

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

The Children's '68

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ABSTRACT

This project analysed 1968 as a watershed moment in children's culture and its related disciplines, following Marwick's (1998) now canonical definition of 1968 as the crystallisation of the cultural revolution of the 'long sixties' (c.1958-c.1974). We pursued this objective with specialists from cognate fields within childhood studies, including children's history and media, children's culture, heritage and art education, and bring them into dialogue with historians of 1968. This new collaboration brought together researchers and practitioners from Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK. By thinking about children's culture as a site for artistic and intellectual experimentation, at the centre of ideological activity across disciplinary boundaries and national borders, this project opened up new ways of understanding the 1968 liberation movements and their legacies. Culminating in a series of public events and exhibitions in 2018 for the fiftieth anniversary of 1968, it brought the children's perspective into scholarly debate and public commemorations.

1- Introduction

The global upheaval caused by the protest movements around 1968 revolutionised social structures, overturned cultural conventions, challenged political ideologies, and catalysed civil rights activism by women, gay people and ethnic minorities. Childhood historians stress the importance of this period in altering the authority structures that shaped children's lives. However, many of the fields driving these changes – children's media, childhood studies, children's heritage and art education – remain pushed to the margins within historical master narratives of 1968. These disciplines have had little chance to reflect on their own development, to draw the connections stemming from their shared heritage in 1968, or to trace the historical legacies that have shaped the assumptions underpinning them.

The overarching aim of this project was therefore to analyse 1968 as a watershed moment in children's culture and its related

disciplines, following Marwick's (1998) now canonical definition of 1968 as the crystallisation of the cultural revolution of the 'long sixties' (c.1958-c.1974). We pursued this objective through a new research collaboration with specialists from cognate fields in childhood studies, children's history and media, and practitioners involved in children's culture, heritage and art education, and historians of 1968.

2- Project details

The overarching aim of the project was to analyse 1968 as a watershed moment in children's culture and its related disciplines. This was realised in two key ways:

First we organised an international, interdisciplinary conference, entitled 1968 and the boundaries of childhood, and held at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Tours, 12th-14th October 2017.

Our conference focused on experimental ideas of children and culture for children, children's rights, participation and access to culture in the '68 years. The aim was to generate dialogue between specialists from cognate fields within childhood studies (including children's history and media, children's culture, heritage and art education), historians of '68, and contemporary practitioners involved in working with children and culture (publishers, artists, children's librarians etc). It also included the project's exhibition of non-sexist and multiracial children's books from the 1970s from France and the US (for details on this exhibition, see below). Participant reports can be found in English by Lucy Pearson [here](#), and in French by Cécile Boulaire [here](#), and Loïc Boyer [here](#).

As Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, a round table participant, and leading authority on French children's literature put it, investigating the impact of the '68 years on children's culture has long been 'an intellectual necessity', and the conference underscored that such a project also had to be international and comparative in scope. The international and cross-disciplinary approach proved stimulating, and modified our initial ideas in the following key ways:

1. Provided us with greater understanding of how radical avant-gardes in children's culture flourished in different ways, and only partially converged in terms of timing and ideas.
2. We identified that there were nevertheless important connections between these movements, and scope for comparing very different national traditions in ways that could advance understanding in these fields.
3. By juxtaposing different historical narratives of developments in children's culture, we could identify patterns, notably the important role of cultural exchange between East and West Europe, and the Trans-Atlantic axis.
4. It opened up our vision of the period considerably to include new texts, new ideas, new media, new countries and topics for consideration.

Second, a selection of the conference papers was published as part of the special issue of the scientific journal *Strenae* in May 2018. (The special issue can be found in online, open access format [here](#).) This publication was particularly important as a vehicle for bringing together scholarship by scholars within disciplines, and particularly national contexts. We therefore decided to translate key articles into French and English, to further facilitate scholarly exchange. It featured articles by network partners and others on the Scandinavian countries, Poland, Czechoslovakia, West Germany, Italy, France, the US and the UK.

