Images of Childhood: Changing Patterns in Academia and Society

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Abstract

There is a correlation between changes in society and changes in how adults imagine children and childhood. This book review assesses two studies that address this relationship: *Beyond the Century of the Child* (2003) edited by Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman, and *Childhood and Society* (2001) by Nick Lee. The review traces the Western history of childhood through time while connecting images of the child to changes in academia and society. It subsequently addresses the contemporary imagining of childhood during a time when both adults and children are confronted with, and influenced by, a new, complex, and rapidly changing society. The advent of accelerating globalization and modernization fundamentally altered the Western adults' view on children and childhood. The concepts of "infantilization" and human "being" versus human "becoming" are used to describe the gap between the worlds of children and adults created in the last century, and the ways in which this gap is now being bridged.

Keywords: childhood, images, human becoming, infantilization

Introduction

Childhood constitutes a part of each one of us. But although we–as adults–all have been children, childhood is regarded as something separate from adulthood. And not only has childhood been defined as something separate, but "childhood has been defined in opposition to adulthood" (Lee, 2001, p. 8). Furthermore, adults in contemporary Western society will imagine the child differently than adults in the Middle Ages or during the time of the Enlightenment did. There seems to be a correlation between changes in society and changes in how adults imagine children and childhood. While there is not a lot of literature regarding the images adults have of children, at least two contributions make an effort to assess this theme. Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman have edited a collection of eleven essays titled *Beyond the Century of the Child* (2003) that focuses on this topic. In *Childhood and Society* (2001) Nick Lee explores the image of the child as "being" or "becoming", focusing on the influence that major changes in society had on these classifications. The two volumes present us with an in-depth analysis of the history of childhood and its accompanying images. Both of these works stress that the modern Euro-American child (and the way this child has been regarded by adults) is by and large a cultural construct. The child is a reflection of our hopes and fears and, indeed, of our society in general. So how do we imagine children now, when both adults and children are confronted with, and influenced by, a new, complex and rapidly changing society? To understand how we currently imagine childhood, it is necessary to trace the changing image of the child throughout Western history. After all, as Michael Zuckerman (2003, p. 229) notes in his epilogue, "The study of childhood is inherently a historical study". The advent of accelerating globalization and modernization fundamentally altered the Western adults' view on childhood. In what ways has this view changed and what are the consequences of these changes for the way adults approach children? The two volumes discussed here have tried to answer these questions through distinct approaches.

In his introduction to *Beyond the Century of the Child* (2003), Willem Koops shows how Philippe Ariès presented us in 1960 with the concept of infantilization, which asserts that the view on children in the twelfth and thirteenth century was primarily one of small adults, and that this view was gradually transformed into one wherein children came to be seen as more childish and thus distinct from adults. Generally speaking, this process began in 1850 and ended in 1950 (2003, p. 12). Several scholars have declared that the "century of the child", which pedagogue Ellen Key had proclaimed in 1900, is now over.

Nick Lee (2001) argues that changes in our image of the child are directly related to changes in society. Lee explores how paradigms in society are related to the image that adults have of childhood and the influences of globalization on this image, using the concepts of adults as human

"beings" and children as human "becomings" (Lee, 2001).

In this review, we will first briefly discuss each of the volumes separately, focusing on the changes that occurred in how adults imagined childhood and children throughout history. Thereafter, we will use the ideas presented by the authors of the two reviewed books to more closely examine the evolution of the images of childhood in academia and in society in general. We will place a particular emphasis on the role of the modern media in the changing image of the child. In the last part of this review, we present the contemporary image of the child and look at how this image influences our practices regarding education, childrearing and the relationship between adults and children. The conclusion summarizes the results of our examination of the image of the child as explored in the two works reviewed, and presents some additional thoughts about the contemporary image of the child.

Literature in Focus

Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural history and developmental psychology

Encompassing a period of 500 years, from the beginning of the fifteenth to the end of the twentieth century, *Beyond the Century of the Child* (2003) is a collection of essays written by historians, pedagogues and developmental psychologists who explore whether we have moved beyond the century of the child, which had been proclaimed by Ellen Key in 1900. The volume centres on the question of "whether we have exaggerated the childishness of our children and thereby infantilized them excessively" (2003, p. ix-x). This question already implies that adults have a certain amount of influence over the way childhood is conceived. In his introductory essay, Willem Koops stresses a crucial point that resounds throughout the anthology: "Children are what we adults choose to see and what we have made of them in our cultural history and society." Thus "we are imagining childhood" (2003, p. 1). As several authors show, the twentieth century as experienced in Europe and the United States was marked by a paradox of an increased infantilization of the child and the parallel development of child consumerism.

