 2008; McNeil 2010). New materialism is sometimes even equated with material feminism (McNeil 2010) thus acquiring a position within specifically feminist theory. Materiality is also taken up within political theory (Bennett 2010) and discussed as deeply interwoven to geopolitical and socioeconomic structures (Coole and Frost 2010) as well as education (Fenwick and Edwards 2011; Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010).

Knowing and being are inseparable

Finally, within feminist research an 'ontological turn' can be said to have taken place (Grosz 2005; McNeil 2010) in order to question the centrality of 'knowing' that has happened at the expense of 'being'. What counts as knowing has been defined as that which is possible to conceptualize linguistically (by humans). Barad (2007) responds by coining an onto-epistemology, arguing that knowing and being are inseparable. As much as nothing 'is' alone (Mol 2002, 54), there is no knowing without being, nor being without knowing and to try and formulate theories of either alone is always lacking.

Within educational theories and practices a focus on the present, on *what is*, has been hard to argue against the long-standing belief in education for the human-mastered future: *what could be* (Lenz-Taguchi 2011; Popkewitz 2000, 162–163; see also Rautio and Winston forthcoming). Hence, the phenomenon of children carrying stones in their pockets, in an educational view, almost cries out for an explanation that has to do with learning as improving. That carrying stones might not be directly relevant for the child in the long run does not, however, yield it insignificant. The attention to momentual and material, advocated in this paper is to be taken as complementing rather than replacing approaches that sketch the temporal and discursive–political–structural patterns and developments related to childhood (see Prout 2011, 6). Taking the momentual and the seemingly irrational seriously complements the understanding of temporal and structural patterns in shedding light to how those patterns were produced and came to matter in the first place (Horton and Kraftl 2006, 82; Prout 2011, 7).

Horton and Kraftl (2006, 71) express a concern that too much of what humans do in their everyday lives is overlooked in academic geography as *pointless*. I would strengthen this concern by suggesting that pointless-seeming activity can often be autotelic activity: things that are done for no apparent reason other than for doing them; doodling, fiddling with your coffee mug, carrying stones around, arranging fruit in bowls according to colour (I do this at least). To witness something seemingly pointless, yet inherently rewarding for those who engage with it, is an occasion to ask: what is it that takes place in the moment? Of the multiplicity of answers, one possibility is to provide a new materialist reading in which the human individual engaged in autotelic activity is not interpreted as the main meaning-making character, rather a 'lateral hero', a follower of some action initiated by his/her material surroundings.

Autotelic material practices

Autotelic activity is something that escapes instrumentalist value claims: it seems to be an end in itself rather than a means to an end. The activity is enjoyed in itself and sustains itself. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990), writing about the by now classic 'flow' experiences in which people as if forget themselves and keep doing what they do because it is intrinsically rewarding, says that these experiences are predominantly autotelic in character. At first it would seem fitting to discuss children who pick up and carry stones around as having flow experiences. As notions of psychology, however, 'flow theory' and 'autotelic personality' refer to skills, or meta-skills of individuals (e.g. Asakawa 2010; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002) as well as to personality traits (Asakawa 2004) or to psychological selection as explaining this kind of behaviour:

people choose to do things that make them feel alive (Asakawa 2010; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). This line of reasoning highlights the human individual as the agent, the one with skills, the one who chooses and the one who has the disposition or the proper personality traits to experience flow. Virtually no role is cast for the material surroundings in which, and with which autotelic activity takes place.

What if it is the stones, the three shiny white ones and the five black sharply lined ones lying on the ground, rather than personality traits of individuals alone that bring about autotelic behaviour? Could we suggest that autotelic practices emerge in encounters characterized by aesthetic-affective openness on our part (Bennett 2010). If so, we would need to be more aware of the practices with which we cultivate and sustain such openness.

The interest in autotelic practices in everyday life arose from my previous study in which people did not carry stones around but wrote letters about beauty in their everyday lives. All in all 44 letters were exchanged by four people, all adults, of a small arctic village in Finland (population c. 30) within a time-frame of one year (see Rautio 2009, 2010) Beauty, in these letters, became as if a verb: a continuous, open-ended process of articulating the ways in which one is interwoven with and conditioned by one's surrounding environment. Articulating beauty in everyday life was proven a practice that sustains sensory attentiveness, openness and imaginative interest towards the material world. That is, aesthetic relating to surroundings was proven to cultivate and sustain further aesthetic relating to surroundings (Rautio 2011, forthcoming).

