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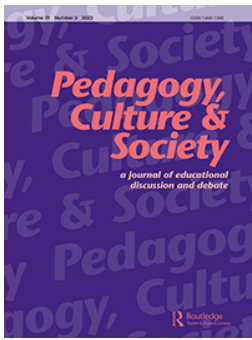
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## Intra-generational encounters with balloons and bread rolls: exploring reciprocity in post/age spaces

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### ABSTRACT

This writing originates from unease with assumptions that often shape intergenerational practices and everyday encounters in the UK, for instance, assumptions about generational ‘gaps’ or ‘roles’ and the pedagogy of ‘interventions’ to promote meetings ‘between’ ages. Such interventions are usually predicated on chrono-logical notions of infant, child, youth, old age, and life stages. Haynes and Murriss suggest dis-continuing age/stage-related categorisation by imagining post-age spaces and pedagogies and proposing intra-generational practice. Quinn and Blandon bring ageist ideas of the ‘human’ into question through their post-human research on dementia and life-long learning. Thinking with such provocations, we re-visited accounts of our own intergenerational experiences, and inspired by Barad, diffractively re-turned them through a selection of readings. Responding to Mannion and Haynes and Murriss we work with the concept of reciprocity understood as flowing through adult/child and human/more-than-human bodies. This shifted attention onto the intra-active happenings and ‘at-onceness’ of generational or multi-age in/en-counters. We troubled ageist discourses of deficit implicit in the notion of ‘gap-bridging’ and generated the concepts of ‘shouldness’, describing the kind of ‘forced play’ of such bridging interventions; and ‘nowing’ defying the chronos of age-based categorisation, to (re) imagine qualities of intra-generational encounters.

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### Introduction: the inter/intra-generational

What difference might it make to frame relations between humans of various ages, such as the very young and ‘old/er’ adults, as *intra*-generational rather than *inter*-generational? In this paper, we ponder upon/with this question. We challenge the categorical ordering of individuals based upon assumptions about how when one is born shapes their capacities, lives, worlds, and understandings of age-others.<sup>1</sup> We propose the language of the inter/intra-generational, and the relations among and between different chronological ages it refers to, are made to matter (Barad 2007) through such assumptions which justify narratives of separation and underscore difference(s). In turn, as the notion of generational division permeates discourse about intergenerational relations in both

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the Global North and South (Vanderbeck and Worth 2015), the pedagogy of interventions attempting to bridge such divides often stress the need for greater age/generational knowledge – as if divisions were simply due to lack of understanding and not also a product of age-categorisation itself.

The question of what difference inter/intra-generational terminology makes arises from concerns regarding the limitations and marginalisation associated with ageist thinking and practice. We wonder what renewed possibilities abandoning age segregation and ageist assumptions might offer, particularly in the provision of education and care services for the youngest and oldest bodies in human society. Everyone is affected by the ageism in society.<sup>2</sup> While ageism comes in many shapes and forms, the ‘old/er’ adult and the child are more likely to be both directly and indirectly impacted by ageism.<sup>3</sup> Although the literature regarding ageism concerning older people is vast and has grown further during the time of COVID-19 (see for example, Swift et al. 2021), the association of ageism with children is less prevalent. For example, a publication titled, ‘*Contemporary perspectives on Ageism*’, adopted a definition of ageism as ‘a social construct of old age that portrays ageing and older people in a stereotypical, often negative, way’ and gave little attention to young people beyond studying how they become ageist or assessing their attitudes towards ageing and older people (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer 2018, v). This is one of many examples of research on ageism that ignores its impact in the lives of children. However, the dominant narrative of the social discourse that children are not yet capable or suited to participate in the world (Murriss 2016), works alongside notions that suggest older adults are ‘past it’ (Ingold 2020). Drawing inspiration from writers such as Erica Burman (1994, 2008), who have been tackling ageism against children for several decades through deconstructive critiques of developmentalism, we question *inter-generational* approaches built on fixed ideas of what particular age groups are bringing to the party.

Despite the prefix *intra-* typically referring to interaction occurring between members of a single generation (Izuhara 2010), here we borrow from Karen Barad (2007, 33) and use *intra-* to signify ‘the mutual constitution of entangled agencies’ within relations that may disrupt practices of differentiation on the grounds of age. The active and relational term ‘*intra-generational*’ draws attention to the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman actors within ‘*inter-generational*’ settings and spaces. For us, attention to terminology and its material affects also extends to notions of reciprocity, which we suggest enacts separations within such *inter/intra-generational* encounters and interventions.

Expectations for improved generational cooperation and intergenerational solidarity are infused with the notion of reciprocity – as a transactional exchange of support and knowledge between members of different generational cohorts over time and across familial or societal bonds (Izuhara 2010). We argue that, in positing essential differences between generations, the use of the term *inter-generational* enacts an implicit separation based on age, despite often intending the opposite. We are somewhat troubled by the construction of generational relations as necessarily conflicted (White 2013), and by assumptions about generational ‘gaps’ or ‘roles’ and the pedagogy of ‘interventions’ to promote meetings ‘between’ ages, usually predicated on chrono-logical notions of infant, child, youth, old age and life stages.

Both authors have been involved in pedagogical initiatives, in care and education settings, designed to promote intergenerational relations for ‘reciprocal’ social and health

benefit. Lois is a PhD student and researcher at the University of Bristol, and her doctoral study focuses on how children, older adults, practitioners and things intra-act within non-familial intergenerational programmes. Her work draws upon more-than-human scholarship to offer new ways of thinking about generational relations, age, and difference. Joanna is an academic at Plymouth University, with long-standing interests in community education, Philosophy for/with Children and inter-generational relations. We met through the space of the Adventures in Posthumanism research network and were brought into conversation through Joanna sharing her writings about reciprocity with Karin Murriss (Haynes and Murriss 2021). This started a chain reaction of *chitchat*, explained below, in which we shared a series of provocations over weeks, months, years. This paper seeks to continue our thinking-writing as inquiry (Gale and Wyatt 2017; St. Pierre 2018) by exploring the ways in which notions of reciprocity might be contributing to an ageist narrative of separation.