The essays are connected by their common exploration of the change hypothesis and resulting infantilization as described by Philippe Ariès in his *Centuries of Childhood.* This hypothesis points to a cultural historical process whereby, from the thirteenth century onwards, cultural representation of children showed a steadily increasing emphasis on their childishness (2003, p. 2-3). Ariès' hypothesis has been repeatedly challenged. But still, as Michael Zuckerman argues in his epilogue, his ideas continue to influence the discourse on childhood (2003, p. 227).

The first section of the volume is called "The History of Childhood" and comprises the bulk of the volume with seven essays. The essays are presented in chronological order starting with the Middle Ages and proceeding all the way to the twentieth century, with contributions on the United States, Europe and Asia.

Barbara Hanawalt opens this section with the history of children in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, arguing that this period has been largely ignored in studies of childhood (2003, p. 42). Els Kloek focuses in her contribution on early modern childhood in the Netherlands. She states that the interpretation of Ariès has fostered an ahistorical approach to the history of childhood (2003, p. 60). Conceptualization of childhood in the colonial, republican, Victorian, and modern historical eras are outlined in the context of the United States by Karin Calvert. She notices how the gap between childhood and adulthood was particularly present during the Victorian era (2003, p. 81).

John R. Gillis takes up the concept of the child developed in the Victorian era and works out the consequences of the advent of symbols and images of children; he argues that adults tend to neglect the reality of the child over its image. The child is now ritualized and forms a permanent source of identity for adults (2003, p. 94). These cultural constructions make it difficult to experience children in reality. The subsequent contribution by Peter Stearns drifts away from this emphasis on culture and instead focuses on behavioural aspects in the relationship between children and adults. He points to the tension between two parallel developments: a mounting parental discipline and the increased targeting of children as consumers (2003, p. 96). The two concluding chapters of this section, written by Hideo Kojima and Michael Nylan, turn the focus away from the western history of childhood by

discussing traditional views on child rearing in Japan, and the ways in which the state is linked to education in China.

The second section of this volume, "The Child in Developmental Psychology and Pedagogy", begins with an excellent essay by Micha de Winter on several major pedagogical movements. De Winter also points to the problems associated with the current dualism between infantilization and consumerism (2003, p. 179). He explores the tensions of calculation versus construction, individual versus social orientation, and assimilation versus political emancipation. But rather than defining the paradoxes surrounding children and moving on, De Winter tries to develop a solution based on education, and argues for a participatory pedagogy that is "aimed at the triangular relation between a child, a responsible adult and the social world" (2003, p. 180). In his contribution on ambivalence in developmental thinking, Gerrit Breeuwsma (2003, p. 183) builds upon the position of Gillis that the image of the child has grown more important than children themselves, by acknowledging that professionals focus more on the child in theory than in practice. Sheldon White concludes the volume with an essay on the role of developmental psychology in the contemporary world. According to him, the past century was rather one of developmental psychology than of childhood, as academics paid more attention to images of children instead of actual flesh-and-blood children (2003, p. 206).

Michael Zuckerman faces the difficult task of connecting all these authors and their ideas in the epilogue titled "The Millennium of Childhood That Stretches Before Us". He connects the diverse essays through themes like history, progress, science and culture. The common denominator he finds in all of the essays is the observation that adults have drifted away from the real, actual child while holding on to their symbols and imagination of them (2003, p. 238). However, as Zuckerman notes correctly, few authors have troubled themselves with making predictions of the future (2003, p. 226)—i.e., by looking beyond the century of the child (which is, after all, the title of the volume). Zuckerman (2003, p. 242) notes how we now stand at "the threshold of a new childhood". But what this new childhood entails is left to the reader's imagination.

Childhood and Society: Growing up in an age of uncertainty

In this book, Nick Lee (2001) explores how, throughout history, the child has been defined as either a human "being" or a human "becoming". The image of the child as "being" or "becoming" is dependent on different views and paradigms that society as a whole experienced. To illustrate this relationship, Lee describes processes of social change that occurred throughout history from the period of industrialization onwards and skilfully shows how these processes and paradigm shifts are reflected in society's image of the child.

The distinction of the child as either human "becoming" or human "being" has its roots in the historical image of the child as a not-adult or, better said, as a not-yet-adult. In this image of the child as a human "becoming", there is an underlying idea of linear human evolution that regards the Western white adult as the final stage of development. A child only becomes fully human through the process of growing up. We will further develop this evolutionist thinking later on in this review. The image of the child as human "being" is characterized by the more modern idea that children are not inferior to adults. Growing up is not a linear process to achieve the highest status (that of adulthood). Instead, children are human "beings" in their own right. They are social agents, just as adults are.

