

Re-imagining Childhood (Greenwich, 9 May 15)

University of Greenwich, UK, May 09, 2015

Deadline: Mar 1, 2015

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Call for Papers

Re-imagining Childhood: Images, Objects and the Voice of the Child

Centre for the Study of Play and Recreation, University of Greenwich, UK.

The Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past

This conference aims to stimulate interdisciplinary debate on the question of what images and material objects can tell us about the subjective experience of being a child in the past. It will explore the ways in which non-written evidence – in particular that which comes under the heading ‘material culture’ and ‘visual culture’ – can be used to open up new possibilities for the study of the history of childhood.

As Peter Stearns indicated in his ‘Challenges in the History of Childhood’ (JHCY, 2008), no one interested in the importance of history as a way to understand the human condition, can ignore the importance of historical perspectives about childhood. The history of childhood has been shaped by the concerns of the world in which its historians live. Although the discipline that we understand today as ‘history of childhood’ is less than 100 years old, it is a field of growing interest, as reflected in the ever-greater number of publications dealing with the subject. Childhood and children are increasingly present on the bookshelves, in documentaries and in exhibitions, and there seems to be an almost inexhaustible consumption of the values and ideas that children and childhood represent. Thus we find ourselves at a fascinating time for considering what it is that adults seek in the image of the child. What attracts us? What disturbs us? What is at play in the gaze of the child?

One could claim that all histories written about children are related, in one way or another, to the book that is considered to represent the origin of the discipline: *Centuries of Childhood* (L’Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l’Ancien Régime), which Philippe Ariès wrote in 1960. Ariès’ great success was to convince almost all his readers that childhood has a history and that, across time and in different cultures, both ideas about childhood and the experience of being a child have changed. While Ariès’ evidence was wide-ranging, he has been much criticised for failing to subject it to proper scrutiny. In particular, he has been accused of “reading” images too literally. As a result, historians became very cautious about the use of non-written evidence which has only recently started to make a renewed and welcome impact. It is clear that most approaches to the history of childhood depend heavily on textual sources, but this approach can lead to a distorted understanding, in so far as many experiences of the past are not reflected in those texts. Other paths could

be – and must be – explored.

Re-imagining Childhood attempts to go beyond this limitation by arguing that the history of childhood – or, at least, any history of childhood which purports to cover more than a limited historical period – is possible only through a multidisciplinary exercise that adds evidence from visual or material culture to the study of published sources. The study of the material and visual culture of childhood provides a way to contribute to a better understanding of earlier concepts of childhood. These additional sources also help us to tap into children’s experiences and they thereby serve as helpful tools in unravelling the “voice of the child”.

We welcome original studies that focus on any historical period, carried out within the arts and humanities or the social sciences, that shed light on the power of objects and images to bring children back into the history of childhood. An abstract of no more than 300 words for a 20-minute presentation, along with the title, name and affiliation, should be send to Leticia Fernández-Fon-techa Rumeu (playandrecreation@greenwich.ac.uk) by March 1st. Applicants whose papers are accepted will be notified by March 15th.

Reference:

CFP: Re-imagining Childhood (Greenwich, 9 May 15). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 19, 2014 (accessed May 7, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/9118>>.