

CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND GAMES AND SONGS IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE

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INTRODUCTION: a three legged project

This project, part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's *Beyond Text* programme, has three objectives. The first is to conserve, annotate, catalogue and digitise the sound archive of Iona and Peter Opie at the British Library. The archive contains audio recordings of songs and games, along with a wealth of contextual information elicited by the Opies in their conversations with children. Some of this material is published, particularly in *The Singing Game* (Opie & Opie, 1985); but a good deal of it has remained unpublished, and the project will make this available for the first time. This section of the project will also develop a website displaying extracts from the archive, co-curated by children in our partner primary schools. This will incorporate audio material, dynamic graphic display, and video material from the second section of the project – games and songs recorded in our partner primary schools' playgrounds. The audiences for this website will be various: children, of course; also educators, parents, researchers, and anyone interested in children's play, past and present.

The second objective of the project is to conduct an ethnographic study of games and songs in two primary school playgrounds, one in London (Christopher Hatton primary school), and one in Sheffield (Monteney Primary School). The point of this is to explore the current state of play (literally!): how the traditional genres observed by the Opies are being played by children now; what other genres of play are evident in the playground; and how these forms of play evolve, are transmitted, reproduced, transformed, re-created, replaced by novel forms. One particular focus of our work is the relation between children's traditional play cultures and their media cultures. This connection has long been recognised – indeed, the Opies comment on how contemporary media references and other resources are incorporated into the fabric of children's playground lore. It is clear in our study that this continues to happen – but what new genres, textual appropriations, structural borrowings are in evidence? Is there any evidence of the play cultures of new media, concentrated round mobile play consoles, mobile phones, virtual worlds, the participatory internet? Are media references more ephemeral than folkloric forms, as the Opies suggested; or do they endure, fusing with folkloric elements of children's games? And how distinct are these elements in any case?

The data from this section of the project, fully catalogued and annotated, will also be archived at the British Library for the benefit of future researchers. Meanwhile,

panels of children from the schools will be involved in the development of the BL website as co-curators, advising on the design of the website and the choice of appropriate context, and supplying their own descriptive content.

The third objective of the project is an adaptation of a selection of games for physical computer game interfaces such as the Nintendo Wii. This is very much an experimental effort: to see how physical games in the playground would be different from (or similar to) adaptations for a kinaesthetic game console. A pertinent comparison might be the way that Wii tennis resembles some aspects of 'real' tennis (the rules and structures, for example), but differs in other ways (the physical movements and effort; and the cultural context). This section of the project can be seen as a cultural and technological intervention, to provoke a consideration of the relationship between children's traditional play and their media-related play. It recognises that some aspects of children's traditional cultures have been adapted into media formats for many years (fairytales into films and animations, board games into computer games, performance of popular music into physical interfaces for dancing and singing). It aims to set up a new kind of adaptation to study its cultural outcomes. How will children react to their games as computer games? Will they experience different possibilities (and constraints)? Will the association with the specific media cultures of computer gaming relocate them culturally, investing them with different attractions, interests, themes, associations? Will the 'indoor' nature of this kind of play change the play? Will they do it with different playmates or friends? Will the gendered patterns of playground games shift in any way in this different context?

The three sections of the project will be presented in this seminar by the project teams: Jonnie Robinson and Laura Jopson, from the British Library, will present on the ongoing work on the Opie sound archive; Jackie Marsh and Rebekah Willett will present an overview of the ethnographic studies; Julia Bishop and Chris Richards will present focused case studies selected from the ethnographic fieldwork; and Grethe Mitchell and Jenn Sheridan will present an account of the Wii adaptation work so far.

It remains to be said that the project also aims to produce a short documentary film using footage filmed in the various project sites, and produced and edited by Grethe Mitchell. We hope to show in this seminar a brief preview of material gathered so far.

Themes and Questions: folklore studies, media studies and the Circuit of Culture

Our research is located between and across several different disciplines. The varied expertise of our team includes musicology, socio-linguistics, the sociology of childhood, social semiotics, game theory, and computer science. The challenge, as always in interdisciplinary projects, is for the disciplines to speak to each other, rather than remain separate. More broadly, however, the project brings together approaches to children's play from the traditions of folklore studies on the one hand, and media studies on the other. The obvious differences in these approaches are

that the former is predominantly concerned with the texts and practices of orally-transmitted lore and their place in the cultures of childhood, while the latter is largely interested in the engagement of children with the media texts and forms of contemporary popular culture.