In writing letters about their everyday life, the evident inability of human language to fully capture a perceived and felt relation to environment was proven relevant. As the participants realized that their failing attempts to linguistically articulate beauty produced unpredictable results – new insights and unforeseen interpretations that then made them look at old things in new ways – they begun to dwell in the process itself.

What the participants of my previous research underwent quite consciously is tapping into what I contend children to engage with in carrying stones. It is a practice reminiscent of the kind of 'aesthetic apprenticeship' (Bogue 2007, 58) that Deleuze identifies in Marcel, the protagonist of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Deleuze 1994). Marcel proceeds through a curriculum of signs of the world encountered at dinners and receptions, relationships and recollections, as he undergoes an education to become a writer. In this process he comes to understand that rather than in the objects or their subjective reception, the power of material reality to shape thinking, to generate new kind of thinking, lies in the generative difference *in between* an object and a subject (Bogue 2007, 58). Our task, similar to that of Marcel, is thus to take care that we attend to this difference-in-between with openness.

The fact that we are different from pebbles and stones on the ground does not change depending on our attitude or age. The Deleuzian idea of this difference as essentially generative of both of us – stones and us – does not change either depending on our attitude: in our encounter we are generated by the stones whether we think about it or not. What changes, however, depending on our attitude, is how the potential of this generative difference realizes into new insights and directions in us: what do we take from it, how do we allow ourselves to be generated by it (albeit never fully controlling it)?

I write of an 'attitude', an 'orientation', and talk about 'attending to' – synonymously in effect – uneasy about using only one notion. Bennett (2010, 18) talks about a 'capacity' to encounter the world and Drohan (2010) about a 'search' (277–278). All of these varying notions, however, point towards the yet unknown or the different. And all describe that which remains the responsibility of an individual. Even if we cannot know or control what happens when we encounter difference in the world, we nevertheless have a responsibility when we enter these encounters. We are accountable for how we do it: for our attitudes, orientations and

capacities in attending to the world and searching for 'truths'. As part of the aesthetic apprenticeship of my northern research participants, they wrote in their letters about curiosity, playfulness and lightness in connection with attending to beauty. Over the course of the correspondence year, they took on a deliberate attitude of 'tuning to' beauty which meant as if serious light-heartedness and an openness to surprising, serendipitous events (Rautio 2009, 2010).

A research participant, sticking her head into a bag of decaying compost, writes about her delight over what she finds inside the bag – 'As if a landscape out of this world' – and about her amusement over the fact that her husband happened to witness this event: 'He must've thought I had lost it, sticking my head into the bin bag'. This 'losing it' would have pleased also Bennett (2010, x) who advocates a little foolishness to be cultivated in us, in order for us to relate to our material surroundings in new ways. The positivity and potential granted to seemingly irrational behaviour and thought is characteristic of a Deleuzian way of thinking: a genuinely new way of thinking necessarily appears nonsense for it presents a break from the common sense, the norm (Bogue 2007, 59).

When new ideas and new ways of thinking are advocated as valuable *per se*, especially in relation to educating children, the question arises whether new is always also better. While 'new' does not literally equal 'better', rather simply something that has not existed before, we (the so-called Western world) have a long-standing tradition in associating new with progress. And 'progress', along with 'change' and 'growth', we associate with an improved state of things rather than with a process of adapting to circumstances conceived of as the 'nature of things' as the Greeks defined progress (Popkewitz 2000, 162, 163). The deep roots of believing in the power of people to alter societies and world for the better, through science and education in specific, notes Popkewitz (2000), are grounded in the assumption that progress is a linear, sequential development of affairs, which is in turn based on no older than the nineteenth-century deterministic view of physics.