The other main aim of the project was to bring children's culture to the fore of commemorations and discussions around the 50th anniversary of '68. The project's scientific communications and outputs therefore had a strong public engagement element.

The first event was an exhibition at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Tours in Sep-Oct 2017, on the theme of non-sexist and multi-racial children's books from the '70s and today. It brought together examples of militant feminist and multiracial publishers from the 70s from the United States and France, and contemporary items from the library's collection. This was a collaboration between Kim Dhillon and Andrea Francke of 'Invisible Spaces of

Parenthood’, the Children’s section of the municipal library in Tours and the research project ‘The Children’s ‘68/ Le ’68 des enfants’, and it was held at the municipal library in Tours, September-October 2017.

Visitors to the central library in Tours were greeted in the entrance hall by sets of wooden shelving containing a selection of militant, non-sexist and multiracial children’s books from the 1970s. They were invited to make themselves comfortable on some comfy chairs and plastic stools, and browse through the books. The idea was to recreate a children’s library from the ‘70s, in order to take the reader on a journey back in time to an era of protest and consciousness raising, when feminist publishing collectives held the firm belief that children’s books needed to change, in order to help change the world.

The installation also included two original artworks produced by Dhillon and Francke’s Invisible Spaces of Parenthood as part of their ongoing research:

Coleen the Question Girl (2016) by the distinguished sociologist Arlie Hochschild. The first edition was published in 1973 by the Feminist Press, and was illustrated with black and white photomontages by Gail Ashby. The installation included the 2016 edition, revisited by Hochschild in collaboration with Invisible Spaces of Parenthood, and with new, full-colour illustrations by Rhiannon Williams. Kim Dhillon wrote about this on the project blog [here](#).

We tell ourselves stories in order to live fanzine (2017), Kim Dhillon and Andrea Francke. Produced in the DIY spirit of the feminist collectives, the fanzine uses quotations from Dhillon’s interviews with some of the Lollipop Power collective’s founder-members, and extracts from their catalogues and books, to pay homage to the

energy of the ’70s feminist publishing scene.

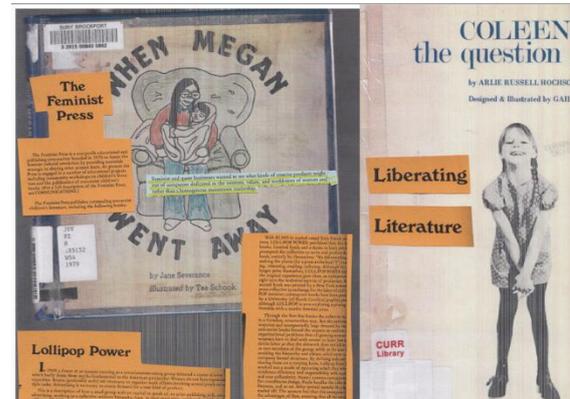


Image taken from the ‘zine specially created for the exhibition, ‘We tell ourselves stories in order to live fanzine’ (2017), by Kim Dhillon and Andrea Francke. Courtesy of the artists.



Images of the installation (Tours Sep-Oct 2017), taken by Cécile Boulaire.

Associated events included:

23 September 2017: Sophie Heywood and Cécile Boulaire from The Children’s ’68

project delivered a public talk at the library, based around the installation.

13 October 2017: The artist Andrea Francke of Invisible Spaces of Parenthood spoke about their work and the English-language books in the installation as part of [The Children's '68 conference](#).

Heywood co-curated an exhibition derived from the project, entitled [‘Le ’68 des enfants: L’album jeunesse fait sa révolution’](#) in collaboration with the Médiathèque Françoise Sagan (Paris), from 2 May 2018 to 28 July 2018. This library holds the historic collection of the first library for children in France, and the exhibition showcased their historic holdings, including the archives of one of the most important avant-garde publishers for children from the '68 years in France, François Ruy-Vidal. The exhibition received a 10,000 euro grant from Bibliocité (Paris Libraries) and included a substantial programme of outreach activities, and a series of videos placed online to ensure that the project reached a wider audience (see for example [here](#).)



