FORUM 42: CHILDREN AS SUBJECTS

Abstract: This discussion is dedicated to the question of whether it is possible to overcome the power asymmetry between researchers and their subjects in the study of childhood, or at the very least to reduce the gulf between researchers and the objects of their studies. The 'new sociology of childhood' places the individual personality of the child and his / her personal interests at the centre of scholarly investigation, though its central presuppositions remain in some respects controversial. The focus on children's subjectivity in academic work is related to the public acknowledgement of children's agency as political and legal subjects. In this framework, the participants discuss the ethical and methodological problems related to work with children as subjects in childhood studies.

Keywords: children's subjectivity, the 'new sociology of childhood', childhood studies.

To cite: 'Forum 42: Children as Subjects', *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, 2020, no. 16, pp. 13–98.

doi: 10.31250/1815-8927-2020-16-16-13-98

URL: http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/eng016/forum.pdf

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Forum 42: Children as Subjects

This discussion is dedicated to the question of whether it is possible to overcome the power asymmetry between researchers and their subjects in the study of childhood, or at the very least to reduce the gulf between researchers and the objects of their studies. The 'new sociology of childhood' places the individual personality of the child and his / her personal interests at the centre of scholarly investigation, though its central presuppositions remain in some respects controversial. The focus on children's subjectivity in academic work is related to the public acknowledgement of children's agency as political and legal subjects. In this framework, the participants discuss the ethical and methodological problems related to work with children as subjects in childhood studies.

Keywords: children's subjectivity, the 'new sociology of childhood', childhood studies.

EDITORS' QUESTIONS

In the early 1990s, advocates of the 'new sociology of childhood' were able to demonstrate that the influence of developmental psychology on sociological theories of child development had led to the conceptualisation of children as inchoate organisms, capable of attaining independence only subject to socialisation within the family or in education institutions [Qvortrup et al. 1994]. The 'new sociology of childhood', by contrast, placed the individual personality of the child and his / her personal interests at the centre of scholarly investigation. Despite the significant impact of these discussions, their central presuppositions remain to a significant degree controversial [Lancy 2012], and some scholars question how far one can modify or mitigate the empowerment of the person directing research relative to the child (i.e. adjust the adult perspective) [Dudenkova 2014], and, indeed, whether modification or mitigation may be possible in the first place.

The focus on child-centred perceptions in academic work goes in parallel with the drive to overcome discrimination against children and to acknowledge their social agency. On the one hand, awareness of social processes in the present day enhances attention to children's culture, yet on the other, this can provoke accusations of undue sensitivity to the prevailing ideological moods of the present. And criticism of this order is often well-founded, since adherence to the tenets of the new sociology

often fails to go beyond empty gesticulation. Unlike gender studies or women's studies, the study of childhood still often presents children as the passive objects of acculturation — as observers or those who enact the ideas of others, or, on the other hand, consumers.

The drive to explain the conceptual foundations of children's subjectivity is fraught with methodological problems. The adoption of methods that allow direct contact with children is likely to run into severe difficulties — legal, institutional, psychological, ethical, among others. If the material used is, say, memoirs by adults of their experiences in childhood, or on the other hand, texts written by children themselves (diaries, letters, and so on), then sources of this kind often inspire scepticism and arguments about their likely lack of objectivity, and / or doubts about the capacity of children to create texts that are free from the ideological and discursive models offered by the world of adults.

In the context of these discussions, participants were asked to consider the following questions:

1 *Is it possible to overcome the power asymmetry between researchers and their subjects in the study of childhood, to halt the process by which researchers endow children with their own subjectivity, or at the very least to reduce the gulf between researchers and the objects of their studies?*

2 *In which areas (disciplinary, thematic, etc.) of the study of childhood is it legitimate or requisite to accommodate the 'voice' or 'perspective' of children themselves? In which does this endeavour strike you as dubious or problematic? What value does a child-centred approach hold for your own investigations?*

3 *Where, in your view, should one see the relation between the attention to children's subjectivity in academic work and the public acknowledgement of children's agency as political and legal subjects?*

4 *Which research materials and methods of investigation / analytical instruments facilitate understandings of children's culture that are unmediated by adult perceptions and representations?*

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MARINA BALINA

In Search of Children's Subjectivity

1 I should begin by saying that my sphere of interest is primarily connected with research into children's literature. My remarks and observations on the questions put by the editors are limited by the specificity of the subject itself, in which the child and the child's sphere of interest as a reader are pre-defined as the *object* of observations and conclusions. Nevertheless, even though the discipline is programmed in such a way, the question of subject-object relationships is a very important one today in research on children's literature, particularly within the discussion of the complex relationship between two categories of research: children's literature and children's reading. Ilya Kukulin and Maria Maiofis wrote as early as 2003, in a special section of the Moscow journal, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* (New Literary Observer), about how these two categories do not correspond; a little earlier, in *NLO* no. 58 for 2002, which was dedicated to the semiotics of childhood, an article by Maria Poryadina had examined the non-correspondence between children's literature and children's reading.

All the same, to a great extent the question is still open today. There is a rather strange separation between these two categories in current research on children's literature, when critics and historians of children's literature

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are occupied with the text itself, discourse analysis of it, its ideological burden, historical value, etc., while children's reading, with its specific characteristics and focus on the child as subject and the child's immediate interests as a reader, remains in the hands of specialists on librarianship, and of the sociologists and anthropologists of childhood. The disconnect between these disciplines results in an asymmetry in research and thereby intensifies the researcher's 'voice of power' in respect of the object of his / her research — children and their active interest in books.

At a recent international conference, I heard a paper on one of the canonical authors of Russian children's literature, Alexandra Brushtein. The subject of the research was the cultural map of Brushtein's memoirs: a thorough discussion of the historical events which were or were not included in her memoirs, and the particular historical personages on whom her fictional heroes were based. But the little girl's reading habits formed no part of the research, since the personality of the child and his / her sphere of interest remained outside the scope of the discussion.

A further problem in transferring the centre of attention of researchers into children's literature from the child as consumer of literature to the child as active participant in the creative process is the constant desire to compile the canon of works out of the category of 'necessary and useful books'. This persistent desire likewise favours the objectivisation of the young reader through this unflinching imposition of other people's tastes upon him / her. It is interesting that the debates about the literary canon begun in 1994 by Harold Bloom are only now beginning to seep into research on children's literature, so that the search for the one and only 'correct' list of books for children is as relevant as ever. As long as researchers into children's literature continue to organise children's reading into the canon and the anticanon and to include and exclude works of literature on particular lists, the child-reader will be regarded as the recipient of information regulated by adults — researchers, librarians, schoolteachers and, last but not least, parents. To bring about any significant change in this situation within the field of children's literature and to attend to the reader's personal interests, it will be necessary to develop a new comprehensive approach to the analysis of the requirements for children's reading, which in many respects is a more mobile concept than 'children's literature'. A part is played here also by today's swiftly changing book market with its diversity of genres (comics, manga, how-to books and internet texts that make no claim to inclusion in the corpus of children's literature).

Briefly during the 1920s there existed an Institute of Children's Reading (directed by A. K. Pokrovskaya) at which reading require-

ments were intensively studied.[1] The child-reader *possessed* subjectivity and was an active commissioner of literature, albeit for a short time. While I am not by any means calling for a return to the experiments of the 1920s, it does seem to me that taking into account the experience of such a generalised approach towards children's literature and children's reading would help in escaping from the dichotomy of subject-object relations. In America, where I have been living and working for the past thirty years, large shops often have interesting events for children at which the right to choose a book belongs not to the adult (the buyer or the shop assistant / advisor) but to the child, who is allowed the time to look at the book that has attracted his / her interest, leaf through it and make sure of his / her choice. Even if the choice then leads to disappointment, it is still an independent act which places the child in the position of the actor and not of a subordinate object. The study of such 'independent' actions is of interest to specialists in a most diverse range of research into childhood, and, it seems to me, offers the possibility of avoiding looking down on the child from a position of 'power'.

2 It is natural to turn to the 'child's voice' or 'child's outlook' in research on memoirs and the various kinds of 'life-writing' or first-person narratives, though it should be noted that such texts are often dictated by particular strategies of writing in which the adult turns towards childhood for reasons which go beyond an interest in childhood as such. Nevertheless, the study of 'childhood' memoirs is an entirely legitimate branch of literary studies. Given that the Franco-American scholar of autobiographical writing Serge Doubrovsky has prepared readers and researchers to eschew the checking of autobiography for documentary accuracy, defining the genre as *autofiction*, the 'child's voice' or 'child's outlook' becomes interesting to students of literature from the point of view of discursive practices and the structural modelling of such memoirs. Childhood memoirs thus offer the researcher all kinds of different chronotopes (correlations of time and place), and are interesting for the evidence that they provide about the relationship between the author in the text and the author of the text, and so on.

Equally interesting is the position of the memoirist who tries to recreate his / her 'childish' perception of history and to comment on it. From this point of view, the reminiscences of the children of the Gulag, children's recollections of the war, or their stories of the

[1] Anna Konstantinovna Pokrovskaya (1878–1972) came from the family of a tugboat-owner in Nizhny Novgorod, and completed secondary education at a classical high school in the city before studying natural sciences at the Bestuzhev Higher Courses for Women in St Petersburg. After graduating in 1899, she became an energetic and gifted organiser of libraries for children, first in Nizhny Novgorod, and later in Moscow. She continued to work in the promotion of libraries for children and children's reading after the Revolution also [Eds.].

Soviet past are undoubtedly important, even though they are not always trustworthy in historical terms. I believe that neither sociologists, nor historians, nor anthropologists should reject such texts on the grounds that they are not sufficiently reliable: narratives of this sort have their value, so long as they do not belong to that currently popular genre, the mockumentary.

SVETLANA BARDINA

Children's Voices and Childish Voices

Since I am not engaged in empirical research on children and childhood, I would like to offer not answers to the questions, but a short theoretical response to the 'Forum' questions and the problem of the study of children's subjectivity.

In my view, the recent methodological discussions in the area of research into childhood and the search for a means of access into the world of childhood that would be free of adult representations have to a large extent been provoked by the distinction which has taken shape within the social sciences between 'real' and 'unreal' childhood. Genuine childhood is defined not only and not so much by age limits so much as by belonging to the world of childhood. It is opposed to a childhood which is alienated from its 'properly childish' nature and deprived of any special 'childishness' — *de-childrified childhood* [Hengst 2000]. The key feature of genuine childhood is its separateness and inaccessibility to the understanding of or by adults: children are not informed about adult life, and adults, in turn, are unable to comprehend the realities of children. It is most probable that that very well known book, *The Disappearance of Childhood* [Postman 1982], in which one of the fundamental — and evanescent — features of childhood is identified as *not knowing* has played a definite role in the establishment of this distinction.

This distinction has also affected the social theorising on the crisis of childhood and the

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dissemination of various initiatives intended to protect the inviolability of childhood from harmful effects that 'destroy' its nature. But what is most interesting is the way in which ideas about the distinction between real and unreal childhood have affected the methodological discussions in childhood studies. It is not the idea of children's not knowing that has proved more important for them, but the idea of not knowing children, that is, the impossibility in principle of seeing the world of children through the eyes of an adult.

The thought that 'genuine' childhood is a mysterious closed space which can be lost if not handled carefully is partly behind the intentions of the new sociology of childhood. Its representatives have drawn attention to the fact that hitherto childhood has been studied through the prism of images created by adults, and that the 'childhood' dealt with by the social sciences is the result of alien projections. This critique has contained quite traditional arguments about the impossibility of overcoming research distance with regard to the object and the asymmetry that arises in consequence of this. It has been pointed out that for a child an interview is something more like an 'interrogation' [Spyrou 2011: 153], that it is the researcher's own parameters that determine how the child's words sound in the final analysis, while the 'children's authentic voices' remain hidden [James 2007: 265]. But from this perspective research into childhood has, in principle, no specific features in comparison with research into other groups that for one reason or another are quite far removed from the researcher. Even the argument that children's lack of linguistic competence leads to their exclusion from the study [Fane et al. 2018: 359] in fact alludes to a characteristic not unique to children.

In my view the reason why these questions are particularly acute in regard to research on children and childhood, and for the boom in methodological reflections in recent decades, is largely that the social sciences have come to formulate the topic of childhood in terms of the category of 'not knowing' (and mutual not knowing at that) and of the impenetrability of the world of childhood. The childhood that was completely understood and interpreted in the 'adult' categories of the social sciences turned out to be an 'unchildish', 'spurious', 'de-childrified' entity, just like a childhood that had been deprived of its true nature by harmful social circumstances. The result was a paradox: either we content ourselves with deriving an 'unchildish childhood' from our research, or we give up our existing research methodology.

One of the most widely discussed questions in the sociology of childhood over the last decades has been the possibility of including 'children's voices' in the research perspective and achieving a more active participation of children in the research. However, these

demands have often just 'been repeated as a mantra', remaining mere slogans [Kraftl 2013: 14]. Despite the widely acknowledged postulate that the child should be at the centre of the research, the answer to the question of how this is to be achieved remains unclear.

In my view these interminable arguments and the lack of methodological clarity in this question are to a large extent connected with the ongoing confusion of ideas about the need to hear *children's voices* and the need to hear *childish voices*. Getting access to a child's voice is a practical methodological question. But getting access to a voice which will remain childish when it is heard is in itself a paradoxical aim, since childhood is implicitly defined as unknowable in principle. The result may be a situation when those children's words (or not necessarily words, but, for example drawings) which best correspond to our ideas of the voices of 'real' children (i.e. those which in a certain sense sound most incomprehensible and mysterious) are given a privileged position. If a child's voice sounds too 'grown-up', if it does not stand out against the background of non-childish voices, that may be ascribed to the distorting attention of the researcher's viewpoint or dominant ideology which transform the world of childhood [Spyrou 2011: 152] and discarded.

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1 It seems to me that the original formulation of the question is not optimal. Anthropology, sociology and pedagogy first define the limits of what is being studied, in our case childhood as a concept and children as a group. If we take childhood as a concept that indicates a certain early stage of life, then subjectively it only begins when one grows out of it. Children do not have a childhood. Roughly speaking, it begins when we leave it behind. And the further we have left it behind, the more diversely do we perceive that which is called childhood. A child does not think of itself as 'existing', as 'a grown up / a young person'. Older adults sometimes take this peculiarity of the child's view of the world into account when in everyday speech they address a child politely, 'Young man, won't you tell me…?', etc.[1]

Therefore I would answer the first part of the first question thus: it is impossible, because the researcher 'defines' what a child is. (S)he always has power over the image that (s)he himself / herself has created. However, (s)he does not always prefer actively to demonstrate that power.

As for the second half of the question, about endowing the child with one's own subjectivity, I would answer it as follows: the researcher may endow the child with his / her own subjectivity, but is this really the subjectivity of the child? Endowing or not endowing the child with subjectivity depends on explicit and implicit definitions of who (what) a child is and who (what) (s)he is at one or another stage of their development and maturation. The Russian folk hero Ilya Muromets spent thirty-three years sitting on the stove as a child, since nobody, until some visiting pilgrims (or in one version, Jesus Christ and the Apostles) arrived, had questioned his infantile status. However, in this process, das Kind matured into der Mann und der Held. How a child understands himself /

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[1] 'Young man' does not sound condescending in Russian [Trans.].

herself also depends on the image of the child formulated by adults. Direct instruction of children in their inalienable rights abruptly changes their understanding of themselves and their capabilities, but, once again, within the logic and spectrum of the adult view. Perceiving a child is more often equated with 'defining a child', 'registering the status of the nature of childhood in the understanding of it within the culture of adults' than with 'seeing a child in terms of his / her own ideas'.

The third part of the question: can the asymmetry be mitigated? I think it can. However, it is impossible to say to what extent this is achievable in any particular research case. Perhaps the location of the observer and the means of recording the life of the child and / or child community may either be a great help, or quite the reverse. The means of observation of children are determined by the 'reserves' or 'preserves' in which the children are 'observed'. The fact that a child has reason does not allow us to assume that the means, devices and methods of 'keeping track' of the child give us an adequate picture of children's subculture. The regimes of seeing the child by adult culture are determined by the relationship of the child to the adults. Thus pedagogy begins to see the child when (s)he is 'naughty' and in need of correction. A 'good child' escapes the pedagogue's notice. A grown-up is not the person who can understand. Even a very good grown-up. (S)he might endow the child with subjectivity by definition, but defining subjectivity without adult overtones, words and outlooks is still more than a little problematic.

It is another matter when we are not looking for 'the child's outlook', not attempting to 'be' the child (like 'being John Malkovich'), but are describing a group of children, or individual children, and their practices, values, interests, etc. Sociological and anthropological research into childhood has a chance of recreating relations within the group, the technology of life, and children's rituals, games, customs, their material world, etc. In that case the asymmetry between the 'adult researcher' and the 'child being studied' is attenuated from both sides.

2 This is a very good question, and allows us to separate those areas of child studies in which it is better not to have recourse to the child's voice from those where it is worth finding such a voice and listening to it. It seems to me that it would be a good thing to take account of the child's voice when studying the spectrum of children's games, and, moreover, children can give detailed accounts not only of those games which they play now, but also of those which they used to play before. Children can talk about or draw their holidays or everyday life at home or at school, but in these cases they have one eye on the person listening with the question 'What do they actually want from me?' The expected stereotype has a great effect here.

There is probably some sense in asking children about various phenomena in the world which are not essentially to do with children. In this case we get the children's view of the social and natural landscape. In the 1920s, for example, the questions addressed to children in various surveys included such as 'What is God? What is a capitalist? What is a Red Army soldier?', and so on. The answers were extremely diverse, because at that time parents had not yet had time to prime their children with the 'right answers' to the questions asked by 'grown-ups' at school. I would suggest that one might hear a great deal that is interesting from children nowadays as well, if one were to ask them about specific things. There will, of course, always be stereotypical answers, but even the stereotypicality of answers in the age of the mass media tells us about something more than just the mass media.

In my research on the history of school textbooks I constantly encounter 'children's' outlooks and voices that are modelled by the compilers and designers of the textbook, promoted by them as children's, and implanted in the child's consciousness, constructing the matrix of a self-image inside it. There were times in the history of textbooks when children were not allowed to speak at all: they were supposed to listen, and at best to understand and reproduce what they had derived from the textbook or by means of it. The child's 'voice' occasionally appeared in dialogues for the schoolroom (particularly for learning foreign languages), but this voice was precisely prescribed and built on reading the phrases that had been given to it.

In Europe, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the school dialogues of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period developed into conversations with the child. The composers of such conversations tried to take account of childish spontaneity, curiosity, and other qualities which they supposed to be typical of children. To a certain degree this was a turn towards the child as an independent actor, an active person who might, for example, interrupt the teacher on his / her own initiative and ask him / her a question. This possibility appeared in Russian textbooks a century and a half later, and even then was not universal. However, in no case are the child's image, outlook and voice in the textbook the actual voice of the child, and the correspondence between them appears in the extent to which the textbook has been successfully inculcated into the personality of the pupil. Children, and later grown-ups too, begin and continue to speak in the words and phrases of their school textbooks.

