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In today's society in which risk is seen as a negative in so many circumstances, it is easy to conclude the children have much less freedom than in the past. It is also easy to idealise a past in which children were more free and risks were much fewer. Growing fears about the potential dangers for children outside the home coupled with a strong emphasis on children's vulnerability have led to a situation in which it is concluded that risk should be managed to nothing. Such a position is questioned in the media, but often portrayed as ridiculous. For example, the press recently seized on celebrity Bear Gryll's comment that children need to learn 'how to embrace and manage risk' with headlines such as 'let children play with knives'.⁽¹⁾ Risk is an important dynamic in Mathew Thomson's recent monograph, which places the child's 'lost freedom' in its historical context. It examines the child's 'landscape' from the Second World War to the 1970s, though he traverses these chronological boundaries to explore the wider significance of this period. It puts great emphasis on the connections between the changing political landscape of the post-war years and the changing meanings of childhood and being a child. It is careful to trace the history both of the landscape of the child and the idea of lost freedom, noting the recurrence of this notion throughout the period.

Lost Freedom adds greatly to a growing interest in child psychology in this period, building on recent publications such as John Stewart's *Child Guidance in Britain*.⁽²⁾ It develops a growing emphasis on the mid-20th century as a crucial moment in the development of thinking about childhood and the family as an institution, and in the increasing importance of psychological ways of thinking in popular debate. Indeed, it adds weight to the idea that the historiography is still all too limited on how psychological thinking and the structures of the welfare state had an impact on the way people behaved, their attitudes and even the 'emotional experience and personal meanings' of living at this time (p. 80). Thomson's work, though not a study of reception or a social history, provides an important new element to this literature. Firstly, it fruitfully explores the spaces between psychological thinking, social policy and public debate and opens up new avenues for research on the movement of ideas across different professional sectors and into the media. Secondly, it demonstrates the importance of using ideas about space and landscapes in tracing the history of this subject, in examining the landscape *of* the child, the landscape *for* the child, and the child *in* the landscape. Thirdly, it persuasively argues that the idea of 'lost freedom' has been significant in conceptions of the child and childhood in contemporary Britain.

In outlining the core arguments of the book in its introduction, Thomson notes that this sense of lost freedom 'became more deeply entrenched in the decades after the Second World War and moved from being an individual feeling to a subject of public anxiety' (p. 1). Furthermore, he identifies the period from the Second World War to the 1970s as one in which the child was largely segregated from the outside, often urban world, with a concurrent idealisation of the home and family life as a place of safety. This was in part due to anxieties about human nature

resulting from the war. It resulted in a new idea of loss, of wider landscapes for the child. Yet, paradoxically, he adds that 'the period from the Second World War to the 1970s was one that saw the making of our idea of lost freedom, but it is also one which we now look back to fondly in search of that lost freedom' (p. 2). And this is the stated aim of the book, to explore this tension and how it came about.

In discussion about the theoretical and methodological approach of *Lost Freedom*, Thomson differentiates between the history of the child, children, and childhood. He adds that the book is not about individual children per se, and this is important. Though the book does start to explore a number of social surveys and say a little about the experiences of children, it is pitched as a history of the figure of the child and how this changed over time. It crosses between a history of psychology and ideas; a history of social policy; and a history of both within wider public and media debates. This is achieved through research into a wide range of sources, from photography and the press, to governmental reports and social research.

The structure is largely thematic, though chronologically informed, and at first appears a little confusing, but the author dedicates a large part of the introduction to outlining this approach. His first three chapters explore the social settlement emerging from the war and the landscape of the child, focusing on photography of the child; the emergence of the welfare state; and the diffusion of psychological theory, particularly Bowlbyism. The second batch of three chapters then move on to examine responses to perceived dangers to children, examining television programming for children; the urban landscape of the child, with a particular focus on the playground and traffic; and the increasing fears about the sexual molestation of children, prevalent mostly towards the latter part of the period. A final chapter before the conclusion treats the 1970s as a separate period, examining ways in which thinking about the child shifted considerably from previous decades.

Thomson's exploration of photography of the child is particularly successful, and he demonstrates clearly the potential of this under-used medium as a historical source. These photographs, mediated as they are, nonetheless tell us much about the post-war world. One example of this is a photograph of a child creating chalk drawings on a road. As Thomson notes, 'the fact that young children would contemplate sitting in the street, facing away from possible oncoming traffic ... enables the viewer to know something about the past in a glance that would only be possible through conjecture after trawling through reams of statistics of urban traffic volume' (p. 22). Yet these photographs are all the more useful in Thomson's analysis of their symbolism in post-war politics and society. The child became a symbol of 'devastation and future hope' (p. 34), powerful in many ways. These images and their analysis are very well integrated into a wider discussion of social, political and economic developments of this era, and highlight a particularly political understanding of the child that emerged from the Second World War. This was in part due to ways of thinking that emerged from certain aspects of the war experience, most notably evacuation but also

