Political presence and politics of noise

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Abstract: The paper is inspired by the recent turn taking place at the intersection of critical citizenship studies and political geography where the meanings of political agency are being contested and re-imagined. As one major theme, this discussion involves the identification of political agency in the practice of everyday life. To introduce a new analytical approach into this line of research, the paper discusses political presence with reference to Jacques Rancière's conceptualisation of politics. By linking his thought with present spatially grounded debates on citizenship and political agency, I consider how politics of noise can be identified from young people's everyday encounters with their political communities.

Introduction

In her two recent *Progress reports* Lynn Staeheli (2010, 2011) takes up the concept of citizenship from a political geographical perspective. By introducing a vast array of research she points out the "continual rearticulations of the relationships and sites through which citizenship is constructed" (Staeheli 2011: 393) and the "material and virtual spaces for public address in which groups struggle to expand, and in some cases reorder, democratic publics" (Staeheli 2010: 67). Along similar lines, Luke Desforges, Rhys Jones and Mike Woods (2005) present theoretical and methodological inroads into the geographies of citizenship, arguing that the flow of ideas should not be solely extracted from citizenship studies into geographical sub-disciplinary research but that geographers themselves also possess an array of analytic tools other than 'space' which they

can offer to interdisciplinary discussion. Other examples of this trend where political geographical ideas are employed in challenging normative notions of citizenship and political agency are respective articles by Fernando Bosco (2010) and Sarah Elwood and Katharyne Mitchell (forthcoming), discussing children's political agency and practice. These papers' explicit agenda is not to reformulate the concept of citizenship but to provide new approaches to thinking about political agency by introducing children's political practices in their mundane intergenerational relations.

These examples demonstrate the ongoing and vivid discussions which seek to bring together critical citizenship studies approaches, political geographical theorisation, and pertinent discussions from a number of sub-disciplinary fields that have started to question the established notions of political agency and citizenship as status, membership and practice. Wishing to contribute to this debate, this paper introduces the concept of political presence for the study of the hidden and imperceptible forms of political agency. Drawing from Jacques Rancière's (1992, 1999, 2001) conception of politics, I suggest that the political aspects of mundane spatial practice can be made more comprehensible if identified as politics of noise. By blurring the line between voiced and voiceless modes of active citizenship, this approach disrupts the binary of political absence and presence.

One of Rancière's main arguments is that if we wish to understand the political as it unfolds in the world we should not be content to get acquainted with the politics of order but search for the ruptures where this order is disturbed by the politics of disagreement. Taking this as a starting point, I present some analytical ideas that help to notice political presence at the back and in the centre of such ruptures. Like Bosco (2010) and Elwood and Mitchell (forthcoming), I do not aim to reconceptualise citizenship *per se* but, rather, consider the unfolding of political agency in

(early) youth. Empirically, the paper engages with some Finnish youths whose practices of everyday life provide apt examples of mundane political agency that differs notably from the more conventional acts of citizenship.

The paper proceeds as follows: First, I provide an overall contextualisation for the article, introducing the dilemma of the discussed young people's political agency and the pertinent scholarly discussion. I then present the analytical frame and my reading of Rancièrian politics. To flesh these out, I bring in an empirical case where politics of noise can be traced with the provided analytical tools. In conclusion I discuss how the developed approach may, among other things, help to overcome some ambiguities related to normativity in the study of citizenship and political agency.

The dilemma of young people's political agency

Young people's interest in politics, their concerns over societal issues, and their readiness to participate in public matters are declining in many liberal democracies. This development has been found alarming in Europe, North America, Australasia, and beyond (Gray & Caul 2000; O'Toole 2003; Forbrig 2005; Nasrallah 2009; Azmi *et al.* forthcoming). At the same time as the Arab Spring exposed the youth's potential to claim democratic rights and initiate political change, in many European countries young people do not seem to appreciate their given rights to take part in societal matters through official or even semi-official channels (Staeheli forthcoming). Surprisingly, this trend is particularly apparent in places that are well known for their functional democratic system and civil obedience, such as Finland.

According to the recent survey of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), Finnish young people's level of interest and readiness to

participate in politics and civic involvement is exceptionally low (Schulz et al. 2010). The annually conducted national Youth Barometer (2010: 100) supports this finding, indicating that youth's interest in civil society and communal action has diminished notably in the last ten years. Yet there is a certain contradiction embedded in this trend. At the same time as the IEA identifies low levels of political interest and participation, Finnish young people are found to be more knowledgeable in societal matters than their age-mates in other countries, and their trust in political institutions is very high. This finding has been made in a number of international comparative assessments that repeatedly portray the educational results of the Finnish school as top-level (e.g. OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA).