3 I do not know to what extent my opinions here will be to the point. It seems to me that it is very important to combine the question about seeing the child with the question about children's language,

that is, how children communicate with each other and what the child's voice is, what the child is like as a subject, at which level of communication (s)he manifests himself / herself as a subject following 'his / her own, children's' rules, at which level of communication (s)he aims to appear as someone who possesses a voice 'of the sort that grown-ups require,' and at which (s)he regards himself / herself as equal to grown-ups or even — more and more nowadays — as better than grown-ups, who, for example, know nothing about the latest model of mobile phone. The political and legal spheres of adult lexis are remote from children's self-awareness, but if compared may turn out to be more comprehensible to children than academic lexis. If we take adult conversations about children, the turn towards children's subjectivity on the academic agenda might show that to acknowledge children as independent agents in the political and legal spheres without defining those spheres on the basis of non-adult logic is a too rectilinear, and not an adequate approach to the question. In the history of childhood as a period of life and the history of its perception, different cultures reveal different (sometimes very different) definitions of 'children's rights' as the rights of an independent or dependent agent or actor. The famous history of the child prophets of Salem is one of the best-known examples of making one or another aspect of children's 'rights' absolute. The image of children's subjectivity in different academic disciplines varies, and this image (or these images) is different from the image (images) in the legal and political spheres and (sometimes in a different way) from the image (images) of the child in spheres that are directed towards practical work with children. I suggest that the development of academic research into the child, children (as a group) and childhood (both as a period of life and as concept in culture) may assist in the adoption of more adequate, many-sided decisions and formulations in the political and legal spheres. And at the same time I suppose that this is a great utopia — declaring that scholarship might in some way be correlated with the aforementioned spheres. It is indeed extremely hard to say whether politics and law have any influence on academia. When people start to study sociology, anthropology or the history of childhood they do so, as it seems to me, in accordance with the evolution of the academic landscape, their perception of the movement of scholarship as such towards that which might become the object of study, in connection with the evolution of general ideas in the culture, and not at the behest of jurists and politicians.

4 Besides the academic, pedagogical, social, political, juridical and other voices that speak of childhood, there are of course the voices that children themselves produce while there are no adults about.

I once witnessed two five-year-old children from different cultures, one German, one Russian, with absolutely no knowledge of each other's language, playing together totally absorbed for about three hours, passing from one game to the next and communicating in such a way that adults had absolutely no idea how they did it. The adults were sitting in a clearing and the children were running around playing all kinds of games. It was quite impossible to understand how they communicated, and how they were able to do it for so long and so remarkably. Therefore the question is how to gain access to children's languages and the languages of childish practices that take place without contact with adults. Moreover, even in these conditions there are particular problems.

When we approach children, we see ourselves through children's eyes. How can one 'extract' the childish character of a child's view of an adult or of the word about him / her? When children have recourse to words they naturally use the adult vocabulary, and begin to organise social contact among themselves in the words and images of the adult world. It is a replica of the world of grown-ups, reworked by the child himself / herself in community with other children. The imaginary worlds invented by children in their games are an outstanding example. These worlds and landscapes have a common structure and definite specifications. One such country existed in the early 1980s. It was called the KCR, the Kacorean Communist Republic. At first it was the KSR, the Kacorean Socialist Republic. Five children played at it for several years, from the ages of nine to fourteen, one of whom was Anton Krotov, the great traveller, who preserved the entire archive of this great power. He has published part of it. The whole ordinary life of the adult world, as observed by children, existed in this country. Newspapers and magazines were published. Money was printed. The state chronicle was written. A whole country. Then the inhabitants of Kasorea decided that they had built communism there, and renamed it Kacorea.

There are many such countries in each generation. Studying them is very interesting and productive. But the children who construct such countries of childhood in absolute isolation from adults adopt adult language, adult concepts, adult constructs and pictures of adult practices. There was a curious experience when children built a sort of town on wasteland in a certain German city. An outside photographer, unnoticed by the children, recorded how, room by room, they built what was really a living settlement out of various planks and other stuff. And they also used what already existed in adult culture, what they had derived from adults, from observing adults and living with them. They knew what a wall was, what a ceiling was, and so on. This gives rise to really serious questions: when children are on their own, who are they — children or adults of their own age?

Modern methods of video recording, including permanent recording and recording that is automatically switched on at regular intervals, have allowed us to see much that once could not even have been imagined in children's subcultures. Constant video recording of the life of African tribes has demonstrated that the childhood of the smallest children, who are not yet talking, is full of the most interesting practices for exploring their environment (see the research of Uwe Krebs and his colleagues). Video recording of children's games in the school playground has revealed an unexpected hierarchy of space imposed quite at odds with the adult planning and architectonics of that space. Children absorb and take control of the space of the playground without reference to the algorithms that adults offer them (see the research of Johanna Forster and her colleagues).

The tools and methods for entering into the world of childhood are various. Each and every one of them, provided it is harmless to children and adults, has a right to exist. There are works to be found in every discipline and every language that discuss the question of how to enter the children's world without adjusting it for the adult. In each case the principles and spectrum of approaches are different. There are several handbooks in English for interviewing children of one age or another on one or another subject. My colleagues and I also studied reminiscences of childhood at one time. We wondered whether we should interview children, and decided not to, because that is a completely different matter. Interviewing adults about their childhood is organised according to the 'law' of interviewing, the law of 'the interview' as a genre, when two people talk and between them a view of the subject discussed comes into being, a text about it is generated. When children are interviewed, one has to talk to children in special ways, and somehow obtain information which is not connected with the fact that the child is confronted with an adult who has to be answered in a particular manner. And in that case the adult really does have a very strong influence.

There are methods based on the study of children's drawings produced without prompting or assistance from adults. There was once a really striking project, but unfortunately the person who did this coursework did not carry on with it, and the coursework was done a long time ago, so that all trace of it is lost. The author took children at the beginning of the first and second classes of primary school, and gave them the same task. She drew an abstract outline, vaguely resembling a fruit of some sort, and asked what it was. Think about it. She got surprising results. The children who had just started school proved much more diverse in their drawings, their visual accounts of what it might be. The children in the second class — that is, children who had already been controlled and

formed by the school — produced variants that were less rich not by one or two, but by many orders of magnitude. It had already been explained to them, once they had been placed in school-age childhood, which mental and symbolic moves were acceptable and praiseworthy, and which were harmful and would not be encouraged, how to save their energy when an adult required something of them, and so on.

There is a curious little book in Russian, *The Life of Six-Year-Old Children*, which makes an attempt at a comprehensive reconstruction of children's life by measuring the various aspects of this reconstruction. Other works examine a particular aspect of children's life. For example, a project for studying the life of children from the poorer strata of society. In every case access to children's culture has passed through heavy internal 'filters', both in that the child expresses himself / herself 'like a grown-up' and in that the appearance of an adult view immediately changes the children's plane of expression.

The child perceives the adult as a fairly alien personage, however positive his / her attitude towards him / her might be. I observed a remarkable case in a trolleybus, when a mother was making quite a long journey with her child, who was of an age to be in the first or second class of primary school, when children are taught the difference between animate and inanimate nouns. For the whole journey they practised this topic, and did it all beautifully. The mother was asking the last question of the test, and the child had to get it right, after which he would be allowed to relax, look out of the window and count the birds. Mother asked the question: 'A teacher?' And the child, without a moment's thought, replied 'What.' The adult researcher, who is like a 'thing', who comes to him / her, asks him / her questions, 'pesters' him / her — that is, of course, a very complicated matter, in the sense of 'What do you want to hear?'

One further comment on the question of the set, spectrum or kaleidoscope of materials, methods and principles of research. A child is a very mobile structure. The material that reflected his / her condition an hour ago may not indicate his / her current condition at all. As a result of this flux, research into contemporary childhood has its pluses and minuses by comparison with the study of childhood on the basis of adults' reminiscences and the very varied evidence of their activities left behind by past generations of children.

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Studying Those Who Study Children: Children's Subjectivity between Epistemology and Ethics

1. Children's subjectivity as an epistemological problem

My own research into the history of scientific approaches to the child in late imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union does not involve work on or with children as subjects, nor is it motivated by an ambition to account for their subjectivity, perspective, voice, agency or worldview. However, my topic does prompt the question of what kinds of relationship pertain between researchers and children as their research subjects and / or objects of study. The period that I focus on (1880–1930s) was indeed dominated by an emphasis on problems of development and socialisation that the 'new sociology of childhood' seeks to distance itself from. However, as the introduction to this 'Forum' rightly highlights, the 'new sociology of childhood' is not entirely clear about what precisely is entailed in its own revision of the relationship between the 'new' scholars of childhood and their subject(s).

The problem at hand is not simply one of methodology. Key to understanding what is at stake is to see that the relationship between science / scholarship on children / childhood and children as subjects / objects of study exists simultaneously on two distinct, yet strategically interlaced, planes — the ethical and the epistemological. It could be argued, in fact, that the principal mark of distinction of the 'new sociology of childhood' is its (broadly Foucauldian) insistence on keeping epistemology and ethics inseparable when studying children. Its main, historic, contribution to the debate is that, in childhood studies, ethics and epistemology are now pretty much hardwired and it is very difficult to imagine them being prised away from one another any time soon. Put slightly differently, one could say that the emphasis on

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children's subjecthood, which pervades contemporary historical, anthropological and sociological explorations of childhood, stems from an epistemology that is in a fundamental way shaped by an ethical 'dominant'. And this interlacing of ethics and epistemology is clearly in evidence also in the assumptions embedded in the four questions guiding this 'Forum'.

However, it is important not to forget that the problem of 'children's subjectivity in scholarly work on childhood', as posed by this 'Forum', remains an *epistemological* problem. Indeed, Q1 about the 'asymmetry of power' is clearly about the asymmetry of *knowledge*-power. Q2 on the child's 'perspective' ultimately concerns the status of this 'perspective' in a particular knowledge economy — for what is the child's 'perspective' here if not a metaphor for the child-subject's 'knowledge', which is made distinct from, but also placed in relation to, knowledge produced by the researcher. For sure, as Q3 implies, the epistemological status of the child-subject's 'knowledge' is inherently tied to the (politically and legally framed) moral status of 'the child' in a given society at a given time in history; and the latter can, in certain contexts, imply a significant elevation in status of the child-subject's 'knowledge'. However, there is still usually an assumption that such 'knowledge' (whether framed in experiential or cognitive terms) is not easy to fit within the regime of rationality in which scientific / scholarly knowledge is embedded by default and on which its dominant position in the wider knowledge economy ultimately depends. Yet when children's subjectivity is turned into something that science / scholarship needs to account for, this essentially becomes a problem of *translating* the child-subject's 'knowledge' into structures of knowledge recognised as those of science / scholarship. What I am referring to here are not the various means of 'objectification' through which science / scholarship so often ends up annulling the subjectivity of the child (that which the 'new sociology of childhood' is usually quite effective in denouncing). Rather, what I have in mind when invoking the operation of 'translation' is the epistemological problem of 'mediation' as expressed in Q4: if the child-subject's 'knowledge' can never be accessed in 'unmediated' form, then science / scholarship is faced with the task of, firstly, identifying 'materials' (sources, objects, etc.) that would serve as necessary 'mediators'; and secondly, devising special analytical and interpretative approaches that would perform the required 'translation' of the child-subject's 'knowledge' into the rational discourse of science / scholarship whereby the desired 'understanding' would be achieved.

What I propose to do in the remainder of my response to this 'Forum' is to reflect, for the sake of illustration, on one particular domain of the study of children and childhood where the interest of scholars from the past, namely those at the forefront of early

twentieth-century Russo-Soviet child science, and the interest of present-day historians and anthropologists of childhood (especially those studying 'children's culture') would appear to intersect. The case in question is the study of *that which children produce or create*, and this precisely as an example of 'materials' that research on children often views as a particularly important 'mediator' of children's subjectivities.

2. Children's 'outputs' as an object of study

What I have in mind here is almost anything that is produced by the children themselves, possibly but not necessarily 'spontaneously' — whether as part of play (free or guided), educational exercise, labour activity, medical therapy or scientific experiment. Typically, the materials in question include children's drawings, art and craft items, children's writings (essays, diaries, poems); but potentially also theatrical and musical performances, for instance. The provisional term that I shall use to refer to all of the above is children's *'output'*. The English word 'output' is conveniently vague, expandable and neutral (and I have deliberately placed it in inverted commas to reinforce the idea that, as a concept, it should remain tactically open). The Russian term that is commonly used in this context is *tvorchestvo* (i.e. children's 'creative output', also implying the more general notions of 'creation' and 'creativity'). *Tvorchestvo*, however, connotes a child that is an a priori 'creator', which might not, in fact, be the role that the child is, in a given situation, performing as producer of a particular 'output'. For sure, in many contexts, children's 'outputs' are, or at least can be, interpreted as manifestations of more or less spontaneous 'creativity'. But at other times emphasis might be on the 'output' as an outcome of *productive* rather than creative labour (an example of *detskiy trud* 'children's labour' rather than *detskoe tvorchestvo* 'children's creative work'). There are also numerous contexts in which a given 'output' is essentially a *response* to a stimulus or 'input' of some kind (pedagogical, experimental, diagnostic, therapeutic).

'Outputs' produced by a child can, of course, be analysed as saying something about the concrete child who has produced them (their personality, level of cognitive development, subjective worldview). However, rather more often scholarship makes them speak about 'the child' or 'childhood' in general; or about some particular subcategory of child (children with a mental disability, 'peasant children', 'street children', children belonging to a specific ethnic minority group, children of a particular age group); or indeed about a historically and culturally specific childhood (e.g. 'Soviet childhood'). Yet children's 'outputs' need not necessarily be functions of the study of 'the child' or 'childhood' per se; they can serve as empirical material for the study of (the development / evolution of)

'humanity' or 'the mind' (including the development of specific mental functions, such as, say, memory). Thus, precisely what is at stake when scholars study children's 'outputs' can be epistemologically hugely diverse, which means that it is essential to look quite closely at how specific bodies of science / scholarship, working in concrete scientific-intellectual, sociocultural and politico-historical contexts, treat children's 'outputs' as research material.

3. The study of children's 'outputs' in early twentieth-century Russo-Soviet child science

In early twentieth-century Russo-Soviet child science, collecting and analysing children's 'outputs' was certainly recognised as one among its many 'methods'. Both Russia's prerevolutionary child study movement and early-Soviet pedology were highly heterogenous fields, assembling a diversity of occupational priorities, disciplinary agendas and theoretical perspectives. Child science was commonly presented as a necessarily eclectic ensemble of topics and methods, each of which was needed to understand 'the child' as an exceptionally complex object of study. This was very much the understanding of child science promoted by the psychologist N. A. Rybnikov (1880–1961) — a key figure at the Central Pedological Institute in Moscow in the early Soviet era. In one of his early overviews of pedological research Rybnikov listed 'methods of studying products of child creativity', alongside also the study of 'children's drawings' and even their 'literary creativity' [Rybnikov 1922: 4, 24–5, 31]. He generally assumed that such 'outputs' should be systematically assembled into large corpora that would then be analysed in various ways, mostly by identifying patterns and regularities.

From the perspective of psychology, which dominated early twentieth-century child science, it was assumed that what I am calling here children's 'outputs' could serve as a potential point of access to the inner psychic life of the child, which otherwise lay 'hidden' from view, given that one could not rely on a child's 'introspection' (*samonablyudenie*) — the only *unmediated* way of accessing 'inner' psychic life according to psychological orthodoxy of the era. Although it was assumed that collections of children's 'outputs' could serve as repositories of data on any number of questions about the child's psyche, psychologists hoped that this material could provide insight especially into the child's emotional states and also their imagination — i.e. those *subjective* parts of the psyche that the otherwise dominant objective methods of experimental psychology, which focused mostly on measuring sensory and cognitive functions, found more difficult to access and analyse.

However, collecting, analysing and interpreting 'outputs' produced by children never achieved the prominence that objective methodo-

logies, such as mental tests, surveys or diary-based observations, enjoyed in Russo-Soviet child science. Most commonly, children's 'outputs' were treated as pieces of 'raw data' collected in the context of broader programmes of research that otherwise foregrounded observation and experimentation as their core methodologies. For example, a parent, teacher or psychologist observing a child in some educational or playtime context would commonly keep and archive what the child produced in some activity (whether spontaneously or under instruction). This would usually be treated as a piece of evidence complementing what was recorded in the diary of objective observation. An 'output' might also be prompted from the child in the context of some experiment (e.g. a drawing as part of a test); or it could sometimes be treated as analogous to a survey response (e.g. an essay requiring the child to reflect on their subjective 'ideals').

Yet the study of 'products of children's creativity' in and of themselves did not, in practice, develop into a particularly significant sub-area of pedological research at the time. The reason for this is not that children's subjectivity was being denied or ignored, but that scholars generally struggled to find ways of 'translating' the various 'outputs' that they were encountering and collecting in the process of empirical research into something that would be scientifically meaningful and relevant to them. Nonetheless, there was one particular type of 'output' — namely children's *drawings* — where such 'translation' was in fact performed with a certain degree of success, which is why this subdomain of research into children's 'outputs' saw greater expansion than the rest.

4. The study of children's drawings as the study of the child's distinctive mode of 'knowing'

One of the key reasons why the study of children's drawings assumed pride of place among the study of children's 'outputs' was that it was perceived as potentially providing an answer to the distinctive ways in which children 'knew' the world. Scholars saw children's drawings as a source that integrated two — in principle separate but in fact vitally intertwined — questions that seemed crucial to grasping the foundations of human knowledge: the distinctive nature of a) children's *perception* of the world and b) their *representation* of this world by symbolic means. Drawings appeared to bring the two together and the core assumption shaping research in this domain was that the development of drawing as a form of symbolic work went hand in hand with the development of perception itself.

Perception was a major, classical topic of psychology of this era, going back to the discipline's roots in empiricist philosophy and its interest in how the human mind knew the world; the topic remained important in lab-based experimental psychology, shaped as it was

by experimental physics and physiology. The core assumption of child science, though, was that children perceived the world differently to adults and children's drawings were expected to provide clues about this. One influential theory of how children's perception differed from those of adults, which had emerged in the early twentieth century, was the concept of the 'eidetic mind' — the idea that young children formed particularly vivid, 'photographic' mental impressions (something that also governed the way their memory worked in early stages of development). Eidetism was assumed to be a characteristic of the minds not just of children but also of 'primitive' peoples, and this connection was, crucially, made precisely by drawing parallels between how children and 'the primitives' visually represented the world in their respective artwork.

Vital to child science foregrounding drawing among children's 'outputs' was also that this activity appeared, on the face of it, to require minimal external support as children seemed to engage in it fairly spontaneously, just grabbing a pencil or paints and doodling or colouring from a very early age. Drawing thereby significantly contrasted other forms of creative or productive 'output', almost all of which was contingent on the child being taught quite complex skills, from craftwork to writing. In some respects, drawing as symbolic activity was understood as closest to speech, if not even more basic and 'primitive', more similar to gesture, allowing researchers to study what the neuropsychiatrist V. M. Bekhterev called 'symbolic reflexes'. However, Bekhterev's own paradigm of understanding all behaviour in terms of associational reflexes (*sochetatelnye refleksy*) also implied the need to incorporate into the analysis of children's symbolic work even the littlest external stimuli (such as introducing a pencil to a child or demonstrating to them how to hold it).

But where the study of children's drawings became really interesting to researchers was when drawing was used not simply as a source for studying structures of perception or 'symbolic reflexes' in their own right, but where the two could be shown to be part of the very same underlying structures of 'knowing'. Particularly controversial in this context became the issue of perspectival perception: namely, the question of the mind decoding an image that contained perspective. Already in the prerevolutionary era Bekhterev and his followers analysed collections of young children's drawings in order to show how these developed from strokes (*shtrikhi*) to squiggles (*karakuli*) to simple representations (e.g. an irregular circle with a dash or two, standing for almost anything) to increasingly more differentiated forms, with the introduction of perspective, crucially, featuring as something of an endpoint in the narrative of the development of drawing in children [Boldyreva 1913: 28–9]. The latter might appear as a matter of normatively enforcing

culturally specific 'adult' mental structures as a teleological goal of ontological development; but for Bekhterev as neuroscientist, the ability to code and decode perspective served simply as a marker that showed that the brain had developed to a particular level of neural complexity that was not in evidence in younger children.