In what follows below, we share our explorations with recurring concepts or terms we coined through our *chitchat* and wanted to explore further. These concepts include post-age pedagogy, gap-bridging, shouldness and reciprocity. We then provide two provocative episodes of inter/intra-generational encounters we each experienced, (re)told to one another and then (re)wrote. By re-turning these episodes (Barad 2014), we attempt to remove<sup>4</sup> ourselves from/with thinking about *inter*-generational relations and reciprocity in ways that reinforce categorisations of age and explore the possibilities posthumanism affords for resisting the absolute separations of child/adult, human/nonhuman, same/different in post-age pedagogical spaces.

## Post-age pedagogies

To think about reciprocity in a different way, we draw inspiration from Haynes and Murriss (2017) imagining of post-age spaces and pedagogies. This perspective challenges the rigidity of conceptions of age which correlate age with ability and marginalise certain generational groups such as children and older adults. Post-age pedagogical spaces are those that attempt to move beyond ageist ideas, policies and practices which define relations between people according to age (and associated dis/ability). Post-age pedagogies are imagined as nomadic, relational and situated, opening possibilities for playful and ageless intra-actions (Barad 2007). Examples of such practice tend to be found predominantly in informal education and arts-based projects, for example, 'Beyond Words' (<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/the-beyond-words-project>) and the 'A Different Reality with Boaz Barkan', featured on BBC Radio 4 programme 'Short Cuts' with Josie Long (broadcast 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2023). In these spaces, understandings of pedagogy include professionalised relations in institutional contexts, informal spaces and places of learning, or (grand)parenting activities. However, such practices have often become infused with neoliberal ideals and tendencies enacted between those positioned as having responsibility, care, knowledge and power, and those who are positioned as being taught or cared for. Dominant discourse around pedagogy already assumes particular ideas of human development and progress as well as relations of power and authority based on age that we want to question.

Through (re)telling and (re)writing vignettes presented later in this paper, we set out to play with pedagogy and with the post-age, as a way of subverting ageist

practice and attitudes and imagining a world where age as a category matters less, and does not operate as the most important way of organising education, care and community provision. We know that there are moments and places where age can matter in understanding the materiality of the world and in making provision for different humans. We are not arguing for the deletion of age as a category, but for a radical rethink of its value, reach and impact. As Haynes and Murriss (2017) suggest, post-age does not mean removing the significance of age, but troubling unjust age-based assumptions:

Age is not a finished category, but is often presented as a hardened marker. . . Like the 'post' in 'posthumanism', 'post'-age signifies that age cannot and should not be erased or discounted in pedagogical relations. (976)

For Haynes and Murriss (2017, 971), age-based categorisation is not only troubling but 'misguided, unnecessary, limiting and counterproductive'. They argue that ageism limits adult-child interactions and call for particular attention to such adult-centred aspects of ageism. Drawing on posthuman theorising, they call into question humanist assumptions about age, agency and ability, whilst making it clear that age should not be erased. Indeed, age as a reference point, among others, is important for example, for the legal protection of children from abuse, unfair treatment and exploitation.

Quinn and Blandon's (2020) posthumanist framing of lifelong learning and dementia draws upon Braidotti (2013), Bennett (2010) and Barad (2007) to similarly question humanist, ableist and ageist notions of what makes a human, human. We were inspired by a presentation given by Jocey and Claudia to the Adventures in Posthumanism research group,<sup>5</sup> at the Plymouth University launch of their edited book 'Lifelong Learning and Dementia: A Posthumanist Perspective' (2020). Their work drew on two research projects 'Beyond Words', with Plymouth Music Zone (2015–2017) and the 'Making Bridges with Music' project (2017), an intergenerational study with pre-school children and older adults living in residential care homes. One of the questions the projects raise is about the capacity for new learning, and for teaching others, regardless of, or indeed in spite of age/ing, or dementia. Their openness to the ever-present possibility of surprise – to the actions of people living with dementia which contradicted researchers', relatives' and practitioners' prior assumptions – exposed human-nonhuman capacities for teaching and learning in the intergenerational encounters.

These provocations and other readings we proposed to one another (Ingold 2020; Weber 2020), offered us ways out of narrow, age-based, and human-centric conceptions of intergenerational relations (Haynes and Murriss 2017, 2021; Peach 2022). We shared accounts of memorable intergenerational encounters and started to think and write about them in different ways inspired by these provocations. We present these writings below as vignettes and re-write/re-turn (Barad 2014) these episodes to take account of the more-than-human actors missing in our initial stories. Through our collaborative writing-as-inquiry (Gale and Wyatt 2017; St. Pierre 2018), we homed in on ideas and played with concepts that could disrupt the assumptions and expectations associated with these encounters between differently (chronologically) aged humans-as-part-of-the-world. In short, we started to (re)imagine them as post-age pedagogical spaces.

