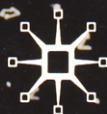




**STUDIES IN  
MODERN CHILDHOOD**  
*Society, Agency, Culture*

Edited by Jens Qvortrup



# Studies in Modern Childhood

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JENS QVORTRUP  
Trondheim, November 2004

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# 1

## Varieties of Childhood

*Jens Qvortrup*

### Representations of children and childhood

Representations of children cover a wide range – from their non-existence to demands for their complete separation from adults. A few years ago an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (see Belkin, 2000) reported a new movement in the US, campaigning for ‘child-free zones’. The main argument among its adherents was that childless adults had a right not to be bothered or pestered by other people’s children. They felt emphatically that children were impermissibly and unacceptably visible – indeed, they had no larger wish than to make children disappear from their compass. In their view, children are a private matter; they should not disturb other people, and it should remain a parental obligation to keep children away from the public space, which apparently is regarded as an adult domain and prerogative. Advocates of child-free zones thus perceive children as a *private good* that is definitely none of their business; the idea of children as a *public good* hardly comes to mind. For them children should neither be seen nor heard, and should enter the societal arena only when they have matured. For them, children’s intrusion into public arenas is thought of in terms of a ‘status offence’. Among adults, they belong to ‘free-riders’ as far as responsibility for children or childhood is concerned.

It would be easy to denounce this new position as an absurd aberration. However, in Europe too we encounter advertisements for child-free holidays and restaurant visits, and perhaps this seemingly growing attitude should not come as a surprise, given a development in fertility rates where, for instance, 40 per cent of German women in academia are expected to remain childless. For better or worse, we may be facing a change in our norms.<sup>1</sup> Until recently women were expected – to the brink of stigmatization if not complied with – to bear and rear children. Currently, this option is merely one among others for young people to choose.

From this rather detached position towards children, there is historically and mentally a long distance to another extreme, namely the Arièsian vision

of children's representation in medieval and immediate post-medieval society. That was a vision of a society which was not short of children but which lacked childhood. Children were plentifully (and visibly) there, but they did not constitute a *conceptual category*, that is, there was no particular awareness of them. They were part and parcel of any local community; they were entrusted with duties like adults; they were not kept away from putative dangerous events – from sexuality to executions; no one prevented them from being witnesses to whatever took place because no one had the idea that children constituted a particular group, or that the child had particular needs. Thus, physically, children were conspicuously present in a society in which there was no clear idea about age-grading or a generational order;<sup>2</sup> no one realized or appreciated children's presence as such because childhood was invisible. Children were there. Not in their capacity as children, however, but rather in their toddler years as animal-like creatures and later as small adults.

The Arièsian vision was one in which children were a part of *public* life, that is, they were not confined to the privacy of a family. Indeed, it is doubtful that an idea of family privacy existed at all: 'sociability . . . hindered the formation of the concept of the family, *because of the lack of privacy*' (Ariès, 1962, p. 398, my italics; see also Brunner, 1980). Children were public in the sense that they were in the open<sup>3</sup> space, and to be in the open space implied large visibility, albeit not in the figure of children as a group or collectivity.

Interestingly, our vision of modern, democratic society is one that is informed by notions of openness (most famously propounded by Popper, 1966), while at the same time it has developed a large number of private forms – from private ownership of the means of production to private organizations and the privacy of families. Children in modern society basically belong to the private family, which is portrayed as a 'haven in a heartless world' or a retreat from the openness of public society. In this sense children have historically experienced a movement from visibility – as small adults – in open local communities to invisibility in public spaces in a modernity which is characterized by much more freedom and democracy – and in this sense more openness – than Arièsian societies.

These apparent paradoxes are resolved by suggesting that *childhood* has entered the historical stage. In fact, this was the gist of Ariès's famous thesis; children lost legitimate visibility in public as they were confined within a variety of forms of childhood: a family childhood, a school childhood, a kindergarten childhood, a leisure time childhood and so on. In short: even if children gained more and more visibility within these confines (see below), sociologically speaking, childhood had become severed from an encompassing encounter with adulthood. Children therefore came to lose visibility within, indeed they were excluded from, the increasingly dominant sectors of the social fabric, emblematic for adults, such as the world of business and labour, urban areas, and the political and administrative sectors.

## The prominence of *the child*

Ariès wrote about family life in pre-modernity while the article in the *New York Times Magazine* is a product of recent individualized modernity. Historically, somewhere between these extremes, the concept of *the child* came to assume great influence. Perhaps Ariès's compatriot Rousseau conceived the concept in the eighteenth century, but it was only with the advent of the twentieth century that it was widely accepted.

