

## Thinking with Deconstruction: Book-Adult-Child Events in Children's Literature Research

Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak

The year 2019 saw the emergence of a new global phenomenon: a wave of teenagers' protests against the lack of coordinated governmental actions to mitigate climate change. The climate strike movement, as these protests have been called, was initiated by Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg, who started a school strike for the climate outside the Swedish parliament building in August 2018 and later confronted top world political leaders and corporate executives at the 2018 Katowice Climate Change Conference and the 2019 World Economic Forum in Davos. Thunberg's message is candid and unconditional in its negation of the conception of the child either as the one who needs to be protected by adults or as the one who saves them. As she declared in front of the adult audience at Davos: 'I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And I want you to act.'<sup>1</sup> The young activists following Thunberg acknowledge that today's climate change politics is essentially that of the deferral of the full impact of climate change to future generations.<sup>2</sup> They also know that they will have to live in and pay for the future that they did not create and are unlikely to control. Therefore, they speak out, forcing adults to respond with concrete action. In their determination, these young people exemplify Jacques Derrida's children learning how to transform negativity into positive agency and affirm life in the face of imminent suffering and extinction.<sup>3</sup> This is the wisdom they share with adults.

The young people's protests have been supported by thousands of adults, including international academics whose work does not

*The Oxford Literary Review* 41.2 (2019): 185–201

DOI: 10.3366/olr.2019.0278

© Edinburgh University Press

[www.eupublishing.com/olr](http://www.euppublishing.com/olr)

concern climate change. I argue that the climate strike movement, as an expression of young people's commitment to something they find meaningful, should become a vital context for research on ecocritical literature for young readers. As it currently stands, this research is either preoccupied with mapping the diverse contents of texts or with discussing their ecopedagogical potential.<sup>4</sup> As such, it is most valuable as a bibliographic or pedagogical project, but it does not address 'the materiality of climate change',<sup>5</sup> reflected so powerfully in young people's strikes. Granted, Nathalie op de Beeck points out that children's literature scholars need to forge more meaningful connexions between ecoliteracy and environmental action, thereby creating possibilities for achieving environmental justice.<sup>6</sup> While she does not provide any concrete ways of how that could be done, I propose that we catch up with Thunberg and her peers by developing new practices of thinking and doing our research that both reflect children's and adults' joint vulnerability and affirm the possibility of shared agency in the face of Earth's finitude.

I argue that children's literature scholars can engage more fully with ecoliterature by creating spaces for intergenerational collaborations around books and reading that would enable children and adults to think together about what it means to be imbricated in the fate of our planet. This goal can be reached through projects promoting participatory research with children as active contributors to all elements of the research process. Participatory approaches entail the decentring of children and childhood as objects of adult research, thus counteracting the epistemic injustice that occurs when knowledge offered by the child is ignored, framed, or instrumentalised by the adult.<sup>7</sup> They also enable the spontaneous emergence of relational sensibilities as ways of engaging with one another,<sup>8</sup> with books and with the world through ethics of interconnectivity. To exemplify such praxis, I discuss how it emerged in *Shaping a Preferable Future: Children Reading, Thinking and Talking about Alternative Communities and Times (ChildAct)*, a project I co-conducted with children at two primary schools in Cambridgeshire, UK, in 2018. I have found it helpful to account for the child-adult collaborations that it fostered with deconstruction—understood not as a method but as something that occurs regardless of our intentions and that may make us do something.<sup>9</sup> In Alicia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei's words,

deconstruction ‘jars things and pushes them off balance just enough to keep things moving, thus enabling transformation’.<sup>10</sup> Being open to this destabilising force enables welcoming the Other—in this case not only the assembled agency of the children, adults and literature, but also the post-qualitative awareness that there is no need for one right research design based on what we have already discovered to be comfortable and what enables us to stand outside of the object of our research.<sup>11</sup> As Hillevi Lenz Taguchi stresses

[w]ithout the Other, no meaning at all can be constructed, and no deconstruction can be made. (...) whether it is the Otherness of your own always reformulated thinking or reconstituted performative practice, or the Other as in the Other human being (...). Deconstructive practices make us aware of the necessity of the Other in a process of ‘becoming ourselves’; as subjects.<sup>12</sup>

