



# Children's Media and Modernity

## Film, Television and Digital Games

EWAN KIRKLAND

Peter Lang

Throughout the modern era the figure of the child has consistently reflected adult concerns about industrialisation, urbanisation, technology, consumerism and capitalism. Children represent a symbolic retreat from modern life, culturally aligned with fairy tales, medievalism, animals and nature. Yet children also embody the future and are often identified with the most contemporary forms of popular culture.

This book explores how products for children navigate such contradictions by investigating the history and textuality of three major forms of modern media: cinema, television and digital games. Case studies – including *Wallace and Gromit*, *Teletubbies*, *Horrible Histories*, *Little Big Planet* and *Disney Infinity* – are used to illustrate the complex intersections between children's culture and modernity.

Cinema – so closely associated with the emergence of modernity and mass popular culture – has had to negotiate its relationship with child audiences and depictions of childhood, often concealing its connection with modernity in the process. In contrast, television's incorporation into family home-centred, post-war modernity resulted in children being clearly positioned as the audience for this domestic entertainment. The latter decades of the twentieth century saw the promotion of home computers as educational tools for training future generations, capitalising on positive alignments between children and technologies, while digital games' narrative references, aesthetics and merchandise established the new medium as a form of children's culture.

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To B and C





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## Thinking of the Children

### Childhood, Time and Modernity

For all adults – including writers, producers, consumers and academics of media for children – childhood is largely located in the past. Even for those with children in their lives, the most intimate encounter with childhood an adult is likely to have is with their own. This retrospective experience of being a child is bound to be characterised by elements of uncertainty, ambiguity, fictionality. Adult childhood is a complex reconstruction based on clearly recalled events, false or uncertain memories, mementoes in the form of photographs and other surviving childhood relics, books, toys and games. It is a childhood depicted in black and white or faded colours. It is populated by people with strange haircuts, clad in unfashionable clothing. It is represented by stories, activities and culture which, from the vantage of the present, appear at best quaint, outdated, superseded, at worst unenlightened, ideologically incorrect and insensitive. In our childhood, be it real or imagined, there were fewer cars on the road, fewer consumer goods in the shops, less bureaucracy regulating our actions. When it comes to media, films were more rudimentary in their special and visual effects. Television shows were less slick and glossy. Computers and telephones were larger and less portable. The internet, if it existed at all, was slower, its content less expansive and multi-media. Videogames were more simplistic in their graphics and gameplay. Being an adult often involves coming to terms with media technologies and culture which was not a feature of our own early years. When looked upon with fond adult nostalgia, childhood is a period which appears less technological, less sophisticated, less complex, in many ways, in the colloquial sense of the term, less modern. Without rose-tinted

glasses, childhood can conversely feel like a place of darkness, of limited freedoms and opportunities, of social and cultural exclusion enforced by a ruling adult elite. Also in many ways, less modern.

A central argument of this volume is that a productive way of understanding childhood, and the many complex and contradictory elements this concept evokes, is through ideas of modernity. The contemporary Western child appears to be a distinctly modern invention. Many significant and enduring perspectives on the difference between adults and children, now taken for granted, emerged alongside modern developments within the Western world. Contemporary childhood was forged in the heat of modernity. In such a context the imaginary figure of the child comes to embody many contradictions, anxieties and hopes of the very era which brought it into being. Childhood serves as a receptacle for everything adults feel they have left behind in the maturation from what is believed to be simpler, more natural, more innocent ways of being. The child functions to articulate adult dislocation from modernity, and anxiety about the speed of social, cultural and technological change. Media for children, including books, films, television and digital games, themselves a product of cultural modernity and modern methods of reproduction, can be understood as a site where these tensions are expressed, negotiated and symbolically reconciled.

Of course, this is not the only meaning attached to childhood. In some formations childhood is not located in the past, but in the future. The children of today represent the adults of tomorrow, the generation which will live on after we are long gone. This constitutes a significantly more optimistic perspective on children and modernity, wherein childhood becomes a site of hope and anticipation rather than nostalgia and loss. Such a conception of childhood can also serve to critique current circumstances, highlighting the inequalities, injustices and indignities of the present, in contrast with some utopian point in the future, rather than an idealised past. That childhood can serve such seemingly incompatible functions, indicates the complex mythic qualities of the concept. Childhood is not a singular formation, but the site of competing perspectives and interpretations. Throughout Western history there have been many conflicting conceptions of what childhood is and what children are, deriving

from theological, philosophical, scientific fields and disciplines. Some of these appear in distinct opposition. Images of childhood innocence seem to contradict concepts of the child as full of sin and in need of control. Ideas of childhood as a time of triviality and carefree activity, coexists with assertions that childhood is the most important formative years of an individual's life. The notion of childhood as a period of play seems at odds with an emphasis on the importance of education and productive activity. Mythologies of childhood as the best time of your life jostle with narratives of childhood as a state of helplessness, confusion and exploitation. The most successful cultural articulations of childhood express multiple conceptions, or better still, manage to stabilise such contrasting beliefs in a seemingly unified whole.

Whether childhood is situated in an imaginary past or an imaginary future, modernity seems to function as a recurring theme. In many respects the ambivalences of childhood reflect the uncertainties of modernity itself, just as childhood evades modernity's efforts to fix and determine its boundaries. This study involves bringing together these two complex, contradictory concepts. Media for children assumes three broad and frequently overlapping approaches. The most common and easily identified of these entails a retreat into a previous era, reflecting a childhood which stands outside of modernity. This frequently assumes a kind of 'neo-medievalism' as exemplified by numerous folktale-inspired animated films, fairy story television shows and videogames featuring captured princesses, beanstalks and trap-filled dungeons. In such circumstances the implied child consumer is effectively relocated to a fantastical realm safe from the trappings of modern life. Another strategy across children's media attempts a reconciliation between modernity and the child, acknowledging the problematic relationship between the two in trying to overcome it. Images of chocolate factories powered by waterfall, inventors constructing elaborate machines from domestic objects, television cyborg aliens inhabiting pastoral landscapes, all represent instances of this tendency. A third form of children's culture embraces modernity in all its frenetic ambivalence, reflecting a childhood which is conceived of as the very embodiment of the modern era. Notably many new techniques in screen entertainment are trialled in media for children, and many new media technologies are promoted

as being beneficial for young people. This suggests that child consumers have a particular appreciation of the technological innovation with which modernity is associated. Most examples of children's media constitute a combination of these three positions.

At this early stage it is useful to make clear the boundaries and limitations of this publication. This is not a study of children and media. Its focus is rather the historical, cultural and institutional ways in which young people have been engaged as an audience, and aspect of children's culture translated across different media formats. The critical perspective this study adopts, inspired by Gill Branston's study of cinema,<sup>1</sup> interrogates the relationship between childhood and modernity, as articulated through media produced for, made available to, or variously marketed towards children. Such an approach draws together the work of many historians, media scholars and critics of childhood who have observed, in various ways, children and childhood's problematic relationship with the qualities that define the modern condition. Through focusing on childhood in children's culture, other important identity formations, such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality or class, are given comparatively little attention. This is not to diminish the significance of these categories, the many ways in which they inform the further segmentation of children's culture, or the extent to which childhood as a stable identity fragments upon acknowledgement that children, no less than adults, are divided along these lines. The emphasis on childhood is rather intended to address the degree to which this identity is often taken for granted, rather than subjected to the critical interrogation commonly applied to other classifications, even in discussion of media for children. In addition this study is undeniably Western, in terms of the childhood it explores and the media it analyses. The intention is not to universalise this specific conception of childhood which, as the following overview makes apparent, is not only historically particular but also geographically, nationally and regionally specific. It may well be that a study of the childhoods of non-Western cultures, and the media produced to meet these children, would result in significantly different findings and conclusions.

1 Gill Branston, *Cinema and Cultural Modernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

The concentration on modernity has also resulted in the study's emphasis on screen media. Consequently other forms of children's culture, such as books, comics, magazines, toys and board games, are necessarily excluded. Scholars of children's literature are admittedly a frequent source of reference, the study of books for children being a more established field than other media for young people. Further examples, including clothing, food, games and action figures, are also considered as contributing to the ways in which children's screen media is oriented towards child audiences through ancillary products. It would undoubtedly be fruitful for subsequent research to consider the ways in which books, sequential art, periodicals and non-digital games for children might be similarly explored as reflecting upon childhood, modernity and media.

As such this is not a study of the role media plays in children's lives, the meanings children make of media, or the nature of children's engagement with popular culture, although many valuable contributions to this area of research are cited in the following chapters. Much work on the history of children's matinees draws upon adults' recollections of cinema-going, the films they saw, and the experience of being in the auditorium. These insights are valuable in determining the content of early screenings which were not recorded at the time. Evidence of children's, and adults', television viewing preferences will inform definitions of children's programmes as those favoured by child audiences, alongside issues of scheduling, production and merchandising. Studies of adults' engagement with cinema and digital games consoles, expressing perceptions of cinema as an adult-only space, and videogame play as a distinctly childish activity, provide useful perspectives on these respective media, and constitute insightful postscripts to their respective chapters. However, this study makes no original contributions to empirical or ethnographic research. Indeed, the critical perspective this study adopts in relation to the child as a product of historical forces entails a sceptical approach towards any universalising claims concerning experiences, tastes, practices or affinities determined by age-based categories of audience. This does not invalidate the findings of such research, and it must be acknowledged that the majority of studies cited do have a critical awareness of the problems of such endeavours. However, this study retains

focus on children's media, its production, distribution, exhibition, rather than the children, and adults, who consume it.

## The Meanings of Childhood

Underpinning this study is an understanding that childhood as a concept has been primarily historically, socially and culturally determined. Histories of childhood, as detailed in the next chapter, although subject to considerable dispute, tell a story in which the meaning of childhood appears to have undergone significant transformation over recent centuries. Cross-cultural studies also reveal significant variation in the ways childhood is understood across different national contexts. This absence of consistency suggests that concepts of childhood, including beliefs circulating what a child is, needs, wants, deserves, and the crucial ways in which children differ from adults, are a matter of cultural convention rather than ontological inevitability. In this respect agehood, meaning childhood, adulthood and all the variations between, before and after, can be considered a social construction similar to gender, race, class, sexuality, ability and so forth. Despite parallels between children and other historically marginal groups, and evidence suggesting childhood is a socially determined identity, until relatively recently, and then only in certain quarters, childhood has not been recognised as a minority status, or as a formation which has been culturally, historically, discursively produced.

Consistent with other marginalised formations, childhood is not simply a social category, but once with significant symbolic meaning. As Marilyn R. Brown writes, in the introduction to an edited collection on images of children in portraiture, 'childhood has been primarily a cultural invention and a site of emotional projection by adults.'<sup>2</sup> Along similar lines

2 Marilyn R. Brown, 'Introduction: Baudelaire Between Rousseau and Freud', in Marilyn R. Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 1.



John R. Gillis writes of the 'virtual child', an invention of the Victorian era, a symbolic rather than actual figure. For Gillis it was the nineteenth century when contemporary ideas of childhood become hegemonic within middle-class Anglo-American cultures, being increasingly embedded and naturalised within emerging structures of class and gender.<sup>3</sup> Literary critic Marina Warner also points to the mythical functions children serve for adult dreams and desires. The author uses the term 'supernatural irrationality' to define the various concepts of imagination, fantasy, wisdom, innocence and sexlessness facilitated by the figure of the child.<sup>4</sup> Symbolic meanings invested in childhood, as Gillis suggests, effectively obscure the 'real' child from view. Indeed, Dennis Denisoff argues that it is an impossible task to disentangle the actual child from social construction of childhood.<sup>5</sup> A similar point is made by Carolyn Steedman in distinguishing 'real children, living in the time and space of particular societies' from 'the ideational and figurative force of their existence'.<sup>6</sup> Historical accounts reveal the two as having a reciprocal relationship. Emerging ideas of childhood in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which Steedman argues functioned as a means of adults negotiating contemporary ideas of self and history, impacted on the attention paid to actual children throughout this period and consequently upon the lives of children themselves. Adult culture determines children's lives according to beliefs in what children are, and children to varying degrees are impacted and transformed by the resulting institutions within which they are located.

As previously suggested, childhood is not a singular category, but multiple. Throughout history 'the child' has been employed for different

3 John R. Gillis, 'The Birth of the Virtual Child: A Victorian Progeny', in Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman, eds, *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

4 Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time: The 1994 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), 42.

5 Dennis Denisoff, 'Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child', in Dennis Denisoff, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 4.

6 Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (London: Virago Press, 1995), 5.

ends by a range of political, cultural, artistic movements. Indicative of the extreme malleability of the virtual child, Brown identifies further paradoxes of childhood within nineteenth-century Europe. During this period, the industrial exploitation of children was accompanied by the cultural glorification and sentimentalisation of childhood within Victorian society. The nostalgic celebration of the child entailed a symbolic withdrawal from urban industrialisation, and the political and scientific revolutions of the era. Yet this was concurrent with the development of a considerable industry organised around the mass production of children's toys, clothes, books and child-rearing manuals, mobilising children as emblems of social, cultural and economic progress.<sup>7</sup> The extent to which children become symbols for adult society suggests the power inequalities between the generations. Although children are themselves not without agency, it is largely adults who have the authority to define childhood in this symbolic sense. As historian Hugh Cunningham observes, 'mostly what we hear are adults imagining childhood, inventing it, in order to make sense of their world. Children have to live with the consequences.'<sup>8</sup> Exploring the political nature of childhood is nevertheless inhibited by the absence of a readily available language which might allow such inequalities to be effectively articulated. George Dimock makes speculative parallels between the exclusion of art by children from the canon of art history and the exclusion of women artists. The author observes that while art history and cultural studies have incorporated children and childhood into the analysis of representation, this is not situated within a clear critical framework. There is no established discourse of 'adultism', or adult privilege, comparable to the interventions made in challenging the depiction and agency of other minority groups.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless any critical engagement with ideas of childhood, children and children's media cannot avoid addressing the politics of this situation.

7 Brown, 'Introduction', 3.

8 Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), 12.

9 George Dimock, 'Children's Studies and the Romantic Child', in Marilyn R. Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

Throughout history children and childhood have therefore been made to bear an array of meanings. Most of these processes take some innate or biological aspect of children and extrapolate this to advance a particular argument or claim. It seems indisputable that most children are smaller and less strong than most adults. This leads to the proposition that children are in need of protection, even from threats that are more psychological or ideological than physical. Steedman is amongst many to note discourses of 'littleness' constantly circulating the child. In researching a cultural history of childhood, the author observes a point where 'it seemed to me that what I was really describing was *littleness* itself, and the complex register of affect that has been invested in the word "little".<sup>10</sup> In such a situation the biologically rooted meanings circulating children, rather than children themselves, emerge as the more truthful subject of the discourse under analysis. The notion of littleness is evident in children's media, from the earliest publication for children to the latest digital games. Another recurring concept is that of childhood innocence. This is perhaps the most persistent symbolic quality attributed to children, one which Cunningham observes even in the later stages of the Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> It is hard to dispute that generally speaking children have less experience than adults, having lived shorter lives, and are consequently less knowledgeable, having had limited time to gain awareness of the world. But to define this comparative lack as a form of 'innocence' involves imposing an interpretation of such qualities that is highly valued, selective and cultural. While the question of child sexuality is a matter of heated dispute, it does appear that before the onset of puberty children have a different relationship with sex, their own bodies, and the bodies of others, compared to those who have passed this biological threshold. However, to interpret this 'difference' as asexuality, the absence of sexual desire, or as a vulnerability to sexuality, sexual imagery, information or activity, is a cultural position which impacts significantly on the lives of children and the media made available to them. This perception of innocence is clearly articulated in the regulations determining the classification of films and other screen texts, where titles containing

10 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 9.

11 Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, 27.

material of a sexual nature are prohibitively certificated to exclude young people from viewing or purchasing such media. The strong desire to maintain childhood innocence, rather than to introduce children to concepts of sexuality and sexual relations, arguably says as much about Western attitudes towards sex as it does about childhood. Moreover the sheltering of children from sexuality might contribute to producing the very 'innocence' such practices claim to recognise.

Recent debates surrounding children's exposure to internet pornography, concerns about childhood obesity, or arguments for the prohibition of advertising targeted at children, reflect ambivalence about sexuality, new media, public health, consumption, commercialism and promotional culture. In such situations, concern for children might be seen as secondary to the anxieties the child permits to be articulated. As a highly mobile symbolic receptacle for a range of values, which also exists as people in the 'real' world, the child constructed through journalistic narratives, statistics, government reports or academic papers, might be produced at any moment as a reification of the subject under debate. The clichéd rally cry, 'won't somebody think of the children' carries with it considerable currency, irrespective of the cause to which it is attached. Children's smallness, their lack of experience, their different relationship with sexuality, all located in biological aspects of children, feed perceptions of childhood vulnerability which can be mobilised by campaigners across the political and ideological spectrum. Such concepts of childhood, informing debates relating to children's access to mainstream media and culture, invariably impact on the design of media and culture specifically aimed at children themselves.

## The Problem of the Child in Media for Children

In a substantial passage, raising various rhetorical questions as pertinent to children's film, television and digital games as they are to children's books, Peter Hunt highlights the problem of defining children's media in a section worth quoting at length:

Children's literature seems at first sight to be a simple idea: books written for children, books read by children. But in theory and in practice it is vastly more complicated than that. Just to unpack that definition: what does *written for* mean? Surely the intention of the author is not a very reliable guide, not to mention the intention of the publisher – or even the format of the book? For example, Jill Murphy's highly successful series of picture-books about the domestic affairs of a family of elephants ... are jokes almost entirely from the point of view of (and largely understandable only by) parents. Then again, *read by*: surely sometime, somewhere, all books have been read by one child or another? And some much-vaunted books for children are either not read by them, or much more appreciated by adults (like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), or probably not children's books at all (like *The Wind in the Willows*), or seem to serve adults and children in different – and perhaps opposing – ways (like *Winnie-the-Pooh*). And do we mean *read by* voluntarily or, as it were, under duress in the classroom? And can we say that a child can really read, in the sense of realizing the same spectrum of meanings as the adult can?<sup>12</sup>

Hunt's questions might well be expanded and reoriented to cover issues within media studies. What is implied in labelling a piece of media 'children's'? What potential relationship between child and media might be entailed in the term? What kind of child is implicated in this process? What age, what historical period, what formation of audience? Does calling a piece of media 'children's' necessarily imply that a significant portion of children have encountered it, enjoyed it, incorporated it into their culture, and continue to do so? Does it imply that it has been made for, marketed at, targeted towards children, and has been successful in its endeavours to reach this audience? Is children's media a matter of genre, suggesting a group of texts which share characteristics with others labelled in the same way? Is children's media a matter of consumption, production or textuality? Is a piece of media which has been made for adults but which finds favour with child audiences children's media? Conversely, if something is produced with children in mind, but gains an adult following, with endorsement from its creators, should it no longer be defined by the term? Is children's media an institution which transcends the tastes of child consumers? Is it

12 Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4–5.

instead defined by academics, archivists, distributors, exhibitors, television stations, certification bodies and pedagogues?

The questions Hunt raises might be asked of films, television and digital media. In many instances these issues appear even more profound. When it comes to the commercial film industry there are very few feature films which have been made for children. Even filmmakers associated with children's culture have been extremely vague about the intended audience for their products. Many 'children's films' appear to contain material seemingly aimed at adult audiences, referencing adult culture or assuming adult cultural capital. If these films are enjoyed by both adults and children, does that exclude them from consideration in a study of children's media? Moreover, children are significantly restricted in what they are permitted to see in the cinema. To what extent are the films children watch in this context chosen under duress in the multiplex lobby? When it comes to broadcasting, there is much evidence of significant overlap between the viewing tastes of children, teenagers and adults. There have been various production departments and companies dedicated to making shows for children, something with a less clear history within the film industry, as well as entire channels labelled as being for children. But these have been variously enjoyed by adults and ignored by children, or have screened the same material in different ways to target differently aged viewers. In some instances the content screened during hours discursively marked as 'children's television' have contained material which was not originally intended for that audience at the level of production and exhibition. The question of digital games is no less complex. As with cinema it is hard to find games producers who will explicitly claim to make blockbuster games for children. One exception might be educational games which have existed since the advent of the home computer. However, such software has often been criticised for its lack of appeal or functionality as games. If a title is made for children and marketed for children, but finds no popularity with young people, should it still be considered a 'children's game' in the fullest sense of the term? Finally, to paraphrase Hunt, surely sometime, somewhere, all films, television programmes and digital games have been encountered by at least one child, despite their certification or broadcasting hour.

As Hunt observes, 'the concept of the child is an ever-present problem for children's literature.'<sup>13</sup> As different ideas of childhood have existed across time, books made for young people inevitably reflect those variations. Writers attempting to address their readership are impacted by contemporary concepts of what children are, what they need from literature and what literature ought to do for them. Such observations are not restricted to books for children, but feature across all kinds of cultures and activities. In an insightful passage, acknowledging the tension between biological and socially constructed perspectives on childhood, and the consequences for media and culture designed for children, John Clarke and Chas Critcher write:

At first glance, it seems reasonable that age should be found to have a considerable effect on the kinds and rates of leisure activity. The biology and psychology of the ageing process seem likely to involve different physical abilities and personal interests at its various stages. That much is not disputed. More controversial is the attempt to assess how far such stages of life and the leisure activities perceived as appropriate to them are constructed by society. To the extent that they are, the effects of age on leisure are not natural and inevitable but socially imposed and open to change.<sup>14</sup>

If childhood is a product of social construction, even children's grassroots leisure activities cannot be considered a straightforward reflection of children's biological difference from adults, or an uncomplicated reflection of children's tastes and preferences. David Buckingham warns against ignoring the degree to which parents, teachers and state-run institutions regulate and control children's activities.<sup>15</sup> Such institutions are informed by the kinds of complex and contradictory concepts of children and childhood previously discussed. These issues become particularly significant when considering the official culture which is made for children to consume. Like

13 Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 6.

14 John Clarke and Chas Critcher, *The Devil Makes Work: Leisure in Capitalist Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 153.

15 David Buckingham, 'Introduction: Young People and the Media', in David Buckingham, ed., *Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 15.

literature, children's media cannot avoid being a reflection of the ways in which children and childhood are perceived by the various organisations and personnel involved in their authorship, at the time they are released, broadcast, or made available to view. This perspective is acknowledged by scholars across various fields of children's culture. As Carolyn Daniel observes in a study of eating in children's literature: 'When adults write about and for children, as is almost exclusively the case in stories published for children, they also disclose cultural concepts of childhood and attitudes toward the child'.<sup>16</sup> Máire Messenger Davies emphasises the extent to which 'historical, psychological, sociological and other academic "constructions" of childhood' have historically informed entertainment for children.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Buckingham writes of the ways in which regulation surrounding children's television programming reflects fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of childhood.<sup>18</sup> Debates concerning the appropriateness of certain products for children hinge on different perspectives on childhood, inevitably intersecting with discourses on media, culture, school, family, parenting and, as is emphasised throughout this volume, ideas about modernity. Culture made for children is therefore a rich and fertile site for scholars exploring the social construction of childhood. It reflects historical variations in conceptions of childhood, but also a high degree of continuity, indicated by the longevity of children's media and practices whereby certain stories, characters and franchises are recycled for different generations. The very fact that there exists literature, cinema, television and digital media which are variously marked as being 'for children' is indicative of the cultural perception that children are different from adults in their tastes, interests, pleasures and abilities. The analysis of such texts reveals much about the nature of that perceived difference, as well as the politi-

16 Carolyn Daniel, *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1–2.

17 Máire Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2010), 8.

18 David Buckingham, 'Children and Television: A Critical Overview of the Research', in Virginia Nightingale and Karen Ross, eds, *Critical Readings: Media and Audiences* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 164.



cal, ideological and psychological investment in the figure of the child. It may also be considered a significant component in the construction and maintenance of that difference.

## The Problem of the Adult in Media for Children

In addition to varying concepts of childhood, the 'children's' of children's media is complicated by the overwhelming presence of adult authorship across the cultural spectrum. Children's writers, producers, directors and designers are almost invariably adults. Consequently the childhood reflected in the texts they produce, irrespective of their success with child audiences, originates from an adult's perspective. It must be acknowledged that all adults were once children, even if the nature of their childhood was itself unique. In this respect childhood is fundamentally different from other marginal identities. Adult authors are thereby afforded a seemingly viable position to write about children and childhood, and to produce media for children in a more entitled manner than might otherwise be the case. Maria Tatar reports Maurice Sendak, celebrated author of *Where the Wild Things Are*, as claiming their status as a former child allows them to do just this.<sup>19</sup> However, Jacqueline Rose, in a controversial yet influential study of *Peter Pan*, is highly critical of the processes and power relations involved in adults producing books for children. It is in the gulf between adult author and child reader that Rose sees the 'impossibility' of children's literature,<sup>20</sup> a concept which can, as Buckingham illustrates, be productively applied to other media for children.<sup>21</sup> The myth of the producer of children's cul-

19 Maria Tatar, *Off With Their Heads!: Fairytales and the Culture of Childhood* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1992), 20.

20 Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

21 David Buckingham, 'On the Impossibility of Children's Television: The Case of Timmy Mallett', in Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham, eds, *In Front of the*

ture expressing some 'inner child', relating their products back to their own childhood, or designing media with their own children in mind, can be understood as strategies for negotiating this seemingly irreconcilable problem. Rose sees such processes at work in the popular construction of J. M. Barrie, author of *Peter Pan*. Comparable mythologies are present across other franchises, for example, in the frequently cited inspiration for the *Pokémon* series in its creator's alleged childhood love of collecting insects.<sup>22</sup> Such efforts on the part of the children's culture industries, which actively circulate such information as a means of defining their products in self-servingly beneficial ways, function to obscure the fact that young people often have minimal involvement in the production of their own media. Even on screen, as performers, children's participation is restricted in a manner which discriminates against the presence of child actors playing child characters. This results in the common casting of teenagers in the roles of school children, the marginalisation of children in favour of adults in family feature films, or the entire absence of child protagonists in some media for children, substituted by animated characters voiced by adult performers. In this respect, media for children differs fundamentally from other culture associated with minority or marginalised groups, where the presentation of an authentic authorial viewpoint is often considered central, and its absence a point of critical attention.

This is not to suggest that children are entirely powerless in such processes. Peter Hollindale details a number of books which have been written by young people, and acknowledges the 'flourishing literary underclass of the school playground' including oral songs, rhymes and parodies.<sup>23</sup> Such 'playground' activities may represent a more child-centric, child authored form of culture. This might be considered the 'popular culture' of children culture, as opposed to the 'mass culture' of the official industries from which

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*Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 47–61.

- 22 Chris Kohler, *Power-Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life* (Indianapolis: Bradygames, 2005), 240.
- 23 Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1997) 11–12.

young people are largely excluded as participants. There are also examples of child consumers impacting on the culture industry itself. Despite the concerns of early twentieth-century reformers regarding young people's enthusiastic attendance at nickelodeon parlours, David Nasaw argues that 'children's effect on the industry was much greater than the moving pictures' effect on the children'.<sup>24</sup> There are interesting examples of 'children's cinema' as the self-organised screening of entertainment by children for children, even if young people had no role in producing the material being screened. Such are the experiences narrated by Ian Conrich in discussion with their grandfather, who held shows of moving images to entertain local East End children using a toy shop projector.<sup>25</sup> These activities, as Meredith A. Bak details, have historical precedents in toy magic lanterns marketed to children to put on shows for paying customers.<sup>26</sup> Digital media in the twenty-first century has also been impacted by the activities of young people, for example, in Rich Ling and Leslie Haddon's discussion of teenagers' development of text culture.<sup>27</sup> Children do make art and literature, possibly to an even greater extent than the adult population, within the schooling system which encourages writing, drawing, painting and other creative activities. However, with a few exceptions, this rarely escapes the classroom. Developments in online cultures have provided children with platforms whereby their work might reach a broader audience. Studies of young fandom have explored children's active production of media content using these opportunities, although many mainstream sites officially exclude users below a certain age. Without diminishing children's agency,

- 24 David Nasaw, 'Children and Commercial Culture: Moving Pictures in the Early Twentieth Century', in Elliott West and Paula Petrik, eds, *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 24.
- 25 Ian Conrich, 'Kitchen Cinema: Early Children's Film Shows in London's East End', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 2/2 (2005), 290–298.
- 26 Meredith A. Bak, "'Ten Dollars' Worth of Fun": The Obscured History of the Toy Magic Lantern and Early Children's Media Spectatorship', *Film History* 27/1 (2015), 111–134.
- 27 Rich Ling and Leslie Haddon, 'Children, Youth and the Mobile Phone', in Kirsten Drotner and Sonia Livingstone, eds, *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture* (London: Sage, 2008), 140.

activity and creativity, the fact remains that when it comes to the culture industry, children are not the makers of their own media.

Neither are children in an official position to criticise media for children. Only adults write and publish books about children and childhood, and only adults publish studies of children's media and culture. The majority of discourses of childhood in circulation, however benevolent in intention, exclude the very group about which they speak. There are many significant volumes detailing children's engagement with media and their articulation of these experiences. But these are compiled, collated and contextualised by adult authors who serve a role in selecting, editing and framing their participants' responses. Various authors have acknowledged their adult privilege, the unequal power relations inherent in their situation, and the ways in which adult intervention might be reduced to allow children to speak for themselves. Encouraging children to reflect upon their experiences of popular culture in a manner unmediated by adult intervention, Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh employ an original methodology, handing children cameras with which to photograph their own environment. As they argue, 'if children's popular culture offers itself as a rich ethnographic site for visual documentation, it is children themselves who might be regarded as obvious ethnographers in its documentation.'<sup>28</sup> Joseph Tobin, writes of their son's engagement with online culture as indicative of certain digital practices amongst young people. The author acknowledges the methodological and ethical complexities of incorporating their own child into the research process. Nevertheless, despite addressing issues of consent, subjectivity and representativeness, Tobin retains control of this situation to a significant degree.<sup>29</sup>

Other commentators appear largely unaware of the adult privilege in which both critic and reader operate. The following extract from John

28 Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, *Researching Children's Popular Culture: The Cultural Spaces of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2002), 90.

29 Joseph Tobin, 'An American *Otaku* (or, a Boy's Virtual Life on the Net)', in Julian Sefton-Green, ed., *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 111.

Palfrey and Urs Gasser's *Born Digital* reflects the 'othering' of the child this can produce:

You see them everywhere. The teenage girl with the iPod, sitting across from you on the subway, frenetically typing messages into her cell phone. The whiz kid summer intern in your office who knows what to do when your e-mail client crashes. The eight-year-old who can beat you at any video game on the market – and types faster than you do, too.<sup>30</sup>

The reader to whom this introduction is addressed is clearly of a different generation to those being ambivalently observed. The reader is adult, as well as professional, Western, metropolitan and, as the introduction progresses, likely to have children of their own. The reader is variously 'impressed', 'annoyed' and 'frightened' by the activities of these 'kids', who are inherently 'different' from the implied audience of Palfrey and Gasser's publication. This may be an extreme, and admittedly journalistic, example of the 'othering' of child media consumers, as well as the ways in which media consumption and use of media technologies are implicated in the marking of boundaries between generations. Nevertheless, even in the most solid of studies, critics can be seen making problematic universalising claims concerning the nature of children's tastes. Jack Zipes is a prolific folklore scholar, whose work on the history of the literary fairy tale frequently illustrates the mode's complicated relationship with child and adult readers. All the same, a chapter exploring the history of the form's development as a children's genre concludes with the claim: 'As long as the fairy tale continues to awaken the wonderment of the young and to project counterworlds to our present society – where children's yearnings and wishes may find fulfilment – it will serve a meaningful social function.'<sup>31</sup> Stephen Kline's otherwise historically grounded and insightful study of the predominantly economic interests which informed the development

30 John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 1.

31 Jack Zipes, 'Origins: Fairy Tales and Folk Tales', in Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson, eds, *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 38.

of children's culture lapses into similar generalisations concerning children and cinema. According to this author, Disney capitalised on 'children's love of imaginative fiction' something which 'provided the real basis for their fascination with the magical technique of animation'. Apparently the *Silly Symphonies* series 'held a special fascination suited to the anarchistic streak in kids,'<sup>32</sup> produced by a studio which was founded on 'kids' love of simple plots, lovable characters and magical pictures'.<sup>33</sup> In a critical study of race, class and gender in Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), Marwan M. Kraidy asserts: 'Children adore magic. The same goes for some adults, but magic will always bear a connotation of childhood'.<sup>34</sup> The author notes that pleasure in magic, or its representation on the screen, is not exclusive to child audiences. Their use of semiotics terminology also implies something of the mythology of childhood. Nevertheless the sentence which opens this quote suggests an inherent emotional connection between young people and a host of narrative tropes. A historical overview of media for children indicates the political, cultural and commercial factors which have led to the prominence of fantasy elements in children's media, as well as the complex address to children of the Disney Corporation, which complicates such casual assertions.

While it is undoubtedly true that children take pleasure in aspects of media made available to them, a more critical perspective would centre on the degree to which recurring tropes of children's culture reflect dominant adult-led discourses on childhood. For example, in a history of children's television, Ruth Inglis claims that 'children love the anthropomorphizing of stuffed animals', observing how 'they also delight in the humanizing of machines'.<sup>35</sup> Such aspects, not diminishing the pleasure they might bring

32 Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London: Verso, 1995), 111.

33 Ibid. 118.

34 Marwan M. Kraidy, 'Intertextual Maneuvers Around the Subaltern: *Aladdin* as a Postmodern Text', in Cristina Degli-Esposti, ed., *Postmodernism in the Cinema* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), 54.

35 Ruth Inglis, *The Window in the Corner: A Half-Century of Children's Television* (London: Peter Owen, 2003), 113.

to child audiences, reflect their cultural association with animality, nature, the pastoral. Conversely, humanised machines, from the perspective of this study, characterise efforts to reconcile young people with the modern condition through the range of anthropomorphic cars, buses, trains, aeroplanes and helicopters which have populated children's culture for over a century. Across the history of media production for children, the pleasures of young readers, listeners, viewers and users have always been significant. However, their power, in contrast to the adult actors who produce, distribute and largely purchase such products, should not be overstated. Certain narrative aspects undoubtedly recur throughout histories of children's media, such as fairy stories, talking animals and alternative worlds. Animation also seems to be fairly consistently associated with children, evident in film, television and digital media. But to connect these recurring qualities with some innate aspect of children's, in contrast to adults', pleasures disregards the extent to which those tastes have been shaped by adult-informed institutions. As Nicholas Tucker asks, in the context of children's books, 'how can one be sure that one is not describing an interaction with literature that children merely get to like, rather than like to get?'<sup>36</sup> Any association between children and particular forms of entertainment, be it fantasy stories, cartoons or slapstick comedy, needs to be placed in the historical, industrial and ideological contexts by which an adult-dominated culture ascribes certain forms of culture to children, and effectively excludes them from others.

## The Organisation of this Volume

Despite these not inconsiderable caveats, this volume explores relationships between childhood and the culture which has been made available to children. A central concern will be how adults' problematic relationship

36 Nicholas Tucker, *The Child and the Book: a Psychological and Literary Exploration* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 6.

with the modern world of industry, urbanisation, technology, consumerism and capitalism is expressed through products aimed at young audiences. Chapter 2 explores ways in which children have been defined in relation to modernity. Historical perspectives on the emergence of contemporary childhood highlight the social processes which have defined this identity, and the range of persisting mythologies and meanings it has been made to bear. The child comes to be associated with the past rather than the contemporary, the rural rather than the urban, the irrational, primitive and animalistic, rather than the rational, civilised human. Children are excluded from the industrial workplace, the city street and processes of capitalist production, while simultaneously denied the expanding rights of modern adulthood. At the same time, contradictions and countertrends within this story emerge. Even if not legitimate producers of commercial goods, children are undoubtedly defined as consumer of such products. Appropriate middle-class childhood becomes one in which children enjoy a range of toys, games and cultural objects designed to ensure their healthy development. In some discourses the child, as delighted recipient of products which embody the marvels of modern manufacturing, appears to exemplify modernity itself. Even across such contradictory formations, modernity appears as a unifying preoccupation, one which becomes even more significant when considering media of the twentieth century and beyond. As these are themselves the explicit products of industry, technology and capitalism, their content variously engages with the position of the child reader, audience, viewer or user in relation to such processes.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deal in turn with children's cinema, children's television and children's digital games. Each medium is related to aspects of modernity, emphasising ways in which these impact on the culture's relationship with young consumers. Cinema as a form which defines many material and symbolic aspects of modernity is seen as having a particularly problematic relationship with children. Film's location in industry, consumerism, capitalism and traditions of popular urban entertainment complicates its engagement with child spectators. This is evident in early and enduring attempts to construct a separate theatrical space for young cinemagoers, although such efforts simultaneously acknowledge the potential positive benefits of cinema for children. Despite such efforts, the public space of



the auditorium, the commercial nature of the film industry, even the running length of the average movie, conspire against child audiences. This results in the absence of all but a few commercial feature films made for child spectators. Nevertheless, despite the marginalisation of the child audience member, the concept of childhood has proven significant for the commercial film industry. Fairy stories, children's literature adaptations, genres nostalgically aligned with childhood, have been successful with mainstream audiences throughout cinema's history. Significant box office takings have been returned by appealing to the 'child in us all', a formation which implicitly excludes actual children. As is the format of each chapter, this historical overview of the relationship between cinema, modernity and children is followed by three case studies designed to illustrate the applicability of the arguments this study presents. The Children's Film Foundation is the focus of the first analysis. The outputs of this organisation represent a rare instance where films have been produced with child audiences in mind. Such cinema constitutes an attempt to address children on their own terms, albeit with a view to pleasing critics suspicious of the harmful impact of media on young people. The next case study examines technology in films for children. While technophobic aspects are identified in many instances, consistent with conceptions of industrial technology as threatening to children, the recurring presence of elaborate machinery constructed from domestic objects is understood as attempting a reconciling between children and the modernity of the film medium. The focus of this study is the *Wallace and Gromit* series, specifically the feature film *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005). This is followed by an analysis of Steven Spielberg's *Hook* (1991). A sequel to Barrie's *Peter Pan*, this case study allows the application of claims concerning the impossibility of children's literature to children's film. This early 1990s family film raises issues of authorship, audience, industry and the appropriation of children's culture for adults, recurring themes throughout this volume.

Chapter 4 explores children's television, employing a similar historical perspective. In contrast to the urban associations of cinema, the domestic location of the television set, like radio before it, means children have a more secure relationship with this medium. The history of broadcasting has shown consistent efforts to screen and produce material for young

viewers. This section opens with a discussion of defining children's television, considering issues of scheduling, content, contexts of production and audience preferences. Each of these approaches complicates a coherent understanding of children's television as genre. The institution's early affinity with post-war modernity is considered as beneficial for child audiences, in contrast to the pre-war modernity of cinema. The medium's function as a mediator between State and the family, its associations with national identity, its conception as an educational force and its 'paternalistic' role in managing the lifestyle of the nation's citizens, meant children were more compatibly positioned as recipients of broadcast material. Subsequent erosion of public service principles has had ambivalent, although not universally negative, consequences regarding the provision of material for child audiences. Indeed, the increasingly postmodern dimensions of television, in contrast to the modernity of cinema, partly explains the closer relationship the domestic screen continues to have with young viewers. Three examples of children's television are then explored. The BBC adaptation of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* provides an opportunity to consider debates surrounding the translation of literary fiction onto the screen, and the ways this version reflects upon themes of the original book. Children's alignment with pre-modern storytelling, the practice of drawing on earlier cultures in sourcing children's screen entertainment, and the location of modern media for children in a neo-medieval realm reflects desires to insulate the symbolic child from the influences of contemporary life. Ragdoll Productions' *Teletubbies* is then considered, as a study in the definition of children's television, considering merchandise, scheduling, audience appeal and the show's content. As a reflection of children's ambivalent location within modernity, attention is paid to contradictions in the show's depiction of an unspoiled Eden-like landscape, the pervading technology embedded in the character's child-like bodies, the erosion of boundaries between organic and machine, and the postmodern self-reflexivity of the show. *Horrible Histories* is explored as characterising various tendencies within children's television. A sketch show which pastiches various television formats, the series reflects the 'mini-schedule' of children's television, as well as similar self-reflexive aspects of television for children. Part of the series' success derives from its conjoining of two seemingly oppositional

features of children's culture, the carnivalesque and the educational. The series' emphasis on the absurdity of previous cultures and civilisations also serves to secure the child audience's privileged location within contemporary modernity.

Chapter 5 focuses on children and digital games. This opens with a consideration of the discourses surrounding children and new technologies. Concerns about young people's engagement with digital games define the medium as potentially detrimental to children in various familiar ways. Digital games are unfavourably compared to literary culture, associated with junk food, and perceived as having a mechanising impact on young people. At the same time, the domestication of the micro-computer which was promoted as an educational tool for use within the family home produces a more healthy alignment between children and computer games. This chapter also presents a history of children and the domestic games console. As suggested by their location in adult public spaces, children were not considered the main audience for early arcade games. The collapse of the American games industry and the ascension of Japanese games drawing on comic books and animation led to videogame cultures becoming more comfortably aligned with children's media. Here we see games based on cartoon characters, drawing on fairy tales, generating ancillary products and multi-media franchises incorporating lunchboxes, television shows, card games, plush toys and feature films. The design of games consoles, pizza restaurants, booklets and animated characters function to align the videogame medium with children's cultures, a connection which has become eroded in recent years. Three examples of digital games are then explored. Activities on the BBC website illustrate connections between videogames and more traditional children's culture. Continuity between the digital game and children's broadcast media are evident in alignments between children, games and learning, as well as the activity children's television historically encourages. *Little Big Planet* is then explored as a game which expresses a certain childness in its aesthetics, its gameplay and its relation to traditions of children's media. The final case study is of *Disney Infinity*. This series, incorporating toy figures of Disney, Pixar, *Star Wars* and Marvel characters, constitutes a synergistic alignment between screen and toy with considerable historical precedent across children's media and culture.



## History, Childhood and Modernity

### A Story of Children and Modernity

This chapter develops the argument, briefly outlined in Chapter 1, that modernity provides a useful means by which contemporary Western concepts of childhood and children's culture can be explored. Although a contested term, 'modernity' can be broadly understood as the current historical epoch, heralded by developments between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries associated with the Renaissance, distinguishing the contemporary period from the medieval. Modernity entails a form of social organisation characterised by industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalism. The period is also associated with philosophical shifts towards reason, secularism and scientific rationalism, individualism and political democracy. As previously suggested, children frequently function as a symbolic antidote to modernity and expression of adults' ambivalent disposition towards contemporary culture and society. Although many historians consider childhood to be a modern invention, in many ways it comes to represent what is thought to have been left behind in the transition from a seemingly simpler, more natural, more authentic past, frequently regarded with a sense of nostalgia, loss and melancholy. The history of childhood reveals a recurring theme in which the child, imagined as somehow timeless, represents a fixed point of reference in an era of turmoil, dislocation and uncertainty. Childhood comes to symbolise a mythical refuge from the angst of the modern era. Numerous discursive, cultural and legislative practices can be seen as insulating actual children from the impact of modern life so they might more authentically fulfil this symbolic role. Yet in other discourses, instead of representing the past, the child functions as a symbol of hope for the future.

This also reflects adults' discomfort with their contemporary situation, only now the child becomes a beacon for a better world, the point which will be reached when the project of modernity, a process which is still to run its course, has been satisfactorily completed. Many discourses reflect this belief, and many practices of modernity such as education, sanitation and healthcare can be seen as working to ensure children fulfil their imagined future potential. Despite the apparent contradiction of this situation, with children positioned at points existing both prior to and after modernity, both constitute reactions to the ambivalence of contemporary modern living. These tensions are characteristic of modernity itself. The modern condition, meaning the social, cultural, economic, political and philosophical state of being in the modern world, is as much constituted by what it has left behind or is moving towards, as what it currently is. As Marshall Berman points out, there is a paradoxical sense in which to be wholly modern is also to be anti-modernity.<sup>1</sup> Insofar as childhood can simultaneously be characterised as a lost past, a state of fluid transition and a movement towards some ideal future adult state, childhood shares many of modernity's structures, complexities and contradictions.

Histories of childhood, from a wide range of scholarly works, provide a useful way of understanding the concept's emergence within Western culture, and its relationship to the modern circumstances within which it was formed. Scholarship in this area functions to defamiliarise hegemonic ideas of childhood, and adulthood, and to highlight the central tenants of these contemporary ideologies. In presenting evidence for childhood as a social construction, the previous chapter made reference to several historical accounts. These included Cunningham's discussion of medieval concepts of childhood innocence,<sup>2</sup> Brown's observation relating to children's paintings, an important source of evidence reflecting changing attitudes towards children,<sup>3</sup> Gillis' notion of the 'virtual child' in the Victorian era,<sup>4</sup>

1 Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010), 14.

2 Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*.

3 Brown, 'Introduction'.

4 Gillis, 'The Birth of the Virtual Child'.

and Steedman's arguments concerning childhood's relation to adult selfhood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> A historical approach is appropriate, given this study's investment in concepts of childhood as a social construct, with an analytical focus on intersections between childhood and modernity. At the same time, this approach is not unproblematic. Rex Stainton Rogers and Wendy Stainton Rogers are particularly critical of historians' attempts to construct a single linear narrative around childhood, a process which invariably result in the imposition of a particular interpretation according to the writer's own agenda.<sup>6</sup> Histories of childhood are complex, inconsistent, contradictory and contested. For the purpose of this study, and in light of these authors' reservations, it is necessary to make clear the story which this chapter intends to tell.

It is a historical narrative which illustrates the ways in which children become increasingly separate from mainstream society. In this respect young people share the same fate as befell the mad, the ill, and the criminal in being, as Anthony Giddens terms it, 'physically sequestered from the normal population.'<sup>7</sup> Many developments modernity entailed, such as the growth of literacy and the printing press, the establishment of widespread schooling, the division between social and domestic spheres, led to increasing dislocation between adults and children. This is a common observation in histories of childhood. There is no precise moment when Western childhood came into being, any more than there is an exact point in time when historians determine the advent of the modern era. Nevertheless, an enhanced belief that children were a specific category of person, occupying a state of 'childhood' which made them significantly different from adults, emerged concurrent with many of the infrastructures, practices and philosophies which constitute the modern era. For example, Colin Heywood writes of the ways in which the schooling system, whose impact was to

5 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*.

6 Rex Stainton Rogers and Wendy Stainton Rogers, *Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

7 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 8.

‘quarantine children from the world of adults’<sup>8</sup> was a combined response to middle-class requirements that male offspring be educated in ways which would allow them to continue the family business, and Enlightenment discourses promoting education as a force for moral improvement and increased worker efficiency. This was facilitated by modern developments such as the expansion of the nation-state as an institution of government and social engineering. Before modernity, it appears, such widespread institutionalisation of childhood was not considered necessary. Although there is considerable dispute about the nature of medieval childhood, most historical accounts suggest that the modern period produced a significant shift in the ways children were treated and childhood was conceptualised, that the degree of separation between adults and children within contemporary Western society is more extreme than in previous cultures, and that many of these changes coincide with developments associated with the emergence of the modern condition.

A central aspect of this historical story is the tendency for children, through these processes, to be excluded from spaces, practices and activities which seem particularly exemplary of modernity. Children were banished from the industrial workplace, the metropolitan public sphere and the city street. Children were insulated from the influences of an urbanised working class and placed in scholastic institutions dedicated to traditional forms of education. Even as the vote and associated democratic rights extended across society, children were and continue to be denied enfranchisement. In addition to this social treatment of children, childhood became increasingly defined in ways which are distinctly at odds with modernity. Children came to be associated with the past, with a pre-industrial traditional way of life, rather than with the present. Children were seen as irrational, frequently associated with religious iconography, and regarded as variously animalistic and primitive. The homogenising category of ‘children’ functions to deny young people the individualism of the modern adult. Clearly justifications are presented for this state of affairs. However, many of these reflect and reinforce the extent to which childhood is seen as outside of the

8 Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 157.



modern. City streets are particularly dangerous for children. The workplace, if not physically injurious, will interfere with children's play and education. Children, unlike adults, have not developed the skills or abilities to manage money, to make sensible decisions concerning their own purchases, or to resist the unscrupulous machinations of advertising agencies. Neither have they the necessary critical faculties to engage in the democratic process in the same rational, informed, unemotional manner as adult participants. If they were to be given the rights and responsibilities afforded the modern adult, common sense dictates that children will only do themselves and others harm. Children are not ready for modernity, and many of the institutions which surround young people, including the production of media considered appropriate for their needs, appear designed to protect them from its influences.

In this respect 'modern childhood' is 'modern' both in terms of its contemporary nature, and in its historical reaction to specific social trends defining the modern condition. At the same time, 'modern' childhood can be seen as a contradiction in terms, positioning children outside of the institutions through which modern adult identity is constituted. Yet this is itself perversely compatible with modernity. As noted, modernity is a condition often at odds with the very qualities which appear to define it, characterised by a sense of mourning for what it has left behind, or anticipation for the state it is moving towards. Furthermore, this is not the only 'story' which these historical accounts will present, although it might be the most prominent. Another equally compelling narrative suggests that, in different ways, far from being excluded from modernity, far from being anathema to aspects of modern life, children come to exemplify the modern condition. In such formations, children have an innate affinity with technology. Children have a thirst for knowledge and experience. Children embody the curiosity, enterprise and imagination upon which modern capitalism depends. Children are symbols of consumption and consumerism, expressing a productive and profitable sense of wonder at the mechanical marvels of the age. Similarly, modernity is youthful, vigorous, energetic. Modernity is about progress, growth, improvement. Modernity is about leaving the old crusty dusty past behind and hurtling towards a brighter tomorrow. These contrasts, entailing different dispositions towards

modernity and towards childhood, form many of the tensions expressed in the children's media texts which this volume will continue to explore.

## Histories of Childhood

Andrew O'Malley makes clear the relationship between the child and childhood, as currently understood within Western culture, and the advent of modernity, when writing: 'The onset of the industrial revolution, the democratic revolutions in America and France, and the rationalization of the sciences and of medical practices ushered in radical changes to class relations and led to the formation of new subject categories, among them the modern child.'<sup>9</sup> Within Western Europe the nineteenth century saw a wave of legislation variously designed to protect and regulate the lives of children, primarily in the areas of education and employment. Such developments reflected changes in perceptions of children's appropriate position in society. Between 1800 and 1900, Harry Hendrick sees the establishment of a 'modern' childhood, one which was 'legally, legislatively, socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalised'.<sup>10</sup> The period marked by these social and cultural developments also saw significant speculation and investigation concerning the nature of children and childhood. Sociologists Alan Prout and Allison James go as far to say "the century of the child" can be characterized as such precisely because of the massive corpus of knowledge built up by psychologists and other social scientists through the systematic study of children'.<sup>11</sup> Debates taking place

9 Andrew O'Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

10 Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872–1989* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37.

11 Alan Prout and Allison James, 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems', in Allison James and Alan Prout, eds, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1997), 9.

in newspapers, periodicals, popular and academic publications, as well as works of fiction, concerning the qualities of being a child as distinct from being an adult, effective methods of child rearing, the dangers posed to and from children, all attest to the significant ways in which childhood has, and continues to be, defined across a range of institutions. Media produced for children, which also began to emerge in this period, were similarly discursive in reflecting, contributing to and disseminating ideas of childhood.

Many writers examining this history take as their starting point Philippe Ariès polemic claim that: 'In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist'.<sup>12</sup> The author of this often-cited statement proposes that contemporary childhood is a comparatively recent development, largely a consequence of social changes within seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. These led to the establishment of different roles, spaces and culture for young and old, and a widely held conceptual distinction between 'adulthood' and 'childhood'. The specific reasons behind this emerging divide, together with its precise chronology and extent, are open to considerable dispute. Amongst other factors, Ariès argues contemporary childhood came about as a consequence of the advent of universal education. Stevi Jackson relates the emergence of Western childhood to separation of the public and private spheres, home, work and education, and anxieties concerning the emergence of an industrial underclass.<sup>13</sup> In a different context, Neil Postman proposes that the distinction between adult and child arose from increased literacy and the consequent 'knowledge gap' between the generations.<sup>14</sup> The exclusion of children from the workplace, and its consequent impact on children's economic, political and social participation, might also be considered central to the division between adults and children. While this move is commonly perceived as an act of child welfare, a survey of the evidence suggests many disparate impulses motivated changes in attitudes towards child labour. Irrespective of the intentions behind these developments, universal schooling, division of social spheres, publishing,

12 Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), 128.

13 Stevi Jackson, *Childhood and Sexuality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Limited, 1984).

14 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: Howard and Wyndham, 1983).

literacy and employment legislation are all aspects of modernity, suggesting the extent to which the increasing institutionalisation of childhood was entwined with modern developments.

Certain criticisms have been levelled at Ariès' thesis and those who have developed his work. Lack of documentation is often cited by historians as a major impediment to understanding pre-industrial childhood, while interpretations of these sources are open to considerable dispute. Paintings of medieval children depicted as 'miniature adults' are often evidenced as reflecting the absence of a concept of childhood within that culture. However, as Peter Fuller notes, such representations might have served specific cultural functions or embody complex projections, impacting on their formal characteristics.<sup>15</sup> The domestic organisation of pre-modern families, in which adults existed alongside children, is also presented as evidence of a lack of generational distinction. Yet Shulamith Shahar observes that living arrangements in the Middle Ages were also integrated across class lines, with all levels of society living in close proximity, but this has not been interpreted to mean there was no conceptual difference between master and servant.<sup>16</sup> Evidence that adults and children wore clothes of the same style is also used to suggest medieval cultures did not distinguish children from adults. However, David Archard points out that, while the practice of dressing children in a distinct manner might reflect their differing status, the lack of such practices does not necessarily prove its absence.<sup>17</sup> Many point out the comparative dearth of lower class commentaries in the evidence available to historians, as well as those of actual children whose representation is always in the hands of adult commentators. As Dimock writes in the context of painting, 'pictures of children are adult fabrications imposed on historical subjects without voice or self-representation'.<sup>18</sup> Such limitations must temper any claim concerning past conceptions of childhood, or their absence. In addition, Messenger Davies points out that such

15 Peter Fuller, 'Uncovering Childhood', in Martin Hoyles, ed., *Changing Childhood* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1979), 78.

16 Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), 102.