However, rather more interesting for our project is the potential complementarity of these approaches, and the common themes they address. The work of collectors such as the Opies demonstrates a considerable overlap between traditional and media-related cultures of childhood; and this overlap has been frequently addressed since by scholars of children's traditional games and play (eg Gaunt, 2006; Marsh, 2008; Bishop and Curtis, 2001). Furthermore, the concepts of folklore and media culture are both concerned with forms of popular culture, and with the central question of children's agency in the construction of their own cultures and identities. Jackie Marsh and Rebekah Willett's paper in this seminar explores further these common areas, looking at how the form, function and transmission of playground culture includes both traditional genres and media-related play (Marsh *et al*, 2010).

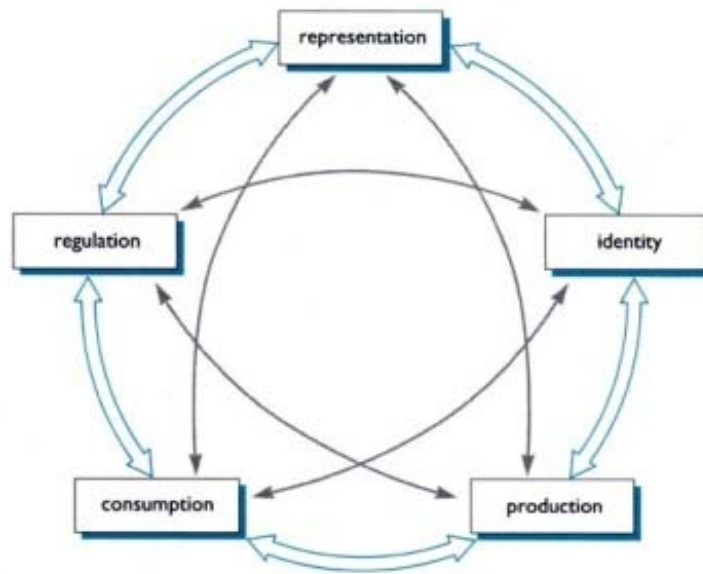
Perhaps most importantly, folklore studies and media studies are both deeply interested in play, and indeed share key references: the work of Brian Sutton-Smith, for example, is prominent both in studies of folkloric play and in computer game studies. Julia Bishop and Mavis Curtis maintain some critical differences between folklore studies and sociological studies of childhood play, in particular the emphasis on the function of traditional play as expressive and performative, as distinct from the sociological interest in development (Bishop and Curtis, 2001, 6-8). But their account of changing conceptions of childlore also produces themes which are shared by scholars of children's media cultures: the relationship between play and identity, between text and performance, and between the texts of play and the social and cultural contexts in which they are produced. These are all themes we are exploring across the sections of our project.

In addition, we can list other key themes shared by the two fields of study, all relevant to our project: the creative use of symbolic resources; the use of the body in physical play; the making of meaning through different systems of signification; and the relation between global and local cultures.

So, while it is easy enough to find differences between the theoretical frameworks, intellectual preoccupations and methodological approaches of these two broad fields of study, the extensive common ground has seemed to us a much better place to start.

Our main question is to do with the relation between children's playground games and their media cultures. This nexus of play and game can be seen in one sense from the familiar sociological viewpoint of structure and agency, as in recent accounts from the new sociology of childhood (eg Qvortrup, 2009; James, 2009), and research into children's media cultures (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, xxx). Are games, rhymes and songs entities which convey conservative structures of behaviour, identity, social expectation and ritual? Or are they resources for the

exercise of children's agency, through processes of transformation, creativity, subversion and innovation? A rather different way to view children's play cultures, however, is the model developed in the field of Cultural Studies of the 'circuit of culture'. The best-known version of this, perhaps, is the one proposed by Du Gay (1997), reproduced in Figure 1.



from Paul Du Gay, *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production* (London: The Open University), 1997

Figure 1: the Circuit of Culture

This model is employed by Willett and Robinson to consider accounts of the relation between children's play and the digital cultures of new media (2008). They emphasise the value of the model for explaining how meaning is made through articulations between the nodes in specific moments and sites of cultural practice.

