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Article abstract

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Memories of a Girl Between Worlds: Speculative Common Worldings

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*Coauthors' names are presented in random order to reflect the equal contributions of each individual in producing this article.

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Jieyu Jiang is a PhD student in the Educational Policy and Evaluation program in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. Her research interests focus on teacher professional qualities and subjectivities in the global educational context and educational policy borrowing and travelling in an international background. She grew up in a one-child family in Anqing, a small city of Anhui province in China. Without siblings around, she chatted with the air and dreamed about having more friends after entering school.

Ann Nielsen, EdD, is the director of the Office of Global Education in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. Her interests in education and research have focused on teacher professional subjectivities, teacher leadership, and school leadership using visual and postqualitative methodologies. She grew up in Iowa as a middle child who spent her early years teaching and engaging other beings from the sanctity of her family's kitchen bathroom.

Janna Goebel, PhD, is an assistant professor of sustainability education in the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University. As an ecofeminist scholar, Janna's work focuses on the ways that education can be conceptualized beyond the human and explores how relationships among humans and the more-than-human world matter in how we approach sustaining life on Earth. She spent her childhood playing in a 40-acre preserve behind her home in New Jersey and, later, dreaming about playing with dolphins from her bedroom in Illinois.

Iveta Silova, PhD, is a professor and the associate dean of global education in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. Her research stands at the intersections of postsocialist, postcolonial, and decolonial perspectives in envisioning education beyond the Western horizon. She is especially interested in childhood memories, ecofeminism, and environmental sustainability. Iveta grew up in Latvia in a small town called Aizkraukle. As an only child, she loved playing outside with friends and enjoyed daydreaming, especially during school hours and music lessons.

This article combines collective biography, diffractive analysis, and speculative fabulation to weave together the authors' childhood memories of "common worlding." Our collective biography brings into focus how we engaged in common worlding in our childhoods through dreaming, metamorphosis, and play by tactfully moving across different worlds and learning with the human and more-than-human others we encountered. As we foreground childhood memory and its potential to reimagine pasts, presents, and futures, we explore what kind of conditions are necessary to (re)attune ourselves to the multiple worlds around us in order to maintain and nurture children's—and our own—other-worldly connections.

Key words: *collective biography; childhood memories; SF; diffraction; pluriversal pedagogies*

As children, we were playful, imaginative, and maybe a little bit odd and wild. Growing up in a one-child family in Asia and Europe, we learned to make friends with air, enjoyed the company of imaginary friends, and found solace in daydreams. Spending time with many siblings and cousins in South America, we disappeared into our grandmother's quiet garden during the day and roamed the noisy dreamworld at night. We sat alone in our bedrooms in North America and dreamt of the day we would greet a dolphin or teach another lesson to an invisible

class waiting for us in the bathroom. Our dreams, imaginary friends, and fantastical encounters with other worlds and beings were all part of the “common worlds”—“the real life-worlds” that we inherited, shared, and cohabited with human and more-than-human others (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2016, p. 1), without hesitation or fear.

As we grew older, we were often told and repeatedly reminded that our encounters with the common worlds were just a dream, a creepy fantasy, or a wild imagination. Although we tried to keep the moments of common worlding protected from adults—behind closed doors, inside warm blankets, or under heavy eyelids—they were eventually relegated to our childhood, a period of life through which we had presumably “progressed” (Adams, 2011, p. 89). The Western culture of scientific empiricism and child developmentalism had further shut out the experiences of common worlding to our collective pasts, childhood memories, or simply imaginations. Eventually, we traded in our days of common worlding and shapeshifting for days of intersecting identities of adult daughters, wives, sisters, mothers, and educators. As boundaries between different worlds continued to grow into impenetrable barriers, we feared that our childhood memories too would fade away one day, along with the remaining connections to other worlds that they had kept.

But, as Barad reminds us, “memory is not a matter of the past”; it “recreates the past each time it is invoked” (quoted in Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 67). It is often compared to “traffic” that flows between interconnected pasts, presents, and futures—always moving in multiple directions, although at variable rates—making possible a radical rethinking of temporal experience (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 38). In this process, memory disrupts the concept of linear unfolding of time that presupposes the sequential progress of childhood into adulthood and instead opens space for alternative understandings of childhood—ones that are neither timed nor clocked based on biological and psychological growth (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012; Tesar, 2016; Tesar & Koro-Ljungberg, 2016) nor measured against Western standards of development (Burman, 2019; Millei et al., 2017; Silova, 2019; Taylor, 2017). From this perspective, children are perceived as *beings* in the present rather than developmental *becomings* on predetermined paths to adulthood (James & Prout, 2015). Simultaneously, the concept of childhood itself is transformed from a noun into a verb—to *child*—describing an experience rather than a stage in life, “something all of us can do” (Haynes & Murriss, 2017, p. 977; see also Kennedy & Kohan, 2008). Childhood becomes “a possibility, a strength, a force, an intensity” (Kennedy & Kohan, 2008, p. 7) that is capable of resisting—and rewriting—the dominant narrative of the individual child moving along a linear developmental trajectory, separated and abstracted from the world, into powerful alternatives.