Politically, the concept of the child was brought to public attention by the Swedish feminist and social reformer Ellen Key, who at the very beginning of the twentieth century published her famous book, *The Century of the Child*, which invoked a new visibility of the child in terms of a better informed and more caring attitude in the adult (Key, 1909). The timing of the publication of Key's political manifesto was hardly accidental. It coincided with the inauguration of a number of child sciences – first among them developmental psychology – through which the child gained scientific prominence. This child – in the singular – has been with us throughout the twentieth century, during which time the individual child has been seen as having got or having *taken* much more freedom to speak up, to have his/her own say, to be a negotiating partner, and so on – in other words s/he has in these ways become much more visible. But these freedoms and visibilities have to be contained within the particular spaces of childhood; they are rarely allowed to be expressed in public spaces, which seem to belong to adults.

Ironically, this child was hardly thinkable without the appearance of childhood in the Arièsian understanding of that term, that is, as a social space that was severed from the social space of adulthood. This psychological child (James et al., 1998) was in fact de-spatialized and de-contextualized in favour of being defined in terms of individual dispositions and was thus a truly universal child. Yet, the psychological concept of the child fitted well to Ariès's vision of childhood in that the latter was confirmed by its compartmentalization of age-groups: the child was not included in human kind but was on her/his way towards humanness and remained until then in a state of becoming and a stage of waiting. As such the child gained a high degree of visibility. Her/his particular needs were discovered and foreseen. The much larger likelihood for survival increased the attention to and protection of the child at the same time as s/he was increasingly seen as vulnerable. However, by the same token children were denied the kind, amount and scope of participation that they were previously granted.

It is one of the paradoxes of Ariès's work that children were much more visible when childhood did not exist. They were much more visible in the sense that fewer doors were closed to them and they had access to the same arenas as adults. However, children probably experienced much less in terms of permissiveness than is the case now. Of all we know, from deMause (1974)

for instance, about previous societies, violence and harshness were widespread, and while the regarding of children as small adults (in the absence of any notion of childhood) meant a right and a duty for children to be participants in the community, it also implied that children were not particularly protected.

It is plausible to suggest that protection and participation, as we understand the terms, were hardly an issue at all in medieval society. They were neither part of a discourse, nor of a socialization or an educational agenda. If there was an idea of protection, it would most likely have been thought of in vague utilitarian terms. It was not primarily the child who needed protection; it was a prospective labour force that had to be nurtured. Therefore notions of opportunity were not grafted onto individual achievements, outcomes or successes but rather related to the survival of the community of which these children were an integral part.

Historically, the formation of childhood was not in the first place an effort to change the child, although this eventually did become the explicit project of both the child sciences and child savers' movements in terms of improving the child developmentally and rescuing children socially. It was, inadvertently, a process through which an ensemble of parameters was 'invented', the totality of which came to make up the architecture of childhood in structural terms. Childhood's very creation, however unwitting, did not leave children and their life conditions unaffected. In fact, one of the parameters was the creation of discourses about the child and her/his abilities as well as about children, who became increasingly private.

The conclusion so far, one might argue, is that the child has never in history been visible in public: in pre-modernity, because the category did not exist and therefore there was not seen to be a relationship to adults or adulthood. If childhood did not exist, adulthood did not exist either and thus a relationship between the two is logically excluded. In modernity, children are invisible in the public space because they have become marginalized from it, partly due to a new and now very conscious definition of the child as a person whose competences and capabilities are found wanting as a full-fledged member of the human community, partly because of a strong tendency to believe that the individual child and children as a group do not relate to adults in general, but only to their parents, teachers and supervisors. It is against this background that a 'child-free-zones' movement, as we saw, can emerge. We may find it repulsive, but its emergence is not contradictory to the position of children in modernity.

### **From contemporaries to next generation**

Despite many historians' objection to Ariès's view of the non-existence of childhood in pre-modernity, it remains fruitful as a heuristic idea. It entails, among other things, the notion that young persons were basically seen as

contemporaries with adults; they were living in the here and now, simultaneous with their elders. Adults did not spend much time and effort on contemplating a child's individual development, but nevertheless expected to be receiving support from their progeny in their own old age, if that was reached. Thus, although there was, conceptually, silence about the child, children and childhood, young persons were not silenced: indeed, they articulated and manifested themselves as indispensable participants in pre-modern public life; at the same time they were most certainly subjected to a harsh disciplinary regime on the side of their adult contemporaries – parents and other adults alike.

As already indicated, the cultural definition of children in modernity is quite the opposite. They have obtained the opportunity, if not a right, to speak up in the family, whereas their position in public has been weakened. In fact, their definition in modernity is strongly characterized by our expectations as to their futurity as adults. Colloquial expressions such as 'children are the future of society', 'children are the next generation' and 'children are our most precious resource' tend to deprive them of an existence as human *beings* in favour of an image of them as human *becomings*, thus underlining the suggestion that children are not authentic contemporaries of adults. They are here, as it were, to be invested in (see Davis, 1940; see also Esping-Andersen, 2002). This view reflects not only their changed position in the new mode of production, but also complies with and is substantiated by developmental psychology's portrayal of the child as progressing towards completeness, which renders the child regressively incomplete the smaller s/he is. The money and expectations invested by adults in children forces them into a waiting position. It is children's fate to be waiting – patiently waiting to become an adult, to have their contributions recognized, to have a say in societal matters, to be part of the citizenry. This eclipse of individuality, indeed of authentic participation, is likely to be thought of in terms of protecting the child and preserving and augmenting his/her potentialities for later use. In this sense it is a forceful parameter in creating childhood as a structural form and in constituting a generational limitation.

