

Philosophical Presentations of Raising Children

Naomi Hodgson · Stefan Ramaekers

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The Grammar of Upbringing

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Naomi Hodgson 
Liverpool Hope University
Liverpool, UK

Stefan Ramaekers
KU Leuven
Leuven, Belgium

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like many (good) ideas, this project started life in a pub in Bloomsbury, London. Over drinks at the end of the IoE-KU Leuven doctoral colloquium in November 2014, we were discussing—coming to terms with—the film we had watched during that event, *The Seventh Continent*. It became clear that it had something to say, and that we had something to say about it. And so began an intense engagement, in early 2015, with Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*, as we tried to find a way to articulate how the film, to us at least, had such force. We didn't set out at that point to write a book. But, one film led to another, and here we are.

As well as our shared interest in Cavell's philosophy, this work developed against the background of Stefan's work with Judith Suissa, which began to renew the task of articulating an educational-philosophical account of raising children. In the context of an increasingly pervasive parenting culture, dominated by scientific accounts of how best to raise one's child into the perfect specimen of obedience, productivity, and happiness, sociological critiques were proliferating, many of which, particularly those of the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies at the University of Kent, have gained purchase at the level of policymaking. We sought something other than a philosophical version of the sociological critique, however. So, informed by the Continental educational philosophy of Arendt and Mollenhauer, and as part of the articulation of a post-critical educational philosophy, developed by Naomi with colleagues at Liverpool Hope, we saw in the films considered in this book—*The Seventh Continent*, *Dogtooth*, and *Le Fils*—an invitation to develop an

affirmative account of raising children. Not a representation of the parenting culture, not a critique that shows what is really going on behind the policy, the practices, and the intensive marketing, but a presentation of those inevitable aspects and experiences that upbringing is: the initiation in to language and world, the representative nature of the parent, and the maintaining of mundane practices that constitute our shared culture and community.

The above is easy to write in hindsight. But to begin such a project—seeking to articulate an affirmative account of raising children—with *The Seventh Continent* (a film—spoiler alert—that culminates in a family’s collective suicide) was, frankly, hard. We shared a sense that it could be done, and a sense of disagreement with the predominant rendering of this film in film theory. But it took a while for us to realise that there were actually two problems we were trying to solve: first, to account for the educational force of (these particular) film(s), and second, to articulate what we saw of upbringing in each one. Each of these problems brought its own complexities. The book that results is an attempt to combine these two lines of thought, as an intervention into the dominant mode of thinking about raising children today, characterised by the ‘parenting culture’:

1. A developing account of the use of film in education and as educational philosophy, and of its potential educational force, drawing on Stanley Cavell’s ontology of film;
2. In line with this usage, responding to each film as an intervention in to the parenting culture by articulating how each one serves as a reminder, in a particular Wittgensteinian sense, of the existential dimensions of raising children.

The manner of our approach to using film is itself also an intervention into existing modes of critique, which seek to uncover and reveal something from the position of the expert situated outside of the parent–child relationship. We instead set out to speak from within that relationship, responding only to what we see on film, in order to further contribute to an educational-philosophical account of that aspect of the experience of being human, i.e. that we bring children into the world.

Due to the specifics of each film and the particular dimension of upbringing that they present, the three chapters on film (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) are not all structured in the same way. Our account of *The Seventh*

Continent in Chapter 3, for example, engages more fully with existing literature on that film, and on film in educational philosophy, in part to frame what we say about this film, but also to further articulate the approach we are taking to the use of film more generally, and what we are trying to resist in doing so. Chapter 5, on *Le Fils*, entails more detail on the film itself, due to the relevance of its narrative arc—or lack thereof—to the argument we are making. In each case, however, and as we elaborate further in Chapters 1 and 2, the aim here is not to understand the films, nor to develop a full-blown theory of what raising children ought to be. Rather, the force of these films, as we have received them, is articulated in response to the particular aspects of them that make visible elements of what we do when we bring children into the world, and invite them to share our world, that we claim are rendered invisible by the dominant culture of ‘parenting’. What we provide are nothing more than reminders.

The chapters that comprise this book have taken a number of forms during their long gestation. An earlier, condensed, version of what are now Chapters 2 and 3 has been published as Ramaekers, S. and Hodgson, N. (2018) ‘Educational Transformation and the Force of Film: Viewing Michael Haneke’s *The Seventh Continent*’ in *PES Yearbook 2016*, ed. Natasha Levinson, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society. An earlier version of Chapter 4 appears as Ramaekers, S. and Hodgson, N. (2019, forthcoming) ‘Initiating Children in Language and World: Learning from Dogtooth’ in *PES Yearbook 2017*, ed. Ann Chinnery, Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society. Chapter 5 is based on a chapter Stefan wrote on the film in a Dutch handbook, Ramaekers, S. (2008) ‘(Zich) wenden’ in *De lichtheid van het opvoeden. Een oefening in kijken, lezen en denken*, ed. Jan Masschelein, Leuven: LannooCampus.

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The development of the book is not down to the two of us alone, drinking coffee, trying to work out what Cavell means (although there was a fair bit of that), but has been enriched by conversations with various colleagues at numerous events. We would like in particular to thank our respondents at the Philosophy of Education Society and the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society conferences in Toronto,

Seattle, and Chicago for the insightful responses and questions: Kanako Ide, Lauren Bialystok, Kip Kline, Mario Di Paolantonio, and Stephanie Mackler, as well the other participants who raised questions and kept challenging us. We'd like to thank Mario in particular for many conversations (and disturbing examples of the parenting culture from the Canadian context) and for the invitation to present our work on *The Seventh Continent* at York University, Toronto. We owe Prof. Warren Crichlow a special thanks for his challenging response to our presentation that day.

We are also very grateful to Amelia Derkatsch at Palgrave for her enthusiasm for this project, but also, and mainly, for her patience. We have tried here to offer a philosophical account of raising children, and philosophers, we know, are renowned for their abstract thinking, far removed from the day-to-day. We receive our own reminders, however, of the reality and complexity of raising children on a daily basis from our own families, and we thank them for these, and for their support and patience. These notes of thanks are offered in no particular order, but last but not least we wish to thank Malbec, for her support and inspiration over the last few years.

Liverpool, UK
Leuven, Belgium

Naomi Hodgson
Stefan Ramaekers

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