

‘The Scream’: Meanings and Excesses in Early Childhoods

Settings

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Abstract: Young children's screams have been misunderstood at best and at worst subjected to discipline. Drawing upon data from an ethnography in a London Nursery, this article suggests that not only are screams part of the 'soundscape', but they are overflowing with meanings including about inequities in the social order of educational settings. These meanings are afforded by the physical and socio-cultural aspects of voice quality, as well as overcivilising efforts. Suggesting an approach of methodological answerability in listening to 'the scream', the article considers voice quality in relation to what matters and as a *mode* of potential transgressive and political articulation.

Keywords: voice quality, answerability, overcivilise, inequalities, scream

Walid's voice rose loudly, transforming from a murmur of words to an extra-linguistic vocalisation reverberating across the setting. An educator looked over and commented, 'Use your words, Walid.'

(Westside Nursery, London, UK)¹

These sounds, both the scream and the verbal response it elicited from adults, are most likely 'recognisable' to anyone who has spent time in an early childhood setting, at very least in the UK. Whilst 'the scream' is a ubiquitous part of the 'soundscape' (Schafer, 1977) in such early childhood institutions, its communicative – in the broad sense of 'having something to say about the world' rather than the technical, functional sense of communication (Standish, 2013) – and sensory potentialities are generally neglected, an absence which this article seeks to address. In contrast, as I will discuss further below, 'the scream' is often ignored, met with irritation, or even subject to discipline within a culture of 'schoolification' (Moss, 2013) where young children are prepared for 'standards-based'

¹ All individual and institutional names have been changed for confidentiality and anonymity.

compulsory education, at very least in situations where a child is considered 'capable' of communicating verbally. Children's screams, and other vocal productions, are often viewed as disturbances in public spaces spatially disciplined for "'adult" ways of behaving and of using space' (Valentine, 1996: 596) and subjected to restrictive anti-'noise' legislation (Oswell, 2009).

Such reactions are, in part, a reflection of the primacy accorded to the acquisition of *verbal* language in early childhood research and practice-based literature (e.g. see Berk and Roberts, 2009; Oates and Grayson, 2004; Weitzman and Greenberg, 2002) and curriculum documents. The *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2012: 4) curriculum in England, for instance, denotes 'communication and language' as one of three 'prime' learning areas for young children. Here, communication is about creating a 'rich language environment' and supporting developing 'skills' in *speaking* and listening (DfE, 2012: 5). This emphasis on the verbal, rather than other aspects of bodily sound production, may also relate to a more pervasive absence. Scholars have long neglected sound as a mode of communication and often disparagingly relegate its use to babies or non-Western people, implying derogatorily that both they and sound itself are 'embryonic' in relation to more rational and advanced modes of communication (Finnegan, 2002).

The emphasis on verbal forms of communication often lies at the heart of methodological writing which invokes the importance of attending to children's 'voice' from a metaphorical point of view while neglecting the material, acoustic aspects of 'voice' (Schnoor, 2012). Such neglect is increasingly questioned in formulations of 'hybrid childhoods' (Prout, 2005; Lee and Motzkau, 2011) which contra biosocial dualisms highlight the importance of considering the 'more-than-social' as ways to move beyond instrumentalism in regard to 'voice', emotional expression, and agency (Kraftl, 2013). Here the concern is to situate 'voice' as a complex socio-material interaction rather than emerging from an originary subject:

Voice is viewed as a situated, contingent process that emerges out of heterogeneous constituent parts – everyday interactional practices, hearing technologies, the relative

functioning of a child's ear and their mastery of language, adult-child power relations, predominant discourses about childhood, and so on (Kraftl, 2013: 5).

Indeed, recent theorizing suggests the meaning(s) of humanly-produced sounds are not merely ones deriving from the linguistic, but from the acoustic aspects of voice quality itself (Van Leeuwen, 2009) fashioned through interaction with objects as well as with body-internal resources, such as tongues, mouths, vocal cords, and lungs. Here, meanings are suggested by 'voice quality' or the pitch, timber, rhythm, and volume of human sound, both in relation to and separately from words. On this account, meanings are shaped, in part, by the physical possibilities involved in the production of voice (Van Leeuwen, 2009). For instance, a high pitched, tensed voice quality is produced by tensing the muscles of the larynx to produce more taut vocal cords leading Van Leeuwen (2009: 70) to suggest: 'The resulting sound not only *is* tense, it also *means* "tense"' – although I would caution that other meanings are also possible. It is not just the physical aspects of voice quality which influence possible meanings and communicative potentials, but the characteristics of sound itself. Finnegan (2002) argues that sound is a mode particularly suited to attracting attention and communicating in settings that are busy or limited visually, as is the case in many early years settings: sound is able to move around and through obstacles in a way that visuals cannot.