How did this change in the view of children come about? Was it a revelation in the minds of adults, a sudden affection brought to them with the waning of the Middle Ages (Ariès, 1962) or was it an impulsive sentimentalization at the turn of the twentieth century (Zelizer, 1985)? Ariès and Zelizer have both underlined the importance of changed attitudes in this reconstruction of childhood in people's minds; this view does not contradict my view that altered attitudes towards children were inherently connected to changes in modes of production and children's position in them. In other words, children lost their position as useful people as they were gradually transferred from manual activities in pre-industrial eras to mental activities in early industrialization's schools. From working side by side and

simultaneously with adults, that is as contemporaries, their new position as pupils implied that only with many years delay could their school work be exploited as useful, if that connection was perceived at all (see Qvortrup, 2001). This new diachronic feature of their obligatory involvement required scientific justification, which was delivered by developmental psychology's claims that the child is preparing him/herself for adulthood. While schooling as such has become clearly appreciated as indispensably connected with a future qualified labour force, children have been deprived of a visible role in the (diachronic) social division of labour and instead reduced to receptacles of knowledge from adults – parents and teachers. The reverse side of their being sentimentalized therefore has been a silencing of their competences and capabilities, which apparently have all to be taught and learned as they grow up.

### **From participation to protection**

Ariès has been accused of portraying medieval parents as not caring, affectionate or protective. However, I think his main message was about participation rather than protection, although the two notions are of course related. He did deplore what he saw as a decreasing role of children in the social fabric and he was critical of a protection which developed into domestication and institutionalization; a positive understanding of protection that increasingly turned into control of children and young people. Control is not a negation of protection, but rather its authoritarian or paternalistic version. What is more, moving towards this extreme version of protection at the same time degrades children's ability to employ their capacity and competence and reinforces an incipient lack of confidence among adults in the abilities of children.

The new and conscious emotionality or sentimentalization must be interpreted positively in terms of a child-friendliness previously unheard of in history. It implies a growing attention to the child, an appreciation of his/her needs, and at least in the family – to a certain extent also in kindergartens and schools – recognition of children as contemporaries, if not equals. In modern societies it has become the rule rather than the exception that it is unlawful to smack children; in families the development is slower – in only a handful of countries are parents not permitted to use corporal punishment (see UNICEF, 2003). I choose to interpret these developments optimistically, although one cannot completely ignore the hypothesis that they have been eased and facilitated by the increased conviction of a positive relationship between friendly and caring treatment of children and 'child outcome', as the productivistic term runs. I do not dare to think what would have happened, if the relationship had been negative.

Although these developments must be considered as encouraging and as a sign of the child's increased visibility, there is a price to be paid. In the

first place, as we have seen, they harmonize with a new view of the child as an 'incomplete' or a 'not-yet' adult – a child who is, moreover, deemed more and more frail and vulnerable. Second, they go together with decreased options for children to participate in the broader areas of society. Thus, while children have obtained a greater say in the family and in some countries also in schools, and consequently we have reasons to believe in growing child-friendliness in these arenas, it is probably also true to suggest that such a friendliness is not obvious in society at large. It may not be pertinent, beyond the proponents of 'child-free zones', to speak of child hostility; I would not, however, hesitate to use Kaufmann's notion of 'a structural indifference' towards children and childhood on the part of corporate society, including, to varying degrees, the polity (Kaufmann, 1996). Indeed, indifference is one way of silencing or ignoring.

Given the characterization of the child as vulnerable, it seems appropriate to welcome a protective mood. The question is however what the limits of protection are and how protection and participation are offset against one other. Despite a growing tendency, for instance in social studies of childhood, to grant children competencies to the brink of omnipotence, it must be emphatically said that giving them anything close to equal rights would be an unwarranted risk. We have to admit that children are both physically smaller, and mentally and socially less experienced, and therefore Marx's contention that equal rights under unequal conditions are tantamount to unequal rights applies. On the other hand, an extreme emphasis on children's alleged vulnerability may be used by more powerful segments of society as a pretext for needlessly silencing and marginalizing them.

Schooling, as mentioned above, is a good example. There were undoubtedly many reasons for abolishing classical child labour, protection among them. However, these good reasons are not sufficient for overlooking or even devaluing children's new obligatory work in schools. It is not difficult to understand why influential advocates for schoolwork, such as the state and business, wanted to interpret schooling as a gift to children and parents and thus to ignore children's important input in the social fabric as a whole. Anything else would have entailed massive financial outlays to children or their parents. Stressing protection and socialization measures at the cost of interpreting schooling as children's participation in the social division of labour was therefore an irresistible temptation and interest, but nevertheless also a way of suppressing children's contributions.

