

Under the table: Using Video-Creation to Imagine Gestures of Political Child

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Abstract

Centred around a one-minute short film of an everyday activity in a Norwegian early childhood education institution, this article will explore how thinking with video offers the ability to deconstruct and re-imagine taken-for-granted conceptions of children's political participation. Sensitive to aesthetic dimensions of video, this research-creation emphasises bodily intensities and collective vitality often less noticed in childhood research. Paired with both a close and an in-depth reading of Manning's (2016) minor gestures as political as well as Agamben's (1992, 1995) conception of gesture, the use of the cinematic technique of montage enables us to challenge dominant methodological discourses in the investigation of children's agency. While the major gestures of *political child* are often based on identifying children's individualised subject-centred and discourse-based agency, this multi-modal article will explore how video as research-creation might contribute to reconceptualising *political child* differently.

Keywords: toddler, methodology, preschool, post-qualitative, arts-based research

Necessity to reorientate ideas of *political child*

In an article from 2017, Zsuzsa Millei and Kirsi Pauliina Kallio encourage us to conceptualise the early childhood institution as a place of 'mundane political practice' (p. 31). This involves opening up ways of recognising children's political agencies beyond assumptions of 'children as political subjects in waiting' (p. 35), often based on rights and citizenships which are grounded in ideas of the rational individual subject as a decision maker in political processes. Rather, they demand a

resetting of the focus to embrace 'the plurality of political life' (p. 32) and a 'fluctuation politics unfolding' (p. 33) in the early childhood education institution.

One option to meet this demand is by visually concentrating on micro-moments in children's everyday lives. An example of this is the work of Christina MacRae (2019, 2020, 2021¹), who highlights the subtle yet impactful occurrences that often remain unnoticed, operating beneath the surface of our awareness.² Through the use of slow-motion video, she brings these hidden events into our view, challenging the conventional assumptions held by adults regarding their role in guiding children towards becoming political subjects. Instead, her work compels us to recognise that young children's (often bodily) engagement with the world, even in seemingly ordinary ways, carries political significance.

Together with Karin Murriss (2023), I have previously argued for the use of different cinematic techniques such as speed changes, framing and tracking as elements in a post-qualitative performative analysis. These techniques allow crystallising time and challenge ideas of unilinearity, progress and causality. In this article I will adopt this visual focus to explore the daily mundane political practices incorporated in children's lives. To do so, I will explore how a choreographed video montage of a minor gesture (Manning 2016) invites viewers and readers to engage in an everyday situation in an early childhood institution differently. This spotlights previously less valued elements when conceptualising what is termed in this article as *political child*. The expression draws here on the figurations of (the) child³ developed by Karin Murriss. The concept is used to challenge and imagine otherwise what the 'embodied imaginings, cognitive assumptions and beliefs' (Murriss 2016, p. 108) about children and childhood might consist of regarding a political dimension of children's agency. I start by encouraging the reader to watch the film before engaging further with the text.

The film can be viewed by using the following link:

<https://uia.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=85940e49-d804-4d05-ab49-b0bc0109d329>

The film contains a video montage of two- to three-year-old children's feet moving beneath the table while eating (Figure 1). The video footage was collected during an ethnographic inspired project aiming to explore the daily life of toddlers in a Norwegian early childhood institution.⁴ Through choreographing a common everyday situation for many Norwegian children, it is an invitation to question and reinvent how to conceptualise *political child*. The aim of this article is to describe and theorise techniques to highlight these bodily modes of political activity and how they can foster children's possibilities for political participation in their daily lives differently. The film will be used as a constant dialogue partner and example of how a visually choreographed

¹ Together with Maggie MacLure.

² Another example with infants is Silvis (2019).

³ See Murriss and Osgood (2022).

⁴ Informed consent was collected from parents and staff, while situational ethics (Menning and Kampmann 2021) was used to determine children's assent to participate there and then. Additionally, the final film was shown to parents and staff in order for them to consent to its publication.

exploration can be mobilised to rethink ideas of *political child*.



Figure 1) Screenshot of the opening image.

In the first part of the article, I will explore the concept of gesture as it allows me to drive a wedge through what Manning (2016) terms the 'volition-intentionality-agency triad' (p. 6), which is grounded in 'a notion of independence understood according to normative definitions of ability and able-bodiedness' (p. 5). Both Agamben's (1992, 1995) deliberation of the concept of gesture as bodily opening and means without end and Manning's focus on the minor (and minor gesture) will be explored as a theoretical framework. This framework will be continuously enacted and related to, and through, the film.

