Rita Braches-Chyrek (ed.)

The Future of Childhood Studies

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Contents

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Preface

In this book, we will discuss how childhood studies needs to, and might, develop in the future. Since the 1990s, empirical and theoretical work coming out of the „new social studies of childhood" have been the catalyst for a diversity of empirical research, for policy analysis, and for the development of professional practice. This has especially been the case in the field of children's rights and well-being but perhaps less so in other key fields. In addition, we need to critically address the question of whether we need alternative conceptualisations of children and childhood in late modernity/late capitalism? Or is it enough to connect the key assumptions and positions of the „new social studies of childhood" with the heterogeneous and complex constructions of childhood via interdisciplinary approaches whilst retaining the critical considerations that childhood studies offer?

In regards to these question, we propose the following main topics for the contributions:

- *the social and cultural character of childhood in relation to the generational order – change or continuity?*
- *the social construction of childhood and children`s agency – critical challenges or critiques?*
- *the role of new technologies in the cultural and social construction of childhood – revolution or intensification?*
- *interdisciplinarity – new knowledge or just more knowledge?*
- *synthesing social theory, social policy and empirical findings of social science research – conformism or expansion?*
- *and children's rights – technologies of the self or routes to (roots of) politicisation?*

Jo Moran-Ellis

Future-proofing childhood studies? If we can't predict the future, can we at least prepare for it?

Questions about the future of childhood studies are being asked at a time of great national and international uncertainty and, in some contexts, crisis. The financial turmoil experienced across Europe and beyond has prompted commentaries on the future of capitalism (see especially Castells et al. 2012; Cunningham 2014; Picketty 2014; Wallerstein et al. 2013; Shipman et al. 2018) whilst mass movements of people fleeing war, oppression, and calamities of famine and drought, significant numbers of whom are children, have generated contention over how European nations should and can respond. The rise of various nationalisms has unleashed sentiments which have a worrying similarity to those that prefigured the rise of fascism in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Reflecting on these contexts which are shaping the future as well as the present, it is clear that there are urgent questions to be addressed concerning how Childhood Studies[1] can, will and should contribute to social scientific understandings of the futures that emerge. Tied up with these questions are considerable challenges as to how the 'subject' of Childhood Studies is constituted: as a category of personhood named as 'child', as groups of children in different and specific circumstances, as the institution of childhood itself, or a combination of these?

In addition, we can see that there are current challenges concerning the 'home' disciplines that form the core of the social studies of childhood, and debates as to which conceptual and theoretical resources offer the most analytic purchase for different phenomena relevant to the lives of children and the condition of childhood. In the light of such a range of questions and uncertainties, one possible move is to think about ways in which 'Childhood Studies' can be 'future-proofed' so that it remains relevant as a field of scholarship which can make vital contributions to understanding societies on both global and local scales. This 'future-proofing' could involve looking again at the core critical perspectives that have been central to the inception of the field in order to examine how they might need to be developed or revitalised as tools of analysis, whatever changes might materialise. This would require not a solidifying of thinking but rather a comprehensive appraisal of the benefits and limitations of the primary conceptual and theoretical thinking that constituted Childhood Studies in the first place and an evaluation of their potential usefulness in the future.

This chapter takes as its starting point the idea that whatever shape the future takes will be significant in the lives of children *and* significant for the nature and meaning of childhood as a societal phenomenon. On this basis

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[1] I use the term 'Childhood Studies' to denote this specific field of scholarship rather than simply the study of children and childhood which is the substantive topic.

alone, Childhood Studies must be ready to make vital contributions to not only understanding the shape and form of different significances as they emerge, intensify, are ameliorated or countered, but also to thinking about wider social processes framed through intergenerational relations. Rather than argue for a specific theoretical or empirical approach to support this, as was the case when James and Prout (1990) argued for the primacy of social constructionist theory and qualitative methodologies for studying children and childhood, I argue here for a deepening of critical thinking about children's agency, and about the relationship between children, childhood and intersections of micro, meso and macro processes. In my view, this opens up the means of 'future-proofing' Childhood Studies by retaining the raison d'etre for it as a scholarly field whilst enabling that field to engage with key questions concerning the relationships between children, childhood and wider social and political processes.