Lee takes us through a range of changes that have occurred in the Western world since industrialization and shows us how the assumptions and values of a society at certain points in history influenced the image that same society had of its children. Throughout the book, it becomes clear that the image of the child is shaped by the image of adulthood and that, because society has a considerable impact on the image of adulthood, it has therefore influenced the image of childhood.

The major social changes that Lee addresses in the book are the advent of the Fordist system within the industrialized Western society of the early twentieth century, the development of this system into the flexible accumulation economy, the neo-liberal changes in developing countries, and the development of new mass media such as television and the internet. According to Lee, these social changes had an impact on how stable or flexible adulthood was. While Fordism gave rise to a stable and predictable adult life, the

flexible accumulation economy requires highly flexible adults who are willing to adjust to the market, but who are unable to predict their future economic stability and professional tasks. The development of adulthood from a stable end-of-the-road period to an uncertain period changed the image of the child. While in the first case childhood was a preparation for a known future and so the child was a human "becoming" that would eventually turn into a human "being", in the era of flexible accumulation, it is no longer clear what children are growing up to be. In the Fordist era, the family and the home constituted a "place" where children could develop in order to become an adult human "being". They constituted places where children could "become". However, the neo-liberal measures that accompanied the period of flexible accumulation resulted in the collapse of social and health care institutions, and required both mothers and fathers to work. This led to less availability of the home and the family in the education of the child. Children thus no longer had a place to "become", making it hard to see them as "becomings". However, as we will later see, it would take a few more decades until children would be seen as "beings". Therefore Lee characterizes this moment in history as an ambiguous moment for children, who found themselves caught between the status of "becoming" and "being". Development of new mass media such as television and internet removed adults from the position of mediator between children and the world. Children now have direct access to the world and consequently need to learn to make choices about what they want and what they don't want to know about that world. Lee cites Postman (1983) regarding the television as the revealer of the secrets that previously characterized the difference between adults and children: "Without secrets, of course, there can be no such thing as childhood" (Postman, 1983 cited in Lee, 2001, p. 74). Lee argues that, through this revealing of secrets, the boundary between children and adults becomes more blurred and thus children assume a more ambiguous position between "becoming" and "being". The author thus presents two developments in society that have worked to change the "becoming" status children had in the past. In both cases, children enter an ambiguous state, caught between childhood and adulthood. Later on in this review, we will look at the consequences of these changes for the way that we as adults now approach, see and work with children.

Nick Lee devotes the final chapters of his book to a search on how the sociology of childhood can study the child growing up in the "age of uncertainty", and how scholars can study the process of growing up if they don't know the end point of this development. He concludes by stating that children do not live in a disordered world, they just move easier between different orders. Growing up should thus not be regarded as a process of becoming "fully human" but as a slowing down of the capacity to switch between orders.

We will now turn to several important aspects concerning images of childhood as mentioned in both volumes, and analyse these with regard to other contributions centred around this theme. In the first section, we will look at how children have been imagined within academia throughout history. Subsequently, we will assess how changes in society influenced the general image of the child, and discuss the particular influence of the modern media–especially television and the internet–on ideas concerning education and the contemporary image of the child.

Images of childhood

Images of childhood in academia

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance are the first periods in which the image of childhood is examined in the volume edited by Koops and Zuckerman (2003). Barbara Hanawalt argues that the Middle Ages have been largely ignored in studies of childhood. She presents several arguments against the popular view of Ariès that there was no childhood before the modern era. Children were conceptualized differently in pre-modern times: According to her, "concepts of childhood are structured to prepare children for the social reality of their own particular historical time period" (2003, p. 42). However, as Gillis (2003, p. 87) notes in his contribution, in pre-industrial Europe and United States, childhood occupied a very small place in the adult mind. And although the views of children during the Middle Ages should not be dismissed, in order to provide a concise but detailed account of the development toward our current imagination of childhood, we should start by looking at the Enlightenment. This

period was characterized by the intellectual notion of evolutionism, which was applied to almost all aspects of life, from putting forward a justification for colonialism (Barrett, 1996, p. 47) to the rearing of children. The section below addresses several scholars who developed ideas of childhood within the context of evolutionism.

Elsewhere, Koops (2008) describes the history of developmental psychology in the Western world by connecting the gradual evolution of this discipline to the "tidal sweeps of the larger culture" (Kessen, as cited in Koops 2008, p. 15). Starting with the Enlightenment, Koops refers to the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) and his work *Émile, ou de l'Éducation,* written in 1762. Whereas children were formerly seen as barely human and not needing too much attention, *Émile* represents a changing attitude towards children, as Rousseau encouraged a more tender and loving approach to them. (Koops and Zuckerman, 2003, p. 3). In his work, Rousseau introduced the concept of natural, age-related phases of development. By means of a natural upbringing, the child would, he thought, mature into the highest level of the fully developed Western cultural human being (2008, p. 16). Indeed, the Enlightenment was drenched with the notion of linear and irreversible progress. In the eyes of Rousseau, the child was a "noble savage".

