

Kohan, W. O. and Weber, B. (eds.) (2020). *Thinking, Childhood, and Time. Contemporary Perspectives on the Politics of Education*. Lexington Books.

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In this review of *Thinking, Childhood, and Time. Contemporary Perspectives on the Politics of Education*, let us begin at the very beginning. The image chosen by Walter Omar Kohan and Barbara Weber for the cover of their edited book is entitled *Child through Time*, by the poet and artist Tamara Ralis. The choice of art and artist is apt. Ralis explains her art, saying that 'I like what is newly born, before it has taken on color. Perhaps because it gives information about a condition that has not yet accumulated anything external from the world. The essential task is to find this inner place, which has no history' (Interview with Ralis, www.beings.de). From the moment one picks up this book, confronted by this image and Ralis' philosophy, one is taken on a journey of ideas that explores 'a condition that has not yet accumulated anything external from the world', that has yet to take on colour.

It is no surprise that these editors in particular also make a political link in the title of this book since both have interests in political philosophy and practice. Education is inherently political. Less obvious is the suggestion that childhood is political. In this volume, the authors that Kohan and Weber have brought together are clear that in discussing the concept of childhood and the way this is enacted it is political. It is political because it asks at the outset 'How can educators be more responsive to the Otherness that children and childhood offer?' (p. 1). Bonnett, in chapter five, writes about the 'interplay of mutual participation in each other's being' (p. 98). The way in which children and adults exist and interact with one another, and with and in time, recurs throughout the book. This engagement with the Other, whatever that other is, is political.

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Comprising thirteen chapters, in two parts, the authors present questions and challenges to the reader and to accepted ways of thinking about childhood and time and, indeed, our ways of being. The first part of the book offers Phenomenological Explorations of Time, Thinking and Embodiment. In Part two, Decolonial and Poststructuralist Perspectives on the Politics of Education are presented. Although discrete chapters, each speaks to the others. Themes criss-cross through the book. Each, though not always explicitly stated, challenges traditional developmentalist notions of child and childhood. It is in this regard that elements of the book may prove challenging to some. The further, and perhaps more complex, ideas for the reader who is not well-versed in this field of philosophy pertain to the concepts in relation to time and childhood. These, though, offer much in terms of considering how we think of children and how we, as adults, might respond to them. Kohan and Weber are explicit in stating that their goal, in creating this book, is to 'work toward a paradigm shift of our experience of childhood: To perceive the philosophical and political dimensions of childhood and education'. Of course, the readers of the book may no longer consider themselves to be children, so our 'experience of childhood' on reading the book is provoked, of which the various authors will likely approve. Our experience of childhood in terms of our interactions with those who are readily recognisable as children may be altered, and our experience of our own, continuing childhood may be embraced.

The idea of 'a form of life distinct from normative adulthood' (p. 119) is something Kennedy advances in his contribution to the book, chapter seven. For Kennedy, the 'space of becoming other' (p. 119) is a point of interest. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, he writes that we *are* time rather than existing *in* time, and argues that the very language we use to describe childhood demonstrates a certain adultomorphism that plays into the deficit view that so often dominates education, and society more broadly. This adultomorphism is challenged throughout the book. While this is the case, there is an suggestion in the first part of the book that children experience differently to adults. They experience emotions such as happiness and sadness differently, but, importantly, they



experience time differently. This is not just because they have less experience, or perhaps awareness of that thing commonly understood as time; they have to be inducted into adult time, the time of the workplace, the time of deadlines marked in calendars. In their becoming adult, children learn but do not necessarily or voluntarily embrace the chronological time set by institutions such as the school. The authors in the first part of the book urge us to consider how time, as *aion* rather than *chronos*, may impact on our understanding of children, childhood and education, and, in turn, what bearing this may have on our practice as educators. The second part of the book complements the first. The focus is not on the child as becoming adult, but on post-human, decolonial and deconstructive approaches to childhood.

For Mensch, in the book's first chapter, the child's selfhood is a focus. He develops a metaphor based on music and the sense that musical notes are transient in our experience of them as an analogy for our experience of childhood. He adeptly uses this metaphor of a melody that diminishes or recedes for us in his exploration of Childhood and the Genesis of Time. Perhaps recognising the strains of a familiar melody, the adult engages with the child through 'the effort of empathy consist[ing] in accessing the stage, still present within himself, of the child he encounters' (p. 25). In asserting that 'empathy is a function of the development of our selfhood' (p. 26), Mensch's chapter is appropriately placed at the beginning of the book. He asserts the need to access our earlier self while being able to consider our being-in-the-world. His emphasis on our empathetic selves as the thing that binds us to our past melodies but also to others in society that it may function well is fundamental to the book.

Weber's chapter, chapter two, also recognises that children may experience the world differently and asks what we 'can learn about human existence from how children perceive and experience the world'. As in Mensch's chapter, Weber recognises that time 'eludes our grasp' (p. 34). Making reference to discussions with her young son about his drawings, she is clear that before children have an objective understanding of time and space, they live in and with time and space; they are present. Perhaps this 'presenting' is what adults, what some of the

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authors in the book, are trying to capture. There is only past and future for many and if we can capture our childhood, like lightning in a bottle, we are able to be present and may enjoy a different relationship with our selves and those around us.

