

David Oswell

## What Space for a Children's Politics? Rethinking Infancy in Childhood Studies

In many ways Childhood Studies from the mid-1980s onward was so keen to institute children as political subjects that it presumed an idea of politics, but failed to really question what a *children's* politics might be like: how do children actually create, construct and do politics? But also how do we, as researchers and others, recognize when and how children do politics? Often political action and activity has been seen as synonymous with social agency and interaction (e.g. Mayall 2000; Danby and Baker 1998) or considered through a model of participation (e.g. Cockburn 2012; Hart 1992; Thomas 2007). Writing 'children into the script of social order' (Mayall 2000) was a statement based on the empirical observation of what children were actually doing in their everyday lives, but it was also a political and programmatic declaration. The social life of children was seen as conceptually equivalent to the political life of children. Moreover, it was such a view of children - one that both saw children as political subjects and also allowed Childhood Studies scholars to be aligned with the interests of children (Alanen 1994) - that has fed into a reading of children's rights after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which understood those rights as manifestations of, or closely articulated with, an underlying everyday social and political interactivity (Freeman 1998; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013). In this reading of the politics of children, even though empirical investigation into the areas in which children did politics provided fruitful insight and innovation, the question of how children do politics was often assumed. My intention in this chapter, then, is not to sleight the energy or direction of such thought within Childhood Studies, but simply to ask again the question of what is a politics *for children* and *of children*, in such a way that might interrogate often implicit and dominant assumptions. I want to ask this question not as separate questions (that separate at first base an 'adult-centred' from a 'child-centred' politics, 'protection' from 'rights', 'best interests' from 'liberation', and so on), but as conjoined inasmuch as they refer to two sides of the same question and inasmuch as they refer to a singular theoretical (albeit often very diverse empirically) problematic regarding *what kind of*

*space is the space of children's politics*, a space which conjoins the fact of children doing politics with an external recognition of such doing. Let's be clear, a children's politics has never been afforded the luxury of a pure space from which children's interests could be defended, free from adult interests. Moreover, it is in this sense that a politics of childhood is also contingently, but intimately, a politics of gender.

This chapter argues that Childhood Studies has been defined not simply against an idea of 'adulthood', but, perhaps more significantly, against 'infancy'. From its initial moments it has sought to include children within a political space, but it has never systematically and theoretically engaged with the problematic of that space and, as such, has consistently thought of children in terms that attempt to scale-down or scale-up or 'cut-and-paste' adult-conceptions of the political. This chapter argues that, firstly, a more wholesale critique of the edifice of the political upon which children's (political) agency rests within Childhood Studies is needed and, secondly, a positive engagement with the question of infancy needs to be made. If adultist conceptualizations have rested on an idea of the primacy of speech, often within a gendered distribution between reproduction and necessity, on the one hand, and politics and freedom (or agency) on the other, then a politics thought with, not against, infancy suggests consideration of messier, more physical and noisier forms of demonstration, alignment and articulation. In such a demonstrative space, the sound of politics is different (see Oswell 2009; Rosen 2015). Moreover, in such a move to thinking of a *politics-with-infancy*, there is no simple position of the child and childhood with and from which researchers can align their knowledge production and critique; instead, a politics-with-infancy suggests a necessarily collective, negotiated, haptic and diffracted 'vision'.

I start by briefly defining the contours of what I see as the existing problematic. I then consider two aspects of a rethought engagement with children's politics and infancy: firstly in relation to a reframing of children's political space as a space of contestation and assembly, rather than of voice or even dialogue; and secondly in relation to questions of infrastructure and the material resources and supports for a space of politics. My discussion leans on the work of Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler.

## Defining the Problematic

There are three defining features of the problematic: a mutually exclusive binary relation between, on the one hand, a politics imposed on children and, on the other, a politics internal to children's everyday lives; an acceptance that contemporary politics surpasses a domestic/public divide, yet, at the same time, the maintenance of an understanding (not overtly stated) of politics in terms of a classical conceptualization of the political actor as a form of 'public man' and in the context of a *res publica*; and finally, a sense from some within Childhood Studies that mainstream political theory has ignored children, yet matched with a lack of motivation to engage systematically with mainstream political theory on the ground of a 'children's politics'.

