"Being There" in More-Than-Human Worlds: Place, Body, and Time in Ethnographic Research With Children

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In its attention to numerous small explorations with children and place, we reflect on how Edvard Munch's painting "The Researchers" could almost be a scene from our ethnographic fieldwork with children. Prompted by our engagement with Munch's painting, we explore three shifts in our own research practice over time. First, a shift from a sole focus on human relationships to the more-than-human nature of long-term research relations with place points to the bodily, relational nature of knowing that is not easily articulable in words. Second, we grapple with the shifting meaning and purpose of the "data set" within our research. By viewing data as part of a gift-giving logic, interconnection and shifting time scales are emphasized. Third, drawing on the Sámi concept of meahcci, we discuss how fieldwork became "unbounded" spatially and temporally, allowing new ways of knowing to emerge.

Key words: *place, childhood, ethnography, more-than-human*

Figure 1. Edvard Munch: Forskerne / The Researchers (1925-1927?). Credit: Munchmuseet.

Meeting the researchers

Anne

Walking the gallery corridors of the new Munch Museum in Oslo, my mind dwelled on the research paper I was writing with Abi. We wanted to write about place, bodily sensation, and methodology when researching with children, and we were meeting in a few weeks' time to work on it together. Edvard Munch's painting "The Researchers" spoke to me immediately of what we were trying to think about. Coming home, I sent a photo of this painting to Abi with the question "Has Munch painted the methodology we are trying to articulate?"

Abi

When I received Anne's email, I could see the striking parallel. We both do ethnographic research with young children, often in outside spaces. Recently Anne had been working with a kindergarten located near a shoreline, just like in the painting. For many years, we have wondered about the significance of place and "hanging out" in our research. Had Munch sensed something similar about what it means to know with place?

In Munch's painting "The Researchers" (Figure 1), two adults and a group of children of different ages hang out on a shoreline. The painting is dynamic in the way in which it evokes the body and movement. Children wade into the sea, peer over a rock, and dig their fingers into the earth. At many points, the bodies do not seem to be separate from place but entangled in the water, mud, and grass, and the actions of the adults mirror the children. The humans' nakedness seems to emphasize their sensorial connection with and attention to the land through their whole body. Few people look directly at each other, though in places there is a shared attention to something. Encountering place with senses and through movement, knowing, doing, and being are difficult to separate in Munch's visual interpretation of what it means to be "The Researchers." We peer at the details of the picture, zooming in on our screens to look at what the children are holding and how the feet and bodies meet the earth. We offer these reflections, not as a scholarly art critique, but as a personal response to how encountering this painting, at this particular time, stimulated and shaped our thinking. It helped us to think differently about what we are doing when we are hanging out with children and place, noticing numerous small moments all happening simultaneously and in different directions. Munch's painting could almost be a scene from our fieldwork.

In this paper, we draw on our experiences of doing ethnographic research with young children in the UK and in Norway over more than a decade. Much of our fieldwork has taken place outdoors, and we share an interest in the role of place and the more-than-human world in shaping what happens. Anne is from the northern part of Norway, where she has done her fieldwork. This part of Norway includes the Sámi areas, and Sámi culture is an important influence despite decades of Norwegianization, especially in the coastline areas. Through collaboration with Sámi scholars and practitioners, Anne has learned and continues to learn from the Sámi ancestors, including understanding their view of place and time. Abi is from England and lives in Yorkshire. She has researched with the same postindustrial and culturally diverse urban community in the north of England for 15 years; previous to that, she was a community outreach worker in the same place. Abi is particularly interested in the experiences of children outside of classroom settings, and she has spent numerous hours in the local museum, the park, playground, and community playgroups.

In this paper, we contribute to the extant literature on methodologies for researching with children and place by exploring the epistemological shifts that can take place within new ontological arrangements in which ethnographic research with children is understood as more than human. Akin to what Springgay and Truman (2017) call "the tensions between new empirical methodologies and existing phenomenological methods" (p. 211), we find ourselves continuing to value and center "being there" and learning from and with children and place as core

to our research practice, but, we argue, for different reasons and toward different ends, compared to traditional ethnographic research with children. This paper delineates these different reasons and different ends in dialogue with Munch's painting and stories from our fieldwork.