In the next section I examine the foundational call to position children as social actors who are 'agentic' that underpinned the establishment of a major branch of Childhood Studies. I then argue for a refinement of thinking about the concept of agency on the one hand, and the intersections of the structural, the institutional, and the relational on the other. The chapter concludes with the point that the denaturalisation of children and childhood must remain central to all social studies, whatever their focus maybe.

Social Actorship and Agency – past, present and future

As outlined in the introduction, there are some core propositions at the heart of Childhood Studies, two of which are: 1) that children are social actors and that they (can) act agentically, 2) that children's lives should be understood at micro, meso and macro levels with attention paid to how these different levels of society are connected with each other and what mediates those connections. The first was intrinsically linked to the agenda that Childhood Studies established in the last decade of the twentieth century: namely to be an inter-disciplinary field of study which would engage with children's lives and the nature of childhoods from a position which located children as social actors in their own right, and recognised their perspectives as valid sources of insight into their experiences in, and understandings of, the social worlds they inhabit (James/Prout 1990; Waksler 1991; Mayall 1994; Qvortrup et al. 1994; James et al. 1998; Moran-Ellis 2010). Connected to this, children were framed as active agents in their own lives, mediated through their interactions with other actors (James/Prout 1990) and the materialities of their worlds (Hutchby/Moran-Ellis 1998). The second foundational proposition was concerned with understanding the relevance of macro-level processes and structures, meso-level institutions, and micro-level interactions for the shape and form of childhood, children's lives, and their subjective experiences. This is well demonstrated, for example, in the work on childhood poverty (eg. Ridge 2011; Ben Arieh et al. 2014).

The theoretical claim, and the empirical evidence underpinning it, that children should be taken seriously as social actors and as agents posed a con-

siderable challenge to the dominance of developmental psychology[2] and Parsons' functionalist theory of socialisation (Moran-Ellis 2013) in studies of children's lives. In 1998, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis noted that:

„Over recent years, what can be described as a 'competence paradigm' in the sociology of childhood has emerged in a number of key publications [...] The main thrust of this research is to take issue with the perspective on children and childhood propounded by developmental psychology, and by socialization theory in mainstream sociology, in which children are seen as the objects of overarching social processes by which they move from being non-adults to being adults. Without denying that human beings develop over time and in describable ways, nor that appropriate social behaviours are learned and not natural, the competence paradigm seeks to take children seriously as social agents in their own right; to examine how social constructions of 'childhood' not only structure their lives but also are structured by the activities of children themselves and to explicate the social competencies which children manifest in the course of their everyday lives as children, with other children and with adults, in peer groups and in families, as well as the manifold other arenas of social action" (Hutchby/Moran-Ellis 1998: 8).*

In effect, empirical work showed that, as social actors – 'meaning-makers' in Mead's terms (Mead 1934) –, children have a relationship to the world(s) they inhabit and to themselves which is mediated by their self-view, their self-understanding, and their understandings of social orderings (such as each of these are at whichever point in their lives). For all social actors, adult and child, understanding and self-view are emergent and relational, and are the underpinnings for the intentions which shape the social actions of individuals. So, being a social actorship is significant for social action and, given *social* action is underpinned by intention, intention and acting are thus the basis for conscious agency but are not, in themselves, sufficient for agency to be realised since agency is situated within, possibly competing or conflicting, social orderings. This is no less the case for adults than for children.

We can also note a parallel between a sociological view of agency as the link between how a person understands the world and their intentional actions in relation to this, and the social cognitive conceptualisation of agency as the *outcome* of action, cognition, affect and other factors including environmental ones (Bandura 1989). This is persuasive in positioning agency as a core feature of being human: an important point, since it neither presupposes nor requires conditions of independence or autonomy for the individual.

However, not all action leads to the outcomes intended by the actor, and not all intended actions are realisable. Hence, agency must be understood as an interactional accomplishment (Hutchby/Moran-Ellis 1998) not as an internal property of the individual, and this is again the case for both adults and children. For children, however, the limitations of resources, power, and exposure to experiences which can expand world- and self-views are very significant for their capacity to be agentic (see Moran-Ellis et al. 2014, for an illustration of this point). This is a point to which I will return later. The situated nature of agency is something which Hutchby and Moran-Ellis also stressed:

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2   See Luke 1989, Hendrick 1990, Burman 2008, and Turmel 2008 for various histories of the dominance of the discipline of psychology in creating accounts of normative childhoods.