17 David Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2004), 22.

18 Dimock, 'Children's Studies and the Romantic Child', 192.

accounts exclude those responsible for caring for young people. Asserting an unavoidable biological component to childhood, the author writes:

Children up to puberty need constant supervision and generate considerable amounts of physical labour in terms of feeding, clothing, keeping clean and transporting. And children, by simple virtue of being children, always did ... The problem with the cultural history of childhood is that it is not written by the people who perform this labour. They were almost certainly far too busy.<sup>19</sup>

Further challenges to Ariès' interpretations are presented by evidence that previous cultures did indeed express a concept of childhood. Cunningham identifies child rearing advice in the Bible, as well as Greek and Roman texts.<sup>20</sup> The author also notes that physicians by the end of the fifteenth century had categorised maladies which were particularly associated with children.<sup>21</sup> In direct opposition to the claims of Ariès, Cunningham states: 'medieval writers and painters showed that they distinguished childhood from other ages, divided it up into different stages and invested it with characteristic forms of behaviour and feeling. Children were not simply "little adults"'.<sup>22</sup> Barbara A. Hanawalt details the criticisms which have been levelled at Ariès and other historians who developed such arguments. These include the limited evidence from which their 'cavalier' interpretations are drawn, the elite nature of historical sources, and the lack of national or geographical variation. Hanawalt charges such historical perspectives with contributing to narratives whereby children's lives have steadfastly improved from the Dark Ages into modern times. This, the author suggests, is a particularly comforting perspective for contemporary readers, one which confirms popular perceptions of the 'medieval' as necessary undesirable and unsophisticated. Like Cunningham, Hanawalt references historians who identify awareness of childhood in medical texts, works of

19 Maire Messenger Davies, *Television is Good for Your Kids* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1989), 54.

20 Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, 29.

21 Ibid. 31.

22 Ibid. 34.

literature, childrearing practices, legal records, cultural objects and pictorial representations. As Hanawalt writes:

The abundant evidence of manuals devoted to children and stages of life, art and archaeology, miracle stories, and coroners' inquests indicates that medieval and renaissance Europe recognized a distinct period of childhood and had exact words that applied to different stages of childhood.<sup>23</sup>

Assertions that medieval society had no concept of childhood constitute a normalisation of current standards. More appropriate to say that pre-modern society appears to have had a concept of childhood, albeit one that differs from contemporary perceptions, the exact nature of which is open to debate, the extent to which is also a matter of uncertainty. The fact that this has been perceived as a totalising absence reflects the hegemony of Western ideologies of childhood.

Authors critical of the positioning of children in society observe how modern developments served to marginalise young people, relocating them to the periphery, in a manner which seems at odds with perceptions of contemporary culture as somehow 'child centred'. The 'invention of childhood' might conversely be understood as the 'invention of adulthood', a modern formation from which children, along with a host of other identities, were excluded. As Warner writes, children's perceived innocence emerges from their location as outsiders, 'outside society, pre-historical, pre-social, instinctual, creatures of unreason, primitive, kin to unspoiled nature'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, outside everything which the modern adult is supposed to embody. The otherness of the child, in contrast to the white, male, middle-class adult, emerges from the absence of rationality and reason, a quality eighteenth-century writers considered central to humanity in differentiating mankind from animals. As O'Malley argues:

23 Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'The Child in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', in Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman, eds, *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 33.

24 Warner, *Managing Monsters*, 44.

If the ideal figure of the age was the productive, moral, self-disciplined, healthy, male adult governed by the faculty of reason, the child came to be viewed in many regards as its opposite: the subject interpellated through absence and difference.<sup>25</sup>

Childhood inhabits a similar realm to other minority identities in failing to conform to these normalising standards. Observing the connection between women, slaves, the insane and children, Steedman notes how the 'extraordinary plasticity' of the term 'children' allowed it to imply a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, weakness and submission which had no necessary relationship to chronological age.<sup>26</sup> Children's marginal status is also reflected in literature for children. Amy Ratelle suggests a comparable alignment between children and other othered or minority group in the overlap between discourses of animal rights, issues of slavery and women's rights in animal fiction for children.<sup>27</sup>

## Children and Modernity

Developments associated with modernity contributed to an increasing distinction between adults and children. Many of the resulting measures served to position children outside of modernity. One of the clearest articulations of this process was the prohibition of child labour. The relocation of children 'from the workshops to the school benches'<sup>28</sup> was achieved throughout the nineteenth century as a consequence of successive acts of legislation. These gradually reduced the number of hours children could legally work, while increasing the extent children were obliged to be in the classroom. Eventually the former was entirely eclipsed by the latter. This

25 O'Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child*, 11–12.

26 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 7.

27 Amy Ratelle, *Animality and Children's Literature and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 39.

28 Heywood, *A History of Childhood*, 142.

turn against child employment was articulated almost entirely in terms of children's work in industrial contexts, and seems a concern which was not present in previous eras. Significant evidence suggests that in pre-modern times young people were integrated into agricultural and craft-based work from an early age, with little concern that this might impact adversely on their wellbeing. From the age of seven children might run errands, help with harvests, pick vegetables and tend farmyard animals, tasks being allotted according to a child's developing abilities, affording more responsibility as they grew older. With the industrial revolution came an erosion of such casual participation in a domestic economy increasingly displaced by a separate industrialised workplace. In the early stages of this period, entire families were incorporated into the workforce of factory employees. However, around the mid-nineteenth century Jackson relates how middle-class Victorian sentimentalisation of children, economic changes which decreased the demand for child workers, concerns about the burgeoning of a dangerous lower class, and discourses promoting the shielding of children from adult sexuality combined with a more general desire to control young working-class people, resulting in increasing pressure to outlaw child labour.<sup>29</sup> A series of parliamentary acts throughout the nineteenth century eroded and eventually forbade children's participation in the industrial workplace. It is undeniable that the working conditions for many children in this period were dangerous, and that concern for child welfare was a prominent justification for these measures. However this was not the only implicit or explicit rationale expressed, and there was a specific targeting of industrial working conditions in this period. Children were far from the only group for whom factory work was injurious and exploitative. Nevertheless it was they who became the focus for campaigners, many of whom would have themselves been beneficiaries of the expanding industrial economy.

Calls to remove children from the industrial workplace were frequently justified in terms which construct childhood and modernity as somehow incompatible. Lionel Rose draws attention to arguments that a cheap child

29 Jackson, *Childhood and Sexuality*, 41.



workforce reduced the incentive for mechanical innovation, inhibiting the progress of modern developments.<sup>30</sup> According to such arguments children and their labour represented an obstacle to technological innovation. For many, Hendrick argues, child labour appeared to symbolise the threat of industrialisation to a perceived natural order, to the extent that campaigns against child labour were directly engaging with concepts of industrial progress and its impact on society.<sup>31</sup> Other forms of employment associated with the modern space of the city were also targeted. Steedman observes that in the mid-Victorian period children were visible on streets in a number of capacities, as sellers of goods, as street entertainers and as workers engaged in family professions. From the 1830s these 'street children', characterised by their apparent wildness, independence and lack of adult accompaniment, came to be regarded as a threat to urban order.<sup>32</sup> Children's removal from paid employment associated with the industrial workplace and the city street was accompanied by antipathy towards children's relation to broader systems of capitalism. In a study of early twentieth-century American childhood, Viviana A. Zelizer narrates the 'expulsion of children from the "cash nexus"', a 'cultural process of "sacralization" of children's lives'<sup>33</sup> resulting in the transformation of the useful child worker into the economically useless yet sentimentally priceless child. In analysing heated arguments surrounding the definition of child labour, Zelizer observes similar distinctions drawn between industrial and agricultural employment, with the latter regarded as positively beneficial.<sup>34</sup>

Other developments in the treatment of children were informed by ideological constructions of childhood at odds with a modernity characterised by the dissemination of scientific knowledge, and a shift from religious or spiritual to rationalist models of understanding. Gillis writes

30 Lionel Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain 1860–1918* (London: Routledge, 1991), 22.

31 Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, 25.

32 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 112–113.

33 Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 11.

34 Ibid. 77.

of a crisis of faith in the mid-nineteenth century, in which many turned away from institutional religion, towards nature, 'noble savages' and children as a substitute.<sup>35</sup> The investment of children with religious sentiment was accompanied by concern that young people, particularly the urbanised working classes, were becoming too self-reliant, knowledgeable and independent. If the modern adult was characterised by an increased understanding of the world around them, the child should express an ignorance consistent with an innocence befitting their angelic state. This appears to be another aspect of the nineteenth-century anti-child labour movement. Hendrick details how reforms represented an attempt to 'save' children from, or force them to 'unlearn', adult knowledge and conform to middle-class domestic values of childhood dependency.<sup>36</sup> A similar precocity was observed in child performers, as detailed by Steedman. Pressure to legislate against young people's employment in the entertainment industry reflected an awareness that such children, trained to manipulate the emotions of their adult audience, 'were not only knowing, but had knowledge of their own knowingness'.<sup>37</sup> Moves towards universal education would seem to run counter to this trend. However, the form of education privileged in this process was non-vocational, distanced from industrial practice, and in many cases strongly linked to the church. In contrast to a growing interest in science, modern literature and politics among the general population, new schools tended towards a Humanist education, disassociated from technology and business. As C. John Sommerville observes: 'the public seemed to want education to stay the same, and all the more so as other things began to change'.<sup>38</sup>

In other discourses the child is differentiated from the rational adult by their primitive, animalistic state, serving to locate them in a past which pre-dates the evolution of the human species. The second half of the nineteenth century, William Kessen notes saw 'a riot of parallel-drawing between

35 Gillis, 'The Birth of the Virtual Child', 86.

36 Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, 28–29.

37 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 136.

38 C. John Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* (London: Sage Publications, 1982), 190–191.

animal and child, between primitive man and child, between early human history and child.<sup>39</sup> Similar constructions of the child also emerge through developmental theories of childhood informed by Darwinian evolution. Archard locates the basis of child psychology in Darwin and Haeckel's theory of 'biogenetic law', both of which connect the development of the child with the development of the human species. Similarities between human embryos and those of various animals were observed and presented as evidence of mankind's animalistic origins. As a consequence of their close connection to this ancestry, children were seen as possessing many instincts and memories of mankind's early evolutionary stages.<sup>40</sup> Heywood points to the concept of recapitulation, attributed to the work of G. Stanley Hall in the early twentieth century, in which the child's growth reflects the development of humans from animality to civilisation.<sup>41</sup> This, Hendrick argues, served to represent children as savages at the beginning of the evolutionary process, and therefore a potential threat to society.<sup>42</sup> Such perspectives have clear impacts upon literature for children. Ratelle observes frequent instances where child readers are encouraged to identify with animal characters, part of a drive to teach children to treat animals well, but also reflecting a perceived solidarity between the two in recognising adult hypocrisy and their shared subordination.<sup>43</sup> Notably, this hypocrisy was frequently shown to be the consequence of an urban culture 'driven economically by an unrelenting productivist ethos.'<sup>44</sup> Associations between children and animals further serves to exclude children from the sophisticated civilised metropolitan adult, and position the child in opposition to commercial capitalism.

Many of the discourses emerging around this period explicitly defined children in relation to nature. In this respect the Romantic Movement which emerged in the late eighteenth century appears exemplary. Jonathan

39 William Kessen, *The Child* (London: Wiley and Sons, 1965), 115.

40 Archard, *Children*, 40–41.

41 Heywood, *A History of Childhood*, 28.

42 Hendrick, Harry, *Child Welfare*, 36.

43 Ratelle, *Animality and Children's Literature and Film*, 31–32.

44 Ibid. 19.

Bignell identifies this as a philosophy in which the child is ‘uncorrupted, innocent, authentic and contrasted with an adult world of guile, artifice and the “civilisation” underpinned by capitalist industrialism.’<sup>45</sup> Messenger Davies similarly considers the movement ‘a reaction to the spread of industrialization and its ugliness, overcrowding and pollution’ in which the child is contrastingly aligned with nature and noble savagery. Significantly there is a strong anti-educationalist dimension to the form of child rearing proposed by one of the movement’s founders, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>46</sup> Romantic art, in its depiction of children, reinforced their associations with the past and with nature. It is often considered partly responsible for the successive outlawing of industrial child labour and the belief that a ‘proper childhood’ was one separated from the capitalist marketplace. Examples cited by Christopher Parkes include Thomas Gainsborough’s 1785 painting ‘Cottage Girl with Dog and Pitcher’, or William Wordsworth’s 1804 poem ‘Ode: Imitations of Immortality’.<sup>47</sup> Cunningham points out that Wordsworth’s impact reflects his alignment with contemporary thinking, and cites Joshua Reynolds’ portrait of a six-year-old girl, ‘The Age of Innocence’, as similarly representative.<sup>48</sup> As Gillis writes, by the end of the eighteenth century childhood had come to represent ‘not only uncorrupted nature but also the nobility associated with simpler times and peoples’.<sup>49</sup> And yet, despite its construction as the antithesis of modernity, the child, as it became known, was a product of the very modern processes it stood against. Moreover, when it comes to the study of media for children, such products are undeniably tied to modern processes of manufacturing, marketing, distribution exhibition and retail. It is this disjuncture between the modern medium, the product of technology, industry and capitalism,

45 Jonathan Bignell, *Postmodern Media Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 115.

46 Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture*, 26.

47 Christopher Parkes, *Children’s Literature and Capitalism: Fictions of Social Mobility in Britain, 1850–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

48 Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, 134.

49 Gillis, ‘The Birth of the Virtual Child’, 91.

and the pre-modern audience, which the children's culture discussed in this volume variously attempts to negotiate.

## Early Modern Media for Children

The period which saw the increasing institutionalisation of the child within Western societies, also saw the emergence of specific children's media and culture. Such developments are the product of modernity at a number of levels. Media technologies such as the printing press, photography and cinema, the establishment of mass media organisations and the expansion of consumer cultures underpin and are underpinned by modernity, reflecting, facilitating and disseminating its influences. The emergence of a distinct literature for children, while capitalising upon such technologies, also reflected the modern belief that children were fundamentally different from adults. As John Rowe Townsend writes:

Before there could be children's books, there had to be children – children, that is, who were accepted as beings with their own particular needs and interests, not merely as miniature men and women.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to reflecting beliefs that children were different from adults, the emergence of a distinct children's culture conceivably served to broaden this divide. Production of culture for children with qualities and characteristics distinct from adults' functions to perpetuate mythologies of children's nature. This is evident in the comments observed previously, whereby authors such as Zipes,<sup>51</sup> Kline,<sup>52</sup> Kraidy<sup>53</sup> and Inglis<sup>54</sup> make claims

50 John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children: An Outline of English-Language Children's Literature* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 3.

51 Zipes, 'Origins'.

52 Kline, *Out of the Garden*.

53 Kraidy, 'Intertextual Maneuvers around the Subaltern'.

54 Inglis, *The Window in the Corner*.

concerning children's taste for animation, fantasy narratives and animals, based on media made available to children. Such assertions coincide with Romantic conceptions of children and imagination, magic, the uncivilised, the pre-industrial and the animalistic, despite emerging from media texts not made by or even specifically for children, but provided for them by adult institutions. These perspectives inform even approaches to children's grass roots activities. Regarding anthropologies of children's unofficial culture, James and Prout discuss academic imperatives to construct children's street and playground games as a kind of primitive, even primeval oral tribal practice preserved throughout the generations.<sup>55</sup> The suggestion that children are somehow intimately connected with the media technologies they enthusiastically consume, expressed so starkly in the opening paragraph of Palfrey and Gasser's book,<sup>56</sup> reflects the alternative discourse in children's relationship to modernity. Rather than being antithetical to the condition, children come to embody the modern, in their innate appreciation and understanding of new technologies and the experiences they generate. This frequently assumes a source of anxiety resulting in an impulse to intervene, imposing restrictions which effectively curtail children's engagement with contemporary media. Nevertheless, a continued investment in the pre- or anti-modern child, appears at odds with a perception of children's intuitive affinity with the latest thing.

As Townsend<sup>57</sup> suggests, the emergence of commercial media for children coincided with an increased belief that children had distinct needs, tastes and capabilities which ought to be met by appropriate cultural experiences. In previous societies evidence suggests children enjoyed the same activities as their elders. Folk tales, rhymes, songs and stories were the culture of all ages, transmitted orally at communal gatherings, accessible to all within earshot. There appears to have been little attempt to restrict

55 Allison James and Alan Prout, 'Re-presenting Childhood: Time and Transition in the Study of Childhood', in Allison James and Alan Prout, eds, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1997), 242–243.

56 Palfrey and Gasser, *Born Digital*.

57 Townsend, *Written for Children*, 3.

the young's exposure to their content, however violent or sexual. As a distinct children's culture emerged, it followed the tendency to define childhood as located in a pre-industrial past. Numerous paintings dating from the seventeenth century feature evidence of different styles of clothing for children. As Jackson remarks, this predominantly copied adult clothes from previous generations, now considered too out-dated for adults to wear.<sup>58</sup> Rural attire associated with farm and country workers, Anita Schorsch observes, was also fashionable among the upper-classes due to cultural connections with innocence and health, popularised within the work of Rousseau.<sup>59</sup> This underlined symbolic links between childhood, agrarianism and previous ways of life. Such impulses can also be observed within emerging adult-run organisations specifically designed for youth membership, such as Baden-Powell's Scout movement. A similar reaction to urban life's perceived ill effects upon the young, this organisation was informed by the rites-of-passage rituals of ancient and 'primitive' non-Western societies.<sup>60</sup> The continued tendency for children in Britain to wear school uniforms, including blazers, pleated skirts and ties, a form of attire which is no longer required in the majority of adult workplaces, is a particularly persistent example of this tendency. Children's narrative culture follows a comparable pattern. It is widely accepted that the literary fairy tale is the recorded version of folk narratives which, in pre-industrial society, were part of an oral form of storytelling encountered by all ages. With the move towards social modernity, old folk tales and fables were considered too sophisticated for adults, and with the development of the adult novel were relegated to the nursery bookshelf.

Clare Bradford observes the extent to which, from a young age, contemporary children are introduced to medieval-inspired narratives and imagery in a range of cultures including animation, picture books, fairy-themed celebrations, novels, feature films and television programmes. Although medievalism is by no means restricted to children's culture,

58 Jackson, *Childhood and Sexuality*, 39.

59 Anita Schorsch, *Images of Childhood: An Illustrated Social History* (New York: Main Street Press, 1979) 44–45.

60 Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, 197–198.

Bradford points to modern comparisons drawn between childhood and pre-modern periods in Renaissance and Enlightenment rhetoric, whereby both children and earlier cultures were associated with ignorance, simplicity and youth. Succinctly underlining the collapse between historical period, media and children, Bradford writes:

one might regard the Middle Ages, children's literature and child readers as occupying a 'pre' state: the Middle Ages as premodern, children's literature as that literature which precedes literature proper, and child readers as pre-adults.<sup>61</sup>

Across a range of media this results in children's stories taking place in strangely ahistorical worlds, the precise period of which appears deliberately vague. Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb consider eighteenth-century debates within Romantic philosophy as a fundamental influence on literature for children, with its celebration of a childhood located in a pre-industrial past.<sup>62</sup> The recurring theme of the garden, Hunt sees as 'particularly attractive' to writers of children's literature 'in the context of a threatening, changing society' with the countryside functioning 'to preserve a wholesome, conservative idea of childhood'.<sup>63</sup> From a more provocative perspective, Rose, in a critical attack on the process of adults writing books for children, observes how the child in children's literature represents a state outside of culture, 'the site of a lost truth and/or moment in history'. This is the place where an older, natural, superior sensibility is preserved, which an adult author can retrieve through the act of writing for children. Consequently, Rose argues, children's literature functions as a means by which a mythic yet seemingly authentic past, eroded by the social and cultural decay of modern developments, can be reclaimed.<sup>64</sup>

61 Clare Bradford, *The Middle Ages in Children's Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 7.

62 Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb, *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002).

63 Peter Hunt, 'The Same but Different: Conservatism and Revolution in Children's Fiction', in Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson, eds, *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 76–77.

64 Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 43–44.



At the same time, this is not the only impulse determining children's media. As with any discursive or ideological construction, childhood and the imagined audience it produces is not a singular, unified or consistent concept. Thacker and Webb assert that the Romantic philosophies which informed ideologies of childhood and associated tropes of children's literature were themselves far from coherent.<sup>65</sup> Daniel also observes the presence of both Romanticism and earlier Puritan impulses in children's literature. The contradictory child which emerges from this tension is idyllically innocent and pure, but can also be dangerously wild and primitive.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, different representations of the child and constructions of the child reader frequently hinge on an author's disposition towards the 'wild child' rather than fundamental disagreement concerning its essential existence. Children's media and modernity's parallel emergence meant one responded to the other, in a manner which was not entirely oppositional. Hunt points out that the first 'Golden Age' of children's literature emerged within a tumultuous period which saw the publication of *Das Kapital* as well as the growing trade union and Women's Suffrage movements. Beneath their seemingly conservative surface, Hunt argues, many children's books were concerned with 'empowerment, subversion, growth, liberation,'<sup>67</sup> consistent with Ratelle's identification of humanitarian and animal rights discourses within fiction for children.<sup>68</sup> Although the contents of a book are most commonly the focus of scholars of children's literature, Seth Lerer observes a combination of medievalism and mechanisation in the production of Victorian children's publications. Of nineteenth-century adventure books, Lerer writes:

Covered in gold letters, with coloured pictures set into, or raised out of, leather covers, these books embody the ideals of exploration and conquest of the late Victorian period. But they also embody the mechanization of artistic reproduction in the nineteenth century ... Such volumes are, in a fundamental way, about their own mechanical

65 Thacker and Webb, *Introducing Children's Literature*, 14.

66 Daniel, *Voracious Children*, 12.

67 Hunt, 'The Same but Different', 78.

68 Ratelle, *Animality and Children's Literature and Film*, 39.

production. They yoke together art and technology and, in many cases, stand as marvels of production on a par with the marvelous tales told between their covers.<sup>69</sup>

Parkes discusses changing attitudes towards children's relationship with capitalism, as reflected in books for young people. A prominent eighteenth-century concept was of the child as victim of capitalism in need of protection from the industrial workplace in order to enjoy a proper childhood. This contrasted with earlier traditions which saw child labour as a necessary recourse against idleness and sinfulness. However, throughout the nineteenth century, Parkes argues, as partial consequence of the continued requirement for young people to contribute to the economy, this Romantic perspective gave rise to the 'imaginative child', a figure for whom 'participation in commercial activity allows for the release of a natural capacity for ingenuity that is just as innocent as it is precocious'.<sup>70</sup> Instead of being a victim of capitalism, the child comes to represent the spirit of enterprise, innovation and ambition that is capitalism's very embodiment. For Parkes this is evident in the inventor's biography, a counterpoint to the animal stories Rattell considers, which suggested scientific discovery as having an affinity with the curiosity and ingenuity of childhood. Mary Shine Thompson, in the introduction to an edited collection on island narratives in children's literature, discusses Stephenson's *Treasure Island* very much within the context of social, industrial and capitalist modernity, as a book which 'writes out the dynamics and the nature of the modern world',<sup>71</sup> and set the model for future island narratives written for children.<sup>72</sup> Lerer also writes of twentieth-century children's books as gesturing towards a reconciliation between the child and new modern sensibilities. Kipling's *Just So Stories* constitute an attempt to reinvent fables in the era of Darwin's theory of evolution, a bid to retain fantastical aspects of children's traditional

69 Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 329.

70 Parkes, *Children's Literature and Capitalism*, 4.

71 Mary Shine Thompson, 'Introduction', in Mary Shine Thompson and Celia Keenan, eds, *Treasure Islands: Studies in Children's Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 15.

72 Ibid. 18.

culture even when these ideas were being challenged in a period of expanding scientific epistemology.<sup>73</sup> Post-war children's literature, Hunt goes on to argue, while expressing something of this opposition to the present also represents 'the tension between the author's personal preference for the past, and the child character's (and readers') preference and aspirations for the future'. This is frequently played out through tropes of modernity. Hunt goes on to write of *The Borrowers* and *Tom's Midnight Garden* as books which 'pit the conservative values of (adult) tradition – and countryside and the garden – against the corruptions of the modern world, and yet', in a reflection of the tensions within modernity itself, 'it is the modern world which the child characters have to live in, and look forward to'.<sup>74</sup>

## Childhood and Consumer Culture

Although the dominant childhood detailed previously largely expresses pre-modern, anti-modern, or regressive characteristics, as various critics of children's literature suggest, another countertrend serves to more positively align the child with modernity, to the point where young people come to exemplify the modern condition. In contrast to Sommerville's point concerning the non-vocational content of children's learning,<sup>75</sup> Denisoff argues that the education system which emerged in the nineteenth century was geared around developing children as contributors to economic growth.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, despite representing an alternative to industrialised employment, the schooling system might be understood as embodying many modern impulses of surveillance, systemisation and control. John Jervis notes how Bentham's panopticon, the prison designed to give inmates a permanent sense of potential surveillance, the model of institutional con-

73 Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 182.

74 Hunt, 'The Same but Different', 80.

75 Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, 190–191.

76 Denisoff, 'Small Change', 10.

trol through internalised policing which Foucault draws upon in *Discipline and Punish*, was also intended as an architectural template for workplaces, hospitals and schools.<sup>77</sup> In its hierarchical organisation according to age rather than ability, through the regimentation of time and space employing bells, whistles and monitors, and in the testing, ordering and disciplining of young people across a range of practices, the state school system represents a very modern approach to education. Indeed, Steedman sees the organisation of late nineteenth-century 'mass schooling' as part of an attempt to define and fix the nature of childhood at specific ages, conscripting a variety of scientific disciplines.<sup>78</sup> While principles of freedom and individualism inform modern philosophies, in reality, as many commentators have observed, the effects of modernity are to control and massify. In this respect the homogenisation of young people under the title of 'children' is not as opposed to the period as it might appear.

While children may have been excluded from direct participation in capitalist processes of production, it is not the case that children have been historically distanced from consumer capitalism. Relations between children and commercialism might be characterised by the tension Daniel Thomas Cook identifies between 'sacred childhood' and the 'profane market', a contradiction negotiated through a combined strategy of defining products as beneficial for children's health and development, while constructing children themselves as desiring agents deserving of such goods.<sup>79</sup> In the introduction to an edited collection on children and nineteenth-century consumer culture, Denisoff details the extent to which, in relationships restricted and facilitated by class position, children participated in the production, distribution and purchasing of goods and services. From the early stages of the nineteenth century, Denisoff claims

77 John Jervis, *Exploring the Modern: Patterns of Western Culture and Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 55.

78 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 7.

79 Daniel Thomas Cook, 'The Rise of "The Toddler" as Subject and as Merchandising Category in the 1930s', in Mark Gottdiener, ed., *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 114–115.

that young people were invested in their role as consumers, and commercial culture relied on children seeing themselves in this way. Children served as both buyers and sellers of goods, yet while significant ambivalence was expressed towards the latter, the former increasingly became the appropriate role for young people to occupy.<sup>80</sup> Lisa Jacobson in a study of early twentieth-century markets points to the contradiction, within American society, as in Britain, whereby labour laws imposed restrictions on children's ability to earn, at the same time as they were increasingly subject to the pressures of the marketplace and the appeal of mass popular culture. The implication of children in commerce and capitalism is evident in the range of books and toys for young people which marked the emergence of modern childhood, even if children were not afforded the independent means to purchase these products themselves. Marketing targeted children as purchasers of juvenile goods, as the brand-loyal consumers of tomorrow, and as an active influence on household consumption.<sup>81</sup> Education and play, for middle-class parents, also became heavily associated with the buying of toys. Emphasising John Locke's assertions concerning the educational value of playthings, Teresa Michals details how the well-purchased 'Good Toy' became 'the symbol and instrument of childhood innocence, freedom, intellectual and emotional development, and ultimate professional success'. The author emphasises the contradictions inherent in manufactured objects which represent both 'non-commercial innocence' and 'major market forces', allowing children to develop into productive adult men and women, while also facilitating a childhood retreat from the adult marketplace.<sup>82</sup>

Romantic ideologies of childhood also appear mobilised in the service of a kind of hedonistic delight, which in turn imbued children's commercial objects of desire with a purity and innocence which counteracted the industrial processes entailed in their production. Gary Cross argues

80 Denisoff, 'Small Change'.

81 Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

82 Teresa Michals, 'Experiments Before Breakfast: Toys, Education and Middle-Class Childhood', in Dennis Denisoff, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 30.

that the sense of wonder attributed to the child feeds into the model of the enthusiastic child consuming new toys, dolls and books purchased by parents. Both the youngster and the adult in this arrangement are indulging in 'the pleasures of encountering a fantastic world of new goods and entertainments', one as the recipient of a new toy, the other vicariously through the joy expressed by their offspring.<sup>83</sup> It is here that Cross sees the transformation of the 'sheltered innocence' which continued to exist in institutions including the school, the church and the child-rearing magazine, into the 'wondrous innocence' of the shopping mall, the media and the family holiday.<sup>84</sup> Reflecting the malleability of ideologies of childhood and consumerism, even when divorced from industry and economy the child could be reconfigured to facilitate children's role as consumer, as recipients of commercial goods, or as hawker of advertised products. Jacobson observes the extent to which images of childhood innocence and purity were used to sell a range of goods, projecting the virtues of the child onto the qualities of the product.<sup>85</sup> As example, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra describes the images in an 1860s Christmas book, a commercially produced object of domestic consumption themed around childhood, as containing sentimental depictions of children 'in bucolic settings, implying their organic connection to nature while emphasizing their absolute separation from the world of trade and business'. In the context of middle-class antipathy towards the negative aspects of capitalist industry, childhood, through this contradictory process becomes an acceptable seasonal object of adult consumption.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, in the images contained within these books and the poems which accompany them, Kooistra observes suggestions of the middle-class child as capitalist in the making.

83 Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.

84 Ibid. 42.

85 Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 21.

86 Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'Home Thoughts and Home Scenes: Packaging Middle-class Childhood for Christmas Consumption', in Dennis Denisoff, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 157.

The tensions between modernity, pre-modernity, media and children, and attempts to make these disparate elements harmoniously coexist, can be seen in one of the first relationships between child audiences and screen entertainment in the form of the toy 'magic' lantern. As detailed by Bak, children's use of this piece of domestic technology, which pre-dates the cinema as a form of popular entertainment, reflects many issues concerning children's engagement with screen-based media across the twentieth century. Bak argues that the commodity of the toy lantern 'positioned children's recreation time within a new economy of labor and leisure, where a modern culture of media spectatorship took hold'.<sup>87</sup> The location of the toy in the domestic sphere is significant in aligning this early form of screen media with children, in contrast with the more troublesome urban location of the arcade or theatre. An interesting distinction within this history emerges between the toy magic lantern and what became referred to in different contexts as the 'projecting lantern' or the 'optical lantern'. The latter was an effective repurposing of the magic lantern as a utilitarian means of instruction, employed as a way of communicating information to large groups of people in public spaces. While the projecting lantern was used for serious scientific and educational purposes, the magic lantern of the nursery continued to be defined as an object of wonder and imagination. Such associations echo those of earlier theatrical exhibition by entertainers, perceptions which institutions applying the same technologies for serious purposes sought to suppress. In contrast, the design of toy lanterns sought to evoke this wondrous past, eschewing the functional practical design favoured by the lecture lantern, in favour of 'details and flourishes' which 'evoked the older, artisan-crafted lanterns of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century showmen'.<sup>88</sup> At the same time as looking back to this exotic media history, the toy lantern functioned to align young owners with many aspects of modernity, primarily entrepreneurial capitalism, consumerism, technology and innovation. Juvenile magazines promoting these products encouraged children not only to act as spectators but to emulate the role of early exhibitors in their organisation of domestic

87 Bak, 'Ten Dollars' Worth of Fun', 112.

88 Ibid. 115.

shows for paying friends and family. Such a culture defined the child as both promoter and technical aficionado. The continual mechanical innovation whereby increasingly enhanced versions of the lantern were made successively available suggests that children were explicitly appealed to as consumers of technologies, however 'magic'. While the role of the child as exhibitor finds less continuity in subsequent iterations of domestic children's media, Bak makes many observations which underline how the toy lantern 'played an instrumental role in the development of contemporary children's media culture'.<sup>89</sup> Toy magic lanterns established visual media as a respectable form of leisure and amusement for children, and introduced practices of domestic screen entertainment which anticipated home movies and the video cassette recorder. The endless release of new models of toy lanterns along with new forms of compatible software, embedding the plaything within commercial strategies of perpetual progress and innovation, anticipating the 'upgrade culture' of contemporary games consoles and mobile phones.<sup>90</sup> Even protracted accounts of the opening of packages containing lanterns<sup>91</sup> prefigure internet broadcasts which centre on the unboxing of toys and newly released pieces of technology. Moreover, the construction of the child in the home as a skilled and competent manipulator of visual technology finds resonance in recent narratives concerning young people's proficiency at setting VCR timers, navigating the internet, besting their elders at digital games and circumventing parental locks on restricted television channels.

89 Ibid. 112.

90 Ibid. 128–129.

91 Ibid. 120.



## Cinema for Children

### Children's Cinema, Modernity and the Matinee Movement

The idea of 'children's cinema' might appear to be a straightforward concept. However, relationships between children, the film industry and the cinema-released film have always been problematic. Much of this has to do with cinema's public theatrical location. In their discussion of children's films Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples make an important distinction between the site of screened media and the media content shown in such a space, between 'children's cinema' as 'the exhibition of films for a general audience containing some children' and 'children's cinema' as 'the dedicated production of films for children'.<sup>1</sup> 'Children's cinema' understood as a space in which entertainment is screened for a dedicated child audience will be the focus of the following section. The next section will involve an examination of the children's film as cinematic text rather than exhibition site. At the same time, the history of children's cinema entails an understandable degree of overlap between these two concepts.

The word 'cinema' refers to a public building, traditionally theatrical in organisation, historically associated with urban environments, specifically designed for the presentation of screen-based entertainment for paying audiences. Despite some significant developments since the first of

1 Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids: Children's Cinema and the Family Film', in Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham, eds, *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 92.

these establishments was opened in the early twentieth century, the basic organisation of the cinema space and the ways it functions as a cultural site have been largely consistent. Audience members arrive, pay for entry, sit along with others in the auditorium facing a large screen, onto which moving images are projected. The location of the theatrical auditorium, the cost of entry, the beverages and confectionary available to purchase, the size of the screen, visual and audio technologies have changed over the decades. But the basic organisation of the experience has been remarkably consistent. 'Cinema' also refers to the material screened within such spaces. This content has undergone some substantial changes since the establishment of the picture house as a place of popular entertainment. Synchronised sound, the use of colour, shifting aspect ratios and the incorporation of a third dimension may appear the most striking developments in film techniques, but many storytelling traditions have proven remarkably consistent. Maybe the most striking change in cinema over the century has been in the programme of events provided by the picture house. Twenty-first-century cinema audiences commonly expect to see a standalone feature film, accompanied by trailers and advertisements. This appears a very different experience to those of earlier audiences, whose evening of filmed material may have been interspersed with live acts, or who would have been offered a varied programme of mixed entertainment including shorts, cartoons, news-reels and more than one feature film. The screening of theatrical material to children has also been impacted by these changes in practices, although the specific format of children's screenings which distinguishes them from mainstream shows reveals certain continuities across the decades, consistent with the tendency for media for children to retain and preserve features and formats of past cultures.

Of all the media considered in this volume, cinema has the clearest affinity with modernity, and also has the most problematic relationship with child audiences. In the aforementioned study which takes the medium's close relationship with capitalist modernity as its overarching framework, Branston writes of: "The sense of Hollywood cinema, in the 1920s and 1930s,

as the very essence of the turbulent “modern”.<sup>2</sup> The film industry’s reliance upon systems of transport, accountancy and communication, and the vertically integrated cost-minimising industrial practices employed by early film studios contribute to this perspective. Cinema’s affinity with modernity has been observed in various ways by a number of commentators.

Regarding the public sphere and mass media as crucial aspects of modern democracy, James Donald and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald describe cinema as ‘the definitively *mass* medium’, arguing, like Branston, that film studies might benefit from interrogating spectatorship in relation to broader modernist debates.<sup>3</sup> Tom Gunning draws connections between early cinema and the amusement park. This author, in an influential challenge to history’s emphasis on the seemingly inevitable development of narrative filmmaking, emphasises the extent to which the appeal of early exhibitions was the mechanical hardware, as much as the celluloid software it projected.<sup>4</sup> The degree to which Gunning’s ‘cinema of attractions’ resonates with contemporary exhibition practices suggests the continued value of this perspective on popular theatrical cinema. Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson’s edited collection on the medium and the city refers to the early twentieth century as the era of the ‘modern metropolis’ in which ‘the birth of film arises very much out of the material and imaginative conditions that this new version of the city constructed’,<sup>5</sup> while Ben Singer associates cinema with the chaotic barrage of ‘manufactured stimulus’ of urban spaces.<sup>6</sup> The

2 Branston, *Cinema and Cultural Modernity*, 32.

3 James Donald and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, ‘The Publicness of Cinema’, in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds, *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2004), 126.

4 Tom Gunning, ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde’, in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, eds, *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 56–62.

5 Andrew Webber, ‘Introduction: Moving Images of Cities’, in Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson, eds, *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 5.

6 Ben Singer, ‘Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism’, in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (London: University of California Press, 1995), 88.

American film industry's role in promoting consumer capitalism is indicated by Charles Eckert's 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window', detailing the extent to which cosmetics, clothing, furniture and white goods featured increasingly on cinema screens throughout the same period.<sup>7</sup> Branston also mobilises Miriam Bratu Hansen's notion of classical film as 'vernacular modernism'. Describing cinema's 'contemporaneity with twentieth-century modernisms and modern culture', filmmaking as 'a cultural practice on a par with the experience of modernity', and film as a form 'perceived as the incarnation of *the modern*',<sup>8</sup> Hansen details cinema's congruency with modern changes in social relations and sensory perception, its democratic spirit and its appeal to the newly formed 'mass public'. The space of cinema is both symptomatic of modernity and, for Hansen, provided a reflexive site where the impacts of modernity were negotiated.

Many of these authors are admittedly writing about early film history. The status of cinema as the defining medium of mass popular culture has, in many ways, been superseded by television, while other commentators have considered the internet as providing a more adequate model of Jürgen Habermas' 'public sphere'. Developments in cycles of filmmaking, as well as screening practices, such as the emergence of the drive in, the multiplex, the art house and more recent site-specific screenings, have undoubtedly impacted on the nature of cinema culture and the institution's relationship with differently aged audiences. The drive in was associated with adolescent filmgoers, the multiplex is connected with teenage mall culture, while the art cinema audience are presumed to be older and more educated. Increased targeting of holidays by blockbuster releases and marketing towards the 'family' audience suggests the emergence of a more compatible relationship with child spectators, albeit accompanied by adult carers. This will be considered in the final section where Hollindale's concept of 'childness'<sup>9</sup>

7 Charles Eckert, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window', in John Belton, ed., *Movies and Mass Culture* (London: Athlone, 1999), 95–118.

8 Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism', in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds, *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2004), 337.

9 Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*.

will be applied to recent developments in popular cinema. Nevertheless, many of the features identified by film historians concerning cinema's relationship with modernity remain aspects of contemporary cinema. In some cases these have intensified in recent decades, such as the synergy between cinema and merchandise, the emphasis on spectacular effects-based storytelling, increased advertising and marketing, and the saturation release of blockbuster movies. If cinema is a medium which, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, exemplifies modernity, this provides material and symbolic reason for its uncomfortable relationship with child audiences. Although the box office has long been superseded as the main source of revenue generated by the Hollywood film industry, the cinema remains the primary site with which feature films are associated. Even if the city is no longer the prime location of the movie house, the most prestigious film premiers take place in metropolitan theatres. The cinema is still by definition a public auditorium, despite changes in its scope, size and design. This conflicts with the city's construction as a place of danger to children, who are more appropriately located in the protective domestic sphere of the family home. However, as a space in which the tensions of modernity are negotiated and explored, in the context of certain kinds of cinema, the child, or rather the sense of 'childness' certain screen texts articulate though their evocation of children's culture, can be seen as productively working in conjunction with the institution to reflect upon the nature of the modern condition. In a contradictory sense, characteristic of childhood, modernity and the relationship between the two, the figure of the child movie-goer has had a significant role in the development of the film industry. Evidence suggests young people, just as their adult contemporaries, have always sought to participate in cinema culture, and exhibitors have been keen to capitalise upon such desires, albeit with some telling modifications to standard practices of exhibition. When deliberately tailored to child patrons the theatrical experience undergoes notable reorientation, intended to define it as a child-friendly enterprise. These efforts can be understood as managing perceptions of the cinema space and film entertainment as both adult and modern.

As the next section details, the commercial film industry has rarely produced films specifically designed for a child audience. Nevertheless, histories

of exhibition reveal considerable evidence of the practice of film theatres setting aside specific times in their schedule for children to attend. As Sarah J. Smith<sup>10</sup> and Terry Staples<sup>11</sup> accounts of children's cinema in Britain make clear, not long after the institution of the movie house, theatre owners were capitalising on children as an audience who could fill their empty auditoriums when adult cinemagoers were otherwise engaged. Such institutions appear in perpetual dialogue with concerns about the ways in which childhood might be impacted by this modern medium and the space in which it was exhibited. The fact that children were considered a special audience so early in cinema's history, as they subsequently came to be in relation to radio and television, reflects the intensifying sense throughout the twentieth century that children were a separate category to adults, one whose nature was under potential threat from the 'adultifying' influences of modern mass media, or who might be beneficially served by an alternative kind of service. Teachers, parents and interested groups attempted to define appropriate, and inappropriate, film material for children, and the conditions in which they were screened. This, Smith argues, was a response to the significant impact cinema was having on young people's leisure activities, although the author emphasises the extent to which this was far from homogenous and overlapped with adult experiences.<sup>12</sup> Anxieties expressed were various. Screened content was criticised as potentially harming young people. The physical space of the cinema was also subject to scrutiny. Dangers inherent in these enclosed and often overcrowded buildings were violently realised by early disasters in which children were killed and injured. The auditorium was also regarded as a dark place where children might be subject to sexual abuse from predatory adults, or from other children. But there was also an interest in children being provided with films which they found enjoyable, partly a response to the bad behaviour observed by commentators when children were not adequately engaged, but also originating in

10 Sarah J. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

11 Terry Staples, *All Pals Together: The Story of Children's Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

12 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 141–142.

more benign interests in young people being entertained. Although there were calls for children to be prohibited entirely from cinema attendance, this was not the predominant voice, and many sought to use cinema as a tool for education or moral improvement in an acknowledgement of the medium's positive potential.

Staples dates the first documented UK cinema screening for children as 1900, noting that this does not likely represent the first such event, but rather the earliest instance for which evidence remains in the form of a publicity poster.<sup>13</sup> From the outset these performances were distinguished from mainstream screenings by their matinee scheduling times, the reduced cost of entry, and the frequent inclusion of sweets, fruit and other consumables in the ticket price. However, the content being shown at the early screenings Staples cites was largely indistinguishable from adult programmes. Child matinee goers of the 1920s saw much the same films as adults, with the bill only occasionally cut short to allow the auditorium to be cleaned in time for the mainstream show.<sup>14</sup> Particularly interesting to note is reports of payment for entrance in the form of jam jars or food-stuffs subsequently donated to local hospitals. Theatre owners, aware of the criticism their trade was attracting, can be understood as improved their standing within the local community by foregoing the commercial aspects of the modern movie theatre. A less official economic alternative is represented by the practice of children using various methods to gain entrance to the theatre without having to pay.<sup>15</sup> In both Smith and Staples' stories of children's cinema attendance, these screenings seem particularly chaotic affairs. Smith writes of the constant screaming and stamping throughout Saturday matinees, with children running around the aisles, crawling under the seats and using the floor as a toilet.<sup>16</sup> Other accounts detail spit balls, half-eaten ice lollies, bubble gum, water balloons and dried peas being thrown around the auditorium.<sup>17</sup> A similar observation is made by Nasaw

13 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 2–3.

14 Ibid. 22–23.

15 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 142–143.

16 Ibid. 144–145.

17 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 201.

concerning the noisy 'clubhouse' atmosphere of early American nickelodeons.<sup>18</sup> Although these narratives are based on personal accounts, they construct an image of cinema spectatorship consistent with mythologies of the child as trickster, of children as unruly and uncivilised. An emphasis on consumption throughout the screenings, on the food-related mess and bodily fluids left behind following children's shows, seems particularly reflective of discourses of childhood as animalistic. Narratives depicting the adult space of the auditorium taken over by rambunctious young people, the screened content on show drowned out in the anarchy of over-excited children, resonate with fictional constructions of childhood. Stories of stink bombs, cap guns, catapults and itching powder released in the auditorium<sup>19</sup> seem almost drawn from the pages of the comic books exhibitors handed out to children to keep them busy as they waited in line to enter the cinema. One commentator even makes this connection, arguing that matinee audiences' antics were 'all Bash Street kids stuff'.<sup>20</sup>

A significant moment in the history of British screenings for children, cited by both Staples<sup>21</sup> and Smith,<sup>22</sup> was a disaster at a Paisley cinema in late 1929, where smoke from a smouldering film tin caused a panic in which around a hundred young people were killed. As material evidence of the dangers of modern public spaces, flammable chemicals and unscrupulous cinema owners, this led to greater regulation of children's screenings with an emphasis on crowd control. The event coincided with concern for the material being screened, as the recent advent of synchronised sound led to the development of genres such as horror movies, crime dramas and sex films which regulators saw as particularly harmful to children.<sup>23</sup> One response to the concerns which Smith records, a proposition that would have provided a third definition of 'children's cinema' to the two proposed

18 Nasaw, 'Children and Commercial Culture', 22.

19 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 146.

20 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 187.

21 Ibid. 25–28.

22 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 160–161.

23 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 30.



by Bazalgette and Staples<sup>24</sup> was the establishment of entire cinemas dedicated to children.<sup>25</sup> Another alternative is represented by the screening of film material to children in church halls,<sup>26</sup> providing a 'cinematic' experience for young people, albeit one that did not take place in the commercial cinema auditorium. The template for respectable UK children's screenings was the American Mickey Mouse Club. In this the organisation of children's cinema involved not only appealing to young people as spectators, but also convincing concerned adults that such experiences embodied wholesome children's entertainment conducive to dominant ideas of childhood. Kline sees the advent of Saturday matinée screenings featuring 'cartoon clubs' as suiting exhibitors' desire to dispel cinema's seedy image and promote picture houses as a legitimate space for 'family entertainment'.<sup>27</sup> Richard deCordova details the heavy promotion of traditional children's products featuring the Disney brand, such as doll houses, paint and pencil sets. While financially beneficial to all, the presence of these products suited the pedagogical rhetoric of the day which regarded toys and play of any kind as educational.<sup>28</sup> Although commercial in nature this was a kind of modern consumer practice which, as previously discussed, was seen as positively beneficial to children.

Such practices are evident in Britain, where from the mid-1930s Odeon cinemas imported the Mickey Mouse Club.<sup>29</sup> Variants across the British cinema circuit included Granada's Granadiers Club, Empire's Ranger Club and Ritz's Union Chums Club. Exhibitors sought to mobilise the same combination of 'popularity and respectability' as their American counterparts.<sup>30</sup> DeCordova's account also emphasises the ways exhibitors sought to placate adult concerns surrounding children's cinema attendance by incorporating

24 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids'.

25 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 165.

26 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 44–45.

27 Kline, *Out of the Garden*, 110.

28 Richard deCordova, 'The Mickey in Macy's Window: Childhood, Consumerism, and Disney Animation', in Eric Smoodin, ed., *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (London: Routledge, 1994), 210–211.

29 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 166–167.

30 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 52–53.

non-cinematic activities into their Saturday morning screenings. These included marble shooting, doll dressing and ice cream eating competitions.<sup>31</sup> British clubs entailed such 'collective rituals'<sup>32</sup> including patriotic club songs and pledges which emphasised the institutions' function in keeping children out of mischief, praised the good care provided by cinema staff, promoted road safety and sympathy for the poor and needy.<sup>33</sup> Various institutionalised practices distinguished children's club screenings from mainstream exhibition in an attempt to promote cinema institutions as a beneficial influence on the young in the eyes of parents, teachers, local authorities, politicians and other concerned adults. In their emphasis on activities which had nothing to do with cinema, exhibitors reflected antipathy towards relations between children and the film screen. This is counteracted through the presence of traditional children's activities, taking place outside the modern space of the cinema auditorium. At the same time the cinema experience for children, with its combination of celebrity visits, talks and performances, harked back to earlier periods of film exhibition, where moving pictures were interspersed with other forms of live entertainment. Public-spirited sentiments expressed in their club songs, and the connections these organisations forged with local organisations, also suggests a sense of young people as future citizens in the making. Drawing on the work of Hansen and Mayne, Smith argues that the 'alternative public sphere' cinema provided for women, queer and immigrant audiences might also be applied to children who 'colonised' the cinema auditorium. The space of the film theatre afforded 'liberating escapism through films and a warm, dark, virtually adult-free environment for engaging in "wild" and subversive behaviour'.<sup>34</sup> Along similar lines, Nasaw sees the early nickelodeons as a place where young people could escape adult surveillance, a consequent source of concern for reformers.<sup>35</sup> Such an assessment suggests that cinema

31 deCordova, 'The Mickey in Macy's Window', 207–208.

32 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 51.

33 Ibid. 53–60.

34 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 172–173.

35 Nasaw, 'Children and Commercial Culture', 25.

offered young people access to the benefits of modernity, in the form of a public space which could be staked as their own.

Histories of children's matinee performances tend to conclude in the 1970s. Staples' history sees the gradual phasing out of many defining characteristics of children's cinema clubs throughout this period.<sup>36</sup> The decline of children's screenings is considered the combined consequence of changes in the management and ownership of British cinemas, industrial disputes and the competition posed by Saturday morning television. It is with a certain nostalgic sadness that Staples notes multiplex kids clubs offering a choice of films on both Saturdays and Sundays, where children are required to be accompanied by an adult and confectionary is not given for free. Instead its sale becomes a commercial requirement of shows breaking even.<sup>37</sup> Despite such claims, weekend screenings for children continue in many major multiplexes and independent cinemas. These maintain some qualities of pre-1970s institutions, defined by their location in the schedule, reduced ticket prices, and the incorporation of competitions and activities. Studies of children's cinema as an exhibition practice are problematised by the relative lack of critical attention paid to the auditorium or cinema within traditional film studies. However, a recent article exploring children's relationship with cinema, specifically parent and baby screenings, is particularly noteworthy. Karen Boyle's study indicates the continued ways the cinema experience is being tailored for particular audiences, which include practices like senior screenings, toddler screenings, autism-friendly screenings, alongside more traditional children's screenings and cult film screenings. A study of the different ways these practices function, the kinds of films selected by exhibitors, and the logic determining their decisions would be a valuable contribution to media studies. Boyle's paper, and the very existence of dedicated parent-infant screenings, suggests the continued definition of the cinema as an adult space. This is reflected in the general exclusion of infants from the auditorium, but also in the respondents to Boyle's study who say the

36 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 223.

37 Ibid. 242.

pleasure of going to the cinema is in feeling 'like a normal grown up'.<sup>38</sup> This leads to antipathy, Boyle suggests, towards the exhibition of 'children's films' at such events, attendance of which is considered an opportunity to evade child-related preoccupations.<sup>39</sup> Concerns expressed in a radio programme about the practice, comparing parent and baby screenings to a form of child abuse,<sup>40</sup> as well as discomfort expressed by attendees at their infants being in the presence of depressing or violent content<sup>41</sup> indicate continued anxieties concerning the impact of cinema on young audiences, although the reasons behind carers' misgivings are notably complex. Also revealing are contrasts drawn between cinema and television. Although interviewees expressed a certain middle-class distaste for the domestic medium, in other conversations it appears that television is equated with children, education and responsible child-centred parenting, from which the cinema is a welcome escape.<sup>42</sup> Like Smith,<sup>43</sup> Boyle uses the term 'colonization' to describe the ways parents and carers are reconfiguring the auditorium,<sup>44</sup> indicating a continued struggle over audience's uses of the cinema public sphere for those who have historically been excluded from modernity, such as women, mothers, infants and children. Despite film scholarship's overwhelming emphasis on the content of cinema screenings, such studies emphasise the importance of the cinema as a spatial institution, the context in which film material is screened, and the function of programming in defining audiences and their preferences.

38 Karen Boyle, 'Watch with Baby: Cinema, Parenting and Community', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13/3 (2010), 279.

39 Ibid. 284.

40 Ibid. 275.

41 Ibid. 284–285.

42 Ibid. 282–283.

43 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 172.

44 Boyle, 'Watch with Baby', 279.

## Children's Films and the Navigation of Modernity

Having considered 'children's cinema' in terms of exhibition practices, attention will now turn to the content screened in such spaces, as a means of defining films for children. As Neil Sinyard observes:

In depicting childhood, the cinema ... has generally excluded, creatively speaking, the voice that could speak with first-hand authority on the subject: namely, the child him/herself. Hardly any films have been made *by* children *for* children.<sup>45</sup>

As already noted, the same applies to much media for children, which is produced with young people in mind but without their significant participation. Official representations of children, in paintings, photographs and literature are rarely authored by children themselves, and Sinyard is correct to identify the absence of children's perspectives in cinema about childhood. However, children's film is something of an extreme case, insofar as films made *for* children, meaning feature length movies designed for theatrical exhibition, are extremely rare indeed. The medium lacks the institutional support enjoyed by other children's media. Townsend observes, over the past century, libraries and schools have provided an established demand for children's literature free from commercial pressures.<sup>46</sup> British children's television within the public service tradition has enjoyed a degree of regulatory protection,<sup>47</sup> while children are also an economically significant audience for commercial television.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, films for children have not been offered such sustained protection. From a purely commercial perspective children might be considered a particularly unappealing film audience. An illustrative example cited by Amy M. Davis concerns MGM's 1939 *The Wizard of Oz* which reportedly failed to make a profit due to the

45 Neil Sinyard, *Children in the Movies* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1992), 11–12.

46 John Rowe Townsend, *A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children* (London: Longman, 1971), 10.

47 David Buckingham, Hannah Davies, Ken Jones and Peter Kelley, *Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse and Policy* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 5.

48 Ibid. 127–128.

high percentage of cut-price tickets sold to children. Similar issues impacted on Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). When the concessionary ticket price was suspended the film broke records for box office takings. When it remained in place, cinemas only reported record numbers of attendees.<sup>49</sup> The large presence of children in the audience attending a mainstream screening has potential adverse impact on a theatre's profits. Indeed, one of the motives for the institutionalisation of children's matinees was the provision of a separate space for young people to enjoy bargain basement film material, preserving the mainstream screening schedule for full-paying adults.

As Bazalgette and Staples observe, Hollywood has historically regarded films produced solely for children as 'just bad business', preferring the more universalising, ambiguous and easily exportable category 'family film'.<sup>50</sup> The tenuous nature of the genre has been reflected in many studies engaging with the notion of children's film texts. For example, Heather Addison, who draws on Bazalgette and Staples in a chapter exploring 'children's films in the 1990s' soon collapses 'children's film' and 'family film' in an analysis of subgenres of the cycle.<sup>51</sup> Ian Wojcik-Andrews considers the definition of children's film in the opening chapter to their book on the subject, drawing on critics of children's literature. Despite such considerations, the author's study often conflates children's films with films about childhood in a study which includes *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948), *Salaam Bombay* (1988), *The Cement Garden* (1992) and *Stand by Me* (1986).<sup>52</sup> A study carried out by Karin A. Martin and Emily Kazyak on heterosexuality in 'children's G-rated films' uses certification as a guideline, although the authors admit 'the audience for these films is broader than children'

49 Amy M. Davis, 'The Fall and Rise of *Fantasia*', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds, *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 66.