The second part will concentrate on the concept of research-creation and cinematic techniques to highlight the minor gesture and put the concept into practice. Here, I will explore how mobilising practices of filmmaking allow one to create research affectively by illuminating bodily expressions previously rendered as 'less desirable, as less knowledgeable, as less valuable' (Manning 2016, p. 4).

Thirdly, I will argue that this practice of visually choreographing (minor) gestures invites us to explore an alternative approach to *political child* (and children's agency) whereby *political child* is conceptualised not as a political individual subject but as a relational and ephemeral inherently political being 'to come', which leads to the demand of including the yet-unthought.

Engaging in the *minor* dimensions of children's everyday lives

The first major conceptual strand that this article mobilises is the concept of minor gestures as developed by the Canadian cultural theorist, political philosopher and artist Erin Manning. By drawing on process philosophy as developed by Whitehead and Deleuze & Guattari, she suggests

reorientating the focus of research from the *major*, as the location to explore what really matters, to the *minor*, often categorised as 'less educable, as less desirable, as less valuable' (Manning, 2016 p. 4). Several researchers have mobilised these or similar conceptual strands to explore new possibilities in educational research (e.g., Sweet, et al. 2022). Hence, this article responds to (amongst others') both Andersen's (2017) and Reinertsen's (2015) appeal for a minor approach in qualitative research.

Following these researchers, I aim to undermine the *major* as a 'structural tendency that organizes itself according to predefined definitions of value' to unanchor 'its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards' (Manning 2016, p. 1). What would be the major in this mealtime situation? From the perspective of health research, this situation might be explored to study, for example, picky eaters or how to extend children's palates to a wider horizon of tastes to support a healthier future diet. From the point of view of literacy studies, the situation could be used to help children expand their vocabulary. Others with a sociocultural background might want to explore the ritual of eating, how power is constituted and the interactions around the table, or how children's participation is constructed through the communal practice of eating according to rules, regulations and common values. In contrast, ducking beneath the table attempts to challenge the general idea of what is valued as important and hence worth researching.

Highlighting minor gestures beneath the table

Manning's (2016) focus on the minor leads her to the concept of the minor gesture as an approach to explore the (so far) less valued. According to Manning, highlighting the minor gesture guides us to the nexus between intentionality and agency, and I will argue that this move also creates an opening for challenging and re-configuring ideas of *political child* beyond individual agency and rights.

As Manning (2016, p. 2) argues, in its motion the minor gesture disrupts norms and opens new expressive paths. It is tied to the present event, yet speculative, extending its tendrils beyond the immediate context. It assigns its own transient value despite often going unnoticed due to its improvisational aspects. Thus, what is the (transient) value of (visually choreographing) moving feet under the table? Being ephemeral, this minor gesture neglects to attain access to the intention and demands to be approached differently. It makes visible the shortcoming of language and invites us to speculate, as '[i]t is the generative force that opens the field of experience' (Manning 2016, p. 64). Manning (2020) describes this eloquently in her book *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*:

The minor gesture activates the opacity of the movement of thought coursing through the occasion, tuning it to a future-pastness that alters the quality of the mode through which it will come to expression. Modes of existence are fundamentally altered by the as-yet-unthought, and it is this force-of-form that minor gestures make resonant. (p. 47)

In the case of the film, choreographing movements of feet aims to tap into the force-of-form to

engage in modes of being political that are fundamentally altered by taking notice of the possibility of exploring the yet-unthought of this event. As Manning underlines, minor gestures also challenge institutional frameworks, a point especially important to this article for witnessing young children's everyday lives in the early childhood institution. Minor gestures' capacity lies in expanding the exploratory process beyond the tangible object. Tracing minor gestures aims to make visible a sensed energy that illuminates how an event is not solely about an externally positioned individual but also about the ecosystem it inhabits. (Manning 2016 p. 75). This article and its accompanying film aim to follow up on the questions that minor gestures impose on us, such as:

What else could be at stake in the encounter if it were not organized around the certainty of knowing? What might become thinkable if knowledge weren't tied to an account of subject-driven agency? And, what else might value look like if it weren't framed by judgment? (Manning 2016, p. x)

This involves transferring the conceptualisation of progress in early childhood education, moving from determining what is happening and how to predict the future based on existing conceptual frameworks to imagining a future by giving space to what often lingers in the shadows.