This dilemma, problematic in its own right, appears even more awkward when placed in the prevailing policy climate. Finnish child and youth policies are deeply rooted in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that provides children with universal rights to protection, provision and participation (Kallio & Häkli 2011a). Since the ratification of the UNCRC in 1991, children's[1] right to be heard and participate in matters concerning them has been taken to the fore by researchers, policy-makers and child rights activists (Strandell 2010). As a result, participation has become an unquestionable right of the child that is acknowledged in supra-national policies (e.g. European Union White Paper on Youth 2001), national legislation (e.g. Finnish Youth Act 2006; Finnish Child Welfare Act 2007), municipal strategies (e.g. City of Tampere Child and Youth Policy Strategy and Child Welfare Plan 2009–2012), as well as in numerous agenda setting policy documents (e.g. The Finnish Government Child and Youth

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[1] The UN defines the child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (UNCRC §1). In Finland, as in most liberal democracies, this right thus concerns all minors and, in part, also young adults up to their late twenties (see e.g. European Union White Paper on Youth 2001; Finnish Youth Act 2006).

Policy Programme 2007–2011). With regard to citizenship, children and young people's active roles are hence much appreciated, noticed and provided for.

Together these facts raise the question: Why are the Finnish youth not interested in acting in and for their communities when they *trust* the prevailing political system, are *knowledgeable* and *aware* of the societal issues and problems of their worlds, and have *means* and *arenas* to participate and take action in matters important to them? If compared with their coevals at the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, they appear as apolitical, immature and apathetic citizens, and not as active political beings. How should we understand the development and unfolding of political agency in situations where people are given broad opportunities as citizens from early on yet they seem to scorn everything that has to do with their communities and the society at large? The next section provides an entry point toward understanding this puzzle.

Unravelling youthful political agency

One way to start unravelling the above-presented dilemma is to look into the interpretations and implementation of children and young people's rights. Since the establishment of the UNCRC, it has become evident that the fulfilment of these universal rights involves major difficulties. In particular, the reconciliation of children and young people's rights to protection/provision and their participatory rights has proved problematic (e.g. Franklin 2002; Kallio 2012). The main reason is not the disagreement on the *significance* of the latter – rather, there is a notable difference of opinion on its *meanings*. Already the drafting process of the Convention exposed a considerable discord on how the right to be heard should be understood, who are responsible for listening to children, where children are supposed to express themselves, and on which grounds their views should be supported and furthered (Moosa-Mitha 2005; Legislative History I 2007).

Since then, both the core of and the limits to this right have been constantly shifting and blurred, depending on how, by whom, where, and on which grounds they are construed.

Consequently, the problems related to children and young people's participation have received increasing attention within academia. Their active agencies and roles have been debated in the context of legal procedures (Ruddick 2007; Archard & Skivenes 2009), armed conflicts (Goodwin-Gill & Cohn 1994; Brocklehurst 2006), social work and child care (Vandenbroeck & Bouverne-de Bie 2006; Forsberg & Strandell 2007), school (Bragg 2007; Thomas 2009; Lazar 2010), community development and planning (Percy-Smith 2006; Murtagh & Murphy 2011), cultural politics and work (Stephens 1995; Shepher-Hughes & Sargent 1998; Katz 2004), civil activity and activism (Skelton & Valentine 2003; Bosco 2010), and beyond. This vivid discussion has brought to light the contextual nature of children and young people's social roles and agencies. The importance of noticing the differing geo-economic and socio-cultural environments where childhood and youth are led is ever more emphasised, and the ambiguity embedded in the three-fold set of rights has become more explicit as these rights are implemented concurrently in various empirical contexts (Wyness *et al.* 2004; Lund 2007).

This discussion has largely organised around two intertwined yet distinguishable interpretive strands. On the one hand, participation is taken to mean agency that unfolds in children's everyday lives – engagement in the mundane activities of the home, the school, hobbies, peer groups, social media, local communities, etc. On the other hand, participation is understood as active involvement that takes place on public and (semi-)official arenas, such as court houses, parliamentary apparatuses, school boards, NGOs, youth organisations, demonstrations, online participation channels, and so on. Respectively, the promotion of participation has come to mean very different things, both in research and policy making. Whereas some think that children's

positions should be strengthened primarily by supporting their mundane engagements others accentuate the importance of involving children and young people in formal public action.