Without seeking to displace the particular affordances of material aspects of voice production and sound, Schlichter (2011) warns, however, against moves which naturalise such meanings, separating them from the socio-cultural environment in which they are produced and heard. Without someone attributing meaning to the vibrations and waves which pass from the lungs through the body, they become superfluous information rather than meaning-rich expressions (Roosth, 2009). It is here that the particular acoustic conventions of the spaces and places where sounds are produced becomes important: a

scream will have different meanings in a dark, underground parking lot than in an early childhood setting.

It is in this sense, then, that the 'scream' – as a particular production of voice quality – cannot be said to hold one meaning that crosses time and place. Indeed, voice quality can contradict both verbal productions (which it may accompany) and naturalised categories such as 'race', gender and age/generation with which it is often linked. This leads Schlichter (2011) to indicate the potentials of voice quality to be 'disruptive' and 'transformative'. Even further, Žižek (1996) argues that voice exceeds and indeed 'resists meaning' – unlike words which seek to stabilize or fix meaning. Here he seems to be implying that voice quality, as a deeply visceral experience for both producers and listeners, is not easily or perhaps ever entirely translatable into the symbolic or linguistic, rendering it radically indeterminate in meaning.

This body of work, although paradigmatically diverse and offering contrary perspectives, suggests that voice quality, and by extension the 'scream', is a critical avenue of investigation with the potential to offer insights into processes of meaning construction, communication, and 'voice'. As such, in this paper I will consider: What would it mean to listen to children's screams as voice quality rather than noise? What might such an investigation have to say about acoustic conventions and the social order of early childhood settings?

Generating data

The discussion in this article will draw on data 'generated' (Mason, 2002) as part of a larger year and a half long ethnographic study examining children's imaginative play involving themes of death and violence. For the purposes of this paper, I am using the term child to refer to those people involved in the study setting who were 0-5-years-old. Given the ubiquity of age-based segregation in educational institutions, curriculum documents (DfE, 2012), and multi-scalar policy, this categorisation has conceptual and practical import, whilst still

remaining an open question. The children represented in this article are not considered to be static beings unchanged over time, place, and play partners with meanings of 'the scream' easily transportable across contexts and players nor is this an attempt to locate 'the scream' as fundamentally a 'voice' of childhood. I will seek to demonstrate, however, that play interactions, considered as a 'cultural reality' (Edmiston, 2008: 6), bring to light salient points regarding the negotiation of meanings in relation to 'the scream'.

The research involved spending one day a week in an early childhood setting in West London as a participant observer, joining children as a co-player when invited. This positioning has been described elsewhere as 'least-educator' and involved on-going reflection upon generational inequities while attempting to be situated 'outside of the *institutionalised responsibilities and authority* embedded in an educator role' (Albon and Rosen, 2014: 38).

Westside Nursery is a maintained, non-for-profit nursery, based in a low-income neighbourhood in West London. There are up to 80 children enrolled in the setting, 40 part-time and up to 40 full-time. Families receive the 15-hour national entitlement for nursery education with additional funding for full-timers provided by the national and local governments on the basis of 'need'. Children attending the setting range from 2-4 years old, speak over 15 home languages, and come from diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural communities. Verbal communication between children and children and adults takes place primarily in English; however, in some cases, home languages are spoken.

Three 'critical moments' (Albon and Rosen, 2014: 6) from this study will be elaborated below. These moments are not intended to be exhaustive or representative of the productions of screams in Westside Nursery, but instead are those moments which either 'disturb or jar' or 'are so mundane that we may miss their presence'. Examination of these seemingly contradictory moments, by 'looking askew' at them, allows for interrogation of 'entrenched assumptions' and 'consideration of the ways these practices are "normalised"'.