There is no doubt either that it is right to introduce measures to protect children against modern society's urbanization and motorization and the increasing rapidity of transport and communication. Should one therefore not unambiguously and unreservedly welcome a statistic from the UK, where it was shown that whereas in 1971, 1000 children were killed in traffic, in 1990 this figure was reduced to around 300? Indeed, this was the result of conscious efforts to protect children. However, as found in a study from

1970 and replicated in 1990, the number of children who were allowed access to the city without adult company was reduced accordingly. The share of children who were allowed to (1) cross the road alone, (2) go to leisure places alone and (3) use buses alone had decreased dramatically during the 20 years (see Hillman et al., 1990, pp. 44 and 131; see also O'Brien et al., 2000).

Although the reduction in traffic fatalities is of course welcome, is it permissible to suggest that the price for the positive result is by and large paid by children in terms of a decrease in their freedom of independent mobility? The price was certainly not paid by adults in terms of adapting to children's needs, or in acceding to their legitimate demands to be able to use the city as if it was theirs as well.

The example is not unique. The introduction of curfew bills in both the USA and the UK may be interpreted in the same way. Under the pretext of a wish to protect young children from danger, they are not permitted to be outside during specified periods, typically during the hours of darkness. It is however well known that these measures towards children are most welcomed by many adults who see themselves as disturbed by children.

In the light of such examples, we are forced to look dialectically at vulnerability, protection and participation. While it is relevant to regard children as vulnerable, it would be pertinent also to suggest that the adult world is vulnerable. Considering the investments made in the city, in its infrastructure to accommodate traffic, in factories and other business establishments, and one might add also the costs of adults' education, it is no wonder that great efforts are made to protect these investments against unruly children and their putative destructiveness. From this viewpoint, it is arguably adult properties, infrastructure and qualifications that must be seen as exposed and vulnerable; and accordingly it is logical to suggest that children are prevented from authentic participation in the life of the city in order to protect adult installations, rather than, or concurrently with, proposing that institutions for children are there to protect them against the dangers represented by the adult world.

A balanced view would imply that the severance of children from adults is explained dialectically, but the vulnerability of the adult world is seldom mentioned, and this imbalance is in fact one way of silencing children.

### **From public to private responsibility**

Why should the adult world make concessions to the advantage of children, in terms of, for instance, adapting to their demands and needs and thus incurring costs? This question is, I believe, crucial for our understanding of the representation of children and childhood in modernity. It is a question, basically, about responsibility for children and/or childhood.

It can be deduced from what was said above, that responsibility for child-bearing and child rearing has changed from a public to a private responsibility. Privatization means in this context first of all familialization: parents make autonomous decisions to have children, when they want to have them, and how many they want to have. This was, one might argue, always the case. However, the more or less conscious presumption of generational interdependencies in pre-modernity had a profound impact on attitudes to the reception of new members of a community. Although the demand in numbers varied, the survival of a community depended on reproduction of a new labour force, which at the same time was there to provide for both young and old. The perception of these tasks as common – and in this sense public – endeavours was supported by a social order in which reproduction and production could not be separated. Neither production nor reproduction could be reduced to the private realm; both were transparently important for the whole community, including the contributions of children. No one could with impunity attempt to free-ride. Such were the principles as seen in retrospect. They did not, however, guarantee the smooth functioning of community life and we know that tensions, frictions and poverty were frequent events in the past.

It is possible – indeed necessary – to argue that generations remain dependent on each other even in modern society. However, this insight seems to have gone astray as divisions of labour have intensified. First of all, it appears nowadays as common knowledge that production and reproduction are completely separate functions. Although business and the trades are completely dependent on a renewal of a labour force, it is nowhere part of their, let alone a political, agenda that they assume any responsibility for its renewal. Even the state has reservations about getting involved in family decisions, unless life or welfare are jeopardized. No wonder, therefore, that individual adults regard it as a right to opt for a childless life, the extreme expression of which are movements such as those demanding ‘child-free zones’.

As a result, parents – families with children – are left with reproductive responsibilities which have proven difficult for them to shoulder alone, as envisioned empirically in, for instance, disproportionate poverty rates for children and in low fertility rates. However, the privatization or familialization of children – combined with their portrayal as incomplete, vulnerable and of no economic use – has additional consequences in terms of children being silenced or denied access to resources.

The historical development towards making children a private matter, as we have seen, coincides with a more caring attitude – a positive feature which however has rendered children increasingly dependent, the more so since they are also depicted as vulnerable and in need of adult protection. As such, their status as dependants is not exclusively a negative one, because leaving them with an independent status on par with adults would in fact

be overlooking actual relations of power and endangering children. On the other hand this argument is not valid as a reason to hide significant aspects of children's lives. The good reasons for protecting children against exploitation and subjugation do not justify depriving them of a right to conceptual autonomy (Thorne, 1987), that is, an autonomy which allows them to be heard and seen in their own right. This is, as a matter of fact, what often happens – deliberately or thoughtlessly – in, for example, public statistics and social accounting about children.