Rightly Childhood Studies has been critical of the social structures through which children's lives have been, and are, governed and regulated, of the dominant ideologies and discourses of childhood, which are circulated and support reactionary perceptions and conceptualizations of children, but also of the multiple ways in which children have been, and are, ignored or erased in many affairs of public and social policy and political debate and consideration (Thomas 2013). Equally, Childhood Studies has made clear and evident how children, through their everyday interactions, shape and also make the worlds which they inhabit. These social interactions are seen as political; they are defined in the context of and often against adults and adult definitions of who children are and what they should be doing. For example, James and James foreground how children who are 'out of place', with regard to normative adult ideas of childhood, are seen to cause both criminal and symbolic offence (James and James 2004 ). Or for example, Danby and Baker talk about how the interactions of children in a pre-school classroom are political, with some children aligning the teacher against other children in such a way that the children 'restore social order' differently to that of the adult teacher alone ( Danby and Baker 1998).

There has been a schism in children's politics - between a politics *for children* and a politics *of children* - at the heart of sociologies of childhood for the last forty five, if not more, years. In 1973, Norman Denzin stated that 'children find themselves talked about, legislated over, tested and scrutinized' and that 'the perspective of the caretaker is embodied in our definition of the child' (Denzin 1973: 2-3). In contrast to such a top-down, adultist conceptualization of children, Denzin

argues that children, as for all human beings, should be understood 'in active, interactionist terms'. They are 'symbol manipulating organisms... capable of *mindful, self-conscious activity*' (Denzin 1973: 7). Denzin is critical of deficit models of children and, although hesitant to throw child development completely out of the window, wants to understand such development in interactionist terms, namely in the context of children's everyday experiences and active interactions (Denzin 1973: 9). A resolution to the schism is offered such that 'children be accorded the rights to act like adults, be given the responsibility that comes with those rights, and be given access to the resources to organize and act out such rights' (Denzin 1973: 15). A solution to the deficit in a politics *for children* is found in an everyday politics *of children*. And yet understanding of such everyday politics is by virtue of constructing children 'like adults': namely, a solution to the problem of the deficit is to model children *as adults*. In doing so, the solution to the deficit (one that is profoundly shaped in modern times by discourses of development and socialization) erases any reflection on *the infancy* of children's politics, namely reflection on the difference children make to a *conceptualization of the political*. Moreover, in the shift to a politics of children any close alignment of childhood and care, and the gendering of such relations, is erased in favour of an implicitly masculine conceptualization of the child as a political actor.

This difficult relation to gender has been central to a politics of childhood. Central to this has been a critique of understandings of children that locate them only inasmuch as they are products of families and reproduced through systems of care and welfare. This has meant that Childhood Studies scholars have been critical of 'protectionist' ideas about childhood (see Archard 1993), but more extensively the project of giving children a voice and facilitating their rights has been dependent on the demand to 'extricate children, conceptually, from parents, the family and professionals' (Mayall 2000: 243). The extrication of children from such ideas and practices of development, protection and care (namely, a set of ideas and practices that place women and children in a normalized alignment) and the placing of children, conceptually, fully into the realm of the social and the sociological is also seen in terms of a movement of children from the a-political to the political: '[t]he sociological project is to work initially on the task of extracting children theoretically from the family in order to study their social positioning as a social group' (Mayall

2000: 247). Yet for Mayall and others such a move does not simply mean an acceptance of a gendered division of labour and space that sees a public realm shaped by the supposedly masculine affairs of economics and politics and a feminized private realm of domesticity, mothers, children, and reproduction. On the contrary, the domestic is itself seen in terms of economics and politics (Mayall 2000: 248). The work of Carol Smart and colleagues (Smart, Neale and Wade 2001) has, for example, been significant in conceptualising family as a site of political contestation and negotiation and her work has been very clearly aligned with Giddens' public policy work on 'the democracy of the family' (Giddens 1998).