50 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids', 94–95.

51 Heather Addison, 'Children's Films in the 1990s', in Wheeler Winston Dixon, ed., *Film Genre 2000: New Critical Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 177–191.

52 Ian Wojcik-Andrews, *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory* (London: Garland Publishing, 2000).

even if 'children are certainly centrally intended as part of the audience'.<sup>53</sup> The term 'children's films', used in either popular, journalistic, or even academic context, rarely refers to features designed solely with children in mind. More likely it implies a film of this type, produced for mass or family audiences, which is expected to contain some children and likely to feature textual tropes associated with children's culture. Producers must make efforts not to alienate or exclude young people from such experiences. But family films must also ensure they do not alienate adults who serve as ticket-buying chaperones for young cinemagoers, and represent a significant market in their own right. Unlike books, television and digital media, which a child can consume alone or with peers in the family home, films watched in the public cinema space are likely to require adult accompaniment for the duration. Indeed the UK regulatory structure of cinema has institutionalised this within various certification practices such as the 'A' and '12A' classifications.

Any commercial film for children must therefore incorporate the presence of adults as part of its implied audience. Given the power imbalance between carer and child, this situation might seem to privilege the former over the latter, a reality observed by one of the most popularly perceived filmmakers of children's culture. Walt Disney is quoted in an official Corporation publication as saying:

While the rights and privileges of youth today are far greater than ever before, in entertainment as in other sides of their home and public life, it is still the parents who, in the main, decide what their growing youngsters may see on the screen. So it is the parents and other adult guardians of children's welfare we must satisfy.<sup>54</sup>

As Bazalgette and Staples acerbically observe, if the film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989) was truly aimed at children it would be called *Sis, Dad Shrunk Us*.<sup>55</sup> The context in which feature films are viewed, combined with the commercial environment in which they are produced, undermines the possibility

53 Karin A. Martin and Emily Kazyak, 'Hetero-Romantic Love and Heterosexiness in Children's G-Rated Films', *Gender & Society* 23/3 (2009), 321.

54 Dave Smith, *The Quotable Walt Disney* (New York: Disney Editions, 2001), 132.

55 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids', 96.

of a clear and unambiguous 'children's cinema' primarily addressed at children, to the exclusion of other audiences. Yet despite their marginalisation as an exclusive audience, the figure of the child has had considerable significance throughout the history of cinema. Even if the State is not involved in funding films for children, it most certainly maintains prohibitive practices which determine what features children are permitted to view. Certification is formally organised around age, and the details of such structures reveal, with unusual clarity, official conceptions of appropriate media for children to consume. The website for the British Board of Film Classification, an institution established in 1912 under its previous title the British Board of Film Censorship, provides an official insight into national-specific perceptions of child audiences and their relationship to screen content. The BBFC's 'U' certificate film, viewable by cinemagoers of all ages, contains various prohibitions relating to categories including 'discrimination', 'drugs', 'imitable behaviour', 'language', 'nudity', 'sex', 'threat' and 'violence'. This reflects taboos surrounding children and sexuality, as well as concepts of children as vulnerable audiences, mimicking activities they see on the screen, or being traumatised by visual content. Inclusion of 'discrimination' suggests similar concerns of imitation, with assurances that anti-social activities in 'U' films which might be repeated are treated in a disapproving manner. The child spectator reflected through such processes is therefore both a potential threat to social harmony, and a potential victim of unsettling screen content.

Definitions of 'PG' films, detailed as those which 'should not unsettle a child aged around eight or older' express more negotiation, with individual parents given responsibility in determining the appropriateness of material for their offspring. The presence of sexuality is more likely to be allowed in films of this category. However this should be 'implied', 'discreet', or in the form of 'innuendo'. A distinction is implied between the viewing capabilities of the modern knowing adult and the innocent child likely to miss such references. Fantasy and historic genres are also cited as providing a more acceptable context for violent actions, reflecting continuities between cinema considered appropriate for children, educational content, fairy stories and the fantasy genre. The belief that fantasy provides a beneficial means for children to encounter otherwise unpalatable realities has roots



in psychoanalytically informed studies of children's fiction. Cinema, in the UK as elsewhere, is therefore regulated in terms of recognisable discourses concerning children, childhood, young people and the media. Moreover, despite stipulations concerning the treatment of subject matter, children's relationship with screen content is predominantly constructed as lack, in terms of what must be absent, rather than what is present. Ratings suggest only that films are not considered inappropriate for children, rather than positively indicating that they are made for or particularly likely to appeal to this audience. A 'U' certificate does not indicate a feature's 'children's film' status, but rather its suitability for all ages. Even within its own website, the BBFC admits the fraught endeavour of defining films according to young audiences, admitting: 'it is impossible to predict what might upset any particular child.'<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the ways in which mainstream cinema certification has been organised around perceptions of the child viewer, as the previous section indicated, children have been spectators of filmed material since the medium's institutionalisation. Children have been recognised as a specific audience deserving their own screening time by exhibitors with various commercial, public relations or philanthropic motivations. Films programmed for the events might not have been specifically made for children. Nevertheless, like the films shown at the 'watch with baby' screening discussed by Boyle, the media selected to be exhibited at children's matinees can be understood as 'a public statement about its suitability' for audiences within this context.<sup>57</sup> Children's literature finds its definition in books promoted by publishing houses, selected by librarians, awarded prizes or featured on bestseller lists. Scheduling is similarly implicated in understandings of children's television. Child audiences are not entirely unengaged in this process. While acknowledging the overlap between adult film experiences, Smith argues that children in the 1930s enjoyed their own distinct cinema culture<sup>58</sup> often representing continuities with other children's media. Favoured genres included cowboy and crime dramas, and

56 British Board of Film Classification <<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/>> accessed 1 May 2017.

57 Boyle, 'Watch with Baby', 286.

58 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 141.

adventure films following romantic traditions of children's stories, such as Zorro, Robin Hood and Tarzan.<sup>59</sup> Kline also notes how Disney's early animated films drew upon fairy tales such as Cinderella, Puss 'n Boots, Goldilocks and Little Red Riding Hood,<sup>60</sup> a tradition which no doubt continues to enhance child audiences' relationship with animation. Despite many connections with previous, and subsequent, children's culture, there are some apparent anomalies. Pre-war cinema circuit screenings for children, the content of which was often selected with the collaboration of education-ists and local authorities, included animal documentaries and children's literature adaptations,<sup>61</sup> but also adaptations of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1926) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935),<sup>62</sup> texts which, in their original form, few would consider to be children's literature. At more commercial screenings there is a high frequency of adventure films, serials starring child protagonists,<sup>63</sup> cowboy films, films featuring animals, cliff-hanger serials and cartoon shorts.<sup>64</sup> Some of these genres became regular components of the children's film circuit, leading to what Staples calls the 'eternal triangle of matinee programming': Westerns, serials and cartoons.<sup>65</sup>

Any assumption that such content simply reflected audience tastes is challenged by the considerable external factors which contributed to the composition of these programmes, including adult pressure groups, educationalists and specialists, and official censorship bodies. Economic pressures are also a consideration. For example, Staples cites 1930s polls which record children's favourite film star as being Shirley Temple, topping both Western star Buck Jones and cartoon character Donald Duck. However, in contrast to the two runners up, as a combined consequence of Temple's success with mainstream audience and the matinee market's

59 Ibid. 148–149.

60 Kline, *Out of the Garden*, 110–111.

61 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 43.

62 Ibid. 46–47.

63 Ibid. 8–9.

64 Ibid. 22–24.

65 Ibid. 71.

lowly position in the distribution hierarchy, 'their overall top favourite film star could almost never be seen on Saturday mornings, because she was too good for them'.<sup>66</sup> Cinema owners were not always successful in their endeavours to please child spectators. The failure of one early cinema club, Smith attributes to the choice of screenings. Documentaries and lengthy literature adaptations failed to distract child viewers from the more exciting programmes presented by rival cinemas.<sup>67</sup> Due, partly, to economic pressures, there are frequently retrospective qualities to material being screened in these spaces. As Staples notes, half of the features shown in post-war matinees were made by a pre-war film industry,<sup>68</sup> while children attending matinees at the Roxy theatre in the late 1940s were still being shown Buster Keaton films.<sup>69</sup> 1960s audiences would watch screened material featuring George Formby, Old Mother Riley and The Three Stooges, as well as silent movie compilations.<sup>70</sup> Such practices resonate with traditions whereby culture considered too unsophisticated for adults comes to be passed down to children. A promotional card for the early 1970s Super Saturday Show, reproduced in Staples' study, suggests traditions established in the post-war period persisted throughout the decades. The poster-like image promises a 'serial', a 'feature film', 'cartoons' and 'cinema', represented by images of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, recurring icons of the matinee movement. These are accompanied by 'competitions' and, reflecting the multimedia nature of children's screenings, 'top ten pop music'.<sup>71</sup> Although Staples' study does not detail these later periods of the matinees' history, in the context of 1970s cinema the provision of a mixed programme appears a significant anachronism, a throwback to the pre-war period, just as post-war cinema for children screened silent films while continuing early cinema practice of combining film and live entertainment.

66 Ibid. 72.

67 Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, 166.

68 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 150.

69 Ibid. 138.

70 Ibid. 219.

71 Ibid. 224.

In terms of children's cinema's engagement with modernity, the recurrence of the cowboy as a trope of children's culture is significant. The presence of the Western in children's matinees Staples attributes to a combination of textual, ideological and economic factors, related to their 'brevity, morality and long-term availability'.<sup>72</sup> Westerns accommodated the diminished nature of the children's screening slot, they satisfied the requirements of concerned individuals, and were cheap and plentiful for exhibitors. At the same time, these were not films made with child audiences in mind, as evident in the presence of standard Hollywood romantic elements which Staples says were particularly unpopular with matinee audiences.<sup>73</sup> Additional forces, external to child viewing preferences, might explain the cycle's prominent association with children's screenings of this era. Clearly this is a genre located in the past, a costume drama set within a heavily mythologised period of American history. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh consider at length 'the enduring nature of the cowboy hero in adult memory', observing the significance of Western iconography to the screen culture of young people growing up between the 1940s and early 1960s. They also note how the recent *Toy Story* (1995–2010) franchise, a trilogy increasingly resonating with nostalgia for a childhood past, reflects the persistence of cowboy and cowgirl iconography in adult recollections of childhood.<sup>74</sup> Further examples, drawn from a number of historical sources, include the Davy Crockett hat, cowboy trading cards, Lone Ranger figures and Disney's Frontierland. In a significant observation concerning the preoccupations of academics of children's culture, the authors reproduce the covers of books by Kline<sup>75</sup> and Buckingham<sup>76</sup> on toys, television and children's screen media, both of which feature cowboys on old-fashioned television sets.<sup>77</sup>

72 Ibid. 63.

73 Ibid. 65.

74 Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, *Researching Children's Popular Culture*, 47–48.

75 Kline, *Out of the Garden*.

76 David Buckingham, *Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Responses to Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

77 Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, *Researching Children's Popular Culture*, 51–52.

The status of the cowboy in memories of children's culture might also be understood in relation to the genre's reflection upon processes of modernity. Westerns bring together a range of origin narratives, primarily relating to the establishment of the United States of America, being set broadly between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the twentieth century. The genre is in many ways located on the cusp of modernity, between the township and the wilderness, between the lawman and the gunfighter, narrating the establishment of agriculture, railways, newspapers, capitalism, democracy and its necessary encroachment on less civilised, natural, uncultured ways of living. In an overview of criticism surrounding the Western, Barry Langford notes the predominant emphasis on a small number of 'A' Westerns in studies of the genre. This entails side-lining the kinds of 'B' movie or serial Westerns which would have been shown at children's screenings. Such films, many of which have likely failed to survive the years, are largely ignored or dismissed as childish and unworthy of adult interest, a process in which 'folk memory of childhood Saturday matinees' is significantly implicated.<sup>78</sup> For many adults, including film critics, the Western represents formative experiences of going to the cinema, as children, when their relationship with the medium was founded. In addition, the Western is implicated in the history of cinema itself. A film credited with establishing many conventions of classical narrative filmmaking is Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), a short silent film which, although the term was not in circulation at the time, would be understood as a Western by contemporary generic standards. Exploring the structural tensions of the genre, Langford observes the 'ambivalent relationship' between 'apparently dichotomous' spaces, such as interior and exterior, urban environments and wilderness, whereby 'the Western finds its determining ground'. This is a genre about the taming of the landscape and the closing of the frontier, a process which is regarded with significant antipathy. The results is a genre characterised by 'an undertow of both nostalgia and anxiety for the future.'<sup>79</sup> Such a sensibility resonates strongly with perspectives of child-

78 Barry Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 61.

79 Ibid. 65–66.

hood as an expression of historical ambivalence about processes of modernity. Structures of childhood are also implicated in the sense of cultural memory and popular historical mythology which Langford and others see in the Western's treatment by critics. Westerns constitute 'curiosities, relics of an older age in a film culture dominated by newer technologies of action spectacle like science fiction and techno-blockbusters'.<sup>80</sup> The Western, like childhood, represents a site of multiple origins. The genre depicts the historical origins of American society. For those of a certain generation it symbolises formative experiences of cinema. And it has a role in the emergence of commercial narrative film itself. Like childhood, the Western is variously celebrated for its classic generic purity, regarded with fond yet condescending nostalgia, and dismissed as undeserving of serious attention. Despite its apparent absence from cinema screens, both matinee and mainstream, two of the four films Langford cites as representing contemporary transformations of the genre have associations with children's cinema: *Star Wars* (1977) and *Toy Story* (1995).

The post-war period saw renewed criticism of children's screening spaces, resulting, for a unique period, in the production of films for a child audience. Throughout 1946, Staples observes, the issue of children's cinema: 'At all levels, except amongst children ... was one of the talking points of the year'.<sup>81</sup> Two British film companies were dedicated to the production of film material appropriate for children across the matinee circuit. The Children's Film Department, later Children's Entertainment Films, was a subsidiary of Rank cinemas intended to provide material for the chain's children's cinema clubs. Their first production, *Tom's Ride* (1944), appears to satisfy Bazalgette and Staples' requirements of a children's film in presenting young audiences with 'child characters with whom they could identify in a social and urban context that was indisputably contemporary England'.<sup>82</sup> Other films produced under the Rank umbrella included *Sports Day* (1944), *Jean's Plan* (1946) and *Bush Christmas* (1947). The Children's Film Foundation was established with a similar remit, to produce appropriate material for matinee screenings, subsidised through

80 Ibid. 54.

81 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 118.

82 Ibid. 96.

a levy on cinema ticket sales.<sup>83</sup> The intentions of such companies and the films they produced was not simply to entertain matinee-goers. Part of the CFF's project was also to promote the respectability of cinema, as explicitly stated in its aims: 'To demonstrate to educationalists and social workers that the film industry in this country aims at producing and exhibiting films which are suitable in every way for children'<sup>84</sup> as well as to produce films 'of a type that children will readily pay to see.'<sup>85</sup> However, notable efforts were made to ascertain children's tastes, from questionnaires<sup>86</sup> and infra-red photographs of child audiences watching films in the cinema,<sup>87</sup> subjecting children to scientific scrutiny as a means of determining their film tastes and responses to on-screen action. Staples notes an end to the Children's Film Foundation's funding in the late 1980s,<sup>88</sup> although the institution continued in various guises, largely in partnership with television, a medium with which the organisation had enjoyed a notable relationship.

Investigating the Saturday morning matinee as a space of exhibition, and producers like Children's Entertainment Films and The Children's Film Foundation, provides a further corpus of films not only watched by children of this period but designed for children to see. However, throughout their lifespan these organisations never succeeded in meeting the demands of the matinee circuits, or their own ambitions of providing a continuous rotating programme of feature films for children. Unless they were attending a Rank matinee screening children would not have seen CEF films, and CFF movies were only a relatively small proportion of the nationwide matinee programme. It must also be acknowledged that, although screened in cinemas, not only was the majority of the content shown not made for children, much of it was not strictly speaking feature films. Although they were a part of the programme, the matinee movement appears to have been hampered by the lack of movies made for children, but also by the feature

83 Ibid. 175.

84 Ibid. 189–190.

85 Ibid. 191.

86 Ibid. 142.

87 Ibid. 158–159.

88 Ibid. 240.

length film as a format. The standard duration of the theatrically released film appears unsuited to children's attention span, programmers' perceptions of children's ability to focus, or attempts to keep a mixed group of young people entertained with a single piece of film content over an hour in length. Media produced by both Children's Entertainment Films and The Children's Film Foundation were in most cases distinct for starring child characters, but also for being shorter than the average mainstream picture, tending to be between fifty and sixty minutes long.<sup>89</sup>

## Childness and American Cinema

Previous sections explored various ways in which children might be considered to have a problematic relationship with cinema culture. The potential dangers of the cinema space, both physical and moral, real and imagined, required children be provided with their own period in the cinema schedule. Perceptions of the medium as having a potentially negative influence on the young led to filmed entertainment being supplemented with activities which had little to do with going to the pictures. The material of the general schedule was also considered inappropriate for children. As a consequence, as the matinee movement developed, children were provided with different programmes to the mainstream. Although these did not necessarily contain material made for children, in some instances films were produced specifically to be viewed by young people at these dedicated screenings. While satisfying young people, such efforts also served a role in pacifying concerns amongst adults, from whom children often required permission and necessary funding to attend cinema screenings, and who may also have accompanied them in the auditorium. Concepts of children's cinema, compared to children's literature or children's television, are therefore problematic on various levels. Many of the practices of

89 Ibid. 159.



the matinee movement had an eye to pleasing adult carers as censors or potential audience members. Any filmed material they screened was made by adults, selected by adults and often produced without children in mind. The location, financial structuring and communal viewing experience of cinema can be seen as compromising and complicating the institution in its exclusive address to children. Nevertheless, despite the marginality of child audiences this narrative depicts, children have had a significant role in the operation of commercial cinema since its inception, as evidenced in the popularity of film amongst young people, the way the certification system is structured around age, and the frequency with which 'children's film' collapses into the prominent 'family film' genre.

In describing and defining a certain kind of mainstream cinema the concept of 'childness' is extremely useful. The term is drawn from Hollindale's influential work, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*. This study undertakes an intervention in discussions concerning the nature of children's literature, turning attention away from such external aspects as authorial intention or the engagement of child readers, towards a consideration of defining qualities of the text.<sup>90</sup> The critic's concern is with the negotiations taking place on the page between the author and the reader in terms of the construction of childhood a book contains.<sup>91</sup> This construction is primarily located in child protagonists, who Hollindale argues, ought to represent a diversity of characters in order to present children with a healthy pluralised range of self-images.<sup>92</sup> A successful work of children's literature is one which contains a resonant depiction of childhood for significant numbers of child readers. This is a requirement the author sees screen media as failing to deliver.<sup>93</sup> Although it is easy to dismiss the literary critic's approach to such culture as disciplinary snobbery, when it comes to cinema numerous problems have been identified with the representation of children on the cinema screen and the production of films engaging with child audiences. Bazalgette and Staples point out how the star system works to privilege

90 Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, 25–26.

91 Ibid. 12.

92 Ibid. 14–15.

93 Ibid. 20–21.

adult actors and adult-centred narratives. Family films, the dominant mode of cinema incorporating child audiences, frequently revolve around parents dealing with the problem of children rather than the concerns of children on their own terms.<sup>94</sup> The word 'childness' is coined, or rather, revived in Hollindale's discussion of the distinguishing characteristics of children's literature, as a means of describing aspects associated with childhood without using disparaging, condescending, reductive, tautological or otherwise inappropriate adjectives such as 'childish', 'childlike' or 'juvenile'.<sup>95</sup> Childness is historically variable, subject to a range of influences and discourses, both personal and individual, as Hollindale writes:

a complex amalgam of more or less permanent characteristics with many changing ones, determined by religion, society, culture and science as well as being coloured by the idiosyncrasies of individual perception.<sup>96</sup>

There is significant value to the concept of 'childness' as a means of understanding the family film cycle, in ways which draw upon and develop Hollindale's application. The author's focus is very much on child literary figures, or the adult protagonist whose psychology is bound up with childhood experiences. In transposing this concept onto cinema the term extends beyond the depiction of child characters, who often have a marginal role in family films. Neither is it limited to understanding the text's function for child readers, another concern of Hollindale's study, as child filmgoers are not necessarily the sole audience being addressed by family film cinema. In this context, 'childness' refers to textual qualities which signal a film's affinity with a broad and overlapping range of children's media, including literature, cinema, television, toys, games, folk tales and digital culture. The term incorporates textual aspects such as colour, design, music, the angling of the camera, whether a film is live action, animation or computer-generated. Such aspects of a film resonate with childhood in ways which are historically and culturally variable and open to subversion,

94 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids'.

95 Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, 45.

96 Ibid. 48.

regeneration and contestation. Nevertheless there are aesthetics, narrative tropes, genres, qualities and characteristics that have an established and recurring presence in Western children's culture, which mark film's 'childness' irrespective of the presence of child characters on screen or child audience members in the auditorium. This concept also becomes useful as a means of understanding the function of such qualities for adult spectators. As has been made clear, Hollywood does not make 'children's films', but rather, films for 'children of all ages', a mythical formation which suggests the mythical nature of the childhood these experiences mobilise.

Despite the shift in medium, this does not represent a major diversion from Hollindale's study. Although the author's emphasis is on child readers and child characters, there are numerous points when adult or non-child related functions of childness are cited. It is a preoccupation with childhood and children which concerns authors of books for young people, Hollindale argues, not actual child readers.<sup>97</sup> Of the three interests such literature addresses, adult readers' desire to refresh a continued connection to childhood, and adult beliefs in the nature of childhood, outweigh the child's concern for their own present childhood, two to one.<sup>98</sup> The original example of the term's use, in *A Winter's Tale*, refers to an adult considering the pleasure they enjoy in experiencing the 'childness' of their son. Hollindale writes of a 'transaction' between the fictional adult and child, constituting 'a shared set of pleasuring beliefs about childhood and child behaviour, in which the adult can engage ... as a participant observer'.<sup>99</sup> Crucially, in a paragraph less than four lines long, Hollindale acknowledges that a book may not feature any child characters, and yet might express a complex sense of childness. Examples the author cites, albeit briefly, are the Biggles adventure stories or stories about animals.<sup>100</sup> Consequently a feature film might exhibit childness without featuring child characters, and present an engagement with childhood not intended primarily for child cinema-goers. There are no children in the first three *Star Wars* (1977–1983) films.

97 Ibid. 31.

98 Ibid. 42–43.

99 Ibid. 47.

100 Ibid. 85.

*Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) has no significant child characters. Most Disney films do not feature children, but rather, adolescents on the verge of adulthood seeking escape or adventure. Child characters are also thin on the ground in Pixar animation. The considerable success of these films results from their appeal to a broad audience consisting of adults as well as children. Yet, despite these caveats, there is something about them which most Western audiences would associate with qualities of childhood. And as with children's literature, films of childness succeed to a significant extent by presenting adult audiences with satisfying images of childhood for adults, as well as children, to enjoy.

Despite the tenuous status of the children's film in the commercial industry, childness has proven of significant value to Hollywood throughout its history. Cary Elza writes of the importance for early filmmakers of Victorian constructions of childhood in *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Peter Pan*. Adaptations of these works express tensions within modernity characterising aspects of early cinema, particularly relating to special effects techniques used to create images of the fantastical. Because they enjoy an affinity with the spiritual, Elza argues, the Victorian child or more specifically the Victorian girl, serves to reconcile the 'magic' of cinema's impossible spectacle with the spectacular technologies entailed in their realisation.<sup>101</sup> Audiences of early cinema, Gunning suggests, were well aware of the mechanics of the moving image, which often constituted the attraction for filmgoers, rather than the films themselves.<sup>102</sup> Appreciation of the trick film, as with contemporary special effects cinema, entailed a sense of wonder at the impossible images brought to life on the screen, accompanied by a knowingness that the spectacle results from media technologies skilfully employed by the filmmaker. Such pleasures depend upon a process of doublethink, combining 'childlike' amazement at the realisation of fantastical scenes, alongside knowledgeable 'adult' appreciation of the cutting edge industrial techniques through which the experience is generated. Filmmakers' decision to draw upon works of children's literature, however

101 Cary Elza, 'Alice in Cartoonland: Childhood, Gender, and Imaginary Space in Early Disney Animation', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9/1 (2014), 8.

102 Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions'.

loosely interpreted, secured this process. Focusing on Disney's little-known early shorts with their combination of animation and live action, Elza's study indicates the function of both the child and children's culture in providing a means whereby the tensions and contradictions of special effects cinema can be secured. As with the original *Alice in Wonderland*, a critical distinction can be drawn between the child of the text and a text's childness, although the two are frequently collapsed and mutually dependent. The Alice shorts might bear little relation to their source material. Nevertheless, Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, the child actor playing the character on the screen, the status of the novel as a classic of children's literature, popular understandings of the book as a gift for a real-life girl who served as the template for the novel's protagonist, in addition to any actual children in the auditorium enjoying the picture, enhances the implied wonder and enchantment of the adult spectator adopting a child-like disposition towards the screen. Disney is seen as enacting a sleight of hand in this respect, as the animated world of the Alice comedies is structured as emerging from the imagination of the live action character/actor herself,<sup>103</sup> much as Carol's book is revealed to be the dream of its fictional/real child protagonist.

Animation has been identified as a form particularly prominent in the exhibition of films to children. However, as with the Western and the serial, the relationship between cartoons and child audiences is complex and far from exclusive. Cartoon shorts, like other staples of the matinee circuit, were not made for children as their main audience. In a study of mainstream cinema bills of this period, Eric Smoodin illustrates the extent to which animated shorts were part of the programme of entertainment delivered to all cinemagoers, often complementing the mainstream feature films they accompanied. Animation only became 'more rigidly fixed as children's entertainment', Smoodin argues, in the 1950s.<sup>104</sup> Even then, Jason Mittell observes that this did not happen until the subsequent decade, as theatrical shorts of the studio era become repackaged as longer programmes of animation screened during the 'kid vid' slots, along with mainstream

103 Elza, 'Alice in Cartoonland', 14.

104 Eric Smoodin, *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* (Oxford: Roundhouse Publishing, 1993), 7–8.

television cartoons which failed to engage adult audiences.<sup>105</sup> The reason behind animation's historical association with children might be related to the 'childness' of the cartoon. Irrespective of content, as a form which traditionally emerges from drawn images, animation has connections with the picture book and the comic as established variants of children's literature. Aspects of traditional children's narratives, such as talking anthropomorphised animals, can more easily be realised in animation than live action. Paul Wells writes of the ways in which the mode suits depictions of magical transformation, making explicit connections with the work of Warner who sees this as a defining quality of the fairy tale.<sup>106</sup> As a means of showcasing the affordances of the form, early animators tended to use such stories as their source material. Kline notes Disney's use of folk tales,<sup>107</sup> while similarly themed Betty Boop shorts were also released, titled *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1931), *Dizzy Red Riding Hood* (1931), *Mother Goose Land* (1933) and *Snow White* (1933), predating the Disney feature length version by some years.

Animation's association with child spectators partly emerged from the mode's compatibility with already established forms of children's culture. But like the Western, the cartoon's alignment with children also coincides with ways in which animation engages with modernity. Wells discusses early examples of the form as exemplifying aspects of artistic modernism, as well as the complexities and contradictions of the modern experience through experimentation with graphic space, abstraction and metamorphosis.<sup>108</sup> This is expressed through an often ambivalent engagement with urbanity, science, technology and its impact upon the human condition, reflecting

105 Jason Mittell, 'The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s', in Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, eds, *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003), 33–54.

106 Paul Wells, "'Thou Art Translated': Analysing Animated Adaptation', in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), 201.

107 Kline, *Out of the Garden*, 110–111.

108 Paul Wells, *Animation and America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 20.

many conflicts of the machine age.<sup>109</sup> Within early animated shorts Wells sees tensions played out between science as rational exploration and a form of supernaturalism, between 'pragmatism and progress', between artistry, industry and commercialism. In such cartoons: 'Fragments of fairytale mix freely with the sense of circus frivolity and machine angst'.<sup>110</sup> In the case of Betty Boop films, Kristian Moen observes a playful incorporation of aspects of contemporary culture, such as popular music and amusement parks, into the traditional tale.<sup>111</sup> Comic frisson is frequently generated through tensions between these pre-modern stories, the mechanical nature by which they are realised and the insertion of anachronistic features into the neo-medieval world. Terrance R. Lindvall and J. Matthew Melton discuss animation, both theatrical and made for television, as eminently postmodern, self-reflexive and intertextual.<sup>112</sup> Animated characters speak directly to their audiences, reflect upon their nature as cartoons, fall out of the frame, and argue with their creators. From the early stages of animation history the artist has appeared alongside their drawn creations in a manner which subverts the invisibility of classical realist cinema. These qualities, which Wells sees as constituting a 'continued exposition and amplification of "modernity"'<sup>113</sup> resonate with aspects of childhood and twentieth-century children's culture. Animation, like children and the symbols of childhood, constitutes a means by which the processes of modernity are worked through, often in an ironic and playfully unthreatening manner. Such aspects of animation, particularly associated with Warner Bros' output, exist alongside more conservative traditions historically aligned with the feature length work of the Disney studios. These films, according to Wells' account, in many ways enact a retreat from modernity

109 Ibid. 22.

110 Ibid. 29–31.

111 Kristian Moen, *Film and Fairy Tales: The Birth of Modern Fantasy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 176–177.

112 Terrance R. Lindvall and J. Matthew Melton, 'Towards a Post-Modern Animated Discourse: Bakhtin, Intertextuality and the Cartoon Carnival', in Jayne Pilling, ed., *A Reader in Animation Studies* (London: John Libbey, 1997), 203–220.

113 Wells, *Animation and America*, 49.

in which such anachronistic components are largely absent. An emphasis is placed on the generation of photorealistic imagery and anatomically correct movement, effectively erasing rather than emphasising the films' hand-drawn processes of production. In this respect the 'innocent' childness of cartoon content contrasts with the 'more urbane, less coherent, cacophonous agenda' of the Warner Bros' shorts. While this output of 'Termite Terrace' expressed 'fascination with machine culture, adult pastimes and popular art', constituting 'a model of incongruity and irony, caricaturing popular figures, satirising institutional conduct and re-exploring graphic and narrative idioms',<sup>114</sup> the Disney model appears designed to evoke a more naïve, wondrous, pre-modern sense of the childlike spectator. It is in this service that many animated adaptations open with a book, a retrospective move which Moen argues aligns the animated feature with literature, rather than the spectacle of theatre and cinema.<sup>115</sup> At the same time as retreating from their modern cinematic origins, such films frequently, simultaneously, evoke the wonder of new technologies, in the form of multiplaning, rotoscoping or their detailed depiction of natural phenomenon. Although Disney is considered by Wells as moving animation in a direction which compromised its early associations with modernism, this was accompanied by a distinct modernisation of production practices, inherent in the cost-effective industrial systems the businessman introduced, and in the substitution of the animation auteur with the brand of the studio owner. The 'popular utopianism' Wells sees in Disney's shorts, expressive of a 'folk sensibility' which entailed 'accentuating the positive, the aspirational and the rural, in the face of an advancing modern world',<sup>116</sup> at odds with the increasing industrialisation of the animation process, represents another attempt to efface these troublesome traces of modernity.

A sense of childness, evident in animation, entailing a retreat from modernity but also a playful engagement with its tropes, appears to have become increasingly central to the film industry over the past decades. American cinema underwent significant transformation in the post-war

114 Ibid. 50.

115 Moen, *Film and Fairy Tales*, 181.

116 Wells, *Animation and America*, 23.



period as a consequence of changing demographics, increasing suburbanisation and anti-monopoly court action. The studio system, a factory-style form of production which characterises the early modernity of the industry, was effectively dismantled. In addition, as Paul Grainge writes, cinema's status as provider of 'classic family entertainment' was usurped by television,<sup>117</sup> leading to what the author suggests, on many levels, was a more 'adult' cinema, combining art house, foreign films, social problem films, experimental filmmaking, exploitation cinema, soft and hardcore pornography. This mature cinema is seen, in subsequent decades, as being superseded by a more 'childish' strategy towards filmmaking. Such a perspective is exemplified by Robin Wood's critique of Reaganite entertainment. Contrasting 1980s blockbusters with the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities of the 1970s 'incoherent text', Wood considers films of the period symptomatic of the reactionary politics of the era. Closely associated with the work of two filmmakers, the combined effect of the Lucas-Spielberg phenomenon is to diffuse the political turmoil of previous decades through an escapist retreat into fantasy. In many respects, although the term was not available, Wood is detailing the emergence of a cinema of childness, with critical focus on the conservative or reactionary tendencies of such trends. Developments in Hollywood, including the increased emphasis on visual and special effects, nostalgia for Saturday morning matinee features, the absence of sexual or otherwise contentious subject matters and paternal reassurance, result in what Wood terms 'children's films conceived and marketed largely for adults'.<sup>118</sup>

This second wave of 'New Hollywood' represents a resurgence, if indeed it ever demised, of the 'family film', a cycle Bazalgette and Staples date back to the Depression era whereby studios successfully sought to protect their profits and stave off regulation by appealing to an audience combining adults

117 Paul Grainge, 'New Waves, Specialist Audiences and Adult Films', in Paul Grainge, Mark Jancovich and Sharon Monteith, eds, *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 371.

118 Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1986), 163.

and children.<sup>119</sup> The formula proved similarly successful in terms of box office performance from the mid-1970s onwards. Peter Krämer argues that since this period the industry has variously emulated the practices developed by Walt Disney<sup>120</sup> and George Lucas, filmmakers whose output resonates with a childness appealing to a mixed audience. Echoing the assessment of Wood, if not the writer's critical perspective, Krämer argues: 'most of Hollywood's superhits since 1977 are basically, like *Star Wars*, children's films; more precisely, they are children's films for the whole family and for teenagers, too'.<sup>121</sup> In an earlier discussion of the 'family-adventure' movie, Krämer argues many of the most successful recent American films combine the children's film, family film and adventure movie, providing both 'childish delight and absorption' and 'adult self-awareness and nostalgia'<sup>122</sup> in a similar manner to the function of childness in the cinema of attractions considered above. The 'cross-generational family film' which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, is discussed by Robert C. Allen as a re-orientation of Hollywood around children under eighteen and adults over thirty as a means of capitalising on changes in American audiences. The commercial value of the family film is evident in Allen's discussion of the cycle as representing 'the discursive marker for a set of narrative, representational and institutional practices designed to maximise marketability and profitability across theatrical, video, licensing and merchandising markets by means of what we might call cross-generational appeal'.<sup>123</sup> Such trends intensified, in part, due to the

119 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids', 94.

120 Peter Krämer, 'Disney and Family Entertainment', in Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond, eds, *Contemporary American Cinema* (London: Open University Press, 2006).

121 Peter Krämer, "'It's Aimed at Kids – the Kid in Everybody": George Lucas, *Star Wars* and Children's Entertainment', in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (London: Routledge, 2004), 366.

122 Peter Krämer, 'Would you Take Your Child to See this Film? The Cultural and Social Work of the Family-Adventure Movie', in Steve Neale and Murray Smith, eds, *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), 305.

123 Robert C. Allen, 'Home Alone Together: Hollywood and the "Family Film"', in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds, *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 114.

emergence of the sell-through video market. During the late 1980s watching rental movies at home replaced cinema attendance as the main means of viewing feature films, with a successful video release potentially generating a further \$30 million in revenue. Financially, VCR and subsequent digital equivalents have become increasingly significant to the film industry, even if the cinema release retains cultural and promotional significance. This marginalisation of the box office as the prime source of revenue generation has undoubtedly shifted the relationship between Hollywood and child audiences, children's culture, and childness. The events Allen cites in narrating this process significantly include the 1988 release of *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*, and the ascension of Disney's Buena Vista Home Video division in 1992, the same year as profits from VCR sales first surpassed total box office receipts.<sup>124</sup>

Connections between genre and certification are evident in Annette Kuhn's discussion of the 'H' for 'horrific' category, established by the BBFC in response to the post-sound cycle of horror movies and their perceived harmful impact on children.<sup>125</sup> In a similar genrification of the ratings system, Kevin S. Sandler writes of the 'Incontestable R', a model which functions in a manner similar to the old Production Code in guaranteeing Hollywood's products constitute 'respectable entertainment'.<sup>126</sup> Contemporary studio executives, Wojcik-Andrews observes, have become increasingly mindful of children as film consumers, evident in concern to secure a non-prohibitive rating for blockbusters titles, described by the author as 'PG-13 children's films'.<sup>127</sup> The importance of ratings for a film's profitability is observed by Allen, with PG and PG-13 theatrical releases

124 Ibid. 112–113.

125 Annette Kuhn, 'The Child Audience and the "Horrific" Film in 1930s Britain', in Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen, eds, *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 329.

126 Kevin S. Sandler, 'Movie Ratings as Genre: The Incontestable R', in Steve Neale, ed., *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 204–205.

127 Wojcik-Andrews, *Children's Films*, 17.

being twice as likely to earn \$60 million, and three times more likely to earn \$100 million than R-rated films. Certification is significant to the sell-through market, with prominent grocery stores refusing to stock or restricting the visibility of home videos if categorised as adult.<sup>128</sup> That a film receives a PG certification does not mean it is made for, or will even be of interest to, children. It does mean that children are not excluded from seeing it in the cinema or buying it on DVD. This has led to a wave of films themed around childhood, children's modes, and culture associated with children. The extra revenue generated by merchandising has further privileged forms of filmmaking associated with children such as animation and fantasy narratives. Drawing on marketing rhetoric, Allen writes of the 'toyetic' qualities of family and animation feature films, which are more easily translated into products whose likenesses are uncomplicated by star rights and royalties issues.<sup>129</sup> This suggests that although child audiences are bad business for Hollywood, a sense of childness can prove extremely lucrative.

## The Children's Film Foundation

A point which has been laboured throughout the previous chapters is that while children have been enthusiastic cinema spectators throughout the institution's history, and although catered for as filmgoers by the provision of matinee screenings, little of the material which filled their programmes was made with child audiences in mind. As Staples observes, in the USA the specialist production of films for children was considered 'unprofitable and unnecessary'<sup>130</sup> and the American cinema which children saw in

128 Allen, 'Home Alone Together', 116.

129 Ibid. 120.

130 Terry Staples, 'Doing them Good', in Duncan Petrie, ed., *Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment: Lectures, Seminars and Essays by Marina Warner and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 125.

these slots, the Westerns, cartoons, serials and features, was designed for a mass rather than juvenile audience. Nevertheless, beyond the Hollywood film industry there have been efforts to make films specifically for young people. Bazalgette and Staples observe a number of organisations outside the UK which have produced authentic cinema content for children, which they define as films 'offering mainly or entirely a child's point of view' which 'deal with the interests, fears, misapprehensions and concerns of children in their own terms'.<sup>131</sup> Significantly funded through government subsidy and intended as resistance to American cultural imperialism, the Danish Film Institute and the Iranian Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults have produced material which the authors argue fit this criteria. Staples also discusses live action fairy tales produced in the USSR in the 1940s by the Moscow Children's Film Studio. *The Little Humpbacked Horse*, *The Magic Fish*, *The Land of Toys* and *The New Gulliver* were shown in Odeon clubs, either dubbed or accompanied by a narrated commentary.<sup>132</sup> Around this period J. Arthur Rank, head of the Odeon cinema chain, began funding films designed for the club chain. The first of these, the aforementioned *Tom's Ride*, was partly intended as a morality tale by the Methodist cinema owner, and subject to considerable discussion. According to Staples the film, just ten minutes in length, was designed around dispelling the principle of 'finders keepers' through the story of a boy who finds a wallet containing five pounds and decides, rather than spending it on a new bicycle, to return the money to its owner. Reportedly three endings were shot, hinging on the question of whether Tom should be rewarded for his actions, or if virtue was reward enough. The decision that the protagonist should not receive a prize at the film's conclusion, Staples writes, was a source of disappointment for many matinee-goers.<sup>133</sup> Rank's Children's Entertainment Films produced several short features, but the cinema-chain's output is overshadowed by that of the Children's Film Foundation.

131 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids', 96.

132 Staples, 'Doing them Good', 129.

133 Ibid. 130–132.

Central to Bazalgette and Staples' definition of an authentic children's film is one which features recognisable child protagonists in meaningful roles which are central to the film narrative. Such a requirement resonates with Tucker's claim that until adolescence children prefer literature which focuses on children or child-like protagonists,<sup>134</sup> and Warner's observation that children's books across the ages feature child characters for child readers to identify with.<sup>135</sup> This is a recurring aspect of children's narrative media, one which the family film disregards in its emphasis on adult stars. Also significant to this process is the text adopting a child's point of view. Aidan Chambers places emphasis on children's literature establishing a child at the centre of the story 'through whose being everything is seen and felt'.<sup>136</sup> A further element Chambers identifies is that of the author taking the side of the children, as evidenced in the purported 'us kids against them adults' disposition of the books by Enid Blyton.<sup>137</sup> These qualities can be seen in many CFF movies. The vast majority feature children in central roles, and their storylines often involve children working together to foil criminals and thieves. Adult authorities only become involved in the last moment, or are consistently held up for ridicule as obstructive and ineffectual. The textual qualities of these films made for children might be considered to reflect further aspects of children's literature as distinct from mainstream narrative culture. Tucker, in the introduction to a study on the subject, makes several broad observations concerning the qualities of writing for children. Many of the author's claims concerning the nature of children's printed texts hold true for children's screen media. In summary, Tucker asserts that books for children 'deal with concrete events rather than with abstract discussion' and 'have an emphasis upon action in preference to introspection'. Consequently, characters in children's novels lack ambiguity.<sup>138</sup> Children's

134 Tucker, *The Child and the Book*, 18.

135 Warner, *Managing Monsters*, 40–41.

136 Aidan Chambers, 'The Reader in the Book', in Nancy Chambers, ed., *The Signal Approach to Children's Books* (Harmondsworth: Kestrel Books, 1980), 258.

137 Ibid. 261.

138 Tucker, *The Child and the Book*, 9.

stories avoid sub-plots and flash-backs,<sup>139</sup> and while some children's books have aspects of darkness many tend towards 'optimistic fantasies'<sup>140</sup> reminiscent of the 'reassuring outcomes' stipulated by the BBFC for a 'U' certificate film. The cinema content produced by the CFF generally follows a clear and straightforward narrative trajectory, without disruptive changes in chronology or diversions from the main storyline. At the same time, several films exhibit moments of surrealism or chronological disjuncture, particularly those featuring fantastical or supernatural elements. An early distinction is established between the film's heroes, usually the main child characters, and its villains, usually criminals and authority figures such as teachers, park wardens and businessmen. However, a problem with applying these observations to films for children is that the kinds of storytelling favoured by mainstream cinema tends to follow patterns similar to those outlined by Tucker. The simplified 'cause and effect' structure the author sees in children's books<sup>141</sup> corresponds with aspects David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson referred to, in a non-pejorative manner, as the 'excessively obvious cinema' of Classical Hollywood filmmaking.<sup>142</sup> More pertinent to the distinction between mainstream media and media for children is Myles McDowell's seemingly obvious point that 'children's books are generally shorter'.<sup>143</sup> As noted, most CFF films tend to be around sixty minutes in duration, a considerably reduced running length compared to the average feature.

Many of the CFF films made available by the British Film Institute can be productively considered engaging with the situation of their protagonists and implied audience within modernity, in terms of technology, the city and history itself. One notable way in which cinema associated

139 Ibid. 14.

140 Ibid. 12.

141 Ibid. 10.

142 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

143 Myles McDowell, 'Fiction for Children and Adults: Some Essential Differences', in Geoff Fox, ed., *Writers, Critics, and Children: Articles from Children's Literature in Education* (New York: Agathon, 1976), 141.

with children effaces its own modernity is through the screening of adaptations set in a pre-industrial past. Such strategies are evident in many feature length works of the Disney studios, neo-medieval fantasy and fairy tales, and the adaptation of classic works of children's literature for the screen. As well as securing a film's relationship with young audiences through association with a more respectable medium, this frequently allows the depiction of a world in which the troubling influences of modernity are absent, or in some instances, can be transformed in more playful self-reflexive ways. This is not the case with the majority of CFF films, a possible consequence of their restricted budgets, and their imperative to present child audiences with contemporary child characters with whom they could identify. Given the research which informed these films in the pre-production process, it may also be that the effacement of modernity is something more desired by the family audience for cinema of childness than films for children. One notable exception is the period drama *The Man from Nowhere* (1976), a Gothic story set in a Victorian mansion in which an orphaned girl is sent to stay with her uncle. The film makes use of the generic trope of the heroine haunted by visions nobody else believes to encourage close identification with the child protagonist, as an ominous adult figure dressed in mourning apparel warns her to leave. In a reveal which expresses the negative associations of modern technologies, the man who terrorises the girl is shown to be the local railway signal operator who the uncle's scheming housekeeper communicates with using telegraphy. The climax involves the heroine mobilising a group of vagrant children in a chase, a popular trope of children's films first introduced in *Tom's Ride*. In keeping with the period setting, its end credits are notably theatrical, involving each cast member stepping onto the screen and bowing between parted red curtains which fall to mark the film's closure.

The vast majority of CFF films are, however, set in the present day. This does not preclude them from engaging with issues of history and childhood's liminal location within past, present and future. Such a theme is comically played out in *A Hitch in Time* (1978). Here two young children befriend the inventor of a time machine installed in a 900-year-old castle. Through the course of their adventures they visit various notable moments in British history, including the 1950s coronation, the Civil War, World War II and



the Dark Ages. Their whistle-stop journey is contextualised by the presence of a sadistic history teacher whose ancestors, along with the children's own relatives, are repeatedly encountered during their travels. In some respects the children are shown to have an affinity with the past in the familiar faces they meet from their own present, and in the knowledge they express about the historical situations in which they appear. The sequence where one protagonist chaotically jumps from one period to another, due to the machine's malfunctioning, constitutes a compelling metaphor for children's unstable temporality. In this moment, to quote James and Prout: 'Childhood appears to be, so to speak, lost in time: its present is continuously banished to the past, the future or out of time altogether'.<sup>144</sup> As with the previous film, the climax involves a chase sequence of child solidarity as a gang of lacrosse players are enlisted to prevent the time machine's destruction. A more sombre articulation of children's relationship to history is evident in *Out of the Darkness* (1985), another Gothic narrative set in a contemporary Derbyshire village. If, as Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith observes, this literary mode represents an expression of 'the peculiar unwillingness of the past to go away',<sup>145</sup> it is interesting to note the ways in which children, aligned with other figures marginalised within modernity, afford a supernatural connection to historic events. The focus of the film remains consistently on the three children, nevertheless adults perform some significant roles. A mother figure, who notably leaves the film before the children begin ghost hunting in earnest, presents a rational voice in contrast with their unsettlingly spooky surroundings. She explains the scientific reason behind déjà vu, and, in a rationalist perspective on the passage of time tells her daughter: 'The past is the past, the present is now, and soon it will be tomorrow'. Other adults function to provide exposition, particularly a local historian who tells the children of a story from the times of the plague, when a boy was expelled from the village and evidently hunted to his death. A critical reflection upon the association between children and

144 James and Prout, 'Re-presenting Childhood', 234.

145 Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, 'Introduction', in Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, eds, *Modern Gothic: A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 4.

animality is evident in the medieval blacksmith placing a bell round the boy's neck so he can be heard returning. One significant discourse the film mobilises, similar to *A Hitch in Time's* depiction of 'The Dark Ages', is a negative alignment between the medieval period and superstition, disease, violence, death and child abuse, in implied contrast with benign Western contemporary culture. The villagers, whose appearances uncannily mirror those seen in the children's visions of the past, are wrestling with the guilt of their ancestor's crimes. In the film's dramatic climax, the main character assumes the role of the persecuted child. This allows a rescue mission to be undertaken, where the villagers positively invert the roles played by the medieval villagers in rescuing the boy, rather than hunting him to his death. Children thereby allow the adult community to achieve redemption and undo the debilitating impact of history. The film concludes in an optimistic manner with the children emerging into bright light, the historian explaining that they have 'helped the village get back its heart'. As the credits roll, the children discuss their experiences in a well-lit modern kitchen surrounded by friendly adults.

Although these films show children's connection with the past, their contemporary protagonists are also depicted as adept at using the tools of modernity. The three children of *Out of the Darkness* are competent at using the pay telephone, communicating with walkie talkies, managing money, and display a degree of confidence and independence in the absence of adult supervision. Although the characters do not visit the future, *A Hitch in Time* is framed through the fantastic invention of a talking time machine. Many CFF films present children as having a similarly close and productive relationship with technologies. *Glitterball* (1977) is a science fiction film where two children find and protect a spherical silver alien which appears more machine than organic, eventually helping the ball return to its mothership. *The Sky Bike* (1967) features a boy obsessed with aviation, who befriends an inventor developing a cycle-powered flying machine. *Egghead's Robot* (1970) is a farcical film where a child protagonist assumes the inventor role. Aided by his sister, Egghead has adapted his father's paratrooper robot into a double of himself to avoid doing domestic chores and to win the local cricket match. An early CFF feature prefiguring a multitude of films and television narratives featuring anthropomorphised automobiles is

*The Adventures of Hal 5* (1958), starring a 1920s Austin 7 which comes into the possession of a vicar while visited by his niece and nephew, Charles and Moira. The car's personality is represented by an animated face which appears on its radiator, unnoticed by the other characters, reflecting the continued combination of cartoon and live action in children's media. Much of the narrative revolves around the sentient vehicle's attempts to reunite with its last owner, a former squadron leader who has purchased a nearby farm, and the machinations of an unscrupulous garage manager. The relationship between children and technology is significantly gendered. Charles is shown to be knowledgeable about mechanics, challenging the villain in identifying the repairs needed, and teaching the local farmer how to start his new tractor. In contrast, Moira appears more sympathetic to the car as a potential being with agency when she says: 'If I was a car I'd hate steering wheels ... cos they'd stop me going where I wanted'. Technology, in the form of the classic car, effects a final restoration of natural order by the end of the film. The villainous garage manager is exposed after being knocked into a lake by Hal. The squadron leader decides to give up farming and return to his former profession. By way of apology the garage owner renovates the car and gives it to the vicar with his blessing.

Although many CFF films, including *The Adventures of Hal 5*, take place in rural or suburban locations, consistent with children's exclusion from the modern city, a significant number are set in the capital. Indeed, the iconic logo which opens every film features a shot of Trafalgar Square and the bells of St Pauls' Cathedral. Reflecting the significance of the city to CFF productions, several films chronicle protagonists' attempts to navigate, rather than retreat from, urban life. The schoolboys of *Operation Third Form* (1966) are adept at coordinating their efforts, employing telephones boxes, maps and bus routes in their plans to foil a robbery. The two boys of *Night Ferry* (1976) operate a rail side tea stall, and the protagonist of *The Boy Who Turned Yellow* (1972) appears capable of using the London underground unsupervised. *The Salvage Gang* (1958) depicts four children confidently journeying through the city. Their quest is to earn the money to replace a saw after it is broken in the course of building a rabbit hutch. A garden shed in which the first and last scenes take place is a recurring space of childhood in CFF films. The pet, a close-up of which opens and closes the film, reflects Romantic

associations between children and animality. But the shed as a site of work and play suggests a more contemporary children's culture of construction and engineering. The narrative sees the protagonists engaged in a range of entrepreneurial activities which include painting a barge, washing cars and dogs, and eventually collecting scrap metal. This endeavour mobilises the child as symbol of renewal, growth and industry. As an activity which recycles old materials, it anticipates the prominence of environmental concerns in later children's media. When one character's bed is mistakenly sold its retrieval necessitates a race across the capital, followed by a long sequence where the children wheel the ungainly object back through the streets of London. This provides an opportunity for the city to be displayed as a source of iconic spectacle. The children ride on a double decker bus, cross London Bridge, inadvertently trap a city gent in a telephone box, and collect a sleeping homeless man along the way. While incorporating historic landmarks, including St Pauls itself, the film also shows modern aspects of the city, with a lingering shot of a high rise block, and another showing construction work taking place within the capital. Borrowing a petrol station oil can in order to lubricate the bed's squeaky wheels, ably dismantling and reconstructing the furniture to get it round tight corners, and enlisting the help of a friendly café owner, the children are comfortably located in their urban environment. Consequently, *The Salvage Gang* represents children at one with the modern city, albeit eerily empty of cars by contemporary standards.

The modernity of CFF films is also reflected in the generic prominence of science fiction. Although Staples sees *Glitterball* as the precursor to *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*,<sup>146</sup> an earlier film in which a group of children afford refuge to a similarly mechanised alien creature is *Supersonic Saucer* (1956). Reflective of the more moralistic aspects of earlier CFF releases, the film constitutes a lesson on wish fulfilment and honesty. When the children express desire for cakes or money, the telepathic alien retrieves these from the local town, only to be admonished by the virtuous protagonists and told to return them. In *Kadoyng* (1972) a group of children befriend a human alien who, in a narrative engaging with the more destruc-

146 Staples, *All Pals Together*, 235.

tive aspects of modernity, helps stop a motorway from being built across the village green of their rural community. Their plan, a synthesis of the industrial, scientific and the natural, involves mixing large quantities of an alien formula which will spread indestructible vegetation across the area designated for development. These fantasy films use alien characters to enact a collapsing of magic and technology, reflecting overlaps between the medieval and the futuristic in children's narrative culture. In a self-reflexive engagement with the filmic medium, magical technological powers are often realised through control over the mechanics of cinema itself. The alien of *Kadoyng* can teleport himself and other characters, through the technique of the jump cut. The alien of *Supersonic Saucer*, as well as transforming into an animated vehicle, is able to make events reverse by rolling film stock backwards, a power used to exhaust a gang of crooks trying to capture the children. In *Egghead's Robot* the android performs a series of tasks in fast motion, batting, fielding and weeding the suburban garden. Speeded-up film is used to realise the super-human abilities of the robot's machinery, constituting a fit between the technology of the android and the technology of the medium.

A film reflecting children's exemplification of modernity in its many forms is *The Boy Who Turned Yellow*. John, the schoolboy protagonist, like *The Salvage Gang*, is initially identified with animals in the form of a lost pet mouse which motivates his story. But despite such traditional aspects the film expresses a strong sense of contemporary childhood being closely aligned with science, technology and the city. Another feature set in the capital, the narrative opens with a school trip to the Tower of London, allowing various historical facts to be relayed to the audience. This lesson in national heritage soon segues into a science class where narratively essential information on electricity, light and the operation of television are delivered. On his way home from school, in a moment of surreal fantasy John's skin, hair and clothing inexplicably change colour. The transformation notably takes place on a tube train, embodiment of modern metropolitan transportation, while in the presence of a young woman who constitutes a picture of contemporary fashion. John's condition baffles his parents and physician. That night he is visited by a magical character called Nick, short for Electronic, a yellow figure with a beacon on his head who gains sustenance

by plugging himself into the mains. Nick teaches John how to travel at the speed of light by moving through the flickers on his television set. Skiing through the wavelengths, John visits a power station, a floodlit football stadium, finally returning to the Tower of London in order to find his lost pet. Consequently, John is intimately at one with the city, its technology, and its infrastructure. His journey takes in historic, cultural and industrial aspects of the capital. Ultimately the adventure is revealed to have been a dream, its content induced by the science lesson in which he fell asleep. But John wakes with a seemingly intuitive knowledge of the operation of electronic conduction with which he impresses his teacher and classmates.

