I still remember the rush of excitement and incomprehension that I experienced the first time I encountered *Changing the Subject*, the pioneering book by Julian Henriques and colleagues (1984). That work challenged standard psychological thinking about the study of people. Developmental psychology, in particular, was thoroughly deconstructed [a new concept a quarter century ago], and its essentialism, its whiteness, its assumptions of linear development, and its universalism were exposed as discursive constructs that served to perpetuate a certain ideology of childhood, and, not coincidently, the prospects for academics who had built their careers around teaching and reifying these assumptions.

Since then, Erica Burman (2007), Carolyn Steedman (1995; Steedman et al., 1986), Couze Venn (2002), Valerie Walkerdine (1990, 2002), and others have continued to explore notions of child subjectivity that draw on the expansive theorizing of French intellectuals, of transnational postcolonial theorists, and of many strands of psychoanalysis to argue for conceptions of childhood subjectivity that are discursive, inclusive, sociopolitically situated, transitory, multiple, and that explicitly refuse essentialist and binary notions of being. Some of the excitement this debate generated took place at the Recombinantizing Early Childhood Education [RECE] conference, which met
for the first time at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1991. Most of the authors in this collection have presented papers at that conference over the years and have been influential voices in articulating critical, deconstructive, and discursive notions of childhood.  

Sadly, those of us who are interested in liberatory, situated, agentic, and imaginative notions of childhood seem to occupy a parallel universe, a twilight zone. Developmental psychology has continued on its merry way as if these new intellectual movements never existed. I teach two sections of undergraduate child development every year, and apart from a superficial nod to multiculturalism, the field is essentially as it was when I completed my doctoral degree more than twenty years ago…and not much different from what it was when I studied Mussen, Conger and Kagan’s Child Development and Personality as an undergraduate thirty-five years ago. Students are still exposed to atomized notions of children. Conceptions such as “emotion,” “cognition,” and “social development” are still presented as discrete domains that are assumed to evolve in a linear fashion with age. Despite some nods to multicultural difference, the modal child is still a middle-class white Western child. Sexual and gender difference beyond the male-female binary is not acknowledged in any of the textbooks that I have used. While psychoanalysis has made incredible contributions to our understanding of children through the work of Melanie Klein (1975), D.W. Winnicott (2002), therapists at the Tavistock Clinic in London (e.g., Alvarez, 1992; Alvarez & Reid, 1999; Rustin et al., 1997), Italian child analyst Alessandra Piontelli (1992), and French analysts such as Maud Mannoni (1987, 1999), Laurent Danon-Boileau (2001) and Catherine Mathelin (1999), the hallowed canon of child development fails to even acknowledge the existence of unconscious life in children. Although hedged a bit with qualifications about the influence of context and recognition of variations in the pace of development, child development is still assumed to be linear and progressive. While most textbooks discuss the heredity/environment, nature/nurture debate in ways that give a nod to environmental influences, nowhere is the sociopolitical situatedness of children’s lives closely examined. Nor is time devoted to exploring the ways in which textbook writing and academic work are inserted into power relations that reify fixed forms of knowledge and capitalist social relations as inevitable and as an inherent good in child development (cf. Richards, 1984). Enabling future teachers and other professionals to develop critical, deconstructive perspectives while embedded in this kind of twilight zone is not an easy task.  