In mainstream political theory and political sociology, there is a tradition that sees a dissolution of the divide between private and public as constituting a broader societal shift which is typified by the decline of public man. For example, Hannah Arendt has argued that the modern age sees an increasing surpassing of the political by the exigencies of the private, of necessity, of reproduction and of economics as *oikonomia* (i.e. as household management). This transition is aligned with the growth of modern issues of welfare and of the growth of the state (Arendt 1998). Or Richard Sennet, in his conclusion to *The Fall of Public Man*, presents two images of what he calls 'intimate tyrannies': the first is 'a life limited by children, mortgages on the house, quarrels with one's spouse' and the second 'the police state in which all one's activities, friends, and beliefs pass through the net of governmental surveillance' (Sennett 1977: 337). Domestication (both petty homeliness and also state surveillance and control), in which the child becomes a dominant figure, is contrasted with an idea of the *res publica* and public man. Childhood Studies may have issues with this reading of modernity, but in its critique of normative ideas about socialization or development, it has often failed to mark the infancy of children as a point of *difference in and against* a dominant model of political agency that is predicated on a free individual expressive subject within *res publica*. Often children's politics has been argued on the basis, not only of it freeing children, conceptually, from the household, but also from a realm of necessity seen in terms of reproduction and the biological. This is certainly the main thrust of the political ontology offered by James and Prout (1990) (see Oswell 2016). Much recent work on biopower, biopolitics, and hybrid humans/technologies/natures begins to shift the basis of this ontology (Lee 2014; Prout

2005; Wells 2011). And some feminist work in Childhood Studies raises significant questions about children's socially necessary labour and a gendered division of social reproductive labour (Rosen and Newberry, forthcoming). But any rethinking of children's politics must rethink also the conservative core republicanism at the heart of Childhood Studies. To think about the spaces of children's politics, or children's 'spaces of appearance' in Arendt's terms (1998), implies a deconstruction not only of children's relation to family and welfare, but also their relation to politics itself, to the dominant models through which politics has been conceptualized. The original spirit of Mayall's articulation of a sociology for children with a politics of childhood needs to be pushed further in terms of the very givenness of the political itself, inasmuch as children can't simply be offered a ready-made mask of 'political actor', but rather their presence in politics is itself a push for redrawing the terms, conditions and positionalities of politics. In this sense, over and above the innovations of Alderson's research on the politics and rights of babies and infants, her work repeats this form of political actor (Alderson, 2000). In order to think through this problematic I want to focus specifically on the work of Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler on speech and political space and to consider further, but also provisionally, the question of 'what kind of space is the space of children's politics'. In doing so, I will first consider questions about political contestation and assembly and, second, questions about the material support or infrastructuring of political space.

### From Voice to Assembly

If politics, at its most radical moment, refers to the processes through which actors and resources bring about social change (namely, processes of disturbance and transition), then it refers to a different set of processes than 'the social', which is the object of such disturbance and transition. It is important to understand the social practices, agencies and dynamics that form a social system or social world. It is also important to understand how children are key social actors and agents in the social worlds they inhabit. To write 'children into the script of social order' is an important aspect of a broader epistemological politics regarding the contribution of children to social order. Such sociological work has taken different perspectives (e.g. the Bourdieusian

research of Alanen and Siisiäinen (2011) or the actor-network research of Prout (2005)). But in failing to differentiate ‘the political’ from ‘the social’, and in conflating ‘political actors’ with ‘social actors’, such work has offered empirical observation and theoretical analysis of the status quo, not of change as a political formation dependent on a transitional political moment. Such sociological work might consider the social dynamics within which people and resources are formed; it might also offer an account of the unequal distribution of resources between actors as constitutive of such dynamics; but the position and force of such actors in the overturning of one system or dynamic into another on the basis of such inequalities might be seen as political, and not only sociological. In this sense, to talk of a situation as political is to understand such a situation as something more than sociological. Martin Breugh defines the social bond as collective existence, but the political bond as collective action (2013: 202-3), by which he means not simply collective agency, but concerted orchestrated agency that brings about a change in the structure of collective existence.