However, the problem of perspective resurfaced in the late 1920s when a follower of Bekhterev, T. N. Baranova, a psychologist working in Tashkent, documented, controversially, that rural Uzbeks seemed unable to 'see' (i.e. properly decode) perspective [Baranova 1929]. Baranova attributed this to her research subjects' religiously-influenced insulation from visual culture as such, i.e. to the fact that they apparently never encountered figurative images in their environment and would have been culturally discouraged from engaging in visual representation more generally. This finding was later taken up by Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria as a potentially important confirmation of their cultural-historical theory of development, which argued that development depended on the acquisition of symbolic tools from the social environment [Lamdan, Yasnitsky 2016]. Crucial here was that it was not only the development of drawing as symbolic behaviour that required mediation from outside (which was something to be expected), but that the development of perception itself, i.e. of mental structures through which the world is 'known', depended on such cultural mediation as well.

It was at this point, however, that 'subjecthood' entered the scene, although not the subjecthood of children but of Soviet nationalities. In the context of the early 1930s' cultural revolution, the above studies were soon interpreted as chauvinistically claiming that some of the Soviet nationalities were culturally 'backward', even 'primitive'. The pedologists who made such arguments were swiftly denounced and the topic of 'perspective' effectively became taboo. However, this did not prevent scholars continuing to study the drawings of children from ethnic minority groups, so long as this did not imply allegations of civilizational 'backwardness'. In fact, in a 1935 study of the drawings of the children of Siberian Evenki, carried out by psychologist A. M. Schubert, the images analysed were still being associated with eidetic perception, as well as with the art of aboriginal peoples from across the world. However, the emphasis of this study was now on the superior aesthetic value of these drawings [Schubert 1935]. In fact, the drawings in question were promoted as testimonies of what appeared to be unusually advanced skills of representing objects that formed part of these children's distinctive environment (e.g. reindeer). Crucial here was that these drawings were attributed forms of *universal* value, both in terms of their aesthetic worth and as modes of 'knowing', given the 'accuracy' with which the Evenki children represented the reality that surrounded them.

5. Children's 'outputs' as evidence of educability: A different kind of ethical 'dominant'

The *value* that we invest in children's 'outputs' as objects of study is indeed crucial to understanding how particular 'outputs' become treated as the prized 'mediators' of children's subjectivities. Crucially, though, this value varies both culturally and historically. In late imperial and early Soviet Russia, children's testimonies were mainly valued in terms of how well the children producing them responded to external stimuli in the context of particular programmes of guided development (whether as part of progressive education, defectological therapy or systems of resocialisation). In other words, children's 'outputs' were essentially treated as a mark of 'achievement'. In fact, very often, the key purpose of collecting children's 'outputs', and even generating them in the first place, was for the sake of publicly displaying them in pedagogical museums or special exhibitions. And most commonly, the 'achievement' on display was not straightforwardly that of the children who produced the 'outputs', but of the institutions in which they were being educated or cared for. Yet at the same time, these 'outputs' were also intended as demonstrations of something pertaining to the children themselves — namely their *educability*. Indeed, the 'outputs' that went on display were almost always by those whose educability was actually in doubt — 'the difficult', 'the defective', 'the delinquent'. This also meant that, even as 'achievements', such 'outputs' were by default deemed inferior to standard forms of academic output of a more intellectual kind. The association of arts-and-crafts outputs with manual work reflected a strong class bias, which arguably persisted into the Soviet Union, despite the nominal reversal of class hierarchies after the revolution. For sure, early Soviet educational reformists sought to normalise learning through doing and making, as better suited to the new body politic of workers and peasants, in contrast to learning through the logocentric methods of reading and writing, associated with the values of the bourgeois intelligentsia. Nonetheless, the ideal outcome of Bolshevik 'labour education' was ultimately meant to become a hybrid of the two — a person 'of deep culture, but with work-callused hands' [Malinin, Fradkin 1993: 137].

Crucial to note in all of this, though, is that to foreground children's 'educability' as the key framework for interpreting children's 'outputs' need not be tantamount to the repressive subordination of children's subjectivity to a set of normative pedagogical structures and patterns of development ultimately determined and governed by 'adults'. It also does not mean that children thereby automatically become 'inchoate organisms, capable of attaining independence only subject to socialisation' (to quote from the introductory text to the 'Forum'). Rather, what it means is that, in the early twentieth century, the interest in specifically children's 'outputs' was governed

by a *different kind of ethical 'dominant'* — not the obligation to *emancipate* 'the child' as a 'subject' (as demanded by today's dominant ideology), but by an ethics (intimately tied to the project of modernity) that was rooted in the obligation to *elevate* the child to an ideal of humanity associated with 'civilisation' and 'culture'.

6. In lieu of a conclusion

My response to the 'Forum' questions has evidently not been an attempt to answer them as such. What I have sought to do is 'unpack' some of the dilemmas embedded in them from the perspective of my own research interests and findings. What I would like to finish with, though, is by suggesting the following: if we genuinely want to shed light on children's 'subjectivity' as a both ethical and epistemological problem, it is, in my view, vital to *study the study* of children, and to do so in historical perspective, ideally through an interdisciplinary combination of historical, sociological, anthropological and philosophical approaches. What I am essentially advocating here is an approach to knowledge-production in the field of childhood studies that would be broadly akin to what 'science and technology studies' have developed in relation to 'science' more generally. This would, I believe, introduce an in my view essential form of reflexivity into childhood studies that could help scholars cut through some of the epistemic knots in which the field appears to have gotten entangled (not least in its valiant efforts to conjoin epistemology with ethics).

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My opinions may seem over-concentrated, since the concept of the subject and experience of childhood has been the exclusive topic of my research interests for many years. I shall try to demonstrate the acuteness of the theoretical problem of using the category of 'subject' as applied to a child, and then reflect on the epistemological, methodological and ethical consequences of this problem.

The first difficulty is connected with the fact that a researcher who uses the category of 'subject' at once becomes a convenient target for criticism for substantivising experience, pro-Western colonialist attitudes, anthropocentrism, and overall one has to be ready to be accused of violence. The fact is that the category of 'subject' was taken over from mediaeval psychology and became widely used as a convenient instrument for the generalisation, universalisation and structuring of human experience, which immediately vitiates the possibilities for using it in social anthropology, since it is a priori insensitive in the task which anthropology sets itself of describing the Other's otherness. If we leave aside that historical and philosophical tradition which has critiqued and restored the necessity and legitimacy of using the category of 'subject', which Vincent Descombes has called 'les débats autour du sujet', and confine ourselves to the contemporary theoretical situation and attempt to make a cross-section and arrangement of positions, it turns out that the necessity of a category of subject arises 1) when the researcher is dealing with speech and action in the first person; 2) when theoretically what is at stake is the novelty, initiative or independence of the actor, when the action establishes new

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causal series; 3) in legal or ethical situations where responsibility is to be assigned. Therefore it seems to me that when using the concept of the 'subject', it is very useful to distinguish the ontology and the ethics of the cogito. If the ontological model associated with the modern cogito has been endlessly discredited, the ethics of the cogito, that is, certain ethical directives, of which the most important are universalisation and emancipation, remain not only operative, but even superactual. It is, precisely, a matter of the practices of the minority in its efforts to integrate itself with the majority, and in a certain sense the reverse movement of stressing the value of the individual vis-à-vis the universal. It seems to me that in this way the category of 'subject' has today much more to do with ethics, including scientific ethics, than with psychology or epistemology. A lack of attention to the ethical aspects of the concept of subjectivity in the broad sense leads to the methodological and epistemological dead ends in which researchers on childhood find themselves.

I shall try to explain what I have said from another angle. As stated above, the subject is a certain theoretical model which allows unique human experience to be transformed into universal. At the same time the authenticity of selfhood may be constructed either by means of the logic of identity, i.e. in a systematic distinction between self and other, as in classical German philosophy, or by means of the logic of individuation, i.e. in an infinite listing of the inner properties or qualities that make me me, as in Leibniz as a consequence of his law of the identity of indistinguishables. Both these theoretical logics have low efficiency when used to study childhood. Let us begin with the question of what we are studying, when we speak of childhood, and whether we have the right to say that we are dealing with experience in the splendid modern sense of self-evident and universal direct and immediate (or even mediated) access. Is our own experience of childhood a condition of our access to childhood, since it is by now the experience of an adult person? Thus we cannot bring into mutual identity the correspondence between the adult's experience and the child's experience: the logic of individuation does not work. However, it is impossible to insist that the child's experience is absolutely different in respect of the adult's experience. It would be strange to erect in respect of children an artificial barrier of their otherness and distinctness (and ridiculous in respect of one's own children), and to apply the epistemological device of epoché, the suspension of judgment: we are obliged to understand them. Thus we can say that in the case of childhood experience the theoretical logic of identity based on distinction does not work either. There can only be a positive result when we shift the focus of research interest from the experience of childhood to the child or group of children. Or (and this is also a way out of the theoretical dead end) we can stop using the category of 'subject' when we speak

of the child, understanding its limitations, or else we can use it in a minimal sense, accepting its limitations, as Descombes does, relying on the critique of the interiorisation of experience proposed by Wittgenstein: the subject is simply a supplement to the action, somebody who speaks in the first person singular. Another similar variant (to the extent that both conceptions go back to Greimas's theory) is proposed by actor-network theory. The child is one of many agents who bring about change in the world, but it is another matter whether the registration of this activity is a sufficient scientific result.

But still, these suggestions are palliative measures, because it can be understood that neither the first nor the second brings us any closer to the question of the degree of responsibility that the child bears for his / her actions, which sooner or later will inevitably face researchers into childhood, even if we systematically and methodically avoid describing childhood via the category of experience. And in this paradoxical manner we come back again to the concept of the subject, but now exclusively in its ethical and legal dimension. Without doubt the ready-made psychological or legal definitions of the child's responsibility (or rather lack of responsibility) are unlikely to help, and more likely to lead us astray. To answer this question we need a subtle and profound attunement and a removal of the contradictions between the several philosophical theories of action: Davidson's causal, Anscombe's intentional and Austin's performative. At this stage we can do no more than take note of the acute lack of the theoretical toolkit necessary to impute not irresponsibility, but responsibility to children, because the criteria of 'deliberation, purpose and intention' proposed, for example, by Austin work in regard to actions performed by children, so why do we not equate children with other candidates for inclusion in the circle of animals and machines capable of action? Is that humane and ethical or inhumane and unethical? In this way the question of the subjectivity of the child is located at the very epicentre of acute current philosophical discussions.

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Are Children Born Social Actors?

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'Maybe there are only two kinds of question in the world,' wrote Peter Høeg in his novel *Borderliners*. 'The kind they ask in school, where the answer is known in advance; asked not so that anyone will be any the wiser, but for other reasons. And then the others, those in the labo-

ratory. Where one does not know the answers, and often not even the question, before one has asked it. <…> That was what we meant by science' [Høeg 2013]. Unfortunately in contemporary Western research on childhood — a field which is also called 'critical sociology of childhood' or 'the new sociology of childhood' — the question of whether children should be regarded as subjects or actors long ago became a school question. There is a 'right answer' to it: yes, of course they should.

This is most noticeable at Western childhood studies conferences. To propose in that milieu that a social scientist should not a priori regard the child as a subject is in a way tantamount to telling those involved in gender studies that women are intellectually inferior to men, or declaring at a conference on social inequality that the poor have only themselves to blame for their misfortunes. As one of the masters of the anthropology of childhood, David Lancy, has subtly remarked, the rhetoric calling for 'children to be regarded as social actors' has taken up such a solid position within childhood studies that it is reproduced even by those scholars whose results obviously contradict this call [Lancy 2012]. The aim of this brief essay is to turn a school question, the answer to which is known in advance, into a scholarly question, to which we are all trying to find an answer.

The question of whether children should be regarded as social actors may be answered in two senses. The first sense is strictly methodological. It can be rephrased as should we, as researchers, give voice to the children whom we study? That is, should we base our conclusions about children and childhood not only on information derived from the adult world (state statistics, the views of parents, teachers and officials), but also on data 'provided' by the children themselves? It is easy to answer this question: yes, we should. However, when posed in this form the question ceases to be specific to research on childhood and becomes a methodological question which can and should be addressed to any field of study. If we are studying women, we should not survey only men; if we are studying immigrants, we should not only observe the behaviour of employees of the federal migration service; if we are studying Mickey Mouse, we should not only interview Donald Duck (although Donald Duck's views may in themselves prove very important for the study of the life of Mickey Mouse).

However, it is important not to confuse this question with the question of children as 'social actors' in a completely different sense, the ontological sense. Are children, by definition, free acting subjects, who are capable of autonomous acts independent of the adult world? Should we, as researchers, a priori regard children as social actors, and not as the objects of care? A positive answer to these questions is enticing by virtue of its progressive, revolutionary nature, parti-

cularly after social scientists have for many years not given children a voice. To a certain extent it is this argument that the representatives of the new sociology of childhood reproduce in their texts. For a long time childhood has been 'invisible' in the social sciences, they say. Information about childhood has been collected from an adult perspective, and thanks to psychology and pedagogy we have become used to seeing children as immature adults, 'incomplete people', so that our task today is not simply to study the various 'cultures of childhood', but to lay bare and criticise the inequality between children and adults [Alanen 1994; Oldman 1994; Christensen, James 1999]. The very principle of ontological differences between children and adults must be questioned, and children, in this sense, are just such an undeservedly marginalised group as, for example, women [Alanen 1994; Qvortrup 1994]. Consequently, we can regard children and adults as classes that exist thanks to the ability of the ruling class (the adults) to exploit the subordinate class (the children) [Oldman 1994]. At the same time, children have the capacity to speak for themselves, and this capacity is a political capacity (in Rancière's sense), because political entities are those that are capable of speaking, while apolitical entities are those that can only make noise [de Castro 2012]. Children are thus endowed with the ontological status of subjectivity, the capacity to speak and act for themselves, a priori.

It is interesting that this sort of romanticisation of childishness is also present beyond the bounds of the new sociology / anthropology of childhood, for example in philosophy and social theory. In one of his essays, Jean-François Lyotard [Lyotard 1993] has recourse to the image of the child as that which best describes the task of philosophy and philosophers. Lyotard's idea is that philosophy should be open to the experience of childhood, that is, aim to find answers to questions in the same way as a child does, and at the same time understand the limits of its knowledge. In his work *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* [Agamben 1993], Giorgio Agamben 'brings the child onto the stage as a possibility for the infinite approbation of new forms of life: the child is not an immature person, the possibility of an adult, but sets up his / her own forms of life, hitherto unknown' [Dudenkova 2019: 44]. Dudenkova herself, a Russian philosopher and theoretician, in the essay cited above and in other works has recourse to Agamben, Kant and Nietzsche in order to propose a different means (in comparison with those to which we are accustomed) of interpreting capacity for action and opportunity, according to which a child is a fully-fledged active subject [Dudenkova 2012; 2019]. In her essay 'Freedom for Children and Perverts' [Reshe 2017], another philosopher and psychoanalyst, Julie Reshe, following Lyotard in a certain sense, describes the child as someone who has not yet become normal, who

exists in opposition to adult common sense. Children's thought, according to Reshe, which is attracted to new knowledge and questions stale common sense, should thus be emancipated and become the model for thought in general. It would seem that the argument in these philosophical works, unlike that in the new sociology / anthropology of childhood, is not ontological but epistemological, that is, it is not a matter of the qualities of real children, but of the figure of the child as a metaphor for a particular kind of knowing. Nevertheless an attentive look at philosophical texts written in this tradition shows how closely connected with the ontological argument the epistemological one can be.

Thus in her dissertation and texts, Amy Glaser, a philosopher of childhood, declares for the reinterpretation of the very concept of autonomy that supports our opposition of adults to children [Glaser 2019]. Having inherited Enlightenment traditions, says Glaser, we regard autonomy as the capacity for taking decisions independently and making choices. This autonomy is thus presented as an internal characteristic of the individual, which children do not possess and which adults do. This is, however, not the only way of thinking about autonomy. The alternative is not rational but relational autonomy. This approach stresses people's interdependence on each other and on their environment, and this dependence is thought of not as an obstacle to autonomy, but as an essential characteristic of human social life. In essence, there is no such thing in nature as an 'autonomous independent decision', and children's and adults' actions and thinking are equally dictated by a combination of internal and external factors. In this sense (and here it is no longer a question of how to think of autonomy, but of the essential characteristics that children possess), children are no less, and even more independent and autonomous than adults (because children have been less subject — in a temporal perspective — to the influence of the repressive forces of society). Infants can, Glaser asserts, be fully-fledged social actors in certain circumstances: they effectively convey their emotions and express their wish to play and wish to get help from other people. Moreover, infants possess features that make them 'better people' than adults, for example they are better at expressing love and care, in their ability to imagine, in being unprejudiced and flexible. These are more or less the conclusions to which the attempt to reinterpret the concept of autonomy leads us.

When we assert that new-born babies have certain characteristics that make them 'better people', this means, whether we admit it or not, that we believe in the existence of autonomy, subjectivity, agency, etc. in a certain human nature that is separate from society and its efforts to socialise. In essence, attempts to recognise subjectivity in children a priori implicitly repeat the postulates of Rousseau in *Emile* [Rousseau 1961 (1762)]: a child is a good being

'by nature', because (s)he is closer to the 'good' natural condition than an adult. Civilisation and society corrupt us, artificially inflating our desires, which we (again 'by nature') are incapable of satisfying, and so they make us unhappy people. Children are not yet subject to the repressive influence of society (one might recall Glaser's argument here), and nature, which knows better than we do what a child needs to develop, 'speaks' in them. Thus the goal of education is not a positive one (developing particular qualities for integration into society) but a negative one, which amounts to combating the influence of society, listening to nature, and 'affirming' the child in nature. In this model subjectivity, obviously, is present in the child from the moment of birth, precisely because subjectivity is here the voice of nature. This is the only way of explaining the a priori presence of subjectivity in the child.

The opposite way of thinking of education to Rousseau's, as a positive and not a negative project, may be best described in the works of Durkheim. In his famous late text *L'éducation morale* [Durkheim 1973 (1902–3)], Durkheim convincingly shows that collective living and social order would be impossible without two important peculiarities of human behaviour: the desire for a regular existence (our society would fall apart if we did not perform certain actions at certain times with enviable regularity) and the capacity for self-control. These qualities are not naturally present in human beings. Children's activity is characterised by the irregularity of its expression: a child can easily slip from one emotional state to another and from one form of activity to another. The child is unacquainted with self-control: (s)he will not stop in his / her desires if (s)he is not stopped from outside. Does this perhaps mean that a child is freer than an adult, as Rousseau and the modern theoreticians who romanticise childhood would say? Not entirely. The adult world's urge for a regular existence the adult world may be alien to the child, but traditionalism is very strong in him / her: it is enough to do something (s)he likes once, and a child is ready to repeat it ad infinitum — we have all had occasion to notice this while observing children, says Durkheim. A child has no self-control, i.e. the internal ability to limit his / her desires, but (s)he is much more susceptible than an adult to suggestion from outside. Indeed, in a situation where a person has no fully developed social ego or moral authority to structure his / her individual thought, that person is to a much greater extent the slave of habit or of external forces. A person who is driven by nature is not free. Disciplinary influence, according to Durkheim, does not suppress our personalities, but develops them, makes us capable both of living in accord with others, and of resisting internal and external forces. The moral authority of society creates a genuine subjectivity that is lacking in man in nature [Ibid.].

The Soviet pedagogue Anton Makarenko, who seems to have been unacquainted with Durkheim's work (though we cannot know that for sure), nevertheless treats Rousseauiste ideas of education with well-aimed irony, criticising them from the same positions as Durkheim:

In 'heaven' the child was regarded as a creature full of a particular composition of gas, which they had not even managed to find a name for. This was, however, that same old-fashioned soul that had exercised the apostles. It was supposed (as a working hypothesis) that this gas had the capacity for self-development, so long as it was not prevented. Many books were written about this, but they all essentially repeated Rousseau's dicta:
'Regard childhood with reverence...'
'Beware of hindering nature...'
The chief dogma of this faith was that in conditions of such reverence and caution toward nature, the said gas would without fail grow up into a communist personality. In fact, in conditions of pure nature what grew was only that which could naturally grow, that is ordinary weeds [Makarenko 2015 (1935)].