Our focus on childhood memory is therefore concerned less with documenting what happened in the past and more with exploring “how we actualize *alternative trajectories of living*” (Middleton & Brown, 2010, p. 241, emphasis in original). In particular, Keightley and Pickering (2012) explain how memory and imagination are inextricably linked “as part of the same activity within temporal consciousness” (p. 78), not only linking together past, present, and future but also enabling a process of mutual transformation of ourselves, our past experiences, and our possible futures:

Through imagination we develop a sense of the temporal relations between different experiences, different episodes and different stages in our lives. Without this sense of temporal interconnectedness, ranging across the recollected past and the contingent present of the remembering subject, lived lives are unliveable. (p. 51)

In this sense, memory research resonates with the SF genre, referring to “a potent material-semiotic sign for the riches of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, speculative fiction, science fact, science fantasy ... and string figures” (Haraway, 2013, p. 9). In looping threads across multiple times and spaces, the SF practice is “a model for worlding,” where SF also stands for “*so far*, opening up what is yet-to-come in protean

entangled times' pasts, presents, and futures" (Haraway, 2013, p. 10, emphasis added). By bringing together childhood studies, memory research, and SF practice we thus aim to (re)animate the processes of ongoing common worlding that have been primarily associated with childhoods but have always already been a part of us, regardless of age. More importantly, childhood memories enable us to string together the "playful imaginings of what might have been or what is still to come" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 51), while offering important pedagogical provocations for (re)attuning to our pasts, presents, and futures in the multiple, pluriversal worlds.

With the goal of revisiting our own experiences of common worlding, we came together to reflect deeply and collaboratively on the memories of our childhoods in/with the wilds.¹ Over the course of seven months, we practiced collective memory work to reengage our relationships with multispecies, multimattered kin (Barad, 2007; Chandler, 2013; Haraway, 2015). In this article, using collective biographical methods (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012) and diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007; Davies & Gannon, 2012; Mazzei, 2014), we pick up the threads of our childhoods and weave together stories from our own childhood memories in a speculative thought experiment to (re)animate our experiences and relationships with more-than-human worlds and explore new pedagogical possibilities for ongoing common worlding.

Animating childhood memories through collective biographies and diffractive analysis

Memory works in multiple directions. This is something that we may have experienced in our own childhoods or read in popular children's books and scholarly literature (see Keightley & Pickering, 2012; also Barad, 2010; Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012). Memory work helps us to address and work through the many paradoxes of scholarly research, including the long-established divides between space/time, culture/nature, childhood/adulthood, reality/imagination, and self/other. Therefore, it seems only appropriate to approach this study from the perspective of a collective biography, which is located in the interstices of yet another paradox: the one "created when researchers individually and collectively put the individual, liberal humanist subject under erasure" (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 357). Originally associated with feminist research (Haug et al., 1987) and subsequently developed in a poststructural vein (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014), collective biography is an intimate, embodied, generative methodology where researchers are also simultaneously research subjects, working with their own memories and producing interpretations in the intersubjective spaces of their interrelations with each other and between their pasts, presents, and futures (see also Millei et al., 2019).

Rather than a fixed methodological approach, collective biography requires the "constant *undoing* of method" (Gonick & Gannon, 2014, p. 12, emphasis added) as each research collective decides how to approach their work in terms of choosing topics, invoking memories, or writing, rewriting, and analyzing the memories (see Haug et al., 1987; also Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014). Our research was organized in four phases. In the first phase, we formed a reading group to ground this research methodologically in the literature focusing on memory work, collective biography, and childhoods (Davies & Gannon, 2012). After discussing the methodological foundations for the study, in the second phase, we dove deeper into the theme of *the wilds* to center our discussions more specifically on childhood and childhood ontologies, and multispecies encounters in human and more-than-human worlds with the goal of reacquainting ourselves with the wilds within-beyond us. The third phase of the project called for the independent memory work of writing our childhood memories in/with nature / other species / other worlds. Once our childhood memory narratives were individually crafted, we held weekly virtual writing retreats for sharing and collectively elaborating on these memories. In phase four of the project, we shared, wrote, and rewrote our stories in an iterative process to bring out the details, bodily sensations, and the texture of memories until we were able to experience each other's memories from inside ourselves, until

our bodies began to be affected by each other's memories. Davies and Gannon (2012) describe this process vividly:

The original holder of the memory writes and rewrites the memory in light of this collaborative attention to the detail until, with a collective sigh, or with tears, the assembled memory-workers say—yes, that is it exactly—we know this moment from inside itself. The story telling and writing and re-writing thus take the form of an encounter, not so much between individual subjects and discourse, though it is also that, but working with the intensities and flows that, collectively, move us. (p. 360)

Working with memories required us to listen to our bodies and let our bodies speak. Writing our memories allowed us to remember the embodied details and sensations of past encounters and to bring them back to life in our narrations (Davies & Gannon, 2012). In this process, our memories appeared, not as static images in our minds or as a recollection of past experiences, but as material presences that were made alive by the emotions and embodied sensations they evoked in/with us then and also now (Davies & Gannon, 2012). As we read aloud and (re)read our memories collectively, we experienced moments when our bodies brought to the surface memories in their “ongoingness,” which were difficult to articulate because the lines between childhood and adulthood were no longer distinct. In such moments, memories often appeared fragmented in language and intelligibility, which was perhaps an example of “an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation” (Barad, 2007, p. 149). Barad (2007) places this experience in a broader perspective:

Memory is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual. Re-remembering and re-cognizing do not take care of, or satisfy, or in any other way reduce one's responsibilities; rather, like all intra-actions, they extend the entanglements and responsibilities of which one is part. The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook....; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind. (p. ix)

As we collected the threads of our childhoods and shared our memories aloud, they were no longer isolated, hidden, or bound by time and space. Together we were able to see and experience new pasts, presents, and futures. Oftentimes the reading of one memory evoked other memories, creating an interference pattern (Haraway, 1997) in each other's bodies and memories and opening up the “possibility of a diffractive mo(ve)ment” (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 371). The iterative and collaborative approach of the re-remembering inherently entangled our memories among and across each other, not as an intertwining process but as an exploration of the multiplicity of the memories (Barad, 2007; Davies & Gannon, 2012, Haraway, 2016; Murriss & Bozalek, 2019), allowing our embodied memories to remain entangled and affecting us “in a process of becoming different” (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 361).

In short, we experienced the collective biography method not as reflective but as diffractive work (see Davies & Gannon, 2012). Diffraction is “the practice of reading insights through one another while paying attention to patterns of difference” (Barad, 2011, p. 3). Collectively (re)remembering activates the polyhedral lens in the kaleidoscope that reveals common worlds and opens them to us. It helps us understand the multiple worlds that were entangled in our childhood memories by providing us with “a way to illuminate the complexity of the always/already entangled processes of dis/continuous becomings that make up what we are used to calling ‘world’” (Thiele, 2014, p. 207). The concept of diffraction also helped us through our weaving of collective memories by “a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction” (Barad, 2014, p. 168) where difference in our memories, and in the worlds that we visited as children, is constitutive of those entangled worlds.

The concept of diffraction was also present in our analysis of the collective biographies. In our collaborative practice, we worked to dissolve the illusion of separate, preexisting selves (Davies & Gannon, 2012) and did not search for sameness (Mazzei, 2014). Attending to Mazzei (2014), our diffractive analysis of the memory stories moved away

from an attempt to reflect theory and away from a search for themes that emerged from the stories. Instead, we identified entry points that invite the reader into the stories of common worlding. Mazzei (2014) describes this process as reading the data “through multiple theoretical insights [moving] qualitative analysis away from habitual normative readings (e.g., coding) toward a diffractive reading that spreads thought and meaning in unpredictable and productive emergences” (p. 742). A diffractive reading of our memories allowed us to read *through* each other’s memories to discover how they made differences and produced situated interferences (Haraway, 1992). It helped us to “resist the urge to separate in order to clarify” (Thiele, 2014, p. 209) and allowed us to follow the entry points that the memories triggered in us, either together and/or separately according to what rippled in our bodies.

We weaved together our childhood memories into a speculative fabulation story, highlighting connections between our encounters with other worlds—and each other—across space and time. We called this collectively written story “A Girl Between Worlds.”

A girl between worlds

The girl loved daydreaming. She was really good at it. She could daydream anytime, anywhere. Standing in her room by the window, staring outside. The colours blurring, the sounds fading away, the window getting foggy from her breathing. She could daydream sitting at her desk at school, listening to the teacher talking ... the teacher’s voice slowing drifting away. She could daydream riding a train, watching the trees go by, watching train stations passing by ... one, then another, then another. She could daydream singing in a choir, her voice merging with the voices of others, no longer able to tell them apart. Daydreaming felt like floating into another world, into an outer space. Weightless. Peaceful. Quiet. No thoughts rushing through her head, no noise. Simply tuning out and slipping away.

“Are you listening?” The girl suddenly heard a voice, followed by a loud snapping of fingers inches from her face. The sound startled her. “Pay attention when I am speaking!” said the teacher, with a growing irritation in her voice.

And just like that, the girl was **snapped** back into the classroom.

The girl liked to **snap** her fingers to let her students know she had arrived in class. The girl’s students faced her in their desks under the sink along the baseboard in the kitchen bathroom. At least she assumed they sat at desks. She couldn’t see them, but she knew they were there. The girl would talk to her students every day when she used the kitchen bathroom. It didn’t matter what time of day, when she sat in her large white chair, class would resume in real time with whatever was going on with the students. The girl was a little small for her teacher chair. Her legs didn’t always touch the ground, but the round seat was comfortable. When the girl checked in on her students, she discussed their problems, sang songs with the students, and once in a while, solved their disputes.

One night, the girl’s parents went out to a party. Her older brother was babysitting her, but he was not really the best at it. Even though the girl was younger, she often felt she babysat her brother. That night, the girl went to visit her class. As usual, she snapped her fingers to let the students know she had arrived. She was busy talking with her students when she heard giggling from outside. She looked up and saw her brother laughing at her. She hadn’t quite closed the door, and he could see her talking to her students. The girl was embarrassed and hurt. She looked down to get comfort from her friends, but they had disappeared. Her students were gone. They never came back again, and the girl was crushed. Her brother laughed and laughed at her that night. The girl was pretty sure that he knew how mean this was but she never said anything. It didn’t matter anyways. Her friends were gone. She was

all **alone**.