## Intra-generational encounters: putting concepts into play

Through noting concepts that resonated during our shared reading and bringing them to our conversation about our encounters, we wondered in what ways the pedagogy of interventions and initiatives aiming to bring ‘young’ and ‘old’ together might be sustaining age-based categorisations and divisions. Intergenerational initiatives take various forms in their efforts to bring generations together, including, for example, community projects, mentoring, visitation programmes and co-located schemes. UK-based intergenerational programmes are still emerging, supported by a growing body of domestic and international research which has documented a range of cognitive, social, emotional, educational and physical and mental health benefits for those involved (Galbraith et al. 2015; Gerritzen et al. 2019; Giraudeau and Bailly 2019; Gualano et al. 2018; Martins et al. 2019). Despite helping to justify these interventions, several authors acknowledge that the desire to evidence outcomes, often categorised by age or generation (Mannion 2016; Vanderbeck 2007), has resulted in neglect of more nuanced (Mannion 2012), relational (Kuehne and Melville 2014; Sánchez, Sáez and Pinazo 2010) and process-oriented perspectives (Melville and Hatton-Yeo 2015). In response, as elsewhere (Peach 2022), we are not seeking to dismiss such potentially life enriching initiatives but to bring their assumptions into question and ask what might such approaches be concealing or overlooking?

Voicing our growing discomfort about the ways such interventions are pitched, and indeed our involvement in them, either as practitioners involved in community education, and/or as researchers conducting academic studies and programme evaluations, has motivated this enquiry. From our characterisation of generational division and efforts to reduce such divisions in intergenerational work comes our critical use of the notion of *gap-bridging*; an approach that we argue only serves to reinforce the view that this is a real division. The ‘gap’ between generations is constituted through segregation, living apart, through assumed differences of interest, and through what each age-group is felt to be lacking, that might be compensated for, or restored, through certain kinds of initiative. Our unease arises from how intergenerational initiatives may reinforce and reproduce generational ‘gaps’ through the notion of reciprocity on the road to addressing larger political agendas and encouraging a ‘society for all ages’ (Mannion 2012, 386).

The dominance of linear, essentialist and developmental understandings of the human lifespan leads to assumptions about ways in which young or older generations *should* or can engage with each other, and the benefits thereof. From this comes our creation of the concept *shouldness* to illuminate the pull-force towards instrumental and outcomes-led interventions and how they position those who take part, including the more-than-human. Our intention is not to delete all the constructive guidance that exists to support, protect and care for children or older people in institutional settings, but to pause for thought about the impact of ageist discourses in our everyday, professional or research lives. Typically, through interventions framed in this gap-bridging way, children might learn, (and have their futures in/formed), through the accrued wisdom (the past/s) of older people, and older people might become more enlivened in the now through the energetic presence of youth (Ingold 2020). According to such initiatives, there ‘should’ be age-relatable outcomes. These outcomes ‘should’ be mutually received/given through processes of reciprocal exchange within intergenerational (learning) encounters (Sánchez and Kaplan 2014).

Thinking with the concepts of ‘gap-bridging’ and ‘shouldness’ has offered us a way of making-sense of things that trouble us in what currently happens within the pedagogic spaces and interventions which characterise intergenerational practice. The ideas underpinning these concepts are not necessarily new, but ones we feel are often overlooked in a field lacking critical theorisation and conceptualisation (Kuehne and Melville 2014). These concepts have also provided opportunities to re-think that which is taken-for-granted within intergenerational encounters as given, necessary, or inherently positive, in particular the notion of reciprocity.

### Unpacking reciprocity

Greg Mannion (2012) opens the door to further thinking with the concepts of reciprocity, gap-bridging and shouldness through his account of intergenerational practice as:

always an emplaced activity that advances a society for all ages through increasing reciprocal communication and *exchanges* of many kinds between people from any *two generations* for the benefit of individuals, communities, and places (382–387, emphasis added).

Mannion’s work values intergenerational encounters as positive and place-sensitive ways to address social justice and environmental challenges, with a view to contributing to the flourishing of both people and places in a future society for all ages. We are encouraged by this potential, although we question a sense of ‘generation’ as a straightforward identifier from which *two generations* may be known and targeted, and which underpins the notion of reciprocity. For example, Mannion centres on intergenerational learning as a ‘potentially reciprocal process occurring across generational divides’ (2016, 4). We challenge the notion of reciprocity as exchange between segregated bodies, which reinforces gap-bridging and shouldness. This critical challenge is entangled with our thinking/writing about the pedagogic value of the inter/intra-generational.

Notions of intergenerational reciprocity, beyond those related to intergenerational justice and family transfer, have long been associated with intergenerational learning. As Sánchez and Kaplan (2014) point out, ideas of exchange and transference are considered as creating the possibilities for learning across generations. Intergenerational learning, therefore, is often predicated on the reciprocal exchanges of knowledge between differently-aged people. Yet for Kaplan (2002) producing distinctions between generational groups to identify who is giving or receiving in a reciprocal exchange is a false categorisation. We agree with Kaplan that identifying the from-to of an exchange-based conception of reciprocity originates from a desire to classify the process and therefore, is an artificial mechanism of structuring relations. Mannion (2012) similarly advocates for relational perspectives, but nonetheless suggests reciprocal ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ are key attributes of interactions and concepts for understanding intergenerational education. Reciprocity underpins both the purpose (mutual benefits) and process (mutual exchanges) of intergenerational relations within interventions. In this way, reciprocity itself is the mechanism by which gaps-are-bridged and benefits that *should* be accrued are achieved. Thinking-with Mannion, and particularly his place-based, sociomaterial understanding of intergenerational relations (Mannion 2016), however, enables us to conceive reciprocity differently, and may provide different understandings about learning within such interventions.