We need the force of such unanticipatable and irruptive (auto)-deconstructive events<sup>13</sup> to disrupt our current practices and orientate ourselves to doing research *with* and not *about* children’s ecoliterature and *with* and not *about* young readers<sup>14</sup> as a way towards collective intergenerational ventures addressing contemporary environmental issues. Complex phenomena such as environmental issues require not only branching out into inter- and transdisciplinary approaches within academia but also creating collaborations with those who will inherit the uncertain future when we are no longer alive. As Karen Malone stresses, children ‘deserve to be acknowledged in these critical debates of the Anthropocene’<sup>15</sup> if they are to be able, in Rosi Braidotti’s words, ‘to navigate across the stormy waters of the postanthropocentric predicament’.<sup>16</sup> I also argue for the decentring of children’s literature studies as an adult-centric field preoccupied with representation towards an opening to the sense-making that results from socially and culturally situated experiences catalysed by relationalities involving readers, texts and the world around them. Such a rethinking of the value and use of attending to children’s literature will enable our field to engage with wider phenomena, thereby not only ensuring the relevance of knowledge we are producing but also offering us ways to take ethical responsibility for it by aligning it with struggles for environmental and intergeneration justice.

Wrocław, Poland, where I live and work, repeatedly features on lists of places severely affected by smog. It should then not come as a surprise that one of my favourite ecocritical texts is *Un Lun Dun*, a fantasy novel by China Miéville. In Miéville's London, the fictional Secretary of State for the Environment, Elizabeth Rawley, transports '[c]arcinogens and toxic pollution' 'down across the southeast' to revive the Great Smog of 1952,<sup>17</sup> which results in the growth of air pollution in London and in its mirror version, the unground city of UnLondon. Fed by 'press releases' and high 'ratings from environmentalists',<sup>18</sup> the British public is unaware of the threat. The Prime Minister supports Rawley's actions and enjoys 'the possibility of deploying their contact [the Smog] in various trouble spots' as '[a] chemical weapon that can strategize like a general (...)'.<sup>19</sup> Miéville's smog is in fact the Smog, a personified contamination that can absorb anything it encounters to exude pollutants. On the brink of being devoured by the Smog, UnLondon is saved by teen Deeba, a Londoner who mobilises its inhabitants—people and other species, some of whom originate from waste discarded from London—to oppose the villain. I have published on *Un Lun Dun* on several occasions, analysing its anti-neoliberal message and the concept of intergenerational solidarity it propagates as qualities of Radical Fantasy fiction for young readers.<sup>20</sup> I find Miéville's fictionalisation of smog appealing as it invokes important political and economic contexts, including the use of media as weapons of mass distraction, the denial of climate change or smog washing,<sup>21</sup> that is investing in businesses profiting from pollution while this money could be spent on reducing it.

The 'epistemic work'<sup>22</sup> of *Un Lun Dun* made me select it as the central text for ChildAct, a participatory project that I co-conducted with two groups of primary school pupils (age 10–11) from John Clare Primary School in Helpston and Westwood Primary School in March, both in Cambridgeshire. The project aimed at creating a platform in which young and adult readers jointly explore how utopian literature shapes ideas for the desirable future, how these ideas evolve in the encounters with readers' localities and how they may call readers into action. The key premise of utopian fiction is that the establishment of such connexions should lead to shifts in worldviews and to concrete actions. As I argue elsewhere, *Un Lun Dun* may be read as a utopian text whose young characters can have substantial

impact on social policies, including environmental protection, through catalysing intergenerational solidarity.<sup>23</sup> At the end of the novel, Deeba, aided by her UnLondon friends, confronts Rawley with the intention of stopping her from using the Smog as a chemical weapon. Deeba's fictional environmental activism indirectly prefigures Greta's. It would be thus interesting to establish whether the young members of the climate strike movement identify ecocritical literature as playing a part in their mobilisation. Such a study would help to fill the present gap in research on utopian literature for young readers: although such texts aim at eliciting critical responses to the current status quo, there is little research on actual reactions to utopian messages.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Anita Tarr's conclusion that *Un Lun Dun's* 'prominent theme of resisting consumerism becomes irritatingly didactic'<sup>25</sup> reflects an adult's perception of the book's contents that may have nothing to do with young readers' responses to this element of the novel. In light of the all-pervasive adult survival fantasy that children are, as Nick Lee argues, "human futures"—at once bridging the gap between the present and the future and being the material from which the future will be made<sup>26</sup>—such critical practice entails epistemic injustice, consisting in forcing adults' (authors' and critics') agenda of a just future onto young readers.