However, Rousseau never intended his book to become a text on pedagogy and upbringing. Rather, it was a revolutionary text of the Enlightenment that he wrote mainly in order to express his discontent with French society and its cultural reproduction (Koops, 2008, p. 5), reflecting his vision of man as an autonomous individual. But still, Rousseau's impact on how we think of childhood has been profound, and has shaped education in Europe until the present time (Koops, 2008, p. 9). In the introduction to *Beyond the Century of the Child,* Koops (2003, p. 6) traces the legacy of Rousseau through the German pedagogical movement of the Philanthropists that gave rise to the "*Vom Kinde aus*" (From childhood onwards) movement of Pestalozzi. These movements institutionalized child rearing and education, and led to children being placed in a separate niche of their own: a school or kindergarten (Koops and Zuckerman, 2003, p. 9).

The institutionalization of Rousseau's ideas is reflected in the phases of development as described by Piaget (1896-1980), which show a remarkable resemblance to Rousseau's *Émile*. In his article *Het Kind Terug in de Tijd* (The child back in time), Koops (2008) points to the cultural anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) when characterizing the work of Piaget. Lévy-Bruhl wrote extensively about the development of humankind and the rationale of "primitive" peoples, expressing his belief in a linear and progressive development towards the Western man. Piaget applied Lévy-Bruhls notion of the "prelogical primitive man" to small children (Koops, 2008, p. 16), thereby creating the same linear path of development as Rousseau, regarding the Western adult as the highest achievable goal. This idea of progress was widespread in these years and not confined to one discipline. This trend of regarding the Western adult as the highest possibility of evolution is also referred to by Lee (2001). This author presents, as we have already seen, the idea of a human "being" versus a human "becoming". Only a Western adult could possibly be a true human "being". The idea of Western human completeness was connected to the time of colonization and indeed, Rousseau lived in the age of European exploration and colonial expansion and Piaget witnessed the "New Imperialism" typified by the vigorous expansion of European colonial powers and the justification of these practices via the emergence of doctrines of racial superiority. The prevailing assumptions were that all civilizations went through the same sequence of evolutionary stages and that, as they evolved, they got more civilized, moral and orderly (Barret, 1996, p. 48). The White Man's Burden was easily applied to the child. Indeed, colonists often viewed their subjugated peoples as ignorant children who had not yet developed to their full potential. We can thus see a parallel between the ideas of Western society regarding the wider world (i.e., people could be placed in an evolutionary hierarchy that culminated in the white adult as the highest form of humanity) and the ideas this same society had about its children (i.e., they were to evolve in an ontogenetic process that would culminate in their becoming adults). The notion of human "becoming" was thus applied to all humans who were not white Western adults.

However, this idea was challenged by another cultural anthropologist after the Second World War. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) condemned the hierarchical phases in human civilization and its associated value judgments.

Commissioned by UNESCO, Lévi-Strauss wrote the famous text *Race et histoire* in 1950, at the time of decolonization following the Second World War. Here, Lévi-Strauss stated that differences between peoples are the result of geographical, historical and social conditions and are not biologically based. Thus, he contended, the concept of "race" has no scientific foundation. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss called for the abolition of the hierarchically ranked values placed on civilizations (Finkielkraut, as cited in Koops, 2008, p. 15). Applied to childhood, this meant that there was no hierarchical relationship between the phases of development, and each age group can be seen as having its own culture (Koops, 2008, p. 17). This marks the beginning of the transition of the image of the child as "becoming" toward an image of the child as "being".

As the intellectual and social climate started to change, so did the image of the child. In fact, since 1950 some scholars have argued that childhood is disappearing altogether. As Koops (2003, p. 13) argues, the concept of childhood enjoyed its finest century between 1850 and 1950, a time during which an appreciation of the distinctiveness of the early years of human life was at its height. Koops defines the infantilization that was prominent during this 100-year period as "the increasing duration of the childhood stage" (2003, p. 2). A longer period of childhood was accompanied by a greater separation between adults and children throughout the *century of the child* (1850 - 1950). As we have seen, children were placed in a separate niche, away from the adult sphere of life, a phenomenon that to some extent involved an important physical separation between children and adults. However, this space between children and adults has been decreasing due to a number of changes in society that we will turn to in the next section. As a consequence, the infantilization of the past century is coming to an end: Children instead now tend to be seen as "beings" in their own right. We will now consider the factors that have contributed to this decreased separation between children and adults.