Familialization also implies keeping children hidden in the family, inaccessible to the public gaze. For children, this can be detrimental. From a cultural point of view it must be regarded as a major shortcoming, which however seems consistent with the position of children in modern society, economically and symbolically.

The last decades have however seen an improvement in our understanding of children and childhood. We have, for instance, become much better informed about children's material conditions. The picture is not one in which children invariably lose, but it is nevertheless obvious that children belong to the more endangered groups in society. One major reason for this is – once again – that children are seen as belonging to the family or the household, and since parents are expected to share their incomes with children, it follows logically that income per household member will be lower than in households without children, even if economies of scale are taken into consideration. The situation of children is alleviated when the welfare state intervenes on behalf of children (or families with children), and it can be shown that children's poverty rates are systematically higher in countries (such as the USA and Italy) where the welfare state is more poorly developed than in the Nordic countries in Europe with a strong welfare state commitment.

It has to be said however that nowhere have children a constitutionally-based right to receive welfare support from the state (see Qvortrup, 2003). Even in welfare states, children are basically dependent on their parents. The reason for this is the unshaken ideology of the family, which perceives children as a parental responsibility.

Historically, children are arguably the last remaining group which has not yet been recognized as having a claim on current political and societal resources. The political and industrial revolutions of the West, Reinhard Bendix said, 'lead to the eventual recognition of the rights of citizenship for *all adults*, including those in positions of economic dependence' (Bendix, 1977, p. 66, my italics) – but not for children, who did not, as subjects, take advantage of these changes. In a sense, following Bendix's line of argument, children are still – politically and economically – part of a feudal system which accorded no immediate rights 'to subjects in positions of economic dependence such as tenants, journeymen, workers and servants: at best *they are classified under the household* of their master and represented through him and his estates' (ibid., pp. 66–7, my italics).

The criticism levelled here does not intend to hide the fact that children's material welfare has in general improved dramatically over the last centuries; but it is at the same time interesting to note that formally children remain by and large subsumed within the household – or perhaps more precisely, the family – without individual *rights* to *societal* resources. Despite much progress made and despite the advancement represented by, for instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it remains a fact that children do not enjoy economic and political rights as autonomous citizens.

### **The chapters in this book**

The introduction so far can be read as a symptomatic account of what social studies of childhood is about; or perhaps rather as the editor's idiosyncratic perspectives, which do not necessarily coincide with the views of the book's authors, let alone with the richness and complexities of children's life worlds. The chapters in this book do in fact demonstrate that childhood studies have gone a long way to broaden and deepen the analyses. A couple of decades ago these studies used to be labelled 'the new sociological paradigm of childhood' or 'the new social studies of childhood'. However, although the adjective 'new' is no longer considered appropriate, some would argue that there nevertheless remains a need for assuming something which is particular for childhood studies; something which distinguishes them from other branches of research dealing with 'child', 'children' and 'childhood' or from other departments of disciplinary studies of social science provenance. Others would underline the normality of childhood studies in the sense that children as human beings and childhood as 'their' social space should and must be studied with the same arsenal of theories and methods as other human beings and their respective social spaces. There were and remain tensions and ongoing discussions as to distinctiveness or sameness about the life worlds of children vis-à-vis the life worlds of other age groups or generations. These debates are reflected in intellectual arguments about the salience of focusing on one childhood or a plurality of childhoods, on perceiving children and childhood as anticipation of adulthood or as in the here and now, on weighting the activities and agency of children above the impacts upon them of close or distant societal forces, on childhood as confined to the family and the locality rather than as a societal or even a global phenomenon and so on.

Even if these arguments were and are indispensable constituents of ongoing discourses and (dis)agreements for coming to terms with the most fruitful access for understanding childhood, they are hardly, or with few exceptions, addressed explicitly in the chapters of this book; yet it should not be too difficult for those who want to find support for one view or the other to do so. Most chapters do carry 'messages', scientifically indeed, but

also at the end of the day politically, since welfare and the well-being of children are not apolitical issues (see Mayall, 2002). They do have political antecedents and they do carry political implications. In this sense, as editor, I welcome engagement and involvement.

The introductory words above could be accused of being stuck in impermissible conceptual binaries, an example of which is an implied divergence between generations. As such Heinz Hengst's chapter could be taken on board as a criticism, given his reservations, to say the least, against dichotomous thinking. When a subheading (above) sketches a development in the perception of children from contemporaries to next generation one might (mis)understand Hengst's message about children nowadays as contemporaries as a conceptual return to an Arièsian dream world where generations are mixed up with each other. However, his use of the Mannheimian concept of contemporaries is in fact signalling or portraying a futurity that is already with us. Without sacrificing the reality of distinct generations, Hengst is nevertheless making a diagnosis of our current era as dominated by media and consumption. Our entry in this era has led to a cultural 'Freisetzung' (a loosening of traditional and normative bonds) which has equipped children and young people with insight to master and decode media messages and competence to act as consumers – at least on par with adults.