This serious gap in research on utopian texts for young readers reflects a broader problem in children's literature studies and research on children and childhood. As Karen Malone points out, prior to the introduction of children's rights agenda and the new sociology of childhood, research on children typically rested 'on the assumption that children, compared to adults, were incompetent and unreliable narrators of their life experiences and, in this way, developmentally incomplete.'<sup>27</sup> This in turn meant that the adult researcher was perceived as a detached observer of children as objects of research lacking the ability to understand their world. Children's literature scholars still tend to see human lives as unfolding according to age-determined needs, interests, competences and achievements. Such approaches objectify young readers as human becomings on their way to achieving full maturity, independence and agency. However, considering the growing recognition of children as capable social agents influenced by and influencing their everyday lives, as well as taking into account recent methodological developments in childhood

studies reflecting this understanding, the developmental stance could be replaced with a focus on real child-adult relationalities, including acknowledging them in research methodologies.<sup>28</sup>

The recognition of children as not only capable of understanding their lives but also of documenting and sharing their perspectives, needs or actions has led to the emergence of participatory research with children as knowing subjects capable of contributing to the research process, including identifying research needs, designing the methodology, collecting and analysing data and disseminating findings. Participatory research with children as co-producers of knowledge encourages what Kristen Cheney calls 'epistemic diversity' that 'resist[s] or even rupture[s] the status quo of adults as the primary holders of knowledge', helping 'children's knowledge to be seen as more legitimate in the eyes of researchers, policymakers, and development practitioners'.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it provides opportunities for children and adults to work as partners beyond the research itself, through everyday social actions in communities. Such an approach offers a way to reduce—at least to some extent—power asymmetries between children and adults and to attune research to children's interests and expertise. Admittedly, redefining typical child-adult relations may be difficult because of unavoidable gatekeeper interventions of adult collaborators or the risk of overburdening children with too many tasks and responsibilities. Embracing relationality in participatory research also means a process-oriented rather than outcome-centred perspective, with participation itself entailing a lot of coordination, negotiation and unexpected interruptions. Therefore, participatory research demands flexibility and creativity, which nevertheless could be seen by some as methodological inconsistency. Nonetheless, relationality sensitises us to the complexity and contingency of intergenerational encounters, including the varied intensities with which children and adults take part in the research process.<sup>30</sup>

Following the participatory model, ChildAct proposed a child-adult exploration of utopian texts for young readers as an intergenerational dialogue about building good societies and shaping better futures. Although I had theorised about alignments of the intergenerational participatory approach and children's literature studies,<sup>31</sup> it was easier to write about them than actually forge them. Despite an elaborate

description of a potential development of ChildAct that I had to provide to obtain funding, the project was launched in a minimalist fashion: I assumed that the young readers who volunteered to read *Un Lun Dun* would define the research problem and particular methods spontaneously, in conversation with me. I explained the framework of the project to the children and invited them—as experts on their reading and lifeworlds—to plan the shape and progress of our collaboration.