### *Rethinking reciprocity as flow*

Intergenerational practices as a ‘reciprocal process involving all-age exchanges’ (Mannion 2016, 5), to us, seems to acknowledge but under-appreciate reciprocity as a ‘relational’ and ‘never-ending process’ (Lanas and Rautio 2014, 181). Re-reading Mannion (2012) and diffracting through anecdotes we had told one another (Barad 2014), the term ‘reciprocity’ sparkled with possibility, embracing perhaps what arises unbridled between and through bodies in motion; and affects that flow or resist and are felt in the now, whether or not intended by the pedagogy of the coming together of generations. Thinking with Haynes and Murriss (2021), we consider reciprocity as flowing through adult/child and human/more-than-human bodies, rather than an exchange. We ask if we can re-move reciprocity as a swapping exercise that suggests separation and distance. We suggest something is missing about the simultaneousness of flows in, through and amongst *intra*-generational relations. Rather than a process by which something happens, then another thing happens in response to enact positive change – a then-then interaction – reciprocity as a simultaneous flow is now-now. Reciprocity as a flow, therefore, challenges the simplicity of a linear exchange from-to and back again and questions its assumed positivity. The possibilities for resistance, for reciprocal flows to be both positive and negative all-at-once, or as Lanas and Rautio (2014) suggest, for re-thinking what kind of contribution is considered ‘positive’ and ethical is always changing, always on the move.

Reciprocity as a series of dispersed ever-changing, never-ending flows means that we are not looking for a direction of flow; nor do we seek to single out humans as either recipients or initiators of exchanges. Posthumanism helpfully engages with the notion of reciprocity to emphasise the relationality of humans and nonhumans in the world (Jones 2021). In this way, both human and more-than-human are entangled and immersed in reciprocal flow/s of *intra*-generationality. They are ‘in it together’, *intra*-actively distinct but not pre/existing as individual entities (Barad 2007). Mannion’s (2012, 2016) work has provided a stable foundation for us to build upon/with as he takes account of the more-than-human to explore intergenerational learning and educational encounters through the lenses of place and space.

Mannion (2012, 392) contends places are ‘criss-crossed flows and disconnections’ and therefore, he shifts emphasis from human adult or child to stretch the boundaries of time, space and embodiment. He suggests any place can be ‘intergenerationally and reciprocally shared with or without physical or multigenerational copresence’ (392), which leaves us thinking about the presence/absence of ever-changing reciprocal flows within our own intergenerational encounters. Where are the flows? How can we attempt to identify them? *Should* we attempt to identify them? Or might this very attempt be at odds with flow? Responding to these questions whilst attempting not to betray our critique of linearity, simplicity and categorisation, we attend to where the *effects* of flows of reciprocity may occur and to where the interfaces of criss-crosses and dis/connections between, with and amongst people, places and more-than-human things matter in our re-writings (Barad 2007).

## Method – diffractive re-turns/being made malleable to a series of NOWs

Through this writing we aim to mimic the reciprocal flows of conversations that popped up and led us in many directions at once, initiated and inspired by the Adventures in Posthumanism (AiPH) group.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging that writing is a thoughtful and curious practice of research, ‘lingering on the edge of the not-yet’ (St. Pierre 2019, 3), our contributions are not intended to recount what was said between us as separate people chit-chatting (which implies exchange), but as chitchat that bubbles up in the NOW. This chitchat picks up the trail of crumbs left over from numerous Zoom calls, emails and a riverside walk, and carries them in new directions of thinking/writing about the intra-generational.

Our desire was for new entry points into this field of enquiry/practice and for approaches that include the more-than-human. We proposed readings to one another, based on what we found noteworthy and resonating with the particular momentum of our enquiry. We met via Zoom to talk about what was striking, and sometimes to lift out memorable phrases and analogies, or to raise questions. The criteria for the selection of readings were that the pieces in some way unsettled the negative or limiting ways that generational relations are portrayed as characterised by division and offered a new framework for thinking. Readings included, but were not limited to, previous work by Joanna, written with Karin Murriss (Haynes and Murriss 2017, 2021), Mannion’s writing on reciprocity and intergenerational learning (2012, 2016), Kohan and Weber’s (2020) edited book, ‘Thinking, Childhood and Time’, and Quinn and Blandon’s (2020) ‘Lifelong Learning and Dementia’. Each reading seemed to resonate with or speak to us about our experiences of intergenerational encounters/interventions. We shared reports of particular events early on in our enquiry, as we felt our way into it, and then we invited each other to re-write these episodes of intergenerational interaction with the clear and deliberate intention of decentring the human children and adults who had been foregrounded in our initial tellings/writings; through re-writing the events we set out to produce something new that would take the more-than-human into account (Hackett and Somerville 2017).

By re-thinking the relations between humans, materialities and discourse in the episodes outlined below, we acknowledge that research is always in the process of becoming (Mazzei 2020). The emergent nature of our inquiry meant that we did not set out to ‘collect’ or ‘analyse’ ‘data’ in a particular or predetermined way. Instead, what emerged was a series of momentary inquiries that playfully transformed our thinking/writing/philosophising. As Susan Nordstrom suggests in a collection of writings about ‘infant-methodologies’ (Tesar et al. 2021), we engaged in inquiry which played with and troubled notions of age and time.

Adult bones must become so vulnerable that they can become shaped by a series of nows.  
A body made malleable by the series can be born again and again to an inquiry practice that is continuously transforming with and transformed by the series of nows. (Tesar et al. 2021, 3–4)

Quite unintentionally, our inquiry-as-thinking-and-writing emerged over a long period of making ourselves malleable to a series of concepts, provocations and disruptions. Each new reading was a point of transformation that contributed to the inquiry in that moment. Each meeting or zoom conversation was a re-birth or enlivening of our thinking. Each email thread was an invitation for our thinking to be (re)shaped. This process was not

linear. We did not set out with a clear plan or intention but allowed ourselves the possibility of being born again and again. We were kind to ourselves in disrupting expectations about how inquiry should be done, and principally, how long it should take. The moments of nothingness or stillness in our writing and thinking were also part of the series of NOWs that transformed our practice. Slowing our scholarship (Ulmer 2017), setting off in new directions, re-tracing components of our chitchat, and getting lost all over again did indeed feel like embarking on a process of becoming vulnerable at times, but also helpfully resisted the orderliness and accepted chronology of traditional research methods to do, think, and write differently (Taylor 2017).