Depending on which orientation is emphasized, somewhat different kinds of political worlds are imagined as the context of children and young people's active agency. The former approach identifies the political community as experienced, enacted and defined in the everyday practices of childhood and youth. The latter, instead, locates participation more in the formal political community. Neither one of these interpretations is unwarranted – it has become evident that even young children and early youth can act as participants in political communities in both senses (e.g. Bosco 2010; Skelton 2010). Yet the identification between these differently reasoned worlds is of utmost importance for making sense of youthful citizenships and political agencies.

The recognition of formal and informal political worlds as entwined but distinctive realities forms the node where the above-introduced dilemma can be disclosed. Civic education and participatory policies usually attempt to provide children and young people with information, tools and arenas for participation taking place in the formal political community, ranging from purely institutional (e.g. school councils, child parliaments) to semi-formal (e.g. demonstrations) and occasionally even activism-related activities (e.g. social movements). Simultaneously, the surveys that seek to measure their interest and readiness to participate, and awareness of political matters, are motivated by and oriented towards thus organized political world.

Yet children and young people's opinions, orientations and interests are not grounded merely there but, at least as closely, in the political communities that unfold in their everyday lives. That is, the lived communities of the home, the school, the neighbourhood, hobbies, social media, and the like. It is in these socially constructed worlds – spatially situated along the lines of transnational, local or otherwise relational citizenship rather than on territorially bounded

municipal, national and cosmopolitan grounds (Staeheli 2011: 397; cf. Koefoed & Simonsen forthcoming) – where children and young people acquire unquestionable positions, roles, identities, subjectivities and interests through, by and for which to act and develop as political agents (Kallio & Häkli 2011b). These worlds are rarely considered as focal when young people's political orientations and activities are surveyed.

Put together, civic education, institutional participatory practices and assessment processes are typically concerned with political realities that differ eminently from the ones where children and young people are spontaneously most active and have things at stake. By concentrating on formal political communities they do not therefore succeed to identify, touch upon or measure youthful agents devotedness and activities in their *lived* political worlds. This sightlessness to children and young people's political realities derives from the common conception where they are not thought to lead political lives in the first place, unless specifically involved. However, they do, as it is being increasingly noticed in the topical research (e.g. Lister 2007; Thomas 2009; Bosco 2010; Skelton 2010; Staeheli 2010; Strandell 2010; James 2011; Bartos 2012; Elwood & Mitchell forthcoming; see also the forthcoming 2013/2 special issue in *Space & Polity*).

Youthful agents' political presence escapes our attention because the forms of action developed and employed by them, their articulations of the matters important to them, their tactics of politicisation, and the contexts where their political agencies mobilise, are greatly distinct from the politics familiar to us, as adults and researchers. Therefore, the power relations of childhood institutions and peer cultural communities, the norms and moralities that the youth follow, resist and negotiate in their everyday lives, their practices of care and social responsibility, and the bonds that children and young people build and protect in their personal relationships, are noticeably *absent* when their politics are considered. Yet it is these very

practices and relationships through which they make-*present* their intersubjective political agencies.

Analytical tools for studying political presence

The below-introduced analytical tools derive from our ongoing theorisation on political agency at the *Space and Political Agency Research Group* (see e.g. Kallio & Häkli 2010, 2011b; Häkli & Kallio forthcoming). Briefly put, we approach political agency in relational terms as a particular way of relating to the world, extending beyond rationality, formal know-how and determined involvement. The premise of this interpretation is the understanding of 'the political' as constantly contested and remade in social practice, and subjectivity as the condition of possibility to human political agency. For empirical research this entails that the politics of any action, dynamics and processes are defined and analysed context-specifically (cf. Elwood & Mitchell forthcoming).

This paper sets out to further develop our model for distinguishing different modes and spaces of children's politics (Kallio & Häkli 2011a, see also Bartos 2012; Azmi *et al.* forthcoming). The model expands the dimensions of 'the political' along two intersecting continua: explicitness and reflexivity. The previous refers to the degree to which 'the political' is readily identified and defined (known–contested–unidentified politics), underlining the distinction between political and 'apolitical' agency as unclear and unsettled (horizontal axis). The latter conveys the actors' reflexivity of the politics of their action (vertical axis). Based on this field, Figure 1 depicts political presence in terms of political involvement and political engagement, covering a whole range of settings where people find themselves as members of political communities.