„ ...the idea that children are competent social agents requires that researchers situate the study of those competences in the empirical circumstances of children's real, ordinary everyday lives [...] that those empirical circumstances, or 'arenas of action' can be both enabling and constraining in terms of children's capacity to display social competencies [...] in order to understand adequately the properties of children's social competence in the arenas in which it is situated, it is necessary to attempt to view the relevant social action 'from within', that is, as far as possible, to reveal the procedures by which the participants themselves organize and make sense of their activities in a given social context" (original emphasis; p10).

Recent work in Childhood Studies concerned with mapping future trajectories for the field conceptually and theoretically have often been formulated around critiques of the emphasis on agency and social actorship in the early work which came to define the field in the UK at least – in particular the arguments made by James and Prout 1990; Qvortrup et al. 1994; James et al. 1998; Mayall 1994; and Waksler 1991. Spyrou (2018), writing in the editorial of one of four special sections in *Childhood* about the current and future directions for Childhood Studies commented that there is some need to examine the starting points of this field, identifying agency as one idea which needs re-exploration, and calling for more of a foregrounding of 'relational understandings and approaches' (p420). He also reflects on calls by various current scholars for a „much bolder engagement with developmental psychology now that Childhood Studies has matured enough to overcome its defensiveness" (p420).

I share Spyrou's call for a deeper engagement with questions of agency as a relational phenomenon, and note that this is not just relevant to Childhood Studies. This deeper engagement becomes more pressing in the light of social trends which look likely to develop further and be significant for societies since without a more theoretically informed conceptualisation of agency we are not in a position to identify how human beings can and do respond to these trends in ways which can help combat inequalities and injustices. As Moran-Ellis and Sünker have noted elsewhere,

„Manuel Castells argues, in the last volume of his three volume work on „The Information Age", the production of a „responsible, educated society" (Castells 1998: 353) is absolutely necessary for the very survival of the human species in the face of all the predicted environmental catastrophes we face since we cannot depend only on the idea of governments as responsible agents. A responsible, educated society has to be composed of educated citizens who can structure and form their social relationships based on reflexivity, social power of judgement and competence in politics underpinned by the capacity to reason and to determine the means by which this can be achieved for themselves" (Moran-Ellis/Sünker 2018: 284).

The realisation of this educated citizen, ready for whatever future conditions and events transpire, has to be based on the capacity of the individual to be agentic. This means fostering the capacity to engage in democratic processes from as early in life as possible (Sünker/Moran-Ellis 2008) as a social actor – a point which has also been brought to the fore by UNICEF (2002: 14) in a global context and in an EU White Paper on Youth (European Commission 2001/2011) with respect to the European scale. This brings together both an empirically demonstrable aspect of children's lives – their constitution as social actors who can act with intention – with a political imperative.

So, the global issues and challenges which we can imagine as the most relevant for societies in the (not so distant) future - including the environment, world-wide inequalities and injustices, global flows in labour and refugee migrations, expansions of digital worlds, the challenges to, and of, late capitalism, the rise and fall of different global powers, austerity, AI and robotics, the rise of nationalism and right-wing populism – can be met head on analytically and politically by Childhood Studies in the future partially through a serious consideration of how agency is conceptualised and understood, and how far it can offer explanatory power. To be clear, I am not arguing here for the ontological conceptualisation of an autonomous, independent figure long promulgated in Western scholarship with all that is problematic with that. As Burkitt (2016) argues, a relational sociological approach to agency by default locates social actors within manifold social relations and the significance of some of those social relations lies in their communal nature. So, my call is for recognitions of inter-dependency, relationality, and the significance of material conditions of action, of capitalist modes of production, and modes of societalisation, for human action. In respect of interdependencies and the relevance of vulnerability within this, children are often characterised as intrinsically vulnerable and/or 'incompetent' and are hence unable to be agentic in any kind of meaningful way. However, Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013) show us that children themselves may evaluate their own vulnerabilities and frailties as part of their framework for acting and in this sense agency and vulnerability are not mutually exclusive.