Barad (2014, 175) considers differences not as distinctive categories but as ‘differences-in-the-(re)making’ - *within*, contingent, and in on-going performative processes of being made to matter. Therefore, whereas returning to something, in this case our vignettes, aligns with reflection – implying a distinction or separation between source and reflected image which replicates absolute difference, diffractively *re-turning* provides a means through which to rethink the notion of difference as difference *within*. Re-turning each vignette was about changing the conditions of ontological possibility, exposing differences between children-adults, humans-nonhumans as performative processes in-the-(re)making. Taking notice of how generational boundaries are negotiated within intergenerational encounters requires considering how differences are made to matter (Barad 2007), rather than what differences ‘are’.

As the re-turnings of each of the episodes overlapped with the readings we engaged with, multiple, invigorating and perplexing patterns were produced. With each turn, the possibility of a new pattern emerged. Ulmer (2016) likens this to some sort of analytical kaleidoscope, which we find useful. Reconfiguring the vignettes was not about replacing or overwriting the initial descriptions, but about (dis)placing different images to create the possibilities for new patterns, critically engaging with the different patterns produced, and considering which differences matter and for whom. Paying attention to these differences opened-up methodological possibilities for seeing and understanding intra-generational encounters differently.

## Provocative episodes

The first of the two episodes below describes a memorable outing involving Joanna, two of her grandchildren and a picnic in the park. The second tells the story of preschool children and an older adult living with dementia playing with a balloon together. Lois observed this balloon interaction whilst conducting research of an intergenerational programme at a care home in the Southwest of England in 2019.<sup>7</sup>

### *Bread rolls*

#### *First turn*

One grand-parenting day we were in the park by 10am, picnic lunch in the rucksack. Quite soon Frankie was asking ‘is it lunchtime?’ Not lunchtime yet, grandparents replied. A similar exchange took place five minutes later. And five minutes later. We adults initially resisted the idea of eating lunch, based on checking clock time (although it really did feel like lunchtime and I felt hungry). Snack followed snack (banana, crackers), followed by wanting to know what other

food was in the rucksack. Are there sandwiches? It was now 10.45am. So we found a spot to sit and take all the food out and eat it. By 11 we had eaten the picnic lunch. It suddenly seemed that we all felt more energised and able to play. The rucksack contents, now in our stomachs, no longer called out to us.

### *Re-turn*

Rhythms of sleep and digestion shifted through comings together of different bodies, in different habitation spaces: urgent liveliness of younger bodies, sluggishness of older ones. Between 5 and 66, between 3 and 54, between all the years lived and living. The draw of a city park: tall trees, grasses, big wide open sunlit and shaded spaces; birds and squirrels; cafe and toilet buildings; vertical wooden and rope structures constructed with some thought for stretching, climbing, crouching, swinging, moving limbs. But filled bread rolls, apples, bananas. Containers of water for drinking. All contained in a rucksack, carried on the back of one adult female human body. Hunger and food packages in the bag seeking to coincide, the call to grazing of the picnic blanket. The bag emptying of bread rolls and fruit and re-filling with cores, skins and wrappings. Re-energised bodies running barefooted between trees. Laughter.

### *Balloons*

#### *First turn*

The bubbles get spilt. Bring out the balloons. Children with balloons invade the quiet area of the care home lounge where Ella, Grace (preschool children) and Evan (resident) are playing. Ella and Grace become distracted and chase the balloon around, grabbing at it as soon as it hits the floor before vigorously throwing it into the air again. After a few moments, it drifts in Evan's direction. This initiates a modified game of catch between Grace, Ella and Evan as they repeatedly hand, rather than throw, the balloon to each other. Over time, the balloon game steadily gets more ferocious. The balloon is lofted into the air, hesitates, and then settles. Evan claps and cheers loudly when the girls manage to catch or hit the balloon before it touches the ground. Spectating adults in armchairs occasionally join in when a balloon floats nearby. Ella, Grace and other children laugh, squeal and run around the small area to fetch stray balloons. There is little verbal communication between Evan and the children, nor the children themselves, but an implicit knowledge of what the game entails as it evolves and a shared excitement when a balloon is mishandled.

#### *Re-turn*

Air apprehended, fighting against the plastic skin holding it in. Let loose from the tentative clasp of warm hands and floating upwards. Taunting bodies, taunting gravity, an invitation to play. A yellowy mixture of smooth and wrinkled faces, wooden coffee table, sun-bleached laminate floor and beige armchairs are left below, then zoom back into view, magnified as the balloon peaks and rushes back towards the earth. Moving unpredictably, balloons, bodies, hands, eyes, and apprehension dance around the space. As balloon and limbs contort, both skilfully navigating furniture, the tease of balloon-floor contact implicates all in a contest with/out rules. Bodies and balloons inflate the possibilities of the game and disrupt them all-at-once by drifting toward new hands or hiding places, bouncing untameably, staying aloft. Capture. The squeaking friction of skin and slippery surface is accompanied by the high frequencies of human laughter. Again, and again and again.

## Reframing: post-age spaces of reciprocity

Through re-writing these episodes we intended to disrupt the focus on human children and older adults and the deafening linearity and anthropocentrism of the first turnings. As simultaneously disruptive and constitutive forces, balloons, bread rolls and other material-discursive phenomena seemed to reveal something more about the intergenerational encounter, something we were missing. In the following section, each vignette is addressed individually before discussing what the re-turnings illuminated about the intra-generational encounters as post-age spaces of reciprocity.