Gesture as catalysing concept

While in her book on the minor gesture Manning (2016) conceptualises a thorough reorientation of what is valued beyond neurotypicality when an 'autistic perception' is applied, the concept of gesture in itself is less explored. Hence, I will continue this article by looking at some general dictionary definitions to make visible some of the dynamics of the concept and why it might be especially useful to explore or extend ideas of children's political agency. One definition states that a gesture involves a movement of some sort with a body part, but not to perform an action, as it rather 'expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Another broad definition spans 'from the ordinary iteration of a habit to the most spectacular and self-conscious performance of a choreography' (Ruprecht 2017, p. 17). However, there is another side of this concept that makes it especially interesting to challenge notions of agency and volition. Gesture is described as an expression of intention or feeling, 'although it might have little practical effect' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, what is the point of a gesture? To elaborate on this question, I will take a closer look at Agamben's engagement with the concept of gesture in some of his writings.

Pure means without ends as an opening to rethink children's agency

The contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has written extensively on topics such as biopolitics, sovereignty, art and aesthetics. One of his concepts is gesture, which he defines as 'the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such' (Agamben 1992, p. 58). Gesture, for Agamben, is neither a means to an end (as in Aristotelian praxis) nor an end in itself (as in Aristotelian poesis), but a pure means that shows the potentiality of human action

without actualising it. In his essay 'Notes on Gesture'⁵(1992) Agamben develops his concept of gesture by drawing on various sources, such as the ancient Roman author Varro, who distinguished three spheres of human action: *facere* (to make), *agere* (to act) and *gerere* (to bear or carry on). Agamben (1992) argues that *gerere*, from which gesture is derived, is the third and most original mode of action, which does not produce or perform anything, but simply exposes the mediality of human activity:

[...] if producing is a means in view of an end and praxis is an end without means, the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyzes morality and presents instead means that, as such, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for this reason, ends. (p. 56)

Agamben (1992) considers (the art form of) cinema as the place where gesture is most fully realised since cinema has the capacity to capture and display the pure movement of human bodies without any specific purpose or meaning. His concept of gesture has implications for his philosophical project. It challenges the dominant paradigms of modernity, such as the instrumentalisation of action, the commodification of life and the spectacle of images, which obscure the potentiality and creativity of human beings. In addition, it proposes a new way of thinking about politics that is not based on the representation of identities, interests or opinions, but on the expression of a common experience of being-in-potential. Drawing on Agamben, the choreographed film of the gesture of moving feet involves a potentiality. The aim is to actualise this potential through the choreographed film as it portrays and enacts pure movement without a specific purpose.

As Agamben (1992) argues, gesture is always an expression of the inability to articulate something in the existing language. It essentially has nothing to communicate because it demonstrates the existence of humans within language as pure intermediacy. However, this aesthetic intermediacy is significant in its own right as it facilitates the manifestation of humans existing within a medium. Consequently, it paves the way for an ethical perspective (Agamben 1992, p. 57–59). In his later work Agamben defines gestures as 'what remains unexpressed in each expressive act' (Agamben 2005, p. 62). Others following Agamben's line of thought point out gesture's character of being 'an opening of the body beyond itself' and transindividual and relational at its core (Ruprecht 2017, p. 4).



⁵ He reworked his approach in his work *Opus Dei* (2013) with a greater focus on function. However, its definition in connection with cinema in 'Notes on Gesture' (1992) makes it especially relevant to this article.

Figure 2) Screenshots from the film.

I wonder how highlighting gesture as 'what remains unexpressed in an expressive act' might allow children to enter the political stage more on their own premises. If the challenge of being political for children of a younger age is their inability to express themselves concisely in verbal language, an approach based on gesture exceeds aiming to interpret children's subject-centred volition. Children's agency is then not conceptualised as "to make" or "to act", but as being-in-potential through ongoing but ephemeral movements. Let us take a closer look at what gesture the film portrays. The delicate movements (see Figure 2) do not seem to be a direct means to an end. In addition, they normally escape the adult's gaze from above the table. The children's intentions remain hidden, but making their voice visible (as a marker for volition) is not the goal of the current approach. Rather, this article is an invitation to rethink what being political in childhood might be: an invitation to explore and remain in these grey zones, beyond the need for intentionality to be agentic.