Implicit political agency

The political is well-known

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT
POLITICS OF NOISE

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT
POLITICS OF VOICE
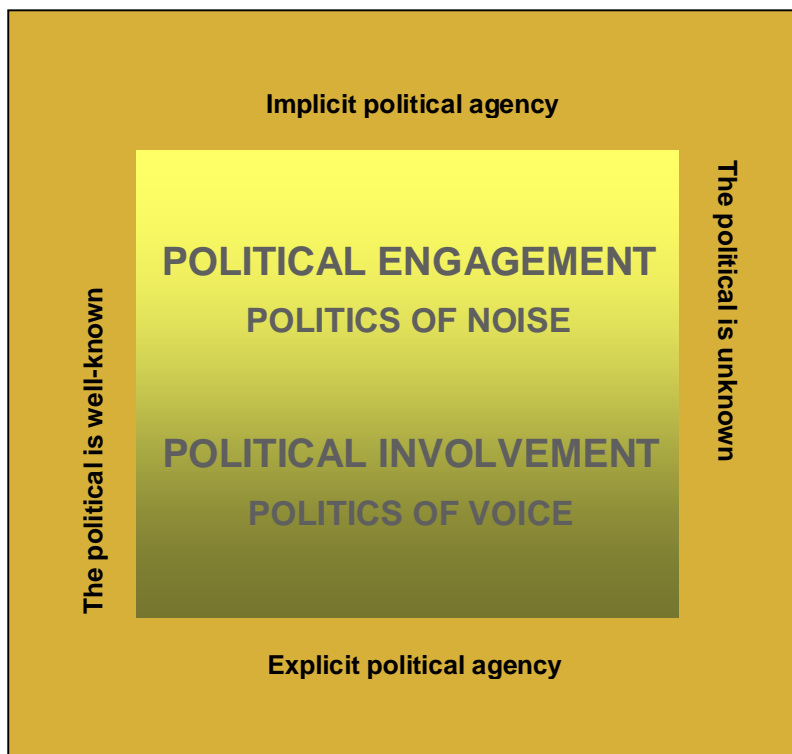
The political is unknown

Explicit political agency

Figure 1: The field of political presence.

Horizontally, the field of political presence sets from the community point of view, stressing the contextuality of 'the political': what is 'known' as politics varies from place to place, including the temporal element. As indicated by Figure 1, political engagement is more often linked with the 'not-yet-politicised' issues than political involvement where established, recognised or contested political matters are typically more at stake. The vertical dimension is explicitly actor-centred, portraying self-identification (understood as inseparably connected with social recognition). This identification is not necessarily reflexive, openly articulated or leaning on a particular (political) imagination or vocabulary. It ranges from feelings of belonging to understanding of social positions to acknowledgement of partisanship to intentional membership,

and anything in between. In general, political involvement is more explicitly perceived of than political engagement but, depending on the context and the people, this may mean very different things.

The analytical field presented in Figure 1 brings together relational political geographical thought and Rancière's (1992, 1999, 2001) conceptualisation of politics by coupling political engagement with 'politics of noise' and framing political involvement as 'politics of voice'. Those familiar with Rancière's theorisation realise that this is not the obvious choice but involves a particular reading of his work. In his original thought, 'noise' does not belong to the political world *(la politique)* as such but becomes politics *(le politique)* only when it translates into 'voice', i.e. succeeds to enter, be heard and interrupt the ordered political world of policy *(police)*. This stems from the fact that unlike many political geographers, Rancière does not make the distinction between 'Politics' and 'politics' (e.g. Skelton 2010). Instead, he divides the world into the established order of things where politics implies a disruption through a reconfiguration of what he calls "the system of partitioning" (Dikeç 2005: 186; Swyngedouw 2009). The potential of voice is, anyhow, always grounded in noise that is produced by the people beyond the policy order. Here 'people' refers to the subject of democracy that holds "the power of the *one more*, the power of *anyone*", and not to calculable and measurable members of a certain community (i.e. population) (Rancière 1992: 59, emphasis in original).