Interrogating ‘the scream’

In the sections that follow, I will discuss three critical moments involving screams issued within the course of imaginative play, albeit sometimes ambiguously situated in relation to the hazy boundaries of play worlds and everyday worlds. The Oxford English Dictionary (Murray, 1933: 271) defines ‘scream’ simply as: ‘To utter a shrill piercing cry, normally expressive of pain, alarm, mirth or other sudden emotion.’ The particular voice quality – the ‘shrill piercing cry’ that does not make recourse to the linguistic – is the way I am characterising ‘the scream’ in these pieces of data; however, as I will argue, whilst such a voice quality sometimes signified a complex mixture of emotional states, ‘the scream’ could never simply be reduced to a naturalised emotional expression. Indeed, the screams discussed below carried multiple other meanings, notably the invitational and carnivalesque. In the final section, I will go on to consider the status of ‘the scream’ in the setting more broadly, suggesting that the status of childhood was central to the way screams were addressed by educators in the setting.

Critical moment 1:

Sherine and I were in the block area building together. Taylor, Mark, and Dylan approached holding guns made of blocks and began shooting at us. The sound of the guns incessant ‘ptchew, ptchew’ grew so loud that Sherine’s protests – ‘We are building a house!’ ‘Stoooppppp!’ – could not be heard. She got louder and louder until she was screaming at the top of her voice, her whole body vibrating with the force of the sound: ‘Ahhh!’ At the sound of her scream, many of the shooters left. But one remained, still aiming his gun at us and shooting loudly. Sherine turned to me, ‘You tell him to stop.’

In this first critical moment, Sherine’s scream most obviously might be understood to suggest: ‘Stop shooting at us’. Here the scream served almost as a piece of punctuation –

an exclamation mark – for her verbal expressions. Sherine may have been mobilizing the scream with a directive function in mind, aimed at reorganizing the social space in some way, for example an attempt to change the boys' actions. Sound can be effective in 'marshalling' people because it is difficult to drown out (Finnegan, 2002: 88). Here, the intensity of Sherine's scream, aimed at surpassing the sound of the shooting, created a particular soundscape which demanded a response. A connected meaning of the scream here is 'leave', a move on Sherine's part to protect the fragile 'interactive space' (Corsaro, 1985: 125) we had been building. At the same time as being a dismissal, her scream is suggestive then of a sentiment of caring. Here, the scream conveys: 'I care! I care about the interactive space, about being shot at, and about my co-player and myself!'

A final set of meanings in this scream might be a frustration that her use of linguistic messages – 'We're building a house!' and 'Stop' – were not understood or were not heeded by the three boys. This is suggestive of a sense of (momentary) powerlessness: 'In this moment, I don't have the authority to get the other children to respond when I speak.' There is a gendered dimension to this sense of subordination: as Rogers and Evans (2008) noted in their study of young children's play, boys often attempted to 'colonize' space where girls played. Generational power, as well as institutional authority, is also implied in this scream. This can be read in conjunction with her final turning to me to 'Tell him to stop'. Here, Sherine seemed to be suggesting that I had an authority in this moment to reorganize the space simply through my status as an adult and without recourse to extra-linguistic screaming. Thus, Sherine's scream in this moment embodies a number of potential meanings, some of which are contradictory: for example, a sense of power to reorganize the space sits in tension in this moment with a lack of authority to do so. 'The scream' in this critical moment is perhaps the most widely 'recognisable' of the three. Although screams were often modulated or disciplined in the setting, as I will go on to discuss, the use of a scream in this moment did not fundamentally jar with 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 2003) operating in the setting where focused activity – in this case building a house – was seen to

be sacrosanct and where loud vocalisations were seen to be connected to feelings of, often overwhelming, magnitude.

Critical moment 2:

Abdul noticed May, Denise, and Samira sitting by the climbing frame. He sped towards them with his arms out and issued a low-volume, dramatized scream in their direction: 'Ahh!' They began to laugh. He started to scream more loudly, waving his arms wildly as they jumped up. 'We need to go to the bus!' shouted May, quickly leading the escape. Abdul continued to chase the others, screaming at full power as he ran.