Munch's "The Researchers" is helpful to our thinking, first because it illustrates the compelling immediacy of child, place, and bodily exploration that is so central to our methodology. At the same time and as we go on to explore, it acts as a starting point to unpick the political, unseen, and unknowable nature of childhood and place that sits within our research practices; whilst the painting presents a scene seemingly transparent and fixed, it conceals complexity beneath its surface. The painting was created many years ago; its effects on us today are unpredictable and could not have been imagined or intended by the artist. In this way, time, place, and meaning making become folded together in ways that complicate traditional qualitative master narratives of knowledge production (Osgood & Robinson, 2019; Somerville, 2013; St. Pierre, 2017). To explore these generative complications, we have structured our paper around three overlapping starting points, namely:

1. Over time, we have come to think of long-term (ethnographic) fieldwork as being about building and committing to relationships with place, as well as with human communities. As we explore below, this approach requires the researcher to enter into a kind of relationality that is cyclical, is collective, and sits in the body in ways that are only partially articulable in words. Meaning emerges differently, and a long-term relationship with place renders not just deep connections with human research participants but a deepening potential for different ways of knowing to emerge between bodies over time.

2. We grapple with how fieldnotes, visual data, and small stories accumulate in large quantities as a result of this long-term work with more-than-human communities. Beyond codifying extractable data for legibility and meaning, we consider how to deal with, and do justice to, overwhelmingly large data sets within a postqualitative framework. We consider the logic of gift giving as one response to this.

3. We note how the thinking and doing that is part of our research process is rarely bounded by the time and space allocated to doing fieldwork. Whilst we continue to "do fieldwork" in that we deliberately carve out times and spaces to meet our research participants at our research places, we simultaneously argue for an unbounding of the fieldsite via the Sámi concept of *meahcci*, or taskscape, to acknowledge fuzzy spatio-temporalities in relation to research and knowledge production processes.

Situating our work

Young children often seem to have a particular attunement to place and the more-than-human, leading to early childhood research becoming a particularly fruitful area for new materialist, postqualitative, and place-based approaches and methodologies. Building on poststructural critiques of qualitative methodologies and ethnographies as capable of producing singular, objective, and "truthful" accounts of the world (Gullion, 2018; Pillow, 2015; St. Pierre, 2017; Wolf, 1992), childhood studies scholarship has developed "new ways of sensing and being in the world" (Osgood & Robinson, 2019, p. 8) that resonate with Munch's depiction of "The Researchers" and sit in contrast to the notion of knowledge production as buttressed by an extractable and transferable data set. Somerville's (2013) work on place/body knowing shows how place itself works on the researcher body, shaping what it means to know. This approach to learning with children and place through body and memory is reflected in Powell and Somerville's (2018) description of deep hanging out with children. The Common Worlds Research Collective has employed the notion of small stories and mapping everyday spaces to pay attention to children and place (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2014; Rooney & Blaise, 2022), demonstrating the importance of histories and inheritances beyond what is literally observed or said within the fieldsite itself. As Pacini-Ketchabaw et al.

(2014) argue, alternative methodologies, such as cartographic mappings and arts practices, are necessary to trace "fluid and nonlinear" assemblages within which early childhood and education sit. The politics of nonlinear and noninnocent assemblages of ideas, stories, and bodies is further explored by Hohti and Tammi (2024) through their notion of composting stories, which attends to the "piling together" of ideas and experiences during ethnographic research, "carefully (and sort of carelessly)" (p. 604) and what this produces.

Whilst feminist new materialist / common worlds / postqualitative research has contributed to a well-established critique of "the ruthlessly linear nature of the narrative of knowledge production in research methodology" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 179) and the position of the researcher as objective master storyteller, this work takes on a particular significance within childhood studies. It does this by providing a critical attention to childhood studies' complicity in constructing the child (and the childhood researcher) as bounded, rational, and separable from place (Kromidas, 2019) by affirming that knowing, being, and noticing are all inseparable from place (which itself extends beyond here and now). Our starting point for exploring the implications of how childhood research complicates what it means to be human within our own ethnographic research practices is our proposition that long-term fieldwork involves more-than-human relationships.