Matters are further complicated in the U.S. in that leaders of the profes-
sional societies that serve as official spokespersons for childhood and early childhood professionals—the rainmakers who control accreditation and who constitute the main lobbying groups around child legislation—have also proven allergic to these critical frameworks for thinking about child needs. One of the reasons splinter groups like RECE emerged is that the gatekeepers of the profession have resisted providing a space at conferences and other professional venues for subaltern and critical voices. Gatekeeping allows the leaders of such groups, who benefit from the status quo, to suppress dissonant points of view. The increasing shift in public education in the U.S.—and perhaps globally—toward bureaucratized forms of accreditation, manualized practice, accountability, and operationally defined standards of training and care has served as a Trojan horse to shape the vernacular of teachers and other child professionals around instrumental and objectifying language, thereby shaping an ideology of childhood that is antithetical to any notion of the child as agent of his or her own destiny or master of his or her imagination, as Vivan Paley (2004) has pointedly noted.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to imagine things otherwise. The book grew out of a series of summer conversations between Michael O’Loughlin and Rich Johnson on the lanai of Rich’s house in Hawai’i. Michael has taught for a number of summers in Hawai’i with Rich, and each summer we found ourselves bemoaning the lack of critical inquiry in the field and our inability to find an effective means of standing up to the hegemonic forces that discipline the shape of the field. We were particularly concerned about the ways in which teachers’ practices are increasingly boundaried and policed, and we grieved for the stifling consequences for future generations of children. We issued an invitation to distinguished colleagues across the English-speaking world and invited those colleagues to address the issue of childhood subjectivity. Our purpose was to bring together influential thinkers who are forthright in their refusal to be seduced by simplistic binaries, who are willing to address the notion of childhood subjectivity in ways that are complex and critical, and whose arguments lead to practical advances in our thinking about child policy, child-rearing, pedagogy, curriculum, and child psychotherapy. The essays in this collection are the result of our invitation. We are especially grateful to Jonathan Silin for graciously permitting his previously published essay to be part of this collection.

The collection opens with Jonathan Silin’s deeply textured meditation on his own entry into literacy, and the ways in which “learning often involves unspoken forms of loss.” Jonathan speaks poetically about the act of learning
as an opportunity for reconnection with losses and he ties what he calls his “textual hesitation” in with the trepidation and desire associated with his exploration of his own sexual identity. He speaks of his homework struggles, those “anguished collaborations” produced with the help of one or other parent, as reflecting the deep ambivalence Jonathan experienced about speaking in his own voice—an ambivalence that is also echoed in my autobiographical essay that serves as the other bookend for the collection. Jonathan wants to reach past the official world of school curriculum for the performative and the world of desire. Can you get more antithetical to the lexicon of instrumental schooling than this radical idea? His evocative essay refuses the idea of learning as either exclusively acquisitive or exclusively cognitive. As English teachers have long understood, learning is a powerful appeal to the unconscious. Inclusive and nurturing learning requires time, conversation, and the existential component that Martin Buber (1970) referred to as an I–Thou relationship.

Jonathan’s essay calls to mind Max Van Manen’s (1986) lovely description of teaching as a phenomenological act. Jonathan’s case is all the more persuasive because of his courageous odyssey into his own inner self, particularly as personified in the troubled relationship he had with his own father.

Jenny Ritchie widens the angle of discussion with her exploration of the complexities of developing a decolonizing educational practice for Māori children in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Jenny is one of those rare Pākehā who has managed to develop a profound awareness of her whiteness and who refuses to be hindered by her Pākehāness from working frankly and evocatively with her Māori colleagues. She locates her work within both Western and Māori ways of knowing, and she understands well the importance of located, historically constituted subjectivity, and the power of official education to nurture indigenous subjectivities through the “re-normalisation’ of things Māori.” Advocating Kaupapa Māori forms of education that validate Māori ways of knowing within a predominantly Pākehā university system and an Anglophile educational bureaucracy takes courage, self-reflexivity, and an ability not to be waylaid by obstacles. Jenny has all of these in abundance. She also possesses a critical understanding of the importance for Māori children of connections to Mauri (life force) and to ancestral memories and histories. Jonathan Lear’s (2006) recent discussion points out the catastrophic consequences for subjectivity that occur when a people is deprived of the capacity to construct a narrative of hope and possibility, using myths, historical memories, religious rituals, culture, music, and language to develop possible futures. The alternative is cultural annihilation and the death of subjectivity (see O’Loughlin, 2008). Jenny’s
chapter speaks to this important issue.