The girl spent a lot of time **alone**, sitting there without friends to accompany her. She was the only child in her family, and adults were always busy working, preparing meals, washing clothes, or doing other important things. They never sat or laid down during the daytime—they were always so busy.

When she was alone, the girl loved to talk to the air. She knew nothing or nobody was there, only air, but she still talked. The air would always hear her crying, laughing, thinking, self-talking, grumbling, and sharing. Although nothing was around her, the girl developed a habit of leaving some space for the air, pretending there was “something” there. She sat in the chair, but she would only sit in the large half of the chair and leave a little space on the other side. She lay in bed covered with a heavy quilt on snowy nights—the outside was so cold, but the space inside was warm and comfy—making some space for many little homeless animals to join her inside the warm quilt. “I am opening an animal shelter,” she said to the warm air inside as she buried her head in the quilt. “Little duckling, chick, dolphin, and baby panda, you are safe and warm now! I will protect all of you and all good night.” She whispered and whispered. This would make her feel comfortable, protected, and warm. So many animals were with her, and she knew she loved them, her nonexistent little animals.

“What did you just say? Are you talking to yourself? Don’t do it again! It’s creepy.” Her mother opened the door and came into the bedroom, but nobody answered. There was nobody in the room but the little girl who was sound asleep—**small** in a huge empty bed.

Sitting on the edge of her bed, she had never felt so **small**. Her dreams had been crushed.

For as long as she could remember, she had been captivated by dolphins. The girl was in awe of them. This was more than a fascination. She loved them. Her room was painted to look like the ocean, she had dolphin colouring books, and, one Christmas, her parents gifted her a small lamp shaped as a dolphin riding a wave. On the bottom, in her father’s handwriting, it said: “Follow your dreams.”

The girl knew she would grow up to work with dolphins. She thought she might become a dolphin trainer. She had been told she had a better chance of becoming a professional football player, but if she tried really hard in school, she might achieve her dream. *A professional football player?* The girl knew there were no women or girls who were professional football players. Did this mean there was no chance that she would meet and work with dolphins someday?

She loved being near the water. She and her mother, kindred spirits in their love of the sand and waves, would take afternoon walks on the beach alternating their gaze between searching for seashells in the sand and scanning for dolphins on the horizon. On this day, to the girl’s delight, there was a pod of dolphins near the sandbar. The moment had arrived. She would finally meet a dolphin. The girl and her mother walked toward the pod. The dolphins charged toward them and spun around just six feet from where they were standing. These creatures were not being playful. They were powerful. They were fishing, and the girl and her mother had wandered into their space. The girl fled back to the safety of the shore, her mother running right behind her.

As she slunk into bed that evening, the girl looked longingly at the painted horizon where the sea met the sky on her bedroom wall. She turned off the soft light of her dolphin lamp, closed her eyes, and tried to **fall asleep** with

the sound of waves echoing in her ears.

Ever since she was a girl, it took her a while to **fall asleep**. Thoughts and sounds floated in and out of her hazy mind as she tried to wind down for the day. As she finally closed her eyes, she'd suddenly find herself immersed in an empty dark space filled with music. The instrumental sounds would start off mid-song and increase in volume like an orchestra building up, until the suddenly very loud music woke her up. As she dozed off again, the loud music would start playing again and would wake her up a few times before she was finally able to silently fall asleep. She didn't know the music. There were just increasingly louder instrumental sounds filling her ears and her mind until they were so loud that they woke her up.

As the years went by, she got used to that and didn't think much of it. Then, one night, as she fell asleep, instead of instruments, there were people talking—a chatter of which she was not part but a listener. It was as if she had entered a room filled with several people who were talking to each other, having long conversations that she just started to hear midway, and they carried on with no regard to her coming into their space. Much like the music, those indistinguishable conversations increased in volume until the loud chatter woke the girl up again and again. She could never identify a voice, a word, or a sentence. There were too many people. It was too loud. At some point while falling asleep, she crossed through a loud space where people talked or music was played. Some days she'd get right back to her awakened self, and some days she'd cross through and go somewhere else for the rest of the night. Sometimes she wondered if one day she would be able to figure out a way to stay there a while longer and listen.

Speculative diffractions: (Re)reading childhood memories through one another

Entangled in a speculative fabulation story, our childhood memories invite analyses that foreground a collaborative and participatory process of reading—and (re)reading—memories “through one another” (Barad, 2014, p. 179) rather than a reduction of data like a traditional thematic or theoretical coding would require. Drawing inspiration from Karen Barad's (2007) concept of diffraction as a methodological practice and its extension by Lisa Mazzei (2014) and Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2012), we engage in a diffractive analysis by reading insights from our memory stories through one another and following wherever they lead. As Mazzei (2014) notes, such an approach “keeps analysis and knowledge production on the move” (p. 742). It takes on a rhizomatic (rather than hierarchical and linear) form, following different trajectories of children's engagement with different worlds and beings. In this process, we pick up the threads of our memories to weave together a narrative of playfulness, dreaming and metamorphoses, tactfulness, and fragility. Just like our childhood memories animated portals to other worlds (e.g., dreams, play, or physical places), the pedagogical openings that emerge through our diffractive analysis help us articulate the kinds of conditions necessary for living “well together in the more-than-human common worlds that we inherit” (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020). Following these entry points, we elaborate on the new pedagogical possibilities that emerge from speculative fabulations inspired by our childhood memories.