1. Fieldwork as a long-term relationship with place

Through much of the 20th century, long periods of fieldwork were a foundational gold standard for "quality" ethnographic research (Green & Bloome, 1997), together, of course, with a focus on human participants and their cultural practices (MacDonald, 2001). A rationale of "saturation" underpinned early ethnography's valorization of the long fieldwork period, that is, the collection of enough experience and a detailed enough data set (of human activity) to convincingly underpin the knowledge claims the ethnographer would make (Gullion, 2018). In this way, a close relationship between length of fieldwork and size of data set was conceptualized. Increasingly, the critique of the extractive nature of ethnography together with the contributions of decolonial and antiracist research (Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2021; Truman & Shannon, 2020; Smith, 2021; Tuck et al., 2023), have emphasized the importance of a researcher's commitment to a place, community, or cause that is not so closely tied to the desire to build a large data set. This work articulates a relationship with a place or community that is less functional and extractive and more embedded (Clarke et al., 2017; Spyrou, 2024). Mason (2021) has described this as a practice of "staying"—long term at a place and beyond single research projects—via "the persistent attachments we maintain with others despite more dominant temporalities of progress, productivity and work" (p. 510).

At the same time, there is something important and inseparable about how these human practices play out in and with the places in which they happen. Somerville's (2013) writing on place/body knowing is important for acknowledging how staying (Mason, 2021) with place might shape the researcher's body and self, where mutual entanglements between body and place can prompt an investment in ways of knowing that emerge slowly and uncertainly and are difficult to pin down with words. Bodily experiences of places shape our own bodies and capacities (Somerville, 2013; St. Pierre, 1997). Often in our research, we find our longest relationship is with the place rather than individuals. Children get older and leave the playgroup or kindergarten, along with their grown-ups. Staff change, get new jobs, or are subject to organizational restructuring. We have seen these changes play out over the years we have returned to our respective fieldsites. Place, too, is not a constant. Changes with the season and over time play out across different timescales in the more-than-human world, including beyond human perception (Springgay & Truman, 2017). From the perspective of this (im)perceptible constant change, ethnographic saturation feels irrelevant. Instead, following Somerville (2013), the purpose of investing in a long-term relationship with place might be to continually open up to possibilities for different ways of knowing to emerge over time, to become more tangible. As Abi writes of her fieldsite, "Still, I return again and again, despite

having plenty of 'data.' I find it is possible to think differently when I am there" (Hackett, 2021).

Stories from the field 1: How can "what it means to know" start with place?

Some years ago, Abi visited Anne's fieldsite in Arctic Norway, and we made a trip with a group of kindergarten children to the shoreline, agitated by the question "Could/should methodology be shaped by place, and if so, how?" It was mid May, and the snow had recently melted, meaning that after many months, the children could lie on the grass and the earth again. Anne, who was organizing the event, began by inviting the children and grown-ups to lie down in a circle on the ground and observe sounds, textures, and bodily sensations in this place (see Figure 2). *How does the body feel in place? What does place have to teach us? How can you listen to place before human language obscures the messages?*

Figure 2. Lying on the ground to observe place. Photo credit Anne Myrstad.

Stories from the field 2: How can we listen to place first?

Recently, Abi took part in an interdisciplinary project about children and trees. Interdisciplinary researchers came together for a whole-team retreat to share progress at their various fieldsites, all of which involved working in participatory ways with young people in outside spaces. Abi worked with a colleague, Jan White, to plan a session inspired by Rasmussen and Akulukjuk's (2009) proposition to talk to the environment first. Describing Nunavut ontologies of language and environment, Akulukjuk explains, "When he—my father—was growing up, he was told to go outside his dwellings as soon as he woke up: talk to the environment first before anything else" (p. 283). We had identified a nice meeting room located next to an ancient woodland, and we felt that for a project about children and trees, we should listen to place first. We invited the project team to walk into the forest and find a spot alone to listen and attune, in silence, for just 10 minutes. We then invited people to walk in the forest, barefoot if they chose, again in silence for 10 minutes. Then we returned to the meeting room to begin discussions, wondering *how might this activity have shifted discussions or what participants choose to share next?*

Of course, it is not possible to definitively answer the last question—what *difference* does making more space for bodies to attune with place make? To language? To thought? To research? After the shoreline activity in story 1, we asked the children to tell us what they had noticed. We wonder now what might have happened if we had not encouraged the children to narrate their bodily experience. Listening to place might involve a different kind of

conceptualization of language or meaning making, one in which not everything can be evidenced or proven, and bodily felt sensation can only partially be articulated in words. Sometimes, language can come to stand in for or even obscure place-based knowing (Abram, 1996; MacLure, 2013a). As Rasmussen and Akulukjuk (2009) suggest, perhaps "we ought to be asking what language the environment speaks" (p. 279).