The moment I gave away the copies of *Un Lun Dun* to the participants, I realised that anything could happen. I no longer controlled the project as it was the children, their parents (through allowing and encouraging their offspring to participate) and teachers (through taking care of the logistics) that also controlled the flow of the research. Derrida would perhaps say that inviting the children to think of possible research agendas was an eventual break catalysing further deconstructive effects. As Lenz Taguchi argues, ‘to make something new is how deconstruction happens: through a process of not knowing, uncertainty, indeterminacy; being always a bit lost to one another.’<sup>32</sup> In my case, the event of deconstruction meant starting out the project without the comfort and reassurance of the binaries of children vs. adults, agency vs. socialisation, the deficient child vs. the ideal child, all of which still dominate children’s literature studies. Instead I had to face the challenge of radical unpredictability, messiness and the sheer complexity of the newly emergent relationality and interdependence. Finally, these new conditions were also brought about by the non-human agent, *Un Lun Dun* itself, and its performative and creative agency. Not only did the novel affect the very conception of ChildAct, but it also produced exchanges of ideas among us and elicited concrete actions from us. Simultaneously, through our relational encounters, we interacted with it by catalysing and propagating its epistemic work. In other words, *Un Lun Dun* both generated our relations and was constituted by them. It could even be ventured that while we were reading and discussing the novel, it was also reading us,<sup>33</sup> our fantasies, hopes, needs and frustrations, interacting with us as we were working on the project.

Our conversations about *Un Lun Dun* revealed that the children found the diversity of Miéville’s characters and the richness of the setting fascinating. They enjoyed pointing out Miéville’s lexical

inventiveness and his allusions to phenomena from the real world. However, both groups were most compelled to explore the ecocritical contents of the book. I was astonished when a member of the Helpston group declared we should write a letter to the government demanding the introduction of *Un Lun Dun* as obligatory school reading. Having called themselves John Clare Pollution Aid, the team designed its logo and decided to examine the book by making a film adaptation of it.<sup>34</sup> They intended to use the video to encourage others to reflect on whether their voices count in environmental policies. The children also planned to combine the making of the film with conducting a school survey about pollution awareness and include the results in a letter to the government and environmental organisations. The children explained to me that a field they liked was being developed into a new housing estate despite protests from the locals. I shared with them my worries about smog in Wrocław: they were appalled by the fact that their peers were discouraged from playing outdoors in winter because of the high level of dangerous substances in the air.

The research design developed by the March team also focused on ecocritical issues: the novel inspired the children to organise two competitions for their peers: one invited proposals for efficient food management to reduce the amount of rubbish in the household and the other asked for coming up with inventions of environmentally friendly means of transportation to school. The children were hoping to collect a portfolio of such inventions to be shared with the government. The children's choices do not seem surprising in light of Greta's response to the question whether she was happy to see the growing presence of climate change in political agendas: 'I am not more hopeful than when I started. The emissions are increasing and that is the only thing that matters. I think that needs to be our focus. We cannot talk about anything else.'<sup>35</sup> To paraphrase Karen Malone, how can those who are most affected by climate change and pollution NOT be thinking about the present and future of their planet 'when they have the most to lose'?<sup>36</sup>

Following my initial commitment to epistemic diversity, inter-generational relationality and attentiveness to children's self-perception and self-positioning in their interactions with literature, I accepted the young readers' agenda. Rather than being 'academic' methods



in which children would have to be trained, their research designs involved child-focused practices reflecting how they understand and experience the world. Malone stresses that the frequent insistence on 'training' children in formal (adult) research methods as a vital element of participatory research implies a deficit approach: children need to meet adults' expectations as to how knowledge is produced.<sup>37</sup> Although I was not aware of Malone's insights at the time, I acknowledged and relied on the children's decisions about the focus of our collaborations and the best ways to carry out their ideas. Hence, through becoming open to the collective agency of children, adults and the book, *ChildAct* moved away from observing and representing the workings of literature from a distance towards joint spontaneous involvement in and responsiveness to them from the inside.

The Helpston team's plan to make a film adaptation of *Un Lun Dun* was not accidental: Some members of the group had a lot of expertise in film-making and won a national competition. Hence, they confidently identified this approach to the book as most effective. All the participants defined their own involvement in the process without my intervention: there was the director, the cast, the props manager, the special effects person and the make-up artist. My initial role was to advise on the script, which enabled me to observe the children's work. However, the project soon demanded a more direct engagement on my part. During one of the rehearsals we wondered how to represent the Smog as we ran out of actors who could impersonate it. After some impasse, we concluded that the image itself should be somehow comic. Acting on an impulse, I suggested that I be the Smog. The children agreed enthusiastically. Someone said I should wear a grey T-shirt. I brought one to our next meeting and got it back with 'I am the Smog' written in black on the front. The children also instructed me how to move and decided I did not need to say anything. The children believed that my impersonation of the Smog was appropriate: although both children and adults produce pollution, it is the latter that are responsible for activities causing contamination and for taking measures to counteract it. Simultaneously, Smombies, Miéville's characters that are addicted to the Smog and have to breathe in the fumes, are played by children, which may reflect the fact that the current young generations do not know a life without irreversible pollution. Looking back at my decision to play the Smog, I think