Jacques Rancière helps us to think of this political formation and what might constitute such a political moment; moreover, he, perhaps unwittingly, allows us to think of such a moment in terms of the question of infancy. His engagement with the question of the political is framed in terms of its classical European ‘origins’ (*arkhe*) in Aristotle. The patriarchal, Eurocentric and slave-owning contexts for such thought clearly constitute limitations. For Rancière such an origin is a point of contestation and reinterpretation. Rather than repeat the idea that there is an anthropological divide between the human animal and other animals by virtue of speech, or reason through speech (*logos*), Rancière reads Aristotle’s discussion about ‘man as a political animal’ (*zōon politikon*) as a problem about recognition and dispute (1999: 21-42). It is not that Rancière is dismissive of the idea of a life committed to public affairs (*bios politicos*), but that he contests its foundationalist and essentialist assumptions (cf. Arendt 1998; Agamben 1998). He refuses an idea that who has and who doesn’t have political speech might be based on the qualities, attributes and capacities of the person (namely, refusing that there is an essentialist reason for not recognising women or barbarians or slaves or children within the political community or *polis*). For us this means refusing essentialist ideas about adult reasonable and rationale speech set against

essentialist ideas about the babble, or lesser speech, of infants. On the one hand, Rancière sees the classification of people and things into different types of people and things in terms of what he refers to as *police*. He doesn't see this exactly in Foucauldian terms as a question of control or government (Rancière 2010: 94-6); rather he sees this in terms of how the sensible (that which is and can be perceived and sensed) is distributed (e.g. in terms of those who might be seen to have some qualities and capacities rather than others). For example, small children are seen to embody, as a form of habitus, a lack of seriousness and a propensity for play. Groups of teenage black boys may be felt by some white adults as threatening and hyper-aggressive. These racist biases and prejudices are not simply cognitive constructions and classifications; they are felt and sensed as habitus, as a form of the distribution of the sensible. In contrast, and on the other hand, Rancière refers to *politics* as that which contests and overturns the distribution of the sensible that is policed. The contestation is predicated on a dispute or on the recognition of a *wrong*. He refers to dispute through the notions of *disagreement* or *dissensus* (Rancière 1999 and 2010). Politics, in this sense, is a rare occurrence, inasmuch as it does not refer to a generality across all social existence. The wrong at the heart of politics is twofold; it refers both to the fact of domination (i.e. to forms of political subjectification and relations of dependency) and to the symbolic distribution of bodies into 'those that one sees and those that one does not, those who have a logos... and those who have no logos, those who really speak and those whose voice merely mimics the articulate voice to express pleasure and pain' (Rancière 1999: 22). In contrast to Aristotle, to the presumption that politics is predicated on a primary distinction between those animals who speak (and who have capacity for justice, for thinking about what is useful and what is harmful) and those who only make noise (*phone*) (and who merely express sounds of pleasure and pain), Rancière argues that such a distinction (a distribution of bodies and the sensible) is dependent precisely on a prior articulation, namely on the account given by those who lay claim to having speech. He states that: '[p]olitics exists because the logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech' (1999: 22-23). Politics names the contestation of the distribution of the sensible on the basis of those who can speak and those who are deemed unable to speak, but also of the recognition of some sounds as speech and some as noise or babble.



Although Rancière begins with the analogy of speech, it is clear that such an understanding of politics implies the recognition of more than speech. The sensible for Rancière refers to an idea of aesthetics 'as the system of *a priori* [albeit defined in Foucauldian terms as a kind of historical *a priori*] forms determining what presents itself to sense experience' (2006: 13). The sensible is understood as *aesthesis*, as that which is perceptible, sensed, and experienced. The sensible is that which can be expressed and that which can be experienced as expression, such that expression is not necessarily vocal, but can imply an articulation across a range of media and mediums. In that sense then, we have an understanding of children's politics that is not reduced to children's voice and the recognition (or not) of that voice as speech (i.e. it is not simply about giving children a platform to speak or listening to what children say, although that is clearly important) nor is it reduced to children and adults in intergenerational dialogue, such that politics is defined as the sharing of experiences and positionalities through interactional talk. In that sense, the imperative 'voice is not enough' would constitute a radical demand regarding our common sense of what constitutes the political, a demand more radical than found in Lundy's framing of the issue (2007). It is more than an invitation to participate. A children's politics would define that which ruptures the perceptions of those dominant in such a way that their perceptions are radically refigured and such that the participants of a new settlement includes those children and their sensibilities that were previously excluded.