Drotner concurs with Hengst in the assessment of mediatization as crucial for understanding modern childhood, and she makes a forceful plea for heightening the attention of media studies to childhood and for increasing childhood studies' awareness of media. While underwriting a trust in the idea of the 'complex' society, her chapter is at the same time continuously searching for commonalities while balancing between acknowledging children's ability to deal with modern media in their most various forms and a recognition of the stakes held by proponents of knowledge on the one hand and entertainment on the other. The significant point is that children in both realms are subjects and objects. An important conclusion made by Drotner is that children are able to make choices of media on the basis of what is relevant for them in given contexts rather than being attracted by a particular medium as such. The almost global access to media tends to unite children over the world in a common identification, while at the same time 'intensifying users' recognition and reflection on local differences'.

Drotner's concluding caveat to avoid ingrained and opposing epistemologies of childhood innocence and childhood competence by transcending them serves well as a password into the two next chapters, which also deal with the media world. David Buckingham and Sara Bragg report about a study of children's and parents' responses to sex in the media and how they relate to each other in this context. The authors question the reasons for media panic about children who are said to be growing up too fast. Essentially, the authors find that children are largely well aware of their own knowledge about sex, and of the expectations that both culture and

parents have as to what they should do or should know. They know about their 'territory' and about when they appear to reach its limits. Children are keen to present themselves as self-regulating. The study reported is an optimistic and positive account of children's insight and the authors find much support for understanding current cultural panic about children and the media as highly exaggerated. On the other hand a general act of empowerment of children such as the study might imply may entail costs in terms of burdens of full citizenship which may be heavier for some than for others.

The optimism of Buckingham and Bragg is not shared by Stephen Kline, who is much more reluctant to accept children's defensive capacities vis-à-vis the massive ammunition levelled against them from the media industry. Without denying the agency of children, he is rather inclined to understand the relationship between children and the media industry as a very unequal power relationship between partners whose interests do not coincide. The media world is thus seen by Kline as one among many other structural forces that children as well as adults have to contend with. Whether the media actually can or will result in violence or other unacceptable behaviour is obviously hard to prove; on the other hand profit-seeking companies are hardly to be seen in terms of benevolence or malevolence – perhaps they are better represented as indifferent to anything other than their own commercial interests. Everyone is likely to be a part of such a commercial ambience and children may eventually be as competent to meet the challenges as adults. Even if children and adults in this comparison may be seen as contemporaries, to use Hengst's phrase, nothing is said about the power relations between humans and the commercial world.

Media in all their varieties are a part of an ever-widening array of technological instruments at our disposal, and it is some of them which Cindi Katz takes to task. In Chapter 6, Katz, who has done so much in her earlier work to trace the common influences of capitalism in both the developing world (Sudan) and the modern world (New York), concentrates mainly on its most recent expressions of importance for children's everyday life in New York. The new developments, not least after 11 September 2001, in the USA, indeed eventually in many parts of the world, focused towards new regimes of surveillance are paralleled by an already flourishing industry dedicated to controlling children's movements and behaviour. Under the pretext of providing protection to children a plethora of monitoring and – in effect – disciplining measures are launched at the market while instrumentalizing parents' anxieties in the modern city. The chapter can also be read as another example of the way that children's participation opportunities are slighted with good parental intentions while serving the interests of the producers of hypervigilant products in amazingly, indeed disturbingly creative forms. One might suggest, given prevailing attitudes of sentimentalization, that corporate society is blatantly transgressing a moral agenda which has been with us for at least a century.

The questions raised here in the context of children's relationship with media and technology appear in various other contexts in the book; typical, of course, in social studies of childhood's attempt to find its identity or perhaps identities. They may be formulated in numerous ways, for instance in terms of protection and participation, constraint and opportunity, vulnerability and resilience, dependence and independence, adaptation and transgression or, most abstractly, structure and agency – all binaries or dichotomies, which never do completely justice to reality but nevertheless have some heuristic value and analytical utility.

Of course, it is the question of social order, which applied to childhood through a Parsonian optic, is the barbarian question (see Parsons, 1964, p. 208). Children are a challenge, not to say a provocation to the social order. They constantly seek to test the limits or even to transgress any normative agenda, as Chris Jenks suggests. They are the true, recurrent and joyful deconstructionists of an orderly social system that is understood as a continuous grand narrative, irrespective of whatever transformation society undergoes. It is the fate and/or tragedy of children that it is eventually them, as adults, who will be the corrective instance, entrusted with the prerogatives of socializing governance vis-à-vis never ending cohorts of transgressors. No social order will allow itself to accept a child's transgressive perseverance or persevering transgression since this will lead to anarchism. On the other hand, as Jenks suggests, some lessons about morality might be learned from even inarticulate voices of despair or resistance or optimism, since most systems also harbour more attractive responses to unorthodox demeanour than incarceration or institutionalization.