The point of the Circuit of Culture is that it replaces the problematic binarism of structure and agency with a more complex, nuanced, dynamic model. Rather than an oppositional model which locates one group of researchers as hopeless determinists and another as inveterate voluntarists (to paraphrase Qvortrup, 2009), we see a network of intersecting influences. Our identity might be partly shaped by the media we consume or the games we play; but it could equally well work the other way round. At the same time, this relationship is impinged on by the meanings of texts, in media or game; while in turn these may be shaped by forces of regulation, or by our interpretative or creative interests. Admittedly, a problem of the model is that, while we gain nuance and complexity, we have to put up with ambiguity. But these kinds of ambiguity cannot be resolved at a general theoretical level, only at a specific, empirical level. We may decide that one child's identity is powerfully influenced by

the forms of play or media his peers have introduced him to; while another seems to have a considerable degree of control over her choices of play or media made in the playground, and the ways in which her playmates engage with these. At the same time, this local, empirical level contains much more than the apparently bounded textual forms which are inevitably isolated in the processes of collection and archiving. Whatever might be at stake in the play and agency of children's culture, it will appear in the ways in which these textual forms are situated in specific social contexts, in the physical and social geographies of the playground, in the investment with meaning of bricks and tarmac, climbing frames and landscaping, hula hoops and skipping ropes. And in any case, we find ourselves repeatedly echoing Sutton-Smith's emphasis on the inescapable ambiguity of play.

For our project, the articulation of *consumption* and *production* is particularly important. Children can be seen in one sense as media consumers, using game consoles, enjoying musical films, fascinated by media narratives of martial arts (Richards, 2010), aware of the forbidden fruit of games like *Call of Duty* (already appearing in our research interviews with primary school children). They engage energetically in long-running media franchises like *Harry Potter*, *Dr Who*, *Pokémon*. They are subject to the economic forces involved: they buy at one remove through 'pester-power'; they live in households that may be 'media-rich' or not; they are surrounded by powerful, well-researched media marketing campaigns.

At the same time, however, it is already commonplace in the age of new media to conceive of the reader, player, viewer, user as a kind of producer, both in the sense of 'active audiences' (producing their own meanings) and in the sense of remixer, poacher, mash-up artist, appropriating elements of other media texts to produce their own, circulating them through the new platforms of dissemination available in the participatory internet. From this perspective, children, like other media consumers, are now routinely perceived as 'producers' (Bruns, 2006). Rather differently, though, in the context of children's playground practices, it is clear that performative appropriations of media tropes are constantly enacted as dramatic play: and Chris Richards' paper in this seminar will explore how the cultural resources of superhero and martial arts narratives are used in just this way by one boy (Richards, 2010).

In relation to children's oral culture, however, the notion of the child as cultural producer is of course very old. Children 'produce their own cultures' (Corsaro, 2009); but they also produce the textual corpus of traditional games, rhymes, songs, jokes, threats and curses, and all the other genres noted by the Opies in *Lore and Language* (1959). This corpus, and the processes of transmission which sustain it, have sometimes been seen (eg Marsh, 2008) as examples of the oral formulaic thesis developed by Parry (1930) in relation to the Homeric stories and applied later to Yugoslavian oral epics (Lord, 1960). The scholars of these traditions demonstrated how songs and stories were composed of formulaic elements which made it possible for the performer both remember such elements through mnemonic devices, repetition and redundancy, and to re-compose them in the act of telling or singing, to some extent: omitting, re-combining, replacing phrases or even whole

sequences with others, contributing new elements, customising the performance to local interests and needs.