Images of childhood mirroring society

Whereas Koops and Zuckerman (2003) mostly concentrate on changes regarding the image of the child in academic thought, Lee (2001) focuses on the impact of the societal changes brought about by industrialisation and Fordism. Lee argues that the different ways in which society views its children are influenced by society itself and by major paradigms governing a certain period of time. To understand why children were seen as "becomings" in the past and why they are beginning to be regarded as "beings" in the present, we have to turn to these changes in society, and we have to review how the image of adulthood developed as a result of these changes because, as we have already seen, "childhood has been defined in opposition to adulthood" (Lee, 2001, p. 8).

In explaining the image of adults as human "beings" versus children as human "becomings", Lee points to what Harvey (1989) called Fordism. The innovations brought about by Henry Ford in the first decades of the twentieth century would profoundly change the course of industrialization. As a result of the standardization of manufacturing operations, workers came to specialize in a particular subcategory of the production process. The Fordist system made working conditions stable, which in turn stabilized important aspects of adult life. The man would be the breadwinner and work in the same industry for his whole life and, because he earned enough to support his family, his wife could stay at home and raise the children. People were less dependent on natural conditions like the weather and the market for their sustenance. According to the author, until the era of flexible accumulation—which followed after the Fordist era—intimate relationships were expected to be monogamous and long lasting. Getting settled in a stable relationship was part of becoming adult, and thus part of becoming fully human. Lee cites Parsons' (1971) definition of the "normal American family" to illustrate this (2001, p. 15). According to this definition, the stability of society relied on the widespread acceptance by each individual of his or her role in society and thus also in family life. Adulthood was a pre-defined, socially constructed phase in one's life. One would grow up and become a full human "being" by settling into work, forming a stable relationship, and assuming a role that was in accordance with society's expectations.

The child growing up in such a stable society can basically be characterized as what we would like to call a not-yet-adult. Childhood was defined in opposition to adulthood: where the adult was stable, the child was unstable; where the adult was seen as a finished human "being", the child was an incomplete human "becoming". Growing up was

a linear process toward becoming complete, toward achieving the highest possible stage of humanity: adulthood. This superiority of adults legitimized adult authority over children: "The "finished" standard adult had powers over and responsibilities toward the "unfinished" child" (Lee, 2001, p. 19).

In her article *Changing Images of Childhood*, Sorin (2005) described ten images of childhood, and defined three types that conceptualize the child as an incomplete "becoming" on his or her way to adulthood. The first of these types, the "innocent child", lives his or her life in a world that is separate from adulthood. In this view of children, contact with this adulthood should be closely watched over and mediated by adults, for the adult knows what is best for the child (Sorin, 2005, p. 13). As we have seen earlier, children viewed in this way were kept in their "own places" (i.e. kindergarten). The "evil child" is evidence of his or her parents' intimacy and thus is born evil. If a child is not considered good enough by adults, he or she is thought of as having no real worth in life (Sorin, 2005, p. 14). The third image of the child as described by Sorin (2005) is the "adult-in-training". Childhood is a period of practice for adulthood. Children develop in a linear fashion, with adulthood as a final stage (Sorin, 2005, p. 16-17). This "adult-in-training" is, according to us, the closest to the human "becoming" that was a popular conception during the Fordist era, as described by Lee (2001).

According to Lee, the deterioration of Fordism also had an important impact on adulthood and consequently on childhood. In the 1960s, the mass production created by the Fordist system started to generate a saturation of the market. Stability as offered by Fordism turned into rigidity once the consumer market started to require more flexible investment and employment and a more market-oriented production (Lee, 2001, p. 13). Lee argues that the "new economy", as it has been described by Arthur *et al.* (1999, cited in Lee, 2001) demanded a flexible adult who was prepared to adjust to the market through the ideas of "flexible accumulation" (Lee, 2001, p. 14). The consequence of this development, according to Lee, is that adults, at the start of the twenty-first century, find themselves unable to predict whether they will be able to maintain stable employment five years into the future. Adulthood is no longer synonymous with stability, and this increasingly manifests itself in personal relationships. Adults are no longer expected to settle into lifelong relationships as they were during the first decades of the twentieth century. Adulthood has thus become more flexible. This leads Lee to raise the question of whether an adult can still be regarded as a human "being". If an adult is always changing as a result of the need to adapt to new situations and employment, would it not be more accurate to state that adults are "becomings" as well? We will elaborate on this notion further in the next section on the influence of new media on images of childhood and adulthood.

Regardless of whether an adult should be defined as a "being" or "becoming", Lee clearly shows us that, through flexible accumulation, the image of adulthood has changed. As we have seen, childhood is defined in opposition to adulthood. We can therefore assume that the image of childhood changed as well. According to Lee, the following question arises: "If adulthood is flexible and ill-defined, what is a child growing up to be?" A child can no longer be defined as a not-adult or a not-yet-adult if the very meaning of adulthood is not defined. These problems of definition characterize what the author calls the "age of uncertainty" (Lee, 2001, p. 19). In the following section, we will look at another major development in society that profoundly changed our way of looking at the world and the means by which we interact with this world: the advent of the television and the internet.