Keeping questions of agency and actorship at the forefront of future work in Childhood Studies also allows for connections with questions of inter-generationality, post-colonialism, and global issues, for example, whilst still locating children clearly at the centre of our gaze and taking into account issues of power, resources, and ideologies. To do this, though, requires a sharper engagement with the concept of agency and a reworking of how it is conceptualized. In the next section I sketch out two elements of this sharper conceptualization which have not yet been addressed in the literature – scope and scale[3].

Extending conceptual thinking about agency – scope and scale

Before looking at how the conceptualization of agency can be extended it is useful to check the contemporary picture of its deployment at least in terms of volume of use. Looking only at two key English-language journals[4] – *Childhood* and *Children & Society* – agency featured in around 300 articles in the former and 700 articles in the latter in the period between 2000 and 2018. Of the 300 articles in *Childhood*, 27% (82) mentioned agency in the abstract, 9% (27) included the term in the title of the article, and 7% (22) nominated it as a keyword. The picture was similar for *Children & Society*: 13% (93) of articles mentioned agency in the abstract, 3% included as part of the title, and 6% (45) nominated it as a keyword. The gap between the use of the term 'agency' as

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3   Although see Neumann, 2009, for a discussion of the concept of scale in human geography.
4   Search conducted using journal search engines, advance search feature.

part of a text and its positioning as a central feature of an empirical study or theoretical publication is considerable. This reflects a tendency in Childhood Studies more generally to 'invoke' the term agency rather than to open up the 'black box' of agency (Campbell 2009) and social actorship and subject it to critical scholarship (see Moran-Ellis 2013; Mizen/Ofusu-Kusi 2013).

This 'black box' approach is problematic since as a core tenet of the argument that children's views and experiences are as important as those of adults for understanding the social world and social phenomena, agency is given considerable weight. The current questioning of the value of this concept for Childhood Studies and challenges to its use are therefore made in a context of a preceding lack of analysis of it both theoretically and substantively. Some of the more recent critical work on agency has characterised a situation in Childhood Studies where there is an „almost dogmatic insistence on agency and its constitutive importance for Childhood Studies" (Esser et al. 2016: 2) and attention is drawn to the limitations of this concept (p5). However, the problem may be less to do with the concept and more to do with limited analyses that do not pay sufficient attention to the socio-political, structural and institutional contexts in which children and adults are embedded with all the consequences of these contexts for the distribution of power[5]. A further key error is to take agency as an internal property of the individual, exhumed from any cultural, social, historical or other context, or to presume that there is an elision of agency with conformity conceptually, a presumption criticised elsewhere (Moran-Ellis/Sünker 2013). In the light of these critiques, I argue future-proofing Childhood Studies entails a more nuanced theorisation of agency to take into account its relational and material nature, and the relevance of macro, meso and micro processes in children's lives including how they are mediated. Specifically, agency has to be located not only as a „practical achievement" (Hutchby/Moran-Ellis, 1998: 15) – and therefore contingent on the conditions in which actors are embedded at any given time – but also as being contingent on a series of factors which may be in play in different constellations under different circumstances. In respect of this, I have argued elsewhere (Moran-Ellis, 2013) that addressing questions of 'agentic scope and scale' provide a means of analytically taking these other factors into account, and that is the relevant to in relation to all social actors, not just children.

What, though, is meant by 'agentic scope and scale'? The online Oxford English Dictionary defines 'scope' as „The extent of the area or subject matter that something deals with or to which it is relevant" (OED)[6]. whereas 'scale'[7] can be understood as the relative size of something. In relation to agency, this brings to the forefront the need to analytically include the 'arena of action' (Hutchby/Moran-Ellis 1998) within which the social actor is acting, delineating the boundaries of that arena, the range of resources that constitute it and the distributions of their availability within it, and hence *the scope* that arena of action affords for agentic action for all and any of the social actors in that

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5   See the special issue of *Global Studies of Childhood* edited by Sutterlüty and Tisdall (2019) for a corrective to this.

6   https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/scope accessed 1 July 2018

7   https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/scale accessed 1 July 2018

arena. Here resources include the discursive, the material, the institutional, the human, and the non-human.

