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Affect, Embodiment and Place in Critical Literacy. Assembling Theory and Practice. By Kim Lenters and Mairi McDermott.

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"classrooms have always been politically charged and rife with uncertainty

while grounded in the crucial nature of the work" (p.xviii)

In this edited volume, editors Kim Lenters and Mairi McDermott, together with a diverse range of contributors, explore the potential of posthuman theories of affect, embodiment and place as a response to the political, unpredictable and urgent nature of literacy teaching and learning. Across 24 chapters, many of which are written by literacy educators in collaboration with researchers, the book offers posthumanism as a practical theory, one that can help teachers navigate and work with this "messiness and chaos" (p.xiii).

The book comprises short chapters across diverse contexts, practical examples and prompt questions, making it feel readable and well connected to practice in classrooms and communities. The format of the book is carefully considered, and includes vignettes, definitions and boxed notes. The authors seem to deliberately invite action and response, even at one point encouraging the reader to turn down the corners of the page in order to refer back to it more easily. Throughout, there is a strong focus on definitions and terminology; I wonder if this is a response from the authors

to something I often hear both researchers and educators say about posthuman theory; that it is full of jargon, and language that is too hard to navigate.

The structure of the book is experimental and plays with the idea of 'journeying' through the book, with chapters called 'orienting maps' intended to guide the reading and chapters titled 'plateaus' that assemble together groups of chapters around common themes. Although I mentioned there are 24 chapters in the book, only 13 are actually described as chapters; these are each written by an academic and educator collaborating together. The additional parts of the book include four 'orienting maps', intended "to help guide the reading and understanding of posthuman literacy approaches" (p.14), and four 'plateaus', written by the editors, introducing each themed section of the book and providing a concluding commentary to the whole volume. Finally, two chapters (Ramzy and Ko) provide 'traveller reviews' commentating on the process of the collaboration. Although there are a lot of different kinds of chapters and a quite complicated overall structure to the book, something which does unite all the contributions and provides connecting threads, is the shared reading groups in which all authors participated. As a novel approach to bringing theory and practice into dialogue with each other, the editors convened a series of reading groups and a three day research retreat for the authors. Thus, texts by Comber, Nichols and Campano, Zapata and Van Horn, Ehret and Hollett, and Waterhouse (see page 13 for full details), together with the contributing authors' own interests and specialisations, underpin the ideas in the book.

An overarching theme of the book is an interest in the relationship between theory and practice. Comber (orienting map 2) describes the need to find useful different theories in order to "pursue the questions that continue to haunt me" (p.74), and chapters throughout the book particularly seek to illustrate how posthuman theories concerned with place, bodies and affects might offer new ways of grappling with and unpicking questions that are rarely asked. Ehret and MacDonald describe this as attending to things that are "unconscious but intensely felt and present" (p.44), and the chapters in the book give many concrete examples of what these questions might be. These questions, which are likely to resonate for both researchers and educators, include wonderings about how to keep planning vibrant (chapter 4), what processes sit behind choosing books or resources for the classroom (chapter 10) or how teachers move intuitively to build pedagogical relationships with students (chapter 2). The examples make a case for the importance of lived experience to research and theory, but also the potential of theory to foreground things we might have overlooked or that we have forgotten and need to remember

An interest in noticing what may have been overlooked is seen as an ethical stance by many of the authors in the book. Thus, a second key driver of the book is retaining a focus on the critical within posthuman theory. This is something that activations of posthumanism within educational studies have been criticised for omitting or underplaying in the past (Ahmed, 2008; Petersen, 2018). Scholarship in recent years is developing more effective frameworks for holding together criticality and posthumanism within educational research (Ehret and Rowsell, forthcoming; Hackett et al, 2020; Kuby et al, 2019). This book makes a useful contribution to such a framework in a number of ways, perhaps most compellingly through an invitation to stay with moments that are messy or that elude neat solutions. Aukerman and Jensen (chapter 6), for example, ask: how do we honour the children and answers that unsettle and disrupt us? Naming the vulnerability, curiosity and the trust that is required by both educators and researchers to value and give time and space to this kind of "everyday sensemaking" (p.106) are important steps in articulating the relevance of posthumanism and related theories to education for social justice.

The inter-connection between place, multiple stories, and felt experiences is also central to many of the contributions to the book. Thiel and Pelling (chapter 5) consider boundaries and how they produce expectations and possibilities for inhabitants. By applying the notion of boundaries as a conceptual tool to analyse school spaces, they demonstrate its practical application. Hirst and Burnett (chapter 11) illustrate how a strength-based approach to education can be extended beyond the individual to consider what students and places do relationally. This relational thinking recognises that schools are always situated in places that may sometimes be marginalised but always hold multiple stories. Temporality is also shown to be essential for opening up multiple and complex stories, helping us to think widely about how "relatedness and permeability of place can play through educational practice" (p.183).

This interconnectedness - of global flows, spatial and temporal trajectories, and the material immediateness of a classroom, or a hill, or a campus forecourt, - is another theme running through much of the thinking in this book. Massey's notion of 'throwntogetherness' and posthuman assemblage theories are particular resources for much of this work. For example, Bartlett and LeBlanc's (chapter 1) discussion of junk modelling expands beyond the immediate success of the activity to consider connections between places, junk, things and people that stretch across space and have histories and futures. Asking what role literacy might play in a globalised world, Merchant and Devender-Kraft (chapter 7) ponder the way in which language politics can remain in the

background, yet still shape feelings of belonging. Whitty and McKay (chapter 10) recognise the healing that needs to be done in relation to biographies and histories of places and communities that are not over; they wonder how literacies might upend inequalities and disrupt single stories.

This book holds together tensions, for example, between agency as relational and affect as operating beyond human consciousness and control, with the sorts of outcomes teachers might desire (or be compelled to provide) in classrooms. There are points where this feels particularly conflicted, for example suggestions that we can "reconfigure the assemblage to create new affects in relation to the things that may repel some students" (p.32). This is a sticky kind of a proposition that walks a fine line between illustrating the practical use of a theory and turning such theories into what Manning would describe as an "apparatus of capture" (Manning, 2016, 32), fixing and instrumentalising theory in order to offer guaranteed solutions. Continuing to balance on this line, the book returns frequently to over-arching themes of criticality, place, assemblage and affect, turning them one way and another to show how they might unsettle assumptions, validate inchoate impulses and make new stories visible. In the opening parts of the book, the authors describe posthumanism as an invitation. The notion of theory as an invitation to try out useful tools that can energise educational practice is a powerful one that I would wholeheartedly subscribe to. It is not just the case that theory can give a language to help explain what happens, but also that practice in literacy classrooms can expand theory. This interest in theory doing more than offering an explanation or certainty is central to the project to work with posthuman and affect theories in relation to educational practice, an emerging body of scholarship to which this book makes a substantial, welcome and accessible contribution.

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