The CFF films represent a unique collection of cinema material made specifically for young people to be viewed in a theatrical context. Although aspects of the Romantic child are evident, together with expressions of childhood's temporal dislocation and rurality, the majority of films surveyed in this admittedly limited overview depict a strong and positive relationship between children and core aspects of modernity. Child protagonists are seasoned at navigating city streets, spaces and modes of public transportation. They have a close, albeit gendered, relationship with technology, construction and enterprise. They express a confidence, agency and self-organisation deriving from the general absence of adult figures to drive the narrative, and a sense of solidarity with other children, visualised in the iconic chase sequence of many a film's climax. In this respect the heroines and heroes of the Children's Film Foundation contrast dramatically with the children of mainstream cinema, who are largely marginalised, isolated and depicted as significantly less competent and capable than their adult co-stars.

### Technology, Mousetrap Machinery and *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*

Many films of childness attempt a retreat from or rejection of contemporary modernity, at odds with the cinematic medium. This may be considered a recurring preoccupation of the cycle, evident across a diverse range of film

texts. Features based on fairy tales, opening with a leather bound illuminated book position the film's point of origin outside of modern media and culture. Literary adaptations broadly function in a similar manner, positioning the film text within a pre-industrial narrative culture, even if its content has a relatively recent publishing history. The *Harry Potter* (2001–2011) series is a case in point. Journeying to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry transports audiences along with the contemporary protagonist into a quasi-medieval world where stone hallways are lit by candlelight, pupils write with quills, steam train and rowboat serve as transportation, and birds provide the postal service. The series' private school setting, the Dickensian design of Diagon Alley, the absence of processed food from the Hogwarts dinner table, the bricolage of archetypes, settings and imagery the series combines from traditional children's culture, all evoke the past rather than the present. These are undeniably aspects of the films' source. But the success of the adaptations suggest such books serve this kind of cinema well. Moreover, filmic aspects such as the series' earnest classical score, its aesthetic of stone, polished wood and moonlit forests, together with the films' very literary faithfulness, enhance the retreat from modernity which the book series also enacts. This is by no means the only strategy employed by films of childness. Elsewhere can be seen attempts to negotiate tensions between children and modernity, through the reconfiguration of modern spaces and the reimagining of modern technologies. *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971) opens with an abstract credit sequence depicting the mass production of commercial confectionary. In contrast, the factory which the ticket winners enter once the film begins represents a notable de-mechanisation of the industrial workplace. Easter eggs are laid by golden geese, a train runs on fizzy drink, and the factory's nerve centre resembles a forest glade. Chocolate is churned by waterfall, lollipops grow from the ground like flowers, and candy canes and jelly bears hang from trees. Confectionary production represents a wholly natural process. Again, much of this imagery is present in the source novel, but the film's longevity, remade in 2005, suggests the book functions well according to the requirements of the family film cycle. This movie takes a space exemplifying modernity and imbues it with childness, first through its association with sweets and chocolate and then through its depiction of manufacturing in



non-industrial terms. Technophobic aspects can be seen in the representation of the industrial workplace as a dangerous site for children, as each ticket winner falls foul of the mechanical, electronic or chemical hazards the factory contains. However, both film adaptations celebrate the wonders of the factory and the filmic techniques through which they are realised, transformed in a manner which makes them more compatible with the aesthetics of childhood and children's culture.

It has also been noted that films of childness frequently employ newly developed imaging techniques in their production. Mark Langer considers the extent to which technological competition as a means of product differentiation was prominent within the early animation film industry. This entailed an emphasis on the invention of new methods in colour, sound and photorealism throughout the popular press, studio publicity and awards ceremonies. In contrast to the dominant tradition in Hollywood cinema, Langer argues such strategies result in disruptive spectacle, drawing attention to a studio's technological achievements at the expense of narrative immersion.<sup>147</sup> While the relationship between childhood, child spectators and early cartoons has been shown to be a complex one, animation is a recurring feature of children's culture and cinema experiences. A foregrounding of technology continues to inform recent developments in animation. As Julia Moszkowicz argues, from its early days technology-centred discourses dominated popular criticism of computer-generated animation. Consistent with claims concerning the cartoon's frequent interrogation of its own forms, Moszkowicz suggests that many CGI movies constitute self-reflexive commentaries on developments in digital art.<sup>148</sup> The contemporary nature of such techniques often contrasts with the retrospective nature of their settings or narratives. Computer-generated films following *Toy Story*, including *Dinosaur* (2000), *Shrek* (2001), *Ice Age* (2002), *Astro Boy* (2009), *Monsters Vs Aliens* (2009), *Despicable Me* (2010), *Mars Needs Moms* (2011), *Hotel Transylvania* (2012) and *The Good Dinosaur* (2015)

147 Mark Langer, 'The Disney-Fleischer Dilemma: Product Differentiation and Technological Innovation', *Screen* 33/4 (1992), 343–360.

148 Julia Moszkowicz, 'To Infinity and Beyond: Assessing the Technological Imperative in Computer Animation', *Screen* 43/3 (2002), 293–314.



are notably backwards-looking, in their pre-historical, pre-industrial, or distinctly retro aesthetics. Many recent CGI films showcase current technological achievements while reflecting on the nature of modernity. *WALL-E* (2008) features an anthropomorphic robot left behind on an abandoned planet Earth, tasked with cleaning up the rubbish left behind by excessive consumer capitalism which has rendered the planet uninhabitable. The film's second half, set on a space station, depicts the surviving human race as bloated and inactive, fad obsessed and unimaginative as a consequence of their over-dependence on technology. *The Croods* (2013) takes place during pre-historic times, and depicts a family of cave people whose life is disrupted by tectonic shifts and the arrival of a young man carrying fire. This provokes a rivalry between the traditional caveman father and the fire-carrier who is represented as more 'modern'. In a scene which replays early animation shorts' juxtaposition of the contemporary with the medieval, the father produces a number of desperate inventions as a sign of his own comparable modernity, including sunglasses made of bark. A final recent example, *Zootropolis* (2016, *Zootopia* in the US) evokes the most urban of genres, the detective thriller, the buddy cop movie, film noir, in its story of a small town rabbit working as a police officer in the big city. Set in a metropolis populated by civilised animals who talk, wear clothes and have jobs, the film's plot revolves around predators reverting to a feral animalistic state induced by an artificially produced narcotic substance.

Rather than retreating from modernity, technology and urbanity, these film examples embrace such aspects of the cinema experience, while attempting to emolliate the largely antithetical relationship such qualities have with children and childhood. They depict technology as natural, as friendly, as humanised, as quaint and quirky. Aspects of technophobia are undeniably present, but exist alongside benign representations of mechanical, industrial, technical, urban processes. Moreover, films of childness frequently play with the properties and possibilities of photographic, hand drawn and digital filmic techniques, evident in conspicuous displays of spectacle, the mixing of visual forms, and moments of reflexive commentary which disturb the self-effacement of technology considered characteristic of classical filmmaking. In this respect, Disney's *Enchanted* (2007) is a particularly interesting text. It narrates the Brechtian or postmodern

ejection of a fairy tale character from a cartoon world into contemporary New York City. Once there, the heroine effects a reconfiguration of the modern urban landscape according to the tropes and aesthetics of the cinematic fairy story. This involves engaging passers-by in musical numbers which transform the city into a Disney song and dance routine, enlisting the help of the city's pestilent wildlife to clean and tidy her benefactor's apartment, and bringing with her a number of other characters from the animated world including a friendly chipmunk which transforms into a CGI animal. As Maria Sachiko Cecire observes, this is a film which engages with 'the disjuncture between the medievalisms of its fairy-tale realms and the trappings of modern life',<sup>149</sup> enacted at the level of narrative, but also through the modes of representation the film employs. A distinction is initially established between neo-medieval fairy tale animation and modern live action, but the work of the film is to erase this divide. This is primarily channelled through the figure of Giselle, the Disney princess made real, but also realised through computer-generated animation, the mode which has increasingly augmented and replaced Disney's traditional cell frame style, and the means by which live action non-human cartoon characters are realised. In addition, as numerous commentators have pointed out, many scenes from the film effectively reproduce, in photographic terms, famous moments from the studio's cell animation library. *Enchanted's* engagement with the meanings of medievalism and modernity are consequently worked through using the language of cinema, in a manner which recalls Hansen's idea of the medium as a space where experiences of the modern condition are negotiated.<sup>150</sup>

A further way in which cinema of childness engages with filmic processes, technology and childhood is through a trope which might be labelled 'mousetrap machinery'. Named after the long-running board game, mousetrap machinery features in many films of childness. It might be defined as: apparatus combining everyday domestic objects which, when activated,

149 Maria Sachiko Cecire, 'Reality Remixed: Neomedieval Princess Culture in Disney's *Enchanted*', in Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein, eds, *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 243.

150 Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses'.

perform an elaborate chain of sequential actions resulting in the completion of a household task. A classic example of such mechanics occurs early in the fantasy adventure *The Goonies* (1985). In order to allow Chunk entry to Mikey's house, the boy pulls on a length of string. This lifts an upturned bucket, which releases a bowling ball. The bowling ball runs down a pathway and falls into a metal pail. The pail drops, depressing a rope and pulley attached to a pair of bellows. The bellows inflate a balloon which bursts, startling a chicken, which lays an egg. The falling egg hits a seesaw, which pivots, causing a boot to kick a football onto a target. This switches on a lawn sprinkler connected by a piece of string to the garden gate, which, as a result, opens. Similar devices, often associated with the British artist W. Heath Robinson and the American illustrator Rube Goldberg, recur throughout visual media associated with children and childhood. Examples include the breakfast machine in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), Frank's coffee-maker in *The Cat from Outer Space* (1978) and the kitchen contraptions in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985). The frequency and historical longevity of such machines within a cinema of childness, suggests they perform some ideological, thematic or discursive function significant to children, childhood and film audiences.

Certain qualities of these machines express an impulse to make technology, in various ways, child friendly. Firstly, they are devoid of industrial associations. On many levels, they are domesticated. They exist within the home. They are constructed from recognisable household articles or childhood accessories: a saucepan, an egg whisk, a bowling ball, a balloon, a toy train. Their tasks, cooking meals, feeding pets, opening a gate, getting dressed, are all home-based activities. They also appear to have been made in the home, rather than constructed in a factory or purchased in a store. In this respect, mousetrap machinery translates the mechanics of modern capitalist industrialisation according to a contemporary childhood constructed as unsuited to the industrial workplace, yet rightfully located within the family home. Secondly, while over-elaborate, the operation of such machines is clearly visible, understandable and, in some cases, recreatable. In this respect, mousetrap machinery avoids the mystifying aspects of modern industrialisation. In earlier societies, Sommerville suggests, technology was a straightforward extension of the body. Modernisation

ruptured this clear connection between technology and task, as inscrutable machinery alienated workers from the causal consequences of their labour. This led to concerted attempts to segregate children from a workplace parents no longer understood.<sup>151</sup> Sommerville's account may constitute an accurate assessment of the processes of modernity and its impact on children, or may itself reflect childhood's discursive function within 'stories' of modernisation. Such historiographic issues notwithstanding, the technologies of mousetrap machinery sequences counteract perspectives on modern mechanisation as somehow obfuscating processes of production. They make no secret of the intricacies of their operation. Indeed, their transparency represents part of their pleasure. Easy to understand, their function in feeding, grooming, aiding transportation, or opening a gate, produces a reassuringly 'natural' relationship between body, tool and space, and a more child-friendly brand of technology as a consequence. At the same time something of the dangers of modern technologies remain, as these contraptions frequently prove comically unreliable, dangerous or destructive.

A franchise which has made the aesthetics of mousetrap machinery its signature is the *Wallace and Gromit* series produced by Aardman Animation. Admittedly this is a property which challenges the media boundaries inherent in the organisation of this volume. The series includes four short films, shown on television, two cinema released feature films, and an educational children's television programme. The character of Sean the Sheep, first seen in *A Close Shave*, has also starred in a television show, and produced a further spin off for younger children, *Timmy Time*. As well as crossing boundaries of media, which include live performances and digital games, the *Wallace and Gromit* franchise also appeals across generations. The first short films were broadcast by the BBC during prime time holidays, affording the characters 'recognition across all age ranges'.<sup>152</sup> Subsequent iterations have been broadcast in slots more aligned with children and pre-school viewers. Along with *Toy Story*, the three original shorts are the focus

151 Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, 172–173.

152 Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 100.

of Scott Lash and Celia Lury's study of 'animism and animation' which makes reference to the same self-reflexive qualities previously considered. As with early cartoons and contemporary CGI movies, the authors suggest that techniques of the animation process are a source of interest for many *Wallace and Gromit* viewers. While none of these shorts were released in the cinema, the authors point to the series' 'cinematic' design, and claims made by their producers that, irrespective of how they were ultimately distributed, they were made as films rather than as television.<sup>153</sup> Despite its problematic status as cinema for children, the *Wallace and Gromit* series exemplifies the kinds of machinery this chapter discusses, while *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* is a rare example of British films of childness.

The series collectively titled *Cracking Contraptions* foregrounds the nature of the technology the *Wallace and Gromit* films employ. These brief shorts see the two characters experimenting with a variety of homemade devices, including a remote-controlled shopping cart, a breakfast-serving robot, and a gadget for changing television channels. The latter involves launching a tennis ball into a complicated mechanical arrangement which then extends the television across the living room to Wallace's armchair. Machines across the series variously incorporate pulleys, spring-loaded boxing gloves, spinning wheels and conveyor belts. Any actual technology in the series appears notably outdated. Wallace's television set has only four channels, the camera they own resembles something from a museum, and many of the inventions look more steam-driven than electrical. The only digital components to this technology are the hands and fingers which they frequently incorporate as part of their transparent operation. They are consistently shown to be comically impractical, over-elaborate, destructive, or serving ironically to obscure more authentic experiences. Wallace's snowman machine destroys Gromit's artistic sculpture. The fake Christmas scene Gromit performs for Wallace's camera hides an idyllic festive tableau. A wheel falls off the shopping cart, the robot malfunctions and flings fried eggs into its inventor's eyes, and the channel changer runs out of balls. This leads to Wallace substituting a remote control for the missile, a decision

which concludes in catapulting the set across the living room and crushing him against the wall. Technology across the series is naïve, old-fashioned and domestic, but often reflects a darker side to home appliances reminiscent of dystopic science fiction. The collision of human and technology in *Wallace and Gromit* frequently evokes the image of Charles Chaplin in *Modern Times* (1936), strapped to a feeding device, or grinding through the cogs of a huge machine. This is bleakly realised when a coin operated dinner server runs out of power and leaves the characters locked in their seats, hungry, sitting in darkness.

In a manner which enhances their representative function as ordinary people dealing with the challenges of modern life, Wallace and Gromit are 'everyman' figures whose occupation seems to follow whatever profession the narrative demands. Vocations have included running a bakery, a window-washing service, and in *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, operating a pest control business, protecting neighbourhood allotments from rabbits. Alarm systems located in their customers' garden gnomes activate a series of mechanisms in the characters' home, designed, like many mousetrap machines, to prepare them for the day. Characterising the outdated form of power these contraptions employ, this starts with the gas hob being lit, causing steam from a kettle to turn a wheel which makes a long pole ending in a finger prod the underside of Gromit's mattress. Launch is then activated and the two are tipped from their bed down chutes where various devices get them ready for work. Suction cups screw on their hats, mechanical hands pour them mugs of tea, larger hands spring-board them into their overalls. The presence of these hands and fingers humanises the technology they are sliding through, as well as emphasising its over-elaborate nature, the tasks they accomplish being as easily completed by human as machine. This is exemplified by the 'autostart' function on the pest control car, which causes a hand to emerge from the bonnet to crank the vehicle's old-fashioned starting motor.

Suggesting their mixed audience, Aardman Animation products often evoke cinema from previous eras. In another feature film, *Chicken Run* (2000), a group of birds endeavour to escape a farm before they are slaughtered and made into pies by a monstrous industrial machine. Significantly drawing from British films set in the Second World War, the feature exhibits

the same retrospective reference points as seen in previous CGI animation. The chickens live in Nissan huts, trade with spiv-like rats and use a variety of methods drawn from classic escape movies. *The Wrong Trousers* concludes with a train chase, reminiscent of the serial films of matinee screenings, while reflecting cinema's historic preoccupation with mechanical transport as a defining aspect of modernity. According to the domestic location and childness aesthetics of mousetrap machinery, this takes place across the characters' living room on a toy railway set. *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* uses cinematic points of reference similarly reflective of popular culture's interrogation of the modern condition. The film evokes the narrative and iconography of Hammer Horror, Ealing comedies, *Carry on* films and Gothic fiction in its story of a monstrous creature terrorising a Northern community, consuming vegetables intended for the village fete. Wallace and Gromit inhabit a world seemingly set in the immediate post-war period, in a stereotypical British town, filled with terrace houses, women in curlers, pipe-smoking men in stripy pyjamas, cobbled streets and vegetable-related double entendres. The climax involves a cinematic 'dogfight' between two canines chasing each other on aeroplanes detached from a carnival ride. This parallels a battle between the two human protagonists, resembling a chase across the battlements or cathedral rooftops of a 1940s horror film, while an angry mob of pitchfork wielding villagers waits below.

Such allusions are consistent with the film's reference to Frankenstein, a Gothic narrative itself reflecting on the dangers of modernity, technology and scientific development. The focus of Wallace's 'harmless brain alteration', intended to help him lose weight, entails the character trading personality traits with a rabbit named Hutch. Blurring the boundaries between human and animal, a theme of the werewolf mythology which the film also references, is a tradition of children's media although rarely a source of horror. This is evident in the humanisation of Gromit and the many pet companions and farmyard animals who accompany supporting characters across the franchise. The trope also reflects upon the condition of modern man within the civilising process, modernity's division of humans and animals, adults and children, men and women, the sane and the insane. Concurrently, the series plays with tensions between animate animals or human and inanimate machines. Wells considers the idea of



bodies becoming machine-like to be a recurring theme in the development of animation.<sup>154</sup> A collapse between the organic and the mechanical, for example, is identified as a key preoccupation played out in early Disney shorts.<sup>155</sup> The machines of the *Wallace and Gromit* series frequently incorporate the bodies of the characters, as the opening sequence to *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* shows. They become components of their own devices, suffering physically when they malfunction. Lash and Lury suggest, that this is the source of much comedy in the series, being 'the single-mindedness of the inventor Wallace's reliance upon machines, and his own rather mechanical rigidity'.<sup>156</sup> At the same time machines take on human or animal qualities. In *Cracking Contraptions* a malfunctioning vacuum cleaner acts like a rabid dog then like a bucking horse as Gromit tries to get it under control. The car from *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* shakes like a dog in order to clean itself of mud. Sean wears a jumper machine knitted from his own wool, a sight gag based on the intimate juxtaposition of the organic and the manufactured. There is a dark side to such machinery, an inevitable consequence of the tensions and contradictions with which the series plays. Many of Wallace and Gromit's inventions have military aesthetics and associations, such as the porridge gun, the aeroplane into which Gromit's motorcycle sidecar transforms, and a football-shooting cannon. The spectre of the military industrial complex is monstrously realised in the villainous robot canine of *A Close Shave* whose metal exoskeleton recalls the cyborg at the end of *The Terminator* (1984).

Mousetrap machinery, in cinema and other cultures associated with children, might be understood as working through conflicts inherent in mass production of media associated with an audience whose relationship with technology, mechanisation and modernity is decidedly ambivalent. In addition to the technologies of modernity, this machinery also reflects upon the technologies of the moving image itself. Although many examples cited above are from live action films, they have a cartoon-like quality which makes mousetrap machinery's location in stop frame animation highly

154 Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation* (London: Routledge, 2000), 19.

155 Ibid. 23.

156 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture Industry*, 90.



appropriate. As in animation, throughout these sequences, 'the principles of movement themselves are necessarily over-enunciated'. The result is an 'exaggerated reality', identified by Wells as part of animation's traditional aesthetic. This involves an 'over-determined' 'over-illusionism' whereby actions and events assume spectacular proportions.<sup>157</sup> Exaggerated movement and momentum features in many live action films of childness. It is a quality of the booby traps in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; Anakin's accidental destruction of the mothership in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (1999); the closing credits chase sequence of *Stuart Little* (1999), combining shoe, toy truck, toy plane, bowling ball and tennis racket in defenestrating Snowball the cat; and the restaurant scene in *Matilda* (1996), where an overturned dessert trolley deposits a small cake and fork neatly onto the heroine's plate. Although not animation, there is an animated quality to these moments consistent with Wells' analysis, whereby objects take on a life of their own, while moving in a distinctly over-determined manner. And despite not involving technology, such sequences are characterised by the same transparency, sequentiality and cause-and-effect mechanics as mousetrap machinery.

These moments also reflect upon the mechanical and narrative nature of cinema itself. Insofar as films achieve their illusion of movement by showing image after image in rapid succession, cartoons lay bare this process, demystifying the moving image on the screen otherwise obscured by live action film's mimetic qualities. The stop frame animation of Aardman, the mechanics of which are revealed in the very logo which opens their films, is similarly illustrative of processes entailed in producing screen entertainment. *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* opens in a self-reflexive manner, depicting the often tense relationship between the two characters through a series of still photographic images framed on a living room wall. These resemble familiar domestic snapshots, but in sequence they create a storyboard or comic book of events unfolding before the camera. This effectively reveals the manner by which the cinematic image, whether live action, animation or stop frame, is made to move and become meaningful. Mousetrap

machinery embodies such processes, while representing a visual metaphor for the narrative and editing techniques of dominant filmmaking. The cause and effect rationality which structures these sequences remains a central aspect of mainstream cinema. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's detailed examination of Hollywood cinema conventions and devices quotes a 1920s screenwriting manual describing film plot as 'a careful and logical working out of the laws of cause and effect'. Narrative principles of classical Hollywood ensure scenes and sequence run smoothly and coherently from one to the next. As the authors elaborate: 'Here in brief is the premise of Hollywood story construction: causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals.'<sup>158</sup> They are also the laws governing the mousetrap machinery sequences described above. The balloon bursts, causing the chicken to startle, causing the egg to be laid, causing the seesaw to drop. Each consequence has clear consequences of its own. The goal of *The Goonies* sequence is the opening of the gate. The apparatus involved constitutes both the means of its achievement and an obstacle, insofar as each component must effectively run its course before the task is completed. In addition, the mechanics of such sequence transform common domestic events, a gate opening, cooking breakfast, getting dressed for work, into visually spectacular cinematic entertainment.

### *Hook* and the Impossibility of Children's Cinema

Recent developments in the Hollywood film industry, including the increasing significance of home video, the importance of merchandising, and an emphasis on visuals over dialogue in light of expanding international markets, might be considered to have beneficial consequences for the position of children as the audience for cinema released feature films. Wood<sup>159</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 13.

<sup>159</sup> Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*.

and Krämer<sup>160</sup> variously suggest the adult experience of attending certain Hollywood blockbuster movies constitutes a pleasurable engagement with childhood via the childness such cinema evokes. This might be expected to facilitate more child characters, more child-centred narratives, and a greater incorporation of implied child audiences at various levels of production. A prime example of this, a film discussed by many writers on American cinema of this cycle, is *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*. Although most authors focus on the 'regressive' function of the movie experience for adult audiences, this is in many ways a remarkable film from the perspective of children, cinema and children's cinema. The main character is a young boy who is present in practically every scene. The narrative, of three siblings hiding an alien from sinister authorities, would not appear out of place in the catalogues of the Children's Film Foundation. The film is shot in a unique style whereby the camera largely maintains a child's eye perspective throughout its duration. This strategy avoids many problems involved in films featuring both adult and child character, with performers occupying conspicuously different portions of the screen. Most films tend to privilege the adult and the upper section of the frame, to the detriment of child characters. If the dominant optical perspective of the Hollywood camera, as feminist film theorists have long asserted, is male, it is also adult. Bazalgette and Staples come to similar conclusions, observing that 'family film' narratives tends to marginalise child characters and child-centred concerns.<sup>161</sup> Yet despite the relegation of child protagonists, these films still rely on a sense of childness for their successful function as family entertainment. Fredric Jameson makes a significant observation concerning *Star Wars: A New Hope*, a film also considered pivotal to the reorientation of Hollywood around family centred entertainment. The author notes ways in which the film draws upon 'Saturday afternoon serials' of the kind discussed by Staples,<sup>162</sup> variously featuring 'alien villains, true American heroes, heroines in distress, the death ray or the doomsday box, and the cliffhanger at the end whose miraculous resolution was to be witnessed next Saturday

160 Krämer, 'Would you take your child to see this film?'

161 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids', 96.

162 Staples, *All Pals Together*.

afternoon'. *Star Wars* is considered a 'nostalgia film' not in the sense that it evokes memories of a particular era, but rather for a particular form of children's entertainment, one which Jameson notes is largely only relevant to those growing up between the 1930s and 1950s.<sup>163</sup> Nostalgic children's film for adults thereby employ a sense of childness largely through their location in children's culture. Child protagonists, child-focused storylines and children's concerns can therefore be largely absent. A film of childness without children, one which practically narrates this very process, is Steven Spielberg's 1991 sequel to *Peter Pan*, *Hook*.

Through directorship alone, Wood's 'Lucas-Spielberg' cycle clearly applies to this film. Discussing such cinema's association with children, Wood makes an admittedly problematic distinction between the 'true innocence of childhood' and the 'sentimental, sanitized, desexualized version of bourgeois ideology', between 'the childlike' and 'the child-ish' infantilised adult spectator of children's film for adults.<sup>164</sup> In a chapter attempting to unpick seemingly disparate elements in American cinema, which explicitly cites *Hook* as an example, Jim Collins separates what might be considered two distinct modes of childness within 1990s Hollywood cinema. These strategies are labelled 'Eclectic Irony' and 'New Sincerity'. The former is associated with postmodern play, 'dissonance', 'ironic hybridisation' and 'eclectic juxtapositions of elements that very obviously don't belong together'. Conversely, 'New Sincerity' moves in a different direction, retreating from the same technological and cultural developments, being 'obsessed with recovering some sort of missing harmony, where everything works in unison', adopting a mode of representation which 'rejects any form of irony in its sanctimonious pursuit of lost purity'.<sup>165</sup> Given the significance of the Western to adults' nostalgic memories of children's matinee screenings, an interesting contrast is presented

163 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in John Belton, ed., *Movies and Mass Culture* (London: Athlone, 1999), 192.

164 Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, 175–176.

165 Jim Collins, 'Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity', in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins, eds, *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1993), 242–243.

between the generic awareness of *Back to the Future Part III* (1990) and the demythologising project represented by *Dances With Wolves* (1990) 'situated in a West before the Western "got to it"'.<sup>166</sup> Both Eclectic Irony and New Sincerity might be understood as aspects of contemporary children's culture. They indicate contradictions in the construction of a Western childhood, characterised both by playful make-believe and earnest spirituality. The symbolic child of childhood cinema effects a magical reconciliation of these two, whereby the fantastical, the fanciful, the fictional, the playful becomes a source of truth and authenticity which cuts through the harsh realities of a cold and unenchanted modernity.

A sense of Collins' New Sincerity cinema mobilising adult longing for a fictional childhood innocence, a lost purity located in the past, as a means of escaping the overwhelming forces of contemporary modernity resonates strongly with Rose's controversial arguments concerning the function of children's literature. Indeed, in the introduction to a reprinted edition of *The Case of Peter Pan*, Rose also considers *Hook*, describing the Pan of this version as representing 'that part of human-ness which fathers must retrieve if families are to survive the material onslaught of the modern age'.<sup>167</sup> Rose points to the origins of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* in adult publications and theatrical performances, ones depicting childhood predominantly for adult readers and audiences. The activity of writing for children, Rose argues, is not simply to provide benign entertainment for young readers. Rather its intention is to seduce the child through the depiction of child characters which then ensnare the child reader, encouraged to find themselves in the pages of the book. This process is driven by a desire to fix, contain and secure childhood for distinctly adult ends. It is a mythic childhood, functioning to assuage anxieties about modernity, sexuality and the ambiguity of language itself. The figure of Peter Pan, the child frozen in childhood, Rose sees as emblematic of this project. Many of these observations resonate with the tenuous nature of children's cinema. The idea that a single film text, or indeed single cinema experience, might address children of all ages is a dubious suggestion. Throughout its history the matinee movement

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 257.

<sup>167</sup> Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, xiv.

clearly struggled to fulfil this remit. Various institutions of children's cinema exhibition and production reflected a fear that children might be seduced by the film experience, alongside a desire to harness such seductive possibilities in order to impart valuable lessons. The shift from unregulated screenings to respectable matinees with increased adult supervision was designed to ensure child audiences adopted the 'correct' relationship with the medium, rather than the more rambunctious free-for-all described in many accounts of early children's cinema attendance. This constituted a non-participatory film experience, to use Rose's distinction, more children's play than pantomime,<sup>168</sup> although structured activities such as songs and competitions can be considered a managed gesture towards previous interactive theatrical cultures.

For Hollywood cinema, the figure of the child-like adult filmgoer represents a universal consumer, undifferentiated by class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or nationality, suiting the international screen industries and the economic principle of profit maximisation through appealing to as broad a demographic as possible. In the ideological context of Reaganite entertainment, the mythic 'child in all of us' serves the reactionary function of uniting this fragmented body of filmgoers of diverse political and identity-orientated affiliations into a unified audience who might all be addressed by the same blockbuster motion picture. Like *Peter Pan*, most contemporary 'children's films' are not made for children, but nevertheless exhibit a childness in their relationship to children's cultures. Just as *Peter Pan* constitutes 'a little history of children's fiction in itself',<sup>169</sup> films of the Lucas-Spielberg cycle represent an anthology of material screened to children throughout the twentieth century. As with the 'fairy play' it is a form of entertainment which may feature child characters, but is performance largely for adult audiences. If this form of entertainment transforms 'so-called adults' on the stage into children,<sup>170</sup> the adult spectators described by Jameson are adopting a similarly infantilised position through their nostalgic engagement with entertainment from their childhood. Collins' criticism

168 Ibid. 32.

169 Ibid. 77.

170 Ibid. 32.

of New Sincerity cinema as entailing a retreat from the complexities of a disorientating modernity and the politically conservative dimensions of children's films for adults can be compared to Rose's consideration of the children's story as repressing the complications of language and communication, issues of power and control inherent in who is speaking and why, and the dislocation between writer and reader.<sup>171</sup> These manoeuvres facilitate the return to traditional storytelling and classical Hollywood cinema conventions following the experimentation of the previous decades. The evasion of anxieties circulating sexuality and sexual difference also enacted in children's fiction<sup>172</sup> corresponds with the perceived desire to circumvent challenges of the previous decade's political movements. This sees the stabilisation of the 'incoherent texts' of the 1970s which Wood reads as reflecting political tensions and social divisions which the family film subsequently papers over. The disavowal this involves results in a similar 'excess' as Rose sees in *Peter Pan*,<sup>173</sup> a frequent criticism of the big budget, spectacle-centred, special effects-littered, set piece-driven cinema which *Hook* typifies. At the same time, often as a consequence of such hyperbole, incoherences and inconsistencies persist in even the most conservative of cinema. Childhood as asexual, fixed, homogenous, serves various functions of the cinema of childness, but so do conceptions of the child as perverse, fluid, uncontrollable and anarchic.

Such an endeavour is not without problems, and one of the things which makes *Hook* such a compelling text is the tangle it produces in trying to overcome the various impossibilities at work within its own project. One of the ways in which the contradictions of children's films for adults are reconciled, much as with children's literature, is through the construction of the filmmaking process, no matter how technical, mechanical, calculated and adult, as somehow child-like. In discourses surrounding the making of *Hook* there are similar attempts, as Rose observes in the production notes of *Peter Pan*, to construction artists and technicians as 'in league' with the

171 Ibid. 21–22.

172 Ibid. 25.

173 Ibid. 37.

child or the child-like.<sup>174</sup> The inscription of the child in the 'scenic artist' can be observed in the artificial otherworldliness of the Neverland stage sets, which many commentators compared to a theme park. A *Sight and Sound* critic observes a Disneyland aesthetic to the production, commenting 'the series of set-pieces around which the film is structured closely resembles a map of the attractions on offer to vacationers'.<sup>175</sup> If this is meant critically, it is a perspective positively embraced by one child actor who, in an erasure of the toil entailed in film production, claimed: 'Every day it was like going to work at Disneyland'.<sup>176</sup> A similar process can be seen in stories of the inspiration for Spielberg's adaptation. Screen writer Jim Hart claimed the genesis for the script originated in his three-year-old son Jake who drew a picture of Captain Hook escaping from the crocodile which devours him at the end of the original play.<sup>177</sup> Four years later, in an anecdote quoted in a different source, Jack is reported to speak the 'magic words' which form the premise of Spielberg's movie: 'What if Peter Pan grew up?'<sup>178</sup> Attributing this contradictory suggestion to a remark made by a child can be regarded as a further attempt to disguise the predominantly adult authorship at work in producing the blockbuster movie. Equally, the description of Jack's remarkably succinct high concept summary of *Hook*'s premise as 'magic words' attributes the same mystical aura to the film's conception as Rose observes in mythologies surrounding *Peter Pan* itself.

A similar inscription of childness surrounded the film's director at the time of release. Steven Spielberg may no longer have the same status as creator of family entertainment, but around the production of *Hook*, in academic, journalistic and popular discourses, numerous writers attempted to construct the director as a child-like adult. One of the 'movie brats' nicknamed the 'Cincinnati kid',<sup>179</sup> authors wrote of Spielberg's child's eye

174 Ibid. 32.

175 Christopher Frayling, 'Hook', *Sight and Sound* 1/12 (1992), 51.

176 Douglas Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg* (New York: Citadel Press, 1995), 198–199.

177 Ibid. 199.

178 Philip M. Taylor, *Steven Spielberg* (London: Batsford, 1992), 137.

179 Chris Auty, 'The Complete Spielberg?', *Sight and Sound – International Film Quarterly* 51/4 (1982), 275.



perspective having the effect of 'bringing adult viewers to their knees',<sup>180</sup> producing films which, as a consequence, 'appeal to the child in everyone'.<sup>181</sup> Friend Richard Dreyfuss is quoted as referring to Spielberg as 'a big kid who at twelve years old decided to make movies, and (on some level) he's still twelve years old'.<sup>182</sup> Biographical details used to explain his films stem from the director's childhood. As Philip M. Taylor remarks: 'It is almost as though as the man he seized upon the chance to relive what he saw as a comparatively unhappy childhood and then to reorder it on film'.<sup>183</sup> The experience of watching a meteorites shower with his father,<sup>184</sup> the sense of loneliness and estrangement following the man's departure,<sup>185</sup> and a schoolyard scuffle involving a missing Davy Crockett hat<sup>186</sup> are said to have inspired aspects of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *E.T.* and the importance of movie merchandising for the director. As quoted on the front cover to Andrew Yule's tellingly titled biography *Steven Spielberg: Father of the Man*: 'I use my childhood in all my pictures, and all the time. I go back there to find ideas and stories. My childhood was the most fruitful part of my entire life'.<sup>187</sup> These recurring narratives, as with Barrie, function to reconcile the adult with production of culture for children, constructing the director as a man-child, rather than as a professional producer of slick and commercially successful big screen entertainment. Further mythologies Rose observes of *Peter Pan*, also enhancing its status as a tale for children, involve the collapse of the author into the fictional central character, with 'Barrie as eternal child'.<sup>188</sup> Industrial and critical discourses surrounding *Hook* associated Spielberg with both writer and his creation. Following the commercial success of *E.T.* in 1982, a film which references the story in multiple ways,

180 Sinyard, *Children in the Movies*, 32.

181 Taylor, *Steven Spielberg*, 33.

182 Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, 24.

183 Taylor, *Steven Spielberg*, 14.

184 Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, 11.

185 Andrew Yule, *Steven Spielberg: Father of the Man* (London: Little Brown, 1996), 127.

186 Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, 14.

187 Yule, *Steven Spielberg*.

188 Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 19–20.

Taylor quotes a newspaper headline describing the director as the 'Peter Pan who would be King of Hollywood'.<sup>189</sup> Writing in 1986, in a footnote to a discussion of *ET*, Wood notes it as 'peculiarly appropriate' that Spielberg's contemporary projects included a version of the story,<sup>190</sup> while Christopher Frayling's review notes how the director is 'forever telling interviewers that deep down he *is* Peter Pan'.<sup>191</sup> Industrial mythologies positioning Spielberg as eternal child rose to the foreground in discussions of his 1991 project. It was publicised that at forty-four-years-old Spielberg was the same age as Barrie in 1904 when his play was first produced. According to Douglas Brode, an autographed cover of *Time* magazine featuring Michael Jackson, 'Spielberg's leading contender as child-man celebrity', hung on the wall of the director's Universal Studio office.<sup>192</sup> Taylor writes that *Hook* is both 'the film Spielberg – and Spielberg alone – had to make' and the 'ultimate autobiographical project'.<sup>193</sup> As well as identifying with Barrie and his child creation, Spielberg also expressed adult identification with Peter Banning, *Hook*'s grown up equivalent. Brode, in a similar vein to Taylor, describes the film as 'highly personal autobiography disguised as mass-market entertainment'.<sup>194</sup> This overlapping authorial identification, Spielberg as Barrie, as Pan, as Banning, as child and adult combined, manages the adult authorship of a film constructed as children's culture through its association with a canonical children's literary text. It attempts to assert coherence over a project riddled with contradictions, through presenting the director as a figure who personifies and presumably reconciles many conflicting elements of the film itself.

'Spectacle of childhood for *us*, or play for *children*?'<sup>195</sup> *Hook* refuses clear answer to this question in its opening scene, establishing both the film's self-conscious awareness of its literary source, its spectator relationship and

189 Taylor, *Steven Spielberg*, 28.

190 Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 176.

191 Frayling, 'Hook', 51.

192 Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, 198–199.

193 Taylor, *Steven Spielberg*, 136.

194 Brode, *The Films of Steven Spielberg*, 204.

195 Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 33.

the position of children on the screen. An audience are shown watching a children's performance of *Peter Pan*, the first of a number of explicit references to Barrie's original. The production is naive, the child cast inept and unprofessional. Maggie, the protagonist's daughter who plays the part of Wendy, forgets her lines. Although the performance is just as constructed for the camera, its relative amateurism contrasts with the film's big budget, star-studded professionalism. In the same instance, *Hook*, like the school play, is marked as a spectacle staged largely for adult enjoyment. No matter how narratively peripheral they might be, the children on the stage, on the screen, and in the audience are nevertheless central to the symbolic childness upon which the film's otherwise impossible task depends. As Jack Hart's outline suggests, *Hook* is founded on the contradictory premise that Peter Pan, the eternal child, has somehow grown up and become the most adult of adults, a corporate lawyer. Played by Robin Williams, another figure who confuses the boundaries between adult and child, Banning's dislocation from childhood is characterised by an inability to remember his own past, a workaholicism which disrupts his relationship with his family and a fear of flying. The film's central theme of childhood foregrounds the normally default adulthood of the protagonist. Banning is depicted as stern, uptight, officious, obsessive, picky, petty, over protective, unimaginative and bound by decorum. Collins observes the 'free-floating technophobia' which contradicts New Sincerity's frequent reliance upon sophisticated special effects.<sup>196</sup> In *Hook* this is combined with a rejection of capitalism equally at odds with the film's economic base of production. Banning's profession is compared to that of a pirate, enemy of children in the original play, while his mobile phone, a constant connection to his work, constitutes an impediment to communicating with those around him. The economic foundation of the family film's nuclear family is obscured, suggesting all that is required to sustain harmonious relations is that members spend quality time with each other.

Modernity, capitalism, business, the law, technology, adulthood, are all defenestrated along with Peter's mobile phone early in the film. So

196 Collins, 'Genricity in the Nineties', 260.

begins the project of transforming this 'pitiful spineless pasty bloated cod-fish', this 'old fat grandpa man', back into a child. Banning's return and reintegration into Neverland dramatises Wood's description of the infantilising spectatorship process inherent in children's films for adults, via the fabricated authenticity of New Sincerity cinema, described by Collins as 'a never-never land of pure wish-fulfilment, in which the problems of the present are symbolically resolved in a past that not only did not, but could not exist'.<sup>197</sup> The film's protagonist reclaims this lost state of childhood through assuming the identity of a character of children's fiction, with Barrie's text functioning as a literal gateway to the past and the means of reclaiming his own childish self. *Hook* follows the trajectory of many children's books and childness movies, in which characters travel to magical worlds aligned with previous eras, filled with mythical tropes of children's culture. The idea that childhood exists as a place, as a physical location, which might be returned to with the right potion, portal or wardrobe, is a compelling fantasy. Its enactment in *Hook* starts with the Bannings travelling back to their childhood home in London, described as a 'magical place for children'. In contrast to the more naturalised depiction of previous events in America, once in England scenes become increasingly staged. The long uninterrupted take as the Bannings enter Grandma Wendy's house, the ethereal lighting of the nursery, the incorporation of the Captain's hook into the fittings, use of symmetrical and deliberate framing, accompanied by full orchestral music, suggest an unreality to these events. The house appears unchanged since the Banning's childhood, and they are told that no growing up is permitted within its walls. Upon returning to Neverland, the spaces of the film become increasingly artificial. Elaborate sets such as Hook's ship and the Lost Boys' den reflect the Disneyland aesthetic previously mentioned. The Lost Boys themselves, described by Collins as 'a folk culture par excellence'<sup>198</sup> evoke various archetypes of performed childhood: the ragamuffin, the scout, the Victorian street urchin, the flower fairy, the artful dodger. A notably less reassuring exception is their leader, Rufio,

197 Ibid. 257.

198 Ibid. 260.

whose punky haircut evokes a threatening urban delinquency, and who significantly dies before the film's end.

Throughout *Hook* there is a constant confusion between concepts of childhood, the childhood of adult characters and the childhood of children's fiction. Grandma Wendy announces herself to be the Wendy from Barrie's book, claiming her bedtime stories were the inspiration for the author's work. Having located Barrie's fiction in the imagination of a child, albeit one played by Maggie Smith, after Captain Hook kidnaps the Bannings' children the film reveals that these stories were actually real. Consistent with the 'fetishisation of "belief"'<sup>199</sup> that Collins sees informing New Sincerity cinema,<sup>200</sup> Banning's progress to Neverland and his rediscovery of the Pan within involves convincing successive characters, and finally himself, that he is the actual grown-up protagonist of Barrie's fictional play. This is first confirmed by Wendy, then by Tinkerbell who accosts Banning in the nursery and recognises him by his smell, and finally by the smallest of the Lost Boys who identifies Peter through similar spiritual means by looking into Banning's eyes and touching his face. Finally, Peter remembers his true self, the eternal child, paradoxically, by acknowledging the pleasure he gets from being a father. It is the very childness Hollindale locates in Shakespeare's play, the pleasure adults enjoy in engaging with their own children.<sup>201</sup> This childhood, founded on traditional child-parent power relations, facilitates the restoration of the father, a component of Wood's critique of Spielberg-Lucas cinema.<sup>202</sup> The extent to which this involves a displacement of children within a text masquerading as their own culture is consistent with Bazalgette and Staples' point that family films, of which *Hook* provides an example, are concerned with parents dealing with parenthood, rather than children dealing with childhood.<sup>203</sup> Banning's children are symbolically central to the film. Their kidnapping is the catalyst which calls Peter Pan back to Neverland. Their memory is the means by which

199 Ibid. 259.

200 Ibid.

201 Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, 47.

202 Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*.

203 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the Kids', 95.

the hero rediscovers his ability to fly. Their return to the nursery constitutes the film's joyful conclusion and Banning's redemption. Children as characters and as actors are significant in authenticating the childhoods the film attempts to mobilise, but children's screen-time is minimal, and rarely without accompaniment. Their ultimate role involves a capitulation to the adult character defined as representing a more authentic version of childhood, a childhood bound up in adulthood, or rather, in parenthood. The Lost Boys willingly submit to Banning's leadership. The last thing Jack and Maggie say reaffirms their status as their parents' possessions. The rebellious Rufio kneels submissively before the adult Pan, and dies in his arms wishing he had a father like Banning.

At the same time, to quote Rose once more: 'None of this, however, really works.'<sup>204</sup> Despite this neat analysis, the film's realisation of its central project, if such an intention can be securely identified, is far from coherent, belying the impossible contradictions it attempts to reconcile. This is a film riddled with tensions, between adult and child, between actuality and fiction, between childness and the marginalisation of child characters and perspectives, between authenticity and artifice. The contradictions inherent in an eternal child inhabiting the body of a forty year old man, of culture addressing adult concerns through tropes associated with media for children, of special effects cinema which seems to reject the very technology upon which it depends, betray the impossibility of a project which exemplifies so much of the family feature film. *Hook* illustrates the tenuousness not only of children's films, but of a single text's ability to address a multi-generational audience. Consequently, despite its clear industrial location in Wood's Lucas-Spielberg cycle, *Hook* expresses aspects of the 'incoherent texts' more favourably considered in the same volume. Distinguished from the deliberate incoherence of avant-garde filmmaking, or the incoherence which results from ineptitude, Wood identifies a cycle of films that simply 'do not know what they want to say.'<sup>205</sup> This textual confusion is considered a consequence of tensions within 1970s America, cracks in society over which the Reaganite era of Hollywood entertainment is seen to affect an

204 Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 34.

205 Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 47.

illusory reconciliation. Such films' inability to resolve their internal contradictions, or to present a cohesive stance towards their subject matter, results in complex, often disturbing cinema, frequently verging on the subversive. While not necessarily radical, in contrast to the classical plotting of the *Star Wars* or Indiana Jones films, *Hook* can certainly be considered fragmented, inconsistent, excessive. The film's over-artificial *mise en scène*, conspicuously fictional points of reference and contradictory mix of anarchic and sentimental childhood undermine any unambiguous sincerity it may attempt to generate. Williams' dialogue involves a characteristically frenetic array of knowing references to mature culture, incorporating Freudian psychoanalysis, *Mighty Mouse* and *Lord of the Flies*. This is combined with a mawkish sentimentality seemingly at odds with such aspects of the performer's persona. The specific significance of Tootles' marbles, Maggie's song, or Jack's baseball are narratively and thematically unclear. Mermaids rescue Banning from drowning in one dream-like sequence, but are never seen again. None of the Lost Boys appear to possess the ability to fly. The Indians, mentioned in Tinkerbell's first scene, never make an appearance. At one point the fairy inexplicably transforms into a full-grown woman, dressed in a wedding gown, only to return to pixie size moments later. This scene, like others, expresses aspects of taboo sexuality which run throughout the film. The Oedipal relationship between Peter and Wendy, Banning's amnesia and heavy drinking suggestive of childhood trauma and abuse, the sexualised mermaids' interspecies mouth-to-mouth resuscitation of Banning, the queer coding of Captain Hook whose attempts at grooming Banning's son include giving him his first ear piercing. These aspects compromise the reassuring childness of the film and its family film values. A coherent study of *Hook*'s incoherence might read it as personifying the impossibility of children's cinema, and the Lucas-Spielberg 'infantilising' project. It is an extreme example of the cinematic practices discussed by Wood, embodying the characteristics of adult-appropriated children's film transformed into family feature outlined by Bazalgette and Staples. Throughout this process *Hook* makes little attempt to conceal its predominantly adult address, symbolic use of children and childhood, and the conservative reaffirmation of patriarchal parental authority which is its central theme. In its explicitness, *Hook* might be considered less objectionable than other family films

in which this agenda is more subtly hidden, and consequently harder to criticise, expose and ultimately reject. As *Peter Pan* does for children's literature, *Hook*, through its very instability, exposes the impossibilities at the heart of cinema of childness.



## Television for Children

### Defining Children's Television

Expressing sentiments which parallel many frustrations experienced by critics defining children's literature, Messenger Davies writes:

People often talk about 'children and television' without any clear definition of what they mean by either children or television. A child could be a baby who can't speak yet. It could be a toddler, still learning the rules of behaviour. It could be a primary school pupil – or even a secondary school pupil – puzzling over the skills of reading. Are we talking about boys or girls? Only children or members of a large family? Tower block dwellers or farmers' children living in remote parts of Scotland? Children with two parents, or four parents, or one parent, or no parents?<sup>1</sup>

As with all media, any attempt to align a group of texts with child audiences soon begs the question, what kind of children are being referred to? In the case of television Messenger Davies suggests this is an issue of age, but also of gender, class and geographic location. Although such factors clearly impact on other children's culture, they appear particularly prominent in discussions of British television. Due to the regulatory structures in which the medium operates, informed by concepts of national identity, public service provision and inclusiveness, British television is traditionally obliged to cater for the broadest spectrum of child, and adult, tastes in a manner which literature, cinema and digital games are not. However, this has rarely been a straightforward process. As David Oswell asserts:

1 Messenger Davies, *Television is Good for Your Kids*, 9.

Right from the beginning, the child television audience constituted less a known entity and more a problem: one of how to address this diverse audience and how to organize it.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘problem’ of children’s television, or more specifically, the children’s television audience, has resonance with issues surrounding children’s cinema discussed previously. Its precariousness might similarly rest upon the extent to which the diverse range of individuals covered by the term ‘child’ evades modernity’s impulse to rationalise and categorise. It may also emerge from the ways children themselves resist being defined in such a manner. Buckingham et al. are not alone in observing children’s ‘unwillingness to *be* children – at least as defined by adults,’<sup>3</sup> something which frequently leads children’s television to label itself in more oblique terms. An examination of historical relations between television, modernity and postmodernity, illustrate the degree to which the ‘children’ of children’s television proves a recurring challenge to broadcasting’s modernist project.

This challenge is immediately evident in concerns, like those circulating cinema in the early twentieth century, that television has a negative impact on children. Such assumptions are implicated in the seemingly confrontational title of Messenger Davies’ 1989 book from which the above quote is taken, *Television is Good for Your Kids*. In another early television studies publication, Jane Root observes how the figure of the child audience facilitated an exaggeration of the medium’s power. Various examples of monstrous imagery are cited as metaphorically constructing the television set as alien, as demonic, or as having the power to turn its audience into zombies.<sup>4</sup> Such beliefs, Buckingham observes, persisted in politicians’ demands for the banning of Australian soap opera, royal family members’ attacks on screen violence, and condemnation of the education establishment for incorporating popular television into their curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Written over twenty years ago, Buckingham’s examples still resonate, in more recent

2 David Oswell, *Television, Childhood, and the Home: A History of the Making of the Child Television Audience in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 47.

3 Buckingham et al., *Children’s Television in Britain*, 119.

4 Jane Root, *Open the Box* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1986), 8–10.

5 David Buckingham, ‘Introduction: Young People and the Media’, 3.

discussion of sexualised images within music videos, continued criticism of representation in popular media, and attacks on media studies' presence in the academy. In a manner also reflecting the history of children's cinema, television institutions have traditionally responded in two ways, through protection in the form of regulation and censorship, and through the provision of television content specifically designed for child audiences. Official bodies, following similar guidelines as the BBFC, have been historically tasked with regulating the content and broadcasting times of programmes, to ensure children are not exposed to offensive language, violence, sexual images or imitable acts. However, these practices, like certification, only serve to define children's viewing negatively, in relation to what it does not or should not contain. They result in material which may not be considered harmful, but which is not necessarily targeted at young people as an audience. Children's television, meaning the positive provision of programmes for children, is not simply material conforming to prohibitions of sex and violence, criteria which the majority of daytime and early evening viewing largely adhere. Accordingly, positive stipulations have required both public and commercial channels provide for young viewers. As with the comparatively limited output of the Children's Film Foundation, this provides a fairly coherent corpus of material to study as 'children's television'.

Attempts to define the textual qualities of children's television are problematised by the fact that provision for children in the UK has always been envisioned as a distinctly multi-genre enterprise, entailing age-specific versions of most formats available throughout the mainstream schedule. Just as Hunt points to the 'lack of generic "purity"' in children's literature,<sup>6</sup> children's television has incorporated drama, documentary, reality TV, game shows, magazine programmes, news, sports and situation comedy. By the 1960s the principle of the 'mini-schedule' had been established in British television, entailing a mixed and varied cycle of shows.<sup>7</sup> Any history of television for children reveals a wide range of programme types. Buckingham et al.'s various snapshots of children's television across the

6 Hunt, *Children's Literature*, 3.

7 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 84–85.

decades include an educational piece on the history of the piano (1954),<sup>8</sup> a Western based on an old radio series, a ventriloquist-based variety show, a maritime adventure serial (1957),<sup>9</sup> *Jackanory*, *The Magic Roundabout* (1966),<sup>10</sup> *Yogi Bear*, *Emu's Broadcasting Company*, *John Craven's Newsround* and *Blue Peter* (1978).<sup>11</sup> Considering the qualities of children's television, Messenger Davies details various stylistic themes. These include 'brightly coloured sets, vivid graphics, multimedia presentations (print, restless camerawork, fast editing, computer graphics) and glamorous young presenters given frequent direct address to the audience ... characterised by informality or "wackiness"'.<sup>12</sup> Beyond these broad characteristics, unevenly present across the spectrum of children's television, there is little consistency in children's programming in terms of generic or textual qualities. Certain recurring elements can be identified, such as the prominence of animation and puppets, but these are not exclusive to children's entertainment, nor do they appear essential components. The art and craft show seems a genre particular to television for children, but this also has parallels in mainstream entertainment such as cookery and lifestyle programmes. Drama tends to feature child characters, but television presenters are largely adults. Television for children frequently expresses an imperative to educate, but it also has a playful tradition of sending up adult authority and the teaching establishment. As within children's literature, fantasy appears a frequent subgenre of drama, but drama is itself a subgenre of children's television, and not a prominent one at that. And as with children's cinema there is also a strong dramatic realist tradition inherent in the desire to present audiences at home with recognisable child characters on the screen.