A second move requires an appreciation of the relative size of the effect of that action, making visible the factors and conditions which create or limit the *scale* of effect. For example, children in a day nursery may have some *scope* to be agentic through their manipulation of material resources, social rules, and discursive practices (as is well demonstrated by Danby and Baker's 1998 analysis of children playing together in an early childhood setting) but the *scale* on which the agentic accomplishment operates is bounded institutionally and locally. As the range of arenas available or open to children changes, scale may change but scope to be agentic may well remain constrained by limitations on access to resources of various kinds as a result of power relations/distributions of power or material deprivations.

In any situation, thinking about scope and scale opens up questions about the extent to which features of being a child such as size, age, levels of experience, distributions of power (in peer groups, between generations and within institutions), access to resources, effects of ideologies, and structural positionings are or are not relevant for the phenomenon under investigation or the research question being addressed. Paying attention to these generates an analytic frame for understanding the interplay between agency, vulnerability, development, knowledge, experience, access to resources and fields of action.

To illustrate this argument, we can consider the case of 9 year old Martha Payne which was reported in national UK newspapers in 2012. Martha had started her own blog about her school lunches in which she commented on the food: how it was served, how appealing it was and the quantity. She also added a photograph each time. Her blog attracted much attention from other children and from adults, and she soon had over a million viewers. The poor quality of her school dinners led to adverse publicity in the press even though this was not what Payne had sought. The school attempted to prevent her from blogging by confiscating her camera and this was widely reported in the press[8]. Martha herself wrote in a blog entitled 'goodbye'[9]:

„This morning in Maths I got taken out of class by my head teacher and taken to her office. I was told that I could not take any more photos of my school dinners because of a headline in a newspaper today… I will miss sharing and rating my school dinners and I'll miss seeing the dinners you send me too…" (Goodbye; 14 June 2012).

A clarification was added to the blog by her father stating that the decision to ban her use of a camera in school had come from the local Council, not from the school who had been supportive of her blogging.

Martha was able to accomplish her social actorship through the use of a material resource – a camera – and home access to the internet. The demonst-

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8   For example, Rowenna Davis (2012) Guardian article, accessed 1 July 2018 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/15/girl-school-dinners campaign, Huffington Post (2012), accessed 1 July 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/06/18/martha-payne-neverseconds-blog-malawi-kitchen_n_1606105.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_cs=FjvmbimxLF7jL6oanTDf7

9   http://neverseconds.blogspot.com/2012/06/goodbye.html

ration of the agentic nature of her action resides in the number of viewers of her blog, the status of those viewers, the reaction of the Council, the raising of money for a food charity, and the interaction of others with her endeavours. So, the *scope* of her agency was mediated through these resources. The arenas of action were the school dinner hall and the internet, and her actions were photographing her meals and writing a blog. Thus a genre (blogging) and a medium (website) coupled with a digital camera provided the scope for her social actorship and her agentic actions. This in itself does not prefigure the scale of her agency. With few readers and not much interest, the scale would be small, perhaps only local or confined to family which might also have meant her agentic action was confined to expressing her views. However, because of the way in which news of her blog, her support for a food charity which was intrinsic to the blog, and the reactions of the Council to adverse publicity about state-provided school meals for children in Scotland spread, the *scale* of her agency was extensive. Her scope to be agentic was initially countered through the capacity of the institution (in this case the Local Education Authority) to control the resources she could have access to during her school day – the camera. The scale of her agency was not compromised by the usual limiting features of being a child; indeed it may have been enhanced by the novelty of her status as a child.

Extending the analysis of children's social actorship to include the scope and scale of their agentic action, or attempts to be agentic, thus leads to a richer understanding of the conditions under which agency and actorship are more, or less, likely, an understanding which in is essential to Childhood Studies continuing to make its unique contribution to understanding the social world in current and future times.