Meahcci is a Northern Sámi concept that helps us to think about long-term knowledge and place over a nonlinear timescale. Meahcci refers to a Sámi understanding of the landscape (Schanche, 2002) grounded in a practical use of different local areas where different tasks are carried out depending on the season and weather conditions (Joks et al., 2020). There are variable and different *meahcit* (plural of meahcci); for example, *muorrameahcci* is where you collect wood (practice in the wood forest), *luomemeahcci* is where mulberries are picked (harvesting in the mullet marsh), and *guollemeahcci* is a fishpond (where you fish), or meahcci can also be where material is collected for Sámi crafts, which in Northern Sámi is called *duodji* (Joks et al., 2020, p. 3). Through these place-related practices, knowledge and skills have developed that have formed the basis for living in the area. This refers to a cyclical and sensitive way of being in and with nature, where people and the environment can be understood as in an indivisible process that works together.

Meahcci is helpful for our thinking about place, body, perception, and coming to know because it points to a form of knowledge that is relational and collective. Meacchi taskscapes connect human activities to places, but they exist beyond the timescape of an individual person or generation. Places carry histories that shape relations and atmospheres. In other words, place extends beyond what is immediately present or that which lies within human perception. As Tsing (2015) writes,

> Whilst there is a tendency to equate place with the here and now, it is always more than this. (p. 50)

We read that Munch's painting "The Researchers" is a motif of the shoreline in Hvitsten by the Oslo fjord, where Munch stayed in the summers over several decades. The painting is dated over a period of sixteen years (1911 to 1925–1927?), offering a different reading of time and what it means to have a relationship with place. Whilst the painting seems like a snapshot in time ("it could be a scene from our fieldwork!" as we declared at the start of this paper), it is much more than that. Like our research with children and place, it might be that "The Researchers" is a partially articulable accumulation of bodily experiences and stories, drawn from collective and relational ways of knowing and being in place.

Stories from the field 3: Walking in the forest

We enter the forest as a tight group of grown-ups and small children, and the sound of the leaves crunching underfoot is overwhelmingly loud. Many drag their feet deliberately through the leaves, amplifying the noise. Human voices chatter and shout, but they are small ribbons carried on the current within the ocean sound of the leaves.

This story is taken from a research project Abi was involved in called *Voices of the Future*, which explored what happens between young children and trees. The idea of listening to place (as discussed above) is brought into sharp relief here, as trees and feet create a soundscape that is unexpected, striking, and drowns out the human voices. As others have argued, human meaning making (e.g., language) emerges from, and is inseparable from, a more-than-human soundscape, as "vibrational entanglements between bodies and places" (Gallagher et al., 2018). However, as well as understanding how meaning emerges from a more-than-human context (Hackett & Somerville, 2017), we are also interested here in what Gallagher et al. (2017) call expanded listening, that is, a kind of listening that extends beyond meaning.

Thus, an ethnography that starts with place, or listens to place first, as we have experimented with in this section, must necessarily extend beyond what it is possible for an individual researcher to literally perceive, or express in words. We need to think carefully about how we are conceptualizing time when we talk about long-term ethnographic fieldwork, to account for the invisible, the unsayable, atmospheres (Stewart, 2011), vibes (Miles, 2022), and the frictional more-than-human histories (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013) that underpin them. From a perspective of taking place seriously, we might think in terms of the stories and histories that sit within place itself rather than within solely the human actors that are participating in our research. Body/place knowledge is shaped by atmospheres, by processes that lie outside of human perception, by different kinds of temporalities and the inheritances of things that happened before or elsewhere. Place will not articulate stories in human language, but they still need attending to as best we can.