This new relationship with those around us may involve *phronein* in our educational practices, as presented by Lamberti in chapter four. This way of being, he proposes, includes thinking and practical wisdom. This, we could suggest, is as much for the teacher as for the children, particularly as he draws our attention to the importance of listening. In a context where children's rights discourse asserts that children's views should be encouraged and attended to, his emphasis on 'listening as a basic element of "phronein"' (p. 75) is helpful, not least because, as he goes on to say, 'learning to listen well to others is part of th[e] learning process' (p. 89) that supports our thinking. Indeed, it may, he suggests, the attitude of listening as a way of being may help us towards 'the first principle of happiness' (p. 89). Happiness, we might suggest, involves play of some sort.

In chapters five (Bonnett) and six (Caputo), play is central. Bonnett refers to the current context in which we find ourselves to explore 'childhood and "childish" ways of being' (p.93). While his chapter refers to play, *Thinking and the Play of Being*, his message is serious. In his chapter, he considers the kind of thinking needed to address the issues of the age and questions how the problems we currently face in the world can be combatted by thinking in the same way as before. He proposes features of thinking that align with the world of which we are a part and that 'celebrate "unwordly" qualities that we associate with childhood' (p. 94). While adulthood is caught up and bound with chronological notions of time, he ponders whether we might adopt a more childish approach, a playfulness that allows us to see what is 'really real' (p. 97). In seeing the 'really real' we will engage with and, importantly, *in* the natural world in a new way. He talks of 'nowness', which resonates with the presenting to which Weber refers in chapter two. Caputo, in chapter six, exemplifies the nowness and playfulness discussed elsewhere in the book. She shares a project, *Philosophia Ludens*, that she undertook in Italy with a group of eight year-old children. In the project, the children played



philosophical games. Hers is a chapter that illustrates the possibilities of exploring the philosophical with children. It requires the listening that Lamberti seeks and it acknowledges and embraces a way of being that is childish. Of course, one has to be careful in using the word 'childish' as it smacks of disapproval. This is not the case here, nor in Kohan's chapter eight. Indeed, this chapter is a useful bridge to the next chapter, where Kennedy discusses 'child time, wild time' (p. 127) as something to be embraced. Recognising where child has traditionally been positioned, 'at the liminal margins of "human"' (p. 124), he challenges adult dominance, while recognising the terror in which the wild or untamed child holds for the adult.

The notion of a 'childlike revolution' is one to which Kohan refers in his discussion of Paulo Freire and the *Childhood of a Philosophical Life*. He likens political revolution to a child because 'it inhabits an open, non-dogmatic, and restless way of existing' (p. 138). It is at one and the same time, 'learning how to be a revolution while being a revolution' (p. 138). He notes that for Freire, the outcomes of a revolution are not what is important; the experiencing, the *nowness*, of the revolution is key. So, in comparing the revolution to child, the child *is* the revolution; the child is present, the child is learning to be child while childing. Kohan advocates for an a-chronological childhood in education. He desires that the child is cherished within us all, that aoinic nature of childhood is nurtured in order that adults retain the curiosity of childhood. He wishes this, not just for the general population, but particularly for teachers that they may foster childlike dispositions so that 'a new possible world can emerge' (p. 141).

The explicitly political continues in chapter nine, with Rollo's exploration of Democratic Child's Play. Again, the juxtaposition of play and the political are clear. In exploring ideas of agency, he builds his discussion on work from other contributors to the book, such as Weber, Kohan and Kennedy. He wishes to go beyond Arendt, who he sees as depicting 'childhood as purely social and therefore prone to conformity' (p. 151). He considers it a more political way of being but is cautious that we do not simply draw 'an analogy between the oppression of children and people of colour' (p. 155). However, he does advocate a decolonial

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education for children. To do this, he argues, children must be released from adultist expectations of children and adult behaviour toward them. The notion of a progression to adulthood is distasteful to Rollo. Children should, he holds, enjoy an element of power, a place in society that allows them to engage as agents in political life and that respects them '*as they are*' (p. 155).

The succeeding chapter, from Murriss, also addresses the question of children's agency. Here, she explores the Posthuman Child in order that De(con)structing Western Notions of Agency might be considered. Like others in the book, she challenges the notion of *chronos*. Even cyclical time, she says, 'is assumed to be linear' (p. 164). Murriss' concern is that dominant Western notions of adulthood are problematic, particularly for those in the Global South, and this is bound up with the ways in which we think of time. She draws on Barad's work to consider 'quantum leaping[, which] means a radical break in continuity' (p.168). In quantum leaping we may be able to create a way of being that is less adult-centric, less human-centric and more ethical. This may be achieved by rejecting the developmental view of childhood, where children progress to a predetermined adulthood. She urges a different type of listening, as also seen in Lamberti and Caputo's chapters. This also requires that we 'listen to' the non-human in advancing Murriss' thesis.

Perhaps the final chapter from Merçon may help us on our route to a new way of being. She begins by telling us 'We are tired' (p. 209). She continues, 'We are tired of time's linearity. Tired of progress and evolution. Tired of developments. We feel depleted' (ibid). The weight of this kind of time, of history, presses upon us as we lurch from one political and environmental crisis to another. In this chapter, she considers 'alternative histories, other narratives' (p. 210). This resonates well with other chapters within the book, particularly Murriss'. The environmental is, for Merçon, linked to education and is overtly political. In advancing ecoeducation, she urges us to think about what education could be and what role philosophy might play in this. She ends her chapter, and the book, with a reference to the Cohuirimpo tribe in Sonora, Mexico: "'The body of thinking is



what we have to cultivate to be wise and free, just as we cultivate the universe”
(p. 217).

Kohan and Weber’s book can certainly be seen to cultivate our thinking. It succeeds beautifully in urging us to free our thinking about childhood and time, and the inter-related nature of these ideas in advancing a shift in our way of being together.

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