Childhood beyond naturalism – integrating the micro-meso-macro

A second major contribution from Childhood Studies concerns childhood itself. Starting with a social constructionist approach[10] there has been an important de-naturalisation of childhood and a re-inscribing of its fundamentally social nature. The unravelling of this naturalism has been achieved through examining the social and historical character of the relationship between childhood, children and society, and the way in which this shapes children's lives on the one hand, and the structure of society on the other (cf. Alanen 1988; Sünker 1995; Qvortrup et al. 2009). One outcome of this has been to bring forward questions of how the micro-, meso- and macro-level domains of childhood operate to produce an ideological grounding of childhood as 'natural' and children as 'close to nature' which forecloses on opportunities for them to be visible as social actors. However, despite this, Childhood Studies has tended to focus on the micro-level of childhood with little attention paid to wider

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10   More recent theoretical moves have sought to integrate de-naturalisation with questions of material lives – for example Lee's work on the biosocial in childhood (Lee/Motzkau 2011), and critical realism in childhood studies (Alderson 2013; Larkins 2019)

societal contexts and dimensions other than as background contexts. This is problematic for building robust theories of social processes and ensuring the relevance of Childhood Studies in the future when it comes to dealing with major social issues. As Lefebvre (1961/2002) shows so compellingly, all phenomena are manifest at the level of the everyday (cf. Sünker 2013). Without this, claims about societal and structural level situations are empty. It is at the level of the lived life that the global issues of society are ultimately felt: global warming, financial crises, health crises, inequalities, injustices. And whilst they are felt and experienced at the individual level, they are nonetheless still operating at institutional and societal levels. As future scenarios unfold, analysis of the connections and mediations of these levels for children and childhood will be key. As social actors, children, and all humans, are actors on specific stages, multiple as they may be, which are erected in the socio-structural theatres of societies. The evidence for this is furnished by looking back to earlier periods of great social change.

In the period of the emergence of early Capitalism and the rise of the new bourgeoisie, it became clear even at the time that childhood was central to the success of this enterprise. As Luke charts (1989), the Lutheran reforms across Northern Europe produced the form of childhood we recognise today: childhood as a period of schooling and future-orientated investment by adults, be they parents, the Church or the State. Benjamin (1969) notes that the processes conceived for making children available to society were shaped through a constellation of functionalisation, instrumentalization, and heteronomy. Aries (1962) also charts shifts in the positioning of childhood vis a vis the State which arose with the major shifts in French society from the Ancien Regime, some 100 years after the Lutheran reforms began, a shift which Donzelot examines through a different lens but which nevertheless leads to the same conclusion that the shape of childhood is a product of State and bourgeois interests under emergent Capitalism (Donzelot 1979; Moran-Ellis/Sünker 2020). In both analyses, the key point is the generalisation of social control and the development of previously unimagined means of intervention in living conditions and life worlds of citizens. For Donzelot, the control of the 'private' family, a dangerous and unruly place from the point of view of the governing powers, is made possible through investment in the form and shape of childhood; for Aries, the sentimentalisation of childhood opens up a similar entrée into the emotions of the citizenry and governance through affect.

The persistence of these interventions which structure childhoods is evidenced in the analysis of Beck (1992: 134) who notes that in current times a system of „human service, administrative and political institutions" has developed which „intervene normatively with pedagogic and disciplinary actions in ways of life 'deviating' from the official standards of normality". In this respect, Schindler (1994: 20 ff.) reminds us that this was initially achieved through the moral intellectualisation of childhood. There is no reason to think this will be different in the future. Finally, we should also keep in mind that the production of childhood as a 'transitional state' and a preparation for the future is a firmly bourgeois and capitalistic project. Wild (1987), in a wide-ranging study of children's literature from the 18th century, notes that this material is imbued with prognoses of the future adult which the child should

become if lessons are learnt or might fail to become if they are not. This future adult is the owner of goods, is bourgeois and citoyen at the same time, and occupies an 'independent' place as a bourgeois subject in the market place (cf. Sünker, this volume). If Capitalism persists as the organising system globally then adulthood will continue to be framed in these terms, mediated with whatever societal changes arise in form and content.

As with a deepening of the conceptualisation of agency in action, a sharpening of attention to the macro-meso-micro levels and links is of utmost importance for the future of Childhood Studies as a relevant field in social sciences. This also connects with the work in Childhood Studies which has sought to critically examine generational asymmetries, critiquing the naturalisation of these asymmetries and challenging the erasure of the dialectic between autonomy and dependence which is significant throughout life for all people. In a society which places a high premium on the appearance of independence, childhood remains a period of time in which macro-structures of law and ideology and meso-structures of institutions actively constitute it as a state of personal dependence through distributions of formal and informal power between generations. The final point to be made here with respect to future developments of Childhood Studies is the significance of the way in which generationally defined social relations intersect with, and are mediated through, other structures of social inequality and asymmetry (Honig 1999; Alanen 2001; Bühler-Niederberger 2005; Bühler-Niederberger/Sünker 2008)[11].