Images of childhood and the influence of the new media

Koops & Zuckerman (2003) and Lee (2001) stress how changes in Western society have radically altered the image of childhood. The advent of the mass media has had a profound impact on relations between adults and children. In fact, media specialist Neil Postman (1983)–who is cited in both volumes–argued that childhood, as we know it, is disappearing due to the existence of new media. Looking at the historical evolution of media, we will first consider the advent of writing and printing of books before turning to the new media.

As Koops (2003, p. 11) points out in *Beyond the Century of the Child*, Postman was the first scholar to identify a connection between the image of childhood and the mass media. Postman states that without schooling and education, children, as we have defined them in the past century, do not exist. In a non-literate world like

the Middle Ages, there is no need to make a distinction between children and adults, as everyone shares the same access to information (Postman, as cited in Koops & Zuckerman, 2003, p. 11). The art of printing books created a whole new social and intellectual world of symbols. This triggered a new concept of adulthood, which came to be seen as a "symbolic, not a biological, achievement" (Postman, as cited in Koops & Zuckerman, 2003, p. 11). To become an adult, a child had to master certain skills. In relation to the images of "becomings" and "beings" as explained by Lee (2001), it was no longer customary that a human "becoming" would automatically develop into a human "being" just by getting older.

Koops and Zuckerman (2003) have shown how this "becoming" was embodied within schools as the institutionalization of upbringing; placing children in their own world where they could mature in phases made a distinct concept of childhood inevitable, as the child was clearly seen to be unlike the adult. Children could be brought into adulthood one step at a time through learning. However, the invention of telegraphy initiated a process in which information has become more widespread, more easily accessible and therefore uncontrollable. This has had a considerable impact on the concept of childhood. The subsequent inventions of the telephone, radio and especially television and internet have radically altered the separation between adults and children. In media such as television and the internet, knowledge is transmitted mainly through images rather than text, and this phenomenon has to a large extent eliminated what has long been a major obstacle to children reaching out to the adult world: illiteracy (Koops & Zuckerman, 2003, p. 11). As Postman points out, the secrets which separated adulthood from childhood are disappearing, and therefore childhood is starting to disappear. We are now in a situation comparable to that of our ancestors in the Middle Ages, with everyone sharing the same access to information.

Lee (2001) also cites Neil Postman and the concept of the "disappearance of childhood". He approaches the notion of Postman in a manner that differs slightly from that of Koops and Zuckerman (2003) by putting a greater emphasis on the societal conditions that made the widespread availability of televisions possible. In his explanation of how the television changed how children were viewed, Lee again turns to Fordism. Since the eighteenth century, the family and the home had been viewed as a cocoon around the child. This cocoon was meant to protect the innocent child against the outside world. The outside world was mediated by the parents, thus shielding the child from direct contact with it. The introduction of the television had a great impact on the image of the child, according to Lee. By means of the television, the outside world could reach the child directly. Parents lost the opportunity of being mediators. It is at this point that Lee refers to the work of Postman (1983). "Postman argues that the television shattered the secrecy and privacy of the home, thereby destroying 'childhood'" (Lee, 2001, p. 75). Due to the easy accessibility of information brought about by the television, the innocence of the child has been lost. Lee contends that a consequence of this lost innocence is that children can no longer be considered "becomings", for they have access to the same information as adult "beings".

Lee disagrees with Postman's claim that childhood is disappearing. He argues that "Childhood has not 'disappeared', it has rather become more complex and ambiguous" (Lee, 2001, p. 76). According to him, children still exist and so does childhood. However childhood does not exist in the same way as it did before. As there is no hierarchy between adults and children– childhood is no longer defined as a preparatory stage for becoming fully human–adults and children must now learn and develop together.

This complexity is acknowledged by Koops and Zuckerman (2003). Since the belief in inevitable progress has disappeared, and there is no longer a final destination to reach, the idea of "growing up" has become less appealing. Adulthood is no longer attractive to children. Furthermore, the period of adolescence has lost its traditional function as a turbulent transition period between childhood and adulthood, as the line between these two periods has become blurred. As Koops shows by referring to the pedagogue Dasberg, this is apparent in the new forms of youth-sentiment that have replaced the traditional longing to grow up (2003, p. 10). Adolescence is now the favourite age of this century: children want to become adolescents as soon as possible, and adults do not wish to mature out of this phase. Koops stresses that "it is no longer easy to imagine how children can be drawn into adulthood" (2003, p. 11). As we have seen earlier, the blurring of

boundaries may lead us to wonder if, in addition to the disappearance of childhood, we can speak of the disappearance of traditional adulthood as well. Koops and Zuckerman (2003) certainly seem to think so. In light of this disappearance of a clearly defined adulthood, what do we expect our children to grow up to become? In the next section, we will look at the current image of childhood and the consequences this has on educational systems, the role of the teacher, and the different assumptions regarding child rearing.