### *Bread rolls*

The Bread Rolls vignette plays with the encounter between grandparents and grandchildren. In the first turning, the activity is constrained by the logic of chronological time, infused with notions of developmental progress that insist children do not *yet* understand when the 'right' time for lunch is. Although not initially obvious, perhaps also the super early lunch routines of many early childhood settings and the aromas of cooking and rattling of cutlery that begin to permeate these spaces from early morning, somehow inscribed in children's bodies, are surfacing again in the now. Pacini-Ketchabaw (2012) describes clocking practices in early childhood education settings; noting that the clock is both producer and enabler, she writes,

The clock structures both the arrangement of children and educators in the classroom and the very practice deployed throughout a regular day. At the same time, it produces particular knowledges about what it means to be an educator and what it means to be a child in an early childhood classroom. The clock is fundamental to how early childhood education is understood, organized, and enacted. (154)

In a later co-written article, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Kummen (2016) suggest a different kind of temporal framing to that of clocktime in the early childhood setting may enable ecological thinking. Similarly, in troubling linear conceptions of time and progress institutionalised through education, Murriss and Kohan (2021) highlight the colonial and disciplinary acts of chronological understandings of time that prevent other temporal patterns from being noticed. For instance, they note that alongside the Ancient Greek word for chronological time, *chronos*, two other words also represent time, *aion* and *kairos*. *Aion* refers to the intensity of time, whereas *kairos* refers to a critical moment distinct and never equal to another (Murriss and Kohan 2021). This provides opportunities for challenging the hegemony of chronological understandings within adult, and in particular western, conceptions of time, as well as the disciplinary logics underpinning clock-time. As they suggest,

the clock as a material-discursive apparatus is entangled with the way bodies are produced, disciplined and colonised (Murriss and Kohan 2021, 590)

In the first turning of the vignette, the clock, in its entanglement with bodies and snacks, restricts the activity by producing hierarchies of age, knowledge and behaviour. Grandparents, rather than grandchildren, know when lunchtime is and when lunch 'should' be eaten. This 'shouldness' enacts a separation between the generations. The differences between grandparent and child, who do/do not understand lunchtime, are

made through both the materiality of the clock depicting the actual time, 'It was now 10.45am', as well as discursive ideas about the timeliness of children's routine, the development of children's skills such as patience and understanding, and the appropriate time of day to eat lunch. This shouldness orients the relation towards the future – towards the instrumentalism of this encounter for (children's) learning and development. Haynes and Murriss (2021, 7) call this the 'performative agency of the clock'. Differences are made to matter through the temporal experiences of adult and child being somehow out of sync, or more specifically of child being out of sync with adult. Chronological time, or clocktime, and associated ageist and developmental logics, co-constitute the gap between generations that frame the child in the encounter as lacking (Murriss 2016). Yet, there are other experiences of time occurring.

It was the unconventional eating of lunch well before lunchtime that made this moment provocative. The accordance with the clock and its disciplining of bodies into routines and convention, 'Not lunchtime yet', followed by disrupting these rules, 'So we found a spot to sit and take all the food out and eat it', made it stand out. In the chapter, 'Child and Time', Barbara Weber (2020) discusses children's conception of time as situational rather than chronological. She contends children's experience of time as different from adults', schooled out of children through education. What is interesting to us is that both Murriss and Kohan (2021) and Weber (2020) share a critique of the colonising and developmental logics surrounding education and confirm childhood and 'childing' as a particular experience outside of chronological temporality. Principally, they link time with age. In particular, Weber (2020, 42) argues a situational temporality may yield momentary and relational appreciations of time as 'at once-ness'. This 'at once-ness' diverts our attention towards the embodied experience of time, a felt time, a feeling hungry, that moves the grandparent-grandchild encounter from pre-determined and restrictive understandings of chronological time towards the intra-active happenings of the NOW (Haynes and Murriss 2021). Letting go of the disciplinary and hierarchical acts of *should-ness* - of both chronological age and time – created the opportunity to give in, and yield to the in-the-moment, at-once-ness of eating lunch.

The second re-turning of the vignette, therefore, explores the encounter as intra-generational – reimagining the event to articulate the ways in which the *chronos* of age/ism may be breached. From a posthuman perspective, time is neither objective or subjective but co-constituted through entanglements (Murriss and Kohan 2021). Bread rolls, rucksacks, playgrounds, and human stomachs re-configure time in the second re-turning. Whereas clocktime produced age-related bodies and distinctions in the first turning, in the second, a multitude of factors shape the experience of time: 'Hunger and food packages in the bag seeking to coincide, the call to grazing of the picnic blanket'. The ingrained generational grooves we move in and live by, such as adults deciding when and how things *should* happen, are opened-up to questioning. Adult humans teach children when lunchtime is – or do they? Quinn and Blandon (2020) suggest that people with dementia not only have the capacity to learn but may also teach through the intergenerational encounter. This is because the situatedness of people living with dementia in-the-moment means 'they reveal the fluidity and nonlinearity of time and the significance and value of the moment, which lies beyond easy measurement' (Quinn and Blandon 2020, 57). The re-turning of the bread rolls encounter reveals that the initial position of adult/grandparent teaching grandchild the 'right' time for lunch may be reconceptualised

as the capacities of grandchild, picnic blanket, bodies and bread rolls to teach a situational experience of lunchtime – the fluidity and in-the-moment-ness of lunchtime is the lesson learnt.

The posthuman viewfinder through which the intra-generational encounter is witnessed enables human and nonhuman forms of intra-active agency (Barad 2007) to be noticed which disrupt and unsettle understandings of age and time. This does not suggest differences between grandparent/grandchild or human/more-than-human are completely dissolved, but how they matter changes as new distinctions are made between the ‘urgent liveliness’ and ‘sluggishness’ of bodies which are then un-done; ‘re-energised bodies running barefooted between trees’. Distinctions become about energetic capacities of food and bodies rather than based on age. The encounter is re-imagined beyond the limiting conceptualisations of age, knowledge and should-ness. This activity is not merely constituted by the coming together of grandparent and grandchild, but by the intra-active co-configuration of blankets, parks, trees, clocks, rucksacks, wrappings and bread rolls in the post-age playfulness of lunchtime. This encounter is intra-generational.