Some of the same questions apply to this form of cultural production as to the forms produced within the cultures of new media, interestingly. In effect, these are structure-agency questions which we can follow through the articulations of the circuit of culture. How constrained are these producers by the nature of the resources they produce? Are they able, as Buckingham paraphrases from Marx (2009), to make their own texts but not under conditions, or with resources, of their own choosing? How extensive is the actual production of novel or innovative forms? Are they able to produce whole new texts, games, rituals, scripts, performances? Or do they replicate inherited repertoires, swapping out and in the occasional element, or having control over certain defined areas, like players of computer games who may determine the outcome of a limited combat sequence, but are generally constrained to follow the trajectory of a fixed narrative?

The oral poet, after all, might introduce some new epithets, or omit the occasional character or sequence, or change the order of events to suit the temper of the audience; but Troy must still fall, and Odysseus return to Ithaca. However, children's rhymes are, as we know, much less subject to the control of ur-narratives of this kind, much more susceptible to radical revision, re-combination, irreverent hybridisations of genres, substitution of the pleasure of pure sound for the conventional semantics of verse. Some examples of this revision and diversity (noted by Curtis in her documentation of very varied repertoires in different playgrounds: 2001) are appearing in our exploration of the Opie sound archive: variations of melody for 'Under the Bram Bushes', for example, recorded but not transcribed in *The Singing Game*, as Laura Jopson will outline in her paper.

If theories of orality have been employed to consider children's traditional play cultures and texts, they have also been used in approaches to new media for some time now. Particularly influential has been Walter Ong's idea of *secondary orality*: that the fluidity of new media recaptures something of the provisionality, responsiveness, performativity of oral cultures – the characteristics that Ong termed the psychodynamics of oral narrative (Ong, 1982). So, in our project, the playground performances of Abba songs, (found both in the Opie archive and in our 21st century playgrounds), seem to be evidence of texts 'caught' from media sources as well as from playground transmission. Rather differently, the play of a small boy with a piece of wood, which alternates between gun and guitar (recorded on one of our playgrounds last year) can be seen as an improvisatory performance whose cultural resonances might be as old as *Beowulf*, and whose contemporary sources might be as ambiguous as *Guitar Hero* or *Medal of Honour*. If this yoking together of ancient epics and computer games seems far-fetched, the connection has been made in studies of game narratives. Murray points out the similarities between the protagonists of oral narrative which Ong calls 'heavy heroes' (Murray, 1998); while Burn compares the formulaic nature of oral narrative and programmed game narrative, and the implications for media education (Burn, 2007).

This example of the boy with the gun-guitar makes another point clear: that the performative practices of the playground are made up as much of music, physical movement, gestural repertoires, and the imaginative use of found physical objects and environments as they are of language. Orality (and indeed the articulation between consumption and production in general) is *multimodal* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2000), and it is true that Ong has been criticised for logocentrism in his account of orality. Needless to say, scholars of playground culture have long been aware of this: Julia Bishop and Mavis Curtis's book includes studies of the cultural geography of the playground (Armitage, 2001); the patterns of clapping repertoires and of musical variation (Arleo, 2001); and the physical structures of hopscotch (Lichman, 2001). In our own project, the complex intersection of gesture, action, movement, music, language and playground context is amply demonstrated by the version of Eeny-Meeny Dessamini which Julia Bishop will discuss in her paper (Bishop, 2010). A methodological challenge for our project, then, is to analyse the games we find across all the modes of signification they employ.

For our project, then, the articulation between production and consumption needs to consider a complex network of elements: commercial media production, dramatic play, folkloric transmission, and the cultural and semiotic resources available to children from these different sources.

Other articulations also clearly help us think about the dynamic processes emerging in our project data, though there is only room to briefly sketch a few of these here.

The relation between *identity* and production, for example, is clearly salient here. While we may observe and analyse the forms and structures of children's play *ad infinitum*, the question of why they play – what social and cultural purpose does their play enact – is likely to involve the question of identity, whether we conceive of this in terms of social roles (rehearsed and explored through role-play and fantasy play); or structures of friendship and kinship, extended and cemented in play; or as the reflexive project of the self, begun in childhood (Giddens, 1991). Similarly, ethnic identity shapes play and is shaped by it, as we are seeing in our playground research, and as has been found in earlier research on singing games (Marsh, 2001; Gaunt, 2006).