2. Large data sets and small stories

Relationships, fieldnotes, and video data can accumulate in overwhelming quantities over the years and decades of doing ethnographic research in places and communities. Whilst early papers in posthumanism and childhood often concentrated on small pieces of data, a single story or brief moment with a child, using this as a jumping-off point for thinking about the vibrancy of the nonhuman or interconnectedness of the material world (e.g., Hultman & Taguchi, 2010), more recent postqualitative childhood research has worked to situate stories or moments within a long-term relationship with a place, including that which cannot be literally perceived. This is important for ensuring our work retains what Osgood and Robinson (2019) have called the "political edge" yet has led to debates about the need to sort, classify, and rationalize large data sets, and whether this is possible/desirable within a postqualitative paradigm (MacLure, 2013b; Rautio & Vladimirova, 2018). Rather than a process of sorting and categorizing the extracted "data set," this work might require institutional and community memory that stretches before and beyond the life of the research project, as well as the aspects of what it means to know that sit within our own emotions, investments, and dream worlds (St. Pierre, 1997) and are difficult to express in words. One example is the work the Common Worlds Research Collective (2020) has done to connect moments of walking or being in places with children with histories of that place, reminding us that all lives are entangled with different times, other beings, and nonliving entities. A single moment is more than we can observe here and now and will always be mixed up with forces of relationships (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Rooney & Blaise, 2022). This approach corresponds to that of Indigenous scholars who state that many methodologies of an Indigenous nature reflect realities across space and times and parallel worlds (Finbog, 2023; Porsanger, 2012). Indigenous knowledge is interconnected to multiple sources and embedded in land, cosmology, and other beings, meaning that "all species, not solely the human species, are sources of knowledge" (Kovach, 2021, p. 69). Decentering human participants and telling small stories about more-than-human components of place encourages a shift in timescale and speed of the action (Kraftl, 2020) as well as muddying the neatness and meaning of the stories.

Stories from the field 4: A campfire

In a project where Anne was one of two researchers invited to support early years educators in strengthening Sámi language and culture in a kindergarten, Anne followed children and staff on their trip to the forest to make a campfire and pick berries. To gain multiple points of view of children's participation and learning during a campfire activity, the event was documented by two GoPro cameras mounted to children's chests, combined with Anne's handheld video camera (Myrstad & Kleemann, 2022). Anne's camera footage shows the teacher explaining about using birchbark, *beassi,* to start and feed the fire, teaching children the word and the useful practice. The children appeared to listen carefully to the teacher's explanation. However, a chest-mounted GoPro camera revealed something more: a two-year old child using their fingers to tear *beassi* from a log at the same time as

beassi was pronounced (Figure 3).

Anne's first reaction after seeing this image was "WOW! She is holding the word in her hand, getting a first-hand-experience of *beassi*." Looking and listening closer to the GoPro moving images, it is more: the girl tickles her fingers under the bark several times. The bark is hard, and resists. After a while, the hand moves to the surface of the bark. The hand strokes the rough texture before the fingers grasp a loose, thin flake. The flake detaches from the bark.

Figure 3. Dolla (campfire). View from the two-year-old child's body camera. Photo credit Anne Myrstad.

As others have found (Holmes & Jones, 2013; MacRae, 2019; Rotas 2019), experimenting with visual data can often be a route to unsettling assumptions and attuning to the richness and complexity of the knowledge place and children have to offer us. In addition to the more-than of human perception, the story of the campfire (story 4) also helps us to think about the more-than of place—its complexity, and how our attention and experience in place with children will always be partial. Childhood research often prefers neat interpretations, a translation from materiality of experience into language (MacLure, 2013a) and a demand for children to explain an experience in a language that research can comprehend (Hackett et al., 2024). Specificity and accuracy of a particular moment in time, as documented and logged by the researcher, requires understanding and legibility. Halberstam (2011) describes how this urge for legibility and singular meanings can result in the dismissal of other forms of knowing, and as Jones et al. (2014) point out, this urge is prevalent in childhood and educational research, where "overly familiar and habitual notions of who the child is blocks possibilities" (p. 62). Resisting this impulse, Hackett and MacRae (2023) write about developing an approach to child observation that extends beyond what can literally be perceived and is more about how the more-than-human dimensions of events we witness can animate us as researchers. Similarly, instead of "making sense of the child," we are interested in exploring whether attuning to "haptic felt-sense, atmospheres and alternative timescales and relationalities" (Hackett & MacRae, p. 23) might help recognize "invisible forces that resist human explanation but animate children's common worlds" (p. 6).