In Chapter 3 I focus on the tension in childhood subjectivity between the interpellative processes that arise from entry into symbolic systems such as language and culture and the possibility that agency and imagination can be cultivated in any child by focusing on that kernel of interiority that resists symbolization. Although psychoanalysis is often dismissed for its exclusive focus on intrapsychic processes, and for a well-documented indifference to sociohistorical experience, through an exploration of spectral presences and trails from inherited intergenerational trauma, I hope to demonstrate that a psychoanalysis of the social is both possible and useful. I explore spectral presences in children’s lives in some detail, and I offer a range of psychoanalytic understandings that I have found useful in explaining how children come to structure their subjectivity around the embargoed silences and tattered shreds of parental voids and unsymbolized or disavowed parental or ancestral suffering. I raise the possibility of creating freeing spaces in schools that might permit children to experience the possibility of desire and the capacity to pose questions. Such an approach demands a recognition of the sociohistorical location of every child, and an acknowledgement of the spectral presences that lurk in the shadows of every child’s subjectivity. While such a depth pedagogy is desirable for all children, the need for this kind of teaching is even more urgent for marginalized groups, including indigenous children and children from disenfranchised ethnic and racial groups, where historical and continuing trauma has led to the kind of losses that Jonathan Lear (2006) believes lead to cultural devastation and loss of hope for the future. It is surely our responsibility to understand the dynamics of subjectivity such that we can assist the children with whom we work in constructing grounded, hopeful, and agentic futures for themselves.

Karen Lombardi explores the realm of the child’s unconscious too, asking why we, adults, fail to grasp the complexity of a child’s questions about death and its infinite terror. Drawing on the works of Klein and Winnicott, Karen explores the potential space between “Me” (the child’s internal world) and “Not-me” (the outside world), in which the child begins to construct a sense of subjective being. As Winnicott’s writings well illustrate, this in-between-space is a fraught place in which the child’s desires and questions can easily become subsumed within adult demand and expectation. Karen focuses particularly on an integration of Klein’s and Kristeva’s work, arguing that in the nexus of these two writers is to be found a vision of the inauguration of subjectivity “both at the external boundary of self and other, and at the internal border of
the boundless expansion of identity and the terrifying and murderous swallowing up of identity.” Drawing on Klein’s notion of “epistemophilic instinct,” Karen, too, is concerned with the child’s capacity for psychic curiosity and the conditions that sustain or shut down subjective possibilities in the child. Karen writes this difficult material with ease, drawing both on her own childhood experience and on a beautiful reading of the allegorical qualities of *Alice in Wonderland*. It would seem that Lewis Carroll’s classic should be mandatory reading for all adults!

Sailau Suaalii’s study of Samoan youth offender subjectivity in Aotearoa/New Zealand will set your teeth on edge, and it provides a welcome antidote to any essentialist assumptions about youth subjectivity. Children in the Auckland ghettos that house poor Pacific-origin peoples are caught in what Sailau calls a tug of war between competing social scripts including the cultural and religious beliefs of their cultures of origins and, of course, as they grow older, the powerful lure of fitting in with local social and cultural norms. Weyesouth, one of her interview subjects, chillingly expressed the pull of social scripts this way: “It’s not their own choice but it helps because that’s just like giving them that background and then once they hit that age when that background comes in, they take it into their own hands. That’s what I’ve found. Um, the only reason, why, um—I’m not blaming my Dad—but that’s where it started from, coz (sic) every time he would smash us, then that was like giving us a good sign, when you have kids smash your kids too.” Through her interviews, juxtaposed with a poignant exploration of her own positionality as a Samoan woman, Sailau explores the tremendous restorative potential that might come from restoring what I call elsewhere missing *social links* (O’Loughlin, 2009) with the lore and spiritual beliefs of their cultural pasts, and she balances this against the awful reality that the social scripts available to Samoan youth offenders stigmatize and misrepresent them in ways that all too easily straitjacket them into numbingly repetitive reenactments of lives expected to be pointless and empty. While theoretically there are multiple subject positions available to Samoan youth offenders, what if, in the end, for these unlucky children, it all comes down to where you have been raised, and the haunting lacunae that have shaped the lives of the people who raise you and with whom you associate? Children deserve better, and Sailau’s chapter poses urgent questions about how we might create restorative communities in which children might flourish and hope.