Representation also articulates with *identity*, a relation which might prompt us to ask how playground games represent the preoccupations of childhood, in their playful confrontations, scatological imagery, mimesis of adult social roles, enactment of fantasy narratives. It might also prompt us to explore what kind of media representations become appropriated by children: whether these be representations of romantic love in *Mamma Mia*; or of glamour in the figure of Beyoncé; or of social worlds in Club Penguin (Marsh, in press). It will certainly also prompt us to consider self-representation. How are the social selves of childhood presented, in Goffman's terms; how does the child employ dramatic means to explore the repertoires of self-representation? As Sartre says, in Goffman's quotation, "the game is a kind of marking out and investigation. The child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it". (Goffman, 1959).

The articulation of *regulation* and *production* might impel us to inspect the policing of the playground (both by children and adults), and the influence of school codes of behaviour, linguistic prohibitions, pro-social injunctions to collaborative play; and, in response, children's inventive forms of evasion, subversion, circumscription. It is already clear that these regimes, and adult conceptions of what Sutton-Smith called the 'progressive' rhetoric of play, shape what is possible on the playground significantly (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Conversely, some of the material in the Opie archive recorded beyond the school playground, such as some of the recordings from a council estate in Chelsea, makes it clear that transgressive play-texts emerge more readily in this environment, as Laura's presentation will show (Jopson, 2010). Nevertheless, our data is also showing the opposite trajectory: that productive, imaginative play can emerge from classroom experiences, as we found was the case with three girls practising cheerleader routines in the playground. The watchword here seems to be ambiguity, again echoing Sutton-Smith.

Beyond the playground and the active repertoires in performance at any given time, we are also considering the stores of material lying dormant in children's memories, the archaeology of play over time, its seasonal fluctuations, apparent in our playground studies, and noted in the Opie sound archive. Furthermore, how the play of the playground relates to their wider cultures: to the film and television they watch, the game consoles they play with, the musical instruments they might be learning, the songs they sing, the domestic rituals of their home, the emblems of superheroes and football teams on their T-shirts and lunchboxes. In short, the 'relation between elements in a whole way of life', in Raymond Williams' well-known formulation of lived culture, perhaps the founding dictum of British Cultural Studies (Williams, 1961). To account for all these elements is beyond the scope even of a substantial research project like this: but it can achieve some of this range, perhaps, and at least point the way to the need for a rich account of the cultural contexts of children's play.

The Circuit and the sections of our project

The British Library Website

If the Circuit of Culture, in an amended form, suggests ways of thinking about the ethnographic studies in our project, it also has implications for the other sections. In one sense, though, the website raises an issue not clearly represented in the model of the circuit of culture: the issue of the cultural histories of childhood and play. To juxtapose the Opie sound archive with recordings from today's playgrounds will raise some profound questions about change and continuity: which texts and practices of play remain constant; which change; what similar or different social and cultural functions do they perform; how is the relationship with the media differently-configured (and what specific differences do 'new' media make); how are the contexts of play different, in home, street and playground? The circuit of culture emphasizes the contemporary moment of cultural relations, rather than the long historical take: we will need, as Marsh and Willett argue in their paper for this conference (Marsh and Willett, 2010), to look both at the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of children's play.

To archive children's games and songs, and re-present them on the website of a cultural institution such as the British Library, is a process obviously motivated by a desire to conserve, to open up a valuable cultural resource to the public, to invest with value aspects of children's culture which routinely go unrecognised and undervalued. At the same time, such an effort re-locates this culture in respect of the circuit. *Production* now shifts to an emphasis on the adult production of archival catalogues and web design. *Representation* becomes the cultural meanings selected by an institution in an effort to represent childhood, rather than children's representations of their own preoccupations (although this is also true of our ethnographic research, of course). *Regulation* becomes institutional selection. *Consumption* becomes the engagement of a set of public audiences with the website: a form of media consumption, albeit framed by cultural policy rather than economic exchange.

The emphasis is, however, on the relation between *production* and *representation*. The website will represent aspects of children's play cultures, necessarily abstracted from their moment in time and space; and will produce some kind of generalised idea of childhood in which identity and agency are central themes. With the aim of connecting this theme of agency in participation by children, children's advisory panels, representing all ages in the two primary schools in the project, will 'co-curate' the website.