In this article gesture appears in two forms. Firstly, as the event we are exploring; under the table, the movement of the feet, not as means to an end, not acting with a goal, "just" a bodily and aesthetic gesture of 'what remains unexpressed' (Agamben, 2005). Secondly, as part of research-creation (Manning 2016) and its communication: the produced film is a gesture, as it will not give an answer to what the *political child* is or what agency for children should be, but rather attempts to "gesture" an example of an approach that might suggest alternatives for how to conceptualise and reconfigure children's political participation in their daily lives.

Cinematic research-creation to make the minor visible

Manning (2016) suggests the concept of research-creation to create space for minor gestures to surface. This hyphenation aims to challenge normative accounts of knowledge production in research (p. 27). Here, the challenge lies in avoiding being enchanted by the more obvious grand gestures that are currently valued as most important and avoiding sedimenting existing ideas (p. 66). The decision to move the camera below the table was a conscious move to position the major gestures out of vision and so to avoid confirming established truths of how to research such a situation.

Through connecting creation to the more analytical process of research, Manning aims to bring more artistic processes into the research, which is both practice and speculation (p. 13). It involves recalibrating the focus of the research into often previously disregarded details, based on movement and body, through 'the processual force of what art can do' (Manning 2016, p. 81). This allows for what Manning calls an 'experiential variation on the object' (p. 81) and is especially important when exploring possibilities for children to become political participants, beyond ideas of expressing individual opinions by means of verbal language.

Film as potential: the power of cinema to de-create and imagine otherwise

Drawing on Deleuze, Agamben (1992) highlights that cinema 'erases the fallacious psychological distinction between image as psychic reality and movement as physical reality', as it consists of

movement images (p. 54). Hence, I see use of video in research as a possibility for reconnecting ideas of (abstract) children's rights with singular movement as physical reality.

Agamben (1995) points out that film as a medium has the possibility to expose 'a zone of undecidability between the real and the possible' (p. 316) as it can 'transform the real into the possible and the possible into the real' (p. 316). It shows what has always already happened (past) but is also about creating the possible (future). Consequently, Agamben (1992) argues that cinema does not have images (of what has been or of what is) at its centre, but gesture. However, this potential is not always used when the 'medium is no longer perceived as such' (Agamben 1995, p. 318). Instead, actualising the medium's capacity demands a certain creative approach to filmmaking which, unlike TV news (or strict observational research), is trying to 'gesture' certain possible futures. If its possibilities are taken seriously, film as the medium and artistic process involves a process of 'de-creating what exists, de-creating the real, being stronger than the fact in front of you' (Agamben 1995, p. 318). It is this conceptualisation of cinema and consequential artistic video research which I believe aligns with Manning's (2016) concept of research-creation and exploring minor gestures.

The main task is to devise methods that allow the uniqueness of a gesture to be highlighted, which in return opens the event to its future possibilities. These methods should resist immediate absorption by the dominant but illuminate a minor tendency that echoes across time (Manning 2016 p. 65–66). The unique nature of the medium of film to explore time and space, along with its capacity for 'prolonged hesitation' (Agamben 1995), introduces what Manning (2016) terms 'a continuous variability' (p. 65) into the process. Here, time is made perceptible, not as a chronological and unilinear measurement of *chronos*, but as event-time, duration and *aion*. The medium of video/film is crucial to make this move, offering as it does the possibility to engage in duration (Lazzarato 2007). Montage, which I will discuss later in this article, allows us to break away from video as mere slices of reality. The choreographed film of children's moving feet shot over a period of several days does not adhere to the measurable time of the event but extends and leaps across time to create an experience of duration.

The film as transducer to provoke questioning

Manning (2016) quotes Deleuze in her description of minor gestures as a 'collective assemblage of enunciation' (p. 84). She argues that they are 'field expressions that intensify experience without reducing it to a single point in time or space. They are not metaphors but metamorphoses, active transducers of the everyday in the everyday' (2016, p. 84). The short film as a gesture in itself becomes a transducer and aims to provoke different questions and ideas of *political child*. It enacts modes of perception beyond the observation of reality and subject intentionality. These field expressions of a mealtime beneath the table do not provide an answer to what a mealtime should be, nor do they serve as a metaphor for political agency. Rather, they transduce interpretation into a new but productive mode of uncertainty.