As with matinee programming, the placing of television within the broadcast schedule has been a significant marker of a programme's official suitability for child audiences. Traditionally, certain times have been set aside

8 Ibid. 19.

9 Ibid. 23.

10 Ibid. 31.

11 Ibid. 33.

12 Máire Messenger Davies, 'Studying Children's Television', in Glen Creeber, ed., *The Television Genre Book* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 94.

for child viewers, typically daytime, late afternoon and weekend mornings when an implied adult audience is at work or otherwise engaged. Janet Thumim suggests that from the early days of television, time of broadcast was as significant as content in defining a programme's relationship with non-normative, non-adult, and non-male audiences.<sup>13</sup> As Oswell observes, broadcasts for children were one of the first aspects of the schedule to be institutionalised, *Children's Hour* representing one of few programmes regularly aired at the same time, between 5pm and 6pm.<sup>14</sup> According to assumptions concerning children's daily routines, morning was allocated for infants in the form of *Watch with Mother*, with older children catered for by the late afternoon slot. This format was subsequently followed by ITV in the form of *Tea-V Time*.<sup>15</sup> Such practices continued throughout the decades, and the hours allocated to this period expanded alongside the extension of television in general. In the 1980s both ITV and BBC consolidated their provision for children in slots designated 'Children's ITV' and 'Children's BBC' respectively,<sup>16</sup> a move which effectively marked all content during these periods as children's television. However, unlike the film material screened at Saturday morning matinees, throughout broadcasting history these slots largely contained material specifically produced for child audiences.

There do remain some notable examples of shows originally made for a general audience becoming regenrified through this process. These include silent slapstick films and serials similar to those shown at children's cinema screenings, prime time American animation like *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*, and older theatrical cartoons repackaged into blocks of appropriate broadcasting length. There are also examples of American sitcoms, such as *Bewitched*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *I Dream of Jeannie* and *My Favourite*

13 Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women, and the Box* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27.

14 Oswell, *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 33–34.

15 Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture*, 34.

16 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 88.

*Martian* being screened as children's entertainment,<sup>17</sup> as if their transatlantic origins and lowbrow format afforded them a certain juvenility. Into the 1990s Marsha Kinder observes not only the revival of classic cartoons from this period in the form of new shows, but the integration of 1930s cartoons into a format like *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, Buckingham et al. observe the ways in which shows like *Batman* and *Thunderbirds* have moved around the schedule as their cultural status changes from family, to children's, to adult viewing,<sup>19</sup> while children's programmes from the 1970s and 1980s such as *Bagpuss*, *The Moomins* and *The Wombles* were rescreened as 'cult classics' on cable channels.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting the 'timeless' or retrospective tendencies in children's media, the characters of silent comedies, 1940s cartoons, early broadcasting for children and 1960s prime time animation have remained in circulation as children's culture well into the twenty-first century, with many animated characters from previous eras being revamped in new shows. The significance of scheduling in defining children's television may have been undermined by the increasing fluidity of broadcasting resulting from new satellite, cable, digital and retail delivery services. However, much of the media broadcast through these new distribution methods remains, in various ways, discursively marked as children's media. The naming of television channels, the listings of online sites, or the labelling and categorisation of DVDs, contribute to this process. Indeed, the now-discontinued classification of 'UC' which identified home viewing as 'particularly suitable for pre-school children' represents an approach to classification positively identifying young children as an appropriate audience, in a manner not evident in the standard 'U' certification of theatrically released feature films.

17 Geoff Tibballs, *The Golden Age of Children's Television* (London: Titan Books, 1991), 138–139.

18 Marsha Kinder, *Playing With Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (London: University of California Press, 1991), 44–45.

19 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 80.

20 David Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?: *Teletubbies* and the Educational Imperative', in David Buckingham, ed., *Small Screens: Television for Children* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 55.

Drawing on a British Standards Council document, Buckingham et al. define children's television as either a show broadcast for children, or one produced or commissioned by a children's television department.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the reticence of the mainstream film industry to make films for children, there is an established tradition of particular departments and production companies making content specifically for young people. These organisations have been guaranteed a demand for their output through regulatory structures, which have ensured children's screenings as part of the medium's public service provision. Buckingham et al.'s history of children's television in the UK is very much a history of the BBC's Children's Television Department. There also exist independent companies dedicated to making children's programmes, such as Ragdoll Productions whose output includes *Rosie and Jim*, *Teletubbies*, *In the Night Garden* and *Twirlywoos*. Bignell points to activities the company engages in, including interviews with children, focus groups, and video recordings of children playing, which inform their output. Research of this kind clearly indicates young people as the organisation's target viewers, although such managed information may also be in circulation as a means of convincing parents of their show's beneficial content.<sup>22</sup> Considering children's television, not as material marked for children through the schedule, or produced with children in mind, but as shows watched by young people, and the category becomes increasingly unstable. A comparative fit exists between timeslots and channels designated for children's viewing, and the content made by children's television producers. But the child viewers such efforts presuppose do not necessarily follow. Neither does the adult audience stay away from material categorised as 'children's'. As observed by many commentators, there is considerable overlap in adults' and children's viewing habits and preferences which complicates any understanding of 'children's television' as material only watched and appreciated by children.

21 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 80.

22 Jonathan Bignell, 'Familiar Aliens: *Teletubbies* and Postmodern Childhood', *Screen* 46/3 (2005), 378–379.

Buckingham et al. observe, 'the most popular programmes with children have *always* been those intended for a general audience'.<sup>23</sup> Children's television viewing practices incorporate much of the media enjoyed by other age groups. Barrie Gunter and Jill McAleer observe mid-1990s children's viewing to be 'as varied as the television schedules'. Nevertheless, as with children's cinema, certain broad favourites emerge. Examples listed include the action gameshow *Gladiators*, the comedy *Mr Bean*, the hospital drama *Casualty*, *The National Lottery* and *Noel's House Party*.<sup>24</sup> These are mainstream programmes designed for a popular audience, and not a single show on Gunter and McAleer's list derives from the official children's television schedule. Hannah Davies, David Buckingham and Peter Kelley make similar observations, pointing out that children's television rarely tops the ratings of children's viewing, with soap opera and sitcoms frequently crossing over both adults' and children's preferences. Nevertheless, the authors emphasise the continued significance of scheduling for children's viewing, even when it comes to mainstream television. The most popular shows amongst children are at the weekend or early evening, indicating the degree to which, even when straying beyond the enclosure of designated screening slots, television scheduling continues to define children's viewing through accessibility and availability.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in discussing the television children watch, much of the screened material Gunter and McAleer detail is not television at all. Instead it consists of cinema released feature films, including *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, *Ghostbusters II* (1989), *Three Men and a Little Lady* (1990), *Uncle Buck* (1989), *E. T. the Extra Terrestrial*, *Turner and Hooch* (1989), *Vice Versa* (1988) and *Superman* (1978).<sup>26</sup> The strong presence of movies in children's television consumption complicates the division of chapters employed by this and many other media studies

23 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 79.

24 Barrie Gunter and Jill McAleer, *Children and Television* (London: Routledge, 1997), 7–8.

25 Hannah Davies, David Buckingham and Peter Kelley, 'In the Worst Possible Taste: Children, Television and Cultural Value', in Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill, eds, *The Television Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 480.

26 Gunter and McAleer, *Children and Television*, 8.



publications. Just as much 'children's cinema' was not feature films, much of 'children's television' is not television programmes. Given children's problematic relationship with the public space of the cinema, it may well be the home where young people's enjoyment of film as a cultural form is more secure, as Buckingham et al. speculate.<sup>27</sup> Of course, this may also be true for most film viewers.

Adults also consume culture considered 'for children', and broadcast media is no exception. As far back as the 1940s Oswell observes more adults listened to children's radio than did children, just as more children listened to mainstream programming than they did children's shows.<sup>28</sup> Official acknowledgement of the overlap between audience tastes, *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* was broadcast twice, first during the children's slot, then two hours later for adult audiences.<sup>29</sup> In the same manner as American cinema, late twentieth-century children's television increasingly courted a multi-aged viewership, reorienting aspects of children's culture to attract a mixed audience. Recent television channels such as Nickelodeon, Boomerang and the Cartoon Network appeared to be catering primarily to children. However, Kinder explores the early days of Nickelodeon as emblematic of a 'transgenerational address' within 1990s American culture. Despite being promoted as 'the children's network', the channel's schedule featured reruns of 1950s and 1960s television which appeared to aim at both a new generation and nostalgic baby boomers. Distinctions between daytime scheduling and later programming targeted at an older demographic suggests a separation of the schedule. But many of the same shows feature in both slots.<sup>30</sup> Karen Lury writes of how emerging broadcasting technologies, changes in scheduling practices, and the emergence of channel branding have eroded traditional distinctions between children's

27 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 141.

28 Oswell, *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 24–25.

29 Tibballs, *The Golden Age of Children's Television*, 135.

30 Marsha Kinder, 'Home Alone in the 90s: Generational War and Transgenerational Address in American Movies, Television and Presidential Politics', in Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham, eds, *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 80.

television and adult or teen viewing.<sup>31</sup> Older audiences are openly courted by channels whose cartoons are no longer restricted to the hours of children's peak viewing. Intertextuality, irony and the combination of old and new animated content implies the targeting of a mixed audience.

In a chapter entitled 'Is Nick for Kids?' Sarah Banet-Weiser considers the *SpongeBob SquarePants* franchise in terms of its appeal to adults as well as young people. Providing a useful division of the series' various components, Banet-Weiser considers four key aspects: merchandise, scheduling, content and audience. The intended consumer of this show can be read in the range of licensed merchandise surrounding the property. These include dolls, lunch boxes and school sets, but also thongs, neck ties and men's boxer shorts. The series is broadcast during the daytime on Nickelodeon, but also after eleven at night on MTV. A number of commentators have identified queer or subversive content within the show. A spin-off movie, released in 2004, starred David Hasselhoff in a performance referencing his appearance in *Baywatch*. Moreover, television research suggests that over one in five of the series' viewers are aged between eighteen and forty-nine.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, Banet-Weiser claims, *SpongeBob SquarePants* is not simply a kids' show because it is associated with products clearly designed for adults to wear. The show has been broadcast in a time slot where young people are presumably not watching. The series incorporates content drawing on knowledge and experience associated with mature audiences. The show's theatrically released film mobilises cultural capital relating to a television series younger audiences are unlikely to be familiar with. And finally, *SpongeBob SquarePants* cannot simply be considered a children's show because adults watch it. The incorporation of the movie into Banet-Weiser's discussion is significant. Given differences between the structure of cinema and television spectatorship, it might be that theatrically released films based on children's media make more concessions to

31 Karen Lury, 'A Time and Place for Everything: Children's Channels', in David Buckingham, ed., *Small Screens: Television for Children* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 15–37.

32 Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

adult audiences. Children may be aware of knowledge traditionally considered the preserve of adults, and may possess cultural capital associated with previous generations, particularly when that material is available on DVD, television reruns, and online delivery systems. Young people may well stay up beyond eleven at night, or employ timeshifting technologies to watch shows broadcast after bedtime. But adult clothes are designed for adult bodies, and children cannot comfortably wear women's thongs or men's boxer shorts. In this respect, ancillary products appear similarly significant in identifying the audience of a television franchise as the cinema audience of a feature film.

### Public Service Broadcasting, Domesticity, Children and the Nation-State

Despite these complications, it is clear that, in contrast to cinema, children have historically enjoyed a more comfortable relationship with television. Such compatibility emerges, in part, through the medium's relationship with social modernity, articulated in a manner which had positive consequences for the provision of dedicated programmes for young people. This is evident in the early establishment of schedule slots for children, largely filled with material produced with that audience in mind. Regulatory bodies enshrined appropriate provision of television for children in stipulations which impacted on both BBC and ITV channels, with particular concerns expressed in the UK that advertising-funded broadcasting did not follow the route of American television in its perceived populism and commercialisation. Broadcasting structures foregrounded children, not only as a group to be shielded from particular content, but also as part of the national audience deserving of programmes which catered for their particular needs. The child emerging from this process is not simply under threat from modern life, although protectionist discourses undoubtedly expressed such concerns. Rather the child television viewer was to be securely located within processes of modernity facilitated by state-regulated

agencies emerging in the post-war period. Structures of traditional broadcasting in the UK have often been ambivalently labelled 'paternalistic', a term which implies an adult-child relationship between broadcaster and audience. In this respect, it could be argued, British television of this period made children of all its viewers.

A contradiction within such processes reflects the extent to which children are peripheral within contemporary modernity, while simultaneously representing its greatest asset and achievement. Those producing children's television found their work underfunded, marginalised and dismissed as trivial. Yet the child audience retains a 'symbolic primacy', whose provision often represented 'a litmus test of public service broadcasting'.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, children's television was frequently touted as an example of the BBC's commitment to principles that commercial television could not uphold, being associated with education, national identity, minority audiences and high programming standards. Expressing a strange antipathy towards its own products, similar to the matinee movement's emphasis on non-cinema related activities, ITV was dismissively seen by the BBC as doing little to benefit children beyond encouraging them to watch television.<sup>34</sup> In this respect the child comes to exemplify the viewing subject of the Corporation's paternalistic remit, its success in appealing to child audiences reflecting the institution's broader ability to inform, educate and enculture the nation as a whole. This may have been expressed in rhetoric emphasising the importance of insulating children from the negative influences of the marketplace, articulating ideas of childhood under threat from modern capitalist forces. However, alternative discourses relating to education and citizenship defined children and children's media in a more positive relationship with other aspects of modernity, such as the Enlightenment project or participatory democracy. Despite significant changes in the television landscape, Buckingham et al. observe that public service principles have been more strongly maintained in relation to child viewers than other aspects.<sup>35</sup> Messenger Davies also notes that the UK Broadcasting Act of

33 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 17.

34 Ibid. 21–22.

35 Ibid. 73–74.

1990, which deregulated many aspects of the telecommunications industry, still required broadcasters to show a minimum of ten hours of diverse children's programmes appealing to a range of age groups.<sup>36</sup> Consequently many post-war structures defining the British child audience remain significant in the deregulated landscape of contemporary broadcasting.

Television is a medium with strong connection to the nation-state. 'For most of its history', Graeme Turner writes, 'in most places where it is available, television has been a national medium. Too expensive to be taken on by an individual or private company, its projected benefits at the outset closely connected to the public good, television broadcasting was introduced by governments for specific national, cultural or developmental policy objectives and addressed to the citizenry of a single nation-state'.<sup>37</sup> Other aspects Paddy Scannell considers as necessitating government regulation include the scarcity of airwaves, the sense in which television constitutes a 'natural resource' comparable to water or electricity, and the belief that the wavebands themselves constitute a form of public property. Early in its development, broadcasting was regarded as having the potential to significantly impact upon national life and public opinion. It was consequently considered appropriate for radio and television to remain under the control of the state, as a national service managed in the public interest.<sup>38</sup> This became increasingly significant with the expansion of government-run institutions in the post-war period, such as the establishment of the National Health Service and the Welfare State. The development of broadcasting networks, and the mobilisation of television as a means of bringing the country together, John Ellis considers alongside a range of other previous initiatives aimed at modernisation and social unification, including the standardisation of working practices, development of

36 Máire Messenger Davies, *'Dear BBC': Children, Television Storytelling and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26.

37 Graeme Turner, 'Television and the Nation: Does This Matter any More?', in Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay, eds, *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcasting Era* (London: Routledge, 2009), 54.

38 Paddy Scannell, 'Public Service Broadcasting: The History of a Concept', in Edward Buscombe, ed., *British Television: A Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 45–46.

railways, and universal literacy,<sup>39</sup> a process in which children were heavily implicated. Buckingham et al. relate the emergence and organisation of children's television to similar efforts intended to manage children's lives in post-war Britain. This included the monitoring of children's wellbeing within the newly established health service and the stricter organisation of schoolchildren according to age. The authors observe how comparable developmental principles shaped television policy, evident in attempts to institute age-related boundaries between viewers throughout scheduling.<sup>40</sup> This constitutes a modernist impulse, to regulate, control, structure and hierarchise, which children, and adults, frequently evaded in their unpredictable and inappropriate viewing habits. Rob Turnock notes the contradiction whereby the rationalisation and centralisation of television in the 1950s and 1960s is at odds with a growing sense of fragmentation within post-war British society.<sup>41</sup> Television was regarded as a technology to unify the nation, at a time when suburbanisation and social privatisation were dispersing, fragmenting and isolating the British population. The medium and its technologies increasingly reflect such tendencies throughout the twentieth century, in the profusion of screens in a single household, and in the provision of an expanding range of channels catering for specific audiences and interests.

Television infrastructures under the control of government agencies were therefore designed to enhance a sense of national unity, and children could not be excluded from this process. A challenge to the fostering of British identity, also an issue in relation to children's cinema attendance, was the presence of imported programmes and formats such as the quiz show, the game show and the sitcom.<sup>42</sup> Ellis notes how associated anxieties encompassed a range of preoccupations, many of them representing aspects of American modernity at odds with those which establishment

39 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 49–50.

40 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 18–19.

41 Rob Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture: Britain and the Transformation of Modernity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 66.

42 Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture*, 20.

bodies intended the medium to facilitate. The transatlantic influence was considered a threat to the organisation of familial structures in which children were located. American television was seen as encouraging 'the abolition of older social relationships in favour of market relationships', of fostering 'a liberal attitude to sexual and family relations' and 'a democratic style of life'. Even as the state employed television as a tool for modernisation, for encouraging technological consumerism, for stimulating public debate and disseminating information, certain programmes from outside the UK were regarded as an inappropriate form of 'extensive modernization'.<sup>43</sup> As Buckingham et al. observe, children's television and viewing habits frequently facilitate rhetoric concerning the negative impact of American cultural imperialism.<sup>44</sup> A double standard is evident, with distinctions drawn between 'good' screen imports such as European folk tales and 'bad' American imports.<sup>45</sup> This maps onto associations between 'good' European traditions, upon which much continental children's culture was based, and a particularly 'bad' form of American modernisation. Animation was consistently identified as a force to be resisted in debates concerning British children's television, particularly significant in light of Wells' arguments identifying American animation as an art form engaging with the experiences of modernity.<sup>46</sup> Concerns about the presence of animation on television screens partly derive from the cartoon's established relationship with commercial cinema. Associations between animation and commerce are noted by Messenger Davies, in relation to Disney, a studio, in the eyes of many commentators, 'synonymous, not with art, but with industry, not with storytelling, but with empire-building'. Animation for the small screen continues to be aligned with Americanisation, commercialism and the toy industry.<sup>47</sup> More recently Japanese animation has become the focus of anxiety for the graphic sex and violence it is considered to contain.<sup>48</sup> As

43 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 53–54.

44 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 71.

45 Ibid. 99.

46 Wells, *Animation and America*.

47 Messenger Davies, 'Dear BBC', 226–227.

48 Ibid. 30.

a country variously associated with high-tech forms of modernity, qualities expressed through certain genres of Japanese animation and popular culture, this appears similarly threatening to Western sensibilities of childhood, particularly when aligned with commercial imperatives designed to sell action figures, trading cards and digital games.

A central principle of British public service broadcasting, one clearly corresponding with aspects of modernity, is the idea that television should enhance the democratic process. Such a concern is evident in Thumim's discussion of 1950s commentators who reportedly express 'excitement about the democratic advantage of wide and instantaneous access to public life in all its many forms: politics, cultural and sporting events, new ideas in science, technology, and marketing'. While in actuality such practices drew attention to tensions within the devolving British Empire, as well as national disturbances in class and gender, this is considered to reflect the emergence of a fresh sense of democracy and egalitarianism in post-war Britain.<sup>49</sup> Television was conceived of as facilitating public debate, educating citizens on matters of the day, staging discussions and screening interviews with significant political figures. Echoing discussion of pre-war cinema, Andrew Crisell argues that television represents 'a strongly democratizing medium',<sup>50</sup> evident in the principle of a universally availability service catering for the interests of all citizens. In this context, television was envisioned as a mediated public sphere, a concept originally put forward by Habermas, associated with eighteenth-century urban coffee houses, changing relations between public and private, the emergence of the middle classes, 'civil society' and the press as the 'fourth estate'. Messenger Davies' discussion of children and the public sphere sees the penetration of the domestic by broadcasting media as significant in allowing women and children, effectively excluded from the kinds of spaces Habermas details, access to political material. This, combined with the oral, visual, non-literary nature of television, affords young people potential engagement with ideas and

49 Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture*, 19.

50 Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 2005), 155.



information previously enshrined in written sources.<sup>51</sup> Along with other broadcast media, television can be understood as introducing young people to ideas of democratic participation, a form of modern politics from which they have been historically excluded. Buckingham observes assumptions that television news will constitute children's first encounter with political affairs.<sup>52</sup> This was afforded by 1950s news programmes aimed at children and the BBC's *Newsround*, first broadcast in the 1970s, one of the corporation's longest running children's shows.<sup>53</sup> As an audience rarely addressed by the printed press, screen media appears central in fostering children's sense of political engagement.

Another historical aspect of public service provision, one significantly overlapping with children's situation within Western society, is the institution's duty to educate its audience. This was an important aspect of early broadcasting. Scannell writes of the ways in which mainstream radio producers drew upon pedagogic movements and organisations in assisting the medium's dissemination of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> From its inception television was conceived as an educational and cultural force, an aspect which finds particular compatibility with the obligation of adult society to teach and enculture young people. Indeed, Buckingham et al. observe an 'uncanny similarity' between the perceived needs of children and the public service mission to inform and educate, as well as to entertain. Spreading knowledge has clear connections with the Enlightenment project of modernity, and is reflected in the significant number of children's shows concerned with teaching literacy, numeracy, science and natural history. This impetus pre-dates modern media, and afforded the easy translation of tropes and traditions of children's culture into a new medium determined by complementary initiatives to foster children's learning. A particular post-war theory of education, Buckingham et al. note, informed early children's

51 Messenger Davies, 'Dear BBC', 4–5.

52 David Buckingham, *The Making of Citizens: Young People, News and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 11.

53 *ibid.* 35–36.

54 Scannell, 'Public Service Broadcasting', 47.

television.<sup>55</sup> This developed into a conception of the child as active ‘playful learner’, conveniently combining the child’s entitlement to entertainment with a need for education and information. Although most apparent in younger children’s programmes, such tendencies are also evident in shows for older children which encourage social participation and engagement.<sup>56</sup> These developments were also informed by a modern democratising project which Messenger Davies identifies, expressed in intentions that children of all backgrounds would be provided with access to ‘accumulated hordes of cultural capital’ traditionally the preserved of privileged households.<sup>57</sup> Despite a perceived shift in the focus towards entertainment rather than education, the author argues that children’s television continues to have an onus to be ‘intellectually and imaginatively enriching and educational and to confer cultural capital’.<sup>58</sup> The history of UK children’s television, and its criticism, reflects continual tensions between the production of education-centred programming informed by middle-class values, and an entertainment-based approach to children’s television determined more by popular culture, market forces, and cultures of childhood which emphasise the autonomy of child audiences.

A final aspect to consider, one of such significance as to overshadow many other aspects of television’s compatibility with children and childhood, is its location in the home. The domesticity of the television, and its relationship with post-war family life, appears fundamental to its enduring relationship with children. The television’s location in the home is not a given. As Ellis points out, there is nothing inherent to the medium that determines its context or consumption. Early experimental television screenings took place in cinemas and other public spaces.<sup>59</sup> In the United States there were efforts to transmit televised stage shows, news and sporting events in movie theatres. If interventions by the film industry had

55 Buckingham et al., *Children’s Television in Britain*, 157.

56 Ibid. 159–160.

57 Messenger Davies, ‘Dear BBC’, 44.

58 Máire Messenger Davies, “Crazyspace”: the Politics of Children’s Screen Drama, *Screen* 46/3 (2005), 391.

59 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 31.

not been hampered by the refusal of American broadcasting regulatory authorities to grant studios the necessary licenses, television might have evolved as a public rather than a domestic medium. Had this been the case, it is likely television's relationship with children would have suffered from the same urban public location as cinema. In the USA, Ellis notes, increasing growth of suburbs, located away from urban entertainment centres and movie houses, facilitated the form television assumed and the new medium's penetration into households.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in the UK television's development as a domestic medium was a response to post-war trends in social organisation. As Raymond Williams argues, television emerged as a product firmly located in the 'family' home, a space which became increasingly significant as a site of improvement, technological consumption and leisure practices throughout this period.<sup>61</sup> The domesticity of the television set coincides with a childhood that has been fundamentally home-based for over a century. In addition to being the environment in which television technology is located, David Morley observes that the home is frequently the very subject of television content. This can be seen in home make-over, gardening, cooking and lifestyle shows. As a consequence, television depicts a world which is familiar to a social group largely excluded from the public. Drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Morley suggests that the effect of television is a domestication of the outside world. To illustrate this phenomenon, Morley notably considers the child of a friend who expressed a familiarity with London, a place they had not visited, based on experiences of watching tourist sites on video.<sup>62</sup> Television therefore functions to compensate for children's lack of mobility and exclusion from the public sphere, effectively bringing the public into the private. Also reflecting upon the content of television and the domestic context of the

60 Ibid. 41.

61 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2010), 20–21.

62 David Morley, 'What's "Home" Got to do with it? Contradictory Dynamics in the Domestication of Technology and the Dislocation of Domesticity', in Thomas Berker, Maren Hartmann, Yves Punie and Katie Ward, eds, *Domestication of Media and Technology* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 22–23.

medium, Ellis observes that the family often features as the subject of television. This is evident in two of the most iconic television genres, the soap opera and the situation comedy, mainstream formats which have proven particularly popular with children. In the case of the latter, Ellis argues, the family frequently provides an environment in which characters are trapped, episode after episode. Even when the situation of comedy is a workplace, a community college, or a space ship, characters frequently assume 'relationships that seem suspiciously close to the internecine struggles of families.'<sup>63</sup> Again, television's preoccupation with the domestic and the familial makes the medium compatible with a childhood similarly situated within the family home.

At the same time, television was not simply a medium located in the home. It was also designed to facilitate the smooth running of family households. This reflects a distinctly modern perspective on domestic life through its concern with regulation, normalisation and classification. Inherent within many television institutions Thumim sees 'assumptions about how people do, or should, spend their time, about domestic organization and routines, and about the disposition of power and authority both within the family and between the family and the State.'<sup>64</sup> From this perspective broadcast television subjects its audience to a degree of social engineering, control and influence, or integrates itself into the pre-existing routine of citizens' everyday lives. Exemplifying the ways in which television was envisioned as enhancing the modern project, Ien Ang cites a 1940s vision of housewives across America cooking their husbands identical meals as instructed by television chefs, the ingredients of which coincide with the surplus and shortages of the national harvest. Such a structure incorporates many aspects of modernity, such as centralised state control, heteronormative domestic organisation, prescribed gender roles, patterns of consumption and mechanised food production.<sup>65</sup> Whether this synchronisation of State, media and family was ever successful seems unlikely. It is nevertheless

63 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 119.

64 Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture*, 19.

65 Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5.

indicative of the ways television was imagined as a means of instructing the organisation of the family home, in which children were an important component. The function of television in attempting to dictate the routine of young people can be seen in the 'toddler's truce', the hour-long break in transmission between 5pm and 6pm, partly intended to provide parents with the opportunity to get their children settled in bed before the start of more mature broadcasting. Although this practice ended in 1956 in the face of increasing competition between the BBC and independent channels, the convention reflects television's perceived role in encouraging appropriate familial routines. Based on normative assumptions of household organisation, early daytime viewing was associated with women and young children. Children's television was similarly organised around standardised conceptions of children's daily routine. The institution of the watershed, whereby material unsuitable for young people cannot be screened on UK television until after nine in the evening, constitutes a means of standardising children's bedtime and adults' evening routine. At the same time, as previously noted, children did not necessarily fall in with such structures. They did not necessarily watch the television which was made for them, preferring mainstream programmes. And adults have also watched, and continue to enjoy, material marked as children's television.

## Children, Television, Modernity and Postmodernity

As the above account reveals, in its formative years television was very much conscripted into processes of modernity. Throughout its first decades, referred to by Ellis as the era of scarcity,<sup>66</sup> broadcasting is organised along modernity principles of hierarchy, control and rationalisation. Scannell notes that early figures in the establishment of the BBC argued that a monopoly service was the best way to ensure provision which was

66 Ellis, *Seeing Things*.

economic, efficient and universal, serving the public and the national interest.<sup>67</sup> Turnock's historical overview, with its subtitle *Britain and the Transformation of Modernity*, opens with chapters detailing three classic aspects of modernity: rationalisation, centralisation and technologies. There is significant resonance with the American pre-war film industry in this systematic approach towards organisation, production and distribution, resulting in what Turnock describes as a 'programme factory'.<sup>68</sup> The structuring of British broadcasting along such principles positively impacted upon the medium's address to children. Consistent with what Turnock considers the broad professionalisation of television in this period, Oswell notes the 'professionalization of children's television'.<sup>69</sup> This entailed producers bringing 'expert' opinion to bear on the perceived 'problem' of television's provision for children. The very fact that children's programming was so soon given a separate presence within the schedule derives from a modern impulse to classify, categorise and segment the audience. Such aspects are apparent even within children's programming itself, as Oswell's summation suggests: 'By the late 1950s, the distribution of children's television programming according to age was firmly cemented in place. Children were both separated from adults and divided within themselves. The distribution of bodies was likewise arranged according to a specified logic of development. Programmes both addressed specific age-groups and also provided markers along a line of progression ... The distribution of bodies within this temporal arrangement allowed the construction of specific audiences for television (e.g. the teenage audience and the pre-school audience)'.<sup>70</sup>

In these respects television of the post-war era is an institution with close historical roots in modernity. At the same time, the modern forces which determined the formation of the television industries were significantly different to those which produced cinema in the early twentieth century. Television was electronic rather than mechanical. It was domestic rather than public. The medium was in part a capitalist enterprise, but one

67 Scannell, 'Public Service Broadcasting', 48–49.

68 Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, 42.

69 Oswell, *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 57.

70 Ibid. 78.

heavily regulated and afforded a degree of protection from market forces. Television was a medium based on technology, but far removed from the industrial factory, the city and the dangers of combustible celluloid. It is a form of communication associated with actuality, as exemplified by the live broadcast, rather than special effects and camera trickery. As a store-bought product, the television set also has the potential to capitalise upon discourses of childhood wonder frequently employed as a means of selling domestic technologies. The child television viewer, as conceived by broadcasters and other structural and institutional agencies, seems significantly more compatible with this domestic brand of post-war modernity. To this degree, as Ellis observes with some reservation, television might be considered a postmodern medium.<sup>71</sup> This perception variously derives from television's location in the suburban home rather than the modern city, its broadcasting of a flow of diverse forms of entertainment, and the medium's frequent mixing of genres and employment of pastiche. Children's television has always had strong aspects of the postmodern. From the late 1940s children's broadcasting was conceived of as offering a wide range of formats. As a whole, the children's television schedule reflects the combination of genres which partly characterises postmodern culture, while many children's shows might be considered pastiches of established adult formats. There are also aspects of hyperreality in the exaggerated and brightly coloured sets of children's television, and aspects of camp in the pantomime performances of many children's television presenters and actors. More significantly, children's television anticipated the fragmentation of broadcasting in catering for a specialist niche audience with particular tastes and interests, rather than being addressed as part of a mass audience. Within that demographic, and the programming provided in this slot, there was further division of shows for particular ages according to the developmental structure previously detailed. That this broadcasting strategy might be considered both a symptom of hierarchical modernity, and a more fragmented postmodern sensibility, suggests the malleability of these terms. It also indicates the extent television combines aspects of modernity and postmodernity, and

71 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 84.

the ways in which conceptions of childhood align with both modern and postmodern principles.

Postmodern aspects of popular culture, entailing a more individualistic, less massified, more targeted address, have intensified as the era of scarcity gave way to eras of availability and plenty. In the latter stages of the twentieth century, this centralised, hierarchical, regulated, state-funded, national-based medium became increasingly decentred, diversified, deregulated, commercial, global and transnational. While the earlier modernity of broadcasting facilitated the provision of children's television, these postmodern developments also had beneficial consequences for the audience. New domestic technologies emerged, such as the remote control, VCR, teletext, cable and satellite channels. The increasingly multi-screen household facilitated the atomisation of family viewing, increasing audience autonomy and individuality in a manner which also afforded young people more control over screen consumption, and the potential for broadcasters to more specifically address child viewers. Drawing upon the work of Sean Cubitt, Julian Wood considers the VCR a particularly postmodern technological formation, leading to a shift from mass entertainment and consumption to more private individualised viewing.<sup>72</sup> As previously noted, the development of home film viewing has led to an increased emphasis on family-friendly feature films,<sup>73</sup> suggesting an affinity between children and such domestic delivery technologies. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of non-terrestrial channels which appear entirely dedicated to children's programming, such as TCC, the Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Disney and Fox TV.<sup>74</sup> Material for children increased dramatically in quantity over the 1990s across both new channels and established terrestrial broadcasting, although Buckingham et al. emphasise this expansion in quantity did not necessarily correspond

72 Julian Wood, 'Repeatable Pleasures: Notes on Young People's Use of Video', in David Buckingham, ed., *Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 198.

73 Allen, 'Home Alone Together', 116.

74 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 88.



with an increase in new home-grown programmes.<sup>75</sup> The broad deregulation of television, the opening up of international markets, and the proliferating ancillary products surrounding children's franchises made television for young people an increasingly profitable enterprise. Aspects of the post-modern turn in television institutions, described by Buckingham et al. as 'entrepreneurial anarchy', are characterised by closer relationships between commercial and public service broadcasters, an expanding television market, and increasing merchandise. Public service providers also exploit the commercial opportunities of children's entertainment, financing shows which would not be economically viable without ancillary sales. Reflective of this ambivalent situation, one interviewee uses the phrase 'controlled exploitation' to describe the associated commercial activity necessary to support programme making for children.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout this period, boundaries between television and other media such as books, videos and computer games also become blurred, in a manner already anticipated in earlier children's culture. Kinder observes the historical 'transmedia intertextuality'<sup>77</sup> between children's radio, television, movies and toys. While this kind of convergence has become an established feature of mainstream media, as intellectual properties increasingly occupy multiple platforms, children's culture has always exhibited a high degree of cross-fertilisation. David Forgacs details how, early in the studio's history, the Disney corporation capitalised upon the 'synergy' between its films, theme parks and licensed products,<sup>78</sup> while Christopher Anderson writes of how Disney used television to promote both its tourist destinations and forthcoming features.<sup>79</sup> Jennifer Gillan's more recent publication on television 'brandcasting' evidences the extent to which the Disney Corporation

75 Ibid. 65–66.

76 Ibid. 52.

77 Kinder, *Playing With Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games*, 40.

78 Forgacs, 'Disney Animation and the Business of Childhood'.

79 Christopher Anderson, 'Disneyland', in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17–33.

continues such practices.<sup>80</sup> Since the mid-1980s, as Tom Engelhardt details in a critique of the 'Shortcake strategy', deregulation of the American television industry has led to programmes which are structured entirely around brands of toys.<sup>81</sup> One of the most successful children's franchises of recent years, *Pokémon*, achieved considerable market penetration by existing in a range of forms, including digital games, television, trading cards, toys and comics. Mizuko Ito suggests that the ascendance of Japan as a producer of children's media derives from the national culture's success in creating hybrid franchises merging digital and analogue, broadcast media, online communications, and videogames.<sup>82</sup> While many commentators regard such developments with distaste, others consider more positive potentials in children's transmedia culture. Drawing clear parallels between children's play using screen-based toys and the cultural discourses of late modernity, Kinder claims:

A child's reworking of material from mass media can be seen as a form of parody (in the eighteenth-century sense) or as a postmodernist form of pastiche, or as a form of Bakhtinian reenvoicement mediating between imitation and creativity.<sup>83</sup>

Such activities, Kinder argues, are facilitated and developed by the nature of product-based shows, through their intertextuality, their evocation of old forms such as the Western and the supernatural compendium, their ahistoric combination of cinematic references, their allusion to both high and low culture, and their juxtaposition of modes such as animation and live action.

80 Jennifer Gillan, *Television Broadcasting: the Return of the Content-Promotion Hybrid* (London: Routledge, 2015).

81 Tom Engelhardt, 'The Shortcake Strategy', in Todd Gitlin, ed., *Watching Television: A Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 68–110.

82 Mizuko Ito, 'Migrating Media: Anime Media Mixes and the Childhood Imagination', in Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith, eds, *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 302.

83 Kinder, *Playing With Power in Movies*, 59–60.

Into the twentieth century, the television medium itself becomes increasingly diversified, facilitating a range of entertainment forms, and accessible across a proliferation of devices. To the seemingly simple question 'What is television?', Sheila C. Murphy produces an array of possible responses, relating to media, distribution, domestic technologies, industries, audiences and their practices.<sup>84</sup> New delivery systems such as on-demand websites and DVD box sets, and viewing technologies such as computers, laptops and other screen-based mobile devices, have severed television's traditional reliance on domestic broadcasting and the cathode ray tube. Associated developments confuse the notion of television, no less television for children, as a whole branch of non-terrestrial channels, DVD titles, downloadable and streamed material are aimed at young people. A highly significant development in children's screen-based culture, illustrating the erosion of boundaries between media and delivery systems, is the 'straight to VHS' or 'straight to DVD' film. Feature-length entertainment can now bypass theatrical release entirely, being made exclusively for purchase at stores and viewing in the home. The successful *Barney and Friends* series, as Inglis observes, in an apparent reverse of normal practices, began as a straight-through video only to become a broadcast television series as a result of its success.<sup>85</sup> Anna Potter writes of Disney's *High School Musical* (2006), a made-for-TV movie which has all the style and structure of a feature film, despite never appearing in cinemas until its second sequel in 2008.<sup>86</sup> It may be testimony to the outdated and limiting structure of this volume and its segmenting of media forms that such a format cannot be accommodated, although it would be a fruitful subject of future study.

A strong discourse throughout this period is that of the 'active audience'. This is a quality of contemporary television viewers Ang identifies in both media studies and media industry research. The former constitutes a

84 Sheila C. Murphy, *How Television Invented New Media* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 5.

85 Inglis, *The Window in the Corner*, 169.

86 Anna Potter, 'It's a Small World After All: New Media Constellations and Disney's Rising Star – the Global Success of High School Musical', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15/2 (2011), 117–130.

repudiation of previous academic conceptions of the audience as passive dupes. The latter represents an acknowledgement of audience 'fickleness, recalcitrance and unpredictability'.<sup>87</sup> Children's role in academic studies is often to provide an exemplary challenge to the myth of audience passivity. Conversely, in other academic accounts, the child or child-like audience allows a reassertion of more traditional Frankfurt School-informed notions of the spectator as helpless, gullible and easily manipulated. The child viewer has historically been encouraged to be an active one, albeit along different lines to those implied by Ang. Stephen Wagg argues that, as a consequence of concerns that children might be stupefied by television, certain elements of activity have traditionally been incorporated into the format of children's programmes.<sup>88</sup> Heather Hendershot points out that television for young children is particularly interactive, with presenters habitually addressing audiences, before pausing for an implied response, or encouraging children to send in letters and works of art.<sup>89</sup> Oswell considers ways in which children have historically participated in television production processes. This included panel shows which allowed children's opinions to be aired, and plays in which children had the opportunity to write, produce and act. The author does warn against overstating children's effective involvement in such enterprises, and acknowledges that attempts to integrate children into television production, hampered by financial, technical and logistical issues, were always 'troubled' or even 'forlorn'.<sup>90</sup> Children's activity, intended to facilitate engagement with the public sphere, active citizenship and civic participation,<sup>91</sup> Buckingham sees articulated in later arguments for children's rights in terms of participation, evident in shows like BBC's *As Seen on TV*, Channel 4's *Wise Up* and *Look Who's Talking*. Although their roots lie in older shows from the 1970s and 1980s,

87 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 10–11.

88 Stephen Wagg, "One I Made Earlier": Media, Popular Culture and the Politics of Childhood', in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg, eds, *Come On Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), 150–178.

89 Heather Hendershot, 'Teletubby Trouble', *Television Quarterly* 31/1 (2000).

90 Oswell, *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 54.

91 Ibid. 49.

these formats are considered distinct in their political emphasis. However, like Oswell, Buckingham remains sceptical, questioning the value of such programmes in representing children as politically engaged individuals. The author notes, as with mainstream television journalism, that established adult groups are often the only voices heard.<sup>92</sup>

At the same time, in other respects children's 'activity' was a persistent source of frustration for television institutions. Child audiences' frequent evasion of viewing structures presented to them reveals a failure not simply of broadcasting strategies in attempting to regulate the lives of its citizens, but of the concept of childhood itself within modernity. The organisation of television according to the division of aged audience follows modern imperatives whereby different groups are classified, categorised and hierarchised. But the habits of viewers consistently disregarded efforts to be compartmentalised in this way, indicating the artificiality of such divisions and the tenuous philosophies on which they are based. As Ang observes, the ideal audience conceptualised in this process is one that is orderly and responsible in its viewing habits. Actual viewers consistently fail these standards of behaviour: 'They watch the "wrong" programmes, or they watch "too much", or they watch for the wrong reasons, or, indeed, they just don't get the "correct" things out of what they watch'. Although the author is not referring to children here, there is something of the errant child in this description. This constitutes a reaction to the paternal aspects of both television organisations and audience studies academics who, as Ang critically observes, have traditionally concerned themselves with the habits of vulnerable or non-normative demographics.<sup>93</sup> Relationships between television and child audiences have always been characterised by uncertainty, in terms of children's viewing preferences, the way children might be served, and the consequences of doing so. Child viewers therefore constitute a postmodern challenge to the ordered certainties of modernity. Many recent 'postmodern' tendencies in children's television programming, such as the transgenerational address of cable channels, reflect a lack of confidence and investment in the very processes whereby

92 Buckingham, *The Making of Citizens*, 52.

93 Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 6.

children are constructed as separate from adult humanity. This is the very founding principle of children's media and childhood itself.

Children's television, or rather the concept of the child audience on which the genre is founded, may have become increasingly troubled over recent years, in line with the postmodern erosion of other modern certainties. The belief that there is a knowable child audience, distinct from adults, which can be reached through the assistance of experts and educationalists, is a characteristically modern assertion. It is also an idea which the history of children's broadcasting and viewing consistently throw into question, even as such persistent practices reveal the currency it continues to maintain. Adults have always enjoyed programming for children. Children continue to enjoy programming for adults. This is something encouraged by recent broadcasting strategies, which facilitates a postmodern blurring of boundaries between audiences, at the same time as audiences appear to be increasingly targeted by specialist channels. Popular shows such as *Adventure Time*, *Gravity Falls*, *Steven Universe*, *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* and *Stranger Things* assume qualities of the postmodern family film, retaining aspects of childness familiar from other forms of children's culture, while addressing an audience of children, adolescents and adults. The dislocation of such shows from the schedules through twenty-four hour cartoon channels, on-demand television and internet streaming, or the commodification of entire seasons in the form of DVD box sets, has increased the availability of children's shows to adults. At the same time, it has made adult material more easily viewable by children. The child in their bedroom, evading adult surveillance, is not necessarily watching a children's television programme. The adult commuter watching 'television' on their mobile phone may well be watching content originally aired on the Cartoon Network. Even as various institutions employ television for modernist projects, the postmodern nature of television, qualities of the medium which accelerate through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, consistently undo such efforts.

## Modern Fairy Tales, Children's Adaptations and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Adaptation has a central role in children's media. A recurring themes which emerges from a transmedia study of children's culture is the tendency for texts to secure their relationship to child consumers through the proximity they share with previous existing and established products for children. In this respect the fairy tale is of enduring significance, although the broad appeal the genre has attracted simultaneously complicates its relation to child audiences. As suggested in discussion of animated adaptations, the history of this kind of storytelling is particularly revealing in reflecting relationships between children, media and modernity. It is widely accepted that the literary fairy tale is the recorded version of folk stories which, in pre-industrial society, were part of an oral culture enjoyed by all. As Zipes states: 'As with most *literary* genres of children's literature, the fairy tale was never told or written explicitly for children.'<sup>94</sup> The fairy tale as known today, Lerer asserts, results from the combined efforts of collectors, editors and authors, predominantly from the late seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, publishing anthologies of folk tales as literary texts originally intended for courtiers and members of the aristocracy.<sup>95</sup> This process was facilitated and expanded by developing technologies of production and distribution within an emerging culture industry. Knowles and Malmkjær also write of how the fairy tale was never solely, or even primarily, for children. Such associations, they argue, are a product of modern commercialism, of marketing and distribution, of scholastic and childcare institutions where fairy tales are told to infants, of publishing strategies which make editions of these tales attractive to children, and video animated adaptations.<sup>96</sup> Reflecting the broad audience for such narratives, Ann Martin asserts 'the history of fairy tales can be viewed as the history of popular

94 Zipes, 'Origins', 26.

95 Lerer, *Children's Literature*.

96 Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjær, *Language and Control in Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), 19.

culture, and particularly the history of popular culture in the modern era.<sup>97</sup> This is evidenced by the range of media, texts and forms of entertainment within which fairy stories are present, including 'chapbooks, bound collections, scholarly anthologies, novels, paintings, pantomimes, scripts, libretti, jokes', which are subsequently 'augmented in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries by films, cartoons, comics, mass-produced books, and advertisements'.<sup>97</sup>

Irrespective of their broad popularity, fairy tales hold strong associations of childness. Given their origins within the folk culture of pre-industrialised Europe this can be considered one of the clearest ways in which children's stories are aligned with the pre-modern. But while the folk tale has its roots in antiquity, as these authors suggest, the literary fairy tale is a particularly modern transformation. Distinct from the oral folk tale, the fairy tale emerged within a modern context, as these stories were written down, performed, photographed, filmed and animated as mass culture. According to their oral origins, these tales are not fixed and static, but changed according to the nature of the storyteller and the storytelling medium. Through such processes of translation they inevitably become embroiled and embedded in modern techniques of communication, reflecting modern attitudes, engaging with the modern condition. The literary fairy tale, like the symbolic child, constitutes a negotiation between the present, an imaginary magical past, and, in instances where that past is imbued with liberal, utopian, or even revolutionary qualities, an imagined future. Fairy tales' association with child readers reflects many tendencies of children's culture to serve as a mediator of history and modernity. Zipes writes of how, in England, Puritan culture enforced a repression of literary fairy tales until the end the eighteenth century. This antagonism derived from utilitarian principles of reason, rational judgement and a distrust of imagination.<sup>98</sup> The Romantic transition of the literary fairy tale into a staple of children's media entailed a re-evaluation of the function of children's

97 Ann Martin, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed: Modernism's Fairy Tales* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 15.

98 Jack Zipes, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves* (London: Methuen, 1987), xiii.



culture, away from didactic socialisation towards pleasure and entertainment. It also involved a reconceptualisation of the child and their perceived primitiveness, wherein the uncivilised, uncivilising, even pagan aspects of the fairy tale become positively aligned with newly emerging perspectives on children and childhood.

The legacy of the fairy tale genre in children's culture functions to distance media for young people from the contemporary. This is something of a theme, as Lerer writes:

In many ways, the forms of children's literature are distinctively pre-modern, as they sustain the techniques of allegory, moral fable, romance, and symbolism. Such narrative devices – central to the literatures of classical, medieval, and Renaissance Europe – were abandoned, even denigrated, by the post-Enlightenment theorists of literature and by modern practitioners of poetry and fiction. Realism, history, social critique, and psychological depth have long been accepted as the common currency of 'literature' in the modern period. Indeed, anything that seemed to depart from such literary forms and indulge in the allegorical, the fantastic, or the ostentatiously symbolic or romance-like would be labeled, in effect, subliterary: in a word, childish.<sup>99</sup>

Children's culture deriving from such traditions is thereby associated with the pre-modern, the medieval, the classical. The culture of adulthood is conversely the culture of modernism and modernity. Lerer's history of books for children reveals a consistent backwards-looking disposition. During the Reformation, the perceived papist nature of medieval literature meant that it was considered particularly abject, characterised by 'childishness, error, sloth, idleness and foolery'.<sup>100</sup> If modernity is associated with a progressive Protestantism, the alignment between medieval literature, Catholicism, and children serves to define the latter in pre-modern terms. Later, Lerer observes twentieth-century entertainment for young girls as characterised by a mid-Victorian sensibility. This was a culture combining the medieval iconography of romantic adventure and Shakespearean tragedy, via the imagery of Tennyson, Scott and the

99 Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 14.

100 Ibid. 79.

Pre-Raphaelite movement.<sup>101</sup> Subsequently, Lerer points to the Edwardian nature of children's literature. According to the author, this era 'defined the ways in which we still think of children's books and of the child's imagination'. Children's literature remains the phenomena of a period which saw the publication of such well-known titles as *Peter Rabbit*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Railway Children* and *Peter Pan*. As a consequence, images of Edwardian England 'live in our memories as guilt-edged times of childhood taste'.<sup>102</sup> However, even in the Edwardian period itself Lerer observes a retrospective aspect to the culture of the time. Barrie's play, the most successful of 1904, combined Shakespearean comedy and Victoriana, shot through the lens of then-contemporary nostalgia.<sup>103</sup> In *The Wind in the Willows*, Lerer sees 'a tension between Victorian domesticity and Edwardian change', while *The Railway Children* evokes a hybrid 'technological supernaturalism' in which the train becomes a monstrous mythical creature.<sup>104</sup> Authors writing fiction for children appear involved in a constant engagement with the past. This includes the past of their own childhood, the past of the literature they consumed as children, and the past of adults who wrote such work. The consequence is a situation where children's books are perpetually mediating imaginary images of previous eras, a series of mythical lost moments, resonating all the way back to the neo-medieval.

Such chains of nostalgic and retrospective association assume a further layer in screen adaptations of classic children's literature. The BBC's version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a book published in 1950, was broadcast in 1988. It was preceded by a live action television show in 1967 and a feature-length animated version in 1976.<sup>105</sup> This was followed over half a century since the book's publication by a film adaptation which, like the BBC version, was followed by two sequels from Lewis' *Narnia* series,

101 Ibid. 241.

102 Ibid. 253–254.

103 Ibid. 259.

104 Ibid. 271–272.

105 Paul Tankard, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Multiplex', in Leslie Stratyner and James R. Keller, eds, *Fantasy Fiction into Film: Essays* (London: McFarland, 2007), 92.

*Prince Caspian* (2008) and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2010). A stage version was also produced in 1998 by the Royal Shakespeare Company.<sup>106</sup> This suggests an investment in the original books which, like the adaptations discussed in relation to cinema and childness, suit certain requirements of media for children. This may reflect the retreat from the contemporary which the literary series represents. As Lerer points out, even if a book like *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is set in the mid-twentieth century, the childhood of its author was of the Edwardian era, suggesting an early twentieth-century sensibility runs through their work. Furthermore, the novel draws upon traditions of children's literature deriving from folk and fairy tales, featuring talking animals, centaurs, unicorns, satyrs, dwarfs and giants.<sup>107</sup> Its iconography is also distinctly rustic, mobilising broad traditions of children's literature which associate readers with the past, folk culture and nature. Martin considers British children's literature such as *The Hobbit*, *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *Peter Pan* as constructing pre-modern pastoral spaces, the fragility of which is a response to urban and technological modernity connected with a melancholy acknowledgement of the inevitable end of childhood.<sup>108</sup> Knowles and Malmkjær argue that for Lewis, redemption is rural in nature. They point out that the Professor's house in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is immediately distanced from both railway station and post office, modern institutions which lead to the degeneration of the countryside.<sup>109</sup> The novel expresses a particular dislike for modern institutions via the unsavoury character of Edmund who, walking through Narnia on the way to betray his siblings, decides that the first thing he will do when king of the land is to build some roads, set up a railway system and build himself a private cinema.<sup>110</sup> Contrasting utopian and dystopian children's fiction, Karen Sands-O'Connor notes

106 Susanne Greenhalgh, 'Drama', in Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson, eds, *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 279.

107 C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Harper Collins, 2009), 181–182.

108 Martin, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, 37–39.

109 Knowles and Malmkjær, *Language and Control in Children's Literature*, 260.

110 Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 100–101.

that the former within post-war literature almost always presents a 'male, white, and regressive version of perfection'.<sup>111</sup> The 'colonising reign' of the four children in the novel's final chapter does nothing to disturb the medieval order or its male-centred religion, and, despite Edmund's promises to himself, the young monarchs bring no aspects of technology or science with them.<sup>112</sup> Reflecting their absorption into this world, by the time they are adult the children 'talked in quite a different style'<sup>113</sup> reminiscent of a pidgin old English.

In studies of literary adaptation, much is made of the issue of fidelity. Throughout this strand of critical studies Imelda Whelehan notes, in an observation applicable across screen adaptations, the 'unconscious prioritizing of the fictional origin over the resulting film' to the extent that 'the main purpose of comparison becomes the measurement of the success of the film in its capacity to realize what are held to be the core meanings and values of the originary text'.<sup>114</sup> Within the field there nevertheless exists wide acknowledgement that a film or television version of a book cannot, in any straightforward sense, reproduce like for like. Exploring the different versions of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*, including novel, film, stage play, digital game and toys, Margaret Mackey observes that even with an unabridged audio version of the novel, 'the most intimately similar to the original print story', voice actors inflect characters with aspects of gender, class and region not present in the book.<sup>115</sup> When it comes to screen adaptations, sound and vision inevitably contribute elements simply not there in print. Different media, by their nature, have different restrictions and

111 Karen Sands-O'Connor, 'The Quest for the Perfect Planet: The British Secondary World as Utopia and Dystopia, 1945–1999', in Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, eds, *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (London: Routledge, 2003), 179.

112 Ibid. 182–183.

113 Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 199.

114 Imelda Whelehan, 'Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas', in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.

115 Margaret Mackey, 'Media Adaptations', in David Rudd, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2010), 116.

affordances, as well as codes, conventions, durations and contexts of production, circulation and consumption. The final *Harry Potter* instalment, at approximately 600 pages, made a weighty single publication, but evidently required two films to adequately contain its content. In contrast, the feature adaptation of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004) condensed the first three books into a single film. Danny DeVito stars in, directs and strangely narrates the adaptation of *Matilda*, providing a presence which has no equivalent in the printed version, and which arguably shifts the text's focus in favour of the adult perspective. Both film adaptations of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* have different endings to the book. Presumably this is because the original conclusion, in which Charlie is simply handed the factory keys, does not provide a suitably cinematic climax to the story. It is also significant to note that the more recent version transforms Mike Teevee from a television addict to a player of violent videogames, a reflection of changes in anxieties concerning children and the media, irrespective of the fact that an interactive version of the film was released on all major games consoles. Contemporary adaptation studies acknowledges the inevitable transformations entailed in translating one medium into another, and the value judgements in privileging one over the other.