What does this mean? From a practical point of view, they will advise on the site design, perhaps through concept drawings as well as suggestions for structure; they will be involved in the selection of material from their own schools; they will produce commentaries on the material. In one sense, this is what any guest curator would do, though inevitably their choices will be constrained to some degree by adult interventions. In another sense, however, the collection of recorded fragments of children's lives is, in the age of new media, something they routinely conduct: photos on Flickr, their own sites on Facebook or Bebo, their avatars in Habbo Hotel or Club Penguin; their videos on Youtube. Indeed, John Potter suggests the metaphor of curation for these new assemblages of selfhood, describing the digital videos of the primary school children in his research as:

a new kind of literacy practice which can be metaphorically characterised as curating. The resources from which they made meaning were collected, catalogued and arranged for exhibition. These included practices which were previously unseen, acts of memory and habitualised behaviour which were not previously recorded in this way, but which were part of their everyday, lived experience. (Potter, 2009)

We do not yet know how the children in our project will think about their curating work at the British Library. They have some sense of the institution from a visit arranged earlier in the project; and the London children have visited it before. What will it mean for them to be part of a process which takes their hitherto unseen, private, intensely local forms of play and exhibit them to the world? We know that many of these forms of play are already a part of the global cultures of childhood, both in the sense of

globalised media franchises on which they draw and in the folkloric sense of oral transmission which, as the Opies and many other have recorded, crosses boundaries of space as well as time. We also know that children are sometimes unaware of this global reach, so will be interested to see how they feel about a global display of their play. Similarly, many other questions will arise, not least from a consideration of how the nodes of the cultural circuit relate to their act of curation.

The Wii Adaptation

Finally, how will the 'translation' of their playground games for physical game platforms such as the Wii relate to the circuit of culture? Like the website, this is not just another way to display children's games, but a form of cultural intervention, in which the children's panels will again be involved, ideally as participant designers, though we are well aware of the difficulties of achieving this which earlier projects have experienced.

In any case, two questions arise immediately in relation to the cultural circuit. Firstly, the articulation between consumption and production. If playground culture incorporates patterns of media consumption and appropriation, and patterns of traditional oral transmission, how will these be changed by the introduction of games on the Wii, or similar platforms? In principle, this will offer a different way for games to be passed on and learnt from child to child. The elements of the games will be anatomised, perhaps: a clapping routine might be generic, while the words and tunes may be more specific (though this also happens in the process of oral transmission, of course – the three-way clap, and indeed many of the tunes, may be familiar to a child learning a game in which only the words are actually 'new'). In principle, again, a Wii version might alter the temporal and spatial distribution of a game: if it can be given, posted, e-mailed even as a file to other children, the process of transmission may be altered – though whether the transmission if a file by internet could beat the impressive speed of global oral transmission noted by the Opies in, for instance, the case of parodies of the theme song of Davy Crockett, remains to be seen!

Conventional models of audience reception, consumption, interpretation break down in the case of computer games, as has often been noted in game studies. Players might consume, view, interpret, follow narratives – but most importantly, they play, and a good deal of academic effort has gone into the analysis and theory of what exactly this kind of interaction with media texts and technologies might mean (eg Carr *et al*, 2006). Play in the case of computer games has been defined as rule-governed, dependent on win-lose states, on particular kinds of player commitment and motivation, on a balance of challenge and reward (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Most of these apply pretty well to traditional playground games such as clapping and skipping games too; and it may be that a Wii version will not change these elements, though it might change the way they are experienced sensorily or affectively – and of course culturally.