Poster for the Paris exhibition, designed by project partner and InTRu member, Loïc Boyer



Image of the exhibition held at the Médiathèque Françoise Sagan, Paris May-Jul 2018, photograph by Hélène Valotteau.

This exhibition will now go on tour. The Swedish Institute for Children's Books will be showcasing a slightly smaller, adapted version of the exhibition 14 November-20 December 2018. An associated study day will be held on 28th November 2018, and speakers will include Heywood, and fellow network members Olle Widhe (University of Gothenburg, Sweden) and Helle Strandgaard Jensen (University of Århus, Denmark). The second French leg of the exhibition is scheduled to open in the Bibliothèque de l'Alcazar, Marseille, in 15th December 2018 to 28th February 2019, who will adapt it to fit material from their collection.

Associated events included Heywood's talk at the BnF on May 4th 2018 (see below), writing workshops; a writing competition; a talk by network partner Loïc Boyer entitled "Origins and destinies of the illustrators of the Quist galaxy"; a poster workshop; and a meet the author session with Claudine Desmarteau entitled "My 1970s: the life of a writer illustrator".

On 17 May 2018 we held a study day to accompany the exhibition, held at the Mediathèque Françoise Sagan (Paris), in collaboration with the National Centre for Children's Literature in France (La Joie par les livres, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris). The morning was dedicated to academic research on the period, including Heywood and Boulaire, who spoke about the project's findings. In the afternoon, publishers, artists and scholars spoke about their involvement in this moment, or how it has inspired their work.

Other key speaking engagements for the 68 commemorations included:

- Heywood spoke at the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art on 25 January 2018, as part of the French institute's annual event 'La nuit des idées' (Ideas

Night), Paris, which for 2018 was on the theme of May '68: Power to the Imagination. A video of her panel can be found [here](#).

- Heywood delivered a talk entitled 'Le '68 des enfants : Livres pour enfants et contre-culture' at the the National Centre for Children's Literature in France (La Joie par les livres, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris) on 4 May 2018.

3. Results and discussion

The children's '68 was loud, explosive, colourful, and, at times, extreme. But one of the main questions we constantly asked ourselves was: was it revolutionary? How much of a watershed moment did it truly represent in children's media?

The most audacious and provocative of the publications and cultural products we discussed point to an ebullition that was above all concentrated in avant-garde and intellectual circles, whilst the alternative schooling movement only really concerned a small number of children in the 1970s. Some were considered so extreme that they were either censored immediately (as in the case of Maspero's French edition of the *Little red schoolbook*) or were never broadcast, such as the Danish television programme *Cirkeline og flugten fra Amerika* (*Cirkeline and the escape from America*, 1970). We wondered then whether we ought to conclude that the impact of these cultural products and radical ideas was in this way attenuated by the restricted circles in which they circulated? We noted first of all that not all the media products discussed in this issue were commercial failures. The *Little red schoolbook's* sulphurous reputation boosted its sales, even in countries where it had been banned (Heywood and Strandgaard Jensen have written an article together on this topic). Feminist books enjoyed sales and

distribution that were impressive for marginal publishers. More saliently, many of the products we look at were not received at the time as revolutionary. Certainly in some of the countries discussed in this issue, there was not such a clear division between what we might term “the establishment”, and the counter-culture. In the UK and Scandinavia, for example, '68 project partners Pearson and Strandgaard Jensen's articles for the special issue demonstrated respectively how mainstream publishing houses, schools and national broadcasting services proved receptive to the experimental media of the '68 years. Boulaire's article for the special issue noted that even the French Catholic publishing house Bayard became interested in recruiting avant-garde editors and artists to work on their magazine for adolescents, *Okapi*. The respected French publisher Gallimard opened a juvenile department in 1972, and would recruit many of the artists of the avant-garde. And, as Reynolds and Kummerling-Meibauer pointed out in conference discussions, there were clear continuities with the earlier twentieth-century avant-garde. The notion of the '68 years witnessing rupture and revolution might be replaced instead by seeing this period as one of renaissance and renewal.