Enacted through the film, I aim to explore Manning's (2016) question of '[w]hat else can be created, sympathetically, in the encounter' (p. 44). In the case of the moving feet, the encounter is

a creative process yet is not the creation of something new from nowhere, but rather a redistributing, reconnecting in alternative ways. Mobilising (in this case video) research-creation illuminates the political element beyond what is verbalised in language, but also deconstructs what constitutes (relevant) knowledge (Manning 2016, p. 41). This seeks to reshape ideas of (political) agency, viewing them as relational creative practice. It suggests the creative use of film to spotlight elements often hidden in the dark. This involves illuminating movement, time and the aesthetic dimension of young children's contributions to their daily lives in educational institutions.

Cinematic techniques⁶ to explore minor gestures

Manning (2016) states that '[t]he minor gesture emerges from within the field itself: it is a gesture that leads the field of experience to make felt the fissures and openings otherwise too imperceptible or backgrounded to ascertain' (p. 65). However, this is not a neutral discovery but a relational emerging, through the entanglement of researchers, technology (such as the camera and editing tools) and people, including the more-than-human involved. Thus, which artistic practices might be useful to highlight these gestures, to place them at the forefront and move them out of the shadows?

Against method but with (cinematic) techniques

Drawing on Manning (2016), the techniques of filmmaking are here not understood as a method, ready to be applied, as the process is twofold. While drawing on certain practices which are specific to the medium of film and are dependent on a certain knowledge or experience with the medium, these cinematic techniques aim to set in motion what Manning (2016) terms 'mobile reorientation' (p. 40), rather than providing a recipe to proceed. However, it is important to make them explicit and available to readers (and researchers), despite not being used directly, consciously, intentionally and in a planned manner, but rather as an underlying language of expression informed by the medium of film. The knowledge of these techniques and language puts the researcher in the position to conduct a certain creative process. As Massumi⁷ (2013, 5:55-6:20) highlights, this process is not about 'illustrating but enacting a concept' while aiming to accentuate the 'potential not yet unfolded'. Hence, the cinematic techniques described below are ingredients in a process 'for crossing [...] this threshold' into the 'world of potential politics'. This means that filmmaking as a practice aims to enact minor gestures through the film created. This allows different kinds of knowledges to intertwine and emerge through this active 'immanent coupling of research and creation' (Manning 2016, p. 41), where the creative process is an independent mode of thinking to raise alternative questions.

⁶ Manning (2016) differentiates between technique and technicity, while the former is closely connected to deliberate skills and methods, the latter is less planned and conscious and allows for subtle, transformative gestures to emerge. When referring to cinematic techniques both aspects are utilised in this article.

⁷ In an oral presentation with Manning.

Montage-ing⁸ the yet un-thought

Montage is a technique that seeks to weave together a sequence of shots or images into one continuous cinematic motion and new 'reality'. It is a powerful tool which allows us to make thus far overlooked connections across space and time. Hence, '[m]ontage is a technique for change: a form of self-producing machine, particularly visible on screen where situations and events work to reconfigure individuals and communities' (Coleman 2011, p. 63). As the minor gesture 'has a quality of a resonant multiplicity singularly itself' (Manning 2016, p. 65), something similar could be said about the technique of montage, which makes it especially useful to explore both communal as well as individual expressions beneath the table. Drawing on Deleuze, Coleman (2011) points out that montage establishes 'connections as yet un-thought, un-named but intuited through things already "manifested" in forms and the performance of those intuited senses' (p. 56). Using montage sets up a clear distinction to observational video research⁹ as it moves beyond ideas of keeping slices of reality undisturbed and keeping the time and space continuum intact (Menning et al. 2021).

According to Agamben (1995), there are two transcendental conditions of montage: repetition and stoppage. This creates what Agamben (1995) terms a 'prolonged hesitation' (p. 317) which brings into being an opening to thought and alternative modes of perception. Hence, choreographing a montage creates a situation which 'is a zone of undecidability of difference between uniqueness and a repetition' (Agamben 1995, p. 318). In this case, a situation of feet moving underneath the table is created by recording this repetitive ritual over several days. Through stoppage and repetition, this event is both re(created) and melted into one situation, a ritual in its own right, where the individual becomes collective through repetition and the relation of movements which create 'a zone of undecidability'.