On playfulness: The intragenerational and multispecies nature of play

Learning through play has long been studied in the major language of academia where researchers have been “keen to dissect, identify and categorize” play across the academic spectrum (Adams, 2011, p. 28). Defining childhood play as a marker of human development has become a dominant driver in pedagogical approaches to early childhood teaching and learning (Adams, 2011). Joanna Haynes and Karen Murriss (2017) suggest that when play is

understood through [a] binary logic, the concept of play involves the real/fantasy binary—children play at pretend, or imitate what adults do in the real world, as, for example, in playing “mummies and daddies.” Conceived as such, play becomes synonymous with childhood. Such a notion of play puts the activity in the service of formation, of becoming an adult. (p. 8)

Positioning play as something that is only available to children arbitrarily time-bounds this concept and negates “a pedagogy of emergent and transitional subjectivities” (Haynes & Murriss, 2017, p. 2; see also Adams, 2011).

As we engage in collective memory work, our attention shifts to the minor language of childhood memories as pedagogical practices, reminding us how “many power producing binaries”—dream/reality, human/animal, inside/outside, work/play—“structure what counts as real learning and who and what is included and excluded” (Haynes & Murriss, 2017, p. 7; see also Adams, 2011). In this context, play and playfulness reemerge as one of the central elements of learning about and with different worlds and beings, disrupting not only the notion of a binary distinction between humans and others but also our understanding of our own place in the world(s). In our collective memories, play and playfulness transform all kinds of beings into children’s interesting playmates: a girl can teach an entire class in her bathroom and students are always eager to see their teacher; a girl can become friends with air, who is the girl’s best listener, and animals can be sheltered in warm blankets; dolphins magically transform into play companions in dreams; and every dream may have its own unique background music harmonizing with the girl’s rhythm of dreaming. Playfulness enables children to walk through multiple parallel worlds. And in this process, the memories—and the worlds—simultaneously interlink and transform through play.

Our work with childhood memories simultaneously unravelled the complexity of our own play as children and its entanglement in our adult lives. Multisensory triggers of our childhood playfulness invoked memories across our worlds through the mention of a time of day, a location, a seasonal event, or an engagement with animals creating an assemblage that exposed “a complex network of human and nonhuman agents” (Mazzei, 2017, p. 680). Play in this way arose as a “being and knowing that can be available, regardless of age” (Haynes & Murriss, 2017, p. 9) and our memories served as agential cuts exposing “the possibilities for the iterative reconfiguring of the materiality of human, nonhuman, cyborian, and other such forms” (Barad, 2007, p. 178).

Playfulness was not only woven into our memories, our memories played with each other. A spontaneous air of playfulness was inherent in our engagement with our childhood memories both for ourselves as adults and for ourselves as children. Memory meetings often evoked bursts of laughter, a physical leaning into each other and excited interruptions of each other where the play embodied within our memories (re)surfaced in our own bodies. Intra-actions of memories played with each other. At times, a single word in one person’s memory generated memories in others. At other times, memories from one person stirred up memories in other bodies. For example, a memory about a child travelling through a dream-world brought forth other memories among members of the group:

It reminds me of being asleep but waking up in a dream but unable to open my eyes and not knowing how that is occurring.

I also have experienced the feelings of being confused in which worlds, especially when I just woke up from an impressive dream. This is an in-between moment—two worlds are both real and clear, but I cannot separate from any one of them immediately.

Writing this article itself felt like play as we realized how remembering and revisiting our memories activated playfulness across time and space. Play was no longer time-bound to childhood nor were our memories of play

“over.” It afforded us the opportunity to engage in an ongoing reconfiguration of our selves and our common worlds too.

On metamorphoses: Dreaming and waking in different worlds

There is a dream-like nature to childhood memory stories. In this speculative reimagining of our collective memories, dreams appear as portals through which we can enter and exit different worlds, as well as a space—and time—for transformations that blur distinctions between day and night and between dreaming and waking life. Like a reflection of the moon in water and flowers in the mirror, this interpretation of the dream world refuses the independent existence of other worlds and draws clear distinctions between human’s reality, imagination, other beings’ worlds, and even rationality and emotions. From this perspective, other worlds or “illusions” are produced by the human mind and they cannot exist without humans and human mind activities. This interpretation further requires ontological differentiation between human and nonhuman, facts and imaginations, and real and dream worlds.

However, the SF memory narrative about the girl’s encounters suggests that dreams may open up other worlds instead of illusory nonexistence. Dreams create a parallel world in simultaneous existence to the waking world, but the only way to enter this space is to temporarily leave the space that our awakened body occupies, and even abandon the shape of our bodies, to float weightlessly, peacefully, and quietly in a different world. The world of dreams and the waking world share our memories, laughs, feelings, experiences, pressures, communications, wishes, and even more than those. Dreams help us store our valuable but subtle ideas silently and present them when we are ready to enter that world. In the SF imagining of the girl’s encounters, dreaming is a speculative thought experiment. In a dream world, the girl takes the train seeing trees passing by and sings in a choir; she can become a professional football player, a dolphin trainer, and open an animal shelter at the same time; she builds intimate relationships with lovely dolphins and plays with them in the sea; she commands the attention of a whole class; she shuttles back and forth in the spaces and worlds where she is willing to stay. Those experiences may not come true in this world filled with *reality*, but if you access it, the dream world will keep them real and vibrant, never fading away.