However, since Makarenko's time they have managed to find a name for the 'particular composition of gas' with which the child was supposedly filled, which is the very same subjectivity or agency. Are we ready to maintain today that this 'gas' is naturally present in the child from its birth, and is capable of self-development? Do we want to claim that it is sufficient to acknowledge the child a subject, and that as a result (s)he will be one? Should we not rather stop seeing the world through the prism of simple oppositions — freedom or compulsion, attention to genuine childhood experience or a view of the child from the adult perspective, complete acknowledgment of subjectivity or its complete rejection? No single pole of these oppositions removes the possibility of its opposite, as twentieth-century social theory has shown us. Durkheim demonstrated how disciplinary influence could assist the formation of free personalities. Since the time of Piaget, who began to analyse intelligence tests not from the point of view of the mistakes children made, but from that of children's unique and irreplicable thought, developmental psychology has paid attention both to childhood experience and to the process whereby a child becomes an adult. And, finally, if we refuse to see subjectivity and agency in children a priori, we by no means altogether deny them subjectivity: we raise the question of the mechanisms and means whereby it is formed.

Political theorists of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Althusser, Foucault, Laclau and others, had already shifted from the identification of the subject to the study of the practices whereby it comes into being. They showed that the question today ought not

to be 'what' (is or is not the subject) but 'how' (the subject is produced), not a search for the 'subject' but a study of the practices of 'subjectivisation' [Penzin 2010]. In this sense, by regarding the child as a social actor or subject a priori (i.e. adding 'children' to the lists of subjects that require liberation and are capable of liberating others, bracketed, say, with 'the working class', 'the revolutionary student body' or 'Third World immigrants'), the new sociology of childhood takes a step backward from the study of subjectivisation to the naïve paradigm of the search for the true subject. By making us sign up to respect for child subjectivity, it prevents us from raising the question (which is an empirical one) of how that subjectivity is formed.

So long as the question of child subjectivity remains a school question and until it becomes a scientific one, we researchers into childhood will continue to produce such comical situations in communicating with each other as I recently observed at an American childhood studies conference. A number of sociologists and anthropologists, on different days and in different sections, all decided to present papers demonstrating their own 'progressive' attitude to children as social actors. This attitude consisted, in their words, in the radical practice of involving the children in their work as researchers. During the presentations we were shown photographs depicting children conducting interviews, children sitting at computers, and children discussing data. Children are no different from adults, said these photographs. As expected, however, among the people telling these stories there was no one below the age of majority. The minors were on the screen and on the pictures at presentations delivered by respected adult scholars with higher degrees and publications. A biologist who displays a dissected frog on the screen at least does not maintain that the frog was also a social actor and a subject.

This last illustration should not be understood as a call to overturn the academic hierarchy and give children the opportunity to speak at childhood studies conferences (although consistent partisans of a priori child subjectivity really ought to try something of the sort). On the contrary, should we not be a little more attentive to the existence of the hierarchy of which we are part and which we are not always ready to turn upside down? Perhaps if we do not see children as already subjects a priori, but examine child subjectivity as something needing formation through the practices of participation, we shall see the necessity of inviting our young schoolgirl-colleague to come to a conference with us?

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We are writing this text together. We have different research experience and different specialities (one of us is an anthropologist, the other a historian), but to a large extent we have similar opinions on the new sociology of childhood and the questions which it raises. All the arguments that follow will relate to the two ideas which seem to us the most substantial, and to which we shall constantly refer.

Firstly, it turns out that we see no difference of principle in the position of a researcher studying any foreign milieu, be it that of Papuans, long-distance drivers or children: it is always the position of an external observer. (There is, admittedly, a difference, in that researchers cannot usually rely on their own experience as a long-distance driver, but they can remember his / her experience as a child. But this circumstance is more of a hindrance than a help.) Collecting information in the actual conditions is a question of the researcher's qualifications or rather of his / her resourcefulness, a question of his / her constant reflection.

Secondly, we still proceed from the fact that childhood is a constructed object. We cannot ignore the mutually conditioned nature of the coexistence of people of different ages, if we want to understand how reality is organised.

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1 In what might this position of power manifest itself? In the intentions of the questions? In arrogant comments during analysis? In a condescending attitude to the informant? Or in the idea of the peripheral nature of the 'topic of childhood' itself? These are all signs that the researcher lacks experience. Practice shows that children know much more than it appears to adults, and play a much greater role in society

than that which adults are prepared to acknowledge. It is enough to conduct a few interviews or read a few adolescent texts to be stripped of these illusions.

We see the problem of power relations in something else. Firstly, the researcher's position of power manifests itself in the very possibility of interpreting and studying children's behaviour. The person who speaks in the name of science has more power than the one at whom 'the arrow of cognition' is directed. This situation cannot be changed in principle. It is closer to history than to anthropology: while the long-distance driver or the Papuan can, if they obtain the appropriate education, study the anthropologist, the dead can never study the living, and a child (up to a certain age) will not be the creator of scholarship. But if the situation cannot be changed in principle, each individual researcher can mitigate it in his / her own case. Let us take, for example, the attitude towards the object of study from the heights of the morality which we radiate. There is an image of childhood in the researcher's head, (s)he knows the rules for relating to the child and the rules for interaction with the child — the child in general. The child must not be beaten, one must display all one's best qualities in relating to him / her, children are themselves the embodiment of all our best hopes, and so on. But what if the child may be dangerous and in need of control? Young offenders are one thing, but what if the child is a wizard? What about the fact that the child is an economic resource and can and must be exploited — sent to work or sold into slavery? The child is another mouth to feed and a heavy burden — that sort of thing is found all over the place. It is the norm in many societies past and present. To study it as a norm and not as a pathology, to avoid imposing our own morality on the reality being studied — that is a way of overcoming the researcher's hierarchical position. There are not many ways of doing this: reflection and self-observation, and constantly reminding oneself that the researcher's view of the world is not the only possible one.

But it is no less difficult to overcome power relations from the point of view of children's reactions. By means of intellectual exercises the researcher may teach himself / herself to take his / her informant seriously, without condescension (perhaps as an equal partner, perhaps as an instrument indicating fluctuations in the environment). But a child, and an adolescent even more so, cannot always succeed in regarding an adult researcher as something besides the possessor of a position of power. From the child's point of view, an adult always has more resources and opportunities. (S)he is dangerous, and it is better not to say too much in front of him / her. Or else you should run to him / her for rescue. Moreover, there is nothing in the childhood milieu that an adult could disguise himself / herself as. Therefore, following the rhetoric of the question, the researcher's

'position of power' might be mitigated by the researcher, but hardly by the child. Therefore it will in any case be necessary to eavesdrop as well as listening, to creep up on them and pursue them as well as interacting and entering into dialogue.

2 Attending to the child's voice is justified in all cases. Our experience — as an anthropologist and as a historian — shows that no sources must be neglected, since the reconstruction of reality is the totality of the intersections of different views of the object. Obviously, the 'child's view' is most important when it is a matter of studying those research objects which we, as a rule, construct as 'child-centred', such as children's practices on the Internet or systems of education. But the child's voice may be significant in all other research. Of course, the status of a child is connected with a particular moral force, and a child's evidence, for example, about war or famine is a more impressive illustration than statistical tables, but it may not add any new information. Also, many aspects of reality are closed to children. We repeat once more that in this sense there is no great difference: the details of the work of a meat processing plant or the extent to which administrative decisions depend on the taste of the coffee in the town hall canteen are also closed to us. The search for the source that corresponds to the question being asked is also a question of the researcher's experience and reflection. But if we free ourselves from arrogance, we can easily be convinced that children and adolescents have access to really striking information: despite what adults think, children know a lot about how the world works.

3 Our direct answer to the third question is only tentative, since we are not at all involved in discussions on the topic of the 'children's agency as political and legal subjects'. Experience of life in academia suggests that the conceptualisation of anything is equally connected both to the evolution of ideas and to the dictate of novelty and the prestige of creating new directions. This is no bad thing: in the same way elections, even the most formal of them, force politicians to do at least something. It is another matter that the total value of a conception does not end with its novelty alone. Here, as they say, time will tell. Besides, when analysing the conditions for the genesis of 'the turn towards child subjectivity', one should, evidently, pay attention not only to the general context of feminist research and the struggle for minority rights (the influence of which is obvious), but also to the condition of the socium that generated the idea. Youth studies began with adults' fear of teenage gangs or adults' efforts to profit — politically or economically — from young people. Why is the question of child subjectivity beginning to be discussed in society? Because society has become more humane and intelligent? Or because it is ageing and has few children? These are questions to which we have no answer, but they are worth thinking about. One

could also use the third question as an occasion for expressing one's own view of child subjectivity and child agency in the modern world.

To be completely frank, we find much in these ideas that is factitious and biased. Furthermore, to those of us who live in Russia the idea of child agency in politics and law is unattractive and absurd not because we distrust children, but because we greatly distrust adults. Their lust for power is inordinate, their possibilities for creating illusions are now practically limitless, their attempts to control the education system and subordinate it to their requirements are disastrous, because adults are for the most part pusillanimous, short-sighted and afraid of the future. Essentially the theoretical element that provokes the greatest doubts is that child agency, and even more child subjectivity, are thought of in the spirit of human rights, as inalienable and constantly operative forces like gravity. But this is not the case. For simplicity let us assume that there is a consensus in society on these questions and the external milieu allows both the agency and the subjectivity of the child, but unlike gravity these forces must be required by the subject and actor himself / herself in order to be realised. And even adults by no means always do this. To discover oneself as a subject is thought of as a break in the routine: are many adults capable of this? What adult is truly capable of conscious choice? The flavour of social optimism in the ideas of 'the new sociology of childhood', even though it is thoroughly diluted by the critique of the existing state of affairs, still seems sickly-sweet. Like many social phenomena, a person's ability to make a free choice, to act and to expect that all this will be regarded as normal by those around — all these possibilities and expectations have an intermittent, flickering character. Sometimes they appear, sometimes not, they depend on the situation. Moreover, child agency may come into being only through inclusion in an already existing environment envisaged by adults, and it is not unambiguously constructed. Is a baby born into a modern child-centred nuclear family an actor and a subject? To judge by the radical nature of the changes that take place in the everyday life and consciousness of most parents, then rather yes than no. But at the same time we do not expect any conscious choice from the baby. To sum up, let us say that in our opinion the theoretical usefulness of the new sociology of childhood appears less substantial and profound than its social engagement.

4 On the basis of everything that has been said, we shall formulate our answer to the fourth question. Let us recall that in our opinion, if we state it in its most forthright form, a separate culture of childhood does not exist and cannot exist. It is a theoretical construct that sometimes does more harm than good. Certainly it allows one to identify the object of study, but at the same time the object is imagined as autonomous, and this is fundamentally wrong. In a milder form our assertion could be formulated like this: like many

binary constructs, children's culture is meaningful only in the context of adult culture. The milieu in which children exist is to a large extent created by adults, and children, and especially adolescents, exist within it, get used to living in it, and make out of it and inside it their own little nests, like wasps in a country cottage. Besides, children inevitably grow up. Therefore the study of 'children's culture' should properly begin with the study of adult culture, since the children, in this case, are not so much actors as re-actors. It must of course be acknowledged that this is particularly the case with historical studies, where we cannot interact or observe directly. It is impossible to understand how youth activism at the beginning of the twentieth century was organised without an understanding of the regime of the prerevolutionary school. Trying to understand the meaning of certain early twentieth-century adolescent texts without reading Nadson would be a waste of effort. In this sense children orientate themselves just as much on the models and / or view of the other as adults do. Only afterwards, by studying children's reactions, we can gain access to their heads and their own ideas. But that chemistry which arises from reading books, experiencing one's own feelings and creating one's own texts, is what gives access to children's culture. We can watch how the reaction proceeds and which chemicals from the environment are involved in it — and that is what is available for 'immediate' study.

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In the foreword to the collection *Children's Folklore: A Source Book* [Sutton-Smith et al. 1999], Brian Sutton-Smith, who was chiefly responsible for organising it and inspiring the ideas behind it, tells a little story: in 1977 (about the time of the dawn of research on children's folklore in our country) someone on a course on children's folklore at the University of Pennsylvania complained to him that it was impossible to write a dissertation on this area of knowledge because of the complete lack of interest in it on the part of the American Folklore Society (AFS) and the folklore department at the University.[1] At about the same time the anthropologist Charlotte Hardman was writing that the history of the study of children

[1] As he tells it, this prompted him to turn to his colleagues Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Tom Burns with the proposal to organise their own Children's Folklore Society within AFS.

in the social sciences was distinguished not so much by a lack of interest in children as by their silence [Hardman 1973: 87].

Since then children and the phenomenon of childhood have become firmly established in many disciplines as a subject deserving of separate study. Nevertheless the problem that Charlotte Hardman called 'children's silence' is currently at the centre of attention of the representatives of the so-called new sociology of children. Researchers propose considering children as social actors, subjects endowed with free will. Ipso facto it is asserted that children, like adults, influence the course of their own lives, and construct their own biographies, including active participation in social events, influence on them and transformation of their content.

What does this approach mean for the researcher? First and foremost it is a change in the ontological premises underpinning the traditional paradigm, shifting the accent from the child as such to the 'construct of childhood'.[1] According to this biologically reductionist construct, the child's development is predictable, because it is evidently regulated by the same psychological mechanisms[2] and laws of socialisation. Anyone who for some reason develops outside the framework of these laws becomes a deviant specimen of the species [Schildkrout 1978: 109]. The new paradigm, however, supposes that there is no such concept as universal experience: it changes depending on time, place and particular circumstances. The child is 'a status of person which is comprised through a series of, often heterogeneous, images, representations, codes and constructs' [Jenks 1996: 32]. Childhood, unlike biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor a universal characteristic: 'In these terms it is biological immaturity rather than childhood which is a universal and natural feature of human groups, for ways of understanding this period of human life — the institution of childhood — vary cross-culturally' [James, Prout 2005: 3]. The immaturity of children is a biological fact of life, but how this immaturity is understood and interpreted is a fact of culture [La Fontaine 1978]. It is these 'facts of culture' that may differ and turn childhood into a social institution, allowing us to see in 'children' and 'childhood' what Ivar Frønes has called a multiplicity of

[1] The historian Philippe Ariès gave prominence in his work to the socially constructed character of childhood. In his opinion, childhood did not exist in the Middle Ages, because children were not endowed with any particular social status. Like adults, they participated in the life of society in accordance with their abilities. The awareness that children might need some other kind of social experience came, according to Ariès' contentions, only in the fifteenth century. A process of the gradual social, political and economic differentiation of children has been taking place since then. Despite the subsequent criticism of Ariès' ideas, he was patently the first to initiate the new discussion within the historical sciences in the West [Ariès 1962: 125].

[2] Freud's model of psychosexual development, Piaget's model of cognitive development, and Kohlberg's model of moral development presuppose universal chronological stages of development from the original, egocentric child to the autonomous, principled and subjectively receptive adult.

childhoods, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems: different positions in society produce different experiences [Frønes 1993]. To sum up, the accent in the new paradigm is shifted from the creation of objective knowledge of the child by the adult researcher to a joint construction of knowledge of the subjective worlds of childhood and the various pathways through life that children follow.

These are the basic theoretical postulates that the new sociology of childhood puts forward. The question that the initiators of the discussion have asked is how far these postulates can be applied and realised. I, however, would like to emphasise that in my opinion there is no point in examining such questions outside a wider and older discussion about the mutual relationship of the researcher and the object of research irrespective of his / her age[1] ([Brettell 1993; Aull Davies 1999; Lawlor, Mattingly 2001] and many others) and also the ontological turn, much discussed in recent years, with its premise of 'a plurality of worlds' and 'a plurality of perspectives' (P. Descola, E. Viveiros de Castro and others). Besides, the topic and arguments based on it follow, as a rule, the logic that governs women's studies: research which places women and their experience at its centre.[2]

If we look at the list of problems raised in the course of such discussions, they are not much different from those which are raised by the new sociology of childhood, the only difference being that in the latter case the 'object of research' is understood as a group of people circumscribed by their age. My question is, to what extent there is any point in this.

The new sociology of childhood made active declarations of the problem of the phenomenon of childhood,[3] helping to bring children over the borders of the marginal periphery. Would it not be right to make the next step towards effacing the borders between children's and adult folklore? The difference in age is a biologically determined fact of which it would not be reasonable to dispute the influence. But is age a sufficient factor for separating the 'children's' and 'adult' worlds, and if so, where is the border between them?

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1 See also the discussion organised within the school conference on 'Folklore in the Field and the Study: The Informant's Knowledge and the Anthropologist's Interpretations'.

2 In 1973 Charlotte Hardman compared her work on the anthropology of childhood with women's studies, asserting that 'both women and children might perhaps be called "muted groups"' [Hardman 1973: 85].

3 James and Prout called the new sociology of childhood 'an epistemological break', a movement of research away from traditional theologies, romantic discourses and psychological theories of development [James, Prout 2005]. However, there is an opinion that the 'new' paradigm is not new at all. In his essay Patrick Ryan shows the connection between the basic postulates of the new sociology of childhood and those types of assertion which authors have been making about children for centuries: 'As sensible as this approach is, this essay challenges the idea that a paradigm shift or an epistemological break has occurred in the current study of childhood' [Ryan 2008: 554].

As a rule, when we set the age limits in our research (qualitative or quantitative), we follow the current administrative division (as if we were to follow administrative boundaries when studying urban space and people within it). Thus, in my observations, people up to the age of seventeen (i.e. below the official age of majority) are often regarded as 'children' in research. I followed the same division when I was collecting children's 'horror' folklore, since the concept of 'children' assumed the creation of a certain age-related framework for the research. At the same time I did not always understand why a person aged eighteen was excluded from my research. Because (s)he had sat his / her exams and left school? Why, when we speak of constructs, do we still follow the construct of age, when the construction of childhood is not limited to the imposition of meanings that reflect the opinion of society regarding the subject at a particular period and in a particular place? When does 'childishness' break off? When does a child become an adult in societies where a person's status is not dictated by the institution that (s)he belongs to (kindergarten, school, university, employment)? Why, in such a case, are we not actively discussing the anthropology of old age? Evidently all these boundaries are just as fluid and depend on a great number of factors, as does the very definition of 'childhood'. Of late I have been hearing more and more often, when works on children and childhood are discussed, the questions 'What is unique about your conclusions?' and 'How does what you are describing differ from what is characteristic and inherent in adults?' Such questions have more than once been put to me when I have been describing how children understand and experience such emotions as fear, and each time I have been hard put to answer them. Is the absence of specificity the result of the methods of collection and analysis used, of the perspective of the research? So far I have not been able to find an answer to these questions for myself, but still it seems to me that the question that calls into doubt the necessity for the autonomous study of childhood is relevant and deserves to be mentioned in the said discussion.

Children should not be studied as a self-contained system; their ontological notions are in just such a process of development, and are changed through the effect of just as great a number of environmental factors, as those of more experienced members of the species. And, perhaps, experience here hardly plays the only really important differentiating role. Only, as far as we know, experience is a relative variable and does not always, and not so much, depend on the number of years lived through, as on factors determined by the time and place in which a particular person has lived.

Having stated certain important considerations, from my point of view, regarding the main subject of the researches of the represen-

tatives of the new sociology of childhood, I should like in the second part to proceed to a more detailed examination of the changes in methodology that the new paradigm presupposes. There is no doubt at all that some changes are necessary, but others, in my view, require some important qualifications and clarifications.