In this moment, Abdul appeared to be using a scream as a greeting or bid for attention. 'One way we assert our existence,' Finnegan (2002: 91) suggests, 'is through our acoustic actions and responses.' However, the scream in this moment implied more than 'hello'; it also served as an invitation to the group of children, an effort to tempt others to participate in imaginative play. Abdul seemed to be saying: 'I'm a scary creature', a call from within the play narrative to 'real' people (at least partially) outside the play narrative. Abdul's scream had a dual, even contradictory character: it was a 'friendly' invitation in the everyday world and a 'frightening' warning in the play. As a character in the play world, Abdul's scream was interpreted by the other children as: 'You should fear me. I'm going to get you!' – indicated by their attempt at a quick get-away in the play world. His scream was initially a low-volume dramatisation, perhaps to indicate its playful invitational quality, but quickly rose in decibels. The physical reverberations in his body while making the scream may have helped him 'feel' the emotions of the creature he was embodying somewhat similar to Hochschild's (2003) notion of 'deep acting' where events and resources – in this case 'the scream' with its all-encompassing physical and aural vibrations – serve to make the 'as if' aspects of play and everyday life *feel* 'real'.

The invitational use of the 'shrill, piercing cry' or at least a symbolic representation of it contradicts the conventional meanings associated with such voice quality, yet was a widely

recognised meaning amongst children in the setting. Although this was not the only way that play was initiated, screams were often used and responded to as just such an invitation to imaginative play. This begins to highlight the way that the materiality of voice quality may have some import on potential meanings. The production of the sound was caused by and in turn caused intense physical responses in Abdul's body, helping him to embody the intensity of the scary creature. Further, as his scream rose in decibels, the sound could not be avoided by others, making reaction and indeed interaction virtually unavoidable. Yet the interpretation of this scream as 'invitational' was highly contextual, not one that would necessarily be linked with a scream in another space or by others, rather than inherent in the sound itself.

Critical moment 3:

A group of children were playing dragons – going on a number of adventures around the setting, often breaking apart to fly on individual endeavours and later regrouping. At one such point, they settled into their 'home', a blanket and pillows laid out in a small corner of the outdoor space. Without apparent prompting, Marivec – a 'momma dragon' – began to scream, standing on the edge of the blanket and directing the sound towards the seated dragons. Soon other children in the group joined in and the scream grew louder and louder into a crescendo of sound. A few of the players sat down or backed away, but the others moved in, some standing up again, and formed a tight circle, continuing to scream at an incredible decibel. The scream maintained – for what felt like an eternity to my ears, but was probably about 60 seconds – and then just rounded out and stopped. The dragons then settled in for dinner.

This collective scream appeared, at least from my observational vantage point, to emerge suddenly and without provocation either within the play narrative or in everyday world negotiations. It certainly was not preceded or accompanied by verbal or embodied clues which I might have looked to in considering meanings: the dragon-children had settled in to

the space smoothly and without contention and Marivec looked in at the other dragons rather than out at a potential external source of provocation either from the play world or everyday world. In one sense then, this scream can be understood as being beyond meaning. I want to suggest, however, that the effort that went into sustaining this collective scream suggest it mattered deeply for these children. Further, this seemingly unintentional scream had the consequence of opening up space for something new, in terms of the meanings associated with such a voice quality, with implications for participants and understandings of the social order.

Following Bakhtin (1984), I would suggest these screams had a 'carnavalesque' quality. He contends the Medieval Carnival was an event when expectations for behaviour, relationships, and symbols from the everyday world were amplified or turned upside down through playfulness and 'sensuousness'. This allowed for transformation by bringing all that was serious and abstract to the level of flesh in order for 'a new birth [to] take place' (Bakhtin, 1984: 21). Similarly, this collective scream – an amplified voice quality taken up in a way that contradicted any sense of a linear play narrative – served to raise questions about the existing 'order' of the early childhood setting. Specifically, this collective scream offered children a (fleeting) release from a much-prized calm, quiet, and orderly nursery – a concern of many educators in the Nursery as well as more generally in early childhood settings (Phelan, 1997).

Interestingly, this disordered use of the scream (in terms of the play narrative and expectations in the setting) served to order the group of dragon-children by connecting their individual experiences: in effect, voice quality created a sense of community. The physical reverberations and the all-encompassing nature of the scream were important factors in drawing these dragon-children together, children who had often made use of individual screams with more antagonistic meanings in narrative or real conflict with each other, such as the moment with Sherine above. The hyperbole of the carnivalesque scream, Bakhtin (1984: 23) might argue, was also important here: the sense of exaggeration and voice

