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Reframing the Bio-Social in Child Research. Review of Lee, N. (2013) *Childhood and Biopolitics: Climate Change, Life Processes and Human Futures*

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In their seminal paper *The Body Made Flesh*, John Evans, Brian Davies and Emma Rich (2009) review the wide range of scholarship on children's bodies and distinguish three approaches in the context of which the body can and has been studied within the broader field of childhood studies: social constructionism (the "body without flesh"), post-structuralism with an emphasis on affects (the "body with fleshy feelings"), and corporealism (the "body made flesh"). According to the authors, the third perspective promises to overcome the "nature" – "culture" divide. However, as the authors noted in 2009 this was yet an unfinished project. As they write:

Shilling, Prout, James and others provide invaluable insight into the connections between corporeal bodies as agentic entities, "lived experience" and culture. But theirs (like ours) is an unfinished project, still stronger on conceptualising and documenting relationships between biology and culture than analysing particularly the first of these elements (Evans et al., 2009, p. 404)

How indeed can one avoid dualist thinking and binary oppositions when studying children and/or children's bodies? Nick Lee in his recently published book *Childhood and Biopolitics: Climate Change, Life Processes and Human Futures* moves, in my view, far beyond the existing approaches in this field by taking a very different point of departure: Nick Lee does not begin by exploring the body as such but explores the life processes of which children's bodies are constitutive parts. Through exploring a long series of detailed examples such as the introduction of the Mosquito teen deterrent by the UK Company "Compound Security Systems" (Chapter 2), recent debates in the fields of evolutionary psychology and epigenetics (Chapter 3), the Durham Fish Oil trial for mental enhancement (Chapter 4), the recent Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation programmes (Chapter 5) and the "framing" of children in the context the Climate Change debate (Chapters 6 & 7), Nick Lee introduces the terms "multiplicities of life, voice and resource" (pp. 50-54) and "bio-social events" (p. 77) to account for the endless-in-

principle and yet distinct-in-practice possibilities of organizing matter and subjectivity – in my words. In his own words:

A bio-social event is a meeting of one or more life processes and one or more social processes to create a new relationship of mutual relevance between the two (p. 74)

Seen in this perspective, the child body entails other “bodies” (e.g. commensal bacteria or human cells, p. 73) as well as is entailed in a variety of broader bio-political or bio-social processes and arrangements such as recent global vaccination policies or much debated natural resource management. All this takes place in dynamic ways, which can be locally distinct, and traced or scrutinised by appropriate cross-disciplinary methods and reflective analysis. Nick Lee invites us to participate in an intellectually challenging endeavour, which, in my view, promises a great balance between micro-explorations of concrete body-related practices (that may even differ between two nursery schools of the same city cf. Kontopodis, 2012) and macro-approaches to corporeality (such as Nikolas Rose’s politics of life itself, cf. Rose 2006).

Nick Lee, who has extensively reviewed a wide range of psychological, sociological and philosophical approaches in his previous very successful books (Lee, 2001; 2005), draws here on Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault and Nikolas Rose as well as on scholars such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway and Gilles Deleuze. Yet, in my view, he sets the foundations for a highly inventive and thought-provoking approach that moves beyond all these existing accounts. Nick Lee’s book reframes the bio-social with regard to child research and has challenging implications across a wide range of theories and methodologies for the study of children and childhood.

Through his very detailed and timely empirical explorations, Nick Lee introduces not only a powerful conceptual frame but also a methodology for mapping and navigating further bio-political formations that concern children’s lives and bodies elsewhere. A particular strength of this approach is its practical relevance with regard to the “bio-social education” (Lee’s term, pp. 147-151) as well as with regard to “navigating the bio-politics of childhood” i.e. undertaking certain action with respect to values such as those of sustainability and intergenerational justice on local and global levels (pp. 160-161).

Given the strengths and scope of this book, one could say that Nick Lee has now accomplished the intellectual endeavour that began almost 15 years ago, in one of his first publications i.e. the chapter “Faith in the body? Childhood, subjecthood and sociological enquiry” (published in the volume *The body, childhood and society* edited by Alan Prout in 2000), which – in combination with the other book chapters – received much attention in that time and opened the path to explore corporeality and materiality in the field of childhood studies. And yet, taking under consideration Nick Lee’s age, it looks like more books are to follow. Building on the powerful foundations, which Nick Lee already developed, future work could probably address the following issues:

- How to distinguish between so-called “life processes” (pp. 69-74, or “life forms”, p. 11) and “social processes”, which, as Nick Lee also acknowledges, is a “heuristic distinction” (p. 69)? Nick Lee’s work echoes, in my view, process-philosophical approaches of the late 19th and 20th centuries such as Whitehead’s process philosophy (Whitehead, 1929/1978), Peircian semiotics (Pape & Peirce, 1988; Peirce, 1958), Tarde’s theory of invention, imitation, and opposition (Tarde, 1897/1999) or Bakhtin’s notion of voice (Bakhtin, 1968, 1973). Much recent scholarship has turned to these resources (for example: Latour, 2005; Stengers, 2002, 2008). Entering in

dialogue with this scholarship, especially with regard to the notion of “event” as well as the notion of “voice”, could probably further inform Nick Lee’s effort to explain the dash between the “bio” and the “social”.

- With regard to methods, expanding the existing data and scholarship by means of an “anthropological mode of inquiry” while investigating emerging biomedical practices, in zones of awkward engagement on different scales (cf. Kontopodis, Niewöhner, & Beck, 2011) could also prove to be very fruitful for further developing Nick Lee’s (so far rather sociological) project – especially with regard to ethnographically mapping and analysing scientific practices such as those of evolutionary psychology or epigenetics, to which the present book also refers.

Given the wide array of theoretical discussions and empirical analyses, these suggestions do not constitute anyhow critique to the present book but rather an invitation for further thinking *along* and *with* Nick Lee. As already written above, I see this book as a highly valuable addition to the research literature in childhood and educational studies. The book also constitutes a rich and timely resource for BA and MA students in education as well as for a wide range of “reflective practitioners” in the fields of pedagogy, child policy and ecology.

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