Repetition/stoppage to hold back conscious ordering

Drawing on Bergson's reflections on the experience of music, Manning (2016) reminds us that it is 'necessary to hold back the conscious ordering of sensation' (p. 22) and draws attention to the necessity 'to increase the duration of the experience of direct perception' (p. 22) when engaging in minor gestures. Montage is a technique which seems useful to fulfil this demand, as it jolts our experience of time and relationality between the individual feet (and the collective of children). Agamben (1995) uses the difference between poetry and prose to explain cinema's possibility, as poetry (and film) allows for 'prolonged hesitation between image and meaning' (p. 317). He describes how the element of stoppage in montage is not just a chronological pause, but rather a disruption that detaches the image from the narrative to present its raw visuality. Here, we move beyond the idea of what Deleuze (2013) terms the action-image, which aims to present an action-reaction sequence and narrative to the viewer. This is how montage allows us to open up thinking and drives a wedge through ideas of volition and agency when conceptualising *political child*. Through being forced to watch children's feet moving seemingly without purpose, although with

⁸ See also montage-ing in Menning et al. 2021.

⁹ For a discussion how this creative use of video is positioned in contrast to observational methods see Menning et al. 2024)

an aesthetic and affective quality heightened by the means of montage, we are compelled into a prolonged hesitation when reading meaning into the situation. This hesitation is also supported by the other important element in montage, namely repetition:

[...] repetition is not the return of the identical; it is not the same as such that returns. The force and the grace of repetition, the novelty it brings us, is the return as the possibility of what was. Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew, it's almost a paradox. To repeat something is to make it possible anew. (Agamben 1995, p. 315–316)

The attached film uses repetition of children's feet moving. These repetitions are of a similar kind, yet not identical, due to certain variations in terms of speed and character of the movement. Through these repetitions we are forced to explore these small nuances and variations of expression. Utilising the technique of montage encourages us to dwell in these nuances. By noticing these minor gestures and their variations the possibility to evaluate this situation differently arises, as it opens a world of its own beneath the table, previously overlooked.

Highlighting body and movement beyond representation of individualist agency

Manning (2016) argues that the body is ecological as 'what it does in that relation is what it is. A body is a tending, an inflection, an incipient directionality. And this incipency includes thinking in its own right' (p. 190). Hence, an important aspect of this cinematic approach is relocating bodily expression at the centre of explorations. However, it is not just the individual body, but its becoming through relation with others and the environment which is accentuated, as there is a 'necessity to consider the body always from the perspective of the collective, or the transindividual' (Manning 2016, p. 193). The way montage works here is by highlighting this collectivity and transindividuality. One viewer of the film reacted by stating that '[y]ou make these feet talk to each other'. Through montage, these seemingly individual gestures and body movements are connected into something transindividual. The fact that we never see the rest of the children's bodies or faces works against individualising and using the modus operandi of conscious individualised agency and intentionality. Hence, the cinematic technique of montage has the potential to work against interpreting the event with the consistent inclination of subject-centred intentionality that leads us away from interconnectedness and relationality. Instead, this cinematic thinking and doing aims to respond to Manning's (2016) demand to 'open the perceptual register beyond intentionality to the thought-in-the-moving of the complex emergent patterns of our daily lives' (p. 193).

When this film was shown at conference presentations to various people, it elicited reactions of remembering their own childhood. Viewers noted that they relived the feeling of walking in socks, while simultaneously recalling their own children's careful, exploratory movements. Drawing on Manning's (2016, p. 73) reading of Walter Benjamin, the object's material-forces of the film create an 'individual and collective' past. Using montage fosters here an affective engagement with their own lives – past, present and future; an affective engagement with their own lives – lived, living and about to be lived. Pointing to Bergson, Manning (2016) describes affect as a 'conscious share

of the nonconscious' which 'briefly made itself felt'; it is 'irreducible to definition but nonetheless semi-consciously ascertained' (p. 20), in this case through an emotional but unarticulated experience made accessible using cinematic montage.

Choreographing *political child* through cinematic gestural montage

Mealtimes in early childhood education have been explored by raising topics like food, nutrition, taste, culture, community, interaction and the senses, but also power in institutional settings (Willemsen et al., 2023). Researching the major can be valuable, as '[t]he minor and the major are not opposed'; they are entrenched in 'co-composition' (Manning 2016, p. 66). However, exploring what happens beneath the table challenges the taken-for-granted dichotomy between what is important and what is neglected in mealtime situations. This also incorporates a speculative move if one leaves the path of the 'preexisting status, of a given structure, of a predetermined metric' (Manning 2016, p. 2). In this case this involves abandoning what happens above the table, excluding facial expression or communication based on words. Literally looking the other way aims to interrupt habitualised ways of researching children's social interactions around a lunch table in an early childhood institution. Mobilising gestures and their cinematic choreographed portrayal with no obvious aim allows our "interpretation" of this event to move beyond the ideas of intentionality, meaning making or representation. It is an expression, but an expression of what? Is it boredom? Is it a dance or maybe a haptic experience and exploration of the surroundings, creating an underworld beyond ideas of self-control and self-regulation?