quality which stretched beyond the individual child may have symbolised a transgression of the 'limits of their [bodily] isolation' where people feel themselves as part of a bigger whole rather than 'atomized' and alienated. Here, the children's carnivalesque scream pushed against (neo)liberal thought dominant in educational institutions (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), which essentially reduces relationships between people to contractual relations between autonomous, rational individuals motivated by self-interest (Sevenhuijsen, 1998a). The sonic reverberations moved between and around the children's bodies in ways suggestive of Elias' (1994: 213) contention that human beings are not hermetically sealed off from others but are 'mutually oriented and dependent'. At the same time as this scream created community, it excluded those who did not or could not join in: those children who sat down quietly or backed away as the scream rose in decibels. Similar criticism has also been levelled against Bakhtin's romanticisation of the collectivity of the crowd in the Mediaeval carnival (Morris, 1994). In the case of this scream, the withdrawal may have been an effect of self-imposed social conventions regarding 'appropriate' vocalisations in early years settings or physical reactions to the scale of the sound.

With the magnitude of the sound produced in this moment there was a particular distortion which took place: an exponentiality created by the strange sensation of both producing a voice quality from inside the individual body and having a similar type of sound return and surround the body in amplified form. Such sonic intensity as well as ambiguity – the complex effects on the dragon-children's bodies caused by the indeterminacy of where one voice started and another stopped – created a particular *group* affect. As Henriques (2010: 75) notes: 'The subject of vibration claims relationality, not exclusivity. Vibrations have a resonating and reciprocal nature, so that every mechanism capable of expressing them can also receive vibrations.' He goes on to argue that sound is closely related to affect due to the embodied intensities they both produce. Whilst the debate about the relationship and slippage between affect and conceptually schematized emotions (for example see Shouse, 2005) is a topic beyond the range of this paper, I am suggesting here both a sense of bodily

affect co-experienced amongst the children through the vibratory resonances of the collective scream as well as a particular amplification of group emotions – which ‘have objects and involve beliefs’ (Standish, 2013: 3). Here, there may have been a number of ‘objects’ of the group emotion including: fury whilst in their character as dragons; guilt, remorse, or discomfort with earlier killings they had engaged in as dragons; and, fear – as actual children of the awesome power of these dragons.

The multiple meanings of screams

The three critical moments discussed above demonstrate that a similar voice quality can have meanings which do not just shift based on context of use but resonate in a singular scream. Just because voice quality and acoustic vibrations carry multiple, often contradictory meanings and are difficult to represent, however, does *not* mean that they do not have meaning. As Henriques (2010) suggests, sonic reverberations have – at the very least – corporeal import and embodied meaning. In part, it is the non-verbal aspect of ‘the scream’ which makes it able to carry so many meanings (and see also Komulainen (2007) for a discussion of the ambiguity produced when representing the non-verbal). The verbal also does not map directly on to the material world (Bernstein, 2000); however, the linguistic offers a potentially more recognisable mode for constructing and conveying meanings about the world. Meanings are even less explicitly mapped onto voice quality such as the scream: we have no dictionary of screams. The characteristics of play in which these screams were produced is also important here. Following Vygotsky (1978), I would suggest that in play a child is not as constrained by the conventional meanings of *voice quality*, notwithstanding the slippery nature of these meanings in the everyday world. That said, acoustic conventions do develop, providing some constancy in linking particular meanings with particular aspects of voice quality: increasingly this happens through popular culture Van Leeuwen (2009) argues. Such broader cultural conventions may sit in tension with more localised meanings. Children in the moments above, as well as others, made use of screams in ways which

stretch and expand conventional meanings, suggesting they are actively engaged in constructing meaning, an organising principle of much of the Childhood Studies literature (Jenks, 2004). Further, the invitational use of the scream is an example of the way an aspect of voice quality can assume a *somewhat* stable and recognisable meaning(s) in a particular location – at very least amongst some of the children in this setting.

Pedagogical resonances of ‘the scream’

Difficulties arise, however, when particular vocal productions and meanings clash, particularly when one is imbued with more authority. Here, conceptualisations of children as fundamentally mutable (Castañeda, 2003) and in need of ‘civilizing’ (Leavitt and Power, 1997) are particularly salient for educators, whose skills are often judged on the basis of behaviour management (Phelan, 1997). At Westside Nursery, for instance, ‘the scream’ was a voice quality that educators often tried to contain as it was not generally considered an ‘appropriate’ or welcome means of communication. Responses to children’s screams such as ‘use your words’, as in the example which began this article, were common, emphasising the importance placed on the verbal. This phrase also alludes to the curricular emphasis on teaching children to identify, ‘manage’, and name emotions (DfE, 2012). Such an approach is ‘ostensibly about the legitimacy and validation of children’s emotions’, however, Hoffman (2009: 22) argues it ‘can be seen as being more about advancing a culturally restricted model of verbal expressivity clearly directed toward instrumental ends of mitigating or controlling negative emotions.’ Indeed, screams were assigned particular emotive connotations by educators, generally those considered to be ‘negative’ as the following field note suggests:

May rushed by an educator, her voice raised in a shrill scream directed at a group of smaller children [an invitation?]. An educator cautioned: ‘May! Don’t scare the others.’