In Rancière's society the sum is always more than its parts combined. Therefore the "unaccounted for" – the people acting from undefined starting points – may confuse the right ordering of policy (Rancière 1999: 11). Noise is produced by anyone who acts from without the order and, hence, can be returned to no-one in particular. As 'pure sound' this conception of noise/voice is parallel to Foucault's (2003: 6-8) idea of "local knowledges" that are defined by

their unlikeness to any qualified knowledge.[2] According to Foucault (2003: 9) such disqualified knowledges can be desubjugated in a genealogical reading that is "about the insurrection of knowledges […] primarily, an insurrection against the centralizing power-effects that are bound up with the institutionalization and workings of any scientific discourse organized in a society such as ours." In Rancière's (1999: 30) terms such a practice "makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise".

In my attempt to bring Rancière's conceptualisation to the analysis of spatially grounded political presence I concur with Davide Panagia (2009, see also Sloop and Gunn 2010). Leaning on Michel de Certeau's key ideas on the politics of everyday life, Panagia (2009: 72) notes that "by extending our conceptions of what counts as sources for political disputes beyond the grammatical and hermeneutic limits of the semantic statement and the deliberative limits of the philosophical argument, we discover modes of political expression that don't simply rely on the need to communicate sense but nonetheless generate noise [creating] an 'espace lisible' of what de Certeau refers to as 'the art of nonsense'; 'the art of beginning or re-beginning to speak by saying'". Along these lines, I associate politics of noise with people's everyday engagements with their political communities while politics of voice refers to more explicit involvement, directed toward or at least someway aware of the formal and 'known' world of politics (Figure 1).

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[2] To those more familiar with Foucault's thinking this point of resemblance may help to see how Rancière's work interlinks with the relational political geographical perspectives where the P/political divide is taken as an analytical starting point (see also Kallio 2012). Yet, while making this parallel it should be noted that Rancière's political philosophy can also be read as a partial critique to Foucault's thought, especially concerning his writings on governmentality. In a Rancièrian reading, the 'conduct of conduct' that is the imperative of governmental rationality may succeed only if the subjects are able to identify the potential of ruptures within the given regime. Foucault does not acknowledge such dependency between policy *(police)* and politics *(le politique)* that, to Rancière, forms the basic condition of political life *(la politique)*.

I wish to accentuate that this analytic division is an attempt to clarify between different modes of political presence, not to separate diverse forms of politics categorically. Like O'Toole (2003) and Skelton (2010) have aptly pointed out, young people's worlds that I will next turn into discussing do not neatly divide into two political realities. However, the division can be found useful in bringing to light those forms of political presence that first appear as political absence. As my aim is to develop analytical tools for studying the hidden and imperceptible forms of political agency, the rest of the paper concentrates on tracing engagement/noise from young people's mundane practice.

Young people's political presence at the Kiikeli Park

The Kiikeli Park case[3] does not present an uncommon tale but, rather, a story familiar from a number of urban studies projects where certain people's use of public space starts to appear problematic as that part of the city is zoned, built and inhabited, leading to an urban conflict. These events takes place in Oulu, Finland, in the early 2000s when the area was zoned and built. Prior to this, it was a stretch of unplanned downtown district that provided a place to hang out to those who were not welcome at the city centre – namely young people, the homeless and others who typically find little comfortable space at the urban commercial district. As Oulu was growing rapidly, the City decided to turn this wasteland into a city quarter that blurs the line between public and private urban space. The park is situated right in the centre of the city at the sea shore and it consists of two parts that are seamlessly connected with each other: a public recreation area and a smallish residential area. Next to these lies a boat harbour that is employed

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[3] The case is introduced here only very briefly because it is intended as a mere illustration, seeking to illuminate how politics of noise can be identified from mundane presence. For a more detailed account on the case and the research methodology, see Kallio & Häkli 2011c.

by private boaters but run by the city, and a marketplace together with an old market hall. It thus provides an inviting living environment particularly to affluent seniors.