Growing up Roman Catholic in the Ireland of the 1950s and 1960s, I grew accustomed to dirtiness. Our bodies were dirty, particularly the genital area.
Good jokes were dirty. Books with even the most oblique sexual content were dirty. Worst of all, we were warned against invasions of dirty thoughts! Reading Rich Johnson’s chapter brought these thoughts back to me. Rich opens his chapter with the dirty child, and he explores the extent to which puritanical norms have invaded early childhood education and rendered the dirty child untouchable. Sure, as Rich notes, “Shit happens,” but why do we call this biological event an “accident?” Using visual culture theory Rich then proceeds to analyze the creeping subjugation of our bodies—both child and adult—through an analysis of visual representations of caregiving. Most poignantly, Rich includes pictures of himself in his caregiving capacity with his own children and with friends’ children and explores how the norms of acceptability in caregiving have shifted such that women caregivers will not touch children [Keep your hands off that dirty child!] and men caregivers dare not touch children [Keep your dirty hands off that child!]. Using literature on the subjugation of the body, Rich concludes his paper with an analysis of the dispossession and sanitization of the male body in work with children and laments the loss both to his own subjectivity as a caring being and to the children with whom men like him might work: “My caregiver body which so willingly…and graciously provided warm, consoling, and deliberate caring touch(es) and compassion to those in my charge now appears to be a body with “unruly subjectivity.” An overriding theme in this whole collection is the calamitous consequences for the question-child (cf. Britzman, 2007) such regulatory regimes may have, a point raised many years ago by Jacques Donzelot (1997).

Glenda MacNaughton, Karina Davis, and Kylie Smith focus their attention on young Australian children’s understandings of whiteness as racial performance. Influenced by Foucault’s notions of power and discourse (e.g., MacNaughton, 2005) these authors offer a sophisticated reading of young children’s negotiation of and performance of racial discourses. They are interested both in how children are discursively shaped by prevailing societal discourses and in how children appropriate and perform these discourses. Sadly, as others have noted (e.g., Seshadri-Crooks, 2000) dominant culture norms are so powerfully embedded in children’s desires that “desiring whiteness” may be the prominent trope in racial identity for all children. A significant innovation in the work that Glenda and her colleagues report is the use of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of rhizoanalysis to rupture received views and make way for multiple possible readings. They do this first by turning the ruptured gaze on themselves, critiquing their own privileged positions in white Australia, and then they use other decal texts to interrogate the positionalities that appear to
be present in the children’s response to the multiracial persona dolls employed in their field work. The “lines of flight” produced by reading the children’s positionings through the points of view of the decal texts open up rich interpretive possibilities, and the chapter intentionally leaves the reader unsettled, appropriately with a great deal more questions than answers. The authors conclude with a plea for “reading otherwise” and with an important reminder that “rhizomatic analysis is political analysis that must always be performed in the interests of challenging privilege in how identity is performed and theorized.” What a refreshing change from the received view of developmental psychology!

In a chapter that rewards a close reading, Derek Bunyard explores the very foundation of Western subjectivity, addressing particularly a fetishism for “professional objectivity” and a practice of education as “controlled child development.” Derek illustrates how, as the Industrial Revolution developed, the only interest was in disciplining the public bodies of the workers. As he notes, drawing on Michel de Certeau, “friendship and the rest of life could slip through such a gap, and as long as these ‘useless’ outcomes did not hinder production they were tolerated.” As we have moved toward a post-industrial society in the West, Derek argues that deskilling, abjection, and a commodification of subjectivity continue to increase. While sympathetic with Donna Haraway’s concern about the dissolution of the subject, Derek is less optimistic than she that a capacity for “free choice” can be preserved, and he points particularly to the increasing atomization of the experience of children in schools—the latest version of the Gradgrind way immortalized by Dickens in *Hard Times*. According to capitalist logic a new enslavement of the mind is necessary for the neophyte proletariat of the new post-industrial era—except perhaps in China, where the old Gradgrind ways still work for the worker bees of the world’s labor colony! Derek’s paper is a wake-up call for educators to pay attention to those residues of subjectivity that resist colonization by prevailing discursive practices so that we may enable children to preserve a space for “self-consciousness,” a space in which, following Christian Metz, he argues that a child can be enabled to engage in “a dialectic between narrativising a life and living it.” We must rescue the question child from the jaws of conventional schooling!