In Westside Nursery, 'acoustic conventions' were largely implicit; there were no written rules or policies governing sound. Educators, however, largely agreed that the indoor space needed to be kept quiet so that 'children can concentrate' and have space 'to do quiet things'. Children who produced screams inside were often told 'use your inside voice' or even sent outside; in her study of New Zealand early years setting, Stephenson (2002) similarly notes that a wider variety of sounds were allowed in the outdoors while the indoors is often more controlled. In the outdoor space, screams were often ignored by educators, however, even in this space they were occasionally subject to disciplinary measures with children told to 'calm down' and even removed from the group they were involved with and sent inside 'play quietly'. As one educator commented in reflecting on her practice: 'We tend to divert this kind of scream because we just see the end point. We don't know the purpose because we come from outside the play and miss the other bits.'

Aversion to particular sensory productions – in this case oral and auditory resonances of 'the scream' – can in part be understood in relation to 'social ordering'; in other words, interpretations of the scream can be viewed as raced, classed, gendered, and complexly generationed (Howes, 2005) in ways which draw on a series of wider narratives about the purposes of early childhood care and education. Bolstered by childhood's 'master identity' (Christensen, 2000) of vulnerability, one such imperative relates to intensified concerns about safety; Wyver *et al* (2010) note how educators operate in a context of 'surplus safety', often attempting to prevent any type of danger for fear of even the most benign injury, concerns exacerbated by the competitive and intense regulatory context many educators work within. These preoccupations with risk combine with dominant expectations that early childhood settings will promote 'school readiness' and, when subjected to an even more future-oriented gaze, early childhood is advocated as a way of producing 'a stable, well-prepared workforce' (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007: 44).

In this context, children's uses of 'the scream' are considered highly disruptive because the more conventional meanings are associated with highly-charged interactions, often linked to

unpredictability and lack of control. As one of the educators at Westside Nursery commented: 'It's a health and safety thing. We have to protect them. Screaming means it is getting frenzied. They aren't contained. They are oblivious to others.' Here, the scream has resonances with fears of the 'feral' child, an enduring association between the 'wildness' of animal and childhood in the adult imaginary. Indeed, the liminal status granted to children in this view has historically been called upon to justify educational programmes (Hendrick, 1997: 43).

A type of circular logic ensues here as a result of this process. Screams come to be seen as an aspect of voice quality that must be managed and regulated, indeed 'civilised' out of childhood. In this process of developing 'appropriate bodies' (Shilling, 2003), screams may become less common-place in adulthood. As such, 'screams' come to be associated with childhood, often fixed as 'children's voices', providing an example of supposedly inherent differences between adults and children. Such premises are often used to position children – as well as women, working class people, and colonised peoples – as uncivilised in their purportedly 'closer' connection to uncontained emotions, senses, and the body (Howes, 2005), arguments which have been used to justify inequity (Connell, 1987; Shilling, 2003).

Further, by rendering a particular voice quality as 'undesirable' *in entirety*, this meaning can become fixed, appearing as a direct and inherent relationship between a particular sound and meaning. One risk here is that multiple meanings can be missed; for example, an invitational scream may be interpreted as an uncontrolled emotional outburst. Relatedly, 'the scream' can be rendered virtually meaningless as it is relegated as disturbance or noise. Here, 'management' (cf Leavitt and Power, 1997) of the soundscape, rather than meanings in the soundscape, assumes importance with important implications for children's political subjectivities and democratic participation.