One of the most controversial postulates of the new paradigm states that childhood as an object of analysis *must never be completely separated from such variables as class, sex or ethnicity*. This assertion is based on the rejection of the possibility of identifying any universal experience characteristic of all children and of childhood as a whole. The English researcher Martin Woodhead gives and interesting example. According to the suppositions of Western planners, Woodhead writes, children 'need' a certain amount of play space, since 'overcrowding' is harmful to their social development and leads to aggressive and uncooperative behaviour. There are therefore rules in force in England that guarantee minimal crowding when children's playgrounds are planned. However, as the author asserts, citing the research on a nursery in South Africa by Liddell and Kruger, this is not a universal biological 'need', but socially conditioned. The research showed that South African children functioned efficiently in crowded conditions that produced unfavourable reactions among British children. In the author's opinion this was in part connected with the fact that these children lived in families with many children in densely populated settlements. Furthermore, the child's perception of its play space was influenced by the attitude of its carers, who had experience of working with children in limited conditions [Woodhead 1996: 48].[1]

The second postulate, against which there does not seem to be any need to argue, says that *the culture of childhood deserves to be studied by itself, independently of the viewpoint and interests of adults.* In other words, children must not be regarded simply as passive subjects of structural definitions. This means that children should be regarded, firstly, as actively involved in the construction of their social life, of the lives of the people around them and of the societies in which they live;[2] and secondly, as people with their own view of

[1] The classic example is the field experience of Margaret Mead, described in her book *Coming of Age in Samoa*. The idea which she brought back from Polynesia contradicted the then current conviction that children have a biologically conditioned need of aggression and rebellion against adults at a certain age (see the works of G. Stanley Hall). Mead did not find any such regularity among the adolescents of Samoa, and thereby dethroned the myth of the universality of such a behaviour strategy at that age [Mead 1928]. She also overturned the universalist theoretical structure of Piaget, who contended that children have little ability to distinguish dead creatures from living ones.

[2] Anna Solberg, for example, focuses on the work life of children in Norway. Using data from several empirical studies, she analyses different forms of activity in which children participate, and shows that these activities affect the children's 'social ages' and assist in the organisation of everyday life in modern urban families [Solberg 2005].

things, which might be different from the view of a more mature person, but is not therefore wrong.

This last assertion is the most important and topical. Clifford Geertz had already written that all ethnographical descriptions, regardless of whatever rhetorical instruments the researchers used, were descriptions of the people who made them and not of those whom they described [Geertz 1988]. A good example of this sort of 'colonial' description — an interpretation made by means of research filters — was presented at a recent conference devoted to the phenomenon of fear in culture. In the opinion of one speaker, children's fears can be divided into rational and irrational ones. According to this concept, rational ones are, for example, fear of a car (which really can hurt you), and irrational ones, fear of a witch (who cannot hurt you, because she does not exist). What is the author of this assertion doing? The interpretation imposes a filter (the adult observer's attitude to witches, who, in his / her opinion, do not exist) on the text of a child in whose world, perhaps, there is no such distinction (for a child, a witch is just as rational a fact as a car on the road). It is noteworthy that in another paper the same distinction was made regarding adults' fears as well as children's. The critique above is applicable to this case too. In other words, when creating a text the researcher must maintain the capacity for critical interpretation of its content and answer this question: to what extent was the image of the life of children that one is describing created by the children themselves and to what extent was it produced by the researcher? In other words, whose voice is louder, the children's or the author's?

The researcher's efforts to escape from his / her own persistent filters when analysing material leads to a need for a change in the conditions under which the material is obtained. Thus representatives of the new sociology of childhood consider that *the only correct method of collecting material is in conditions that are natural for the child, taking into account the social and cultural context of his / her everyday life*.[1] For this reason ethnography has great authority in

[1] There are also divergences of opinion within this approach. Thus Nancy Mandell adopts a radical position in her work 'The Least Adult Role in Studying Children' [Mandell 1988], maintaining that the adult researcher must divest himself / herself entirely of his / her own status and join a group of child-researchers. During her ethnographic research Mandell did all she could to make her actions resemble the actions of the children she was analysing in order to obtain the status of a full member of the group. In their work 'Entering and Observing in Children's Worlds: A Reflection on a Longitudinal Ethnography of Early Education in Italy' [Corsaro, Molinari 2008] William Corsaro and Luisa Molinari presented another, and, in my view, more correct point of view. In their opinion, the difference between the researcher and the children is obvious and there is no point in trying to 'play at being a child'. This approach allowed Corsaro to join a group of children as an 'incompetent adult' who needed to be introduced to the child's world. In other words, the researcher does not ignore the correlation of power between himself / herself and the children, is always aware that this relation cannot be removed from his / her research space any more than it can from any other social sphere [Kowalik-Olubińska 2015].

research on childhood, since it is regarded as the most suitable for documenting children's life, and also the means by which children give meaning to their experience and to their environment [Kowalik-Olubińska 2015: 251–2]. This position illustrates the irreconcilable contradictions between the new paradigm and any quantitative methods that exclude a large number of contextual factors from their attention.[1]

Perhaps the aspect of the new paradigm that is hardest to reconcile with my experience is its aim to *use the child-informant as a coresearcher* ('a partner in the research', 'an independent researcher') [Kowalik-Olubińska 2015: 251–2]. This participation may suppose assistance in developing the research, for example in constructing the research questions, collecting and processing the data, publishing reports and even carrying out independent research projects.[2]

The first time that I experienced the problem of the mutual relationship between the collector and the informant for myself was in 2016. My colleagues and I were working in a village in the Komi Republic in conditions with which we were quite unfamiliar. They were unfamiliar because our informant, a young man who had left school not long before, was not only the son of the owner of the house where we were living, but, as it turned out, our 'coresearcher': he read our questionnaires and commented on them, went with us to interviews, took part in our evening discussions and even tried stealthily to read and 'correct' our field diaries. In other words, he did all he could to 'supervise' the process. On the one hand, his participation was useful: being quite a well-known personality, he could open all the doors in the village, he sometimes asked questions that the researcher had not thought of, and he was told things that might not have been told to a collector who was a stranger. Any question that arose in the course of the research could be addressed to him. And in that sense, we were all glad of his participation. On the other hand, it was the tensest and most difficult field that I have ever spent any time in. And in my opinion, there was at least one reason for that that is important within this discussion: the necessity of constantly balancing between the positions of a researcher-collector and a researcher-analyst. Frank discussion of the field was

[1] Discursive approaches that define meaning at a cultural level flourish within the new paradigm: they contextualise both the children's utterances and the accounts of these utterances. Therefore the research process is always connected with interpretation, undertaken both while listening to what children say and analysing it and afterwards. In other words, it is an active engagement with the context, as opposed to a positivist collection of neutral data which is not influenced by how the researcher perceives, describes and presents the information that (s)he has gathered [Kowalik-Olubińska 2015: 251–2].

[2] An approach which in a broader context is adhered to by followers of so-called *collaborative ethnography* and *collaborative anthropology* — ethnography or anthropology carried out by the joint efforts of the researcher and the subject of the research (see: [Lassiter 2005; Fluehr-Lobban 2008; Campbell, Lassiter 2014] and others).

possible either as a soliloquy or briefly on the veranda while taking a break for a smoke. The rest of the time, in obedience to the ethics of fieldwork, we were forced to be careful what we said, for fear of saying something displeasing to our coresearcher-informant. And there were reasons for this, because he was included in the social structure of the village, and was part of the dominant understandings in it. For example, he forbade us to visit certain informants, because he regarded them, and anything they might tell us, as 'bad'; he slept with an axe under his pillow, because he believed in *shishki* (the local variant of little devils); he was pursuing an active mission to revive the local traditions. There were a number of other contextual factors that contributed to the impossibility of frank joint analysis of the research, such as his difficult relationship with his father and the regular presence of his girlfriend.

In a recent conversation my colleague Alya Solovyeva expressed a similar concern for the need of an ethical interpretation of the situation in which data is exchanged with informants, referring to a recent conference which had been organised jointly with the informants. According to her, the organisers had been forced to exclude certain topics on ethical grounds when drawing up the programme.

In other words, in my view, the correct balance must be observed between the 'inquisitor' and the 'coresearcher', so that the relations between the collector and the informant do not take the form of a hypocritical 'playing at being a researcher'. When Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis spoke of the optimal depth of the relationship between the researcher and the informant, they used what I find the quite successful metaphor of portrait painting. They compared the researcher's position to that of the painter, who must, in order to give a more exact and lifelike representation of reality, take perspective into account, and also choose the best distance between himself / herself and the subject whom (s)he is depicting [Lawrence-Lightfoot, Davis 1997]. It would be hard for a portrait painter, as it would for a researcher, to avoid distortions in the representation of the reality that (s)he observed if the distance between them were either to great or too little. In any case, whatever our approach, how we see young people and our attitude towards them necessarily form their experience of being a child, and, therefore, also their own reaction to the adult world and their interaction with it.

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1 In my view this is not merely a possibility, but a tendency which we can identify at present in childhood studies. I shall not attempt to evaluate the extent or scale of this tendency, but I think that we have every reason to speak of its presence. The very fact of the existence of such a research direction as 'the new sociology of childhood', the very fact that questions about the possibility of the child's participation in one or another undertaking are asked, for example in the political sphere — is this not a view of him / her as a subject? The question could have been put a different way: should the existence of approaches that presuppose viewing the child as a non-subject, and their widespread popularity, be seen as a problem? I think not; there can be alternative viewpoints. Let me explain.

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The same logic as is applicable to the study of people in general lies at the foundations of the sociological theory of viewing the child as an object undergoing influences from outside, e.g.

from his / her social environment, or, by contrast, as a subject capable of voluntarist action. I should like to point out that there is no unanimous opinion in multiparadigm sociology about where the boundaries of human subjectivity lie, any more than there is a single theory of socialisation. Even though theories of socialisation explain, in one way or another, the integration of the person into society, there is no single idea of how socialisation takes place and what its final results are: whether a person is the passive object of influence by social institutions or whether in the process of socialisation (s)he behaves as an active subject and, out of the information offered to him / her, assimilates something, takes note of something, rethinks something and copies something. For some reason researchers sometimes lose sight of the fact that there are several theoretical versions of how socialisation takes place, and also of the thesis that socialisation continues for a person's whole life — all of it, not just childhood. At the same time, the thesis that I would like to emphasise is that from the point of view of sociological theory, the same logic operates in examining a child as in examining a young person or a (supposedly) adult person or an elderly person. Conceptions that considered that human behaviour was determined — by social surroundings, by concealed structural factors, by the logic of the functioning of society as a system, or by some other means — were dominant in sociology for a long period. Therefore there is nothing strange in viewing a child (in those cases where researchers were faced with the task of separating out children as a certain social community) as the object of influence, for example by the people with whom the child came into contact. When, half a century ago, the situation changed and the concept of the voluntarist subject appeared, within a short time the first steps of this logic could be noted also in the analysis of children, their roles, and their possibilities.

From the context of what has been said there emerges an answer to the question posed by researchers in connection with their search for the child's true subjectivity, namely: what is real in the child, childish, their own, and what is derived from their teachers, their mother, or other people? Taking the theory of socialisation as the basis for examining the child, attempts to 'filter out the adult' whose assumptions, models of behaviour, practices and words the child has assimilated and reproduces are manifestly doomed to failure and are moreover unnecessary. The child is no less a subject because we see traces of the influence of other people on him / her, or hear 'other people's voices' in him / her. Adults, who, however, are less often denied their own voices, likewise have at the basis of their actions and replicate what they have assimilated from their social surroundings (some of which they have, perhaps, reinterpreted, and some of which they have simply absorbed). Separating children into

a distinct social group (cohort) is not based on doubts as to whether children are naturally the same as adults, or whether they possess subjectivity by comparison with adults, but on the value of examining and analysing the specific experience associated with their age (which is in turn associated with specific practices and so forth). This is justified in respect of children, and equally, for example, in respect of elderly people, and, if we extend the logic of separating out groups, also in respect of men, and in respect of teachers, and so on. It is another matter that we can actually say that human experience grows, and the growth of experience is as a rule correlated with age, so that the possibility of acting as an expert becomes greater with age. Indeed, children are more limited than an adult physically, and in a legal sense, and indeed, their entry into different spheres as an actor takes place gradually. For this very reason researchers should pay attention to the question of the age at which a person acquires competence in any given sphere. And this age should be determined by experience and studied with reference to a particular problem. This, for example, is what researchers into children's political socialisation do. At what point can we speak of the beginning of the process of political socialisation, of the formation of a child's political consciousness? This question, to which there are different answers, is nevertheless a real question for research. But in the sphere of digital technologies and video games a child gets his / her bearings earlier than in politics. Sometimes an adult can live his / her whole life without discovering a particular sphere, and this is also normal.

Thus it seems to me that the question of children's subjectivity is solved by the researcher's position regarding the possibility of voluntarism in human activity: whether man has free will or not. Questions of whether a child is a fully operative actor, whether (s)he can be equal to an adult in this sense, to what extent (s)he is more dependent, compared with people of other ages, on the actions of other people, are put aside if subjectivity is understood as the capacity of not being passive, of acting in accordance with one's own purposes. Another reason why there should not be a specific approach to children is that it is impossible to draw a clear line between the absence of subjectivity and its acquisition. The child's ability to express itself in a way that will be heard by adults plays an enormous role, but that does not mean that until, thanks to experience or other circumstances, (s)he succeeds in expressing itself in such a way, they have no subjectivity. As to the formation of a 'voice' of one's own, it may be said that the 'voice', or, to put it another way, the language for describing particular spheres and situations in life, may not appear even when a person has passed the conventional limit of childhood or even adolescence. This outlines one of the methodological problems in studying children: from the child's 'voice' adults analyse that which they are able to understand

and hear, and therefore they prefer (or, one might say, find it easier) to study those children who have reached an age when they can express themselves in a language that adults can understand. The result is that the problem here is not one of a lack of material for study, but of the need to develop and expand the methods of analysis. From this perspective I think it would be very productive to turn to the analysis of visual data: children's drawings, and photographs taken by children.

To sum up what I have said, I will note that there is already a means of overcoming the researcher's 'position of power' relative to the child: it is simply a question of how the researcher resolves it at the theoretical level. At the same time I would like to stress there is not (nor could there be, according to the logic of sociological theory) any special separation of the child and endowing of him / her with subjectivity, nor, on the contrary, denial of it to him / her by comparison with a person of a different age.

2 Generally speaking, recourse to the 'child's outlook' or the 'child's voice' is justified in all those spheres in which the researcher might have need of it. At the same time we must understand and consider that the child is not a static subject but a person who is constantly in the process of assimilating new knowledge and practices and elaborating those which (s)he already has. It is essential to ask the question at what point and at what age the child becomes an operative actor in one sphere or another, to study that, and only afterwards to examine his / her 'utterances'. So, returning to the aforementioned example of research into political socialisation, it is useless to listen to 'children's voices' on political questions and state administration before the child has formed an idea of this sphere, before (s)he has started along the road of forming a political awareness. The existence of a specific awareness is quite difficult to establish (the fact that the child knows what the president's name is is no evidence of that), but that is another question.

3 I suppose that the discussion in society about acknowledging the child as an autonomous agent in the political and legal spheres and the turn towards children's subjectivity on the academic agenda are consequences of the same process, a reaction against the succession of social changes of the last decades. Of course, the theory and the academic research founded upon it have their own inner logic of development, but still, the authors of concepts often reflect on social changes in the attempt, at the very least, to explain them. As researchers who have been studying the history of childhood have shown, within society there has been an evolution of notions of childhood from the genesis of the concept of 'childhood' in the seventeenth century (P. Ariès) to the diversification of means of considering childhood in the twentieth century, among which there

is a place for concepts that consider the child as an active subject capable of acting on an equal footing with adults and take responsibility for this (for example, the concept of 'heroic' childhood, analysed by Darya Dimke in a series of articles). As for putting questions about giving children more rights on the agenda, these questions could not have arisen all of a sudden, but are conditioned by the social transformations of recent years, one result of which has been the increase in the field of activity and spheres of competence of children in society. Thus, the social and academic agenda are two parallel processes brought into being by a common source.

4 It seems to me that the future lies in studying documents created by children. They may be diaries, and drawings, and photographs, and videos. The analysis of children's verbal and visual discourse will allow us to look at the question through a child's eyes to a much greater extent than is possible using survey methods where it is impossible to avoid the influence of the personality of the adult interviewer on the child's answers. The analysis of visual materials, including drawings (made at the researcher's request or on the child's own initiative) certainly has complications of its own, and serious ones, connected with the necessity of interpreting the documents' content. Fortunately the list of methods of analysis of visual material which allow the results obtained to be verified and which are used today in work on visual artefacts created by children includes, besides content analysis, iconographic analysis, the basic ideas of which can be adapted depending on the research tasks.

CÉCILE PICHON-BONIN

My current research concerns the visual culture of Russian childhood from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s. I focus both on images created by adults for children, and on those created by children for themselves, and work from a perspective informed both by history of education and by the study of visual culture.

So far as images aimed at children go, a first step is already to acknowledge the impact upon reception of subjectivities and of spaces where subjectivity may be expressed. This is an especially important step when it comes to propaganda images, since it is a helpful way of avoiding the assumption that historical subjects were conditioned in unproblematic and totalising ways. Propaganda has attracted a substantial

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academic literature that is derived from political science as much as from history. Posters and ruler portraits, in particular, have been the subjects of specialised study (see e.g.: [Bonnell 1997; Plamper 2012]). Peter Kenez's idea of 'the propaganda state' [Kenez 1985] has exercised a substantial influence. It is often assumed that propaganda was at once omnipotent and unproblematic in its effects; questions of dissemination and impact are seldom addressed. At the same time, recent research (e.g. [Sumpf 2010; Brandenberger 2011; Berkhoff 2012]) has taken a critical view of these assumptions and has made clear how haphazard were the relations between the ambitions of the Soviet political establishment, the means open to it, and the results that it was able to achieve.

Once the existence of specific spaces of subjectivity has been acknowledged, it remains to define these in more precise terms. It is here where analysis of visual imagery aimed at children can turn out to be useful. We need to establish which images were in circulation, the channels and the means by which dissemination took place, and the extent to which given images were successful or unsuccessful in reaching their intended addressees. In this light, we can study, for instance, such sources as library collections and photographs from the general and specialised press showing children in clubs, schools, kindergartens, summer camps, and other forms of collective life, and also the archives of publishing houses.

The effort to grasp the specificities of children's subjectivity needs to be accompanied by effort to define a specifically adult subjectivity, both when it comes to visual images generally, and more particularly to propaganda images. It is here where we encounter one of the central questions raised by studies of visual culture. As an artefact, an image is the product of society and of political power relations, yet also of individuals working in the publishing world, and the illustrators with whom they collaborate. As a mode of expression, the image reveals, when analysed, the governing presuppositions, whether articulated openly or implied, of the society that shapes the growing child. Thus, images themselves effect work of an ideological kind and act upon those exposed to them, but the same applies in reverse. Study of the spectator and the way in which (s)he responds to images, of their emotional impact upon the viewer, is a central concern of recent research on visual culture (see e.g.: [Deluermoz et al. 2014]).

The analysis of images and illustrated books illuminates in an instructive way the space allowed for children's subjectivity in narratives and images (specifically, their emotions, tastes, judgements, personal experience, and so on). It is also necessary to engage with subjectivity in the mechanisms of reception and to offset straightforward analysis of images themselves by context-sensitive

study and awareness of the educational support that is offered to children. History of education, which itself combines history of ideas and the study of educational methods and techniques, helps in the articulation of the underlying theoretical reflections and the assumptions relating to the ways in which images are used and interpreted, as well as the specific practices by which they are employed.

The assumptions made by the most influential education theorists are set out in manuals aimed at audiences of teachers, and extend, among other things, to the ways in which images are used. Looking at an image is a practice embodied in 'gestures, spaces, and habits', to borrow Roger Chartier's comments on the act of reading. The consumption of an image takes place in many different domains, including not just schools and nurseries, but libraries, private space, and children's organisations (in the USSR, the Little Octobrists and the Pioneers).[1] The existing work on history of education and the social history of childhood in Russia has helpfully illuminated this broader context, examining specific subjects such as child abandonment and juvenile delinquency and the history of the family [Goldman 1993; Ball 1994; Caroli 2004], the different pedagogical trends and the politics of educational practices [Fitzpatrick 1979; Berelowitch 1984; Holmes 1991; Caroli 2011], and the history of childhood in a broad sense [Wachtel 1990; Creuziger 1996; Harwin 1996; Kirschenbaum 2001; Kelly 2007].