The valuing of new ways of thinking within new materialism needs to be related to Deleuzian views in general. Read in the context of non-hierarchical and non-linear views, 'newness' appears as contributing to the ever-richer understanding of *what is* – of the here and now – rather than as harnessed to direct and change the world in the future. The Greek meaning of progress – adapting to circumstances as they are – is closer to home for new materialism. Adapting to something as it is, especially in educational thought, might seem passive, stagnating and without aspirations. It is easy to see why educational practices, built to change our children into better, more productive and useful citizens, seek to predict and control the future rather than focus on the present (Popkewitz 2000).

The growth advocated with a new materialist focus on what is, is neither deterministic nor lacks values or goals. Education for deeper understanding of what humans are growing as part of, and in relation to, highlights practices of *simultaneously* becoming a distinct human being and elaborating on the necessary interconnectedness and interdependence with other bodies (Lenz-Taguchi 2011). Such practices fight hierarchical anthropocentrism in recognizing that the more interdependent and connected we realize being, the more possibilities open up for us (Lenz-Taguchi 2011). To ask what is, and to learn practices of investigating that which is, staying tuned to encounters that reveal some of it, to keep multiplying one's possibilities in the grand rhizome of life.

The implications of carrying stones

In considering children as active beings in their everyday life environments, the often offered view is that of children as agents, as *using* their environments. School spaces, while the epitome of most children's everyday life material surroundings, are often discussed only in

relation to the social, that is inter-human, functions they facilitate (e.g. school design in Nixon and Comber (2011), school lunchtime/space in Daniel and Gustafsson 2010). The possibility of mutuality in child–matter relations receives little attention.

Moreover, a focus on humans in general being in relation to the world usually emphasizes the agency and autonomy of humans as if the sole authors of this relation. Much of environmental education, for instance, is concerned with humans as responsible for addressing environmental problems through developing and fostering a right kind of relation to nature, in a word a sustainable one (Rautio 2011). A Deleuzean and a new materialist take on this would be to claim that we cannot be but always already related to all of our material surroundings, organic and inorganic, and not just related but constituted by it. And most poignantly: these relations are as much influenced by behavior and existence of other co-existing bodies as it is by our intentional or unintentional actions.

The fact that we as humans cannot be solely responsible for and in control of the kind of relations we have to our surroundings, to the environment, does not yield us to conceive our role as deterministic or without significance. It does, on the contrary, stress the responsibility that arises out of our realization that we always act as one part of a complex mesh of relations, the directions and outcomes of which are largely unknown to us. As stones and bears and fig trees can be considered quasi-agential and contributing to the relations between us and them, we as individuals are responsible for our part of these mutual and dynamic relations. We are as responsible for our behavior as ever, we just no longer have illusions that our part is any grander than it is. What is in our power is to maintain availability and openness to our material surroundings.

To appreciate *also* the momentary and the seemingly unguided in children's everyday lives, the fleetingness and aimlessness of autotelic practices, we would have to let go of our insistence on long-term accountability, evaluation and controlling of learning outcomes. We would need to trust that the interaction between children and the world, seemingly irrational and mostly unreflected, also has value. This value, arguably unmeasurable, could be thought of as intrinsic and grounding. Most importantly, however, we would have to embrace the thought that teachers – those who invite, guide, support and steer us – can also be other than human beings. Tiny black inanimate pebbles can invite us into interaction by virtue of existing, guide the nature of this interaction by virtue of their physical form, support our activity through lending themselves to be investigated and engaged with and steer us in our being human through providing a concrete point of reference for our reflection as the species we are.

Bogue (2007) discusses a Deleuzean way of approaching the world with a multisensory pedagogic mindset. Bogue utilizes Deleuze's pedagogy of images in the films of Jean Luc Godard in contending that visual and sonic images can teach us, through the senses of vision and hearing, to think anew: to stop seeing and hearing the norm and to begin to see and hear new things that are/were already there (Bogue 2007, 69–90). Thinking and sensing or mind and body, as an overbearing binary, dissolve, as does the conventional idea of a human being as the one who teaches.