Through the choreographed¹⁰ film we create a zone of affection which is also characterised by indeterminacy. We simply do not really know what it means, represents or is, which helps to hinder us from defining its value based on already set conditions. Manning (2016, p.130) suggests the concept of choreographing for this aesthetic, creative but also political activity:

Choreographing the political begins here, in the midst of shapeshifting speciations. Allied to activist philosophy, allied to the kind of study that happens in the undercommons, a choreographing of the political sees minor gestures everywhere at work, and seizes them. Choreographing the political is a call not only for the collective crafting of minor gestures, but for the attunement, in perception, to how minor gestures do their work.

As Manning (2016, p. 122) argues, choreography at its core does not merely involve arranging bodies into predetermined forms, rather it is about creating movements that embody the intricate dynamics of emerging forms. Attending and merging yourself into the event under the table through cinematic techniques revalues accounts of the events under scrutiny as they 'cannot be reduced to the "volition-intentionality-agency triad"' (Manning 2016 p. 123). According to Manning (2016) this readjusting and shifting of values is political as it starts with a relational ontology and repositions agency outside preconceived group and subject-based identity. Instead,

¹⁰ Through montage.

it highlights an ecology of practices that are undetermined enough for 'creating and celebrating modes of life-living, as yet uncharted' (p. 123). In the case of *political child*, this involves not measuring children's individual agency against ideas of adult agency and political participation, thus only transferring modes of existing politically downwards. Rather, it means opening up the political to previously overlooked and undervalued modes of existence. This choreographed film aims to do exactly that, challenging the idea of volitional agency and modes of being political. It shifts the focus from the presumably individual interactions around a table to a collective field of hidden movements and relations through its untraditional perspective and technique of montage.

Extending perception through prolonged hesitation

Pointing to Ido Kedar and his writing on autistic perception, Manning (2016) suggests that the starting perspective should be to ask 'what else a body can do' to explore 'the role of nonvolitional and preintentional (nonconscious) expression in the event of life-living' (p. 113). According to Manning (2016) this involves challenging neurotypical and able-bodied reasoning and rather seeks to consider the inquiry differently through examining how the body and the world co-emerge, thereby renegotiating our assumptions about what is voluntary. She describes a learned separation (often in childhood) between the skin and the world, which 'tend[s] to foreground the normatively rational over the emergently creative or intuitive, the individual over the relational' (p. 114). This leads to children learning to differentiate between object and subject, a differentiation which is seen as an essential part of being an adult. However, this also consequently 'results in the backgrounding in the experience of the lively continuity and co-composition between body and world' (Manning 2016, p. 114).

By drawing on autistic perception and challenging neurotypicality Manning (2016) wants us to 'dwell longer in the still-composting precategorized field of relations' (p. 114). I connect this 'dwelling' to the 'prolonged hesitation' of Agamben and argue that cinematic techniques invite viewers into extending perceptions about what being political and/or agency is when it comes to young children. The movement of the feet might challenge our ideas of consciousness and volition. Mobilising Manning (2016, p. 117–119), this montage of children's movements highlights that individual subjectivity and agency alone cannot fully encompass being *political child*. At its fundamental level experience is intertwined with collective and ecological elements. Acknowledging these entanglements involves taking seriously the possibility for change, in this case imagining different conceptualisations of what participation and agency involve in institutionalised childhoods.

Cinematic techniques to 'invent new modes of existence'

Manning (2016) encourages us to explore and develop techniques under which experience is opened to a 'different way of functioning' (p. 125) and a more-than-human-centred ecology. The montaged film becomes an 'agencement in its capacity to create linkages not yet assembled, to produce ways of becoming' (Manning 2016, p. 124).¹¹ Working cinematically with video can be

¹¹ Manning prefers to use the French term *agencement* instead of the often-used translational *assemblage* due to the dynamic (and less static) element of the original term.

conceptualised as what Manning terms choreographed thinking. For Manning (2016), this choreographic thinking involves 'an operative technicity that opens experience to emergent collectivity. [...] It is rhythm, a cut in duration, a field of resonance, an interval' (p. 127). In the film the seemingly individual movement of the children's feet is choreographed through the technique of montage. This creates a collective rhythm, an interval allowing for resonance and possibility 'to invent new modes of existence' (Manning 2016, p. 124).