### **Balloon**

The first turning of this episode, without intention, describes the process by which playing with a balloon fulfils its potential as an intergenerational activity – an activity bridging generational ‘gaps’. Although they are rendered invisible in the scene, the first writing starts with acknowledging that the intergenerational intervention is facilitated by (middle-aged) adults. These adults, as preschool or care home practitioners, are expected to enable relations between those considered ‘young’ and ‘old/er’ through the activities they implement; ‘The bubbles get spilt. Bring out the balloons’. The balloon becomes an object of connectivity, a tool to bridge the gap between generations. These efforts attempt to reduce the space, physical and imagined, between children and residents. The ‘gap’ constituted through what each group is thought to be lacking (such as communication skills, relationships, wellbeing, and generational understanding), which might become available or be negotiated through the balloon activity.

Facilitation of intergenerational relations through the balloon activity is part of children’s and older adults’ progress forwards (Haynes and Murriss 2021). The game evolves from a ‘child-only’ activity (Grace and Ella chasing the balloon) to a precarious passing back and forth. ‘Over time the balloon game gets more ferocious’; narratives of progress are woven into the re-telling, replicating the presumed development of reciprocal relations between generations towards positive futures. The pull-force of shouldness towards instrumental and outcomes-led pedagogic intervention ever present. The comment, ‘There is little verbal communication’ reveals Lois’ expectations as a researcher-witness-want-to-be-participant about intergenerational connection requiring a spoken component. Lois’ assumptions about the ways ‘young’ and ‘old’ can/not or should engage with each other are simultaneously confirmed and challenged through the balloon activity. The balloon activity is chosen as it doesn’t necessitate verbal communication, perhaps enabling pre/post-verbal children and older adults living with dementia to participate in different ways through/with the agentic capacity of the balloon which animates residents’ and children’s capacities (Quinn and Blandon 2020).

Participants, spectators and researchers of all ages are involved in and affected by the balloon episode. The experimental posthuman re-turning of the episode serves to both illuminate and trouble this. Play with the balloon in the second re-turning is animated as an in-between, inclusive and full of possibilities activity (Pitsikali 2015). As the game evolves, human others are brought into the play and human/nonhuman bystanders participate. Reciprocity in the intra-generational moment is not a two-way exchange but complex, multi-directional and messy flows between bodies. The effects of these dispersed flows can be located in the anticipation, the dance, the energy and liveliness between human and nonhuman collaborators. Hesitation and tentative handlings of the balloon overlap with 'the high frequencies of human laughter', showing reciprocity as not necessarily positive or negative but intra-actively co-constituted through mutual entangled agencies (Barad 2007). Reciprocal flowing amongst human and more-than-human in post-age spaces can be in tension as well as connection.

The re-turning of this episode also generates possibilities for ageist conceptions of who, and crucially what, can be playful to be questioned (Haynes and Murris 2017). The densities of air, both inside and outside the plastic lining of the balloon playfully intra-act with the furniture, friction of the carpet and fumbling hands of the children and residents. The activity is no longer about bridging the 'gap' of age but about collisions of bodies and matter, always on the move, slowly or quickly. In the intra-action, boundaries and flows between human/nonhuman or child/adult are not constituted by mediating (middle-aged) adult humans but by the unspoken and unpredictable rhythms of play. The passage of the balloon is not a back-and-forth, then-then exchange between differently-aged bodies, but multiple spontaneous flows, often lacking symmetry for they are directed in the moment – in the NOW.

Quoting Cecilia Åsberg and Astrida Neimanis, Haynes and Murris (2021, 7) suggest 'posthuman bodies of the NOW ask us to think "beyond recognition, derogatory difference and the equality of sameness" (13)'. In this way, the second re-turning of the balloon episode was not concerned with identifying individual bodies – recognising who was adult, child, player, observer – and, therefore, reinforcing the differences between them. This does not mean children, adults, researcher, practitioners, and family members are the same. In discussion of intergenerational reciprocity, solidarity and a 'society for all ages' (Mannion 2012), we are at risk of homogenising and collapsing age/generation into an equality of sameness which does not do justice to those involved. For us, a posthuman/feminist new materialist appreciation of difference, as difference-within (the intra-action) rather than a difference of exteriority or absolute separation (Barad 2007), comes to the rescue in negotiating this seeming contradiction; that generations are neither the same nor different. The intra-generational encounter, then, takes up this appreciation of difference-within and refocuses our attention on the moment of post-age reciprocity, the NOW, in which these contradictions are negotiated.

## Discussion

In each of the first turnings the emphasis is placed on the 'gap' between generations being bridged through the intervention of adult humans. In the second re-turnings, we make a deliberate attempt to re-move age, distance and human action from/with the play



with bread rolls and balloons, or at least reframing it to show human and nonhuman flows of reciprocal dis/connection. In doing so, we have played with the concepts of gap-bridging, shouldness and nowness.