Politics implies, for Rancière, the 'demonstration of a gap in the sensible itself' (2010: 38). What was perceived and recognized as noise is placed next to the sound of speech as if they were equivalent, on the same stage. And the force that presents noise on the same stage is understood by Rancière as the righting of a wrong, as the demonstration of a dispute. The righting of such a wrong though is not on the basis of a more accurate and representative account; rather it is on the basis of those excluded, those seen only to emit noise, apparently simply placing themselves side-by-side on 'a common stage' with those who, prior to such a moment, failed or refused to recognize their sounds as if it were speech. Rancière talks about this moment in terms of 'the deployment of a specific scene of revelation' (1999: 25). This moment is quintessentially political: 'Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those

present on it' (1999: 26-7). But those who contest the dominant order, who contest adultist authority and expertise, do so not because they have well-defined identities prior to the contestation and on the basis of which such contestation is made (i.e. in terms of interests and experiences). Rather, those who are not counted - those who are not taken into account and are seen as having no capacity to account for themselves - present themselves on the same stage, in common, with those who refuse their recognition and in doing so they contest the prior terms of recognition and perception. They contest such terms on the basis of a wrong, namely the wrong of their prior exclusion. Central to such contestation is the contestation of the presumed prior identities. In that sense, any politics of children, we might assume, is also a contestation of the identities and established discourses of 'child/adult', 'children/adults', and 'childhood/adulthood'. Politics, in this sense, implies a radical re-thinking and a radical re-representation. In Rancière's terms politics implies the gauging of incommensurables: '[t]he incommensurables of the equality of speaking beings and the distribution of social bodies are gauged in relation to each other, and this gauge has an effect on the distribution itself' (1999: 39-40).

The fact of the social and cultural diversities of children and adults, through gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class and (dis)ability, is not questioned. Yet, the placing of children's perceptions and sensibilities (as more than those specified diversities) alongside those of the adults, who have presumed to know, to differentiate, and to do the work of writing social order, is political inasmuch as those now present on the stage do not simply repeat the words of adults, nor do they even speak as adults speak, but they upset the very terms and conditions of the relationship. And in this sense, this upsetting is not simply 'dialogue'. The psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden talks about the case of Robert, a blind schizophrenic teenager, who has a fear of spiders and who never washes for fear of being sucked down the plughole. Robert wore the same clothes day after day and his hair was matted with grease and dirt. In his account of the psychoanalytic sessions with Robert, Ogden talks about feeling 'invaded by this patient'. He says, 'I felt as if he had managed to get inside of me - to get under my skin - by means of his odour that was saturating my furniture' (Ogden 1989: 57 quoted in LaFrance 2009: 17). Ogden understands his feelings about Robert in terms of Robert's determination to make his presence felt (which Ogden

analyses in terms of a sense of a 'second skin') such that 'he attempted to ground himself in the sensation of his own distinct bodily odour, which was of particular importance to him in the absence of the capacity to form well-defined visual images... His odour provided the rudiments of being someone (someone who had a particular odour), being somewhere (somewhere in which he could perceive his odour), and being something for another person (a person who could smell him, be infused by him, and remember him)' (Ogden, 1989: 58 quoted in Lafrance 2009: 17). Although this example raises questions about sensibilities and the sensible, I am not though suggesting that this is a form of politics because it is not clear that the register of the interaction has changed. The gauging of the two sets of sensibilities in a single measure on a single stage is political if, and only if, the measure itself is changed. If this meant that children spoke simply as we might expect and recognize them to speak, then it would mean we would continue to place them in the same position within any social order prior to such speaking. But if the process of being political is not based on prior political subjects becoming aware of their inequality or of the interests of their pre-defined community, then politics is radically precarious. This means two things: firstly, the political subjectivity of infants is such that any intentionality, any motivation to change the status quo does not take the appearance of the well-defined political subjects in relation to which we may be familiar. We can't map an infant politics onto those images of vanguardist demonstrators or articulate spokespersons in debating chambers. There will be a novelty that is genuinely surprising. Secondly, the language used to talk about the infancy of a children's politics is necessarily both partial and metaphoric. It is partial because it cannot claim to represent a constituency of one set of people against another. And it is metaphoric because it necessarily has a hesitancy to that which it represents, inasmuch as any 'reality' is revealed *post hoc*, after the moment of politics. Moreover, the outcome of a children's politics is not that it cannot be seen and felt (inasmuch as the outcome constitutes a re-distribution of the sensible), but that its recognition by others is seen as caught up in the structure of the social that is at the core of the problem. All of this suggests both a novelty and a surprise, but also a sense of care, attentiveness and support with regard to such fledgling moments. Whereas an adult vanguardist politics or the idea of political debate in an assembly might presume ready-made political actors, fully equipped to take on the task of social and political