As researchers and educators, our claims to authoritative knowledge are often grounded in *being there* (linked typically in ethnography with the notion of saturation we discussed earlier) and the specificity and accuracy of observing what *this particular* child does in *this particular* moment, in order to read for meaning and implication. This approach is grounded in a logic of extraction where a researcher "owns" a data set that fixes a moment or event in time and makes it knowable. Kovach (2021) reminds us of the etymology of the word *data*: it is "something given" and implies "a gifting has taken place" (p. 156). In Indigenous episteme this invites "a learning from the

logic of the gift" (Kuokkanen, 2007). Thinking-with gifting nurtures relationships and reciprocity and reveals that methodologies are more than accumulating data. The gift aspect involves giving something back, thus pushing back against the Western view of data as something extractible. The logic of the gift is grounded in reciprocity and responsibility (Kuokkanen, 2007); it involves ongoing exchange to maintain "an active relationship between human and natural worlds based on a close interaction of sustaining and renewing the balance between them through gifts" (p. 72). Thus, data can never be fully extracted, owned, and transparently read. Paying attention and engaging with multiple sources in time and space, with an orientation toward connection rather than legibility, might be a starting point for involving data in a system of gift giving.

Our encounters with the places and people we describe in our vignettes, with Munch's painting and further on a poem (discussed below), have enriched our thinking; we conceptualize these encounters within a logic of gift giving in the sense that they "sustain and renew the balance" (Kuokkanen, 2007) between ourselves and the more-than-human communities we work with. Spyrou (2023) describes a form of childhood research that focuses on the creation of knowledge rather than the collection of it. This kind of research involves engaging in community dialogues and artistic activities that do not create "extractible resources" in the form of data but are deeply meaningful for children and communities. Spyrou's vision of "a movement of sorts from fieldwork to praxis" (p. 5) resonates with our experiences of the place/body investments, long-term more-than-human relations, serendipitous moments, and unexpected lines of thought that seem to characterize our praxis of ethnographic research with children and place. These encounters offer new connections across time and place beyond fixed data sets. In return, we share and acknowledge the way these encounters are having effects on our thinking that are unpredictable and could not have been imagined or intended.

3. Beyond the (temporal and spatial) fieldsite

Whilst a fieldsite is often temporally and spatially bounded to varying degrees (e.g., "data is collected on Wednesday mornings for a three-month period"; "data is collected in this particular classroom or playground"), thinking can and does occur in surprising moments and via serendipitous discoveries (Sandvik, 2012; Somerville, 2013; St. Pierre, 1997; Osgood & Hackett, 2024). Our story of Anne's encounter with Munch's painting is one such moment. The intense way the children are experiencing the shoreline in Munch's painting helps us to think in new directions. We could consider this thinking *about* fieldwork, but as we will explore in this section, the boundaries often seem fuzzier than this, with complex layers of thought, ideas, and material things coming into play that seem to reframe our research encounters in significant ways.

Stories from the field 5: Walking near snow crystals

It is mid November. Some half-metre of loose and fluffy snow is lying on the ground. An extremely cold period has led to the formation of snow crystals of about 1–2 centimetres in the top layer of snow and around straw and twigs. On a visit to a kindergarten, Anne walks with a small group of children outside in the snow. Encountering the snow crystals, both adults and children stop to admire them. The adults use words and questions to engage with the children.

> Educator: "It's so cold, but what makes it cold?"
>
> Researcher: "They were so pretty as well."
>
> Researcher: "There's more over here. I'll have to get a picture of them."

Everyone moves a bit further over the flat ground to some other straw. Per takes the straw with the snow crystals

over to Kåre, who is sitting with his tongue sticking out.

> Kåre: "Ouch, they're so sharp!"
>
> Researcher: "Think that every snow crystal is different, just imagine it!"