It is also possible to use a wide range of sources when exploring the ways in which images circulate among children themselves and their reception. There are records of children's reactions to images going back to the nineteenth century: for instance, bibliographical guides that include notes on children's responses to a given title, and also discussions in the printed press. There are also abundant materials to be found in the reports on activities organised for children in libraries, museums, schools, and summer camps, and published in specialist journals such as *Krasnyy bibliotekar* [The Red Librarian], *Kniga detyam* [Books for Children], *Pioner* [Young Pioneer], *Iskusstvo v shkole* [Art in Schools], *Deti i iskusstvo* [Children and Art], as well as preserved in the archives of libraries themselves. Specialist research institutes such as the Institute of Children's Reading in Moscow and the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences carried out surveys and tests in order to investigate children's reactions to images, as did the staff of publishing houses. Alongside organising special conferences or meetings, research institutes would ask authors and illustrators to present their work directly to child audiences, and to visit young readers at home. They would study

[1] At different periods, the age ranges for the different children's organisations shifted slightly, but were roughly 7–8 to 9–10 for the Little Octobrists, and 9–10 to 14–15 for the Young Pioneers [Eds.].

the role of the street as a milieu for children at different times of day, and investigate children's responses to posters and shop window displays. These reports also are widely available in archives. Personal testament and memoirs are important further sources.

Visual sources themselves also provide rich information, in particular, current affairs journals such as *Ogonek* and *Pioner*, which regularly carried reportage on life in different Russian and Soviet schools and summer camps. Among archival collections, one could mention particularly the Cicely Osmond Collection, held in the SCRSS (The Society for Co-Operation in Russian and Soviet Studies, London), which contains about 150 photographs taken in a Pioneer camp during the 1930s. These have never previously been the subject of scholarly study.

My own approach to children's drawings is mainly concerned with the evolution, from the 1880s onwards, of the discourses relating to these artefacts, and the attention directed to them, among professionals working in a range of disciplines: pedagogues, pedologists, psychologists, art historians and artists. I address in particular the role (if any) that these observers assigned to children's subjectivity, and, in cases where this role was acknowledged, the ways in which they addressed it (the nature of their observations, definitions and categorisations, interpretations and analyses, and the uses that they made of these, and the extent to which they sought to frame the images, or preferred to let these speak for themselves).

Whether with images created for children or with children's drawings, one approach is to combine the study of raw data (children's responses to questionnaires and their own creations) and consideration of the analyses inspired by this raw data when it reached adult professionals, such as teachers and psychologists. This allows space to elements in the raw data that were ignored or marginalised (consciously or not) by researchers at the time it was produced, yet is also a way of acknowledging the institutional and intellectual mechanisms of power that still obtain at the present day, and shape the researcher's contemporary gaze.

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Translated from French by Catriona Kelly

EKATERINA ROMASHINA

1 It seems to me that one of the peculiarities of the analysis of children's voices by anthropologists or sociologists is that in this situation there is a certain 'enemy' standing between the researcher and the child. This 'enemy' is called a pedagogue. Wherever the pedagogue has been, children's voices are hardly to be heard. And this is inevitable, because one of the tasks of pedagogy is to transform children's subjectivity into adult subjectivity, and it directs its efforts to the end that children's subjectivity should 'cease to be' as subjectivity 'as such'. In this case the pedagogue brings about a certain transference from childhood to adulthood. That is his / her job. Sometimes the parents fulfil this function as well... So the result is a certain paradox: none of the content produced by a school-age child is free. It is always mediated by some pedagogical practices. It turns out that the only possibility the anthropologist has of carrying out objective research into the 'child's voice' is to find a space where there are no grown-ups.

The Internet often serves as such a space. This is so, because adults do not as yet feel themselves as much at ease there as children. Adults (particularly older ones) do not enter it. Besides, this space is so big that it is easy to get lost in it or to conceal oneself. So it turns out that children's 'real' voices are only to be found where adults do not exert any visible and controlling influence on them. I do not know whether this is so in reality, but in any case in all other situations there arises the problem of separating the child's voice from the things that mediate it. As yet, not in the Internet. At least, there are places

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in the Internet where there do not seem to be any adults. There the child can be something like 'natural' and truthful.

However, the child organises, expresses, verbalises and constructs his / her world based on the images and vocabulary of the adult world. And then we see children's interpretation, their understanding of that (un)attainable universe of the adult world which they are so eager to enter. For example, children build 'towns', 'settlements' and 'houses' in which they 'play' at being 'grown-ups', at 'shop', at 'school', and so on. They build a cart and play at being a disabled beggar whom someone else carts around so that (s)he can beg. Where should we look for the 'real' child? Who is (s)he? Where is (s)he? But if, in their school compositions, they write what other people want to hear from them, this also characterises them as persons and as subjects: they make their choice, they want to be liked, and this is also who they are... The logic of constructing the image of a 'good child' sometimes looks very 'grown-up'. We are in a vicious circle.

2 In the field of my academic interests (the history and theory of school textbooks) we find ourselves talking not so much about the 'child's viewpoint' as of adults' ideas of what that viewpoint ought to be... This is also interesting: how adults — professional pedagogues, teacher trainers, and officials — see and understand childhood. How far are they prepared to accept the child's position or impose their own, and are there any children in real life like those whom the pupil encounters on the pages of his / her textbook? By no means always...

3 The turn towards children's subjectivity (including the political and legal sphere) is not a new phenomenon. There were, at least, analogous tendencies in our country at the beginning of the twentieth century. The child as an actor in the political process, 'the builder of a new world', the embodiment of the future, and so on — these and similar ideas were embodied in the educational reforms and in the practices of teaching and upbringing. A lot was done that was new and really interesting. But the process was halted quite soon... Nowadays, it seems to me, the conversation about a special subjectivity of children is primarily the result of departures from the usual configuration of child-adult relations. If children often teach the older generation (how to use technology, for example), then one has willy-nilly to acknowledge their special rights in this world. But whether these rights should extend to all social institutions — that is not obvious...

4 In pedagogy, perhaps, none at all — given the specifics of the discipline. A targeted educational process does not presuppose the existence of any 'children's space' free from adults.

MACHTELD VENKEN

2

In the Europe of the twentieth century, state involvement in child rearing became more systematic. As a result, children increasingly received other opportunities than adults. Research on children's experiences contributes to an understanding of the heterogeneity of life within Europe's recent past. I especially support investigations into the capacities of children to participate actively, and report about the world in which they lived, but I am also of the opinion that analyses of ego documents produced by children in the past or recent testimonies of adults about their childhood need to be accompanied by a serious reflection about the cultural and social labour carried out in order to demarcate children as different from adults, and about what that demarcation meant for the opportunities or hindrances of children to make a difference to their social lifeworlds. Such a contextualisation can indicate when, and how, the inclusion of children's voices in our understanding of the past is legitimate or problematic for a certain child, historical time or spatial context.

In a global history of girlhood, the editors remarked: 'To uncover girls' agency, we are forced to deal with the paucity of sources left behind by children and youth, and especially by girls in cultures where female education was not well established. <…> [C]hildren as a rule are some of history's most silent subjects. <…> [S]cholars who wish to uncover girls' voices must be methodologically creative' [Helgren, Vasconcellos 2010: 3–4].

The cognitive, linguistic and emotional boundaries of children have often been used as an argument against exploring children's voices throughout history. Children were not thought to be rational, which, according to Mary Jo Maynes, is still at the heart of many historians' definition of a social actor [Maynes 2007: 117–8]. There are methodological challenges in finding out how children viewed their treatment by adults, how they articulated this experience

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in their own practices, and how they recall(ed) it in the archival sources historians have access to today. On the basis of so-called historical ego documents (such as letters, youth magazines and a diary) of children in the past, it is often impossible to come to far-reaching conclusions about past societal processes, but nevertheless feasible to include different voices in our understanding of the past.

Recent testimonies of adults who articulated their former childhood experiences in oral or verbal form allow us to complement our knowledge of children in the recent past. Our access to experiences of the past is more distant in recent testimonies, as they are displayed in narratives serving to give meaning to that past for the present. These testimonies are composed in a time where different perceptions on childhood were relevant, and are expressed by people with different verbal and abstracting capacities than when they were young.

In order to illustrate how difficult it is for an historian today to unravel children's voices in the past on the basis of historical child ego documents or recent testimonies, but how rewarding that exercise can be, I will provide some examples of sources I gathered during my research on borderland children in Polish Upper Silesia, a region that used to belong to the German Empire, but switched to Polish state sovereignty in the aftermath of the First World War.

Adults had often a decisive say on whether children were turned from spoken children into speaking children. A group of children that left few individual archival traces was the ill and sickly. Once the First World War had come to an end, there was an interest in lifting the philanthropic child welfare initiatives from before to the national level. Backed up by the scientific finding that adult TB patients had often already been contaminated with the tuberculosis bacteria during their childhood without exposing visible symptoms of illness, nation states such as Poland and Germany offered preventive measures. In 1924, the League of Nations also adopted the needs-based *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* stipulating that 'the child that is sick must be nursed,' and 'the child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.' By means of a hygienic lifestyle, fresh air and good nutrition, strong stomachs and healthy lungs were to be fostered in children. The best effect was believed to be generated by taking children out of their city lodgings and bring them to treatment camps in healthier environments. Given the dominant positivist medical character of treatment camps, the most important indicator for a fruitful treatment stay for an individual child was the evolution of its weight. In archival sources, we encounter the ill and sickly almost exclusively in numbers and classifications. The traces left by borderland children from Polish Upper Silesia who participated in treatment camps in Podklasztorze (Piotrków Trybunalski)

concerned above all their weight difference. An average increase of between 1.6 and 2.6 kg during a six-week stay at the camp was measured between 1928 and 1933 [Szymczyk 2016: 354].

Adults had, moreover, the tendency to narrate the activities of children as innocent and ignorant, instead of as informative. '[C]haracters', the British sociologist David Oswell argued, 'might be said to have agency but only inasmuch as that agency is orchestrated within narrative structure and forms of narration and in the context of other characters with agency' [Oswell 2012: 269]. The anonymous six-year-old son of Georg Janischowski, for example, was written into an investigative report about the funeral of his grandmother, and the wife of the founder of the umbrella organisation of German-minded cultural and political organisations in the Lubliniec district of Polish Upper Silesia, Josef Janischowski, on 25 February 1939 [Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde, R 8403/1529, SS. 296–300]. When after the funeral, guests met in the organisation's headquarter, the son of the deceased, Georg Janischowski, went with his little son to the president's office in order to show him the portraits of Józef Piłsudski and Adolf Hitler. According to Georg's later testimony, he took the portrait of Piłsudski from the wall, showed it to his son, and hung it back up. While taking the portrait of Hitler from the wall, his sister walked in and requested he get the priest. Georg gave the portrait to his son and ran off without having put the picture back. In the headquarters of the organisation in Katowice, it was debated whether to accuse Georg Janischowski of having committed a national disgrace or tacitly having tolerated it. As the only witness, the boy played a crucial role during their investigation, but it was not precisely known how to handle him. The verbal explanation the boy had given right after the event ('that his father had taken the picture down') was turned into an argument against his father, but the idea of interrogating the boy was rejected — given the absence of an 'impartial' adult 'witness' — because it was not considered 'correct' [Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde, R 8403/1529, S. 303]. As a consequence, the boy was anonymised in the report, and given the absence of evidence, Georg Janischowski was not sanctioned. The investigative report was the only source from the late 1930s I could trace back in which a German-speaking child from the district was narrated as an individual, within an organisation counting 1,018 adult members and 1,024 children members in 1938 [Gołąbek 1988: 47].

Most children did not document their coming of age and enacting difference discursively. Only socially and materially well-off children in Polish Upper Silesia produced individual written ego sources. Bogusław Musiak's recent testimony, for example, shows how coming of age took the form of a paramilitary training socialising children into a political collective as members of a group, not as individual

children. In Silesian scouting, childhood became less and less defined on the basis of age, and more and more on the basis of political and national preferences. As the British child sociologist David Oswell has stated, '[t]here is no universal structuring principle (of generationing) which organises and distributes all discourses, practices <…> into "children" and "adults"' [Oswell 2012: 266]. The Finnish social scientists Kirsi Pauliina Kallio and Jouni Häkli have argued that children have been omitted in a traditional understanding of political agency paralleling with 'rational intentional action concerning collective matters known to have political relevance, practised by actors who are capable of understanding and acting on the issues at stake through official or semi-official channels' [Kallio, Häkli 2015: 7]. The authors encourage researchers 'to find politics in people's experienced and practised worlds,' while at the same time looking at 'processes of subjectification', and of 'maturation', within their specific 'geo-economic and socio-cultural conditions' [Ibid.: 3,8].

Boy scout Bogusław Musiak was given a role in local politics from the moment he joined in 1928. He enrolled the youngest group of boy scouts in Polish Upper Silesia on the invitation of his teacher when he was eight years old, five years after scouting had been founded in his district. As early as November 1928, Bogusław's teacher drove him to Katowice in order to meet the Polish President, Ignacy Mościcki. Bogusław was put in the public spotlights as a symbol of Polish Upper Silesia's bright future within the Polish nation state: 'Our group, the little wolves, stood in our uniforms on the steps of the Stanisław Wyspiański Theatre on the Katowice market just below the President. We must have been somehow "important" — as the youngest group <…> — to deserve such a distinction.'

When the Sanacja regime had secured power, the purposes of scouting changed. Every scouting member was to get to know Poland, to contribute to its development, and to be ready to defend it. Bogusław transformed from a passive decorative symbol of the nation's future to an active virtuous little citizen. During a trek around the district, he recalled: 'The older scouts (I was twelve or thirteen years old) drew our attention to four magnificent, almost 300-year-old lindens, commemorating the march of the Polish troops of King John Sobieski to Vienna — and when the spring rain began to fall, they advised us to take off our sweatshirts and shirts, put them in our backpacks, and to march on. Upon arrival, they were dry and no one had gotten a cold. This seems a kind of insignificant thing, and yet, we were shown history and, at the same time, hardened'.[1]

[1] Jan III Sobieski was King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1674–1696). Sobieski was a military commander in the Battle of Vienna against the Ottoman Empire in 1683. In twentieth century Poland, Jan III Sobieski was remembered as a military hero.

Bogusław also remembered how scouting looked when paramilitary exercises had become prioritised under authoritarianism in the late 1930s. In 1937, he joined an elite scouting unit operating under the leadership of a Polish army unit defending the border with Germany: 'In comparison to other "normal" sections, our scouting unit distinguished itself in every way: discipline, knowledge of the field, physical and athletic skills, singing, speeches at campfires' [Musiak 2003: 66]. Bogusław found his future here. When he graduated in 1938, he joined the regiment.

Another child ego source from Polish Upper Silesia can give us an insight into the opinion of a borderland girl, if we are willing to open up our definition of a rational historical actor. The British child philosopher David Archard has put forward that Western thought assumed a connection between adulthood and rationality, which made it logical to consider the acquisition of reason decisive for a coming of age, and to consider children deprived of the (full) capacities to act rationally. A commonly accepted definition of rationality goes as follows: 'the forming of generally reliable beliefs about one's surroundings, having a relatively coherent set of desires and consequently being able, in the light of these desires and beliefs, to order one's preferences consistently between alternative possible courses of action.' Archard proposes an alternative definition in which children can come to be seen as having 'a mind of their own' [Archard 2014: 3–4].

Kinderwelt (Children's World) was a supplement to the *Oberschlesische Kurier* (Upper Silesian Courier), the press organ of the Christian German People's Party (Deutsche Christliche Volkspartei), the biggest political party of the German national minority in Polish Upper Silesia, representing a religious, bourgeois and conservative electorate. After the political takeover by Adolf Hitler in 1933, the National Socialist People's Welfare (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt, NSV) was established in order to influence the way treatment camps were organised. Within the Catholic press organs of the German national minority, National Socialism was criticised as paganism. The Upper Silesian Courier wanted to show its readership that the NSV was unable to build a sufficient network of treatment camp institutions, and that borderland children could continue to attend confessional treatment camps. In 1934, the Catholic editors asked their young readers to relate their treatment camp experiences in Germany, and printed the story of a girl who had returned to the Catholic 'Kinderheim' in St Johann in Riendorf at the Baltic Sea.

Brigitta Krencki's essay was printed in order to assure parents and children that the new political regime had not managed to influence the minds of Catholic children during their treatment camps. Brigitta gave a full account of what had not changed (her travelling, the

welcoming she received from the 'friendly Sisters' in Riendorf, and that she had put on weight), but at the end of her text, she also mentioned having 'learned beautiful new songs'. These four words are the false note in Brigitta's account, as the songs she referred to were national socialist songs, such as the anthem of the Nazi Party, the Horst Wessel Song. Learning these songs was not the reason why Brigitta had been sent to Germany. In the environment in which Brigitta grew up, children were not supposed to like these songs.

If we follow Archard, the girl Brigitta can be interpreted a rational human being, who invented a parallel space, a better real world, where life was more organised: 'Each child was given a clean bed' and supper could be expected at regular times ['Meine grossen Ferien 1934' 1934]. In this sense, Brigitta's wordings take the shape of a child's heterotopia. In contrast to utopias (non-existing spaces where life is beautiful), Michel Foucault's heterotopias are real but 'external spaces', where 'all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' [Foucault 1986: 24]. Brigitta's essay is an example of a child heterotopia: she had the potential to be creative and come up with propositions to make a change to their social lifeworlds, but she also needed to rely on the resources of adults to see her idea proliferated.

Heterotopias have been detected by border scholars when the state border line became less distinct and categories of the inside and outside became diffuse [Green 2012: 584]. In Polish Upper Silesia heterotopias were extremely rare because, in an effort to clearly delineate the inside from the outside, considerable political control was exerted over the borderland population. Brigitta's essay dated from a time of improved German-Polish bilateral relations, and was written before authoritarianism in Polish politics accelerated in the mid-1930s.

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Children as Subjects in Literary Studies

This 'Forum' on the issue of the power asymmetry between researchers and subjects in the study of childhood takes as its subject a key issue in our interdisciplinary practice in general, as well as in literary studies in particular, which I address in specific here. From my perspective as a literary scholar, I would argue that it is impossible to fully overcome the power asymmetry between adults (researchers) and children (the subject of their studies); however, reducing the gulf between researchers and the objects of their studies is not impossible and is indeed welcome, necessary, and crucial, in fact, for the further development of our field. Yet these issues are not black and white and we must be careful not to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater,' as it were.

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In the past four decades increasing attention has been given to this question of the power dynamics governing the relations between child and adult in literary studies, alongside an increasing attention in the history of childhood and childhood studies, which seems to have peaked in recent decades. A founding figure in childhood studies, Philippe Ariès alludes to this question indirectly insofar as his bold thesis in *Centuries of Childhood* [Ariès 1962] that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist' [Ibid.: 128], which has been much disputed since, asserts that childhood itself depends upon its 'invention' by adults. A seminal work productively highlighting this problem specifically for literary studies is Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* [Rose 1984]. With her own provocative argument about the 'impossibility of children's fiction', predicated on the insurmountable distance between adult and child, Rose influentially highlighted this gulf, one that continues to plague the field and provoke valuable debates and counterarguments still today. More recently, Robin Bernstein has made significant contributions to this question, including in her volume *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* [Bernstein 2011], insofar as her work acts to bridge the gap by exploring childhood agency in relation to the performance of childhood and by viewing children as co-constituting culture. Both Rose and Bernstein offer valuable contributions in defining and redefining the field of literary studies with respect to children as subjects. That is, first by acknowledging the problematic and charged nature of the gap and differential power dynamic [Rose 1984] and then seeking ways to minimise its impact and bridge the divide it outlines through interdisciplinary bridges, theories, and practices [Bernstein 2011]. Yet no single, complete, or comprehensive solution to this intractable problem in the field has or indeed can be found; rather, heightened awareness and efforts to counter the power differential by highlighting it, attending to it, and continually reconsidering it offer the best approach for literary studies moving forward. The continuing relevance of this debate is shown by the topic of the 2017 International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) congress devoted to the theme of 'Possible & Impossible Children: Intersections of Children's Literature & Childhood Studies', which seemed to nod to Jacqueline Rose's work in its title and included a keynote by Robin Bernstein, as well as the special follow-up issue of *International Research in Children's Literature* devoted to the topic of '"Possible" and "Impossible" Children', guest edited by Cheryl Cowdy and Alison Halsall [*International Research in Children's Literature* 2018].