it constituted another deconstructive irruption during the project that made me 'absolutely disarmed'.<sup>38</sup> I probably experienced what Bronwyn Davies appealingly describes as 'the joy of letting go of my adult, teacherly self who presumes to already know and to know better'.<sup>39</sup> Yet, I was also compelled to respond to methodological Otherness: I reacted to the unpremeditated temporal unfolding of the project by accepting the same unfolding movement in me. Perhaps I was ready to do so as I had already entered into a spontaneously responsive relation with the children and the book. I play another brief role in the film, that of Rawley's receptionist: in that case, I volunteered to step in very consciously, of which the children approved.

The seven-minute film adaptation of *Un Lun Dun* reflects the children's interpretation of the text. While preparing it, they made a number of interpretative decisions: as Linda Hutcheon notes, 'adapters relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualise or concretise ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on'.<sup>40</sup> The children's rendering of the novel rests on an interplay between amplifications of certain events and allusions to others, which would be both easily recognised by someone familiar with the plot of *Un Lun Dun* and intriguing to someone who has not read it. The amplifications express the children's interests, enjoyment and willingness to experiment. For example, the adaptation highlights Deeba's sense of being ostracised by her friends after her father has accidentally injured one of them in a car accident caused by the Smog. Deeba's being summoned to UnLondon for the second time is also elaborated. Firstly, she unexpectedly finds sunflower seeds in her lunchbox, which the children invented. Secondly, a copy of the novel with a letter hidden between the pages falls into Deeba's hands at the school library. This metafictional play involving a copy of *Un Lun Dun* serves as an encouragement for those who have not read the novel to do so. Moreover, as in Miéville's story, in the film Deeba climbs up a bookcase to find a passage to the underground city. I was obviously worried when I watched one of the girls climbing a bookcase in a classroom and deliberately making a big fuss of knocking down a copy of *Oxford Popular School Dictionary*, but I could also see all the children's excitement at that moment. I decided to watch out for the

climber without disturbing the filming process. The children also spent some time planning Deeba's visit to Rawley's office. It takes place in a small computer room. As Rawley's receptionist, I was instructed to guard it and panic at the sight of Deeba and her friends. I did my best to look helpless. Simultaneously, the children assumed that a member of the government would be condescending to a child trying to argue her case. Hence, the girl playing Rawley delivered a caricatural performance of Rawley's superciliousness.

In contrast, some elements of the original plot are presented minimally. For instance, Brokkenbroll, who betrays the UnLondoners to conspire with the Smog, is shown very briefly when urging the Smombies to find and stop Deeba. The Smog is also shown only at one point, but the special effects accompanying its appearance highlight its menacing force. The children also introduced their own ideas. As Deeba is summoned to UnLondon to rescue it from the Smog, the scenes are shot in black and white to underscore the threat posed by the Smog. This effect is intensified by the swish of the wind, a part of the weather conditions on the filming day. Furthermore, departing from Miéville's story, the children made Deeba and Hemi somehow manage to defeat the Smog by planting the sunflower seeds. While the book focuses on Deeba's struggle to understand the mechanism of the Ungun and on the epic battle between UnLondoners and the Smog's army, the film briefly shows a drawing of a yellow sunflower, the colour comes back and Deeba and Hemi celebrate their success. Perhaps this is a hint that, to fight pollution, one needs simple solutions accessible to everyone regardless of age.