The children sit down, lean forward, and put their tongues toward the topmost layer of snow. The snow crystals attach themselves to tongues. The children smack lips and say: "I think that's good. Do you know what a snow crystal tastes like?"

Stories from the field 6: Walking near snow crystals again

Anne told Abi story 5 above as we walked across a frozen landscape toward the University of Tromso on a cold November morning where snow crystals clung to every tree branch. We chuckled over grown-ups' tendency to offer facts and question / answer engagement, compared to the children's focus on feeling and tasting snow crystals, and the bold question "Do you know what a snow crystal tastes like?" We commented to each other, "It is like two different worlds." Our comment about two different worlds then put Anne in mind of a certain poem by Sámi poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, and she promised to find the book for Abi later. We walked more and took some close-up photos of the snow crystals (Figure 4). We tasted the ice crystals on our own tongues.

Figure 4. A snow crystal outside the university. Photo credit Anne Myrstad.

We are interested in what can happen in our research when we rethink the criteria for what counts as data to include lived experiences, memories from previous events, and unexpected thoughts at random moments. In this way, our thinking connects with St. Pierre's (1997) assertion that she "had analysed much data that had never been textualised into words on a page" (p. 179), including her own memories, dreams, and bodily experiences. From this perspective, we came to realize that both stories of observing the beauty of snow crystals, together with the taste of the crystals on our tongues, our togetherness in that moment on the university campus, and our sharing of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's poem (below), were part of our thinking for this paper. Unbounding the fieldsite in this

way affirms that relevant processes leading to knowledge production in relation to our research with children and place can occur outside of the times and spaces we might have originally allocated to it.

The Sámi concept of meahcci contrasts with the Western tendency to establish boundaries to surroundings: physical fences around schools and nurseries, for example. Myrstad and Kleemann (2022) have pushed back against the boundedness this implies, offering *mánáimeahcit*[1] as a way of capturing the centrality of place in early childhood education in the north. The important concept of meahcci reminds us that our research practice is not bounded or fenced in terms of its location, what counts as data evidence, or the times when we are consciously thinking about it. We could think of our research not as a specific place with a fence around it, but as a kind of taskscape.

Whilst Munch's "The Researchers" appears to us inside a frame, like a bounded research site, in reality it has threads, stories, and affects stretching in many different directions over time and space. One example of this is the story of Munch's (in)decision around his creation of the painting. "The Researchers" was painted in connection to a competition Munch won in 1909 to decorate the University of Oslo's ceremonial hall, the Aula. Rolf Stenersen (1994) writes that Munch "wanted to portray children who, in their play, are young scientists" (p. 153). But Munch doubted himself. He is said to have repainted the subject 20 times. His reworking of the painting in different sketches and versions might be a form of restoring through his cyclical relationship with the place. Munch still doubted, and he tried to hang different versions several times in the Aula, including an alternative, "Alma Mater," which was hung in the Aula in 1916. Alma Mater is often interpreted to be a symbol of the mother of the university, giving energy to the new generation, with reference to the University of Bologna, established in 1088, which was originally named Alma Mater Studiorum. "The Researchers" was bequeathed by Munch to the municipality of Oslo in 1940 and hangs today in the Munch Museum.

Concluding thoughts

Ethnography, participant observation, and visual methods are often good "pragmatic" choices for researching with young children, who are likely to resist or refuse to answer interview questions or comply with participatory or creative task briefs. Is "hanging out" with place and children just a practical way to gather a rich data set of observations and video recordings from participants who are unlikely to cooperate with more formal methods? Like others interested in the implications of a postqualitative shift for childhood research (Hohti & Tammi, 2024; Osgood & Robinson, 2019), we affirm that this kind of research practice has more profound implications for the conceptualization of processes of knowledge production, including the role of time and place, the nature of data, and who/what researchers should attend to.

In this paper, we have traced and explored three separate yet overlapping shifts we see in our own research practice. First, a shift from a focus on building research relationships with human participants to the more-than-human nature of long-term research relations with place points to the bodily, relational nature of place/body knowing (Somerville, 2013) that is not easily articulable in words. Second, we grapple with the shifting meaning and purpose of the data set within our research, moving from saturation and extractability to the logic of the gift. In this way, data remains contingent, and within an ongoing reciprocal relationship among researcher, children, and place. Third, we unpick the notion of a spatially and temporally bounded fieldsite, moving toward a more explicit acknowledgment of how research thinking becomes unbounded (whilst "being there" still remains central to our approach).