Even if childhood studies and the history of childhood recently have had significant successes in incorporating children's own experiences and accounts in scholarship to include the subjective experience of

the child, literary studies has perhaps a harder task in incorporating childhood in its theoretical and analytical practice, since its materials are not directly but only indirectly related to children, as the characters in or audience of largely adult creative productions, but not as writers, witnesses, or actual subjects per se. If childhood studies and the history of childhood can engage in children as subjects in their materials and analysis, in literary scholarship working primarily with texts themselves, this proves less simple to arrange. One exception is in reader reception studies, which are limited and defined in their scope, although they could also inform other types of studies, in part. Yet attending to one individual child's engagement with a text (or voice or writings, for that matter) does not either speak for the multiplicity of children or the full spectrum of ages who may respond very differently to the same text. For, of course, there is nothing monolithic about childhood, just as there is nothing monolithic and generally true about adulthood. Involving an actual child in literary analysis also raises new methodological problems and issues such as adult influence, bias, and aims. Though some literary scholars may wish to move in this direction in response to the conundrum addressed in this 'Forum', this approach is not for everyone, nor for every type of analysis, and has the potential to introduce new problems and pitfalls. Instead I personally would advocate for ever increasing attention to new strategies of attending to the child's voice, agency, and perspective, and alongside it an awareness and scepticism of 'adultist', as it were, aims, bias, and influence, in general and particularly in one's own work. Yet this does not mean discounting all the other good work that can and indeed has been done in the field that does not necessarily put this in central focus.

Perhaps one helpful analogy worth bearing in mind, from the perspective of a comparative literary scholar and area studies specialist, is the value a foreign, outsider's perspective may offer in cultural studies or anthropology, precisely by being different and viewing material from an outside angle. It places the critic in the position of an anthropological observer, which is perhaps fraught in its own way with baggage and necessarily includes limitations of its own, but also has the potential to convey certain benefits by rendering salient differences perceptible. Similarly, although the native-born expert may have much to offer in decoding the cultural significance of references and allusions for example, and in and through cultural 'close reading', as it were, the outside observer expert may also have something to offer through a form of 'distant reading' (cf. [Moretti 2013]) that functions in a comparative or global framework and may be privy to new ways of looking at the material which the native representative may not recognise, precisely because of their considerable cultural expertise and insider status. The outside

observer thus may have the potential to offer a defamiliarised view, as it were, that contrasts with the naturalised one. Perhaps the same can be said of the adult researcher of childhood.

In this vein, the child might be seen as a native denizen of the republic of childhood, conversant in its culture and this experience and the only party who can truly offer an insider's perspective on childhood. (S)he may indeed offer a valuable source of material, but not necessarily be the most reflective expert on it, all the same. (Though I must admit I risk sounding like a colonising adult here, and thereby subject to a postcolonial critique.) Meanwhile, the adult observer, who has the benefit of having once dwelled in the republic of childhood, if long ago (and in this sense his / her perspective proves different from a colonial framework), may have all the more to offer in analysis of childhood and its cultural products and children's literature, precisely because of this distant perspective, which adds to or even potentially layers upon the perspective of the child they once were, which it behoves the researcher also to closely attend to and seek to recall or reconstitute. In this sense an adult researcher may achieve a kind of dual perspective, as Richard Coe identifies as a phenomenon in childhood autobiography [Coe 1984]. In most if not all cases, being a child does not make a theorist of childhood. Perhaps the child would be a better theorist or critic of adulthood, in fact, and indeed as an abstract construct functions this way in some forms of literature where the naïve perspective is deployed strategically to expose the naturalised conventions of the adult world.

Yet even as I write this, I relish the prospect of being proved wrong. That is, that there someday should arise a child theorist of childhood who offers overwhelming, powerful, and paradigm-breaking insights into childhood, which heretofore have been offered only by adult theorists of childhood and, in fact, writers of and on childhood who dare to imagine another better way. Indeed, if I am wrong in this, I would be glad to be so, since this would illuminate childhood further and therefore be to the benefit of the field. Yet, even if this were to be the case, one might still presume that the work of this hypothetical child theorist of childhood would not be complete and sufficient in and of itself. Outside scholarship by adults on childhood would no doubt also be necessary and complementary for the reasons I have outlined, including all the valuable insights on childhood — Ariès, Rose, and Bernstein included — that have brought us to the current state of our thinking in the field. But this is not to say that the theoretical journey is over.

To follow another line of thinking, the researcher of a subject ought to be able to at least approximate a theoretical simulacrum of the subject as part of the analytical process, just as any scholar, scientist,

or expert would be able to conceive of a model of their subject in their mind in order to build it, contemplate it, or study it. A developed theory of mind ought to be able to reconstruct or at least posit the perspective of another being through the attempt to do so and therefore, perhaps, the adult researcher or writer could posit a child's perspective or voice. Whether this mental simulacrum is correct is another question. But it is theoretically possible that one might be able to do this reasonably correctly. Indeed is this not the entire endeavour of literature itself, in a way? To render the experience of one being (the writer or the character in the text) intelligible to another being (the reader), to exercise or exploit our human ability to theorise another mind and engage our human ability to feel for another? If literature offers the capacity to reconstruct or simulate the experience of another, or an 'other', then its analysts might also conceivably be able to do so in the reverse direction, in reconstructing or simulating the child reader.

By the same token, however, though childhood may (or may not) be central to our analytical practice, it cannot necessarily be best perceived by only knowing childhood. Rather, if childhood and adulthood are in some kind of relation, whether diametrically opposed, socially constructed, or as mere artificial terminology superimposed on a continuum or spectrum (depending on one's point of view as far as these debates go), then childhood in itself does not offer a complete picture of the relational complexities or change over time. Rather, the negative space or transitions that also help to characterise childhood also prove important, if not critical, to at least some sorts of studies. Therefore some understanding of adulthood, social constructions, history, ideology, or rhetoric, for example, might also prove indispensable in the analysis of children's literature in its context or that which is extraterritorial to children's literature. In this sense it is precisely *because* of the power dynamic governing the relations between adults and children that one would need to understand and critique the adult construction of childhood, refracted through these power dynamics governing the relations of adults and children. For it is this that is at issue in children's literature, written by adults.

In fact, it is not children who are the audience of this scholarship, although they might benefit from it, indirectly. The audience is, in fact, most often comprised of adults who are scholars of the subject and experts on childhood, except in cases when the scholarship is redirected to an audience of children. At least thus far it has been so. Though a partial change in this regard may in fact be on the horizon, insofar as young people today, such as older school age children now are communicating, organising, agitating, and otherwise exercising their agency in new ways. In a brave new world born of new technologies and decentralised communication systems and

networks, young people have been enabled to achieve voice and agency at a younger age and thereby offer their own perspective and response to the failures of adults to enact policies, for example, which they demand. Think, for example of Malala Yousafzai who won the Nobel Prize in 2014 as an advocate for women's education, the Parkland High School protests for gun control in 2018, and Greta Thunberg's example rallying youth around the world to protest for climate change in 2019.

Certain insurmountable aspects of the power dynamics in the field notwithstanding, I would argue that attention to issues surrounding the voice and perspective of the child in the abstract, if not the concrete, prove important, interesting, and fruitful, on various levels of literary studies. Attending to the concrete voice and perspective of the actual child in practice proves significantly thornier than the abstract and theoretical, however. Within some subfields, such as reader reception mentioned earlier, attention to the perspective and response of the child to the text can and even should be considered, while reception-based approaches may conceivably inform other forms of literary studies. Still, only through dialogic relations could these realisations be optimised, it seems to me, since the child's reception by itself will not suffice. Employing only the child's voice and perspective would never be sufficient in conversing with adult discourse and work on the subject on an academic level. Yet in other types of literary studies, such as intertextual studies, narratology, or formal analysis, the reality of children's voices and perspectives might not naturally figure, while, concomitantly, power dynamics might also prove of lesser significance in these types of studies.

Nevertheless, the *abstract* question of the child's voice and perspective still may figure quite centrally, even if it is a purely artificial construction, reconstruction, or simulacrum, and in fact I would argue that it should. Thus we return to the recurring bifurcation between the theoretical child and the actual child. In this case, the gulf is not necessarily one that can be bridged fully, although attempts to narrow the gap, as it were, may prove very rewarding intellectually and ought perhaps to be implemented. But this is not to say that they must be. Indeed, the child as an abstract theoretical construct is undoubtedly of paramount significance in all aspects, branches, and fields of childhood studies, while the significance of the actual child varies dramatically in practice and by field, as well as depending on the type of study or theoretical approach, even within literary studies. In some fields of literary studies, attending to the actual experience and accounts of children, or our best attempts at getting at these through possibly rare, flawed, or limited materials, is important in autobiography, biography, and history, for example, but may be less so in abstract and theoretical

literary or other studies. For example, the avant-garde interest in the child (cf. [Weld 2014]), which ran the gamut from actual children involved in the artistic process or serving as sources of inspiration to abstract theoretical constructs that may or may not bear resemblance to actual children, encompassed both actual children and an abstract construct of the child. Yet reality and construction do not necessarily meet, while, as Evgeny Steiner has shown, actual children did not always appreciate the products created for them according to abstract constructs [Steiner 1999: 46]. Yet children's literature itself is different perhaps from all other fields or materials used in the study of childhood alluded to earlier (with the exception perhaps of history of childhood for children or childhood studies when addressed to children) in that it in itself marks such a form of communication seeking to bridge the gap between adult writer and child reader, at the very least, and in some sense to transcend the power dynamic and gulf that separates them, which Jacqueline Rose called 'impossible'. So in all cases, and by definition, children's literature marks a communicative act that in itself explicitly, implicitly, intentionally, or unintentionally itself seeks to bridge the gap between the adult writer and the child audience.

In my own literary research, I find the issue of children's subjectivity to be very important and an insufficiently explored area. Yet it is also elusive, if fascinatingly so. Nevertheless, the quest to explore, occupy, or recreate children's subjectivity by writers, artists, and theorists, for example, has had fascinating and important results that are important and illuminating to explore, regardless of whether it is done for an audience of children or adults. In some sense, these sorts of explorations amount to a creative and theoretical dialogue with the problem of child-adult relations as such. I think for instance of Andrei Bely's pathbreaking novel *Kotik Letaev*, which gives sophisticated adult language to the preverbal experiences of a young child and offer an unusual perspective on the surrounding adult world from the child's eye view [Bely 1922], as do other modernist texts and works of literature that preceded them. Such a text directly engages and 'occupies' children's subjectivity but only for artistic gain and to initiate a dialogue around children's subjectivity that both highlights and erases the differences between them, creating a hybrid infant / adult subjectivity. Such attempts at achieving a hybrid adult / child subjectivity, of which other modernist examples also exist, offer fascinating opportunities to explore this problem and as well as engage in its intricacies. Interestingly, innovative work in this regard also occurs outside of children's literature proper, since the abstract concept of the child is not confined to children's literature.

In a wider context, the public acknowledgement of children's agency as political and legal subjects and as world citizens and agents with

rights, culture, and influence is very important and making strides unevenly around the world, in the wake of the 1959 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. For example, in Scandinavia, children's rights, including even to culture and influence over their surroundings and institutions that serve them, have reached even preschool and school children through government policy and regulations, while in the United States of America in the twenty-first century, under the Trump administration, thousands of migrant children have been separated from parents and confined in deplorable conditions in camps. Attention to children's perspective, voice, and agency thus has made uneven strides by this, the twenty-first century, despite Ellen Key's prediction over a hundred years ago that the twentieth century would be the 'century of the child' [Key 1909].

In the end, then, I believe it is impossible to achieve understandings of children's culture that are unmediated by adult perceptions and representations. But ideally something like a dialogic relation can emerge to give voice to the perspectives and concerns of both children and adults precisely by grappling with these issues and methodological problems. As scholars of childhood, we must not go overboard in seeking to attend to the perspective of the child and thereby nail ourselves into a coffin from which we cannot escape. Instead, we should see the value of what we do, about the child, with the child, for the child, that childhood studies not perish from this earth. In this we continue in the spirit of children's writers, like Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren, who always retain something of the child about them in a lifelong defence of children's subjectivity through literary practice. By virtue of our interest in and advocacy for the importance of childhood and its serious study, we earn the right to make our own best attempts to bridge these divides, with a necessary dose of humility, self-criticism, and continual self-scrutiny.

It is also important to recall that children eventually grow into more fully empowered, vocal, and agential adults who are able to record, preserve, and assert their perspectives. We all were children once, which is a very rare case in scholars studying another group and an 'other', and offers a possible corrective. Time thus offers another bridge between the subject of our research and the researchers we are and thus offers a kind of voice and agency gradually achieved over time. As scholars of childhood who keep the child foremost in mind in our work, we should not weaken our voices or our advocacy but continue all the more fervently to assert the importance of children's voice, agency, perspective, and rights through all the means and tools at our disposal even as we act in all ways to advance the power of children's voice, agency, and perspective in, through, and beyond our work and field of research.

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I am grateful to the organisers for the opportunity to take part in this discussion.

One of my research topics is the moral panic associated with the mailing list 'How to Become a Fairy', and the 'death groups' for very small children. The trigger text of the moral panic contains instructions for turning into a fairy by turning on the gas on a domestic cooker (i.e. committing suicide). This text, which obviously has the character of 'black humour', is derived from the innumerable recommendations for turning into, for example, 'a cement fairy' ('rub vaseline all over your body, roll down a long slope onto fresh asphalt, wait for the steamroller

to come, and when it does, shout 'I want to be a cement fairy!'"[1]) or 'a homeless fairy' ('If you draw water from the lavatory...'[2]). Recipes for disgusting or poisonous potions are left by children themselves in the comments to videos of the 'magical' transformation into a fairy, a popular game amongst preschool and young school-age children. My hypothesis is that the root of the moral panic was adults' failure to understand the rules by which communication in children's communities is organised, in particular folkloric communication. A failure to understand the irony and sarcasm that invariably accompany entry into adolescence. A failure to distinguish between a parodic text and a serious one.

Rejecting one's self of yesterday may be cruel, but this and only this brings a child to the maturity (the self of tomorrow) that parents are so much in favour of. When they are revealed (thanks to the Internet, in this case YouTube) the processes of children's and adolescents' communication amongst themselves produce incorrect interpretations on the part of adults and, as a result, overprotectiveness ('the child in a bubble' [Tucker 2012]). The parent sees a problem in the existence of trolling, but does not see a problem in the inability to recognise a parodic text and in credulity (if a child should suddenly decide to follow the instructions of a 'lethal' post). Perhaps because the adult himself / herself believes his / her 'elders', from advertising to fake news, because (s)he often fails to understand irony (the loss of this skill is one of the outstanding features of the modern world).

Considering my intentions regarding childhood, I realised that overall the subject of my study was not so much children (here I relied more on the conclusions of Elizabeth Tucker and Jeffrey Victor and certain observations of Maya Cherednikova) as adults at the point where they come into contact with the culture of childhood. But it seems to me that I do have something to say in this discussion, precisely in connection with the study of adults.

The study of social groups and age groups often works with oppositions. Within such oppositions an asymmetry arises linked to the fact that one of the elements preserves the concept of 'human beings' to a greater degree (and is to a lesser degree interesting for study as a group). I shall give an example from gender studies, a category where scholars are moving more and more away from the biological and towards the social, as they are in studies of age. This analogy is frequently to be found on the pages of a recent issue of *Sotsiologiya vlasti* [The Sociology of Power] (2019, no. 1). The first works were

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1 Syenduk, 'Kak stat feey' [How to Become a Fairy]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHZ9n6dgJTk>.

2 Danil Pavlov, 'Kak stat feey vinks?!' [How to Become a Winx Fairy?!]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXjjvZjF_AY>.

devoted to things that had previously been ignored — the role peculiarities of women, the construction of the female. The man was at first perceived as having zero gender and devoid of any particular signs (everything that is not female is male), but it is only a symmetrical examination that gives a full picture.

It seems to me that in studies of childhood it is essential not to mark the adult view as zero (committed, having social and age-related peculiarities, whatever you like to call it), just as the concept of masculinity does not constitute a zero gender. It is possible that equalisation will result in an understanding that there are common positions free both from specifically children's and specifically adults' (or old people's) perception. In any case this will allow for correction of those attitudes which are native to the researcher as a representative of his / her group (whatever is described and spoken becomes accessible to distinction). The adult view will 'stand out from the background' and become an object of analysis.

In the case that I have just mentioned, the adult attempts to complete the communicative situation by ascribing to the prototype text a purpose and an addressee on the basis of his / her own ideas of the world. In this process (s)he is prompted towards an interpretation by the stereotypes of mass culture, rumours and the media. Hence arises the image of the 'dangerous adult' on the other side of the text, who is deliberately pushing children towards suicide (during interviews middle-aged people provided various details of this adult's psychological profile). From the parents' point of view (I mean not each and every parent, but the collective voice which emerges from reading parents' fora and public pages, appearances in the media and other public contributions to the social discussion), care for the child consists in looking after him / her, supervising him / her and suggesting correct decisions. The child appears as the object — of care on the part of the 'good' adult and manipulation on the part of the (constructed) 'wicked' adult, the real target of whose wickedness is, incidentally, not the child himself / herself but society, the nation or other combinations of adults.

It seems to me that folklore studies and anthropology have cognitive mechanisms for working on this topic. In folkloric texts we can see a peculiar dialogue between age groups, their construction of each other and their answers to relevant utterances. Thus during the protests of 2018, when people came out onto the streets who were not, of course, children, but were not yet adults either (at least, that is how it looked in the social discussion, since we are, after all, talking not about biological age but of people's ideas of each other), the objectivisation of the younger generation which is typical of Russians became obvious. This gave rise to rumours, and urban legends, and memes: the collective adult was trying to prove that young people

cannot be actors, only the objects of 'good' and 'bad' influences. This is not the general view, but the external view. The interviews which members of the 'Monitoring of Current Folklore' group (including me) recorded at demonstrations and elsewhere, and also our observations of the demonstrations showed the opposite: if the young people who had come out on the streets referred to authority, it was often the authority of their own comrades, but more often the argumentation was constructed otherwise (and with a different logic from that of older informants). Still, in the milieu of those protesters who were (pejoratively) characterised as 'children' there arose rumours and folkloric texts of their own. Thus the schoolchildren of Vologda who took part in the event called 'He's Not Dimon[1] to Us' (2018) had an unexpected reaction to the topic of influence: they answered the question about the 'death groups' by saying that it had all been invented by adults to distract them, the schoolchildren, from real problems (to forbid them to watch political videos on the Internet). And here we see the emic view of the objectivisation of children and young people.

I think that the question about children's subjectivity is important now not only as an academic problem. It disturbs some people, and others do not think about the possibilities for a different hierarchy (but they ought to), because the relativity of world outlooks is an idea which finds it hard to take root in our society, which is to a large extent oriented on tradition. But it is important here not to regard categories connected with age as absolute. Because there are many systems of distinction, at some moments in history their classes may coincide, and some qualities recognised as peculiar to a particular age group may be determined by place or residence, generation, family or other factors.