The City planners, the building firms and the buyers of the apartments expected that once the area was physically transformed, the user groups would change as well. Problems emerged as it became apparent that this was not the case. When the park was completed, especially the youth returned to the park to hang out during their summer holidays. Their activities consisted mostly of partying, i.e. getting drunk, playing loud music, driving around with mopeds and socialising in large groups at nights. Annoyed by this disturbance, the housing cooperatives began to file complaints to the City who were at first reluctant to deal with the case but, as the situation became greatly exacerbated, were forced to start 'cleaning' the area. For the first four years the City tried to solve the disturbances with 'soft techniques' (enhancing the park facilities, waste collection and disposal, surveillance, routine policing, etc.). Since these did not have the desired effect, they attempted to close the park down by gating it. As this was barred by the Ministry of the Interior Police Department who declared it unconstitutional to privatise a public area, the park was only partially gated together with the imposition of other policing measures which, finally, succeeded to displace the youth.

Now, instead of looking into the struggle itself in more detail, I turn to the political agency of the Kiikeli Park youth. Living in a Western liberal democracy with good opportunities to participate in formal politics but little interest to do so they form a *par excellence* example of the young people discussed in beginning of this paper. As said, regardless of socio-economic background or any other attribute the Finnish youth are well educated and rather knowledgeable and aware of societal issues: next to all finish high school and continue their studies at the upper secondary/vocational school. In the second place, the City of Oulu is very active regarding

youthful civic involvement, having created their own model of municipal participation where children and young people are given plenty of specific chances to have their say on matters important to them (see the City of Oulu Youth Council 2011). They can participate in local youth councils to which the members are selected at schools and youth centres; vote for and run as candidates in the youth delegate elections; make initiatives through an electronic system where they are assisted by the municipal youth workers; have their say in children and young people's open city meetings, and so on. This work is organised in collaboration with schools, parents and a number of NGOs, civil organisations and other (semi-)private actors (the church, hobbies, etc.).

Even if all of these measures were not in operation ten years ago, the spirit was the same. This is to say that, had they wanted to fight against the gentrification process, NIMBY attitudes, and their right to public space in general there would have been many official, semi-official and informal quarters where the youth could have sought for support. As the area was built partly for public use it would have been possible to acquire a skating ramp or some other youthful element to the park – examples of such enterprises can be found in many equivalent planning processes in Finland (e.g. Koskinen 2010). Alternatively, they could have tried to involve their parents, the media or civic organisations to defend the park as a public and open space for the free use of all city dwellers. Or, they could have organised a peaceful demonstration in the form of a relaxed festival for professing their opinions about the appropriate use of the park. Yet the youth in this case did not appear to be interested in such action. Instead, they resisted the privatisation of the area by other means, by using it for their own purposes that were openly disapproved of by others.

As regards political presence, the Kiikeli Park youth's interest in political *involvement* was minimal but they presented vast interest in political *engagement* in matters important to them.

Instead of *voicing* their concerns they were *noising* them in their practices of everyday life.

Although this noise was not acknowledged as participation or active citizenship explicitly by anyone, it was certainly heard and recognised by a number of significant players (local residents, nearby businesses, municipal technical centre, communal social work, the police, local and national media, other townspeople, parents etc.). Their presence had also many direct and indirect effects. First, for nearly ten years the Kiikeli Park area was lived out and dominated by these youth whereupon other people could make little out of it. Second, their particular presence forced the City of Oulu to take wide-ranging operations at the area, to the extent that they ended up challenging the constitutional law. Third, the youth acquired experience and competence as political agents by participating in "'the politics of people' [that] wrongs policy", thus strengthening as citizen-subjects in their relational political worlds (Rancière 1992: 59; cf. Kallio & Häkli 2011b, Staeheli forthcoming). Fourth, even though this participation was not reflected upon as explicitly political by anyone, it moulded the city as an urban system in a Decerteauian sense:

> "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (just as verbal annunciation is an 'allocution', 'posits another opposite' the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action). It thus seems possible to give a

> preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation." (de Certeau 1984: 97–98,
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> emphases in original)

Returning to the dilemma of youthful political agency discussed at the beginning of the paper, the Kiikeli Park case provides an empirical site where the youth appear as politically apathetic or active, depending on whether their action is deciphered on formal or informal political grounds. From the civic education, participatory policies and democracy surveys point of view, these young people seem as politically absent, lacking both will and interest to any politics (of voice). On the contrary, approached from their lived worlds they, can be recognised as closely engaged in politics (of noise). Considering that in Finland such fairly broadly recognized forms of political agency as squatting, graffiti and street occupation are often perceived in negative terms (e.g. illegal activism) and juxtaposed with more formal modes of citizenship (democratic practices at school) (e.g. Suutarinen & Törmäkangas 2012; HS 2012), it is not surprising that the Kiikeli youth received relatively little empathy.