In the bread roll event, exposing the reciprocal relations between grandparent-grandchild, backpacks, blankets and bread rolls, the agentic capacities of children (entangled with nonhuman matter, time and space) to re-configure temporal patterns of play/lunch, were brought to the surface. Likewise, in the balloon episode, the flow between resident, children, balloon, air, and furniture co-constituted the on-going negotiation of the 'rules' of the play and collapsed the distinction between child and person living with dementia. Just as the re-writing of the bread roll episode reveals the logics of deficiency and developmentalism inscribed in the notion of childhood (Murriss 2016), intersecting with the balloon episode, and the intervention it was part of, is the notion that intergenerational programmes may serve as 'coping mechanisms' to deal with the declines of 'old/er' age and dementia (Quinn and Blandon 2020). As Quinn and Blandon (2020) note, the focus of these interventions is on restoration, (re)connection and (we would add) reciprocity between generations. Although intergenerational programmes respond to the problematic over-segregation of (education and care) provision, we argue these are not (yet) post-age pedagogic spaces or encounters. This is the unease we feel with the intentional de-segregation of generations in these practices – not their desire to (re)connect, but the practices that *restore* age-related distinctions and discourses of deficiency intertwined with the notion of reciprocity. The potential for reconceptualising reciprocity through a post-age and posthuman philosophy, therefore, provides possibilities for intra-generational, rather than inter-generational, relations.

By rethinking reciprocity in a relational way, we may disrupt material-discursive practices of separation, deficiency and instrumentalization within intergenerational interventions and enable a move towards post-age pedagogies. As Braidotti (2016) contends,

Reciprocity is no longer defined dialectically as the struggle for recognition, but rather auto-poietically as mutual definition and specification ... What matters – and this is the shift of perspective introduced by affirmative ethics – is to resist the habit of ascribing antagonistic relations in a logic of dialectical negativity. (52–53)

What sticks with us about Braidotti's suggestion is how the threading together of reciprocity and affirmation encapsulates the critical and conceptual movements we have made through our inquiry. To answer our opening question about 'What difference it might make to frame relations between humans of various ages, such as the very young and the "old/er" adult, as intra-generational rather than inter-generational?', we may respond that considering the coming together of adult and child human bodies and more-than-human things as intra-generational does the political work of resisting the habitual inscription of negative difference in regard to these generational groups, or as Braidotti (2016) puts it, resisting antagonistic relations of difference, within educational and caring spaces. This, we suggest, may move such pedagogic interventions beyond age categorisation and towards intra-generational reciprocity. In short, thinking of these places and practices as *intra*-generational reworks the contradictions of the inter- prefix that imply gap-bridging and shouldness, to bring forth affirmative transformation and relations in the NOW.

## Conclusion

The methodology of writing, re-writing, reading, re-reading and chitchatting with/about posthuman theory and intergenerational scholarship has presented us with a way of departing from human and age-centric practices within research and pedagogic spaces. Our process exposed the fragility of reciprocity within intergenerational scholarship. Reciprocity conceived as something that takes place between age-defined groups, whilst seemingly positive, reinforces notions of segregation and essentialised difference through the language of exchange. The mutuality of the 'exchange' bridges the 'gap' between child-specific outcomes (usually centred around learning/development) and 'old/er' adult-specific benefits (of activity and improved health). Practitioners are often required to, or 'should', enable these benefits, locking them into the framing of reciprocity as exchange.

The re-turnings of the balloon and bread roll encounters each do the work of troubling the order of things: human and non-human; child and adult; linear and non-linear. The undoing of these orders and of reciprocity as exchange is different in each case – one situated in an institutional context, the other in familial interaction. Yet both bring the conformity of traditional generational roles into question, highlighting opportunities for post-age learning where relinquishing hierarchical norms of teacher-learner or adult-child become possible. Questioning the order of things does not imply the equivalence or sameness of bodies, however aged. Reframing each intergenerational episode towards an appreciation of the more-than-human acknowledged the 'pedagogy of matter' (Hickey-Moody and Page 2015, 1) as balloons and bread rolls produced differences in our understanding of these interactions. As our analysis suggests, an offering of a space for reciprocity as intra-generational flow loosens the performativity of age-related capacity, releases forms of play as at-once-ness and adds the more-than-human into the mix.

Whilst we could conclude with possible recommendations, the risk is that we replace one list of 'shoulds' for intergenerational research and practice with another. Rather than prescribe an alternative set of pedagogic principles for intra-generational reciprocity, then, we have sort to address the ageism inherent in the hunt for mutual benefit from inter-generational practice which preoccupies practitioners and researchers alike with age-defined outcomes. Post-age philosophy itself, for us, is a form of anti-ageist and anti-essentialist activism; a political engagement with the differences that are produced within encounters rather than adhered to or prescribed. In this way, *intra-generational* relations hold potentially greater pedagogic value when they engage the 'in-the-moment', situational and flowing reciprocity of intergenerational learning.

## Notes

1. We acknowledge that various conceptualisations of generation exist beyond birth-defined cohorts, including sociological perspectives (see Mannheim 1952). However, we do not have the space nor inclination to debate such categorisations here apart from to say that emphasis upon (different) temporal locations within societal groups, families or histories feeds generational conflict discourse (White 2013) and sustains the intergenerational pedagogical practices/interventions we are keen to unpack here.
2. According to the WHO, ageism affects everyone. Children as young as 4 years old become aware of their culture's age stereotypes. From that age onwards they internalize and use these stereotypes to guide their feelings and behaviour towards people of different ages.

They also draw on culture's age stereotypes to perceive and understand themselves, which can result in self-directed ageism at any age. Ageism intersects and exacerbates other forms of disadvantage including those related to sex, race and disability. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>.

3. See for example the Equality and Human Rights Commission <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/age-discrimination>.
4. Rather than 'remove' which implies an absolute separation from current thinking is possible, in a Baradian style we have included the hyphen. Re-move suggests our thinking is a movement with/against current thinking and therefore can never be distinctly separate from this point of departure.
5. The Adventures in Posthumanism (AiPH) group is an interdisciplinary network with the aim of developing, sharing and generating knowledge in the field of posthumanism. About the group – Plymouth Institute of Education (<https://adventuresinposthum.wordpress.com>).
6. Ethical approval was granted by the School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol.
7. This is something which Lois has since troubled. See (Peach 2022).

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