Contemporary image of the child

In theory

Sorin (2005) presents us with a new image of the child: children are no longer "becomings" and adulthood is no longer an end-of-the-road goal to be achieved through the process of growing up. The modern child is seen as a social actor who participates in his or her own education and life. Children thus construct their childhood together with adults. Children and adults have different roles in the process of growing up. Adults have a guiding role in the learning process, based on their life experiences. However, adults are not superior and cannot decide what is best for the child; this kind of decision-making is always shared with the child. This has consequences for the research regarding children, as it logically implies that such research should be done *with* children, rather than *about* them. Children's voices should be heard and fully taken into account (Sorin, 2005, p. 18-19). This is a radically different approach from the one of the infantilized child as "becoming", over whom the adult has control, the right to decide what is best for him or her, and the duty to protect him or her from the world.

In contrast to Koops and Zuckerman (2003), who focus more on the history of childhood, Lee (2001) also assesses the new view of the child as put forward by Sorin (2005). To illustrate this view, Lee refers to the theory of James and Prout (1997, cited in Lee, 2001) which was created as a reaction to the dominant framework that considered the child as inferior, dependent and not accountable (i.e., as "becoming"). James and Prout (1997, cited in Lee, 2001) consider children to be "social agents in their own right" (Lee, 2001, p. 47). Another important element of the James and Prout theory is that one should not generalize about *the* child. The diversity of ways in which children perceive their childhood is enormous and should be taken into account. Lee summarizes the vision of James and Prout as follows: "Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the society in which they live" (James & Prout, 1997, as cited in Lee, 2001).

Elsewhere, Koops (2008) addresses the modern image of the child by referring again to Lea Dasberg, who argues in her book, *Grootbrengen door Kleinhouden* (Upbringing by Keeping Little), that children and adults before 1950 were seen as living in separate worlds. As we have shown, in traditional education, children were confined to their own separate world. Dasberg (1995) argues, in accordance with Lee (2001) and Koops and Zuckerman (2003), that the modern media contributed to the unmediated contact of children with the adult world, resulting in the abolishing of two separate worlds. As children now inhabit the same world as adults, they have to learn at an early age to relate to that world; to make choices and to build filters in order to cope with the unmediated adult knowledge to which they have access. Indeed, as Koops (2003) argues in his introduction to *Beyond the Century of the Child,* we are now witnessing a renewed emancipation of children. This emancipation is part of the larger sweep of history, which is characterized by swings from infantilization to emancipation and back (Koops and Zuckerman, 2003, p. 10). Leaving the notion of the infantilized child behind, we now imagine children as having their own agency and accompanying opinions, as "beings" in their own right. This of course has implications for the way in which we approach them, as we shall see in the following section.

In practice

The current image of the child is one that regards the child as an agentic "being". Children do not live in a world that is different from that of adults. Instead, they share the same world and therefore need to develop skills to adjust and relate to that world. Adults are no longer the mediators between children and the world; their role has changed from a protecting and authoritarian role to an "accompanying" one. The changes in the image we have of children result both from changes in adulthood throughout history and from this new

direct involvement of children in the adult world. Because adulthood has become less clearly defined, it has become harder to decide what is important for children to learn in the modern world, given that there is no universally accepted end point of the process. As has been shown: it is we as adults who conceptualize the image of the child. We therefore have to ask ourselves the normative question: what do we want our children to become? Keep in mind that, because children are agentic and participative beings, we should also them this same question.

In the final section of this review, we will briefly address both the influence of this new image of the child in two "places" frequented by children and the relationships that children have with adults in those places: the relationship between children and their parents in the home; and the relationship between children and their teachers at school.

Within the home environment, the agentic child has assumed a different role in modern society. Children are increasingly consulted regarding domestic matters. Scheepmaker et al. (2005) present statistics for the Netherlands regarding the influence children (aged six to eleven years old) have on the purchase of certain items. Children's preferences carry a weight of 77 percent in determining decisions regarding the purchase of sandwich spread and 53 percent in determining decisions regarding the purchase of sweets. The figures for the content of dinner and the planning of their own birthday parties are 35 and 92 percent respectively (Scheepmaker et al., 2005, p. 78). Scheepmaker et al. (2005, p. 85) also show that children are becoming increasingly involved in family matters such as divorce. Although parents still find it very hard to talk with their offspring openly about such matters, children are more frequently approached as fully recognised conversation partners.