If childhood in general is transgression and entails numerous forms of institutionalizations, including childhood itself, this is even truer of orphanhood as a special case of childhood. Orphanhood is an embodied challenge to a patriarchal and familial social order. It is not the children as carriers of this status who aspire to challenge any prevailing consensus; rather it is the status itself which has become ascribed to children as a particular misfortune. In Judith Ennew's account, not much is left for orphans in terms of agency. Orphanhood is a double dependency: it is dependency on various forms of caretaking systems, and orphans are prisoners of their own dependency. The orphans are truly at the margin of any society, although typically tolerated for their value as investment objects. The continuity in orphanhood, historically and interculturally, is exactly its extreme marginality; orphans belong to nobody. The way orphanhood is approached as a problem varies, basically according to mode of production, and thus assumes different forms. However, as Ennew shows, different solutions cannot hide the fact that we are speaking about the same problem, which has only been quantitatively exacerbated due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In various guises modes of production constitute the background for understanding the forms and expressions of children's life worlds in several

chapters of this book. They encompass Ennew's chapter on orphanhood; Kline's chapter observes the subsuming of children's media use under capitalist firms' demands for profit; for Olga Nieuwenhuys and Michael Lavalette children's inclusion in the world of work in either the poor or the rich world is premised on relations of exploitation; while Katz's chapter offers an interpretation of what she calls 'the gravity of living in the shards of capitalist modernity'. Helmut Wintersberger also takes up this vocabulary while introducing notions of formal and real subsumption under capital in his analysis. Any simplistic references to reductionism or determinism – so typical when notions of capitalism are invoked – are unwarranted when in fact the realities of unequal relations of power are foregrounded. In the chapters, for instance, on children's work (including Viviana Zelizer's chapter), children are indeed granted important roles as actors, and none of the writers mentioned above are unaware of or not alert to the relationship between structure and agency. It remains important, though, to be attentive to the nature of this relationship; its continuous presence does not contradict its being typically represented as manifesting unbalanced power relationships.

Nieuwenhuys and Lavalette both write about child labour in the classical sense, but in two different parts of the world: Nieuwenhuys writes from the third world, while Lavalette deals with the issue in the modern United Kingdom. There are commonalities between them in the sense of understanding market capitalism or neo-liberalism as a threat to labouring children, but while Nieuwenhuys is inclined to accept children's active participation in work as necessary for survival (in India), Lavalette does not find much consolation or any excuses for letting children work in the UK, where sheer survival is not at stake. His main and classical trade union argument is that children must be protected against waged work because it exploits them, and that the neo-liberal economy and its influence on the British welfare state only exacerbate the problems. At the same time Lavalette critically implies an affinity between neo-liberalism and modern strands of social constructionism in the latter's alleged effort to 'liberate' children as competent agents, which only leads to their being 'adulterized'.

For Nieuwenhuys, in a third world context, the question is rather to acknowledge children as indispensable participants in intergenerational exchange relations. She is careful in distinguishing between paid and unpaid labour (or work), and makes it clear that children's unpaid work is indeed widespread, in fact it is by far the most common kind of children's useful participation. This work is of great importance since it forms a necessary part of a generalized reciprocity and thus finds an almost natural place within communities and localities in developing countries (and, one might add, in the history of the western world). Work performed by children is in fact their 'wealth' and has positive consequences as a part of the intergenerational wealth flows. It is suggested that children's work for wages also has negative effects since the surplus is 'siphoned off'; in that way it is

exploitative. In a sense, therefore, there is agreement between Nieuwenhuys and Lavalette in their assessment of wage labour as exploitative; however, in modern societies Nieuwenhuys' 'unpaid work' does not have the same meaning as in developing countries, where the question of protection versus participation is not raised or contemplated.

This does not mean that unpaid work is not found in the modern world, as Zelizer convincingly points out, but again it carries a different meaning than in contemporary pre-industrial countries, and one may doubt that it is indispensable as a part of a generalized reciprocity. Nevertheless it is deemed extremely useful in its production, on the one hand, of transferable goods and services and, on the other, in its addition to existing capital. Zelizer's main examples are from care work, children as linguistic mediators and children in immigrant enterprises, and she demonstrates that 'meaning, organization, contribution and compensation of children's work' vary systematically from one social setting to the other. Although the work that Zelizer is exemplifying is useful in the contexts in which it is performed, it is to a large extent invisible; at the same time it is found meaningful for children. Zelizer concludes with an interesting flash-back to her famous book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, and makes clear that in principle her new arguments are in line with the main tenets of that book.

Is there a historical development of children's useful participation in any mode of production? Wintersberger makes a bold effort to make sense of children's labour during history and even into the future, while combining it with its position in the division of labour. He describes and discusses the stages through which children's work so far has passed – from traditional to early-industrial labour, from human capital production to consumers – the latter being a role which children for the first time are negotiating without adult interference. The author partly uses a Marxist framework – formal subsumption (classical child labour) and real subsumption (for example, school work) under capital. It is further argued that while children through scholasticization have obtained advantages, they have also been marginalized and affected negatively in terms of their position in the generational division of labour and generational distribution of resources. Even the most developed welfare states have suffered a child-blindness, and although the feminist movement can be seen as an inspiration for giving more visibility to children, it has not unequivocally been in favour of a generational perspective. Wintersberger, though, sees some hope in an – admittedly somehow speculative – future role of children, where they might assume a position as 'new post-industrial producers'.