Dreaming is also a space of transformation, which is most vividly illustrated by a butterfly dream of Zhuangzi, an ancient Chinese philosopher. Zhuangzi once dreamed of turning into a butterfly and later, after waking up, was unable to figure out whether he was dreaming of being a butterfly or whether a butterfly was dreaming of being Zhuangzi (see Roberts, 1979). Zhuangzi’s dream blurs the boundary between illusions and reality, as well as between the human and more-than-human worlds. Similar to experiences of dreaming in many Indigenous cultures, the fluidity between many worlds does not merely exist in illusory imagination and can be achieved through our own transformation or metamorphosis (Abram, 2012; Silova, 2020; Warner, 2007). Zhuangzi’s dream reflects the integral onto-epistemological view of inseparable and interrelated transformations of multiple worlds and beings. In this sense, although there are clear distinctions and differentiations among entities—whether beings or worlds—we are not “making invidious distinctions” (Hall & Ames, 1998, p. 58).

Furthermore, these worlds and beings also transform as they interweave within each other instead of impacting each other in isolation. In our SF memory narrative, the girl has an unerring instinct for her own transformation and that of other beings in multiple worlds, because she sees and acknowledges the interconnectedness of different worlds and beings within them. Through such transformations, the girl becomes an equal and tactful listener in other worlds—she passes by the noises, feels the wind, enjoys the harmony with animals, pours out her secrets to her class, and communicates with music. She also transforms herself. When the girl is sitting at her desk in the

classroom at her school, she is a child “—*but not only*” (de la Cadena, 2014, p. 256, emphasis in original). The desk is a train, and she is a passenger whizzing by the trees. When she visits the bathroom, the girl is transformed into a teacher in front of a class. When she appears to be alone, or feels that she is alone, she realizes that she can never be alone for she has the air with her always. There is no distinction between the observed and the observer, subjective and objective, or the girl’s dreams/memories and the authors’ dreams/memories. There is no hierarchy and superiority among beings and other worlds, and the girl does not feel upset for being in a dream rather than awake nor for becoming a dolphin instead of a god. She is just excited about entering the dream world and metamorphosing there. She may transform into one of the “others” and become a part of the events and activities to continue the unfinished story in other multiple worlds. She may also just scurry by and catch a glimpse of multiple worlds as an outsider passing by.

On tactfulness: Expanding awareness and attuning with other worlds

Remembering encounters with other worlds brings into focus the importance of expanding our awareness, of opening up our senses, of attuning to other worlds, and of learning to see beyond what immediately meets the eye (Abram, 2012; Jensen et al., 2016; Rose, 2013). It may feel like drifting moments, like floating and letting go, because one is moving to a state of being that allows openness to multiple senses, to what else is there, to an awareness beyond vision, and beyond the immediate incitement of this reality (Abram, 2012). The expansion of awareness is a useful thinking tool to “resist the bifurcation between reality and fiction” (Jensen et al., 2016, p. 165), meaning resisting the idea of leaving the “real” world to enter another, supposedly fictional world. Considering other worlds as fictional, especially when focusing on the multiple worlds explored in our childhoods, may be working to maintain the ontological duality that separates them in Western scientific discourse. Our perception of other worlds may therefore be a matter of how open we are to those worlds, depending on how much our awareness is expanded or contracted.

Jensen et al. (2016), in a discussion of spirit worlds in Japanese ontograph, argue that worlds can be animated if we attune to them. Minakata Kumagusu, a Japanese scientist, calls this a “tactful” encounter and “a mode of attunement,” making hitherto invisible beings and powers perceivable (Jensen et al., 2016, p. 149). For Jensen et al. (2016), we don’t leave or enter other worlds, we carefully tune into worlds, and what follows “is a process of mutual interference” (p. 154). Jensen et al. discuss how the existence of other worlds can be perceived by “learning to be affected by different entities and relations” (p. 164), and how other worlds are activated by those same relations based on attunement. Our SF childhood memory stories imagine how this may occur: a girl may tune out of the physical reality through dreaming, daydreaming, or playing and expand her awareness to tune into other worlds, causing her to be entangled with, be affected by, and sometimes interfere with those other real worlds she activates.

Rose’s “expansion of awareness,” Jensen’s “attunement,” and Abram’s “falling through space” represent different moments of the same state. The moments when the girl entered the space that was filled with music and chatter felt like a seemingless floating state, as if she had just stumbled upon this room, this world where things were already going on. Similarly, the girl could daydream easily at any point and had developed the ability to dim her bodily senses to tune out of spaces she didn’t want to be in and to drift, unbothered, into more desirable timespaces/realities. Likewise, a girl passionate about dolphins activated a world where she was surrounded by dolphins, where she loved dolphins and was loved back by them. In all cases, the girl’s awareness shifted, blurring the supposed boundaries between the rational awareness of the present and other possibilities of existence. In our memories, the girl was able to pass through (un)consciousness states, to inhabit becoming-zones that allowed her to tune into other worlds and intra-act with other beings in a process of mutual interference (Barad, 2007; Jensen et al., 2016).