What mattered just as much as the children's approach to the contents of the book was our joint work on the adaptation. It meant that we were in a constant and mutual state of responsibility for what happened. Simultaneously, our reflection was connected to action and emotion—joy, laughter, anticipation, stress and tiredness. We had several meetings during which we rehearsed our roles, experimenting with the costumes and the instruments available in the classroom to produce sound effects. Getting the right make-up for the Smombies was especially time-consuming and tiring, but it made us laugh. We also needed to decide which spaces at school and outdoors we would use in the actual filming, which entailed walking around the school quite a lot. The assembling of costumes,

the decoration of the Smombies' T-shirts and the final cut of the film was done at home, with the parents' help. The adaptation shows the children's capacity to construct knowledge outside of language; it is a multimodal material-discursive knowledge-production constituted by and constituting encounters of human bodies with one another and with the non-human world.<sup>41</sup>

The children's team in March worked with equal enthusiasm and commitment. They had a clear a plan on how to proceed with organising the competitions, but I could see that they enjoyed coming up with ideas of their own. They also liked sharing their recent reading experiences whenever we met. I relied on their expertise as to what would work best for them and their peers. The competitions attracted very few entries and, owing to the children's other engagements, we did not have an opportunity to develop an alternative. Nevertheless, as we tried to determine what went wrong, the children reflected critically on solutions that would facilitate the realisation of the project. As one girl commented, 'I think we should have allowed 11-year-old children to work collaboratively with 7-year-old children so we could discuss and develop their ideas.'<sup>42</sup> The teacher who participated in the project alongside the children reflected that she had never thought of using ideas from a text to explore children's understanding of how they can have an impact on their future and that she would consider continuing 'the project in September with a new group of children to see how they respond to the text and how they will develop the idea of a utopian world in Cambridgeshire.'<sup>43</sup> The participants also concluded that although their research did not produce any tangible outcomes, it nevertheless resulted in 'a constant flow of ideas' between children and adults.<sup>44</sup>

In light of Derridean logic, both collaborations were unique, and yet iterable, events disrupting representational practices and preexisting assumptions about research on children's literature. Our interactions around *Un Lun Dun* were not scripted or predetermined but emergent and experimental as they mobilised collectivities, new knowledges, and affirmative creativity, provoking a change in our lives,<sup>45</sup> in the mattering of *Un Lun Dun* and in the field of children's literature studies. Promoting intergenerational collective meaning-making that was socially just, dialogical, spontaneous, playful, pleasurable and mutually empowering, ChildAct disrupts

typically adult-centric approaches to ecoliterature for young readers and children's books in general. As one of the girls from March commented, 'when I first joined the group, I thought we would first read the book, take notes and produce a PowerPoint presentation on it'.<sup>46</sup> Finally, through its relational sensibility reflected in reciprocal listening, caring and responsibility, the project exemplifies a decentred approach to the field of children's literature by showing how children's texts are implicated in concerns and issues exceeding the traditional disciplinary remits. Admittedly, as such transformative events happen and pass, the understandings developed within them are always partial, limited, tenuous and revisable. However, these events, as Nicholas Royle puts it, are 'never over and done with':<sup>47</sup> by constituting locally situated and interconnected engagements with the world, they produce traces and open the future in micro-universalist terms.<sup>48</sup> As Affrica Taylor cautions,

*twenty-first-century children need relational and collective dispositions, not individualistic ones to equip them to live well within this kind of world that they have inherited. (...). If they are to effectively respond to the big picture challenges of coexisting sustainably in an already disturbed planetary ecology, they will need to be able to build upon a foundational sense of connectivity to the same natureculture collective. Such dispositions (...) will never be fostered through the application of a child-centred and hyper-individualistic developmental framework, nature-loving or not.*<sup>49</sup>

Children's literature studies—reconfigured through intergenerational connectivity and affectivity, joint imagining of better worlds, and collaborations with communities—may substantially contribute to the development of this shared sense of belonging to and responsibility for our world so that we can live in it as well as possible.