Nevertheless, the prioritisation of an 'original' and the promotion of certain formats over others is a frequent component in discussion of media adaptations associated with children. This is a recurring undercurrent in criticism of the Disney studios' fairy tale films, although it is generally acknowledged that any definitive version of these much-reworked stories is impossible to determine. When considering the Disney version of such stories, authors frequently express concern that essential qualities have been corrupted in their translation into animated feature films. Deborah Cartmell is amongst many authors in adopting this position. According to this adaptation scholar, the book which opens the Disney fairy tale constitutes an act of usurpation rather than authentication. In an assessment of the corporation, Cartmell writes: 'Disney doesn't merely adapt a narrative – he virtually steals it, making it *his* story, much to the disparagement of those

who seek to preserve and revere the literary original'.<sup>116</sup> Such a perspective informs Cartmell's subsequent critique of *Peter Pan* and *Mary Poppins*. In a study of *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* which explores the book, animated and live action versions, Whelehan focuses critically on issues of fidelity. Despite acknowledging an academic hierarchy which relegates both Disney and animation, the author nevertheless attacks the 'formulaic qualities' of the studio's output, which are overwhelmingly associated with conservative family values.<sup>117</sup> Changes between the novel and subsequent adaptations, such as the removal of a third adult dog and the expulsion of Cruella's husband, or exploitation of the affordances of animation in the use of caricature to align physical grotesqueness with villainy, are considered serving these reactionary ends. In such criticism it is possible to read symbolic overlap between the fairy tale, the classic work of literature for children, and the child, combining to produce a figure of innocence, defencelessness and naivety against which a knowing, powerful, manipulative culture industry can be unfavourably contrasted. Donald Levin's essay on *Mary Poppins* is one of few to draw positive conclusions concerning Disney's adaptation, suggesting that the film represents 'an explicit critique of its representation of the rigid, authoritarian, patriarchal middle-class culture of the Edwardian England' not present in the source series.<sup>118</sup>

Criticism of the 2005 film adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, itself co-produced by Disney, illustrates the cultural complexities of comparative analysis. Paul Tankard points to an emphasis upon 'family loyalty' in the recent cinematic versions<sup>119</sup> possibly related to the translation of the story from book into blockbuster family film. Megan Stoner's

116 Deborah Cartmell, 'Screen Classics', in Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson, eds, *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 285.

117 Imelda Whelehan, "A Doggy Fairy Tale": The Film Metamorphoses of *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds, *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999), 216.

118 Donald Levin, 'The Americanization of Mary: Contesting Cultural Narratives in Disney's *Mary Poppins*', in Leslie Stratyner and James R. Keller, eds, *Fantasy Fiction into Films: Essays* (London: McFarland, 2007), 116.

119 Tankard, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Multiplex', 82–83.

similar study notes the extent to which Lucy and Susan are incorporated into action sequences, while in the novel their weapons are intended for self-defence. This is considered representative of contemporary gender roles and expectations, in contrast to Lewis' more conservative original.<sup>120</sup> At the same time, both authors reveal perspectives on media, childhood and processes of adaptation which conform to traditional values. Tankard writes of the increasing 'bickering and boredom and general ill-temper' amongst the children when they arrive in the professor's house, components added because 'this was felt (rather disturbingly) to be more in keeping with the experience or expectations of contemporary children'. A similar indication of sliding standards is represented by the reason the children take refuge in the wardrobe, which is to avoid admonishment for breaking a window, rather than to hide from tourists.<sup>121</sup> In detailing the translation of the story from 'allegory' to 'action flick', Stoner's title in itself suggests a favouring of the original over the adaptation. As Christine Geraghty notes, there is a tendency for critics, often from literary backgrounds, to reproduce 'a hierarchy of judgement that brings together and privileges literature, reading, and authorship over screen, viewing, and mass production'.<sup>122</sup> Tensions between literary source and media translation are more pronounced, Cartmell observes, in the case of screen versions of children's books, where 'the battle between film and literature seems to be at its most ferocious'.<sup>123</sup> A prioritising of the printed page seems validated by the many positive discourses surrounding children's encounter with books, in contrast to persistently ambivalent concerns circulating more recent media formats. This disposition as a reflection of childhood under threat from modernity is evident in Stoner's use of the term 'modern' throughout their analysis, referring to changes which accord with contemporary

120 Megan Stoner, 'The Lion, the Witch, and the War Scenes: How *Narnia* Went from Allegory to Action Flick', in Leslie Stratyner and James R. Keller, eds, *Fantasy Fiction into Film: Essays* (London: McFarland, 2007), 78.

121 Tankard, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Multiplex', 82–83.

122 Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 2.

123 Cartmell, 'Screen Classics', 282.

expectations. Suggesting a classic novel endangered by an encroaching culture industry characterised by special effects and action sequences, this allows the author to argue 'a more modern, individualist approach' is represented by the child protagonists' questioning of their prophesised role, in contrast to the book where this is accepted without discussion.<sup>124</sup> The shift from the book's emphasis on Aslan to the film's emphasis on the children, something which might be considered a positive aspect of a children's film, is seen by Stoner as engendering the 'modern moviegoing tastes' of 'modern children', constituting what is heavily implied to be a regretful 'intrusion of modernity'.<sup>125</sup> Such an analysis shows how preoccupations of childhood are implied in criticism of children's media. Stoner's chapter reproduces the implication of 'betrayal and loss' Geraghty observes in discussion of adaptation faithfulness,<sup>126</sup> an issue also observed by Mackey in a chapter on media adaptations of children's fiction.<sup>127</sup> In such accounts there is strong suggestion that the children's book represents the authentic, the untouched, the uncontaminated of childhood itself, corrupted by the contemporary, the modern, the media. Furthermore there appears a strong conservative dimension to privileging a story where children do what they are told, conform to traditional gender roles, own up to their misdemeanours, and do not argue with each other, as they did in a past seemingly founded as much on fictional children in children's literature as it is on children in real life.

Whelehan points to the significance of history in period adaptations and costume dramas in terms of the heritage industry, nostalgia, collective memory and a desire to recapture the past.<sup>128</sup> A sense of period drama is evoked in the BBC's opening sequence, as the four children are seen leaving London via steam train along with other World War II evacuees, a contextualising detail mentioned only briefly in the book's first page. Edmund, who consistent with the later film adaptation expresses much more individualism than his siblings, voices his disappointment at missing out on the

124 Stoner, 'The Lion, the Witch and the War Scenes', 75.

125 Ibid. 77.

126 Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture*, 11.

127 Mackey, 'Media Adaptations', 112.

128 Whelehan 'Adaptations', 11–12.



excitement of the war. This aligns the ultimately treacherous character with the urban destruction of modern warfare, in contrast to the safe countryside to which the children are headed. The aesthetics of the costume drama, a genre with strong literary associations, is further evident in shots of a vintage car pulling into a stately home, and in subsequent location scenes which show off the mansion in which early episodes are set. Following the children's entry into the fantasy world of Narnia, the sense of history remains in the children's clothing and accents, in the show's relation to the 1950s novel, and in its evocation of 'classic' children's adaptations. Anna Home details a number of 1950s and 1960s BBC Children's Department serial adaptations, such as *Treasure Island*, *Great Expectations*, *Little Women* and *The Secret Garden*.<sup>129</sup> Such shows were broadcast on Sunday afternoon, a slot which the Department successfully 'regained' for the screening of the *Narnia* series.<sup>130</sup> In this respect, the sense of the past the series evokes is tied to its location in the schedule. The series acquires a sense of childhood through its association not only with children's literature but with a particular kind of family broadcasting.

Issues of media and production impact on the translation of novel to television. The children's upper-class accents, the received pronunciation of the fawn and the witch, contrast with the 'regional' accent of the dwarf, and the 'rural' accent of the friendly beavers. It is also notable that the children consistently wear fur coats and boots for the exterior scenes, a less visible feature of their appearance in the novel. The book illustration of the children calling for Edmund in the snow shows all three dressed in indoor clothes,<sup>131</sup> while in the television adaptation they wear coats throughout. Presumably this is because child actors feel the cold of location shooting in a way literary figures do not. The effect of having the children dressed in this manner during the first half of the adaptation serves to visually align them with the anthropomorphised creatures they encounter, played by actors dressed in fur costumes. In terms of gender

129 Anna Home, *Into the Box of Delights: A History of Children's Television* (London: BBC Books, 1993), 88–89.

130 Ibid. 94.

131 Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 93.

politics, when Father Christmas hands the children their presents, reference to the ugliness of women's involvement in battle<sup>132</sup> is omitted, although both Susan and Lucy are told, with a slightly patronising laugh, that they are not expected to fight. Instead, Lucy is told: 'After the battle there will be other work for you to do'. This is a reference to the final episode, where Lucy is tasked with tending to the sick and wounded on the battlefield. Elsewhere, use of visual or television tropes adds meaning not present on the printed page. When the name of Aslan is mentioned, there is a brief sequence, symbolic rather than diegetic, where the characters are shown gazing enraptured into glowing light, translating the sense in which each 'felt something jump in its inside'. In the book this is associated with adventure, music and summer holidays,<sup>133</sup> but its visual depiction suggests a more religious interpretation of the novel. Later, when the snow starts to melt and spring starts to break the same structured sequence is repeated, interspersing images of the children's bright faces with shots of blossoming countryside, suggesting an affinity between the children, nature, religious ecstasy, and the rightful ruler of Narnia. When the children finally meet the lion, the significance of the moment is signalled by the end of the fourth episode, while in the book it occurs mid-chapter.<sup>134</sup> The lion is also distinguished in not being animated or performed by an actor in a suit and makeup, but in being a full sized four-legged creature. No other animal in Narnia is represented in this way. The character's voice does not seem to emerge from its mouth, but is rather dubbed on over the soundtrack, appearing to come from some place outside the televisual world. Aslan's image also marks the opening and closing of every episode. The dramatic moment when the animal roars following their resurrection is one which shows off the animatronics of the lion's design. In this respect the authority of Aslan, felt to be diminished in the film adaptation, is enhanced through aspects deriving from the television medium. Aslan's face also appears as an image on the DVD of the series.

132 Ibid. 119.

133 Ibid. 77.

134 Ibid. 137.

On the issue of fidelity, Geraghty points to the significance of reception studies and the position of the audience. Fidelity's importance, the author suggests, may be less pressing in instances where viewers are unaware of the adaptation's source, or where a production does not draw attention to its status as an adaptation.<sup>135</sup> When it comes to children's books, Cartmell claims, as a consequence of being 'more loved and better known' than other literature, and because children 'love to re-read their favourite stories' there is a greater demand for fidelity in adaptations.<sup>136</sup> Whether a demand of child or adult readers, the importance of faithful adaptation appears a major concern informing the BBC version of the book. The name of the series' author appears as the first credit of the show. With few variations, the script follows word for word the dialogue of the book. Although there are some changes in pacing and editing of chapters, there are none of the additional scenes or characters observed in the movie which so irk critics of the later feature film. The series does not start with a book opening, but it does begin with a drawn map showing regions of Narnia in sepia-tinted tones suggestive of old manuscripts, tea-stained treasure maps and book illustrations. A similar aesthetic informs the depiction of animated creatures, such as the unicorns, griffins and eagles, as well as the witch's monstrous army. This makes them appear more like hand drawn illustrations brought to life, in contrast to the brighter colours and bolder outlines of American animation. At the same time, as evident from the DVD extras in the series' box set, a promotional slot on *Blue Peter* featured the animatronic lion and its operator. This functions to associate the literary adaptation with another respectable institution of British children's culture. It does also imply that, at the same time as the show enacts a retreat from modernity consistent with its source, the marketing of the series by the BBC showed off the technology through which the classic text was realised.

135 Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture*, 3.

136 Cartmell, 'Screen Classics', 282.

## Defining *Teletubbies*

In what ways might *Teletubbies* be considered a children's show? As detailed in the previous discussion of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, Banet-Weiser provides a useful means of determining the age-orientation of a television series, in terms of merchandise, scheduling, audience and content.<sup>137</sup> Before considering the ways in which *Teletubbies* reflects upon issues of childhood, media and modernity, the consideration of these various aspects of the show will serve to contextualise this peculiarly controversial programme in terms of children's culture.

As can be said of much children's media, merchandising is a central means of identifying the intended audience for a particular franchise. Mickey Mouse school sets positioned in the cinema lobby, television-based toys in McDonald's Happy Meals, the presence of child-sized pyjamas bearing characters from popular digital games, suggest the targeting of young people as part of the official audience of their respective screen products. Merchandise surrounding this BBC-commissioned show was the subject of international controversy. In the United States, Hendershot observes attacks upon the franchise from multiple directions. Criticisms included the baby talk exhibited by the main characters, suspicions regarding the sexuality of one Teletubby and complaints about the commercialisation of the show.<sup>138</sup> The latter point suggests that antipathy towards consumerism and children's culture, often associated with the 'Americanisation' of the medium in the UK, also constitutes a preoccupation within the United States. Reflecting the close connection between merchandise and recent children's television, Hendershot relates *Teletubbies* to other shows such as *Blue's Clues* and *Barney and Friends*, franchises that rely upon ancillary products in order to survive in the competitive television market. Almost all academic commentators remark upon the range of products the series generated. The show's success provided opportunities for spin-offs and

137 Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule!*

138 Hendershot, 'Teletubby Trouble'.

tie-ins in the form of toys, magazines, records, books and videos,<sup>139</sup> as well as board games, computer games, audiocassettes and clothing,<sup>140</sup> posters, stationery, watches, mugs and crockery. Buckingham notes the nationally specific ways *Teletubbies* intellectual property was licenced. This included Tubby custard in the UK, rice bowls in Singapore and *eau de toilette* in France.<sup>141</sup> Although not specifically discussing children's television, Ellis also mentions *Teletubbies* together with *Noddy* and *Thomas the Tank Engine* amongst the franchises which have generated additional income for the BBC through merchandise sales. A notable executive admitted the surreptitious ways such enterprises managed to avoid claims of exploiting child audiences.<sup>142</sup> Given the criticism the show's producers and broadcasters attracted on both sides of the Atlantic, this strategy does not seem to have been particularly successful.

A survey of the *Teletubbies* material currently available on various websites suggests an overwhelming targeting of children in the form of picture books, soft toys and clothing which seem clearly aimed at young children, including t-shirts, socks, wellington boots and hats. Indeed, at the time of its original broadcasting, Buckingham notes the BBC refused to license adult clothing, reflecting concerns about the show's appropriation by club cultures.<sup>143</sup> Currently there exist small numbers of adult-sized clothes alongside some interesting products depicting the characters as zombies, superheroes or rock band members, suggesting their incorporation into more mature cultures. Notable also are fancy dress costumes in adult sizes. Although the presence of such products suggests interest in the series beyond a child audience, it does not approach the range of adult-orientated merchandise associated with *SpongeBob SquarePants*. In terms of scheduling, *Teletubbies* continues to be broadcast on the BBC's CBeebies channel, which according to its charter, has a remit to cater for ages six and under. It has also been broadcast on the BBC's terrestrial service under the corpora-

139 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 62.

140 Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Education, 2005), 88.

141 Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?', 42.

142 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 168–169.

143 Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?', 57.

tion's remit to provide for young viewers. There is no evidence of the dual broadcasting strategy authors have observed in relation to Nickelodeon, where the same content is shown in both after school hours and late night slots. Indeed, reflective of television's normative relation to family schedules, CBeebies ceases to air after 7pm. Irrespective of scheduling, one of the many criticisms *Teletubbies* attracted concerned perceptions that in its colourful and psychedelic style the show was deliberately appealing to a cult audience associated with drug culture and alternative lifestyles. Hendershot refers to numerous journalistic publications identifying Tinky Winky as a homosexual character popularised on queer chat sites.<sup>144</sup> This 'gay adult fan base' suggests that children were not the only age group engaging with the show. The appropriation of the programme by university students is noted by Buckingham, citing unofficial online sites which emerged following the series' initial broadcast. There appears to have been a significant following for the show within club subcultures, evident in its characters featuring across music and style publications such as *Melody Maker*, *NME* and *The Face*.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, the extent of this 'unexpected audience' may be exaggerated, particularly by tabloid journalists and outraged religious leaders, and the presence of online adult images of children's television characters may reflect more about the nature of the internet than the existence of substantial adult fandom. There is little evidence of *Teletubbies*' adult following approaching the visibility of other prominent fandoms, such as that surrounding Hasbro's 2010 *My Little Pony* reboot.<sup>146</sup> Finally, although this is not one of Banet-Weiser's criteria, circumstances of production appear to be a significant aspect of children's television. *Teletubbies* was made by Ragdoll Productions, a company which, as Bignell notes, spends significant resources conducting empirical research on young children in designing its products.<sup>147</sup> This strongly indicates young viewers are the intended audience for the show.

144 Hendershot, 'Teletubby Trouble'.

145 Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?', 57.

146 Claire Burdfield, 'Finding Bronies – The Accidental Audience of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*', *Journal of Popular Television* 3/1 (2015), 127–134.

147 Bignell, 'Familiar Aliens', 378–379.

At the level of text, irrespective of ironic or subcultural adult appreciation of the series, Buckingham emphasises the extent to which *Teletubbies* makes little concessions to an adult audience.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, although causing significant controversy for its seemingly radical content, there are many parallels with *Teletubbies* and traditional children's media. As Hendershot argues, 'the images and sounds of Teletubbies simply do not seem all that different from the stories parents read to their kids or the questions they ask their kids everyday'.<sup>149</sup> While a cause of concern for those seeking evidence of children's television 'dumbing down', the 'baby talk' with which the creatures communicate, as Lury points out, resonates with the kind of nonsense language spoken by characters from 'classic' children's television, such as *Bill and Ben*, *Morph* and *The Clangers*.<sup>150</sup> The interactive or participatory dimension of children's television Hendershot sees evident in the title of the popular DVD, *Dance with the Teletubbies*.<sup>151</sup> This product was consistent with another contemporary CBeebies show, *Boogie Beebies*, in encouraging children's physical activity, an attempt to counter broad historic claims that television makes children passive, alongside more specific anxieties surrounding 'childhood obesity' in which screen-based media were heavily implicated. The show also invites child viewers to respond to questions from the adult narrator, a common trope in television for children. Reflexivity and intertextuality are two aspects Bignell identifies in the series, many instances of which relate to children's rhymes and stories. These include the opening lines 'Over the hills and far away ...', the much-cited ocean liner sequence featuring 'I Saw Three Ships' and the animation of animals walking in pairs following the story of Noah's ark.<sup>152</sup> Lury also sees the talking flowers of Teletubbyland a reference to *Alice in Wonderland*.<sup>153</sup> In this respect, much as Oswald observes in relation to *Andy Pandy*,<sup>154</sup>

148 Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?', 49.

149 Hendershot, 'Teletubby Trouble'.

150 Lury, *Interpreting Television*, 91.

151 Hendershot, 'Teletubby Trouble'.

152 Bignell, 'Familiar Aliens', 375–376.

153 Lury, *Interpreting Television*, 91.

154 Oswald, *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 63.

*Teletubbies* invites its viewers to participate in the heritage and tradition of culture for children. Further connections are drawn by Buckingham in terms of three broad features of children's television: education, storytelling and entertainment. These components are variously present in early children's broadcasting such as *Watch with Mother*, *Picture Book* and *The Woodentops*, through to *Camberwick Green*, *Trumpton*, *Tots TV* and *Cockleshell Bay*.<sup>155</sup> Accompanying the 'avant-garde' qualities identified in the show,<sup>156</sup> or its relation to absurdist theatre,<sup>157</sup> Buckingham connects *Teletubbies* with surrealist traditions in children's broadcasting, apparent in *The Magic Roundabout*, *The Moomins*, *Bagpuss* and *The Wombles*. The author suggests the reason behind *Teletubbies*' striking, even controversial, appearance was not so much its content, but rather its original combination of these aspects into a single show.<sup>158</sup>

In a paper drawing together biblical studies and critical theory, Brian Britt considers how the story of Adam and Eve's ejection from Eden relates to cultural theory, critiques of modernity and *Teletubbies*. Britt makes apparent the impact of religious narratives on believers and non-believers, and the extent models drawn from the Bible inform academic perspectives on the modern condition.<sup>159</sup> Such an observation seems particularly relevant concerning biblical notions pertaining to children. As has been observed, religious imagery, metaphors and iconography inform even secular concepts of childhood. Heywood details historical ways in which the depravity/innocence dichotomy which contributes to definitions of childhood is rooted in the story of Adam and Eve, the principle of original sin, uncertainty as to whether children are angels or fiends, conduits of the diabolical or the divine.<sup>160</sup> Notions of childhood as a state of innocence before the 'fall' of adulthood, and the recurrence of garden metaphors in children's media and

155 Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?', 53–54.

156 Messenger Davies, 'Studying Children's Television', 94.

157 Brian Britt, 'The Fall from Eden, Critical Theory, and *The Teletubbies*', *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 5/1 (2004), 3–21, 14.

158 Buckingham, 'Child-centred Television?', 55.

159 Britt, 'The Fall from Eden, Critical Theory, and *The Teletubbies*', 4.

160 Heywood, *A History of Childhood*, 32–34.



childhood in general makes this passage of Genesis symbolically resonant. Although childhood is not the focus of Britt's paper, the author describes the story of the Fall as 'a children's tale with greater depth and humour than most contemporary children's literature',<sup>161</sup> an origins narrative including risqué puns, rivalry, punishment and talking animals. Britt also examines how this narrative resonates with perspectives on modernity presented by Frankfurt School critics Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. The story's impactful structure surfaces in both authors' discussion of the souring of the Enlightenment project, the emergence of capitalism and fascism and the ascension of American popular culture. Modernity represents the ejection from Eden, with the culture industry cast as serpent, tempting trusting consumers, promising a happiness it never delivers. Similar conceptual frameworks inform critiques of capitalism, modernity and childhood, lending certain Marxist arguments particular purchase when evoking the child or the child-like audience. As noted, across the popular press *Teletubbies* was itself implicated in comparable debates. Like the American commentators Hendershot cites, Wells details the 'Tubbyrage' expressed by the British tabloids and broadsheets concerning the exploitation of innocent pre-schoolers for profit, the decline of traditions in public service broadcasting, and the 'corruption of language and learning', in contrast to a mythic Golden Age of British children's television.<sup>162</sup>

Concerning the show itself, Britt's analysis emphasises parallels between the world of the *Teletubbies* and the ambivalent paradise of Genesis. Various spaces of modernity, including the theme park, the zoo and, somewhat counterintuitively, the concentration camp and Ground Zero are related to the state of Eden. These are all extraordinary places, temporally and spatially outside the everyday. Equally, there is something over-artificial about the bright, green, ordered environment which the main characters inhabit, making the world of the children who appear in the screen inserts on the *Teletubbies*' chests appear comparatively bleak. And yet, Britt argues, these children and their seemingly dull activities

161 Britt, 'The Fall from Eden, Critical Theory, and *The Teletubbies*', 6.

162 Paul Wells, 'Teletubbies', in Glen Creeber, ed., *The Television Genre Book* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 99.

constitute a source of fascination for the characters, effectively trapped or exiled in a world which, as a modern Eden, frequently resembles more camp than park. Teletubbyland is considered an ambivalent space of late modernity, complete with junk food, mediated entertainment, instructive loud speakers and panopticon-like surveillance in the form of the smiling sun baby. Machines are embedded beneath the surface of the seemingly natural landscape. According to promotional material cited by Britt, the show introduces young children to 'the wonders and magic of high-tech in a safe and friendly way' in a world which 'hums with the technology that supplies ... every need'. This includes machines which produce toast and custard, the anthropomorphic vacuum cleaner who tidies up any mess, and the television screens implanted in the characters' bodies. In this respect Britt describes the Teletubbies as cyborgs, a figure of postmodern ambivalence theorised in Donna Haraway's seminal manifesto.<sup>163</sup>

While Britt's analysis largely explores *Teletubbies* in terms of modernity and the academics who critically define it, Bignell considers the show in terms of the 'reflexive textuality' of postmodern culture. Bignell's previous discussion of children's culture and postmodernity has already been considered, as has the author's discussion of the child as a figure whose liminal status reflects many aspects associated with the postmodern condition. Situating *Teletubbies* within a similar framework, Bignell draws connections between adulthood and modernity, and childhood and postmodernity, emphasising how the former defines itself in opposition to the latter, despite the 'post' prefix suggesting something after rather than prior to modernity and adulthood. Bignell also raises the issue of the Teletubbies' ambivalent status. As beings which are familiar and alien, human and inhuman, they suggest the collapsing of distinctions between adult and child, self and other, modernity and postmodernity.<sup>164</sup> One striking boundary being blurred, central to Haraway's manifesto, concerns the juxtaposition between the natural and the inorganic. This is most striking in the Eden-like world of Tubbyland with its rolling hillocks, flowers and rabbits. Hidden beneath this green and pleasant landscape is the science fiction

163 Britt, 'The Fall from Eden, Critical Theory, and *The Teletubbies*', 13–14.

164 Bignell, 'Familiar Aliens', 364.

zone of the 'Tubbytronic Superdome', a place where machines provide the characters with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of sustenance. Also from below emerge the loud speakers, instructing the Teletubbies how to behave. The artificiality of the seemingly pastoral landscape suggests something deliberately sculptured, manufactured, maintained. The dramatic movement of the camera through this space, the neat arrangement of wildlife for the viewer's gaze, constitutes a scene meticulously staged for the spectator. In contrast, the environment of the Superdome is one of mechanical anthropomorphosis and occasional anarchy. Vacuum cleaner Noo Noo is an inorganic entity imbued with the qualities of a living creature, part servant, part pet. The machine which produces Tubby custard expresses flatulent sounds when depressed. Many sequences concern the malfunctioning of these devices, in which the chaos of erring domestic appliances is accompanied by messy *mise en scène* and camera movements. The show's combination of computer animation and live action, Bignell relates to postmodern erosions in boundaries between different modes of televisuality. As the author writes:

the visual aesthetics of the programme insists on the capacity of television to bring actuality, performance and computer animation together into a coherent textual world that dissolves the boundaries between these representational forms, and between television and the material that it reworks.<sup>165</sup>

Insofar as such techniques service the depiction of scenes from children's nursery rhymes and fairy stories, this combination of new and old representational modes reflects the remediation of traditional tales, some of which date back thousands of years, through the medium of television.

Of course, the emblem of collapsing boundaries between organic and inorganic is the cyborg-like Teletubbies themselves. The beings, and the show they feature within, reflects much of the history of British television, its relationship with modernity, postmodernity and late modernity. Loud speakers which emerge from the ground suggest the public use of media associated with propaganda and population control, particularly when

165 Ibid. 375.

instructing the characters to go to bed. Decades after its abandonment in British broadcasting, the toddlers' truce still exists in Teletubbyland, even if the characters do not necessarily follow these instruction. Ranging in height from the smallest, Po, to the largest, Tinky Winky, the characters reflect the varied age groups British children's television has historically tried to cater for. The order in which characters emerge from their underground home enacts, albeit in reverse, the developmental model informing children's scheduling. The four Teletubbies suggests the four terrestrial channels of British television preceding the introduction of Channel 5 in 1997, the same year as *Teletubbies* was first broadcast. The televisions embedded in the stomachs of the characters also anticipates the personalisation and portability of the screen into the twenty-first century, the acceleration of 'mobile privatisation',<sup>166</sup> developments which have had significant if ambivalent impact on the nature of children's viewing and programming. Sequences which appear on the characters' screens, short scenes in which children assume the role of presenter, narrating their own experiences, might relate to citizen-centred children's shows. There are precedents for such participative involvement in broadcasting for children which pre-date the introduction of television itself. Nonetheless, the Teletubbies in a very physical sense structure these inserts. As adult actors in suits which afford them the physical appearance of babies, dubbed by baby-talking adult performers, the characters represent the same adults masquerading as children critiqued by Buckingham.<sup>167</sup> Lury points out that, despite controversy surrounding the language employed by on-screen characters, the dominant voice within the show is the received pronunciation of the adult narrator.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, Bignell observes the relative marginalisation of the child viewer, aligned with the baby-faced sun who opens and closes each episode, a figure which exercises 'no direct agency over anything that happens', but rather 'looks down amusedly at the Teletubbies and is spatially separate from the action of the main

166 Williams, *Television*.

167 Buckingham, 'On the Impossibility of Children's Television'.

168 Lury, *Interpreting Television*, 90.

characters, paralleling the imagined child viewer who has no direct control over a programme made by adults from the technological and institutional world of television'.<sup>169</sup>

At the same time, the baby sun bookending the show effects a process of child-like delight and enchantment through their giggling response to the terrestrial antics. One of the processes at work within *Teletubbies* is the construction of television, the very medium on which the show appears, as somehow spiritual, supernatural, fantastical. As Hendershot observes, the sparkling effects spinning from the windmill which signify an imminent broadcast suggests something magical is about to happen.<sup>170</sup> Britt reads religious significance into the promise of this transmission from another realm, which causes the creatures to fall about in ecstasy before one of the four becomes the chosen one to receive the images.<sup>171</sup> Thus the television set, a mundane object within the late twentieth-century household, embedded in the bodies of these strange creatures, assumes a mystical, cultish quality, evoking pre-modern sensibilities associated with voices from beyond, the sublime, ecstasy and devotion. The delight expressed by the baby-faced sun at the antics of the Teletubbies is reflected in the joy the beings themselves take in the mundane activities of the children who appear on their bellies. This is exemplified by the over-excited 'again, again' which heralds the repetition of the filmed clip. If the Teletubbies and the sun represent surrogates for the child in the living room, the show not only teaches children how to watch television, but imbues the process of watching with a magic which contrasts with the increasing banality and ubiquity of televisual technology throughout the twentieth century.

169 Bignell, 'Familiar Aliens', 378.

170 Hendershot, 'Teletubby Trouble'.

171 Britt, 'The Fall from Eden, Critical Theory, and *The Teletubbies*', 15.

## Education, Carnival and *Horrible Histories*

*Horrible Histories* is a sketch show broadcast by the BBC, based on a series of popular books published by Scholastic. The franchise exemplifies what David Buckingham and Margaret Scanlon identify as a genre of non-fiction, sold relatively cheaply in supermarkets, aimed at eight- to twelve-year-olds. Success enjoyed by such publications is attributed to their 'blend of humour and irreverence towards "serious" subjects such as history, science and maths'. The series, the authors claim, in contrast to other educational material, are not explicitly connected to official school curriculum and are designed to appeal directly to children as entertainment without necessarily alienating parents.<sup>172</sup> With titles such as *Rotten Romans*, *Terrible Tudors*, *Awful Egyptians* and *Vile Victorians*, *Horrible Histories* explicitly focuses on the more grotesque aspects of various periods. The BBC television show reproduces many aspects of the books. Incorporating animation, written text, puppets and live action sketch show, it evokes the same multimedia address as the publications' combination of cartoons, maps, false newspaper articles and diary entries. Episodes consist of sketches based on familiar genres and formats such as news features, game shows and reality TV. Just as Buckingham and Scanlon observe in the books themselves, the series employs multiple popular culture references to establish solidarity with its contemporary audience.<sup>173</sup> In its emphasis on death, disease, violence and bodily fluids *Horrible Histories* reflects the 'gross out' entertainment of children's media, while also retaining an educational dimension. Two seemingly disparate requirements of children's culture are thereby combined. *Horrible Histories* is both entertaining and instructive, reflecting concepts of childhood as a time for fun and a period of learning. In its anachronistic combination of television genres and formats with periods of ancient, medieval and early modern history, the series embodies certain postmodern atemporal aspects of children's culture and childhood. At the

172 David Buckingham and Margaret Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 34.

173 Ibid. 101.

same time, insofar as the show's 'wackiness' centres on the 'crazy' practices and 'bonkers' beliefs of past civilisations, the affinity this establishes with audiences functions to secure the child viewer as a superior modern subject and contemporary modernity as the exemplary period of history.

There is something undeniably carnivalesque about *Horrible Histories*, a quality with a long tradition in culture for children. The series is filled with stories of grizzly deaths, ineffective systems of waste disposal, injurious medical practices and beauty regimes from the past. A cookery show concerns the ersatz food soldiers ate in the trenches of World War I, including bread made of beans and sawdust, and coffee made of coal tar and turnips. The punchline to this sketch involves a milkman who dilutes his wares with water from the local lavatory, at which point the disgusted presenter vomits into a pail. A puppet version of the 'inevitable animated rodent' Buckingham and Scanlon observe in digital learning packages<sup>174</sup> fronts the series, a figure which might be considered a caricature of a more respectable mascot of child-centred media. Such imagery represents a seeming deviation from the innocent media for children constructed by Romantic discourses of childhood. Its audience is defined by perceptions that children prefer 'vulgarity and sensationalism' rather than 'restraint and subtlety'<sup>175</sup> coinciding with the function of childness as a source of escape from modernity and a modern adulthood defined by seriousness, self-control and middle-class decorum. In the companion to a previous publication exploring salient aspects of the modern condition, Jervis considers various identities, groups and activities which are excluded from the state, yet, through their exclusion, serve to define its central parameters. Although children are not specifically considered as constituting a marginalised group within this process, connections are drawn between the child-like, women and the insane. There is something of childness evident in Jervis' discussion of the carnival and the carnivalesque as a transgressing antidote to the rationality of ordered modernity. An important aspect of medieval life, Jervis sees the Enlightenment period as rejecting this tradition along with other activities considered anathema to modernity, reducing carnival

174 Ibid. 118.

175 Davies et al., 'In the Worst Possible Taste', 479.

‘either to the fun and games of children, or to the meaningless negativity of insanity’.<sup>176</sup>

There is much in Jervis’ description of the ‘world turned upside down’ in children’s media, and many authors identify transgressive tendencies in television for children. Michelle Ann Abate observes the recurring theme of ‘silliness’ across the culture of Jim Henson’s *The Muppet Show*, including ‘bizarre musical numbers’, ‘silly backstage antics’ and ‘unintelligible ramblings’ which ‘embrace absurdity, irrationality, and foolishness’. This the author relates to traditions of nonsense in Anglo-American culture, evident in nursery rhymes and children’s verse, dating back to the nineteenth century. Such modes of creativity are considered a reaction to the order and rationality of the modern ‘Age of Reason’. It ‘resists and even openly rejects elements of logic and linearity’ allowing ‘the possibility for unconventional artistic forms, innovative aesthetic styles, and irreverent – often subversive – cultural interpretations’ which Abate directly links to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>177</sup> Henry Jenkins observes a similar tendency in toy stores, filled with cans of slime, farting dolls, monster labs, Mad Balls and Garbage Pail Kids. Such scatological products are accompanied by television shows combining ‘*Monty Python*-style humor’, food fights, vats of goop and staged scenes of domestic destruction. The focus of Jenkins’ article is *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, which in its fragmented structure, abrasive aesthetic, and rejection of education in favour of noisy and chaotic ‘fun’, is seen as confronting the taste codes and practices of official adult culture.<sup>178</sup> Ellen Seiter also identifies a stream of masculine ‘grossness’ in the animated television series *Slimer and the Real Ghostbusters*, echoed in the

176 John Jervis, *Transgressing the Modern: Explorations in the Western Experience of Otherness* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 14.

177 Michelle Ann Abate, ‘Taking Silliness Seriously: Jim Henson’s *The Muppet Show*, the Anglo-American Tradition of Nonsense, and Cultural Critique’, *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42/4 (2009), 590–591.

178 Henry Jenkins III, “‘Going Bonkers!’: Children, Play and Pee-wee”, in Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, eds, *Male Trouble* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 166–167.



merchandise surrounding the show.<sup>179</sup> This exists alongside its feminine equivalent in cartoon videos for girls which, through their kitsch aesthetic, flamboyant colours, baroque style and excessive femininity, offend middle-class codes of taste and political values.<sup>180</sup> In a more recent paper on *The Demon Headmaster*, Messenger Davies considers the ‘crazyspace’ of children’s drama, similarly entailing the carnivalesque overturning of adult authority, incorporating the same ‘silly, childish, “wacky” ingredients’<sup>181</sup> observed by Jenkins in the ‘bonkers’ world of Pee-wee Herman. Children’s culture parallels the peasants’ carnival in its marginality, its association with a lowly class, and its opposition to an implicitly adult, high, official culture of modernity. Children’s media is full of bodily fluids and functions, humiliated authority figures and violent slapstick. Insofar as it represents ‘an anti-time, outside time, when inversion and paradox held sway, when identical past and future were lived in a present which was thereby alien to itself’,<sup>182</sup> carnival shares the peculiar temporal dislocation of childhood. In its non-linear combination of periods this is a quality evident across every episode of *Horrible Histories*. The fact that the show melds carnivalesque qualities of children’s culture with frequent images of the Middle Ages is a fortuitous coincidence.

Despite the relation between *Horrible Histories* and medieval entertainment, the series is eminently televisual and postmodern in format. Its address assumes familiarity with a range of television genres, and much humour derives from the juxtaposition of pre-modern events with contemporary forms of communication. The first season includes a prehistoric advertisement for sharp stones and blunt stones, a cavemen art show, a fight between Christians and lions presented as a televised sporting event and a soap opera set in a Viking beauty salon. Representing continuity with other anachronistic dimensions of children’s culture, the series also constructs a hyperreal view of history in which television itself represents

179 Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in Consumer Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 1995), 173.

180 Ibid. 167.

181 Máire Messenger Davies, ‘Crazyspace’, 393.

182 Jervis, *Transgressing the Modern*, 15.

the defining framework through which the past can be made comprehensible. Self-reflexivity is considered by Turnock to be an early aspect of television. By way of illustration, the author discusses a satirical sketch involving a deadpan commentary of a royal disaster, the format of which is repeated in several *Horrible Histories* skits. The same 'reverent tone' the same 'received pronunciation', the same 'slow solemn style familiar to viewers well versed in royal events' is employed to illustrate the funeral of William the Conqueror during which servants apparently stole his valuables, the church caught fire and the corpse's stomach exploded. The sketch, like many, shares the corporeality of early modern culture described by Jervis, with its focus on the 'messy materiality' of the body. The detonating remains of King William being stuffed into an undersized coffin is a story which brings the monarch 'down to earth', represents an affront to 'the "classical" body, the body of modernity' which is 'static, closed, sleek, well-bounded, individual, decorous, attempting to approach ideals of beauty'.<sup>183</sup> While effecting an irreverent approach to its historic subject, the sketch enhances the authority of the television medium. In the same 'sleight of hand' as Turnock observes, these routines draw upon the omnipotence of the medium as 'having unparalleled access to a sense of how things really are, or being at the centre of events'<sup>184</sup> even events which precede the invention of the medium itself.

*Horrible Histories*, as Buckingham and Scanlon argue of the books on which they are based, are very British in content and perspective.<sup>185</sup> The structure involves sketches based on recognisable television formats, a continuation of the tradition of British children's television as itself a microcosm of the mainstream schedule. As Oswell writes:

Children's television was not conceived as a particular genre of television, but as a collection of genres which were in themselves not specific to particular age categories of audience.<sup>186</sup>

183 Ibid. 19.

184 Turnock, *Television and Consumer Culture*, 72–73.

185 Buckingham and Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home*, 43–44.

186 Oswell, *Television, Childhood and the Home*, 48.

Buckingham et al. point out that from its early years children's television in Britain was conceived of as 'public service broadcasting in miniature'.<sup>187</sup> The extent to which *Horrible Histories* jumps from game show to music video to news programme is indicative of the structure of children's television itself, and the extent to which children are presumed familiar with the range of programmes being referenced. In addition, the sketch show format itself, Ellis argues, is quite particular to British and European television. Carnavalesque elements are explicitly cited by the author as influencing the genre, constituting a form of comedy which 'breaks boundaries and flies in the face of convention and propriety'.<sup>188</sup> Historical overlaps exist between this mainstream comedy format and children's television. Home notes how children's television has often provided the platform for new talent, citing *Monty Python's Flying Circus* forerunner *Do Not Adjust Your Set* as an example.<sup>189</sup> In representing the prehistoric era, the Middle Ages and Elizabethan periods, the series draws broadly on the comedy of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *Blackadder* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. In one sketch detailing the nicknames Queen Elizabeth I gave members of her court, the actor appears clearly influenced by Miranda Richardson's performance as the monarch in the historical sitcom.

In this respect the series mobilises the postmodern approach to history observed by Deborah Cartmell and I. Q. Hunter in their edited collection on representations of the past in popular fiction. This entails an 'allusive, ironic, 'knowing, intertextual' style 'firmly in the line ... of popular culture's playful and opportunistic treatment of history'.<sup>190</sup> The 1980s and 1990s saw an emerging challenge to established models of history as the straightforward relating of facts constituting what really happened. Instead a self-reflexive emphasis emerged on the active role of academics in

187 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 17.

188 Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 118.

189 Home, *Into the Box of Delights*, 148–149.

190 Deborah Cartmell and I. Q. Hunter, 'Introduction: Retrovisions: Historical Makeovers in Film and Literature', in Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan, eds, *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 2.

constructing particular narratives based on available source material. This was accompanied by a shift from the dominant focus on wars, politics and the achievements of 'great men', towards more social history emphasising the activities of everyday people and those ignored or marginalised within traditional accounts. Such is the context in which educational publications, including the *Horrible Histories* series were produced and the framework within which they are critiqued by Buckingham and Scanlon.<sup>191</sup> These developments, significantly associated with a postmodern turn in the discipline, are considered by historian Robert A. Rosenstone. One challenge for contemporary academics, the author argues, is to 'bring the practice of history kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century'. In justifying the representation of history in popular media, Rosenstone points to academics who identify close connections between established historical accounts and conventions of fiction, namely the nineteenth-century novel. The author considers themselves amongst many who underline the importance of history being related through accessible cultural forms such as film and television.<sup>192</sup> In this respect *Horrible Histories* makes sense of the past through contemporary sensibilities. The contrast between puritan and restoration England is depicted through a pastiche of *Wife Swap*. A music video features four Georgian monarchs as a boy band singing 'Born 2 Rule'. Saxon life is depicted as an *EastEnders*-style soap opera. An encounter between a homo sapiens and a Neanderthal couple assumes the format of situation comedy.

The show's comic mode also employs postmodern aspects which arguably diminish more critical dimensions. Jameson, in discussing postmodern culture, makes the distinction between parody and pastiche. Parody is associated with modernism, and has a critical or political intention. Pastiche is also 'the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language' with the significant distinction that 'it is a neutral practice ... without parody's ulterior motive,

191 Buckingham and Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home*, 91–93.

192 Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (London: Pearson Education, 2006), 3–4.

without the satirical impulse, without laughter'. While Jameson's description of pastiche as 'parody that has lost its sense of humour'<sup>193</sup> may seem inappropriate for a comedy series, the point of *Horrible Histories*' various sketches is not to mock the form in which they deliver their information. The music video, the news report, the cookery show, the medical drama are not themselves held up to ridicule. In many ways these familiar formats represent the straight component of the comedy, the point of reference, the contemporary through which the incongruous and anachronistic historical element is held up for ridicule. An advertisement for *Pharos Fashion Magazine* pokes fun at Egyptian beauty products involving wax cone hair accessories, wool wigs and lipstick made from fat and red powder, but not the nature of such promotions. In a reworking of fairy stories, told using a *Jackanory*-style format, it is not the mode of address which is sent up, or even the traditional tales themselves, but rather Georgian window taxes or Elizabethan superstitions.

Religious ideas which differ from contemporary Judeo-Christianity are considered 'crazy', 'weird' or 'funny'. Puritans are 'loony'. Roman Emperors are 'crazy'. Victorians are 'potty'. Caveman medicine is 'not very good'. History is populated by 'silly' people, 'silly' burial ceremonies and 'silly' elections. A sketch shows a Georgian polling booth where women and non-property owners are excluded from the vote, and there is only one candidate. The talking rat who directly addresses the viewer serves to return the audience to the present, offering commentary on the events and providing closure to the sketch. It reassures the implied viewer of the correctness of contemporary ways in contrast to the 'silly' past, the injustice and ignorance of which have been implicitly overcome. People in the Middle Ages held the 'weird' conviction that Black Death was punishment from God, suggesting belief in connections between sin and misfortune have long been superseded. An advertisement for a Victorian legal company shows that children injured in industrial accidents received no compensation, relegating child labour and unsafe working conditions to the past. At moments the canonical history may be debunked, for example, revealing that Columbus

193 Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', 188–189.

did not discover America. But there is little contextualisation of the process whereby this myth became historical fact. Consistent with the show's preoccupation with bodily fluids, urine is a recurring theme. Viewers are told that this was used as mouthwash in Roman times, to clean clothes in the Middle Ages and to protect World War I soldiers from poisoned gas. Urine appears to have served a medical function throughout the ages, suggesting, although the suggestion is never made, that Western culture is peculiarly at odds with human history in its revulsion towards the liquid. Each sketch functions to depict the past as irredeemably backwards. In contrast the viewer is assured of their privileged place in history, enjoying all the benefits of modern life including effective health care, hygiene, waste disposal, labour relations, representative democracy and non-superstitious belief systems.

The series positions itself as challenging the authority of the educational established, claiming in the lyrics of its closing song to have presented viewers with the 'fearsome facts' and the 'ugly truth' without 'glam or glitz' so that 'the past is no longer a mystery'. This, the song emphasises, is 'stuff they don't teach you at school'. Buckingham and Scanlon observe a similar anti-authoritarian address in their overview of recent popular history publications, arguing the identification such texts attempt relates to broader efforts within children's literature and television to overcome the gap between adult producer and child consumer.<sup>194</sup> In this respect the talking rat is 'in league' with the implied audience, joined in their distrust of teachers and the schooling system. Yet while exhibiting a postmodern approach to representations of the past, and expressly challenging the scholastic and academic establishment, *Horrible Histories* betrays a traditional approach towards historical knowledge. Considering contemporary dispositions towards processes of historical evaluation, Buckingham and Scanlon quote a book from the series as claiming: 'teachers ... will try to tell you there are "right" and "wrong" answers even if there aren't'. Comparable perspectives are barely present in the television spinoff. Indeed, the tone is didactic, according to the educational historian cited by the authors,

194 Buckingham and Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home*, 99–100.

insofar as it is judgemental, emotive in its language and simply presents rather than justifies its interpretations.<sup>195</sup> *Horrible Histories* positions itself as a whistle-blower, debunking sanitised versions of the past produced by schools and teachers, in order to support its own historical authority and authenticity. The 'talking rat' is central here, directly addressing the audience in a colloquial manner. As the show's host, their role is to underline the 'fearsome facts' upon which the preceding skit was based, often accompanied by conspiratorial comments concerning the ghastliness of pre-modern conditions. Even if the mode of delivery is patently anachronistic, depicting events which did not take place, the facts upon which they are founded are presented as indisputable. As the signs which periodically intrude upon each segment assert: 'This really happened!'

Jervis suggests 'the real point is that carnival has no point beyond itself'. In this respect the educational aspects of *Horrible Histories* compromise its status as a carnival form. The series is also a brand. In this respect, the carnivalesque is further undone, as Jervis suggests any form of authorship is anathema to carnival. Unlike other kinds of popular culture, the show does not offer any element of participation, another quality Jervis sees compromised in the translation of carnival into visual culture.<sup>196</sup> The only interaction invited by *Horrible Histories* is structured along strictly educational lines in the form of school-style multiple choice questions. Another key quality of the carnivalesque is its subversiveness. Under the guise of harmless fun, Abate argues *The Muppet Show* challenges established ideas of gender, sexual and bodily normativity, and critiques official institutions of power and authority. In satirising television conventions in parodies of the news bulletin, the hospital drama and the science show, the series critically engages with contemporary anxieties and fascinations.<sup>197</sup> *Pee-wee's Playhouse* is variously described as 'anarchic', 'unruly', 'disorderly', 'grotesque', 'subversive', 'uncontrollable'. Jenkins sees such culture as offering children alternatives to the push towards rationalisation, suggesting such pressures

195 Ibid. 97.

196 Jervis, *Transgressing the Modern*, 28.

197 Abate, 'Taking Silliness Seriously', 605–607.

compromise children's 'capacity to play, to find pleasure, to be creative'.<sup>198</sup> Such qualities are similar to those observed by Wells in the counter-cultural qualities of *Sesame Street*, a show more clearly designed for children than family audiences, retaining a 'non-materialist, pro-environmental, racially and generationally inclusive signature style'.<sup>199</sup> Roughly contemporary with the broadcasting of *The Muppet Show* on British television, the mid-1970s saw the emergence of the Saturday morning magazine programme. Shows like *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop* and the 'famously unruly' *Tiswas* are considered by Buckingham et al. to represent a belated expression of 1960s 'youth culture', incorporating confrontational humour, the mockery of adult behaviour, idiosyncratic presenters, and sexually ambiguous pop performers.<sup>200</sup> Home observes quizzes in which children were pitted against parents and teachers, and the emergence of the 'messy game shows' as a consequence of anarchic Saturday morning television.<sup>201</sup> Drawing on the work of Alison Lurie, Seiter argues a sense of subversiveness exists in both the gross and the ultra-feminine, as commercial children's culture mobilises the same rebellious traditions Lurie identifies in classic children's literature.<sup>202</sup> As the author writes:

Children's commercial television is ... what we may call utopian, universally appealing to children in its subversion of parental values of discipline, seriousness, intellectual achievement, respect for authority, and complexity by celebrating rebellion, disruption, simplicity, freedom, and energy.<sup>203</sup>

Messenger Davies also considers 'crazyspace' a politically subversive dimension of children's television, in its focus on children coping with adults, in

198 Jenkins, 'Going Bonkers!', 179.

199 Paul Wells, 'Moral Panics', in Glen Creeber, ed., *The Television Genre Book* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 99.

200 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain*, 38–39.

201 Home, *Into the Box of Delights*, 150–151.

202 Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 232–233.

203 Ibid. 11.



its endorsement of a child's eye perspective, and in its prosocial messages which encourage empathic sympathy for the underdog.<sup>204</sup>

In contrast, *Horrible Histories* would appear a more conservative, even reactionary expression of the carnivalesque, relegating the mode itself to a less civilised past. A problematic evocation of mental instability is implied in terms throughout Jenkins' piece, such as 'bonkers', 'cuckoo' and 'crazy', as well as the fictional website in Messenger Davies title. It could convincingly be argued that the need for 'crazyspace' is not solely restricted to children. This may be the appeal of *Pee-wee's Playhouse* to college students,<sup>205</sup> the cult audiences for *Tiswas*,<sup>206</sup> or the more recent adult male fandom surrounding *My Little Pony*, a central franchise in Seiter's argument.<sup>207</sup> Adults' consumption of this kind of children's media might be considered a means of indulging in carnivalesque pleasures, made palatable through their association with a childness which can always be projected onto a marginalised social group, leaving adulthood intact and uncompromised. These aspects of children's media might be considered subversive in the context of mainstream culture. When adults watch such material, the moment might be regarded a transgressive reaction to the ways in which the modern adult is supposed to be sensible, serious, tidy and productive in their pursuits. But given that children's surveillance, control, social and political exclusion are founded on dominant assumptions that children are silly, messy, destructive and mentally unfit, these carnivalesque aspects appear less challenging when expressed in media for young people.

204 Messenger Davies, 'Crazyspace'.

205 Jenkins, 'Going Bonkers!', 165.

206 Home, *Into the Box of Delights*, 138–139.

207 Mikko Hautakangas, 'It's OK to be Joyful? *My Little Pony* and Brony Masculinity', *Journal of Popular Television* 3/1 (2015), 111–118.



## Digital Games for Children

### Moral Panics, Videogames and Modernity

The history of children and modern media might be written as a narrative of repeating moral panics regarding new screen technologies' potential impact on vulnerable minds and bodies. This is evident in histories of children attending cinema, as part of a mass audience watching Hollywood films, and as spectators of weekend matinees watching imported adventure serials. Paralleling current concerns about the dangers of the internet, a dual anxiety existed in cinema's early years that children might be doubly exposed, to dangerously adult media content, and to dangerous predatory adults within the dark and unregulated space of the public auditorium. Further down the years a range of ills have been associated with children watching television, from damaged teeth to attention deficit disorder. Messenger Davies writes of the enduring influence of the 'Bobo doll' experiment, a 1963 study seeking to explore connections between aggression in children and violent imagery on television. The study has subsequently 'almost become folkloric in its own right', being broadly cited by uninformed students and commentators alike as evidence of the negative impact of media on children.<sup>1</sup> This is despite the fact that details of the exercise are barely known, as are criticisms the methodology of this small experiment has attracted. The arrival of video technologies, as detailed by Julian Petley, caused concern about 'video nasties' entering the home, films which were, according to the tabloid press, rife with images of cannibalism, bodily mutilation and gang

1 Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture*, 79.

rape.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, certain titles were banned, and a cinema-style ratings system was established in the mid-1980s. A second wave of panic followed the murder of James Bulger by two older children nearly ten years later, the impact of which is detailed by Patricia Holland.<sup>3</sup> Discourses emphasising popular culture's debilitating impact on young people are not limited to screen media. John Springhall discusses concern related to juvenile attendance of 'penny theatre', unlicensed places of entertainment catering for wage-earning children and adolescents who could not afford the admission to more legitimate forms of theatrical culture. These establishments were accused of inciting boys to robbery and young women to prostitution, and linked to a perceived rise in juvenile crime within Victorian society. Scandalised accounts of the attendees of such performances, according to Springhall, 'encapsulate much of the mid-Victorian moral reformers' objection to the non-childlike precocity' of independent, working-class young men and 'worldly-wise little factory girls'.<sup>4</sup>

Speculation concerning the impact of new media on young people continues to resonate into the digital era, reflected in more recent worries about children's exposure to unsuitable material online, or the ways in which text messaging negatively impacts on literacy among young people. Reports of mobile phones giving children cancer, the carcinogenic impact of telecommunication masts, or Wi-Fi 'radiation' suggest that it is not only the content media carry which is considered harmful, but children's very proximity to media technologies themselves. A revealing forerunner to concerns surrounding children in cinemas, significantly paralleling early videogame cultures, is the controversy detailed by Jan Olsson regarding children's participation in early twentieth-century mechanical peep show culture in Chicago and San Francisco. This centred around children's use of coin-operated moving image devices located in arcades which sprang

2 Julian Petley, 'A Nasty Story', *Screen* 25/2 (1984), 68–74.

3 Patricia Holland, 'Living for Libido; or, "Child's Play IV": The Imagery of Childhood and the Call for Censorship', in Martin Barker and Julian Petley, eds, *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate* (London: Routledge, 2001), 78–86.