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[1] The reference is to Russia's Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, who was under scrutiny by oppositional groups for evidence of corruption at the time [Eds.].

ANNA KOZLOVA, ANGELINA KOZLOVSKAYA

This 'Forum' was inspired by a discussion that arose in the course of the conference entitled 'Through Children's Eyes: The Subjectivity of the Child in Social Research and the Public Sphere', which took place in December 2018 at the Department of Anthropology of the European University at St Petersburg. The round table with which the conference concluded was devoted to a discussion of the problem of child subjectivity and its study, and showed that the discussion begun in the course of it needed to be continued and joined by representatives of academic life from different countries and schools of thought. Therefore, in summing up the discussion that had taken place and with the intention of preserving its polyphony, we shall in some cases refer not only to the written answers printed above, but also to what was said during the round table.

The answers we received to the 'Forum' questions revealed evident differences in the meanings that the various participants give to the very concept of child subjectivity. Researchers who have addressed the problem of the possibility of applying the category of 'the subject' to children (Irina Dudenkova, Svetlana Erpyleva, Ekaterina Orekh, Elena and Alexander Liarsky) define subjectivity primarily in social or philosophical terms as the capacity for rational action (Machteld Venken), for action 'in accordance with one's own purpose' (Ekaterina Orekh), or for 'conscious choice' (Elena and Alexander Liarsky), or the capacity 'for autonomous acts independent of the adult world' (Svetlana Erpyleva), or 'the responsibility that the child bears for his / her actions' (Irina Dudenkova). Those authors for whom the application of the concept of subject / agent to children is not problematic are inclined to treat subjectivity in another sense — as 'emotions, tastes, judgments, personal experience' (Cécile Pichon-Bonin), the child's outlook or perspective (Sara Pankenier Weld, Marina Balina, Ekaterina Romashina, Svetlana Bardina), or less often as a peculiarity

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of children's communication (Vitaly Bezrogov, Elena Yugai). In this treatment the concept of agency (Russian *subyektnost*) is very close to the meaning that the term 'subjectivity' (*subyektvinost*) usually has in everyday Russian. What they find difficult, in this case, is gaining access to this outlook and perspective. As a result, their answers to the questions in the discussion were concentrated around the search for a solution to two fundamental problems that exercise researchers into childhood: the *methodological* problem of including 'the child's outlook' in the analysis, and the means of gaining access to it, and the *ontological* problem of the possibility of seeing the child as a social subject or agent.

The question of whether it is justified to address the child's perspective in research on childhood and children, judging by the answers received, is not a problem for the majority of participants in the discussion. As Svetlana Erpyleva remarks, the answer to the question, in the manner in which it is asked, is as unambiguous and obvious for researchers on children as it is for researchers in any other subject area: 'If we are studying women, we should not survey only men; if we are studying immigrants, we should not only observe the behaviour of employees of the federal migration service; if we are studying Mickey Mouse, we should not only interview Donald Duck.' This practically unanimous readiness to include evidence from children in the analysis inspires optimism, though one is put on one's guard by the fact that the people who refer to their own immediate experience of working with children's evidence are few and far between.

The reason for this imbalance between the formulated 'rule' and research practice is evidently the difficulty envisaged by the majority of the participants in the 'Forum' in gaining access to sources that reflect the child's point of view. The snag in including 'the child's viewpoint' in research is not so much a lack or paucity of 'children's documents' themselves (although, as Machteld Venken indicates, for historical research this aspect of the problem is substantial) as the difficulty of 'translation' or 'mediation' (Andy Byford) of children's knowledge within the category of scholarly discourse. According to Byford's exact formulation, the solution to this problem supposes the discovery of '"materials" (sources, objects, etc.) that would serve as necessary "mediators"' and the creation of 'special analytical and interpretative approaches' for reaching an understanding of them.

Some of the participants in the discussion think that the major obstacle to accessing the children's knowledge lies in the asymmetry between the researcher (who is at the same time an adult) and the child. In their opinion such a distribution of power will have an inevitable effect on the information obtained. For this reason, for

example, the method of interview usual in anthropology is criticised and rejected by Elena and Alexander Liarsky, Vitaly Bezrogov, Svetlana Bardina and Ekaterina Orekh as an unnatural type of communication for children and one that particularly reinforces the adult's 'inquisitorial' position. '[F]or a child an interview is something more like an "interrogation",' says Svetlana Bardina, quoting Spyros Spyrou.

However, some authors correctly point out that the asymmetry between the researcher and the object of research is a particular instance of the general question of the possibility of understanding the Other in social anthropological research (Elena and Alexander Liarsky, Svetlana Bardina), and also relates directly to the wider discussion on the researcher's power-'knowledge' over his / her subject (Andy Byford, Elena and Alexander Liarsky, Esta Matveeva, Vitaly Bezrogov). The researchers see only one means of overcoming the manifest inequality in childhood studies, and it is the same as that proposed by anthropologists and sociologists in the relevant discussion in the second half of the twentieth century. It is impossible to do away with it altogether, but one can cultivate 'an awareness and scepticism of "adultist", as it were, aims, bias, and influence, in general and particularly in one's own work' (Sara Pankenier Weld), and the researcher's constant reflection on the question of 'to what extent was the image of the life of children that one is describing created by the children themselves and to what extent was it produced by the researcher' (Esta Matveeva) is essential. The empowered viewpoint of the adult researcher must be marked not 'as zero (committed, having social and age-related peculiarities <...>), just as the concept of masculinity does not constitute a zero gender,' remarks Elena Yugai.

At the same time, in the case of research into childhood the imbalance of power seems particularly strong to some authors. In the opinion of Elena and Alexander Liarsky, it is as clear that 'a child (up to a certain age) will not be the creator of scholarship' as it is that 'the dead can never study the living.' In addition, they warn that attempts by the adult to mitigate that asymmetry in communication with the child, (i.e. 'to take his / her informant seriously, without condescension') may bear no fruit, since it is far from every child that is prepared to see an adult as an 'equal' participant in interaction. The child's perception of the adult researcher as alien, a different kind of person, also comes to the fore in Vitaly Bezrogov's answers.

Noting that it is problematic to regard materials obtained through interaction between the child and the researcher as 'the child's voice', the participants in the discussion regard using 'documents of childhood' as productive. Marina Balina and Vitaly Bezrogov thus view memoirs of childhood as one possible means of obtaining access

to the world of children, though they do acknowledge the limitations of this source. '[T]he adult turns towards childhood for reasons which go beyond an interest in childhood as such,' admits Marina Balina. Documents produced by children (diaries, drawings, photographs, videos, Internet postings) are regarded as a more reliable source by the participants in the discussion. But historical archives have not distinguished themselves by any particular attention to preserving the evidence of children (but even so, a sensitive researcher may find traces of it, as we can learn from the replies of Machteld Venken).

However, in certain researchers' opinions, none of the 'self-sufficient' juvenile sources and utterances (by comparison with interviews and surveys that are 'dependent' on the empowered viewpoint of the researcher) is free of adult influence. Therefore researchers often number among their aims the tracing not only of their own influence, but that of the 'adult world' in general, making attempts to answer the question 'what is real in the child, childish, their own, and what is derived from their teacher, their mother, or other people?' (Ekaterina Orekh). Researchers, as Kirill Maslinsky pointed out at the round table, would happily use children's voices as sources, but 'are quite unable to make up their minds whether they are prepared to regard that voice as authentic.' The fact that children are surrounded by the adult world, and their closeness and constant contact with adults, lead Elena and Alexander Liarsky to the radical declaration that 'a separate culture of childhood does not exist and cannot exist.' In their opinion this concept does more harm than good, and one can to a certain extent understand this position. Researchers whose gaze is focused on the endless identification of adult influences, and on purging these from the child's voice, are ultimately guided by a desire to 'dig down' to the 'authentic' child's voice: 'Where should we look for the "real" child? Who is (s)he? Where is (s)he?' asks Ekaterina Romashina.

Some researchers consider that the child's 'genuine' voice may be found in their drawings (Ekaterina Orekh, Cécile Pichon-Bonin). Alongside speech, as Vitaly Bezrogov remarks, children 'naturally use the adult vocabulary, and begin to organise social contact among themselves in the words and images of the adult world.' The tradition of defining drawings as a source for 'the distinctive ways in which children "knew" the world' also existed amongst Soviet pedagogues, as Andy Byford points out. At the same time Svetlana Bardina takes a critical view of this desire to find 'the real child' in drawings, since, in her view, their advantage over verbal sources is only that they 'sound most incomprehensible and mysterious' (Svetlana Bardina).

The idea that a 'genuine' child's voice, free of adult influence, exists and must be sought for is reinforced (and probably elicited) by the

general knowledge that exists in this culture that the world of children is closed to adults and even totally impenetrable. In Sara Pankenier Weld's opinion, only a child is capable of looking at childhood from the inside, 'a native denizen of the republic of childhood, conversant in its culture and this experience and the only party who can truly offer an insider's perspective on childhood.' The problem that childhood is unknowable in principle, which has established itself in the social sciences, is examined in detail by Svetlana Bardina in her reply, stressing the paradox: 'Getting access to a child's voice is a practical methodological question. But getting access to a voice which will remain childish when it is heard is in itself a paradoxical aim, since childhood is implicitly defined as unknowable in principle.' The trigger that influenced the formation of this arcane knowledge, Svetlana Bardina suggests, may have been Neil Postman's book *The Disappearance of Childhood*, and in Russia, in Mikhail Lurye's opinion, expressed at the round table, Maria Osorina's monograph, *Sekretnyy mir detey v prostranstve mira vzroslykh* (The Secret World of Children in the Space of the Adult World). Ekaterina Orekh offers an antidote to the mania for trying to 'filter out the adult' from childish utterances. In her opinion, the need for it may be obviated by '[t]aking the theory of socialisation as the basis for examining the child <...> The child is no less a subject because we see traces of the influence of other people on him / her, or hear "other people's voices" in him / her.'

We note with regret that the method of direct observation — 'eavesdropping' or 'spying' (Elena and Alexander Liarsky) on children's lives — was not remarked by most of the participants as a promising solution to the methodological problems that exist. As the Liarskys remark, the problem here is the fact that 'there is nothing in the childhood milieu that an adult could disguise himself / herself as.' Ipso facto they (like other participants in the discussion) ignore the tradition of using participant observation that has established itself within the tendency of the 'new sociology of childhood'. As Esta Matveeva notes in her reply, the representatives of this approach have proposed a number of possible ways for the researcher to behave in the children's milieu: doing all one can to make one's 'actions resemble the actions of the children' one is analysing, following Nancy Mandell's experiment, or joining 'a group of children as an "incompetent adult" who needed to be introduced to the child's world,' as suggested by William Corsaro and Luisa Molinari. Vitaly Bezrogov discusses the merits of another method of observation of 'the world of children' without the presence of an adult, namely video recording, 'permanent recording and recording that is automatically switched on at regular intervals.'

In their answers the participants in the 'Forum' raise the problem of the ontological aspect of the problem of children's subjectivity,

understanding it as a means towards consciousness, rationality and voluntarist action, and give very different evaluations of the validity of applying the terms 'subject' and 'agent' to a child. (We should note that in most cases the authors use these terms synonymously, the exception being Irina Dudenkova.) The arguments 'for' and 'against' giving children the status of subjects have forced researchers to formulate their overall theoretical position regarding the subjectivity of the human being as a member of society as a whole. Ekaterina Orekh explicitly prescribes the existence of such an interrelation between the researcher's positions on the questions of adult and child subjectivity. In her opinion, they are both founded on a basic understanding of the role of the individual in the process of socialisation: whether (s)he is a passive object of the influence of social norms or 'behaves as an active subject and, out of the information offered to him / her, assimilates something, takes note of something, rethinks something and copies something.'

Ekaterina Orekh's own position is to acknowledge the person's active role in the process of assimilating social norms, irrespective of age. She points out that 'socialisation continues for a person's whole life — all of it, not just childhood,' and that dependence on external influence of an individual's actions and opinions, and failure to assimilate particular social competences, are not peculiar to childhood. She stresses that the presence or absence of subjectivity does not depend on the child's (or, more broadly, the person's) capacity for verbalisation. Thus, in her opinion the concept of subjectivity, an immanent property of the individual, cannot be a distinguishing feature for separating children as a distinct social category. Instead, she suggests that childhood is to be described as a specific social experience, connected with the practices characteristic of that age.

Elena and Alexander Liarsky, by contrast, in criticising the representatives of the new sociology of childhood for an over-insistent 'social optimism', take up a position of a sort of 'social scepticism'. They dispute the understanding of children's subjectivity and agency 'in the spirit of human rights, as inalienable and constantly operative forces like gravity', and stress the limitations on the opportunities for making social choices not only among children, but among adults too. 'To discover oneself as a subject is thought of as a break in the routine: are many adults capable of this?'

In her comments, Svetlana Erpyleva presents a sustained critique of the idea of inborn subjectivity. Contrary to Ekaterina Orekh, she regards subjectivity as an analytical tool which allows a distinction to be drawn between childhood and adulthood, referring to Durkheim's understanding of socialisation as the process of liberating the person from the power of nature and the formation of an independent personality. She insists on the need to take

account of the side of the question relating to process, that is, on the idea of attainable subjectivity (or 'subjectivisation'). '[I]f we refuse to see subjectivity and agency in children a priori, we by no means altogether deny them subjectivity: we raise the question of the mechanisms and means whereby it is formed.' She criticises the new sociology of childhood for 'regarding the child as a social actor or subject a priori <…> tak[ing] a step backward from the study of subjectivisation to the naïve paradigm of the search for the true subject.'

In her comments, Irina Dudenkova draws out the polyvalence of the term 'subjectivity', reconstructing the sociological and philosophical traditions that lie behind its various meanings. In her opinion, the category of the subject is not a promising or relevant one for studying childhood, because, in particular, 'it is a priori insensitive in the task which anthropology sets itself of describing the Other's otherness.' She sees possible ways out of the conceptual impasse by using the category in a 'minimal sense' ('the subject is simply a supplement to the action, somebody who speaks in the first person singular') or in rejecting the term 'subject' in favour of a concept of agency as treated by actor-network theory (acknowledging '[t]he child <…> [as] one of many agents who bring about change in the world'). We should note that in this approach the problem of whether subjectivity is inborn or acquired, which is explicated in other participants' replies, remains irrelevant. Irina Dudenkova herself, however, calls both the solutions that she has suggested to the conceptual and terminological difficulties 'palliative measures', that is, she does not regard them as entirely satisfactory.

Among the participants in the discussion, a critical attitude towards the prospects of the new sociology of childhood as a research paradigm (Elena and Alexander Liarsky, Svetlana Erpyleva, Irina Dudenkova), or at least a call to approach its postulates cautiously and reflectively (Andy Byford) can be clearly heard. The authors' main objection is to the political commitment of this tendency in the study of childhood, expressed in particular in its proponents' active imposition of a fundamental research position, the choice of which ought, as Ekaterina Orekh supposes in her answer, to be the personal prerogative of each individual researcher. Svetlana Erpyleva remarks, not without a certain irony, that 'the question of whether children should be regarded as subjects or actors long ago became a school question. There is a "right answer" to it: yes, of course they should.' As our authors correctly point out, this problem may be described as a confusion of the categories of epistemology and ethics. At the very beginning of his extensive contribution Andy Byford says that 'the emphasis on children's subjecthood, which pervades contemporary historical, anthropological and sociological explorations of childhood, stems from an epistemology that is in

a fundamental way shaped by an ethical "dominant".' Irina Dudenkova reduces this 'dominant' to two basic aspects, emancipation and universalisation: 'It is, precisely, a matter of the practices of the minority in its efforts to integrate itself with the majority, and in a certain sense the reverse movement of stressing the value of the individual vis-à-vis the universal.' Until researchers into childhood can untangle epistemology and ethics or at least make it clearly explicit that the concept of children's subjectivity is predetermined by an ethical motivation, they will be stuck, she considers, in a 'methodological and epistemological dead end'.

Indeed, persistent attempts to endow children with agency and make them equal with adults by bestowing adult qualities and competences upon them (for example, properties of rationality in the spirit of classical German philosophy, or full political agency), or attempts to dress up the child in adult clothes (for example, involving him / her in the work as a researcher) often look peculiar (like the situation described by Svetlana Erpyleva which she happened to observe at a childhood studies conference). These expectations of researchers into childhood may be clearly illustrated by the words of Sara Pankenier Weld: '[E]ven as I write this, I relish the prospect of being proved wrong. That is, that there someday should arise a child theorist of childhood who offers overwhelming, powerful, and paradigm-breaking insights into childhood, which heretofore have been offered only by adult theorists of childhood <…> since this would illuminate childhood further and therefore be to the benefit of the field.' In other words, if only children could speak our language and tell us all about it!

Unfortunately the need to take up a predetermined ethical position, regarded as the only permissible one, towards children as the object of research deters many researchers from a more detailed interpretation of the postulates of the new sociology of childhood. This discipline, as Esta Matveeva reminds us in her answer, actually invokes both the definitions of child subjectivity enunciated in the participants' answers simultaneously. The new sociology of childhood not only proposes that children should be regarded as fully-fledged social actors, 'actively involved in the construction of their social life, of the lives of the people around them and of the societies in which they live' (the definition emerging from the ethical position); it also emphasises that children's viewpoints, experience and knowledge must be recognised as having value in themselves.

As our review of their answers has shown, the participants in the discussion are inclined in their considerations to make use of only one of the possible meanings of the term 'subjectivity', ignoring the other, or else not to make a clear distinction between them. In this sense Svetlana Erpyleva's call to stop thinking about childhood in

terms of binary oppositions ('freedom or compulsion, attention to immediate childhood experience or a view of the child from the adult perspective, complete acknowledgment of subjectivity or its complete rejection') and to look at subjectivity as a process appears most promising. She herself is not, however, entirely successful in avoiding the logic of opposition in her reasoning: 'Should we, as researchers, a priori regard children as social actors, *and not* [italics ours. — *A.K., A.K.*] as the objects of care?'

Ekaterina Orekh points out the character of childhood as process, its mobility and fluidity, stressing that 'the child is not a static subject' but is in a state of constant change. Besides, as she rightly observes, children's competence in different spheres is not acquired synchronically (for example, mastery of the political sphere usually takes place much later than the acquisition of competence in arithmetic). In this way she raises the question (which seems extremely important to us) of the inner dynamics and diversity of childhood, which was formulated during the round table by Maria Pirogovskaya: 'A human being first becomes a child, and at each succeeding stage (s)he becomes a different child... we do not speak to a three-year-old as we do to a fifteen-year-old, nor vice versa.' It may be noted, however, that for the participants in the 'Forum' the many stages of childhood did not appear self-evident or significant. In the majority of texts, the child is presented in a generalised form, as in opposition to an abstract adult.

But one of the primary postulates of the new sociology of childhood, to which Esta Matveeva also refers, is that 'the culture of childhood deserves to be studied by itself, independently of the viewpoint and interests of adults.' Unfortunately, the concept of the culture of childhood is the concept which is the least requisite and the least reflected upon in the participants' replies (which is also true of social research into childhood as a whole). Children are represented in them as atomised individuals influenced exclusively by adult culture, or else they lose any sort of specificity through being correlated with the model of adult subjectivity (being endued with it a priori or being defined by the degree to which they fall short of that ideal). Adults are also regarded as the child's only 'significant others'. The influence of people of the same age, or the authority of older children, which may at times be much stronger than the influence or authority of adults, are altogether omitted from the analysis.

In our view, it is attention to horizontal communication among children and to children's culture as a space for the collective production of meanings and significations which are constantly interlinked with adult cultural categories, notions and models of perception, but do not coincide with them, that may fill the gap that

has opened up on our understanding of children's subjectivity, and help to provide access to that specific 'childishness' that so many researchers find so hard to grasp.

The answers originally written in Russian were translated by Ralph Cleminson