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Situating Childhood: Editor's Preface

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childhood

disClosure

a journal of social theory



10th anniversary issue

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disClosure:
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issue no. 10

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disClosure:
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Children of the High Street Neighborhood Center are aged between one and five years old and live in the environs of Lexington, Kentucky. They are offered educational experiences often unavailable for poor children.

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Joe Sutliff-Sanders is beginning his dissertation on the child in literature for the English Department at the University of Kentucky. His other publications and professional affiliations center around gender theory and speculative fiction.

Angela Thomas has recently been appointed as a lecturer in language and literacy at the Faculty of Education at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Prior to that she spent two years working at the Centre for Critical Psychology at the University of Western Sydney as a research officer on a project entitled "Children and Cyberspace" and as a tutor and lecturer at the University of Sydney in the area of functional linguistics and visual literacy.

Paul Kingsbury

Situating Childhood

Editor's Preface

On every formal visit a child ought to be of the party, by way of provision for discourse. Austen (27-28)

In the end, lest what is most important remain unsaid: from such abysses, from such severe sickness of severe suspicion, one returns *newborn*, having shed one's skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a tenderer tongue for all good things, with merrier senses, with a second dangerous innocence in joy, more childlike and yet a hundred times subtler than one has ever been before. Nietzsche (37)

A child is ten years old. In its first year it was already *Rethinking Contemporary Mythologies*, and the following year it spoke its first words about the *Buying and Selling of Culture*. At three years old, the child declared the *Fin-de-Siècle Democracy*, and in its fourth year it started *Making Boundaries*. The child progressed through its fifth year by *Reason INCorporated*, and at six years old it was *reVisioning Justice*. On its seventh birthday the child began *coloring*. At the grand age of eight it crossed into *perigiNations*, and last year, aged nine, this child discovered *manholes*.

These italicized moments, as some faithful readers may have guessed, are past *disClosure* titles. Such an eventful life is cause for remembrance, celebration, and renewal (see subscriptions page). It is with immense joy, on behalf of the editorial collective, that I welcome you to the tenth anniversary edition of *disClosure* entitled *childhood*. As a journal that espouses multi- and

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interdisciplinary theoretical encounters with social life, this issue of *disClosure* seeks with *childhood* to splay out the multi-dimensional and intermingling encounters with the event that is childhood. In this sense, one is not born a child, one becomes one, but the child is never One. Always becoming situated, childhood is an intensity often cast between a ticklishness of apparent innocence and a maliciousness that always seems to threaten it, betwixt the spaces of the 'non-child,' other children, and surrounding worlds. Interestingly, negotiating this precarious constellation of innocence and threat presented the editorial collective with challenging decisions concerning the choice of materials for publication. In this issue, we read of how childhood becomes situated amongst historical, discursive, national, ethnic, institutional, and technological forces. Echoing Jane Austen's remark, *disClosure* not only presents childhood as a provision for scholarly discourse but also as a reflexive space for acknowledging the discourses of children 'themselves.'

We begin with Leonora Ritter's proposal of a "tentative taxonomy" that unfolds the shifting terrain of competing and compounding discourses that give form(s) to the child. From the "organic discourse" of the Yequana Indians in Venezuela to the "optional-extra" discourse of the suburban Dual Income no Kids familial model, Ritter traces the ways in which the child as a category is operationalized through and immanent to various discourses. In so doing, Ritter illustrates how understandings of the child as simply 'not adult' are untenable and overlook the politics at stake and fought for in the name of the child.

The theme of discursive power continues in our first interview with James Kincaid who discusses how the child was scripted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a category evacuated of sexuality and agency. Kincaid describes how this romantic maneuver can hysterically produce a child in dire need of protection and surveillance. Kincaid's notion of a "Gothic narrative" evokes the contemporary cultural obsession for depicting people involved with child abuse and molestation as demonic monsters. For Kincaid, this gothic fervour returns an erotic association with childhood repressed by tropes of innocence and vulnerability. Alongside this delicate economy of desire between eroticism and children, Kincaid discusses the politics of sex education, childcare, and the writing and reception of his critically acclaimed books *Child Loving* and *Erotic Innocence*.

Moving from situating the discursivity of childhood towards the situation of discourses, Spyros Spyrou investigates children's lives in two Greek Cypriot elementary schools where children negotiate eth-

nic and national identities in the "flow of everyday life." Spyrou describes how two discourses of "Hellenocentrism" and "Cypriotcentrism" having emerged from a historically turbulent relationship between Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey ideologically inform Cyprus's educational system, teaching practices, and children's classroom experiences. Using ethnographic methods, Spyrou explains how a "diglossia," or, two linguistic varieties of Greek language enable Greek Cypriot children to articulate and make sense of complex political boundaries where children are "one but also more than one."

In our second interview, Jo Boyden begins by stating that the immediate everyday experiences of children can be conveyed effectively by the term "child life." Boyden discusses children's experiences based on twenty years of working and researching children in 'non-western' countries around the world. Boyden believes that the poignancy of doing research with children and offering them a rare chance to speak about their lives can prove to be both methodologically challenging and enlightening. Boyden provides insights into a 'geopolitics' of childhood through the international impacts and liabilities of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, military conflicts, and the controversies of child's labor.

An attempt to offer a social theoretical survey about childhood should engage with the relations between children and the proliferation of various new technologies. In our final article, Angela Thomas provides an extensive analysis of how contemporary childhood is configured by and experienced through cyberspace. In recent years, the Internet has become the site *par excellence* for adults to police, monitor, and establish protection regimes for (their) children. Rather than simply pursue a (repressive) hypothesis whereby the web and childhood are cast in terms of control, Thomas seeks to understand how children "actually" engage through cyber practices and productions of subjectivity where children also discipline each other. By constructing a graphical online chat environment for children called a "Palace," Thomas offers in-depth textual and visual analyses of children's social interaction through the Internet medium.

In situating childhood artistically, this issue of *disClosure* includes two short stories by Faye Moskowitz and Jane Adan that evoke the magic and trials of childhood. There are also poems by María Luisa Arroyo and Carolyn Moran, the artwork of Heidi Steinke (who's piece *King Pin* graces the cover), and drawings by the children at the Neighborhood Center, Lexington, Kentucky.

Now, I urge you to celebrate this tenth anniversary issue by continuing to read *childhood* and *disClosure* issues yet to come.

Acknowledgments

This issue is an assemblage of people's patience, dedication, and sheer hard work. I would like to acknowledge the editorial collective for excelling in all of these qualities and providing a wonderful milieu that befits the spirit and aspirations of *disClosure*. On behalf of the editorial collective for issue 10, the following people deserve heartfelt thanks and recognition for offering their time and energy to make *childhood* possible.

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Lexington, Kentucky
April, 2001

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