### **Acknowledgements**

Shaping a Preferable Future: Children Reading, Thinking and Talking about Alternative Communities and Times (ChildAct) was funded from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant

agreement no. 745888. The grant was awarded to Professor Eugene Giddens (Anglia Ruskin University) and myself. I would like to thank the children, the teachers and the parents who participated in the project.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Greta Thunberg, “Our house is on fire”: Greta Thunberg, 16, urges leaders to act on climate’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate>, consulted 5 May 2019, 7.20 p.m.
- <sup>2</sup> Margaret Somerville and Sarah Powell, ‘Researching with Children of the Anthropocene: A New Paradigm?’ in *Educational Research in the Age of Anthropocene*, edited by Vicente Reyes, Jennifer Charteris, Adele Nye and Sofia Mavropoulou (Hershey, Pennsylvania, IGI Global, 2018), 14–35.
- <sup>3</sup> ‘Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview’, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, New Jersey, Melville House Publishing, 2007), 23–4.
- <sup>4</sup> See for example *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism*, edited by Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2004); Alice Curry, *Environmental Crisis in Young Adult Fiction: A Poetics of Earth* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Zoe Jaques, *Children’s Literature and the Posthuman: Animal, Environment, Cyborg* (New York and London, Routledge, 2015); *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children’s Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues*, edited by Nina Goga, Lykke Guanio-Uluru, Bjørg Oddrun Hallås and Aslaug Nyrnes (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- <sup>5</sup> Adam Trexler, ‘Novel Climes: Anthropocene Histories, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s Trace and Clive Cussler’s Arctic Drift’, *Oxford Literary Review* 34:2 (2012), 295–314, 298.
- <sup>6</sup> Nathalie op de Beeck, ‘Children’s Ecoliterature and the New Nature Study’, *Children’s Literature in Education* 49:1 (2018), 73–85.
- <sup>7</sup> See Karin Murriss, *The Posthuman Child: Educational Transformation Through Philosophy With Picturebooks* (London and New York, Routledge, 2016).
- <sup>8</sup> See Spyros Spyrou, *Disclosing Childhoods: Research and Knowledge Production for a Critical Childhood Studies* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- <sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida and François Ewald, ‘A certain “madness” must watch over thinking’, Jacques Derrida’s interview with François Ewald, translated by Denise Egéa-Kuehne, in *Derrida & Education*, edited by G. J. J. Biesta and Denise Egéa-Kuehne (London, Routledge, 2001), 55–76.

- <sup>10</sup> Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei, 'Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Inquiry* 19:4 (2013), 261–71.
- <sup>11</sup> See Elizabeth A. St. Pierre, 'Post Qualitative Inquiry in an Ontology of Immanence', *Qualitative Inquiry* 25:1 (2019), 3–16.
- <sup>12</sup> Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, 'Deconstructing and Transgressing the Theory—Practice Dichotomy in Early Childhood Education', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39:3 (2007), 275–90.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event', *Critical Inquiry* 33:2 (2007), 441–61.
- <sup>14</sup> For a discussion of such research, see Macarena García-González and Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 'New Materialist Openings to Children's Literature Studies' (unpublished article). 2019.
- <sup>15</sup> Karen Malone, *Children in the Anthropocene: Rethinking Sustainability and Child Friendliness in Cities* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- <sup>16</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013).
- <sup>17</sup> China Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* (London, Macmillan Children's Books, 2008), 518.
- <sup>18</sup> Miéville, *Un Lun Dun*, 518.
- <sup>19</sup> Miéville, *Un Lun Dun*, 518.
- <sup>20</sup> See "Minister," said the girl, "we need to talk": China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* as Radical Fantasy for Children and Young Adults' in *The Contemporary Speculative Fiction*, edited by Keith M. Booker (Ipswich, Massachusetts, Salem Press, 2013), 137–51.
- <sup>21</sup> A term proposed by Piotr Siergiej from Polish Smog Alert. <https://gospodarka.dziennik.pl/news/artykuly/567532,zarobic-na-smogu-biznes-i-pieniadze.html>, consulted 6 May 2019, 10.15 a.m.
- <sup>22</sup> Trexler, 'Novel Climes', 305.
- <sup>23</sup> This motif suggests a possibility of supplementing sexual difference with age as the key determinant of one's entry into politics. I thank the anonymous reviewer for indicating this thought-provoking issue.
- <sup>24</sup> See my discussion of this issue in Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak, *Yes to Solidarity, No to Oppression: Radical Fantasy Fiction and Its Young Readers* (Wrocław, The University of Wrocław Press, 2016).
- <sup>25</sup> Anita Tarr, China Miéville's Young Adult Novels: Posthumanist Assemblages' in *Posthumanism in Young Adult Fiction: Finding Humanity in a Posthuman World*, edited by Anita Tarr and Donna R. White (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 247–72.
- <sup>26</sup> Nick Lee, *Childhood and Biopolitics: Climate Change, Life Processes and Human Futures* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2013), 1.