Noise as politics

Interpreting the noise generated by the Kiikeli Park youth as political presence takes us to the fringes of politics. If self-centred use of public space – be it individual or collective – is understood as political, what then does *not* fulfil the conditions of politics? This question is familiar to scholars working on everyday life political issues, across disciplines (see e.g. Brown, 2002; Dean 2000: 8; Isin 2005: 381). In the current research, it is often met by telling politics apart from other aspects of social life. This interpretation, following Habermasian and Arendtian political theoretical traditions, has been employed by many scholars discussing young people's

political agency, too. These include Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine's (2003) and Sarah Elwood and Katharyne Mitchell's (forthcoming) insightful approaches that provide tools for explicating to the political aspects of the Kiikeli Park case. By stating "Even if it does not take place through formal political structures or fora, young people can act as social and political agents and are competent to be involved.", Skelton & Valentine (2003: 123) stress the importance of hearing noise as voice when applicable, and involving young people in their lived worlds. Elwood & Mitchell's (forthcoming: tbc) approach, instead, appreciates young people's noise in itself as a form of political engagement: "critical perceptions/judgments about inequality, subjectivity, and power relations enter the domain of the political when […] we can find evidence that children are recognizing and asserting themselves as particular subjects, in relation to others, to the structures in which they are situated, and to subject positions that may be imposed on them."

Setting off from different political theoretical grounds, the Rancièrian-Decerteauian reading of politics helps to reveal still some other fringes of politics from the case in question. Rancière's starting point is that anything following the policy order or working along its lines cannot be political because, as an established social order, policy becomes "the 'naturally given' basis for government" (Dikeç 2005: 173). Instead of differentiating the political from the social he dissociates it from *government*, reserving the concept of politics to the disruptions of the regime order: "politics is not the enactment of the principle, the law, or the self of a community […] politics has no arche, it is anarchical" (Rancière 1992: 59; on arche [rule] see also Markell 2006). Moreover, as a whole, political life *(la politique)* exists only in the intertwinement of policy *(police)* and politics *(le politique)*, meaning that the policy order is maintained by the people if the potential of politics exists to them. The potential of politics thus exists in the ruptures of the

policy order. Yet Rancière does not suggest that this intertwinement inevitably leads to political *action*: it denotes only the *potential* to such.

De Certeau, instead, takes the next step by identifying that such 'free' agency is the prerequisite of human life. In the outline of his major work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) he states: "The goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'." (p.xiv–xv). These creative acts do not "obey the laws of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it" (p.29). "Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of antidiscipline" (p.xiv–xv). Continuing this thought, Tim Cresswell (2006) argues that "These *tactics* refuse the neat divisions and classifications of the powerful and, in doing so, critique the spatialization of domination. Thus, the ordinary activities of everyday life […] become acts of heroic everyday resistance […] never producing 'proper places' but always using and manipulating places produced by others." (p.47, emphasis in original).

As connoisseur of both Rancière and de Certeau, Panagia (2009) notices that bringing their ideas together is the key to discovering noise *as* politics. The Decerteauian reading of Rancière's theorisation comes to suggest that mundane politics denotes disruptions of order that are practiced by the groups and individuals who live under this rule, as part of their everyday lives. This political presence produces noise that forms the potential of voice but is political also in its own right. On these grounds, the Kiikeli Park youth can be identified as political actors because they succeeded to confuse the right ordering of policy through noising, i.e. using public space in opposition to the common order, leading to a disruption in it. The power of their politics lay in

their very refusal to communicate with the other parties, their 'non-participation' (cf. O'Toole 2003). They produced Foucauldian local knowledges that differed from all qualified knowledges and, thus, composed Decerteauian networks of antidiscipline that enabled them to act on their own grounds, against the dominant order that did not provide them with an equal position.

In this reading, the driving force of politics is the experienced imbalance of equality but its aim is not the production of new order but non-communicative disagreement. This is not to say that politics of noise could not turn into politics of voice in certain conditions, on some people's part, along the lines suggested by Skelton and Valentine (2003). Yet, expanding on Elwood and Mitchell's (forthcoming) though, this approach emphasises noticing noise as political in a specific meaning. To conclude, I discuss how this interpretive strand may help us to overcome some of the ambiguities related to normativity in the study of citizenship and political agency.