Cinematic approaches with their ability to engage and create events, time, relationality and space are especially useful when engaging in choreographed thinking about *political child*. Readjusting the focal point onto the collective but ephemeral movement of children's feet beneath a table can 'bring to the fore the potential of a different perspective, one that leads away from a humanist bias built on intention and volition toward the complex intervals of an ecological world in motion' (Manning 2016, p. 127). This is especially important when exploring ideas of being political beyond intention and volition and provides an opportunity to include children in new transindividual modes of being political beyond subjective, individualistic volition and agency. Cinematic gestural montage allows the creation of 'transindividual modes of existence' (Manning, 2016 p. 128) through portraying and enacting a conversation between children, feet, chairs and the floor previously hidden. Thus, choreographing *political child* through video-creation means devising cinematic techniques that allow us to foreground movement, collectivity and explore duration (event-time) so as to rethink volition, consciousness and subjective agency when considering what *political child* might be.

Imagining political child through a 'dance of attention'

Manning (2016, p. 192) promotes a 'perceptual account' to conceptualise and engage in the mundane and diverse ways of the everyday, which at its core is also a political act. The creation of a video montage is an example of such a perceptual account of the event of communal eating, which involves possibilities to rethink its position in childhood education. Through these cinematic techniques and the special qualities of the medium itself, the aim is to create something that opens up ways of thinking without erasing the indeterminacy of such an attempt. Here, this involves going under the table, diving into the underworld which separates a taken-for-granted eye-brain-mouth-hand connection as the major gesture of mealtime, while additionally degrading language to an imperceptible background noise. Through choosing this untraditional perspective the major gestures of mealtime are blocked out, allowing us to concentrate on the minor, less obvious and seemingly less important and useful. This cinematic form of research-creation allows for a careful encounter with the event, to create '[r]elational fields, rather than categories' (Manning 2016, p. 192). The montage aims to create a 'dance of attention' (Manning 2016, p. 193) to light our imagination beyond predetermined categories of what being political in childhood involves. Hence, filmmaking practices inhabit a capacity to explore yet-unthought ideas, including the yet-unthought when imagining *political child*.

Engaging in politics in education is thus less about teaching children about democracy, but rather how we can think differently about what participation and voice can be. This consequentially also

challenges what it means to be political or how childhood politics can be constructed. It embraces a relational and affective research approach, and I suggest that video as a medium and its practices assembled with theories and concepts such as (minor) gestures allows for the creation of platforms for *political child* to come into existence in diverse ways.

Institutional education, where the only aim of mealtimes is training the young children to sit still and learn to eat properly, has been widely challenged in many pedagogical approaches. Additionally, the bodily persona of the youngest ones has been widely accepted in many contexts. Nevertheless, there is a difference between overlooking or accepting these bodily movements and using them for inspiration to reconceptualise our thinking of what political participation is. The approach described in this article demands from researchers and educators a pedagogy of 'prolonged hesitation', however not as a hesitation that freezes our action, but one which is intrinsically active – a hesitation of value judgment through exploring techniques to make the minor visible. This article aimed to show how the use of cinematic techniques such as montage paired with conceptual exploration has the potential to set in motion these processes.

An invitation to render *political child* otherwise

One might wonder how (studying) this movement of feet under the table is “useful”. It is exactly this question that might allow us to rethink children’s political participation to avoid their exclusion based on their absent readiness. Manning (2013) argues for a reinvigoration of the concept of uselessness, where value is not predetermined but created in the event. She specifies that this move involves affirmation instead of negation. Negation focuses on the risks of encounters, while affirmation revels in the possibilities and creativity that the same encounter might involve beyond ‘the already-defined now’ (2016, p. 202/203). Consequently, to render children political in different ways might involve more affirming and less negotiating of children’s agency; not setting up a structure or formal process, but rather engaging in aesthetic and political exploration to affirm children’s forms of agency through questioning ‘What else does this event do’ and how can it make us think differently about children as political. Some readers might be disappointed not to find more inscriptional answers in this article, however the aim is not to prescribe, but to encourage a rethinking and creative processual approach to the question of how a child is (and might be) rendered political and how participation might be understood beyond individual subject-centred agency. This task is especially important when the aim is to include groups often ignored in political democratic processes, such as small children, who are frequently disregarded based on individualistic measurements of readiness and rationality.

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