change, an infant politics, in contrast, is in need of support and infrastructure. Such infrastructure is needed as a basic and primary demand.

In such rethinking, children, inasmuch as they might be defined through their infancy, change the nature of political discourse, not simply in terms of what they say (i.e. the comprehensible content of their expressions), but by virtue of the range of form, substance and force through which their presence articulates a politics. It would be incorrect to assume that a children's politics can simply and solely be conceptualized in terms of a (re)distribution of the sensible. Any children's politics as a basic command equally implies a (re)distribution of resources, bodies, materialities and technologies. Any repositioning of children, vis-a-vis their equality, means thinking about the infrastructures through which voices can be heard, staged and assembled and positions elevated. Infrastructure is not thought as simply technical (e.g. roads, pipes, cables, computer systems, etc) nor is it thought to the exclusion of people, but rather in terms of the mix across the two (see Oswell 2013). In AbdouMaliq Simone's thinking, infrastructure is understood in terms of the 'modes of provisioning and articulation' such that these are productive, reproductive, positioning, and distributive of people and things across places and territories over time. Infrastructures are defined through the overlapping and complex patterns of conjunctions, that are not static or fixed, but 'incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional' (Simone 2004: 407-8). Judith Butler has a similar sense of infrastructure as an arrangement, both material and performative. But she emphasizes its supportive nature with regard to the vulnerability of bodies and people. Taft's research on participatory structures in children's and young people's workers movement in Peru considers the deep commitment to the creation of 'collaborative intergenerational relationships', but also how 'many adults have difficulty creating intergenerational dialogue without reverting to habituated and hegemonic adult/child relationships' (Taft, 2015: 470). To talk about infrastructure is to talk also about the interdependency of lives: '[t]here is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, and relations to the environment and to non-human forms of life, broadly considered' (2009: 19). For Butler such support is increasingly recognized as a political

demand, 'a demand for a certain kind of inhabitable ground and its meaning and force derive precisely from that lack' (2015: 127). The demand is 'not for all kinds of infrastructure, since some serve the decimation of livable life (e.g. military forms of detention, imprisonment, occupation, and surveillance, for instance), and some support livable life' (2015: 127). Butler talks about support for mobility in terms, for example, of the rights of women to walk on the streets at night, of Palestinians to walk through prohibited areas, or for black men in the US to walk without being arrested or shot (2015: 128). For children, often infrastructures that facilitate political spaces are so lacking that their possibilities are only fleetingly glimpsed. A group of fourteen year old girls might demand a secure environment and transport between respective homes and a party across town at night: a demand for a right to the city, a demand for freedom of movement at all times of day, a demand that requires thinking through mobility, age and gendered violence beyond the impasse of threat and protection.