Paula Salvio and Gail Boldt take up the argument where Derek leaves off. They present a cautionary tale of the path to perdition as they explain how, in the hands of academic entrepreneur Lucy Calkins, writing workshop has been transformed from a benign and perhaps progressive pedagogy, into a powerful
instrument of the kind of thought control that Derek argued leads to the anni-
hilation of the questioning subject. In their chapter, Paula and Gail revisit the
work of language theorist James Britton and describe the symbiosis between his
ideas and those of psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, a symbiosis that was great-
ly facilitated when Clare Britton, James’s sister, became Winnicott’s second wife.
Echoing earlier discussions by Karen Lombardi and Jonathan Silin, Paula and
Gail explore the importance of potential space in creating an opening for the
child’s inquisitiveness and in providing a place where the child can experience
the pleasures of his or her desires. They review Britton’s notion of the impor-
tance of creating a “third space” for play and fantasy in children’s lives so that
children can do the vital work of constructing subjectivities that allow for play
between internal fantasies and the outside world. Later, using Britton’s concept
of “spectator writing,” Paula and Gail explore how this kind of writing “frees
the writer from the demand to act and to make immediate decisions. The
spectator writer is under no obligation to adjust his uses of writing to the con-
victions of exterior reality.” Quoting Keats, Britton suggests that in such writ-
ning we must “be capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without
any irritable reaching after facts and reasons.” This is undoubtedly the antithes-
sis of the pedagogy of control with which we are all too familiar. Paula and Gail’s
chapter offers provocative ideas for articulating a pedagogy that appeals to the
unconscious and that invites the question child to enter the room.

In the final chapter I decided to resist the temptation to write a theoreti-
cal discourse about childhood subjectivity. Instead, drawing on my own work
in analysis, I illustrate the complexity at the heart of subject formation by
exploring my own coming to be as a knower, a writer, and an emotional being.
If I am successful, my chapter will demonstrate the preposterousness of
dichotomies such as intrapsychic/external, emotion/cognition, and even pre-
sent/past. I believe that it is valuable to conceptualize the growth of subjectiv-
ity more dynamically in terms of “desire” and “curiosity.” I explore the crisis in
subjectivity that I experienced due to repeated misrecognitions of my desires
and curiosity, and I am left, much as Jonathan Silin is, reaching back with
insight and wishing for a more expansive childhood. It is not that I did not have
questions. I did, but, unlike dear, brave, persistent Ludo in Berliner’s (1997)
movie Ma Vie en Rose, my questions remained for too long unspeakable. In my
chapter, too, I raise the specter of intergenerational trauma, and suggest that
in understanding our subjectivities we need to do memorial work into the
family secrets (cf, Rashkin, 1992) that inherently shape our subjectivities.
“Without memorial exercises to confront such losses,” I ask, referring to the
importance of the Irish Famine of the 1840s in my own history, “will these phantoms continue to tumble through time, haunting future generations?” Drawing on Lacanian theory, I conclude my essay with a plea for a questioning pedagogy, one in which the teacher relinquishes a posture of omniscience and “allows the student’s lack to emerge in the form of questions.”

The book concludes with a brief Afterword by Rich Johnson. It is our hope that this work will lead to a reconsideration of childhood and a rethinking of how we might enhance each child’s journey toward becoming. 3

Notes
1. For a more extensive discussion of these ideas, see Michael O’Loughlin, “The Language We Use in Speaking about Children,” in Michael O’Loughlin, The Subject of Childhood.
2. Readers interested in my attempts to do this are welcome to write to me at oloughli@adelphi.edu for a copy of my syllabi for Child Development and for an intensive course entitled The Emotional Lives of Children and the Possibility of Classroom as Community.
3. I would like to thank Amir Azam Ali, Marta Blyth, Dylan Hoffman, Sara Lettiere, and Erin O’Donohue, graduate assistants from Adelphi University’s Derner Institute, for editorial assistance in the preparation of these essays for publication. Special thanks to Deborah Britzman of York University, Toronto for early support of this book, and to Mimi Bloch for writing the Foreword.

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