- <sup>27</sup> Malone, *Children in the Anthropocene*, 29.
- <sup>28</sup> García-González and Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2019.
- <sup>29</sup> Kristen Cheney, 'Decolonizing Childhood Studies: Overcoming Patriarchy and Prejudice in Child-related Research and Practice' in *Reimagining Childhood Studies*, edited by Spyros Spyrou, Rachel Rosen and Daniel Thomas Cook (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 92–104.
- <sup>30</sup> See Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak, Mateusz Marecki, Ewa Chawar, Magdalena Kaczowska, Katarzyna Kowalska, Aleksandra Kulawik, Maja Oźlańska, Milena Palczyńska, Natalia Parcheniak, Eryk Pszczółowski, 'Productive Remembering of Childhood: Child–Adult Memory–Work with the School Literary Canon', *Humanities* 8, 74 (2019).
- <sup>31</sup> See Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 'Literary Criticism for Children's Rights: Participatory Research Model of Children's Literature Studies', *The Lion and the Unicorn* 40 (2016), 215–31.
- <sup>32</sup> Lenz Taguchi, 'Deconstructing and Transgressing the Theory', 277.
- <sup>33</sup> García-González and Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2019.
- <sup>34</sup> The adaptation is available at <https://cypic.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/child-act-shaping-a-preferable-future-childrens-reading-thinking-and-talking-about-alternative-communities-and-times/>, consulted 5 July 2019, 7.20 p.m.
- <sup>35</sup> Jonathan Watts, 'Greta Thunberg, schoolgirl climate change warrior: "Some people can let things go. I can't." Interview'. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/greta-thunberg-schoolgirl-climate-change-warrior-some-people-can-let-things-go-i-cant>, consulted 6 May 2019, 1.15 p.m.
- <sup>36</sup> Malone, *Children in the Anthropocene*, 24.
- <sup>37</sup> Malone, *Children in the Anthropocene*, 37.
- <sup>38</sup> Derrida, 'A Certain Impossible Possibility', 452.
- <sup>39</sup> Bronwyn Davies, *Listening to Children: Being and Becoming* (London and New York, Routledge, 2014), 15.
- <sup>40</sup> Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, second edition (London and New York, Routledge, 2013), 3.
- <sup>41</sup> Some of the children also conducted interviews with other pupils about their pollution awareness. They discovered that most Key Stage 1 pupils (aged 5–7) declared they knew what pollution was although they were not necessarily aware of its consequences. They planned to include some of the interviews in the adaptation but were unable to do so owing to their other commitments before the end of the school year. However, on their own initiative, they recorded another short film with their comments on the novel and on the project, including their collaboration



with an adult researcher, which they found to be the key to successful projects. The film is available at <https://cypic.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/child-act-shaping-a-preferable-future-childrens-reading-thinking-and-talking-about-alternative-communities-and-times/>. During the last session we drafted a letter describing the project and urging those who learn about it to raise more awareness for the pollution problem. I later sent it to the Friends of the Earth and the Children's Commissioner for England. We received a reply from the former. I also distributed the letter among my colleagues.

<sup>42</sup> The quote comes from the survey we conducted at the end of the project.

<sup>43</sup> The quote comes from private correspondence.

<sup>44</sup> The quote comes from the survey mentioned above.

<sup>45</sup> For the discussion of the nexus of affirmative ethics, creativity, connectivity and transformations, see Rosi Braidotti, 'Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment', *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 14:3 (2008), 7–36. I thank Macarena García-González for this reference.

<sup>46</sup> The quote comes from the survey mentioned above.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Royle, 'Derrida's Event' in *Derrida's Legacies: Literature and Philosophy*, edited by Simon Glendinning and Robert Eaglestone (London and New York, Routledge, 2008), 36–44.

<sup>48</sup> See Braidotti, 'Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment', 15.

<sup>49</sup> Affrica Taylor, *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood* (Oxon and London, Routledge, 2013), 118.