Via a logic of gift giving, our encounters with Munch's "The Researchers," snow crystals at the university campus, and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's poem, each in their own way open us up to different ways of knowing. "The Researchers" first caught our attention because of the way it conveyed the immediacy of child, earth, water, body together with

how it presented the illusion of a moment in time as seemingly transparent and fixed. Place is always more than (Tsing, 2015) even as it works on and within the body (Somerville, 2013). Similarly, in their discussion of receiving and composting small stories, Hohti and Tammi (2024) describe two capacities of storytelling: to focus on situated detail and to open up to "unruly edges" and that which is less clear or goes unspoken. Continuing their metaphor of composting, Hohti and Tammi describe how, as stories and bodily experiences become piled together, it is important to turn over and attend to the warm (immediate and attention grabbing) and cool (hidden or erased) parts of the assemblage. From a multispecies perspective, they give the example that

> assemblages of care involving young humans and other-than-human animals can hide the cooler, erased assemblages of the pet industry or educational ideas of human exceptionalism. (Hohti & Tammi, 2024, p. 596)

For child/place research, perhaps we need to attend to how "warm" scenes—where feet meet earth or wade in water, or where children lie on grass, sit by campfires, or crunch through leaves—remain mixed in with "cooler" yet still present aspects, such as research's desire for legibility, extractability, and cause-and-effect narratives about how place benefits children. The logic of the (relational, responsive, more-than-human) gift as a methodological orientation pushes back on childhood research's complicity in (over)representations of the child (and the researcher) as bounded, autonomous, and legible individuals. This complicity is important to attend to, even as we seek new ways for doing childhood research and producing knowledge about childhood.

Back in the warmth of the office, after our walk with the snow crystals (story 6), Anne shared Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's beautiful poem *Mu ruoktu lea mu váimmus* (my home is in my heart), of which these sentences are a part, with Abi:

> *muhto máid dajan deidda apmasiidda/ geat gokčet dán visot/ máid dajan sin jearaldagai'e /geat bohtet eará máilmmi.*
>
> but what do I say to strangers / who spread out everywhere / how shall I answer their questions / that come from a different world. (Valkeapää, 1985/1994)

In this poem, an Indigenous point of view serves to remind us that questions are often charged with our own values and interpretations. Western knowledge systems are based on categories that do not fit non-Western ways of being, doing, and knowing. What does this mean for us as grown-ups researching with children, and as white researchers committed to a decolonizing approach to early childhood research? Decolonizing research practices have been extensively explored in relation to early childhood education (Cannella & Viruru, 2012; Nxumalo & Brown, 2020; Viruru, 2001). In relation to qualitative research more broadly, Indigenous scholarship has called many aspects of the research process into question. For example, Rasmussen and Akukluk's (father's) advice (2009) to "talk to the environment first" calls into question the exclusively human location of useful knowledge contributions; Grenz (2023) questions the role of ethics boards within Indigenous research; and Tuck et al. (2023) resituate visiting, not as a research method, but as a mode of being in relation that is at the heart of their doing of research. In her critique of the academy and its failure to engage with Indigenous episteme or benefit Indigenous communities, Kuokkanen (2007) urges researchers to find "the courage to start from scratch and participate in an on-going, unfinished process" (p. 75).

In the light of this scholarship, taken-for-granted assumptions about the focus (humans, separable from place and each other) and temporal and spatial location (what I can perceive here and now) of research unravel, together with the sanctity of the data set as the location from which authoritative knowledge claims can be made. This unravelling has important (albeit distinct) implications for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, and in this paper, we have considered these implications specific to our own practices of being together in place with

children as a form of ethnographic childhood research. Encountering place with children requires relationships between ourselves and multiple other bodies, both human and more-than-human. These encounters can be a starting point for refocusing or reorienting how we, and children, come to know with place.

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1 *Mánáidgárdi* is the Northern Sámi word for kindergarten, a translation loan from the Norwegian term *barnehage*, which in turn is a translation loan from Frøebel's German *kindergarten*.

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