4 John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta-Rap, 1830–1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 21.

up across American cities in the early twentieth century. Common patterns can be identified in the stories Olsson cites and narratives emerging decades later, for example regarding children gaining access to videogame arcades and playing violent crime simulations. A prominent assumption held that children and young people might copy in real life what they saw in these turn-of-the-century machines, or would otherwise be corrupted by this content, although Olsson observes that there is no clear indication of quite how this process of corruption worked.<sup>5</sup> An enduring model, dating back to before the emergence of modern childhood, is of the child as *tabula rasa*, a blank slate which is marked by experience. Campaigners against penny amusements and the arcades in which they were located represented a familiar coalition of religious groups, educationalists and sensationalist newspapers,<sup>6</sup> similar to those participating in the 'video nasties' debate. The city, symbol of modernity, also appears central to this early instance of media-orientated moral panic. Parlours and saloons housing coin-operated moving image devices were part of a range of electronic entertainment and cheap amusements which constituted early twentieth-century urbanity. Papers reporting city news and current affairs sought to expose the vice of the moving picture entertainment industries located in downtown areas as part of various campaigns to improve city life.<sup>7</sup> Children's status as potential victims of modern stimuli appears dependent on a sense that they are particularly susceptible to the 'alluring signs, gaudy placards, loud music, and electrical bells' of the arcade.<sup>8</sup> As such, children are seen as having a profound affinity with the aesthetics of modernity, something against which they need to be protected. Modernity's external threat is founded on the child's inherent fascination with the kinds of stimulation with which modernity is associated, but which they are ill-equipped to manage. Ideas regarding the relationship between children, modernity and new media

5 Jan Olsson, 'Pressing Matters: Media Crusades Before the Nickelodeons', *Film History* 27/2 (2015), 117.

6 Ibid. 123.

7 Ibid. 107–108.

8 Ibid. 125.

technologies resonate with concerns about children's use of computers and videogames in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Writing about the emergence of computer technologies in the home, Leslie Haddon aligns historical concerns about computer addiction, anti-sociality and isolation with Stanley Cohen's work on mods and rockers, and Martin Barker's work on horror comics.<sup>9</sup> In the 1980s concern was so high that a private members bill aimed at controlling arcade games was only just defeated in the UK House of Commons.<sup>10</sup> Jenkins compares attempts to police videogames and their content with previous efforts to control children's culture in America, including the progressive playground movement, and the establishment of Boy Scouts and Little League organisations.<sup>11</sup> James Newman's critique of the negative discourses surrounding videogames draws similar parallels with controversies about comic books and internet chat rooms,<sup>12</sup> while Jason Whittaker observes connections between the mid-1990s release of *Doom* and the 'video nasties' debates of the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Ken S. McAllister relates how the 1999 Columbine high school shooting was attributed to videogame violence, in addition to popular music consumption. This explanation was seized upon, McAllister argues, in order to divert attention from the more sensitive issue of gun control. In a similar echo of Cohen's study, McAllister identifies the journalistic structure of a media narrative, which opens with suggestions that those exposed to graphic content are likely to be adversely affected, followed by citing of academic sources associating media violence with aggressive tendencies amongst the young, then shocking excerpts from a violent videogame,

- 9 Leslie Haddon, 'Explaining ICT Consumption: The Case of the Home Computer', in Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch, eds, *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces* (London: Routledge, 1992), 86.
- 10 Leslie Haddon, 'Interactive Games', in Philip Hayward and Tana Wollen, eds, *Future Visions: New Technologies of the Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 137–138.
- 11 Henry Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces", in Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds, *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999) 275.
- 12 James Newman, *Playing With Videogames* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 2.
- 13 Jason Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2004), 133.

concluding with a warning for parents to protect their offspring from such material.<sup>14</sup> Christine R. Yano also references Cohen in considering the alarm caused by young people's 'obsession' with *Pokémon* around the turn of the millennium,<sup>15</sup> the franchise being implicated in rampant consumerism, commercial manipulation, child-on-child violence and Satanism.

In the first chapter of a study examining the phenomenon, Newman identifies two broad yet overlapping strands of attack, focusing on either the message or the medium. Newman emphasises the extent to which the popular press focus on violence in videogames, with titles such as *Doom*, *Manhunt* and *Grand Theft Auto* repeatedly identified as particularly examples. Concerns here relate not only to the violent content and its potentially immoral nature, but on the negative impact this might have on players' psychology according to hypodermic lay-theories of media effects. A second, broader strand to popular discussions of videogames concerns a wider cultural decline attributed to the prevalence of the medium itself. Irrespective of content, through the mindless control they exercise over players and the unproductive activity they encourage, videogames stand accused of inducing social withdrawal and isolation in individuals, and falling standards of education performance across society. Almost unworthy of acknowledgement in Newman's analysis, it is such a common sense trope, is the overwhelming focus of attention in effects debates on the impact of the medium on children. This association entirely ignores the pervasiveness of videogaming amongst adults, and the high age certificate of the titles most frequently cited as indicative of violence and cultural decline. The focus on children in these debates frequently allows videogames to be targeted as the cause for perceived deteriorations in levels of literacy. A rhetorical distinction is frequently drawn between the book, associated with productivity, imagination and creativity, and the new medium. Both the member of the British royal family and the Conservative politician

14 Ken S. McAllister, *Game Work: Language, Power, and Computer Game Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 6–7.

15 Christine R. Yano, 'Panic Attacks: Anti-Pokémon Voices in Global Markets', in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 109.

quoted by Newman mobilise an unquestioning belief in the beneficial influences of print media as part of their attack on digital games. These are criticised for inducing passivity, a claim which Newman points out is peculiarly at odds with the physical activity the form demands of users.<sup>16</sup> There are concerns about videogame addiction, something which can be seen in relation to previous children's media consumption. For example, Oswell notes concerns that children might become 'noise addicts' as a result of continuous radio listening.<sup>17</sup> Another unsavoury depiction of children's cultural activity entails association with junk food. Davies et al. use this metaphor to describe attitudes towards children's television consumption and cultural tastes.<sup>18</sup> The same discourses are observed by Buckingham et al. regarding children's viewing of Nickelodeon,<sup>19</sup> and by Mitchell and Reid-Walsh concerning consumption of pulp literature and promotional toys.<sup>20</sup> As something which is mass produced and processed, addictive, of little to no nutritional value, with pejorative health consequences for those who consume it, this functions to align any respective popular culture with crude commercialism and mechanical production, as well as contribution to a perceived obesity crisis.

Kuhn is not alone in observing: 'Childhood seems to be a universal site of, and cause for, cultural anxieties; and worries about young audiences and users have surfaced repeatedly throughout the history of popular media.' At the same time the author notes that 'the content, tenor and circumstances of such concerns are always unique'.<sup>21</sup> This is impacted by the various technological imaginaries of the medium as it emerges, the varying forms the new medium takes, and ideologies of childhood current at the time. One of the pervading discourses surrounding children's relationship with digital games, further defining its negative impact in terms of processes of mechanisation and modernity, is the suggestion that children are

16 Newman, *Playing With Videogames*, 3.

17 Oswell, *Television, Childhood, and the Home*, 26.

18 Davies et al., 'In the Worst Possible Taste', 479.

19 Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse and Policy*, 74.

20 Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, *Researching Children's Popular Culture*, 20.

21 Kuhn, 'The Child Audience and the "Horrific" Film in 1930s Britain', 323.



themselves turned machine-like through their interaction with the medium. Such perspectives are inherent in claims that games technologies 'reduce the player to a soporific state of near trance-like zombification', engaged in a 'thoughtless, monotonous repetitive activity that occupies them in the entirety of their being' and leaves them 'reclusive and isolated'.<sup>22</sup> The child produced by this technological encounter is unimaginative, unthinking, unengaged with other humans, adrift in a synthetic environment devoid of organic interaction. They become as mechanical as the console into which they are plugged. In a different account, David Sheff narrates the experience of an early Nintendo of America employee observing young people playing arcade games:

He watched kids stand in front of the machines, transfixed, their hands melded to controllers, their bony arms like umbilical cords joining human and machine ... It was as if the players and the game itself somehow merged.<sup>23</sup>

Associations between mechanisation and dehumanisation have strong historical resonance with critiques of industrialisation, capitalism and city life. Although automated pleasures have often been associated with popular culture, this sense of videogames having a mechanistic impact may emerge from the conspicuous technology of the medium. Throughout gameplay the tactile interaction between player and interface constantly underlines the relationship between human and machine. Many game genres and titles are organised around robots and cyborgs, technological upgrades in weaponry and enhanced forms of transportation, suggesting an affinity between the techno-fetishism of software and the high tech nature of the delivery system. Promotional and popular discourses surrounding PC and console gaming emphasise the enhanced experiences realised by successive innovation in game technology and game design. While such rhetoric is far from absent in popular consideration of blockbuster cinema, flat screen television sets or internet services, the digital game is a form which

22 Newman, *Playing With Videogames*, 3.

23 David Sheff, *Game Over: Nintendo's Battle to Dominate an Industry* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), 96.

appears to emphasise its technologies more so than other 'invisible' forms of media and culture.

Discussions of the mechanising influence of the videogame experience are not restricted to negative journalists and opportunistic politicians. In an argument emphasising the self-contained nature of 1990s Nintendo games, Eugene F. Provenzo references material which emphasises how successful gameplay involves conforming to the rules of a game's programming. The author concludes that videogames are 'teaching machines that instruct the player using them in the rules of a game as it is being played'.<sup>24</sup> In such a scenario, the colourful characters of the game world seem to be emptied of humanity. The author suggests:

Although characters ... may be presented in the game's scenario, on television, and in cartoons as being feisty and imaginative, in the actual game they are robotized characters whose actions must be carried out precisely according to the rules programmed into the computer in which the game functions.

Positing parallels between the robotic character of the avatar and the child playing the game, Provenzo goes on to argue that such impoverished experiences fail to allow for experimental play, deny the development of an 'inner culture', and limit the player's ability to expand their imagination and self-knowledge.<sup>25</sup> In their soulless mechanical nature, games have a similarly mechanical influence on the child player, negatively contrasted with the beneficial influence ascribed to traditional folk tales. As Provenzo concludes: 'The machine and its program impose an instrumental logic on the play situation and the activities of the child.'<sup>26</sup> Chris Kohler notes that Provenzo went on to give evidence at US Congressional hearings where, as an expert witness, the author spoke of the overwhelming violence, sexism and racism in videogames, despite the weak evidence provided to support this in the author's 1991 publication.<sup>27</sup> The study remains a revealing example of early

24 Eugene F. Provenzo, *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo* (London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 34.

25 Ibid. 95–96.

26 Ibid. 137.

27 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 9.

attempts to theorise videogame experiences at a time when the attitude of semi-scholarly writers was largely negative.

Perceptions of videogames as a mechanistic and mechanising apparatus align the medium with modernity, subsequently enhancing perceptions of technology's negative impact on children. Arguments which attribute more postmodern aspects to the form may appear at odds with such structuring, deterministic, functional qualities. Garry Crawford and Jason Rutter consider digital games from a cultural studies position as embodying various characteristics of late modernity. Videogamers are immersed in consumer culture. Software must be regularly updated and hardware perpetually upgraded. Commercialism is often central to digital games' in-world mechanics.<sup>28</sup> Many games integrate consumerism into their structures and aesthetics, evident in the common collection of coins, purchasing of upgrades and in the assemblage of avatars and virtual spaces. The isolated videogame player would appear to reflect the increasingly individualised and atomised subject of post-war society. This stereotype has been widely disputed, with many citing the social aspects of games, multiplayer digital experiences, and online worlds which function to bring dispersed collections of people together. Nevertheless, the digital game experience is largely structured around a one-to-one exchange between player and screen, in a manner quite distinct from models of cinema spectatorship established early in the twentieth century, or television viewing in the post-war period. From this perspective, videogames would exemplify screen cultures and technologies' reflection of increasing social individualism. The artificial spaces and virtual activities, which commentators have historically feared might replace activities in the real world, would seem to characterise the surface culture of postmodernity and the displacement of the authentic by the hyperreal, as would the virtual videogame star who exists only as a surface of polygons and pixels. Similarly the potential games provide for re-designing spaces through modding, and reimagining identities through

28 Garry Crawford and Jason Rutter, 'Digital Games and Cultural Studies', in Jason Rutter and Jo Bryce, eds, *Understanding Digital Games* (London: Sage, 2006), 158–159.

the generation of avatars coincides with the flexibility of texts and perceptions of personhood in the postmodern world.

Much of this relates to myths surrounding media engagement, media technologies, and the ways they impact on young people. As Crawford and Rutter point out, citing Henry Jenkins and Janet Murray:

gamers are not actually 'transported to another place' or managing their football team to league supremacy but are physically and socially located within a very real world, which will shape their (and others) gameplay, which in turn has real world consequences.<sup>29</sup>

The focus of Newman's study is the ways in which videogame cultures are far from virtual, but situated within very material practices.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, for some understandable reasons, digital games continue to be associated with a retreat from the real into a fantasy world. In some formations this may secure the medium as highly appropriate for children, who have always been constructed as living a somewhat unreal existence, and have traditional associations with fantasy cultures. Simultaneously outrage can be evoked by the apparent commodification, technologisation and (post)modernisation of such 'natural' tendencies in young people. Critics of videogames can employ negative discourses of both modernity and postmodernity, in constructing the child player as dehumanised robot, victim to a vampire-like machine, or as the disembodied meat-free inhabitant of cyberspace, detached from the real world and immersed in the commercialised realm of the virtual. Plugged in or unplugged, the alienated subject of modernity, or the deluded subject of the postmodern, the child seems helpless to resist these totalising conditions.

29 Ibid. 159.

30 Newman, *Playing With Videogames*.

## Children, Technology and the Domestication of the Computer

Many recurring concerns surrounding videogames as children's media reproduce those which have, throughout the twentieth century, circulated children's engagement with popular culture. As Jenkins writes, adults feel a certain discomfort when confronted with technologies which were not a part of their own childhood.<sup>31</sup> Efforts to regulate, certificate or ban children's access to new media appear founded on assumptions that the experiences these unfamiliar forms generate will be physically or mentally harmful to vulnerable consumers. In the context of children's problematic relationship with modernity, such impulses reflect a sense that children are particularly susceptible to the shock of the new. However, this frequently coincides with a counter sense that children, whose practices are less set in their ways, have a particular affinity or skill at negotiating the challenges of new media, or will be attracted to the shiny pleasures they produce. As Messenger Davies observes, there is a fit here between the 'newness' of new media technologies and the 'newness' of children themselves<sup>32</sup> which might be articulated in either positive or negative ways. Central to debates circulating children and new media, with digital games as no exception, are familiar issues of modernity, domesticity, education and play. Before considering more positive articulations of children's relationship with such technologies and cultures, it is worth considering the 'newness' of digital games in light of Messenger Davies' comments. In contemporary discussion there are often close connections between new media and digital media. This latter term is somewhat unspecific given the ubiquity of digital platforms. Virtually all media, including literature, film, television, newspapers, music and graphic novels currently exist in some digital format. A useful distinction is presented by Jenkins between media and

31 Jenkins, 'Complete Freedom of Movement', 266.

32 Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture*, 16.

media delivery technologies.<sup>33</sup> In most cases a medium has a long, often pre-industrial history. The newness, and the digital-ness, of such experiences resides in the devices through which these cultures can now be accessed, such as the compact disk, the DVD, the tablet, the Kindle. Much online activity involves reading text, watching video clips or listening to music. While exemplifying 'new media', the internet might more accurately be considered a new media delivery system than a new medium in and of itself. Nevertheless new delivery technologies are not without consequence, and remain impactful upon the experiences of young people and the media they consume. For example, the emergence of home-based screen technologies for viewing and storing cinema material has allowed children a more comfortable relationship with the feature film. This has in turn affected Hollywood production practices, in addition to a range of non-screen children's culture. The straight to DVD phenomenon, a hybrid of cinema and television formats, has afforded the production of feature length media more specifically organised around the child spectator than any previous commercial venture. Online delivery systems are undoubtedly impacting on the production of media for children in a similar way, with streaming services effectively bypassing retail processes entirely in delivering film and television hybrids directly to young audiences.

Within media studies the 'new' of new media is a prefix subject to significant debate. Whittaker is not alone in arguing: 'Most forms of ICT entertainment may be seen as extending technologies and forms, such as film, video and music, that pre-existed computers and the Internet'. Whittaker points out that games have existed for centuries, and that many digital games either adapt existing activities or draw on traditional children's imaginative games. Nevertheless, the author goes on to speculate: 'Video and computer games ... probably constitute a special exception'.<sup>34</sup> As well as remediating pre-existing game experiences, videogames also allow for them to be commodified and media-ified. Videogames can consequently be considered 'new' insofar as they represent a relatively recent form of popular culture,

33 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (London: New York University Press, 2006), 13.

34 Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook*, 120.

if not a unique cultural experience, and 'new' through their mobilisation of recently consolidated technologies. At the same time, the first videogames were developed in laboratories in the 1960s, meaning this is a medium over fifty years old. Even taking the advent of commercially available digital games as a starting point, the form is approaching forty-five years of age. A growing proportion of adults today experienced playing videogames in their youth or childhood, either in arcades or on home consoles. This point is made by Jesper Juul, who argues one reason for the popularisation of 'casual games' in recent years is the arrival of a generation who are rediscovering old pleasures in videogames through playing them with their own children. The games Juul discusses also represent the return to a time when videogame play was considered simpler and more intuitive. Mobile games, point-and-click adventures, formats incorporating motion sensitive interfaces are accessible to players alienated by the increasing complexities of the medium as it evolved over the past decades.<sup>35</sup> One reason the medium appears 'new', even for those who played digital games as youngsters, is the form's close association with developments in computer technologies, meaning contemporary titles, genres and consoles often appear unrecognisably advanced compared to those of previous eras. Although the term is not employed, Juul's analysis suggests a trend towards childness in recent game culture, significantly appealing to adults and older people rather than children.

As Aphra Kerr writes: 'A good social history of digital games remains to be written.'<sup>36</sup> Constructing a narrative of children's digital games, comparable to the chapters which opened previous sections is hampered by the lack of critical academic sources. While there have been substantial studies of children's literature and children's television, and publications exploring children's experience of film and cinema, books examining children's videogames in a similar manner are sparse, particularly over the past fifteen years. Early attempts to understand videogames, it seems, could

35 Jesper Juul, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players* (London: The MIT Press, 2010).

36 Aphra Kerr, *The Business and Culture of Digital Games: Gamework/Gameplay* (London: Sage, 2006), 20.

not avoid the medium's association with children. This is reflected in the focus and title of many publications, including Provenzo's *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo*,<sup>37</sup> Kinder's *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*,<sup>38</sup> and Sheff's *Game Over: How Nintendo Zapped an American Industry, Captured Your Dollars, and Enslaved Your Children*, a publication which also goes by the less histrionic subtitle *Nintendo's Battle to Dominate an Industry*.<sup>39</sup> In an earlier chapter on videogames and youth, provocatively entitled 'Hellivision: An analysis of video games', Gillian Skirrow explores the attraction of videogame play for young boys. Drawing on child psychologist Melanie Klein, Skirrow argues gameplay represents an Oedipal negotiation of ambivalent feelings towards the mother's body.<sup>40</sup> Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins' *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* explores issues of gender and gaming, with a particular interest in efforts made by the games industry to encourage participation from young women.<sup>41</sup> The collection has much to say concerning proximities between then-contemporary videogames and children's cultures. Similarly Tobin's edited collection, *Pikachu's Global Adventure* chronicles the emergence and decline of the *Pokémon* phenomenon within children's lives between 1999 and 2002, illustrating overlaps between the digital game series and other children's popular media.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, publications focusing on videogames in the current millennium rarely express the same need to relate the medium to children as did the work of previous decades. There are studies, such as Seth Giddings' *Gameworlds: Virtual Media and Children's Everyday*

37 Provenzo, *Video Kids*.

38 Kinder, *Playing With Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games*.

39 Sheff, *Game Over*.

40 Gillian Skirrow, 'Hellivision: An Analysis of Video Games', in Colin MacCabe, ed., *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 115–142.

41 Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds, *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999).

42 Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (London: Duke University Press, 2004).



*Play*,<sup>43</sup> Valerie Walkerdine's *Children, Gender, Video Games*<sup>44</sup> and Sandra Weber and Shanly Dixon's *Growing Up Online: Young People and Digital Technologies*<sup>45</sup> which examine children's engagement with videogames and videogame cultures, often in a more sophisticated and nuanced manner than earlier publications. These are however overshadowed, even within the still-expanding field of game scholarship, by broad studies of the medium's history, politics and modes of expression, or specific titles examining videogames and philosophy, genre, online cultures, morality or aesthetics. Contemporary scholarship appears considerably less informed by the common sense understanding of games as overwhelmingly the preserve of children and adolescents, assumptions which determined most studies predating what Espen Aarseth declared to be 'year one' in videogame scholarship.<sup>46</sup>

Although early publications on the subject frequently address relationships between videogames and child players, the medium's early history which predates such academic interest sees little evidence of 'children's videogames'. In discourses echoing earlier concerns circulating young people frequenting amusement parlours and watching automated peep shows<sup>47</sup> the public space of the videogame arcade was considered a dangerous place for children. Connections between teenagers playing arcade games and juvenile delinquency were made by respected American periodicals, despite the absence of evidence.<sup>48</sup> Similar concerns were expressed in the UK that arcades, as gathering points for young people, were distracting youths from more constructive activities. Such rhetoric

43 Seth Giddings, *Gameworlds: Virtual Media and Children's Everyday Play* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

44 Valerie Walkerdine, *Children, Gender, Video Games: Towards a Relational Approach to Multimedia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

45 Sandra Weber and Shanly Dixon, eds, *Growing Up Online: Young People and Digital Technologies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

46 Espen Aarseth, 'Computer Game Studies, Year One', *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 1/1 (2001) <<http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html>> accessed 1 June 2016.

47 Olsson, 'Pressing Matters', 105–139.

48 Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook*, 122–123.

reproduced traditional fears about young working-class male street culture and social deviancy.<sup>49</sup> Yet early publicly located videogames were not conceived of as a medium for children. Advertisements for the first videogames show adults and teenagers playing or crowding round the cabinets. Arcade games like *Pong* and *Breakout* were placed in adult-only spaces such as pool halls and bars.<sup>50</sup> Games of this era were stark and monochrome in design, sharing few aesthetic continuities with children's media. However the videogame is somewhat unique in emerging simultaneously as both a public and a domestic medium. Steven Poole points out that some of the first commercially available videogames were played in the home. The first games machine, a sports simulation designed by Ralph Baer in the late 1960s, was produced for the domestic market, taking the form of the Magnavox Odyssey. Baer's efforts were somewhat eclipsed by those of Atari founder Nolan Bushnell whose *Spacewar* and *Pong* were produced for public play.<sup>51</sup> Public and home videogaming of this period appear significantly integrated. 1972 saw both the release of Bayer's delayed console and the first appearance of Bushnell's *Pong* in American bars. Five years later Atari's 2600 home system was released onto the market, boasting licensed versions of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*.<sup>52</sup> Less sophisticated versions of these titles were available on a profusion of home machines throughout the period. While much anxiety appears to have surrounded children playing games in public, there is less evidence of concern related to children playing games in the home. The implied child player was reflected in promotional culture. As Kohler observes, in contrast to images of adult arcade games, advertisements for domestic systems typically incorporated parents and young children.<sup>53</sup> As with cinema, children frequenting the public space of the arcade was considered

49 Haddon, 'Interactive Games', 138–139.

50 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 51–52.

51 Steven Poole, *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 32–34.

52 John Kirriemuir, 'A History of Digital Games', in Jason Rutter and Jo Bryce, eds, *Understanding Digital Games* (London: Sage, 2006), 23–24.

53 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 52.

a source of concern. In contrast, when the same medium, albeit with diminished graphics and processing power, was in the home it seems more comfortably and profitably associated with children.

The domestication of the videogame was also facilitated in the 1980s and 1990s by the emergence of computers as consumer products holding a perceived affinity with young people. Murphy points out that, like contemporary consoles, many early home computers used televisions as monitors, a feature which facilitated their integration into pre-existing modes of domestic technological consumption.<sup>54</sup> Writing from an Australian context, Elaine Lally details how the computer became constructed as a domestic appliance throughout the late 1990s, comparable to the VCR and the microwave.<sup>55</sup> Helen Nixon also notes how electrical retail chains and toy stores defined computer technologies and software as domestic items, along the same lines as furniture, magazines and books.<sup>56</sup> Publications with titles such as *Family PC*, *Family PC Australia* and *Parents & Computers* further located these devices within heteronormative domestic arrangements.<sup>57</sup> Advertising has a central role in this configuration, and it is notable that many images reproduced in Lally's study feature children. One depicts a man and young girl baking together with a computer incongruously positioned on the kitchen counter beside them.<sup>58</sup> Another, the cover of a PC buying guide sponsored by Olivetti and Intel, shows a male-female couple with a child in a shopping trolley, suggesting the computer can be bought in a supermarket like any domestic item.<sup>59</sup> Notably, it is the child who selects the chosen model from those circulating the image, while the man and woman, eyes fixed on the youngster, smile indulgently with little apparent preference for one device over another. Implicated in negotiations and justifications for the expense of buying a home computer is the importance of enabling

54 Murphy, *How Television Invented New Media*, 27.

55 Elaine Lally, *At Home With Computers* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 50–51.

56 Helen Nixon, 'Fun and Games are Serious Business', in Julian Sefton-Green, ed., *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia* (London: UCL Press), 31.

57 Ibid. 33–34.

58 Lally, *At Home With Computers*, 51.

59 Ibid. 55.

a family's younger members to develop IT skills, suggested in the rhetoric of purchasing a micro 'for the children'.<sup>60</sup> Producers of microcomputer notably resisted aligning their machines with videogame play, concerned this would relegate their products to the status of a child's toy. Instead, especially in the UK where Haddon observes 'computer literacy' was a persistent preoccupation, manufacturers emphasised the microcomputer's education potential and broad multifunctionality.<sup>61</sup> Domestic computers also impacted on developments in game genres. Arcade cultures of the 1970s and 1980s emphasised fast, brief, 'violent' experiences geared around short repetitive play. This formula, as Haddon points out, was modelled on the pinball machine alongside which many early arcade games stood. Home consoles and many computer games of this period initially followed this format. Other titles explored the specific potential of domestic machines to offer more extended, less frenetic games which incorporated spatial exploration and puzzle solving in a manner significantly deviating from the contracted arcade experience. In particular, home computers facilitated the adventure game, which Haddon sees as challenging the action-orientated arcade format.<sup>62</sup> This genre was unsuited to either the interface or context of the arcade, being designed around the keyboard of the home computer and its domestic location. Involving a less aggressive, more contemplative, 'literary' form of gameplay the adventure game challenged assumptions that videogames were by definition violent and graphic, producing a more cerebral experience with closer proximity to the keyboard-based IT skills these technologies were imagined as facilitating.

Seiter also parallels the ways companies promoted the installation of the personal computer, and instructions on arranging the television set in 1950s America. Contrasting with discourses aligning home technologies with degeneration of family life, both television and micro were defined as domestic appliances which would benefit domestic relations. The author describes the 'utopian claims to enrich family life' of computer advertisements, promising to 'enhance communications, strengthen friendship and

60 Haddon, 'Explaining ICT Consumption', 84.

61 Haddon, 'Interactive Games', 129–130.

62 Ibid. 133.

kin networks' and, significantly, to 'make children smarter and give them a competitive advantage in the educational sphere'. In a manner which reflects the advertising collated by Lally, Seiter reproduces the image of a nuclear family apparently on the verge of hysteria at the profusion of digital entertainment available through their widescreen television set.<sup>63</sup> In such instances the child functions to mediate adults' relationships with new technology. The child aligns the computer with the home, rather than the workplace. The child imbues this unfamiliar purchase with the same sense of wonder observed by Cross in relation to new products promoted through images of children in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Writing of the pleasures adults have historically enjoyed in witnessing children's engagement with culture, Cross observes:

Parents indulged their young with an ever-changing and growing array of toys, dolls, and storybooks, but they also fulfilled their own needs for release from the constraints of work and responsibility by viewing and vicariously enjoying their offspring's carefree play. Through spending on children, parents temporarily entered an imaginary world of childhood fantasy free from the fear and tedium of change. They recovered their lost worlds of wonder through the wondrous innocence of their children's encounter with commercial novelty. Adults found refuge in the mystique of childhood, but a very special kind of childhood, defined and experienced through consumer culture.<sup>64</sup>

This contradictory pleasure, a return to childhood facilitated by enjoying children's engagement with the most contemporary of technologies, runs through the advertisements these authors reproduce. Furthermore, while computer manufacturers might have downplayed such an application of their products, Haddon argues that the agency of children was central in the increasing cultural acceptance of the home computer as a games machine. The author writes of the extent to which, in its early days, the appliance constituted an 'open-ended, multifunctional device'<sup>65</sup> the precise purpose of

63 Ellen Seiter, *Television and New Media Audiences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 120–121.

64 Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 15.

65 Haddon, 'Explaining ICT Consumption', 84.

which was still in question. The implication of Haddon's piece, focusing on the activities of young boys in developing hobby-orientated game cultures, is that male children served to determine the course of the computer's role within the home. As the author writes 'the fact that users concentrated on games rather than employing the micro for multiple applications partially changed the micro's very identity from multipurpose computer to games machine'.<sup>66</sup> In other words, young people had a significant part to play in shaping the definition of home computers' functionality in the formative years of the technology's domestication, orientating it towards game playing, despite the resistance of manufacturers, promoters and parents.

## A History of Videogames and Children's Culture

Further to the domestication of the videogames medium through the home computer, a number of developments in the 1970s and 1980s served to reframe videogames more favourably towards children's culture within public spaces. In the United States the Chuck E Cheese restaurant was established as a brightly coloured chain designed to provide a family-friendly environment in which, amongst other activities, videogames could be played. The chain was established by Atari founder Bushnell, Kohler argues, in response to an awareness that children were attracted to videogames, but that many adults were unhappy with young people frequenting the pool halls and bars in which they were located. One effect, Kohler claims, was 'a preliminary stamp of approval on video games as children's entertainment'.<sup>67</sup> Haddon details the incorporation of arcade games into amusement parks in the 1980s, as a similar response to games manufacturers' efforts to free the medium of its 'sleazy' image.<sup>68</sup> These developments relocate the videogame from the modern context of the city arcade into the postmodern space of

66 Ibid. 85.

67 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 52.

68 Haddon, 'Interactive Games', 127.

the suburban shopping district and theme park. Such measures' alignment of digital games with children reflect antagonism between young people and the city, and a positive affinity between postmodern public spaces and family-centred entertainment complexes.

Throughout the intervening decades videogames have existed across a range of platforms and locations, including arcades, consoles, home computers and portable screens. Significant in terms of defining digital games as children's culture was the availability of handheld devices which John Kirriemuir notes appeared in toy store catalogues of the period.<sup>69</sup> One of the most famous brands was the 'Game & Watch' series. Reflecting alignment between portable gaming of this era and children's media, characters featured on this format included Snoopy, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Popeye<sup>70</sup> a figure still familiar to contemporary children from television reruns of theatrical shorts and made for television shows. The smallness of this brand is noted by Sheff, describing the range as 'a video game the size of a calculator, with a tiny digital clock in the corner', adding how they 'weren't the easiest things to play – the controls were tiny – but they were a novelty.'<sup>71</sup> Their design appears intended to match the physical dimensions of child players. The mid-1980s saw the famous collapse of the American games industry, and the ascendance of Japanese games companies, most notably Nintendo, heralding a less military, more toy-orientated approach to videogame technology, software, marketing and merchandising. The period also saw the release of the Nintendo Entertainment System, also known as the Family Computer or Famicom, which by 1988 had become the best-selling toy in North America.<sup>72</sup> Graphics of this era became more colourful and blocky in a manner distinct from earlier vector lines which did little to disguise their origins in the radar screens of the military industrial complex. This was not simply a matter of technological development, but of cultural influence. Games more explicitly began to incorporate film,

69 Kirriemuir, 'A History of Digital Games', 30–31.

70 Sheff, *Game Over*, 49.

71 Ibid. 28.

72 J. C. Herz, *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Gobbled our Money, Won our Hearts and Rewired our Minds* (London: Abacus, 1997), 20.

television and animation into their sphere of reference, reflecting and enhancing perceptions of videogames as a children's pastime.

The impact of *Donkey Kong*, released in 1981, is important in this respect. This game, Poole observes, was notably distinct from the 'alien-themed shoot-'em-ups' which dominated arcades of the time.<sup>73</sup> Influences upon this precursory arcade game featuring a prototype Mario included Beauty and the Beast, *King Kong* and again, Popeye, the initial source for the game until the license fell through and the designer was required to produce original characters.<sup>74</sup> By the 1980s fairy stories, old monster movies, and theatrical cartoons were embedded across Western children's literary and screen culture. Concerning the centrality of the Japanese industry to Western digital games, Kohler identifies the importance of visual storytelling to the national culture, evident in the popularity of comics and cartoons amongst audiences of all ages.<sup>75</sup> The author observes how the design style of *manga* and *anime* translates well into the medium, particularly in its early stages when graphic resolution was extremely limited. The childness of such iconography to a Western sensibility is evident in J. C. Herz' description of Mario and manga characters as small, cute, baby-like, exhibiting the 'roly-poly proportions of a child' existing in world defined by its 'babyland aesthetic'.<sup>76</sup> There is no suggestion that *Donkey Kong* as an arcade game was particularly designed for a child players. It would be presumptuous to assume that associations between childhood, comic books and animation, or the kind of aesthetics Herz discusses, were the same in these products' country of origin. Nevertheless, when imported into the USA and the UK where such associations exist, videogames become more strongly connected with children's culture. *Pac-Man* released the previous year, is identified by Haddon as significant in changing perceptions of videogame play as a purely masculine activity. Evident of the intersection between childness, childhood and femininity, there remain similar implications of juvenilisation in one commentator's observation that the game's dynamic was more

73 Poole, *Trigger Happy*, 42.

74 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 36–38.

75 Ibid. 6.

76 Herz, *Joystick Nation*, 162.



'hide-and-seek' than 'nuclear holocaust'.<sup>77</sup> Suggestive of the popularity of arcade games with children, Herz notes licensed merchandise related to Namco's character, including pillowcases, backpacks, wrapping paper and lunch boxes.<sup>78</sup> These titles significantly enhanced the sense of videogame as colourful, cartoon-like and associated with pixelated characters rather than military weaponry. Videogames of this era have further aspects in common with children's media. They are short, bright, full of iconic characters, set in simplified worlds, replete with magic and fantasy, and operate on a visual rather than literary register. There is also something significant about the smallness of early videogame characters. With few exceptions, avatars of this period take up only a reduced amount of the screen, dwarfed by the environments they inhabit. This aspect results from the limitations of digital technologies. Nevertheless it resonates with the theme of smallness identified by many commentators on constructions of childhood, children and their culture.

Although the American games market of this period was largely dominated by Japanese companies, Haddon suggests the same was not the case in the UK, where domestic home computers continued to develop. In this country the microcomputer had become the standard games machine, and it was not until the early 1990s that the challenge of dedicated games console began to impact on the UK industry. This period was characterised by numerous multi-purpose computers which, as Haddon observes, came to be defined largely by young boys as games machines.<sup>79</sup> A prominent example Kirriemuir considers is the ZX Spectrum, a machine which could facilitate a range of activities. Echoing Haddon, Kirriemuir notes, 'many of these were bought on the premise of being used for educational or work purposes, most primarily became home video game machines'.<sup>80</sup> Traditional histories of the digital games industry tend to overlook this nationally specific phenomenon, however there is a burgeoning nostalgic interest in old machines, resulting in a number of publications on the

77 Haddon, 'Interactive Games', 139.

78 Herz, *Joystick Nation*, 132.

79 Haddon, 'Explaining ICT Consumption'.

80 Kirriemuir, 'A History of Digital Games', 25.

subject, such as Dan Whitehead's *Specy Nation*. As its name indicates, the ZX Spectrum was a home computer characterised by its bright vivid colours. The common contraction of the brand's title suggests its status as a non-serious piece of technology and integration into playground culture. Like early Japanese videogames its technological constraints tended towards a cartoon aesthetic. Additionally, many games drew on children's culture of the period, either through direct franchising, or by evoking the imagery of British comics. The graphic design of the isometric adventure game *Head Over Heels* is associated with the work of Jack Kirby, but also Leo Baxendale.<sup>81</sup> *Skool Daze* takes place in a two dimensional secondary modern inhabited by an archetypal cane-carrying headmaster, a swot and a bully. Involving a quest to retrieve an incriminating report card from a locked safe, the game is compared to a Dennis the Menace comic panel.<sup>82</sup> *Jack the Nipper*, released by Gremlin Graphics, is also seen as referencing the iconography of Willy the Kid and the Bash Street Kids. Players guided the eponymous infant through a range of puzzle-based acts of mischief, including shooting characters with peas, gluing false teeth together, and freeing prisoners from police cells. Testimony to the game's proximity to comic culture, Whitehead notes how a popular computer magazine ran a 'Beano-style' cartoon strip based on the character.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, in this uncensored environment several ZX Spectrum games were based on films not legally available to children of the time, such as *Friday the 13th*, (1980) *Deathwish 3*, (1985) *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and *Alien* (1979).<sup>84</sup> The extensive list of Spectrum titles also includes a survival horror adaptation of archetypal video nasty *The Evil Dead* (1981).

Game producers outside the UK similarly adapted children's screen media. Of the tie-ins Provenzo lists, *Duck Tales*, Snoopy, *Sesame Street* and Bugs Bunny represent a fairly secure relationship with children's culture, while the audience for adaptations of *RoboCop* (1987), *Predator* (1987) and *Platoon* (1986)

81 Dan Whitehead, *Specy Nation: A Tribute to the Golden Age of British Gaming* (The Zebra Partnership, 2012), 35.

82 Ibid. 39.

83 Ibid. 68–69.

84 Ibid. 4.

are less clear.<sup>85</sup> A digital game based on The Three Stooges constitutes an odd addition to the list, indicative of relationships between children, digital media, and much older forms of screen culture. Sheff claims that in 1989–1990 a certain demographic of children watched more shows based on Nintendo games than based on non-game related content, with series such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers* and *Duck Tales* translated into digital experiences.<sup>86</sup> Lally also notes links between home computers and traditions of children's culture in the presence of brands and characters such as Disney, Crayola, *Sesame Street*, *Scooby-Doo*, *The Flintstones* and Fisher Price. Such associations are considered a means of enhancing games' educational value, legitimising their relationship with young users, and diffusing adult alienation from this new addition to the home. Consequently, Lally emphasises continuities established between the domestic computer and existing cultural practices regarding children, claiming: 'The involvement of these cultural industries with their broad-ranging entertainment and educational interests is part of an ongoing process of integrating computer and software production into these interests, organized along the same lines.'<sup>87</sup> Toy manufacturers including Mattel and Hasbro, McAllister also notes, have divisions focusing on videogame development.<sup>88</sup> Adaptations of films and television shows continue to be disproportionately associated with children's media or family titles, as if the process of translating intellectual property into a digital game indicates the juvenility of its audience.

Videogames retained their association with children into the 1990s. In this era games appealing to a potential 'adult market' were so distinct from regular genres, such as adventure, arcade and sport games, that for the general manager of Activision they constituted a game category in their own right.<sup>89</sup> This reflects a significant inversion of other histories of screen media, where children's films and children's television programmes are the exception to an otherwise adult mainstream. By the 1990s the videogame

85 Provenzo, *Video Kids*, 18–19.

86 Sheff, *Game Over*, 8.

87 Lally, *At Home With Computers*, 59.

88 McAllister, *Game Work*, 18.

89 Provenzo, *Video Kids*, 11.

had been substantially relocated to the home, with one in three American households owning a games console.<sup>90</sup> Nintendo's dominance of the domestic industry is reflected in the company's synonymity with the medium itself. The origins of Nintendo are significant in redirecting Western videogames in favour of child players. Its origins date back to 1889 as a manufacturer of *hanafuda* playing cards. Although these elaborately designed products were not initially made for children, in 1959 Nintendo began printing licensed Disney characters on their cards,<sup>91</sup> constituting a significant alliance between the Japanese games manufacturer and a Western film company associated with children's ancillary products. The deal allowed Nintendo to extend its market to families and young people, advertising their products on television, and retailing them in toy shops.<sup>92</sup> Prior to moving into consoles, Nintendo developed a number of electronic toys, including a baseball pitching machine, a lightbeam shooting game, and a bongo drum synthesiser. This tradition of toy manufacturing continues to set Nintendo apart from its hardware-producing competitors. Notably Kohler identifies a distinct toy aesthetic to the design of the company's revamped version of the American Magnavox's Odyssey in the form of the Colour TV Game 6. 'In sharp stylistic contrast to the futuristic, black – or metal-colored machines that other Japanese companies released,' Kohler writes, 'the CTVG6 was bright orange and had rounded edges. It had a toy-like design sensibility about it.'<sup>93</sup> This design, Kohler argues, became more evident in subsequent machines, functioning to distinguish Nintendo systems from its rivals. In effect, there was a childness to Nintendo consoles which increasingly matched the software they supported.

Reflecting close connections between public and home videogames, 1983 saw the release of *Mario Bros* and 1985 *Super Mario Bros* on Nintendo

90 Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, 'Nintendo' and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue', in Steven G. Jones, ed., *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (London: Sage, 1995), 60.

91 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 29.

92 Sheff, *Game Over*, 19.

93 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 30.

home entertainment systems.<sup>94</sup> This is a series which Sheff sees as seminal, introducing wit, humour and whimsy in contrast to the 'shooting and mass destruction' of other videogame experiences.<sup>95</sup> It is considered central to the establishment of Nintendo and its mascot Mario as frontrunners in the international games industry. Sheff notes the influence of *Star Trek*, in the form of warp zones, and *Alice in Wonderland*'s size-changing mushrooms, while identifying a Dr Seuss sensibility in the design of the creatures which populate Mario's world.<sup>96</sup> Much of the series' fairy tale iconography, including captured princesses, elongating beanstalks, trap-filled dungeons and shape-shifting fungus continue to feature in current incarnations. Science fiction elements, such as space ships, giant boss robots and other futuristic technologies often complement neo-medieval aspects. The booklet which accompanied the game, quoted at length by Kohler,<sup>97</sup> resonates with themes of Western children's media. Its setting involves a magic kingdom, a peaceful race turned to stone by an evil invader, a princess in the clutches of a malignant ruler and a reluctant hero. These are the components of folk and fairy tales, fantasy literature and Disney movies. Provenzo also discusses the content of the top ten Nintendo videogames in terms of psychoanalytic consideration of children's play, noting recurring themes of 'rescue, revenge, and good versus evil'.<sup>98</sup> Jenkins connects the series' emphasis on journeying with the fantasy adventure stories of Middle Earth, Oz and Narnia, turn-of-the-century amusement park rides, and Disneyland where stories like *Peter Pan* and *Snow White* are transformed into spectacular experiences of movement through space.<sup>99</sup> Associations between digital games and early urban twentieth-century entertainment indicate the medium's roots in modes of modernity. In a more recently book on fairy tales in popular culture, Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek observe the translation of Disney films into videogames. The *Kingdom Hearts* series and the hack and

94 Poole, *Trigger Happy*, 42–43.

95 Sheff, *Game Over*, 3–4.

96 Sheff, *Game Over*, 50–51.

97 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 57.

98 Provenzo, *Video Kids*, 88.

99 Fuller and Jenkins, 'Nintendo and New World Travel Writing', 65.

slash *Fairytale Fights* represent the further influence of fairy tales on the medium. *The Path*, an independent game based on Red Riding Hood, is cited as a title which uses the interactive dimensions of the form to evoke the narrative multiplicity and indeterminacy of the oral tale. At the same time, the title's description as 'a psychological horror art game'<sup>100</sup> suggests that, as with other folk tale adaptations, a videogame's origins in fairy stories does not necessarily signify its relationship with child consumers.

Whittaker attributes Japan's dominance of the videogame market to the realisation that the world of digital games was not based on realistic representations, but the construction of 'an iconic empire of signs that may be translated easily from one market to another'.<sup>101</sup> This not only suggests the international marketability of digital games, but also their ready adaptation into other forms of media. Titles of the 1980s and 1990s, like animation, have a particularly simplified 'toyetic' quality. Consequently there appears to have been a profusion of children's merchandise surrounding this period of videogames enhancing the medium's marketing towards young audiences. Provenzo notes the significance of Nintendo-themed lunch boxes, sleeping bags, sweat shirts, wallpaper, dolls and posters, being 'products that have symbolic importance extending significantly beyond their utilitarian function for the cultural subgroup that buys them'.<sup>102</sup> Sheff also notes Nintendo-based products aimed at children, including breakfast cereals, mugs, board games and bed linen.<sup>103</sup> Drawing on interviews with Nintendo's then-president of marketing, Herz makes clear parallels between the merchandising strategies of the company and those of Disney,<sup>104</sup> as well as their core demographic of pre-teenage boys.<sup>105</sup> Throughout this period, the extra revenue, exposure and appeal to foreign markets resulting from the 'toyetic' aspects of these games may well have been fundamental to the

100 Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek, *Fairy Tales in Popular Culture* (London: Broadview Press, 2014), 136.

101 Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook*, 122.

102 Provenzo, *Video Kids*, 15.

103 Sheff, *Game Over*, 8–9.

104 Herz, *Joystick Nation*, 132.

105 Ibid. 136–137.

medium's success and the market's recovery. The later years of the 1990s, and of the century, saw what might be considered the most significant videogame franchise associated with children in the form of Nintendo's *Pokémon* series. Across Tobin's edited collection on the phenomenon, repeated evidence is presented of the significant popularity of *Pokémon* culture amongst young children. As one child is reported as saying: 'everybody talks about it almost all the time'.<sup>106</sup> David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green point out how, similar to the structure of children's broadcast television, different *Pokémon* products appealed to different age groups, from soft toys to a TV show to a trading card game to videogames, allowing developmental progression through the franchise.<sup>107</sup> The authors note how engagement with the series entailed a high level of knowledge, a factor which seemingly served to exclude adults from understanding the function or appeal of the 'craze'. As Christine R. Yano writes: 'Pokémon carries little (adult) cultural capital', citing this as one reason the series was regarded so unfavourably by older commentators.<sup>108</sup> Helen Bromley considers the ways children incorporated *Pokémon* into their schoolwork, having managed to find a classroom in which the franchise had not been banned,<sup>109</sup> further evidence of the series' popularity amongst children to the exclusion of adults. However, the range of significant ancillary products generated by the initial release of *Pokémon* as a handheld Gameboy title questions whether this strictly represents a videogame phenomenon. As Buckingham and Sefton-Green observe, 'there were millions of children who might be counted

106 Rebekah Willett, 'The Multiple Identities of Pokémon Fans', in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 227.

107 David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green, 'Structure, Agency, and Pedagogy in Children's Media Culture', in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 15–16.

108 Yano, 'Panic Attacks', 119.

109 Helen Bromley, 'Localizing Pokémon through Narrative Play', in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 211–225.

as Pokémon “fans” who never played the computer games and never will.<sup>110</sup> In the context of media for children, *Pokémon* might be more significant as a cinematic event. Anne Allison writes of how *Pokémon: The First Movie* (1999) upon release was shown on over 3,000 screens in the USA and two thousand in Japan.<sup>111</sup> Given the widespread bafflement amongst adults at children’s interest in the franchise, this represents a rare instance where a commercially released film achieved success playing across large numbers of mainstream cinemas, almost entirely through appealing to and addressing child audiences.

There are further ways in which videogames, as a medium, broadly address children and children’s culture. Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins present an interdisciplinary conversation between two critical theorists, a scholar of New World voyage narratives and a popular culture academic.<sup>112</sup> One of many insightful points made in this dialogue is the parallel between structures of colonial travel, videogames and expansionist rhetoric informing early discourses of cyberspace. The imaginary construction of the child as future resident of virtual reality, and as navigator of the videogame environment, is productively compared with children’s literature incorporating romantic colonial stories. This is a subject considered in more detail by Jenkins in a subsequent chapter, where continuities are drawn between British colonialism, the American ideology of ‘manifest destiny’ and adventurous quests and journeys into uncharted regions in children’s literature aimed at boys.<sup>113</sup> Connecting videogames and traditions of children’s culture, Jenkins sees digital media reproducing many aspects of the ‘backyard play’ of young males.<sup>114</sup> They offer a comparable space separate from parental surveillance, where boys can compete with each other, share

110 Buckingham and Sefton-Green, ‘Structure, Agency, and Pedagogy in Children’s Media Culture’, 19.

111 Anne Allison, ‘Cuteness as Japan’s Millennial Product’, in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu’s Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 37.

112 Fuller and Jenkins, ‘Nintendo and New World Travel Writing’.

113 Henry Jenkins, ‘Complete Freedom of Movement’, 278.

114 Ibid. 264.



advice and knowledge, and master skills of technology, dexterity and self-control. There they can engage in contained acts of aggression, violence and 'rambunctiousness', role play, and indulge in functions of the body. Jenkins concludes:

Far from a 'corruption' of the culture of childhood, video games show strong continuities with the boyhood play fondly remembered by previous generations.

This is not considered an unproblematic situation, as Jenkins asserts exploration of virtual space alone is no replacement for exploration in real life. The hypermasculinity and hyperviolence of many games provides a means for boys to separate themselves from maternal bonds, while often expressing itself in misogynistic and sexist imagery. Furthermore, game spaces are not constructed by children themselves, but are the product of adult corporations.<sup>115</sup> In this observation, Jenkins is unusual amongst scholars of videogames and children's media in engaging with adult-child power dynamics, and children's subordinate position in the social and cultural hierarchy. Nintendo power is no substitute for actual power. 'For children', Jenkins argues, the videogame apparatus 'offers the image of personal autonomy and bodily control that contrasts with their own subordinate position in the social formation.'<sup>116</sup> This subordination specifically relates to freedom of movement. Pointing to material conditions which compromise children's physical location within the modern city, Jenkins argues that for children living in urban areas this appears increasingly restricted by regulations prohibiting children from noisy outdoor play, by town planning which has reduced available free space, and increasing concerns about children's safety outside the family home. While commentators frequently see the medium as a cause rather than a consequence, Jenkins argues, videogames provide a virtual substitute for freedom increasingly curtailed by other forces. 'Video games did not make backyard play spaces

115 Ibid. 275–276.

116 Fuller and Jenkins, 'Nintendo and New World Travel Writing', 70.

disappear', Jenkins asserts, 'rather, they offer children some way to respond to domestic confinement'.<sup>117</sup>

Despite close cultural connections between children and videogames of the 1980s and 1990s, this relationship is not entirely straightforward. In the wake of the collapse of the US games industry, leading to a glut of unsold cartridges and consoles, there was significant commercial stigma surrounding the medium. To disassociate itself from Atari and Mattel systems, Nintendo did not market their videogame system as a toy. Sheff underlines the significance of language used to define their product in terms of the home computer rather than the games console. Consequently, the Nintendo Entertainment System was a 'control deck', an 'entertainment system' which ran 'game packs' rather than a videogame console which played cartridges.<sup>118</sup> Alongside previous media for children, and the emerging microcomputer, parents were courted with the promise of educational value. The NES came with the rarely explored capacity for a keyboard, as well as other peripherals such as a music add-on and a tape recorder.<sup>119</sup> Many games of this period, in their cartoon aesthetic and remediation of tropes of children's culture appear aimed at a young audience. At the same time, Kohler notes that Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of the *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Starfox* and *Pikmen* series, asserted, like Disney, that they do not make games for children, but rather for players of all ages.<sup>120</sup> There were also countertrends to the juvenilisation of games, in the emergence of the first person shooter, a more military-style genre, heralded by the release of *Doom* in 1993, and followed by *Quake* and *Unreal*. Notably such titles were primarily supported by PC rather than console technologies.<sup>121</sup> The open-ended home computer, despite being significantly defined as a gaming device, was also capable of more 'adult' activities such as accounts and word processing. In contrast to the toy-like design of entertainment systems this was not a technology aesthetically aligned with children, leading to the

117 Jenkins, 'Complete Freedom of Movement', 266.

118 Sheff, *Game Over*, 167.

119 Ibid. 160.

120 Kohler, *Power-Up*, 51–52.

121 Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook*, 125.

development of more mature game playing cultures. The mid-1990s saw the release of Sony's PlayStation, representing a new competitor in the games market with its industrial roots in electronic equipment rather than card games, electronic toys and Disney. Indicative of the approaching shift in videogames heralded by this period, two 'mascots' characterised the format.<sup>122</sup> Platform protagonist Crash Bandicoot appeared in a game which Poole, writing in 2000, considers to be 'the closest approach yet to a true interactive cartoon'.<sup>123</sup> In contrast, Lara Croft of the *Tomb Raider* series, in design and gameplay, was aimed at a notably older audience.

The subsequent decade sees a shift in videogame cultures towards more mature players. This was facilitated by the decline of Sega who stopped producing consoles in 2002 following the failure of the Dreamcast system<sup>124</sup> and the assertion of Sony and Microsoft. 2000 saw the release of the PlayStation 2 which constitutes a turning point in videogame culture's relationship with older consumers. By the twenty-first century the generation who grew up with Atari, Sega and Nintendo were now in their twenties and thirties. Whittaker sees the success of the PlayStation as a consequence of its marketing to older gamers, as 'arcade-players of the 1980s became the console-owners of the 1990s'.<sup>125</sup> The PlayStation 2 was followed in 2006 by the PlayStation 3 and in 2013 by the PlayStation 4. In 2001 Microsoft released the Xbox, a system of comparable sophistication which carried none of Sony's associations with the younger audience for the PS1. If Mario continued to be the mascot of Nintendo systems, the Xbox's flagship title was *Halo*,<sup>126</sup> a first person shooter set in a vast and complex science fiction universe, whose Master Chief is an enormous faceless bioengineered soldier. More recently, as Juul's account of the emergence of 'casual games' suggests, some titles, on some platforms, return to an earlier period of game history, prior to the emergence of the more adult gamer. Casual games are notably easy to play. They employ mimetic interfaces, like the Wii-mote

122 Kirriemuir, 'A History of Digital Games', 28.

123 Poole, *Trigger Happy*, 43–44.

124 Kirriemuir, 'A History of Digital Games', 29.

125 Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook*, 132.

126 Kirriemuir, 'A History of Digital Games', 30.

or the *Guitar Hero* instrument which represent high compatibility with on-screen action.<sup>127</sup> They do not necessitate mastery of complex control devices. In distinguishing casual and hardcore games, Juul describes the former as overwhelmingly 'positive' in ambiance and setting,<sup>128</sup> and in the feedback they give to players.<sup>129</sup> Young people are by no means excluded from the 'hardcore' game category, and the emphasis of Juul's argument is on casual games' appeal across generations. Nevertheless, there is something of childness in the author's description of this cycle of videogame development, in its proximity to the bright, simple, cartoon-like, non-threatening aspects of early games and children's culture. As Juul writes 'the sun always shines in casual games'.<sup>130</sup>

A revealing study, albeit approaching the issue of age and videogame play from a different perspective, is Helen Thornham's discussion of how adults justify and defend their own videogame play. Many of the author's respondents express a clear attempt to define such pastime in terms of modern adulthood, as a serious, rational, normal and logical activity. In discussion, players relate their purchasing of games consoles to the technology's functionality, or rather multifunctionality, being a device which facilitates a number of entertainment activities. This negates videogame play as the primary incentive for ownership. Interviewees emphasise their technological knowledge and competence, suggesting a particular display of adulthood when defending their engagement with entertainment associated with games, play and children. Entailed in this, suggestive of other identity formations with which the modern adult is contrasted, is a 'very particular performance of *male* heterosexual adult rationality'.<sup>131</sup> Female and queer-identified players appear notably more able to enact 'childish' roles within the households Thornham interviews. The social dimensions

127 Juul, *A Casual Revolution*, 34–35.

128 Ibid. 31.

129 Ibid. 45.

130 Ibid. 31.

131 Helen Thornham, 'Claiming a Stake in the Videogame: What Grown-Ups Say to Rationalize and Normalize Gaming', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 15/2 (2009), 144.

of gaming are emphasised, with notable associations drawn between solo gaming, masturbation and sexual inadequacy, suggesting an immaturity and dysfunctionality to playing alone. As the author asserts, while discourse constructs play as a beneficial developmental activity for children, there are no such positive associations for adults. Overall, Thornham's study suggests 'the uneasy relationship between play and adulthood or adult pastimes',<sup>132</sup> indicating that despite developments of the past fifteen years videogames remain strongly associated with children and childhood.