Deleuze's educational views, in more general, albeit few and far in between, are to take learning as not mere acquisition of new skills or information but rather as acquiring a new way of perceiving the world. To be educated is to be able to continuously overcome the habitual modes of comprehending reality (Bogue 2007, 54). To appreciate the world/reality as a dynamic process of metamorphosis arising from differentiation that takes place in all directions at once, is not to conceive reality as fixed relations and stable entities (Bogue 2007, 57). All of this is stretching the whole notion of education, institutionally at least. Rather than suggesting that we should be done with formal education I contend that we should pay attention to the informal education that children undergo on their own, to give it time and space and due value.

Child-friendly task-based methods employed in research with children – photovoice and various other, often visual methods – are often used as a stimulus for talk (or at least for linguistic transcription by the adult researcher) and trusted to foreground children's views of their world (see Fusco et al. 2012). Tasks or activities of children are however rarely approached as evidence in their own right (Woodyer 2008, 3). The idea that children's view of the world is of a different kind to a degree that different methods are needed to grasp it than those used with adults, is deep rooted in research with children (see, e.g. Burke 2007). There is a threat that research methods portrayed as capturing 'the view of the child' actually end up reinforcing the othering of children, if the proposed 'view' is rendered as somehow coherent/universal based on age alone (Burke 2007, 361). Just as some adults are more comfortable expressing themselves in drawing than writing, could we not assume that some younger people could express their experiences with more ease in writing than drawing?

The implications of this paper, for children's geographers, unfold in the form of at least three challenges that are already being taken up (e.g. Tipper 2011; Woodyer 2008) or advocated (Horton and Kraftl 2006) and that serve in diversifying the conceptualizations of child–environment relations as mutual and complex:

- (1) Consider whether bridging the nature-culture divide can be attempted by exploring practices through which children themselves seem to do this.³ This is to say explore the ways in which children themselves as if conduct geography in their everyday lives (see, e.g. 'children's ethnogeography' in Martin and Catling 2011), not only describing these ways as complementing or challenging academic geography but rather interrogating what it is that takes place on its own right: what is the kind of child–environment relation that is undergone.
- (2) Take seriously the idea of interdependence of all life on earth. This is to say not only between individuals of various species or inorganic and organic entities but also intra-species interdependence: if human individuals depend on each other, then adult individuals are dependent on child individuals as well. If not only for species survival, what else? Children's geographers have a unique vantage point into arguing for a multifaceted interdependence between young people and older people. How are we constituted by each other as diverse human beings with varying ages, spaces, locations and biophysical-cultural characteristics? How do young people's ways of existing in their everyday life environments also shape and resonate in others: other beings, other children, other humans in general?
- (3) Finally, engage in messy methodologies. The tendencies evident in educational research in which complexity and open-endedness of phenomena are sacrificed for seeming certainty and closure are argued to be, at least partly, the result of (neo-liberal) political pressure to provide tangible and measurable conceptualizations and thus recipes for national progress through education (see esp. Cheek 2007; Fenwick and Edwards 2011; also MacLure 2006). Methods that celebrate the open, seek to problematize and to produce more questions than answers, are needed not to replace but to diversify the variety of methods with which researchers approach and conceptualize children's everyday lives. What MacLure (2006) describes as the 'baroque method' exemplifies an approach to research that in my view children's geographers could stand a better chance of progressing than researchers in mainstream educational research, perhaps due to evident political pressure. Methods that confuse scale, time and space would tap into the very grounding as if logic according to which everyday life is undergone. Follow children who write, draw, speak, jump and shout without a clear purpose. Create space for this. Join in. Interrupt yourself as a researcher, stay on your toes,

change methods in the middle of your data collecting phase if that is what it takes. Seek the moments in which children produce the unfinished and the pointless and move on. Celebrate data that does not fit into categories. Replace categories and themes with tangents and rhizomes to explore ever proliferating and mutating connections that condition human existence (Rautio forthcoming).

Conclusion

A new materialist reading of humans carrying stones leaves little triviality present in the practice that most adults might consider pointless and most children might undertake as if by default.