Recognising politics

While discussing the politics of marginalised publics – such as children and young people, sexual and ethnic minorities, illegal immigrants and asylum seekers, etc. – even critical research tends to highlight politics with which the scholars themselves can agree with and, more often than not, wish to endorse. While taking such a normative approach, the research comes to evaluate the politics in case from one or another perspective. Problems arising from this research setting have been underlined in the critiques of recognition theories, for instance, by arguing that the ideals of open-ended social development and progress toward a better society are hard to reconcile (e.g. Deranty & Renault 2007; Markell 2007; McNay 2008). These critiques are often sympathetic with Rancière who is uncompromising in the matter. For him, the only lasting attribute of politics is equality, defined in a rather particular way:

"Now for me the current dead end of political reflection and action is due to the identification of politics with the *self* of a community. […] the claim for identity on the part of so-called minorities against the hegemonic law of the ruling culture and identity. The big community and the smaller ones may charge one another with 'tribalism' or 'barbarianism', and both will be right in their charge and wrong in their claim. […] For the *primum movens* of policy is to purport to act as the self of the community, to turn the techniques of governing into natural laws of the social order. But if *politics* is something different from *policy*, it cannot draw on such an identification." (Rancière 1992: 59, emphases in original).

Taking this reading of equality as its premise, the politics of noise approach negates the presumption that political action is always productive, beautiful, sensible, pleasant or desirable, even to those practicing it. Rancière's principle of equality expects that we recognise also the politics that are not in our own interests and do not serve the common good – not in the meaning of acceptance but identification. Even the political normativity proposed by Deranty and Renault (2007: 102) that involves the "rejection of the order of things and the project of a fairer society" is incompatible with this thought, as it provides politics with a mission that it cannot have. Simply put, Rancière's (1999) politics is dis-agreement with order, whichever it may be, without the endeavour to generate new order.

The extent to which this recognition is practiced or achieved in daily life is yet another question – a practical one, I would say. I am, for instance, not particularly happy when I see drunken early youth in the neighbourhood park or as I find the traces of their parties 'in my backyard'. But if it occurs to me that their hanging around succeeds to pierce a rupture in the present order that seeks to categorically govern them – or to keep a rupture open for others to

seize upon – should I dispute the politics of their presence merely because it is unpleasant to me and does not seem to involve a constructive element? Depending on the situation I could answer 'yes' or 'no' but, if I stay true to Rancière, I must ask myself aren't such events *par excellence* disagreements that prevent the order from becoming overpowering and, simultaneously, reveal its limitations and liminalities? Moreover, as comes to children and young people who are in an intensive process of political becoming, shouldn't I appreciate their 'noise' as political also because it forms the basis for all 'voice' they can ever have? Where would the society end up if its children ceased to make noise?

These ambiguities, related to the normative aspects of political agency, led me to choose the Kiikeli Park case as illustration in this paper. Politics of noise surely appear in different modes as well, many of which are much easier to acknowledge as political because of their apparent righteousness. In our ongoing ethnographic study we have encountered many ways in which youth as young as eleven years of age engage in politics of noise, succeeding to pierce ruptures in the prevailing order. These include for instance individual and collective practices of care (e.g. peacefully counteracting peer cultural power relations that involve inequalities), determined use of public space (e.g. walking the dog through park lanes that are planned to be abolished by the golf course extension) and non-commercial use of commercial space (e.g. using the shopping mall as site for private fashion shows). Many would find it easier to agree with the politics of these acts as opposed to the Kiikeli Park youth's performance. But are they more valuable or real, or political, because they disclose desirable developments and activities? This is one of the essential questions that the Rancièrian conception of politics forces us to encounter.

If we take the question of general equality as seriously as Rancière does, we are compelled to ask how to contest categorisations by not replacing them by other categorisations, and how to

recognise political aspects in the forms of presence that are not relevant, advantageous or agreeable to our own politics. These questions are left untouched by Rancière and most of his followers who rarely seize upon the concrete problems of our lived worlds, leaving plenty of space for empirically grounded work at the political absence/presence interface. Returning to Staeheli's (2011) argument over contested and open-ended citizenship, isn't it the noise of everyday life that continually rearticulates the relationships and sites through which political agency is constructed? If walking is the space of enunciation, as de Certeau (1984) suggests, what other spaces of re-articulation can be found through the ruptures crated by people in their mundane presencing?

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