Regarding the school environment, Lee (2001) describes how the new image of the child as an agentic "being", together with the advent of the use of the internet in education changed the relationship between the teacher and the child. In his contribution to *Beyond the Century of the Child* (2003), Micha de Winter advocates educating children to become participative democratic citizens. In this same special issue of Social Cosmos, Sonja Winter (2010) will discuss the consequences of the use of ICT in schools, and Mark Noort (2010) will explore the new images of the teacher in the light of the image we have of our children. Lee (2001) argues that, with the use of ICT in the education of children, the role of the teacher changed. The internet provides an endless amount of information. This requires an adaptation on the part of the student. Instead of passively sitting and internalizing the knowledge that was preselected and prepared by the teacher, the young student now has to build mechanisms with which he or she can filter and classify information before internalizing that information. Again we see that the child has a more agentic and less passive, protected and receptive status in society. The role of the teacher is thus no longer to prepare the knowledge for his or her students in a ready-to-be-consumed fashion but to accompany this process of building up filters and selection of information by the children themselves. Lee makes reference to another transformation: due to the new image of the adult as a flexible and adaptable "being", the teacher is also viewed differently. The adult is now what Lee calls a "becoming-without-end" (Lee, 2001, p. 82). In schools, this implies that the teacher is no longer seen by students, and no longer sees himself or herself, as all-knowing and authoritarian. As the teacher has become a "becoming-without-end", the relationship between children and the teacher changed from one of hierarchical passing of knowledge into a form of collaboration, of learning *together*.

Conclusion

In concluding this review, we can state that childhood is a construct. Adults imagine childhood in opposition to how they imagine themselves. This image that adults have of themselves, and consequently of children, is influenced by the society they live in. In the following contribution to this journal, Sharon Cornelissen (2010) will elaborate further on the image that adults have of themselves and how this relates to the image that adults have of children.

Throughout this review, we have seen that Koops and Zuckerman (2003) stress how the image of the child has changed in accordance with major shifts in academia, of which the most important was the Enlightenment. Lee (2001) showed how the image of childhood changed along with the image of adulthood, and how such changes were strongly influenced by changes in society. Regarding both volumes that we have

considered here, the following question arises: Did society change because ideas in academia changed, or did academia change because society influences intellectual thought and is it thus closer to the truth that it is changes in society that influenced the developments in academia? Perhaps this question is comparable to the eternal difficulty of whether it was the chicken or the egg which came first. And perhaps we can then assume that the two changes in question relate to each other dialectically, as neither can exist without the other. Thus, in fact, the volumes we have reviewed in this article make the very same argument, although each uses a different approach: images of childhood are intrinsically connected to images of adulthood, and images of adulthood are connected to paradigmatic changes, which are an invariable feature of human society.

So what is the image of the child in contemporary Western society? The following articles in this journal will all elaborate further on the history of childhood, and will discuss how the image of the child influences the ways in which we–as Western adults–approach, work with, and teach our children. As their diversity demonstrates, there is not *one* image of the child in contemporary Western society. Every culture, in fact every individual, has a distinct outlook on the world and therefore on his or her self, and hence on the child. Still, in trying to identify broad trends in the characteristics of the image of childhood in contemporary Western society, we would argue that the child has moved closer to the adult, and that the adult has moved closer to the child. As we have seen, television and the internet provide the same access to information for both adults and children. As a result, they both have to develop ways to filter, assimilate and relate to that information. Furthermore, children seem to assimilate these transformations more easily than adults do. This leads to the completely new situation of the child teaching the adult. A child or teenager instructing an adult on how to deal with a computer, or how to read and send e-mails, is no longer an uncommon situation. Here we see an important element of the contemporary image of the child: adults are no longer omniscient beings. The adult as human "being" in contrast to the child as human "becoming", as explored by Nick Lee (2001), no longer exists. Rather, as Lee suggests, the adult has changed into a "becoming-without-end" and so has the child. Children are no longer passive, receiving and unaccountable "becomings". They are now agentic social "becomings-without-end" as are adults. As Koops and Zuckerman (2003) argue, we have moved beyond the infantilized child. Adults and children now learn together and the authority of the adult over the child is sometimes called into question. Hence, we do not only imagine childhood differently. We also imagine adulthood differently.

We cannot define the contemporary Western image of childhood without defining the image of adulthood. These two images are inseparably intertwined. The two images develop simultaneously, they are mutually defining, and they reinforce one other. We cannot define the adult in isolation and know who the child is, and vice versa. It is necessary to look at how adults and children interact, how they approach each other, how they educate each other and how they look at each other in order to learn about each of them. In the 21st century, childhood is no longer defined in opposition to adulthood: the two concepts are each defined in reference to one another.

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