There is also the question of what kind of play an adaptation such as this might be best suited to produce. The spectrum of play genres our project has observed in the

playground varies enormously, ranging, for instance, from the loose, open-ended forms of play Roger Caillois termed *paidea* to the more structured, rule-governed play he called *ludus* (2001). The emphasis in the collections of traditional orally-transmitted play has often been on tightly-structured forms, because these represent a substantive content of patterned language (Widdowson, 2001), music (Marsh, 2001; 2008) or movement (Arleo, 2001) that can be recognisably transmitted. The Wii interface is best suited, perhaps, to deal with clearly-structured forms at the *ludus* end of the spectrum; so we have begun with well-known clapping games such as 'I Went to a Chinese Restaurant', as Grethe Mitchell and Jenn Sheridan's presentation will show. This has been observed in both our partner schools (with interesting variations, of course); and is widely-collected, not least by the Opies themselves. However, the adaptation to programmed computer sequences disintegrates the modes of which the game is composed. The clapping routine becomes separated from the words and music, and is differently dealt with by the adaptation. Nevertheless, this is by no means a mechanical disintegration that can be opposed to some kind of organic unity in the physical playground game. The different modes of music, words, clapping and other gestures are all subject to independent variation by the children as they adopt, transform and recreate the games. So how we might capture and represent these elements independently in the adaptation for a Wii-type platform? Will children be able to choose 'my words' but someone else's clapping routine; or vice versa? How will these choices to replicate, recombine, innovate, be made available? And how will they be different, or differently experienced, from similar sets of choices in the traditional physical play of the playground?

While we have constructed an opportunity for traditional play repertoires to feed into a computer game interface here, we need to consider how the process works the other way too. Mavis Curtis has recorded how forms of imaginative play in the playgrounds she observed were derived from games like *Metal Gear Solid* and game adaptations of films such as *Predator* and *Alien Resurrection* (2001). Similarly, we have observed children playing fantasy adventure games centred on imaginary keyboards located on wooden stumps in the playground. The cultural traffic between traditional lore and new media is very evidently a two-way affair.

Another question relates to the node of production, and perhaps its relation to representation: the presentation of childhood. Like the website, this is an adult intervention in the world of children's play, so, again, a peer culture produced by children for children becomes a form of media production by adults. Briefly, the same approach has been taken to this as to the website. The children's panels are involved as consultants in the design process. What exactly this means remains to be seen. Will they have novel ideas about the design which had not occurred to us? Will they want outcomes that we simply cannot produce? Will their advice steer us towards closer connections with the cultures in which these games are embedded? We hope to have a clearer sense of what this process of participatory design will mean in this context as the project unfolds.

Perhaps more interestingly, however, our intention is that the children will not simply be able to play traditional games adapted for the Wii by us. The application we are

building will allow them to 'record' their own games, both movements and songs/rhymes, for other children to play against. On the one hand, this can be seen as an electronic version of the process of oral transmission: perhaps a new instance of Ong's 'secondary orality', with an emphasis on gestural repertoires rather than linguistic. On the other hand, it can be seen as player production of user-generated content for the Wii – a considerable cultural departure for this platform, which has largely been a one-way experience for players until now.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE PLAYGROUND

The Circuit of Culture implies a 'beyond' in many ways which are relevant to this project. Beyond the playground games of martial arts and dance routines lie the media production regimes of animated film and Hollywood musicals. Beyond the traditional game genres documents by the Opies, and still evident in these playgrounds, lie their antecedents in the chain of oral transmission – older sisters, older generations, older versions of the words, movements, tunes. Beyond the regulated, 'progressive' play of the school playground lies the wider cultures of street and home, where different things may be played, sung, said. Beyond the physical resources for play in the school playground – wood, tarmac, painted surfaces, balls, pom-poms, hula-hoops, climbing frames – lie the different resources of home and wider peer cultures – Nintendo DS consoles, mobile phones, sports equipment, toys, dolls, bedrooms, parks, streets. Beyond the local play even of these contexts lies the global network of children's play, mediated both by new and old media and reliant on the same forms of oral transmission which the Opies documented.

Finally, beyond the playground lies the institutions our project engages with as forms of cultural intervention: the cultural institutions which seek to conserve and exhibit the documentary record of children's play; the computer games industry which invokes ancient routines of play while ceaselessly inventing new clothing for them and newly-engineered ways to transform them.

In all these relations in our project, we expect to observe the dynamic relations between children's play in its moment of creation and the cultural histories and geographies that surround it. The Circuit of Culture is one way to structure how we think about this, though in such an inter-disciplinary project, it can only be one way. Folklore, linguistics, musicology, sociology, computer science, will all have a part to play, and part of our job in this seminar is to keep talking to colleagues across these fields.

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