Jensen et al. (2016) explain that to have such encounters in and with other worlds, one needs “tact,” an ability to navigate life as it unfolds as an “interweaving of visible and invisible webs” (p. 159). Much like the worlds visited by the girl in our collective memory work, the existence of spirit worlds and other “mysterious workings of the universe” discussed by Jensen et al. (2016, p. 161) falls outside of the world of concrete, material things, which is accepted and explained by Western science. Therefore, Jensen et al. (2016) argue that in order to perceive and grasp such worlds, one needs to rely on something other than conscious rationality; one needs tact:

Tact can be seen as the limit point where that which one has consciously learned encounters worldly surprises that go beyond this learning. It concerns the cultivation of a receptive attitude toward the surprises of (nonhuman) things; even things that might lie hidden in plain view. (p. 162)

In our memories, tact may induce a heightened attentiveness that allows the girl to notice and encounter beings that exist in ways that cannot be explained rationally. When the girl used her expanded awareness to visit her classroom in the bathroom, tact allowed her to notice the students who were there and to encounter her classroom waiting for her. She was often in that bathroom and sometimes forgot that her class was under the sink. But as soon as she remembered, she was able to tune in and activate the world in which her students were waiting for her. Or when the girl wandered into the dreamworld, tact allowed her to walk through it curiously but quietly. Listening to the hum of indistinguishable conversations, she did not seem to be bothered by her inability to comprehend these conversations or by being unnoticed in the space she was passing through. In another memory, in a different space and time, the girl shared her world with air, always leaving a little space for air besides her, whether sitting on a chair or lying in her bed under a heavy blanket. The girl’s heightened attentiveness animated various worlds, many of which she visited regularly, and sometimes intentionally.

The girl’s expanded awareness allowed her to notice and encounter other beings that were there but that were made accessible to her by the tactful activation of those worlds. Curiously though, the girl’s inability to understand the conversations and recognize the music in the loud room could also be related to how tact works. As Jensen et al. (2016) explain, tact may or may not change what occurs in other worlds, meaning that in some worlds “tact is required not only to notice but also to be noticed” (p. 164). Perhaps the girl in the loud room noticed that other world but was not noticed by it.

On fragility: When boundaries become impenetrable barriers in crossing worlds

We wander curiously but cautiously into other worlds—the worlds of plants and animals, spirits and ancestors, invisible friends and fantastical beings, daydreams and night dreams. In our childhood memories, the boundaries between these worlds are porous and permeable, sometimes separated only by a blurry vision, a fleeting sensation, a shadow, a sound, or a bathroom door. We remember crossing these boundaries effortlessly as children, slipping in and out of different worlds while taking walks, playing, studying, sleeping, or going to the bathroom. Sometimes we stumble upon—and unintentionally intrude into—worlds where human presence may not be welcome or may not be what we, humans, imagined it to be. In such moments (like in the memory of the encounter between the girl and the dolphin), we are reminded that we are just visitors there. Although our worlds are interconnected, they are distinct from each other.

We intuitively know that we need to tread these worlds carefully so as not to disturb the delicate order of the pluriverse and the multitude of worlds within it. A girl who shares her world with air intuitively knows that she needs to protect it from adults, especially from her parents. When her mom enters the room, irritated by hearing the girl talking to air again and asking her to stop because it is creepy, the girl pretends she is sleeping. By pretending that she is fast asleep, she protects the world of air from an unwanted intruder. A girl entering a

dreamworld is careful not to share her night wanderings with adults, perhaps anticipating that her dreams may be dismissed by adults as just that, only dreams.

But the fragility of the boundaries between the different worlds is not always intuitively felt or known to children. A girl who enters the bathroom to talk to her class is so excited about the encounter that she forgets to close the door behind her one day. Her lively conversation with the invisible class is overheard by her older brother, who “laughs and laughs” at her all night long. Crushed, hurt, and embarrassed, the girl returns to the bathroom that night hoping to see her friends and be consoled by them, but nobody is there. Her friends are all gone and they never return. What appears to be simple laughter or an off-the-cuff remark dismissing children’s stories of unseen worlds and invisible friends—and labelling them creepy, weird, or just “a product of the child’s imagination” (Adams, 2011, p. 21)—can shut the doors to other worlds forever. But it is not other worlds closing their doors to humans; rather, it is humans who refuse to see these unseen worlds, building the barrier higher and higher. As years pass by, these entrances to other worlds—doors, windows, sounds, or beams of light—may too forget that they once connected different worlds. And then, the boundaries between different worlds become impenetrable barriers, separating worlds and the beings within them.