However, even as we sought to emphasise continuity as well as change, Heywood, in her introduction to the special issue of *Strenae*, argued for the importance of historicizing the way such ideas manifested in the '68 years. The period had been strongly marked by World War Two and the Cold War, and their impact on ideas of children and their culture. She argued that this context ensured the children's '68 was profoundly anti-authoritarian in nature, its rhetoric shaped by the language of rights and liberation, and focused on challenging the power structures within the institutions

that shape the lives of the young. As Heywood and Boulaire concluded in their jointly-authored article for the *Revue des livres pour enfants*, the books published by feminist collectives, or children's rights campaigners such as Leila Berg, opened the way for a gradual acceptance of the idea that children's media should try to reflect a diversity of perspectives; such as those of girls, but also disabled children, people from immigrant backgrounds and ethnic minorities. Such ideas may have penetrated institutions and the mainstream in some cases, as noted above, but only partially, and many of the books published in the '68 years still appear radical today. In this sense, if '68 is perceived to have been a moment of paroxysm, of revolutionary effervescence, we should also recognise that its ideas continue to resonate and be debated in children's culture today, from media products to educational policy, fifty years later.

4. Conclusion

By thinking about children's culture as a site for artistic and intellectual experimentation, at the centre of ideological activity across disciplinary boundaries and national borders, this project opened up new ways of understanding the 1968 liberation movements and their legacies. Culminating in a series of public events and exhibitions in 2018 for the fiftieth anniversary of 1968, it brought the children's perspective into scholarly debate and public commemorations. We sincerely hope that this research collaboration will produce new projects and partnerships, and also stimulate further research into the children's literature and culture of this period.

5. Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

Currently Boulaire and Heywood are exploring several avenues for grant bids that will enable them to pursue and further develop their research collaboration. The link between the two researchers has been strengthened by the appointment of Heywood to the editorial board of the scientific journal *Strenae*, of which Boulaire is the editor-in-chief. Further discussions will take place during Boulaire's projected Erasmus exchange visit to the University of Reading in Summer 2019.

6. Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

- Sophie Heywood and Cécile Boulaire (eds) 'The Children's '68/ Le '68 des enfants'. Special bilingual double issue of the online journal of children's literature and culture *Strenae*, 13 (2018) on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of May '68, in May 2018. <https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/1769>
The special issue of *Strenae* includes:
 - Sophie Heywood, 'Children's '68: Introduction' (translated into French by Cécile Boulaire and Laurent Gerbier) <https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/1998>
 - Sophie Heywood, 'Power to children's imaginations: May '68 and counter culture for children in France'. <https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/1838>
 - Cécile Boulaire, 'Okapi, un journal fantastinouï pour les jeunes dans l'esprit de 68' (translated into English by Elaine Briggs) <https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/1823>

- Cécile Boulaire and Loïc Boyer, « Quand la presse catholique fait pop ! Révolution par les bandes dans le magazine Okapi », *Neuvième Art* 2.0, septembre 2018
<http://neuviemeart.citebd.org/spip.php?article1213>
- Sophie Heywood and Cécile Boulaire, '1968 : La culture enfantine en ébullition', *Revue des livres pour enfants*, 299 (2018) pp. 174-181. Published by the National Centre for Children's Literature (CNLJ) in France, this is a wide circulation magazine aimed at librarians, teachers, and other professionals interested in children's literature.
- Sophie Heywood, 'The publishers' spring? May '68 and the 'radical revolution' in French children's books', special issue of *The German Yearbook of Children's Literature Research* on 1968. Forthcoming, December 2018.
- Sophie Heywood and Helle Strandgaard Jensen, 'Exporting the Nordic children's '68: The global publishing scandal of *The little red schoolbook*' special issue of *Barnboken*, on the Nordic children's '68. Forthcoming, Winter 2018.

7- Acknowledgements

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8- References

For a full bibliography, please refer to the introductory essay in *Strenae*
<https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/1998>