Stones have (intra-)agency: stones do things to us and with us

They have us pick them up, feel them, close them in our fist (if particularly smooth and rounded) or hold them between our thumb and forefinger (if small and edgy). They condition our walking: on a frosty morning when the roads are slippery the sight of gravel on the ground makes us pace with ease. Stones play with us if they are flat in the right way. We throw them onto water to make them bounce – just to make them bounce. And if our co-operation is optimal they bounce quite a few times. We rarely make a trip to the shore planning specifically to throw stones. If we happen to walk along a waterfront and there are no flat stones about, we hardly notice this let alone get upset: the act of throwing stones does not occur to us without the stones present. Flat stones make us throw them. Some stones make us carry them around. For no particular reason or function, we find ourselves picking up white stones, heart-shaped stones, round smooth stones. Do humans have an urge to collect being hunter-gatherers, or is it that particular elements in our surroundings make us collect them, to orchestrate and curate – to work with – our material world?

We exist as a consequence of stones: the event of carrying stones makes us in the moment

We become stone-carrying with carrying stones. We literally weigh a bit more, balance our walk a bit differently, think certain thoughts and become certain kind of bodies and individuals in relation to what kind of stone-bodies we encounter and interact with. Large rocks render us small, pebbles that fit our pockets generate us gigantic. Cold stones in our hands accelerate blood supply to our fingers. Stones in medieval churches render us temporary beings. Were there no stones in our world, or should we never carry any around, *we would not exist in relation to them*: we would miss out on a reference point and thus have one less viewpoint to our selves, the kind of beings we are.

Encounters with stones produce non-linear differentiation: we cannot predict all that happens when we carry stones around

We know that both of us change as result of our intra-action. Stones are located elsewhere, gain scents from our fingertips and flint from our pockets. We might find our moody day turn a bit brighter with finding heart-shaped stones. The next day we might lose a finger in a failing attempt to move a rock in the garden. Carrying stones is an act of differentiation for us, the direction of this differentiation we do not know beforehand. Each time, each round of new stones, makes us little different. Spending time and effort in carrying stones around without knowing or caring why one does this is an act of allocating time and space for the world to happen, of developing an orientation of curiousness and an eye for serendipity.

Carrying stones is political: intra-action with stones can have a political framework

In a world of increasing mobility and pressure to be more productive, practices that bear no economic or otherwise measurable significance are political statements. Stones worked with in quarries, in mining, as property, as gravel on streets, blocking entrances or dividing nations as walls, are political material entities. For children, intra-action with stones provides a political niche: a virtually irrelevant material (unless used to break windows or causing washing machines to break down) lends itself to be carried, collected, moved, exchanged, valued and worked with through means that children possess, on their own without adult help, supervision or acceptance.

Knowing being with stones: carrying stones is recognition of what is

When we carry stones, for no particular reason, we engage with a practice that celebrates also being in the present rather than only knowing for the future. We have a vantage point into a mode of being that requires no words, no particular rationale and no rules. In carrying stones, just like our children do, we know ourselves as part of the world: simultaneously interdependent and unique.

Through grasping the complex relations present in children's encounters with matter, children's geographers can resist and protest simplified accounts of children's everyday lives (Horton and Kraftl 2006; Taylor 2009). Furthermore, children's geographers are in a position to provide insights not only back to circulation into academic geography but more widely into theories of materiality that have emerged in other disciplines as well, one pertinent example being aesthetics of everyday life (Irvin 2009; Light and Smith 2005; Saito 2007) which is currently theorized solely through adult views.

Notes

1. See, e.g. Bosco (2010) on children's everyday life actions as the kind of political activism and political agency that is not granted to them by adults.
2. Actor-network theory or ANT has, since its introduction by Latour, been reworked to strands and new sociomaterial theories applied in multiple disciplines (Law and Hassard 2009). ANT has to do with material entities and the connections through which they form nets of action. Recent ANT studies in a variety of fields (see, e.g. Fenwick and Edwards 2011; Holfield 2009; Law and Singleton 2005; Mol 2002; Sørensen 2009) share an objective of understanding how matter comes together and forms associations in order to produce effects. Relational-material theories (such as Barad 2007; Lenz-Taguchi 2011) build on ANT to emphasize the relations between people and things that form as if the junctions of a network.
3. Again, I do not wish to claim that all of children's doings are free from cultural dichotomies and thus somehow authentic. Some practices, however, can be understood as at least blurring and confusing this distinction, and as such worthy of further discussion and research.

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