Losing connection with other worlds does not necessarily mean that these worlds vanish, or even that they lose importance (Jensen et al., 2016). As long as these worlds remain real to children (or adults), their “realness” gives them significant meaning (Adams, 2011, p. 21). From this perspective, our capacity to encounter and engage with other worlds depends on our *selves*. Commenting on encounters with the Japanese spirit worlds, Jensen et al. (2016) suggest that whether or not we *meet* spirits in everyday life depends on who *we* are: “Inasmuch as ‘we’ are middle-of-the-road Westerners, including would-be ethnographers of spirit worlds, perhaps it is true to say that we tend to ‘look in vain’” (p. 156, emphasis in original). They explain that “a resolutely material focus” that aims to “steer clear of the problem posed by supernatural being” is neither adequate nor sufficient for engaging with other worlds (Jensen et al., 2016, p. 156). What is required is a modification of “the bodily and perceptual capacities” in ways that allow for interaction with spirit ecologies. In other words, there is “an ontological dimension to ‘seeing’ aside from what immediately meets the eye” (Jensen et al., 2016, p. 156). Looking back at childhood memories, we suggest that childhood ontology—even within the Western rationality confines—enables one to wander along “a temporal as well as a spatial edge” (Abram, 2012, p. 26), where subtle boundaries between different worlds are not yet fossilized into impenetrable barriers, animating not only us but also the very entrances into different worlds.

In lieu of conclusions: Imagining pedagogical possibilities for common worlding

Children live simultaneously in multiple worlds: “worlds of magic and mystery which often stand in stark contrast to their parents’ world which seems dominated by mundane daily routines” (Adams, 2011, p. 12). Through school (and with age), these worlds often grow apart even further, sometimes fading into the background of adult lives or disappearing altogether into childhood memories. Yet, this does not mean that other worlds—with all of their magic and mystery—disappear, or that we lose the ability to engage in common worlding beyond our lived childhoods. The collective biographical nature of our research and resulting speculative fabulation—deliberately approached through the diffractive practice—have illustrated the interconnectedness and interdependence of common worlds across time and space. As the practice of collective biography wove us together and apart, it (re)connected us with worlds that may have become unseen or inaccessible to our adult selves. It also helped to (re)animate our *selves* to be able to notice again—and be noticed by—other worlds and beings.

The assemblage of childhood memories into a work of speculative fabulation was a deliberate act, deterritorializing ourselves from the major language of childhood studies and qualitative methodology while opening the space

to imagine differently what might have been or what is yet to come. Drawing on the work of Haraway (2016), Barad (2007), Mazzei (2017), and others, this approach allowed us to animate relationships among memories of our childhood experiences where “concepts resonated with other concepts, perhaps with existing concepts, establishing relations with others, thus laying out the plane on which they converged” (Mazzei, 2017, p. 676). We realized that our childhood memories wove together in threads that came from “many kinds of *worlds*, many *ontologies*, many ways of *being in the world*, many ways of *knowing reality*” (Querejazu, 2016, p. 3, emphasis added). We also (re)connected with these memory threads continuing to weave into our adulthoods—sometimes entangled, sometimes fragile, but always intense and intensive. We drew upon the playfulness of our memories; we were open to metamorphoses and changes that created connections to other worlds; we tactfully navigated the memories as they emerged within and among us, and we exposed the fragility of memory stories when they were partial, difficult to explain, or dependent on our recollections of past events and experiences.

As we followed the threads of our memories into the pedagogical literature, we found that they often diffracted from the major literature of education practices and pedagogies that continues to insist on human exceptionalism and “enact onto-epistemological divides through education and schooling, separating humans from other species and other worlds” (Silova, 2020, p. 141). Noting that our memories were “mapping where the *effects* of difference appear” (Barad, 2007, p. 72, emphasis in original; see also Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), we attempted to map differences while articulating new analytical questions and pedagogical possibilities that would enable and encourage the practice of common worlding. Among many conditions necessary for common worlding, our memories brought into focus the importance of playfulness and tactfulness. For example, through playfulness, children (and adults) may recognize the complexity and uniqueness of beings and worlds in their own imaginative and equal ways. Furthermore, playfulness entails the intention of exploring multiple worlds without deliberately refusing others, keeping open the possibility of (re)connecting with other worlds at any time. Similarly, tactfulness extends and connects to this awareness and sensitivity of engaging with other worlds and beings. It allows receptivity to attune to the visible and invisible worlds that surround us both as children and as adults.

More importantly, common worlding requires the capacity for the transformation of our *selves*. Whether through dreams, play, or imagination, the transformation or metamorphosis is a process of “reanimating our selves”—a practice of moving beyond the narrow confines of rationality and autonomy of our modern “selves” and becoming “entirely a part of the *animate* world[s] whose life swells within and unfolds all around us” (Abram, 2017, p. 3, emphasis added; see Silova, 2020). As we step into these worlds—whether by chance or intentionally—we (re)gain the capacity *to child* once again—with full intensity and without any restriction of age—rewriting the dominant narratives of the individual and autonomous child into powerful alternatives of common worlding. And if the connections to other worlds become fragile and fractured at any time, we know that we can always turn to our childhood memories to (re)member and (re)animate ways of being and becoming with our common worlds. Just as we did here through the collective memories of “a girl between worlds.”

1 This research was initially inspired by an online gathering of “The Wilds: Beyond Climate Justice,” which took place from May 31 to June 4, 2020. It also drew inspiration from the “Reconnect/Recollect” project, an international collective biography project that focused on the memories of childhood experiences during the Cold War, bringing into public view alternative and multiple personal histories that have the potential to transfigure divisions into connections in new ways.

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