Positioning of subject and some theoretical and ethical questions

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This presentation has two concerns. We wish to discuss the positioning of the subject in later phenomenologist and post-human theory, and pedagogical and ethical questions that derive from these positions. The starting point for our study are ethnographic studies in Norwegian preschools, and how space and materiality could be interpreted as a participant in pedagogical praxis.

In our studies we have used both phenomenological and post-human approaches. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and philosophy of the body subject insist on the body as centre of perception. To be embodied means that you are unfolded into the world, perceived and shaped by it. The body is a centre of human sensory and intersubjective relationships with others. In Merleau-Ponty’s last work, he introduced the term chiasm which is explained as a reversibility between the thing and the perceiver (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, s. 135). This implies an overlap between the material world and the subject, which means that the subject does not have priority over the world and that we cannot distinguish things from the way they appear to us (Bengtsson, 1999; Løkken, 2012).

The shift from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and the concepts of embodied subjects and chiasm towards a posthuman approach drawing on Karen Barad theory of agential realism (Barad, 2003) opens up to understand the relationships between children and materiality in new ways. This also leads to a different understanding of the position of the human body, from being the centre to being a part of materiality. Karen Barad represents a posthuman approach, which is a critique of anthropocentrism, pointing to the human as the only actor. The main point is that neither things nor human subjects are sovereign actors. What people want and do are conveyed by the things we use and surround ourselves with (Damsholt & Simonsen, 2009). By using the concept of infra-action, Barad (2003, p. 815) makes a theoretical distinction to the concept of interaction. Intra-action describes the actions that occur between human and non-human actors, while interactions are used to describe the interaction between human actors.

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