Tentative suggestions towards a politics of voice quality

Current trends towards ‘listening’ to children’s voices and involving children in decision-making about their lives tends to be premised on the verbal, with political subjectivity constituted by rational articulations (Komulainen, 2007; Kjørholt et al., 2005). This risks negating other forms of communication, including voice quality, ultimately reinforcing a Western elevation of the linguistic to the detriment of other senses and modes (Howes, 2005). Such an emphasis on the verbal also normalises a particular neo-liberal form of participation rights: discursive and rational as opposed to embodied, affective, and otherwise (Wyness, 2012). The corollary of constituting political subjectivity through rational discussion and meaning-laden language is two-fold. As Schnoor (2012: 7) suggests this can ‘*suppress* particular voices (e.g. crying or screaming) in order to “give voice” to *other[s]*’ what Oswell (2009) refers to as the ‘disarticulation’ and even denial of the political expressivity of non-verbal sounds. This produces a tension in efforts to conceive of and constitute children – including those who do not or cannot engage in linguistic productions – as political actors.

Yet, as I have proposed, uses of the scream in Westside Nursery mattered to those who produced them. Screams were meaningful in complex ways, including in ways which were not intended or were generated through the practice itself – as in the seemingly unprovoked collective scream in the critical moment above. It is here that I want to suggest the productivity of considering joyful, angry, humorous, loud, symphonic, and disordered uses of ‘the scream’ as valuable and important, including – although not limited to – acts of political expressivity. In one sense, this contention is rooted in the way listening closely to ‘the scream’ encourages a reappraisal of the taken-for-granted dominance of the verbal and reified meanings of voice quality. ‘The scream’ also commands attention in ways that cannot be avoided, breaking or jarring the social order of the existing soundscape, which – as discussed above – strains at early childhood practices of *overcivilising* (Leavitt and Power, 1997) and adult-dominated rules, routines, and spaces in children’s lives (Mayall, 1994) as well as calling attention to relations of inequality, as discussed in the first critical moment.

Perhaps even more fundamentally, however, the screams discussed in this paper are suggestive of acts which strain at the 'progressive individualization' (Elias, 1994) of the body and contra (neo)liberal moves to atomise people, 'the scream' has the potential to provoke a sense of embodied collectivity and interdependence.

Heading Rikowski's (1997) warning of the dangers of romanticising transgressive acts, however, I am not suggesting that 'the scream' is an effective collective strategy for social transformation but an important political expression, even in the limited but important sense of mattering and affecting those who produce and sustain the vocal production. Indeed, this links to a variety of studies which have attempted to stretch the notions of 'voice' and 'politics' beyond representation, traditionally associated with verbalised 'voice', by pointing to the use of 'multiple expressive registers' which challenge inequities (e.g. see Kraftl, 2013: 3). However, as Oswell (2009: 14) argues: 'In order for voices to become political speech and in order for political communities to form around those voices, there need to be spaces in which those voices can be not simply articulated but also sounded in an environment in which they might be heard and listened.' The Bakhtinian (1990; 1993) notion of answerability is instructive in considering how voice quality might 'heard and listened' to.

Answerability refers to a process of 'sympathetic co-experiencing' undertaken in order to bring meaning and value to others. Being answerable in this way might involve contemplating the meanings suggested not only by verbal productions but also vocal quality, based on the observations and knowledge the researcher brings to a research (or indeed other types of) relationship; and, answering 'as best we can, even when we fear we have not fully understood what was said to us and even when we know that our reply is inadequate' (Tobin and Kurban, 2009: 28). I am not suggesting here that researchers (or educators for that matter) simply interpret sounds for young children and then impose and fix those meanings onto children's screams, little more than a colonial venture based on assumptions of epistemological and ontological sameness (Roosth, 2009). However, an a priori condemnation of acts of interpretation and 'speaking for others' can lead to an untenable

'retreat' position politically and ethically (Alcoff, 2009). Again the notion of answerability is edifying as it does not involve denying distinctiveness and provokes transformation for both the self and others, an unfinalisable process as, in Bakhtin's (1990) words, there is always a 'loophole'. What is crucial then are the ways that vocalisations are received and responded to by others, including researchers, during and beyond the *in situ* process of data generation.

In this article, I have suggested the importance of attempting to listen and act with answerability, not only in relation to children's verbal expressions but to their embodied vocal productions. I have tried to demonstrate a form of methodological answerability, listening to children's screams and trying to make a space where they are heard not as noise but as overflowing with meaning – accepting the tentative and unfinalisability of these interpretations. Through this process, it has been my intention to demonstrate the importance of heading the sonic and embodied aspects of voice quality, at very least because of their implications for human communication and experience. But, even more, I have tried to intimate a politics of social transformation necessarily replete with – both metaphoric and literal – pitch, timbre, rhythm, and volume.

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