In whichever form, there seems no doubt that children are performing useful activities. The question remains whether they are also rewarded for it. Are they also partakers in any system of distributive justice? Can they be seen as legitimate claimants on available resources in the communities or societies in which they live? Nieuwenhuys answers affirmatively as far as

unpaid work is concerned in contemporary pre-industrial societies, while both she and Lavalette, by and large, regard children's paid work as exploitative. In her chapter, Bojer addresses the important issue of distributive justice for children. Rawls's famous work on justice does not address children's position and it is Bojer's aim to see if children can be conceptualized in Rawlsian terms. For this purpose she discusses the notions of children as public and private goods, and while she holds that children, strictly speaking, do not deserve a right to societal revenues, due to their age, they nevertheless must – as humans – have a claim on societal resources. Children are parents' responsibilities, but since they are also public goods with positive externalities it is only logical that parents can legitimately make claims for assistance in shouldering their responsibilities. In the light of Rawls's scheme, Bojer finds that it makes much sense to allow such claims: anything else would jeopardize life as a child.

The scope of children's activities is large indeed. In a historical and a global perspective, as we have seen, children have always been required to participate in a range of more or less useful activities. In this sense they are always, in one way or another, included in the social division of labour with adults. It is however important, as recent social studies of childhood have clearly demonstrated, also to deal with children as active in their relations to other children. For Bill Corsaro, who for decades has been a leading researcher on (mainly) young children in their meeting places, it is important to maintain that the level of analysis for studying childhood and children's life transitions must always be collective, that is, the individual in interaction with others within a cultural context. This distinguishes Corsaro's work from much psychological research, from which he nevertheless advises us not to disengage completely. Rather one should, as for instance through his own theory of interpretive reproduction, make attempts to bridge the micro–macro gap by stressing children's agency in their production of and participation in their peer cultures. Corsaro is careful in stressing the constraints of social structure and social reproduction, but finds that the nature of children's collective actions demands a more micro and temporally situated view of agency. To this effect, Corsaro is presenting his own qualitative empirical data, while drawing theoretically on Emirbayer and Mische's ideas about the 'triad of agency'.

Allison James also uses her own empirical data in an effort, as she says, 'to reclaim subjectivity for children'. She criticizes the schematic use of chronological age, which is so ingrained that even children themselves may be using it (as Ivar Frønes also suggests). There is a lot of 'nature' and 'mythology' to ideas of adulthood, which is in fact socially achieved. The widespread use of age schemes has led to policies which separate children and adults in their everyday lives and invokes a generational perspective. The power of developmental psychology is felt in both social practice and in parenting, which creates anomalies and renders children victims of a kind

of 'ageism' – not only as objects but also in the sense that they internalize the schemes and use it on themselves. James's talks with children concentrate on their views of 'the future' and 'the past', and she argues that concepts of autobiography and of life history are relevant for children as well as for adults; through this the 'ageism' with which children are often saddled is questioned.

Frønes's chapter, finally, is an ambitious effort to theorize about the transition towards adulthood and the importance of age-phases. A particular significance is given to the impact of any child's future as adults – this next age-phase looms large not only in the minds and policies of adults, it is also significant in children's imagery of their own future. Frønes is critical of a one-sided structural approach, although he recognizes its importance. Children all assume particular positions at each age-phase. These are influenced not only by their situation in a generational structure, but also by gender, class and ethnicity. This means that any analysis of childhood must account for both structural influences and for differentiations that occur simultaneously. Despite the acceptance of a powerful structural influence on the formation of childhood, Frønes's chapter can be understood as an advocacy for the plurality of childhoods and for their internal differentiation. The chapter introduces a number of new concepts, such as paths, tracks, synchronicity and diachronicity and is, characteristically for the author, flavoured by an abundance of illustrative examples.

## **Ways ahead for childhood studies**

Is there a historical continuity of childhood that can be extended into a future that may already be with us? As the chapters in this volume testify the study of childhood and therefore also the reality of children's life worlds covers a wide range and demonstrates large diversities. New nuances and gradations are added and oppositions to simplified dichotomies and binaries are boldly aired. Nevertheless, the old fronts between structure and agency are not discarded; indeed, while the constructive role of children is reiterated and made more visible in new areas, we are also witnessing the fact that notions of capitalism and modes of production are increasingly finding a place in the analyses.

The subheadings in the opening sections of this introduction may imply that some of the chapters seem inadvertently to suggest a continuation. As already indicated, it appears that we may again be talking about children as contemporaries in intergenerational terms after a long period in which notions of children as the next generation have been the reigning concept and conventional wisdom. This is particularly indicative within the chapters on media, where children are portrayed as harbouring competences that often match those of adults and indeed not infrequently surpass them. It is significant also to make visible new forms of participation by children, in