In terms of structural analyses, the concept of generational orders and orderings offers us some important analytic purchase. However, in the future other cleavages may also become relevant, and a strong commitment to thinking across levels of society should increase the incorporation of new structural analyses into Childhood Studies. This is because, without a revolution in the status of childhood, the association between specific relations of domination and inequality will continue to constitute childhood as a period of preparation and children as 'outsiders' in society (Kaufmann 1989). Moreover, it can be shown that the mediation of structure and/or institution with action gives rise to important features of social order which are distinguished in the case of children (as well as in the case of some others) by their appearance as 'natural' orders. New 'natural' orders may arise such as children being 'naturally competent' with technology as compared to adults (Moran-Ellis/Cooper 2000; Hutchby/Moran-Ellis 2001), or children being 'naturally' caring as is seen in many discourses in early childhood education. Any such processes of 're-naturalisation' will need to be critically analysed.

Conclusion

Debates about the future of Childhood Studies are not new and are still evolving[12]. In 2005, Prout questioned the limitations of the social constructionist

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11   My thanks to Heinz Sünker for this point.
12   I have looked here at debates in the field of social sciences concerned with children and

framing of childhood, and seven years later Qvortrup (2012) challenged the way in which Childhood Studies had embraced constructionism, and was critical of what he saw as an implicit and explicit child-saving agenda in the field (p45), arguing that these two features had displaced the „…academic effort that aimed at coming to terms with the meaning of childhood as a social or a sociological phenomenon..." (p46). Arguing against the pluralisation approach in childhood studies he stated:

„A dedication to 'diversity of childhood' will necessarily entail taking into account a number of identity markers – in principle an endless number. It is, in my view, a dubious track because it diverts us from what is characteristic for childhood as a social category. Instead it privileges characteristics which do not belong to childhood or which children share with other categories – in both cases children as a category are split up" (p51).

Following on from this critique, he called for a re-strengthening of a structural approach to childhood with generation as a main framing of empirical and theoretical work to understand childhood in society - a call for a recognition of inter-generationality as a key and general point of analysis. Whilst not fully sharing Qvortrup's view, I also argue for the retention of a systematic approach to analysing childhood in the contexts of macro-meso-micro processes. In addition, my argument is a call for a deepening of the conceptualisation of agency and social actorship to more fully bring into account the relevance of material, discursive, relational and ideological conditions of acting. There is both an urgent and a long-term need for a more nuanced conceptualisation of agency through a recognition of the necessity of including analyses of scope and scale in connection to children's actions which also offers a means of analysing the mediation of the micro, meso and macro within and between societies.

Finally, the denaturalisation of childhood, and of children, and the recognition of the inscription of the political in the social worlds of children remains at stake in societal relations constituted around the production and reproduction of inequalities. Such issues are highly salient in contemporary times and look likely to be even more salient in future times. This points towards a convergence between Childhood Studies and new discussions of global politics. In some of the recent challenges in social science – post-colonial studies, new feminisms, new materialism, post-humanism – the question of children and childhood is yet to be fully explored. The place of the subjectivity of children, the forms of childhood, their social actorship, the limits and possibilities of agency along with questions of children's participation, and questions of their being and 'becoming' (Qvortrup 1994: 4) are vital areas in need of more critical, deep and nuanced exploration. Childhood Studies needs to initiate these through an incorporation of its foundational propositions, developed theoretically and empirically on the basis of the scholarship of the last 30 years, into a strong commitment to socio-theoretical analyses of societal structures and an

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childhood, however debates rage elsewhere as to whether the social even matters in children's lives in terms of their future chances. Plomin for example, argues in his new book „Blueprint: how DNA makes us who we are" that the social conditions of living for children have no relevance for whether they become wealthy or poor, happy or sad.

embracing of new ways thinking about processes and mediations across institutions and societies, and between groups and individuals.

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