Understanding children's, and others', vulnerabilities (as might be suggested in the work of Taft in her critique of neoliberal agency with regard to young women's activism (2011), Harris and Shields Dobson on suffering actors (2015), and Mizen and Ofusu-Kusi on children's agency as vulnerability (2013) and Puar (2009) on debility and disability) allows us to have a more attenuated sense of agency. It also raises the questions about the relation between bodies, not only as lived experience, but as living bodies in need of support and infrastructure. Research suggests that all bodies, infantile and adult, are entangled through infrastructure and that (human) living requires such interdependency (Manning 2009), but some lives seem more fragile and more in need of support. Or perhaps it is simply that different bodies need to be at different times and spaces differently supported. To talk about children and vulnerability lets in the question of biology. Evelyn Thoman states that an 'infant's behavior is the ultimate expression of its biological functioning' (Thoman 1980: 243 quoted in Gottlieb 2004: 57). But rather than write this off as a 'social construction', it is important to unpack its biopolitics. Rather than dismiss the claims regarding infancy and biology, it is important to understand how those claims constitute a necessary heritage for the lives of some children, providing them with complex supportive infrastructures. To overturn or to out-live those infrastructures itself requires support and care and the alliances of others.

Equally, it is important to consider that what constitutes 'biology' (as physiology or as development, etc) is too heavily laden with Western connotations and such connotations need to be factored into any investigation and understanding (see Gottlieb 2004: 60-1).

To talk about children's politics in terms of both infancy and infrastructure through the writing of Butler lays bare the vulnerability of infant bodies in a way that doesn't isolate those bodies from other bodies and from infrastructure, but precisely allows us to think through their necessary correlation. Whose bodies and what infrastructures support children doing politics? Through what articulations are bodies and technologies assembled? If, for example, babies communicate not only through sound, but through poohing and peeing, crying and cuddling, what bodies and mechanisms fit together? What might it mean, as Alma Gottlieb says, to shift 'the theoretical axis from the vocal cords to the urinary tract'? It would certainly 'unsettle our language-based model of communication at the same time that it may violate our notions of bodily pollution' (Gottlieb 2004: 55). This is not to suggest an understanding of children's politics as carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1968), but simply to think about how different bodies assemble in relation to different media (pooh, urine, milk, salty water) and through different technologies (nappies, barrier cream, potties).

## Conclusions

The paradox that infancy throws up for politics is that if politics is concerned with overturning current structures and institutions and the mobilization of resources and peoples with regard to such an overturning, then infancy is defined precisely as a condition without access to such means. Infancy is defined as without voice and without resources, but also as the body that inhabits such exclusion and negation. Childhood Studies has been insistent on not letting a definition of children's politics fall back on such an idea of infancy and it has insisted on a theoretical equivalence between children and adults as political actors and agents. And yet, in doing so, it has disavowed the difference that children make to politics. This chapter, then, has argued that Childhood Studies, but also mainstream political theory, needs to (re-)engage with the problematic of infancy in (children's) politics in order to think through that difference and in order to

begin a reconceptualization of the political. The work of Rancière and Butler provide significant, but certainly not the only, points of departure. To think about infancy in politics means that:

- we need to reconsider the media and mediums through which politics is demonstrated;
- we need to think about the infrastructures, the systems of support, the apparatuses and devices that facilitate the spaces through which politics appears and through which change occurs;
- and we need to consider vulnerability as a necessary facet of political alliances and mobilization, inasmuch as it signals a basic requirement of solidarity (that we cannot act alone, because on our own we are weak and helpless to bring about change) and, as such, taking care of others, with others, constitutes a central element to consider in thinking about counter-hegemonic political change.

To argue for these basic starting points is not to discredit the forms and practices of participation and decision-making that form the ground of much current formal and institutional children's politics. It is not an argument against children's councils or young people's parliaments. Nor is it necessarily against the practical impact of 'ladders of participation' (Hart 1992) as a device for enabling and encouraging children's participation in formal organizational contexts. Rather to argue for these basic starting points, as I have done above, for a politics-with-infancy means to argue for a broader sense of politics than one constrained by ideas of intentionality and reasoned, well-argued debate and to open up our sensitivities to noises and stutterings within a broader hegemonic children's politics. Moreover, in this framing, post-adultification means building political infrastructures beyond an adult/child binary. It means foregoing a politics of childhood 'in opposition' to adults, but embracing a politics of articulation across different constituencies of people and contexts. It is equally important to think about politics-with-infancy in relation to teenagers as to babies. To think about the infancy of children's politics does not mean posing a new ontological foundation for children's political agency. Infancy does not constitute a new model of political agency nor does it offer a new form of identity politics. Rather it simply presents a fissure in current conceptualizations of the political.

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