separation of family members due to other circumstances and the experience of new childcare institutions. The period is important in this sense because 'the unique circumstances of the war provided a kind of laboratory for understanding of the landscape of the child' (p. 16). In the subsequent years, the 'shadow' of the war helped to develop a way of thinking about childhood that emphasised potential loss of freedom. Thomson emphasises a less positive narrative of the war here, suggesting that a history of the child in its own right, both during the war and within a process of reconstruction, reveals a different kind of experience and story. As Thomson notes, there was a strong post-war emphasis on home and family as paramount. This adds to a contradictory picture of the social history of the family in the 1940s and 1950s that is still being negotiated within the historiography.⁽³⁾ In the context of this discussion, particularly the history of evacuation, interweaved with the ideas and attitudes of adults are some snippets of children's accounts, which are often so hard to find. At the heart of this discussion is a crucially influential tension inherent in much thinking of this time; that the family was both the problem and the solution for society's difficulties. This tension is important to the argument of the third main chapter, that the 'post-war settlement extended into the realm of domestic childcare and emotional security' (p. 17). The chapter focuses to a large degree on the more liberal elements of Bowlbyism, offering an alternative view to that of Denise Riley, Jane Lewis and others by suggesting that Bowlby's thinking in fact included certain liberal social democratic views emphasising the importance of love and the freedom of childhood. These were not always antithetical to women's interests. This work represents a growing interest in the ideas and impact of Bowlby, recently and currently being explored by historians such as John Stewart, Michal Shapira, Angela Davis and Katherine Holden. Thomson highlights how fundamental ideas about the child were to the post-war settlement, but also starts to analyse the ways in which common sense ideas drawn from psychological theory were transported into people's homes, something we know little about. These ideas became apparent to parents through magazines, newspapers and radio broadcasts. This aspect of the book clearly warrants further research; as Thomson notes, we lack any real 'study of the broader influence, reception, and response to such thinking' (p. 83). Whilst *Lost Freedom* starts this process, it does not - and doesn't claim to - analyse the ways this affected family life on a day-to-day basis. Here, the initial study of publications like *Parents*, *Picture Post* and *The Times* needs to be followed up by other historians with more in-depth research of the particular messages given out by these media, and the ways parents (and children, potentially) used them. Three case studies follow this broader analysis of the landscape of the child, taking in turn the rise of the televisual landscape, the closing down of the urban landscape because of (fears about) traffic, and the limiting of the child's social and physical freedom because of increasing concern about flashers, molesters and paedophiles. Both television and the adventure playground bridged the gap between safety and freedom to explore risk and danger in different settings. Television situated children

in the newly celebrated safety of the home, yet allowed exploration through imagination. Sanctioned and specially designed play spaces complemented this, offering all-important fresh air and new environments outside the home, yet within a child-friendly space. These both represented the idea that children needed protection and the provision of specialised facilities and landscapes, because they grew and developed in relation to their environment. Furthermore, the danger could come from the children themselves, because of a potential 'latent streak of cruelty' from which they needed protection but from which society should also be protected (p. 107). Thomson also starts to explore the potential emotional impact of such thinking, for example through road safety messages, which could have the unintended consequences of leading children to believe that accidents were naturally their own fault. The history of thinking about sexual predators is also an important addition of this book, though as Thomson notes, more is needed about abuse within the home as well as the flasher and paedophile outside. There was a closing off of freedom for children because of the rise in fear about sexual predators, but this period also saw the development of more radical thinking that came to prominence in the 1970s. In tracing ideas that seem remarkable today, we learn about the sympathetic media treatment of 'child-lovers' for at least a short time. Also prominent were new liberal ideas about child sexuality and children's sexual rights, yet neither of these modes of thinking persisted beyond this period. The 1970s represented a moment of radicalisation in a number of ways, from a move away from the home as an ideal environment and something of a realisation that post-war thinking had 'overestimated the ability of the family' (p. 104). The final chapter of this book builds on strands teased out in other sections, and focuses on the late 1960s and 1970s alone, examining particularly environmental education, the children's liberation movement, the politics of play, and a rethinking of vandalism. In this period, a new emphasis on the child's voice and his/her perspective emerged, though whether those voices were heard was a different matter. Thomson also finds that the landscape thinking crucial to the framing of the book came to the fore in this period; the human environment now took the blame for society's problems. Furthermore, thinking about the child broke down in a number of ways; for example, social scientists increasingly recognised that the child in question was usually male. This is a crucial point, and perhaps one that could have been drawn out throughout the book as well as within the closing chapters.

In sum, this is a fascinating, well-researched and insightful contribution to the literature. Through an effective and intelligent use of concepts such as landscape and space to order the arguments of the book, Thomson brings together psychological thinking with social policy and politics, and starts to analyse the incredibly complex process through which these ideas became popularised, effectively continuing previous work, notably *Psychological Subjects*. It opens up new avenues of research, demonstrating that a combination of approaches and source types - such as psychological thought with a broad definition of post-war

politics - can effectively result in innovative histories that are of relevance to a wide audience. This is a very good example of how the tracing of ideas and ways of thinking across different sectors and groups of people can add a lot to our knowledge of modern British history. It is clear there is much more to be done here; the 1970s remains an under-researched decade; we do not know enough about parenting and family life in this period; and there are ways in which the lines of analysis in this book could be developed, such as a closer examination of the variable nature of conceptions of the child, children and childhood according to gender, class and ethnicity. The final important dynamic to these debates is their influence to today's society. As Thomson is no doubt exploring, there is much that has wider significance here beyond academic debates.

Notes

1. The Telegraph, 6 May 2014 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10808822/Bear-Grylls-let-children-play-with-knives.html>> [accessed 27 May 2014].
2. J. Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain, 1918-55: The Dangerous Age of Childhood* (London, 2013).
3. For example, amongst others, A. Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2009); A. Davis, 'A critical perspective on British social surveys and community studies and their accounts of married life c.1945-1970', *Cultural and Social History* 6, 1 (2009), 47-64; L. King, 'Hidden fathers? The significance of fatherhood in mid-twentieth-century Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 26, 1 (2012), 25-46; C. Langhamer, 'The meanings of home in postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2 (2005), 341-62.