## Interactivity, Ludic Pedagogy and the Cbeebies Website

In their study of educational software packages Buckingham and Scanlon detail a number of categories of multimedia games. These include 'drill-and-practice' revision aids, 'fun learning' games which incorporate quizzes and puzzles, 'living books', 'reference works' and 'tools' such as drawing and animation kits. Despite these categories, the authors highlight how most software employ a range of formats, and that despite their 'newness' most packages, such as the 'living book' are adapted from traditional genres, formats and titles.<sup>133</sup> Many educational games draw on the aesthetics and traditions of children's media, in a similar way as film and television draw on literature and earlier forms of children's culture. Educational video-games mobilise a range of intersections between children, technology, play and learning. The digital games available on the British Broadcasting Corporation's Cbeebies website enhance this intersection through an alliance between historic and contemporary trends, such as public service broadcasting, government education policy, pedagogic parenthood, and what Buckingham and Scanlon observe as the increasing "curricularization" of family life'. This is a broad cultural tendency within Western cultures

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>133</sup> Buckingham and Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home*, 114.

whereby the child's domestic home becomes an extension of, or preparation for, the classroom informed by idealised concepts of 'good parenting' and 'healthy family life'.<sup>134</sup> Illustrating the extent to which the BBC has been implicated in such developments, Matt Briggs examines the operation of a 'CBeebies discourse' in relation to the corporation's digital channel for children aged six and under.<sup>135</sup> This emerges through a range of texts, many originating from the BBC itself, extolling the educational benefits of the corporation's television output for children. Such processes reproduce traditional positive associations between children, play, pedagogy and parenthood, while negotiating negative perceptions of media and technology as somehow contributing to an erosion of childhood. As with television, internet use and videogame play continue to be sceptically regarded as a potentially corrosive influence on children's education and socialisation. The CBeebies website works to construct the digital encounter as a beneficial learning experience, drawing upon the channel brand and the public service institution through which it is provided.

Many discourses supporting the CBeebies programmes and CBeebies online have roots in the early promotion of home computer technologies in the UK and other Western countries. Early marketing of the microcomputer to families saw the technology optimistically associated with children in a manner which appears at odds with historical anxieties concerning children and forms of new media. These are emolliated by the machine's multifunctionality, its association with white collar employment, the home computer's domestic location, and the consistent use of images of children in the marketing of this new appliance. Promotional culture thereby mobilises the figure of the child as representative of the future, a future driven by microchip technology. It is also a future in which the implied middle-class child will be all the more capable of succeeding thanks to responsible parents' early investment in technologies with which young people need to familiarise themselves. Nixon observes how in the 1990s the family, the home and young people were central to a range of educational, economic

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>135</sup> Matt Briggs, 'Beyond the Audience: *Teletubbies*, Play and Parenthood', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9/4 (2006), 446.

and cultural imperatives, entailing cooperation between Australian public services and commercial enterprises. The range of publications Nixon details reveal 'a common-sense link between proficiency with computer-mediated technologies and increased chances for educational success'.<sup>136</sup> Interviewees Lally speaks to consistently reproduce associations between home computers and children's educational achievement, something heavily implied in the advertising material the author surveys. One striking promotional example from *Family PC* magazine attributes the success of a twenty-five-year-old future female Harvard graduate earning a six-figure salary, to the purchase of a teddy bear-based computer game.<sup>137</sup> The British Broadcasting Corporation was involved in similar projects in the 1980s, launching its own computer, the BBC micro, aligned with a government initiative to encourage computer literacy in schoolchildren, much to the chagrin of local entrepreneurs.<sup>138</sup>

While public arcade games and technologies were associated with juvenile delinquency, Lally observes that in this formative period there was 'widespread belief that even game-playing is computer use and thus beneficial for children, assisting them to acquire generalized "computer literacy" skills'.<sup>139</sup> In this respect the computer, as a multifunctional machine which exists in both the home and the workplace, becomes the domestic tool for training an imagined future workforce. Such pedagogic associations facilitate the further promotion of software designed to develop broader educational aims beyond basic technical abilities. In such formations, the newness of the medium and the newness of children, observed by Messenger Davies<sup>140</sup> serves to define the computer as a pedagogic tool which will be 'fun' and 'exciting' in contrast to the 'old' 'boring' methods of traditional media such as chalk, pen and paper.<sup>141</sup> Given modern children's location is

136 Nixon, 'Fun and Games are Serious Business', 35.

137 Lally, *At Home With Computers*, 58.

138 Tristan Donovan, *Replay: The History of Video Games* (Lewes: Yellow Ant, 2010), 115–116.

139 Lally, *At Home With Computers*, 59.

140 Máire Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture*, 16–17.

141 Nixon, 'Fun and Games are Serious Business', 36.

the family home and the schoolroom, one of the impacts of such technologies is an effective integration of the domestic and the scholastic. According to Buckingham, the 1990s and 2000s in the UK saw increasing emphasis on parents contributing to their children's learning, part of a government-informed educationalist agenda, entailing rhetoric of empowerment, equality of opportunity and democracy, together with an older morally informed work ethic with the less enlightened intention of 'keeping idle hands busy'.<sup>142</sup> This is the context of Briggs' pedagogic CBeebies discourse, with its anxiety-inducing emphasis on 'good parenting'.<sup>143</sup> For Buckingham such processes entail an uneasy partnership between government and the private sector, and the emergence of an 'educational-technological complex' combining journalists, researchers, advertising agencies, commercial organisations and branches of the government.<sup>144</sup> Digital learning tools into the twenty-first century have increasingly addressed babies and pre-school children, the age group targeted by the CBeebies website. Software of this kind, Buckingham relates, relies heavily on visual material, on stories and ludic formats in order to implement 'more informal, less didactic styles of address' with an emphasis on interactivity.<sup>145</sup>

The author associates such developments with the early twentieth-century toy market, connecting play with education, a recurring theme of modern children's media. Contemporary software furthermore reproduces the work of eighteenth-century children's material culture as discussed by Cunningham, 'a culture controlled by adults and designed fundamentally to manipulate the child into learning by pretending it was play'.<sup>146</sup> Within the current market, this emphasis on play extends across children's cultural landscape. In a self-reflexive commentary Briggs writes of the extent to which their own child's environment is filled with 'toyalsed objects', including clothing, interior decoration and the distribution of playful

142 David Buckingham, *Beyond Technology: Children's Learning in the Age of Digital Culture* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2008), 119–120.

143 Briggs, 'Beyond the Audience'.

144 Buckingham, *Beyond Technology*, 12.

145 Ibid. 123–124.

146 Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, 125.



products across their domestic space. Such a habitus reproduces a 'ludic disposition' informed by contemporary popular pedagogy in which 'to play is to learn'. The CBeebies website is informed by a similar 'ludic pedagogy'<sup>147</sup> which, as Briggs points out in relation to CBeebies television, parallels the developmental ethos in British television for children. Supported by government policy, the CBeebies channel effects a combination of fields already associated with children: parent and teacher, home and school, education and entertainment. As well as a curricularisation of the domestic space, it also entails a curricularisation of younger children, consistent with the courting of this group as a market for commercial educational books, DVDs and websites, such as the Baby Einstein range.<sup>148</sup> These developments inform the pedagogic remit of the CBeebies brand. Writing in the late 2000s, Briggs notes the extent to which the channel's website positions its content in relation to pre-school learning initiatives located in the home, intended to support parents in teaching their children.<sup>149</sup> Although the focus of Briggs' study is the online space as a forum for carers to discuss the brand's television output, the overriding association between education and play has even stronger resonance when it comes to the ludic content of the channel's website.

Here traditional associations between game playing, children and learning are reimagined and mediated through the domestic computer. However, despite the fit between children, play and education, this translation is not straightforward. As Nixon notes in early educational games, the stigma associated with videogames required these digital experiences to distinguish themselves from others in an attempt to maintain established educational hierarchies.<sup>150</sup> Writing in 2007, Buckingham predicts that educational media will increasingly incorporate licensed characters, while suggesting the potential problems of such synergies in compromising the brand identity of both educational products and their source material. The

147 Briggs, 'Beyond the Audience', 451–452.

148 Buckingham, *Beyond Technology*, 122–123.

149 Matt Briggs, 'BBC Children's Television, Parentcraft and Pedagogy: Towards the "Ethicalization of Existence"', *Media, Culture and Society* 31/3 (2009), 26–27.

150 Nixon, 'Fun and Games are Serious Business', 37.

bankruptcy of one publisher in particular is attributed to efforts to capitalise upon the *Star Wars* franchise for educational purposes.<sup>151</sup> The games on the CBeebies website, explored throughout July 2016, manage such tensions by evoking the educationally explicit reputation Briggs sees in the CBeebies channel,<sup>152</sup> together with the public service brand of the BBC itself. As with the 'BBC Jam' schools initiative Buckingham discusses, the public funding of the corporation means its website is unburdened with the necessity of direct payment through subscription, advertising or more intrusive product placement. It can also capitalise on consumer familiarity, and the cross-promotional potential of deriving from an established media organisation.<sup>153</sup> The CBeebies website can be promoted on the channel, and in turn promotes the shows and their merchandise, even if this is not explicitly present. There are, for example, no conspicuous links to a CBeebies online store. Briggs similarly considers the tension between education and risk in relation to children's exposure to screen media, a tension which can be resolved through the application of 'appropriate' parenting.<sup>154</sup> Accordingly, the CBeebies website has a 'Grown-ups' tab in the top right corner, leading to sections on 'Learning Areas', 'Parenting help' and 'Ready for school'. The first of these contains aspects on reading and writing, craft and cooking, maths and puzzles, related to the shows *Alphablocks*, *I Can Cook* and *The Numtums*. The site clearly fits into the 'early learning' market as defined by Buckingham and Scanlon. Games and activities are presented within a framework of 'fun learning', they are based on media-licensed characters, and they claim to support a range of curriculum requirements.<sup>155</sup> There is also an immediate childness to the CBeebies website. With bright colours throughout, large picture buttons which illuminate when rolled over, striking visuals and cartoon aesthetics, the site conforms to many digital and non-digital characteristics of children's culture. The banner which heads

151 Buckingham, *Beyond Technology*, 126.

152 Briggs, 'Beyond the Audience', 453.

153 Buckingham, *Beyond Technology*, 128–129.

154 Briggs, 'BBC Children's Television, Parentcraft and Pedagogy', 24.

155 Buckingham and Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home*, 34–35.

the page contains various incarnations of the CBeebies 'bug' engaged in a number of actions which showcase the range of material the site has to offer. The channel's computer-generated mascot, a plastic yellow creature with a rounded triangular form, is the very embodiment of animation plasticity. Menu items include 'shows', 'watch & sing', 'make and colour' and 'topics' suggesting a combination of educational and entertainment traditions of children's culture. Topic sections include 'art', 'food', 'literacy', 'numeracy' and 'music', along with 'animals', 'dinosaurs', 'space' and 'pirates'. The latter was a particular theme of the channel during this period, largely associated with the show *Swashbuckle*, reflecting traditional tropes of romance and adventure in early children's books. The home page also has a 'join in' section where viewers are invited to send images and videos of themselves, digitally extending traditions of children's participation and community in British broadcasting. Consistent with the BBC's public service remit, many of these function to connect young people with current events of distinctly nationalist orientation. There is a torch-making exercise associated with the Olympic Games, football celebrations related to Euro 2016 and messages for the Queen's birthday. An exercise which involved children singing a song from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* indicates the continued impetus for the BBC's children's provision to introduce young people to improving examples of high culture.

Games and ludic activities of the CBeebies website fulfil a number of functions. The most prominent activity on the site throughout the period of this survey had very little explicit pedagogic content. This was a digital tie-in to the newly rebooted *Danger Mouse* cartoon series. The game follows the structure of any number of mobile phone apps, as players guide the hero and his sidekick through a scrolling landscape collecting coins and fruit. Many generic videogame elements such as collapsing floors, lifts, teleportation pods and bounce pads are present, evoking a range of child-orientated platform series such as *Mario* and *Sonic the Hedgehog*. Representative of the kind of casual gaming Juul discusses,<sup>156</sup> there is no real sense of failure. Adversaries are present in the game's environment,

but they are incapable of impacting upon the player's progress. A more challenging form of the game was available on the CBBC website, aimed at children from six to twelve, which introduces greater control of characters, use of weapons, stealth and the possibility of losing lives. This suggests the intended audience for *Danger Mouse* itself overlaps older and younger audiences. A developmental model informs the channel's digital provision, whereby players progress from one game, and website, to the other. As one of the more 'videogame-like' activities available, *Danger Mouse* contrasted with other more pedagogic games specifically aimed at younger viewers. For example the *Ruff-Ruff*, *Tweet and Dave Game* reproduces the aesthetics of the top-down racing genre, as the show's three characters drive around a track in different coloured cars. Despite such organisation, the player is unable to control the vehicles. Instead, in an exercise designed to develop mouse skills, players are cued to manipulate various aspects of the environment allowing the cars to cross hurdles and gaps in the road. This involves dragging, rotating and clicking objects as instructed. The disjuncture between the aesthetics of the racing game and the actions players perform might reflect what Buckingham notes as the 'impoverished and constraining' nature of educational games in comparison to their 'real' commercial equivalents.<sup>157</sup>

*The Clangers' Magnificent Mending* game, based on another recently rebooted show, fits into the sub-genre of the 'mystery' or 'puzzle' category as classified by Buckingham and Scanlon.<sup>158</sup> This activity reflects the repetitive structure of much young children's television programmes. Following a brief video sequence showing the aliens' possessions being scattered by a sudden change in atmosphere, players are tasked with retrieving and repairing a series of objects. The task entails progressing through a series of scenes. First players locate a hotspot on the Clangers' planet. This segues to an image of a Clanger unable to reach their lost possession, which the player must repeatedly click to dislodge. Next, a brief cut-scene shows the alien returning to their underground home, a steampunk version of the Teletubbies' bunker, where they contemplate the missing part

157 Buckingham, *Beyond Technology*, 132.

158 Buckingham and Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home*, 114.

they need. Players are then presented with a series of objects to repair the Clanger's possession. Selecting one of these objects leads to a penultimate interactive scene where the replacement must be dragged onto the broken tool. If it is a match, the thing is fixed, and a concluding sequence sees the Clanger illustrate its restored functionality. The inclusion of this cut-scene at the end of the game would appear to follow the same structure as the 'early learning' games Buckingham and Scanlon consider critically, where video sequencers merely constitute a fun 'reward' for completing the activity.<sup>159</sup> Yet the sight of the Clanger successfully using their newly fixed tool is contextualised within the activity, representing a logical and motivating conclusion to the action the player has carried out. In this respect the game is 'compelling and motivating ... intellectually, but also emotionally and physiologically',<sup>160</sup> aspects the authors argue are present in mainstream videogames but absent in ones designed for educational purposes. Throughout this process the television show narrator provides instruction, and once it has been completed the player returns to the planet to help another character. The activity appears intended to teach mouse skills, but also shape recognition, problem solving, and the language of digital location devices. Aside from clear connections with the show, there is also a 'mousetrap machinery' aesthetic in the combination of disparate domestic objects, together with a sense of surrealism identified in British children's television. A pencil can be used as an alternative antenna for a damaged radio hat. A tap replaces the spout on a watering can. A pair of glasses serves as the lens for a broken telescope. The game reproduces themes and iconography of previous children's screen culture. It combines the teaching of computer skills and other pedagogic aims. It is narratively structured, and features characters which are familiar to both children and parents who enjoyed previous incarnations of the series.

While it is possible to speculate on the pedagogic intentions of these activities, they are not made explicit. In contrast, *Andy's Prehistoric Park*, another game prominently present on the website, is accompanied by assertions that it has been designed to help 'emotions behaviour', 'understanding

159 Ibid. 35.

160 Ibid. 113.

the world', 'pre-school' and 'school'. Regarding Buckingham and Scanlon's typography, this is largely an 'exploration' game, although it also has superficial aspects of the educational simulation.<sup>161</sup> In a structure corresponding to the levels of commercial videogames, players are presented with a series of sequentially unlocked prehistoric terrains, including tundra, arid, swamp and grasslands. Gameplay involves clicking and dragging various elements into the two-dimensional game space in order to maintain and build this environment for the prehistoric creature it contains. Combining a seed with water produces a bush. Dragging another seed onto this makes the bush produce fruit. Placing a seed outside a cave, itself the combination of two rocks, causes a marsupial to emerge. Each of these achievements, using another videogame trope, is rewarded with trophies in the form of 'I spy' challenges. The labelling of this process might be considered a reference to the traditional game, or the series of children's spotting books still in circulation. In order for the player to progress, the right materials must be combined to activate the required animation. Rather than reflecting a logical relationship between virtual activity and achievement, as in the *Clangers* game, this is more a process of random experimentation and elimination. Insofar as these animated changes to the environment are accompanied by nuggets of information, the activity has aspects of 'information retrieval' that Buckingham and Scanlon observe in early digital dictionaries and encyclopaedias.<sup>162</sup> Each achievement is accompanied by various fun facts communicated by host and tutor Andy. The tundra is home to a woolly mammoth who players soon learn is an herbivore. Planting a seed on rock causes lichen to form, and Andy to explain that this is a plant which does not need soil to grow. In a less playful manner than *Horrible Histories*, these points of information are often contextualised in terms of our current period. Upon discovering flowers, the player is told that these represent the ancestors of contemporary plant life. Prehistoric fruit, players are told, is similar to the fruit found today but quite different to products available in the shops. The marsupial is a relative of our kangaroo. This game combines aspects of commercial videogames

161 Ibid. 114.

162 Ibid. 118–120.

and the educational packages Buckingham and Scanlon critique, as well as broader tropes of media for children. The 'prehistoric park' reflects the presence of dinosaurs in children's culture, a creature which straddles both entertainment and education in its combination of mythology and natural history. Like the garden, the park has Romantic associations with children, and the actions the player performs are connected to nature, such as feeding animals, growing plants and nurturing the landscape. The activity also slyly references the recently rekindled film franchise *Jurassic Park*. At the same time it is hard not to associate Andy, in his safari outfit, with the colonial adventure narratives of earlier literature which continue to inform children's culture.

If the discourse of play is a common means of framing the educational dimensions of the BBC's digital games provision, a sense of interaction has a long tradition within television for children, and other media. The children's matinee movement expressed a keen sense that children should not simply be watching films, but also singing songs together, joining in competitions, and becoming involved in the local community. Broadcasting for children, including radio and television, has a historical emphasis on the importance of activity. A sense of implied interaction can be seen in the many ways children's presenters address their audience directly, asking questions, or encouraging viewers to copy what they see on screen. This established trope, which appears particularly prominent in television addressed to younger children, has the possibility of becoming actual interaction when remediated into the digital environment of the CBeebies website. These connections are evident in the integration of digital game and video clips in *On the Road with Katy*, a spin-off of the aforementioned *I Can Cook*. As a cookery programme this is a series with clear instructive dimensions, not to mention a public spirited remit to encourage healthy eating. The game is divided into three stages relating to four spaces associated with four different recipes. Visiting a castle involves gathering ingredients for a royalty-themed strawberry crown, first by moving a van up and down the lanes of a road, collecting milk, fruit and basil along the way. This process is narrated by the presenter who gives instruction and puts the activity into a culinary context. Next is a game reminiscent of a point-and-click adventure which entails finding cooking implements contained in a series of suitcases.



Together with audio advice there are clear visual cues in the illumination of buttons required to progress and the appropriate object to click. The third stage of the activity is not a game but a video of the presenter with four children shown making the strawberry crown. This clip nevertheless illustrates ludic and interactive continuities between the videogame and the television show. Throughout the seven-minute sequence Katy not only instructs young participants on how to make the recipe, but also encourages the children to rise up like self-raising flour, an activity the audience at home are also invited to perform. Measuring ingredients involves 'the weighing game' in which the children on screen, and implicitly those at home, shout 'more' or 'less' until they achieve the correct portion of flour. Katy asks the children where milk comes from, then joins in with them mooing like a cow. When the children mix their dough the presenter mimes the action for the audience at home who may not have a bowl and spoon but can imaginatively join in nonetheless. A concluding game involves a more open-ended activity, decorating a table for a party.

Analysing discussions amongst carers on the CBeebies website, Briggs identifies three overlapping discourses, the Romantic, the pedagogic and the curricular. Always working in opposition to the competing discourse of a 'toxic' childhood corrupted by media consumption, a perspective which certainly finds resonance in children's engagement with videogames, these counter-discourses work to define watching television as a positive and beneficial experience for children and adults. The Romantic discourse emphasises children's playful exuberance and pleasure in screen media. The pedagogic discourse emphasises the learning experience of watching CBeebies. The curricular discourse, which seems less prominent in the website's current incarnation, entails a professionalisation of this learning content in the context of government education policies supported by the BBC. Pleasure and pedagogy represent two forces in the definition of appropriate children's media which appear in dialogue throughout its history. This tension is reflected in the antagonism between didactic books for children, and the idea that children's literature should engage the wonder and imagination of the child reader. It is evident in assertions that films made for children should contain improving messages, while acknowledging that children's tastes often conflict with such worthy material. It is



apparent in the conflict between television as educational and television as entertainment. In Briggs' example, these oppositions are reconciled through the pedagogic principle that 'children "learn through play"'.<sup>163</sup> The intersection of the video clip and the interactive content in *On the Road with Katy* makes evident the overlap between the address of the traditional CBeebies show and the kinds of engagement afforded by digital interactivity. When in the game Katy asks where her work mat is, she is following a tradition in children's television where presenters ask the audience directly for help, pose questions, or require viewers to perform some mimetic activity. Conversely, when Katy shows children how to weigh flour in the video clip she turns it into a game. There is even a connection between the creative freedom the children are afforded in decorating their strawberry crowns with fruit, an evocation of the Romantic discourse, and the *paidia* table-laying task with which the game concludes. Play, games, interaction have always been a feature of children's television, a foundation of its pleasure and pedagogic structure. It should not be surprising that digital content for young children so easily remediates such features and functions.

## Childness, Colonialism and *Little Big Planet*

Writing in 2010, Tom Bissell provides a journalistic account of their visit to a Las Vegas digital entertainment summit, and the various games being promoted and discussed at the event. These included a Tom Clancy-based first-person shooter, a *Grand Theft Auto*-style sandbox game, war simulators and other triple-A games, a category defined as 'shooters, RPGs, fighting games, and everything else aimed at the eighteen-to thirty-four male demographic'.<sup>164</sup> At the end of this tale, Bissell observes, almost as a postscript, the surprise winner of practically every prize at the annual awards

163 Briggs, 'BBC Children's Television, Parentcraft and Pedagogy', 29.

164 Tom Bissell, *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 74.

ceremony, a British title named *Little Big Planet*. Originally designed by Media Molecules and published exclusively on Sony's PlayStation consoles, since its original release in 2008 *LBP* has produced two sequels, in 2011 and 2014, and two separate releases on the PlayStation Portable and PlayStation Vita in 2009 and 2012. *LBP*'s unique selling point was that as well as being a videogame containing some fifty levels, it is also a level-designing tool. Completing the game involves collecting 'prize bubbles' containing materials, mechanical devices, objects, stickers, decorations and sound effects which can be reassembled by the player to create their own games. These can then be uploaded to the *LBP* website via the PlayStation Network, making them accessible to anyone with a copy of the game. At the time of writing there were over nine and a half million examples of this user-generated content, although the number is likely to hit ten million by the time of publication. *Little Big Planet*'s invitation to 'Play, Create, Share' is a suggestion many users have clearly followed. *LBP*'s critical and creative success suggests a broad audience of players for the title. Nevertheless, many features define the series as a digital game of childness. The introduction and tutorial is cheekily narrated by British celebrity Stephen Fry. The fact the franchise is narrated at all is notable, aligning the series with traditions of storytelling. Casting the voice of the *Harry Potter* audio books coincides with *LBP*'s quirky English humour, its evocation of existing children's culture and its relation to the country's national and political establishment. According to Bissell's narrative, the surprise of *LBP*'s surprise winnings significantly derives from the title's distinction from the more adult-themed and aestheticised games over which it triumphed. These include such blockbuster franchises as *Fallout*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Gears of War*, games replete with militaristic, futuristic and post-apocalyptic iconography. In contrast, the author identifies *LBP* as 'a game aimed largely at children'. As an exclusive PlayStation title, *LBP* stands out as distinctly 'cute', 'playful', 'cartoon-like'. Bissell's description of the game as featuring 'wooden giraffes, doll-like banditos, and goofily unscary ghosts' indicates ways the series incorporates imagery drawn from the nursery, and the unthreatening adversaries which constitute its menagerie of obstacles. The title's central customisable protagonist, and winner of the 'Outstanding Character Performance' award is 'a toylike calico

gremlin',<sup>165</sup> a doll made of photorealistic brown material called Sackboy. Featuring in all *LBP* games, the character's name was later converted to the more androgynous 'Sackthing' to acknowledge the extent to which it has always been possible to design the avatar as either male or female. There is a childness to *LBP*, which this chapter will explore. This quality is evident in the series' genre, its diminutive sense of scale, its remediation of mousetrap machinery, and evocation of colonial adventure narratives.

While Kerr notes the lack of clarity in generic definitions,<sup>166</sup> *LBP* can be confidently described as a platform game. This is a genre implicated in the early defining of games as a form of children's popular culture. Whittaker considers *Donkey Kong*, the 1980s game which initiated the shift in design towards a more cartoon-like aesthetic, along with 1990s console games *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Crash Bandicoot*, as exemplifying the cycle.<sup>167</sup> The first *Mario* game involves the literal navigation of platforms in order to reach the gorilla and rescue Pauline. *Sonic the Hedgehog* on the Sega systems, which rivalled Nintendo before the PlayStation era, developed the platform game in a more dynamic manner, but continued the genre's association with colourful two dimensional landscapes and animated characters. This is a cycle steeped in cartoon iconography. Poole sees a particularly cartoon-like method of dispatching the villains in Mario's world, who are destroyed not through weaponry but by knocking them over and kicking them off the screen world.<sup>168</sup> Subsequent developments in games technology led to the traditional platformer falling from favour in preference for three dimensional games and genres, most prominently the explicitly aggressive first person shooter associated with the AAA adult-orientated cycle detailed above. Writing in 2000, Poole considers the platform game an outdated genre resulting from the transition to 3D gaming, and processes of hybridisation whereby aspects of the platformer have been incorporated into other titles, such as *Tomb Raider*.<sup>169</sup> This series represented a significant shift in

165 Ibid. 88–89.

166 Kerr, *The Business and Culture of Digital Games*, 38.

167 Whittaker, *The Cyberspace Handbook*, 130.

168 Poole, *Trigger Happy*, 42.

169 Ibid. 44.

appealing to more mature gamers, exemplified by virtual celebrity Lara Croft. Subsequent examples of the genre often exhibit a 'retro' appeal. As a traditional platformer, one unfolding in two, or rather, two and a half dimensions, *Little Big Planet* evokes these games of the past, combining them with a photorealism evocative of the stop-frame animation of children's television shows. The game series, as observed by many commentators, engages in a nostalgia for old toys, puppets, wooden animals, television of the 1970s and the consoles and home computers of the 1980s. Its childness, while not inconsistent with contemporary children's culture, appears as much designed to appeal to the adult PlayStation owner.

The title of the series is notable for the word 'little'. This connects a contemporary franchise of digital media with continuing discourses of diminutiveness pertaining to children and their culture. In the introduction to Messenger Davies' study of children's media, the author attempts to determine the ontological aspects of a child. Size comes fourth in a list of eleven defining characteristics. As Messenger Davies writes:

A child is smaller than most adults, and he/she starts life *very* small ... A child is differentially proportioned than an adult: his/her head is bigger in proportion to the body, and other proportions vary too.<sup>170</sup>

The unavoidable biological fact that children tend to be littler in stature than adults, as discussed previously, gives rise to a range of associations including children as small, cute, helpless, in need of protection, insignificant, easily overlooked. Littleness is an aspect of both representations of the child and cultures for young people, collapsing the childness of the child into the childness of children's perceived interests. The presence of smallness is considered in Carol Mavor's discussion of child photographers, and identified as a theme in such classic literature as *The Borrowers* and *Stuart Little*.<sup>171</sup> Steedman writes of the recurring significance of 'littleness' in their

170 Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture*, 10.

171 Carol Mavor, 'Introduction: The Unmaking of Childhood', in Marilyn R. Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 28.

study,<sup>172</sup> while in the context of Victorian fairy tales, Susan P. Casteras parallels the size of these mythical figures, the miniature worlds they inhabit and the smallness of children and infants.<sup>173</sup> An entire chapter is dedicated to 'smallness' in Jerry Griswold's study of tropes in children's literature, along with 'snugness', 'scariness', 'lightness' and 'aliveness'. Examples include the dwarfs of Snow White, the Munchkins of Oz, Tom Thumb, Miss Tiggy-Winkle and Peter Rabbit, the Indian in the cupboard, *Antz* (1998), *A Bug's Life* (1998) and *Toy Story*. When Griswold argues that 'juveniles seem to own the terrain of the miniature' the author refers both to the smallness of characters and the tiny worlds in which they live.<sup>174</sup> Messenger Davies writes of the tendency for children's literature, if not featuring child characters, to feature child-like figures significantly 'at the mercy of bigger, older and more powerful beings'.<sup>175</sup> The 'gremlins' in Bissell's description of *LBP*, like many child-centred videogame avatars, conform to the child-like physical dimensions Messenger Davies details. Sackthing exists in a frequently oversized world of huge boiling kettles, giant oranges and footballs, skateboards the size of buses, bookshelves the length of bridges, towering milk bottles, and enormous cakes. One of the three new characters *LBP3* introduces is Toggle, a pear-shaped figure who can switch in size to navigate narrow corridors, thereby reaching otherwise inaccessible areas. To underline this theme, Toggle is often depicted carrying a miniature doll version of itself. Several orchestrated end of level battles involve players fleeing from or fighting gigantic mechanical creatures which occupy the entire height of the screen, while the avatar is reduced to a tiny figure by the retracting camera. The game's design tool allows any object to be resized, enlarged or contracted, meaning that the objects in Sackthing's world might exist

172 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 9.

173 Susan P. Casteras, 'Winged Fantasies: Constructions of Childhood, Innocence, Adolescence, and Sexuality in Victorian Fairy Painting', in Marilyn R. Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 130.

174 Jerry Griswold, *Feeling Like a Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 51.

175 Messenger Davies, *Children, Media and Culture*, 137.

entirely out of proportion to each other. Complementing this play with size and scale is a play with animation. These qualities relate to Mavor's discussion of the 'animated home'<sup>176</sup> and Griswold's discussion of 'aliveness' in the talking animals, living toys, dishes, spoons and toasters in children's literature.<sup>177</sup> In the world of *LBP* most adversaries the player encounters are basically inanimate objects. These are given life by the attachment of 'brains' which, as the tutorial for level production illustrates, can be programmed to reproduce a range of movements and even to respond to their environment with a degree of logical intelligence. Such aspects of aliveness take a notably uncanny turn in the game's PSVita version, with its unsettling imagery of dolls, clowns and puppets.

A preoccupation of early videogame scholars was the definition of their area of study, distinguishing videogames from other media such as film, literature and drama. Much of this work was, implicitly or explicitly, intended as a provocative response to authors focusing on the narrative potential of digital games as a form of 'interactive cinema'. Gonzalo Frasca's identification of 'simulation' as a core principle of videogames' operation represents one such 'ludological' intervention. According to Frasca, a unique and defining principle and expressive affordance of the videogame is its ability to dynamically simulate environments and situations. Such a paradigm is proposed as a more appropriate way of understanding the formal qualities of a game, its rules, structures and mechanics, in contrast to narrative or representational-based models derived from previous media. This is considered an aspect of all games. Chess simulates the battlefield. Monopoly simulates processes of capitalist acquisition and accumulation. But it is only the advent of computer technology which allows the modelling of complex systems seen in contemporary videogames. As Frasca writes:

Simulation does not simply retain the – generally audiovisual – characteristics of the object but it also includes a model of its behaviors. This model reacts to certain stimuli (input data, pushing buttons, joystick movements), according to a set of

176 Mavor, 'Introduction', 28.

177 Griswold, *Feeling Like a Kid*.

conditions ... video games are just a particular way of structuring simulation, just like narrative is a form of structuring representation.<sup>178</sup>

The value of this perspective for games designers and critics is illustrated with various hypothetical and actual examples. Flight simulators, interactive car adverts, a game which enacts the organisation of a strike, are different from narrative and representational media such as a photograph of a plane, a television car commercial, or a novel about a strike. While valuable in their own ways, such media convey comparatively little of the experience of flying an aircraft, driving the automobile, or managing an industrial dispute.

Although possible to consider the simulation of videogames in relation to the postmodern simulacrum, such qualities within videogames are highly rule-based, logical and mathematical. The videogame simulation is one of modern rationality, as is the ludologist's approach itself which marginalises issues of representation or aesthetics in emphasising the gameplay experience as determined by structure and procedures. Accordingly *LBP* is a world bound by the Newtonian principles upon which Western science and technology are founded. Every object is subject to laws of gravity, inertia, acceleration, force and tension. Depending on their physical properties, objects interact with objects within their locality in a predictable manner which models, albeit in a slightly exaggerated way, the operation of objects in the real world. Many spaces must be navigated through an application of such principles, involving the manipulation of see-saws, balancing forces, springs and pendulums. Even Sackthing is prone to the principles of extreme animation physics, sliding slightly before coming to a halt in a manner which can be challenging to control. Elements of randomness appear to exist, such as the impact of an explosive being dropped onto a wooden platform. But this is rather the consequence of complex forces at work within the simulation, determined by the trajectory of the player, the point at which they hold the bomb, the momentum of the incendiary device as it falls through the air, all of which influence in subtle yet

178 Gonzalo Frasca, 'Simulation Versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology', in Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds, *The Video Game Theory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 223–224.

calculable ways the point of impact and its consequences. Despite a sense of the bizarre, the carnival, the cute which defines the game's aesthetics, from a simulational perspective *LBP* unfolds in a rational rule-based environment, exemplifying the worldview of the Enlightenment.

Complementing the Newtonian principles of its environment, *LBP* is also a landscape of mechanical objects. Lifts, pulleys and vehicles facilitate the player's movement through the world, although such contraptions express a handmade aesthetic, constructed from cardboard, cotton reels and string. Reflecting the mechanisation of organic beings in early animation, living creatures are rendered machine-like in their navigational functionality, while mechanical objects are imbued with a quirky sense of agency and personality. Like many subsequent authors, Frasca applies the terminology of Roger Caillois in distinguishing different forms of videogame play. These exist on a sliding scale between open ended *paidia* games, and more structured linear games defined by qualities of *ludus*.<sup>179</sup> The former Frasca considers a less modernist mode, reflecting a more pluralist world view than the deterministic *ludus* game which is considered 'the simulational structure of choice for modernist simauthors'.<sup>180</sup> *Paidia* allows for multiple gameplay strategies, goals and endings, while *ludus* play is more rigid, inflexible and singular. *LBP* is a clear example of the latter. There is typically only a solitary route from one side of the screen to the other. Play involves defeating adversaries, leaping over dangers such as fire and spikes, pressing buttons, pulling levers and riding vehicles in a pre-defined sequence. Puzzles only have one solution, involving the location and appropriate placing of objects, the identification of weak spots in adversaries, or the manipulation of environments to activate switches in the correct order. Game levels are structurally obliged to have only one concluding point. Upon completion of a level Sackthing is showered with confetti and the player presented with a mathematical score based on the percentage of points they have amassed. Further prizes are awarded for completing a level, or managing to get to the end without losing a life. In

179 Ibid. 229–230.

180 Ibid. 231.



characterising *ludus* play *LBP* represents a videogame experience informed by the mathematical principles of modernity.

These simulational dimensions become more significant in the game-designing mode of *LBP*, a process which is also unforgivingly mechanical. Players are introduced to this aspect of the series as they move sequentially through the pre-designed levels, learning how the game operates, not only as players but as potential designers, in preparation for their own engagement with the *LBP* community. Successive zones are organised to showcase various features of the games engine, including lighting effects, explosives, 'emitters' which make objects magically materialise, and vehicles. Encountering these features also involves collecting them, in the form of 'prize bubbles' which add an increasing range of possibilities to the designer's toolkit. The switches, rods, cogs and pulleys through which game elements become animated are often left visible in pre-designed levels, rendering the operation of *LBP* bare, like the strings of a marionette or the mousetrap mechanics of *Wallace and Gromit*. More significantly, in displaying its operation in such a manner, *LBP* is teaching players how to play and also how to create, exemplifying Buckingham and Sefton-Green's discussion of pedagogy in *Pokémon* culture.<sup>181</sup> If playing the pre-defined levels of *LBP* is a structured *ludus* process, designing games appears entirely *paidia*, allowing the player considerable latitude in assembling the various objects, materials and mechanics they have collected. It does, however, remain an enterprise rooted in logic and causality, contained by the rigid affordances and limitations of the game's physics system. The animated environments users generate must be programmed by the player employing the game's intuitive interface. As in the game, there is an emphasis on physics, even in this highly virtual space. Components are selected from a bag-like icon. They are arranged in space and brought together with the accompaniment of cartoon sounds of hammers banging, saws sawing and glue sticking. Holding the environment in suspension produces distortion emulating pressing pause on a VCR. Sackthing remains on-screen as a humanoid cursor, linking the abstracted building mode with the more concrete play-

181 Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 'Structure, Agency, and Pedagogy'.

able levels and the objects they contain. The avatar can even interact as a body within the constructed world as it is being pulled together. Materials are defined less by aesthetics and more by their physical qualities. Fabric can be grabbed by the player. Glass presents a slippery surface to run across, in contrast to rubber which exerts considerable friction. Foam floats away if not tethered down. Dark matter resists the force of gravity, providing a useful means of suspending objects in space. Levels are made by combining these elements, along with objects the player has collected. However, if the space is not correctly programmed, if pulleys are not connected, if objects are left hanging in space without being anchored to the physical environment, the level will fall apart. The PlayStation Network is full of *LBP* levels which, due to the ruthless nature of the game designing tool, are practically unplayable.

*Little Big Planet*'s universe is determined by principles of Newtonian physics with an explicit emphasis on the mechanical, even if, like mousetrap machinery, it is based on a domesticised representation of technology glued ineptly together combining household objects and materials. The game world is organised around displaying its virtual mechanics, and in teaching players the strict rules of the world along with the skills required to make their own. This emphasis on the physical and the mechanical represents a counterpoint to the virtual nature of the digital environment, associating the game and its constructive activities with the art and craft projects of traditional children's culture. Just as the series' gameplay is grounded in scientific industrial principles, *Little Big Planet 2* can be understood as further reflecting upon the history of modernity, focusing on the development of technology in the Western world. As part of the game's self-reflexivity, *LBP2* shows off the extent to which the series has evolved since the first game released three years previously. Developments are foregrounded through a framing device which structures the player's journey from Renaissance Europe, through a steam-driven Victorian bakery, to an electric factory populated by robots, to a science fiction future in space, with an emphasis on mechanics, technology and utopian progress. In contrast, the first game reproduces many of the colonial dimensions Jenkins observes in conversation with Fuller concerning 1990s Nintendo software. The player starts in 'The Garden', a medieval England presided over by a king and queen.

From there they move to the continents of Africa, South America, North America, China, India and Siberia. The superficial depiction of oriental spaces in Nintendo videogames, including the 'Brazilian dock', the 'Indian temple', the 'Chinese street market' and the 'Soviet factory', is critiqued in what Fuller describes as 'a procession of ornamental images' implying the consumption of both space and cultures.<sup>182</sup> Similarly in *LBP* we have the Meerkat Kingdom, the Serpent Shrines, the Sensei's Lost Castle, the Dancer's Court and the Great Magician's Palace. These zones are full of stereotypes relating to their respective continents. Africa features monkeys, zebra patterns and stampeding wildebeest. South America is filled with wrestlers, skulls and cacti. The Indian level consists of snakes, elephants and blue dancers. Non-European spaces in *LBP* are characterised by exoticism, orientalism and otherness. Only the North American level, unfolding across a subway and building site, shows explicit signs of modern development, and also features the most recognisably human character. Stereotyping informs the game mechanics which these spaces showcase. Lawless Mexico introduces explosives, mystical India introduces emitters, while North America introduces vehicles.

As with the games Jenkins discusses, the ideology of *LBP* works not through character identification but through playing a role, enacting a spatially orientated narrative of conquest and domination.<sup>183</sup> There is a form of identification with the Sackthing players are controlling, not in the manner commonly understood in film and literature, but grounded in the customisation of the avatar. Sackthing is not a character. Its rather dismissive name suggests an absence of personality or identity. Part of *LBP*'s playfulness entails the renovation of this blank slate. A multitude of clothes, glasses, hats, shoes and accessories are available to make the avatar the player's own, and its fabric colour can be changed at any time. These elements are found in prize bubbles which, at the beginning of each level, permit players to dress their figure according to the national themes of each zone. The Savanna offers zebra head and lion mane. Mexico gives players a sombrero and large moustache. In India it is a turban, beard and

182 Fuller and Jenkins, 'Nintendo and New World Travel Writing', 62.

183 Ibid. 71.

baggy trousers. In this respect, the avatar is allowed the opportunity to 'go native', to adopt the superficial costume associated with the region they are visiting, a guise which can be easily abandoned or combined with signifiers of different regions. The player not only collects costumes. The very materials and objects which constitute these exotic levels are also acquired in the same manner. The national stereotyping of this process is obscured by the seemingly harmless tradition of child-like dress-up and construction it entails, just as the toy-like aesthetic of each zone detracts from the limited theming of countries and continents. Everything is available for the player to take and store in their 'goody bag'. These resources can be endlessly reproduced, resized and rearranged to generate original levels players can upload for others to appreciate. In this respect, *LBP* effects a similar 'returning to a mythic time when there were worlds without limits and resources beyond imagining' as Fuller and Jenkins see in earlier Nintendo games.<sup>184</sup> A sense of joy and wonder implied by Fry's breathless opening narrative, played over video footage of *LBP*'s many potential players, including some children, staring in disbelief as colourful computer graphics spill magically out into the real world, serves to obfuscate the problematic politics of the actions players perform. Fuller argues, the mobilisation of New World metaphors in the rhetoric of cyberspace constitutes an attempt to replay the West's colonial past, upon which the development of modernity is significantly implicated, only this time without victims. *LBP* and its PlayStation Portable sequel attempt a similar 'revisionary reenactment of earlier history'<sup>185</sup> regarding English colonialism. In this respect the game attempts a retelling of mythologies of modernity and global adventures, obscuring the historical realities which were the consequence of these endeavours.

The mantra of the *LBP* series, 'Play, Create, Share' evokes three aspects of children's culture apparent across a range of media. Children are encouraged to play, as part of their healthy development and education. Children are encouraged to make things, as evidenced in the many television programmes which induce young people to actively participate in art and craft. Children are also encouraged to share, or at least, to engage in prosocial

184 Ibid. 58.

185 Ibid. 59.

activities, a significant dimension to the pedagogic imperative in children's media. Making something in *LBP* has no economic reward, except to the game's developers and distributors who can boast a profusion of playable levels which any in-house design processes could not hope to approach. Designing levels is presented as a rewarding and edifying activity in its own right, engaging with a community, participating in a creative project which brings a world of people together in a prosocial digital public sphere based around making fun games and sharing them with others. Although figures are not available to indicate how many of those nine and a half million levels are made by children, those interacting with *Little Big Planet* in this way, as those who play the game itself, are engaged in an experience of digital childness. Through its avatar, its gameplay, its spatial narrative, its mechanics, and call for participation, the series reflects the continued engagement with qualities of modernity in children's media and culture.

### *Disney Infinity* and the Animation of Children's Culture

Having avoided detailed consideration of the Disney Corporation's output throughout this volume, the final case study will explore a recent phenomenon produced by the multimedia organisation, *Disney Infinity*. This offshoot of the Corporation's intellectual properties brings together multiple brands, including characters from classic and contemporary Disney feature films, Pixar movies, Marvel superheroes, and various iterations of the *Star Wars* franchise in a playful yet structured digital environment. The brand exemplifies a range of contemporary tendencies in children's media and mainstream popular culture, such as convergence, multi-platform storytelling, remediation and fan-inspired mash-ups. *Disney Infinity* also embodies, in an almost literal sense, the tendency for the studio to integrate screen entertainment and material culture aimed at children as part of its complex relationship between adult purchasers and child consumers.

Lash and Lury, in their discussion of global media argue that a distinct shift can be observed within recent industries, whereby objects and media

become combined. Consequently, 'things become media' while conversely 'media become things'.<sup>186</sup> Positioning such developments in the context of classic Marxist understandings of the culture industry, the authors argue that this situation entails a collapse of cultural superstructure into the material base. As media become 'thingified' they attain use value and exchange value, rather than simply cultural value.<sup>187</sup> This involves a distinct change in the status of commodities in capitalist society. As the authors write:

Products no longer circulate as identical objects, already fixed, static and discrete, determined by the intentions of their producers. Instead, cultural entities spin out of the control of their makers; in their circulation they move and change through transposition and translation, transformation and transmogrification. In this culture of circulation ... cultural entities take on a dynamic of their own; *in this movement*, value is added. In global culture industry, products move as much through accident as through design, as much by virtue of their unintended consequences as through planned design or intention. In changing, cultural entities themselves become reflexive in their self-modification over a range of territories, a range of environments.<sup>188</sup>

Although their focus is not children's media, examples cited to illustrate this trend include the remediation of films into videogames, and cartoon characters' function as costumes and collectibles. As discussed, one chapter considers two animated franchises, *Wallace and Gromit* and *Toy Story*. Other recent examples of children's culture and culture of childness appear similarly illustrative of the collapse between media and materiality. *Barbie: Life in the Dreamhouse* is a series of reality TV show-styled digital animations, distinct from previous photo-realist Barbie fairy tale adaptations. In the bright hyper-pink dreamhouse, characters move with jerky motions that underline their doll-like nature, reference is made to the multitude of careers the heroine has costumes for, and the plasticity of the environment is frequently foregrounded. *The Lego Movie* (2014) employs a computer-generated style which emulates the uneven movements of stop-frame animation, while emphasising the constructed toy world its characters inhabit. This

186 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture Industry*, 4.

187 Ibid. 7–8.

188 Ibid. 4–5.

theatrically released film represents a culmination of multiple iterations of the Lego franchise in recent popular culture, including the Lego stop-frame studio, the practice of animating toys in underground television series like *The Adam and Joe Show* and *Robot Chicken* and Lego kits based on film franchises which have increasingly dominated the brand since the early 2000s. Multimedia properties which have been translated into Lego videogames include *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Lord of the Rings*. These toy adaptations repeatedly emphasise, in both gameplay and cut-scenes, the fact that players are playing as merchandised versions of movie characters rather than the films' stars, as is the case with more straightforward spinoffs.

The tendencies Lash and Lury chronicle appear virtually embodied by the videogame console phenomenon known as 'toys-to-life'. This began in 2011 with the *Skylanders* series, an iteration of Activision's *Spyro the Dragon*. The unique selling point of this system, compatible with Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft consoles, involved players placing sold-separately figurines on a small platform base connected to the PlayStation, Xbox or Wii. A chip within the figurine is read by the platform, unlocking an avatar of the character which appears on the screen in the videogame world for the player to control. Purchasing more figurines, which consist of monsters, dragons and humanoid fantasy characters, allows the player to access more avatars with different appearances and abilities. *Disney Infinity* followed in 2013, and has taken three iterations. The first featured Disney and Pixar characters, the second Marvel superheroes (2014), and the third was based on *Star Wars* (2015). Current figures include Jack Skelington from *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), Vanellope from *Wreck-it-Ralph* (2012), Holley Shiftwell from *Cars 2* (2011), Han Solo from *Star Wars*, Sam Flynn from *Tron: Legacy* (2010) and Black Widow from *The Avengers* (2012). The system features two modes or spaces. Story levels, unlocked by placing the appropriate 'playset' tile onto the base, take place across digital worlds approximating each Disney franchise, and can only be inhabited by canonically appropriate characters. There is also a hub-like 'Toy Box' mode, in which characters from different franchises are permitted to interact. Like the create mode of *Little Big Planet*, this is also a space where players can design their own level using objects unlocked by playing playset games.



*Disney Infinity* was followed in 2014 by Nintendo's amiibo series which featured only Nintendo-licensed characters and was compatible only with Nintendo systems. In 2015 the more eclectic Lego Dimensions was released across all platforms, and featured videogame, television, comic book and film intellectual property from *Portal*, *The Simpsons*, *Back to the Future* (1985), DC comics and *Ghostbusters* (1984), as well as *The Lego Movie*. Figurines across all series take the appearance of detailed unposable collectables, and represent aesthetically desirable objects in themselves. All ranges of the phenomenon can be bought at videogame stores, which currently have a significant portion of their floor space dedicated to such lines. The virtual and actual space of the toys-to-life videogame environment is a prime example of the 'media-environment' Lash and Lury discuss, the zone occupied by cultural objects which have fallen from the superstructure into the materiality of base, or risen from the material base into the media superstructure.<sup>189</sup> *Disney Infinity* and others of its kind exemplify such processes within a global culture industry where 'things come alive, take on a life of their own'.<sup>190</sup>

Although Lash and Lury detail the ways confusion of objects and media has become a recent trend in mainstream popular culture, such processes have clear precedents in screen-based franchises for children. Disney appears to be a trailblazer in this respect. Merchandising, defined by Janet Wasko and Govind Shanadi as 'commodities that derive from a film', as distinct from 'tie-ins' or 'product placements'<sup>191</sup> have a long tradition in the Corporation's screen media. This is a central aspect of Disneyfication as considered by Alan Bryman, in the form of theme parks which maximise opportunities for guests to buy goods, t-shirts and other souvenirs, based on screen media and the resorts themselves,<sup>192</sup> and Disney stores, the first

189 Ibid. 9.

190 Ibid. 12.

191 Janet Wasko and Govind Shanadi, 'More Than Just Rings: Merchandise for Them All', in Ernest Mathijs, ed., *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context* (London: Wallflower, 2006), 23.

192 Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage, 2004), 81–82.



of which opened in 1987.<sup>193</sup> Such practices date back to early in Disney's history. David Forgacs writes of how, since the debut of Mickey in 1928, an appreciation of the extra revenue generated by merchandise impacted on the design of animated characters which became more 'cute' and easily translatable into comics and other consumer products.<sup>194</sup> This pre-dates the release of the studio's first animated feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and Forgacs suggests the primacy of merchandising impacted on the decision to adapt the tale with its seven themed, licensable, merchandisable characters. Davis argues that the success of 'Disney's folly' partly lies in a media saturation marketing campaign which incorporated a profusion of consumer goods. This included products aimed at children, such as dolls, clockwork toys, puppets, blocks, banks, nightlights, bookends and objects seemingly orientated more towards an adult market, such as handbags, radios and soaps.<sup>195</sup> The fact that these were on store shelves and on the nursery floor in advance of the film's release, suggests audiences young and old would already be familiar with the cartoon characters of the feature. Going to the cinema, even in the 1930s, represented the opportunity to see these licensed figures come to life.

In a significant point, still relevant to the Corporation's contemporary strategies and its perceived function as provider of media for young people, Davis observes that Disney's merchandise was more explicitly aimed at children than Disney movies themselves.<sup>196</sup> Evidenced by public claims made by the studio's head concerning his films' status as children's culture, the intended theatrical audience for Disney feature films has always been the family, or the adult spectators wishing an engagement with the mythical child within. As discussed, deCordova also emphasises the significance of toys placed in the cinema lobby in establishing the studio's address to child filmgoers. The author writes of the 1930s as the period which saw the creation of 'elaborate networks of mutual reference' between children as

193 *ibid.* 85.

194 David Forgacs, 'Disney Animation and the Business of Childhood', *Screen* 33/4 (1992), 366.

195 Davis, 'The Fall and Rise of *Fantasia*', 66.

196 *Ibid.* 66–67.

spectator of screen entertainment and as consumer of products integrated throughout the films themselves. Early stages of the decade saw Mickey Mouse appearing on children's clothes, bathroom accessories, toys, games and school supplies. This generated revenue but also constituted, as the corporation itself acknowledged, a 'daily advertisement' for the studio brand within the home.<sup>197</sup> In a mutually beneficial relationship, stores stocking Disney products promoted the cinema, while Disney products on display in cinema lobbies promoted local retailers. Such practices, particularly when it came to toys perceived as educational, served to assure adult reformers of both the toy and film industry that Disney products were addressing children in a suitable manner. Merchandise during this pivotal moment in the studio's history, served to consolidate and naturalise Disney's relationship with child audiences.<sup>198</sup> As anxieties surrounding child attendance at movie theatres has been replaced by concerns circulating children playing videogames and participation in online culture, the toys-to-life phenomenon serves a similar reassuring function. The figurine makes the virtual material, providing a tangible connection between the game, the film, and traditional pre-digital Disney culture. It aligns the franchise with consumer practices of childhood which are familiar to adults. As Forgacs points out, children are only an indirect source of Disney's income. It is the adult who decides to purchase the product. *Disney Infinity* can be considered continuing the relay the author identifies between adult, child, past and present upon which the Corporation's success is founded.<sup>199</sup>

The tendencies described above are not limited to Disney, but circulate many brands with child audiences in mind. Allen writes of the increasing importance of licensed products within the matrix of 'postmodern family entertainment', with children's material culture representing up to two-thirds of retail spin-offs.<sup>200</sup> In a scathing attack on the 1980s deregulation of children's television Engelhardt narrates the apparent reversal of merchandising logic, whereby characters from a successful show are turned

197 deCordova, 'The Mickey in Macy's Window', 204–205.

198 Ibid. 210–211.

199 Forgacs, 'Disney Animation and the Business of Childhood', 362.

200 Allen, 'Home Alone Together', 118–119.

into successful toys. Instead, producers of shows like *Strawberry Shortcake*, *The Smurfs* and *He-Man* began with the toy, while the show was intended to produce 'a child surrounded by an advertising image reflecting off every object that catches the eye'.<sup>201</sup> Despite its virtual qualities, digital media is not immune from 'thingification', 'toyetication' or 'toyalisation'. Indeed, toys might be considered a pre-digital interactive medium, a quality which has become increasingly evident as children's toys more and more resemble figures from films and television programmes, incorporating buttons, flashing lights and recorded sound bites of characters' catch phrases into their functionality. Sheff writes of the range of products associated with early Nintendo videogames, including cereals, notebooks, board games, dolls, puzzles and bedsheets.<sup>202</sup> These may have served a similar function as the Mickey in Macey's window, assuring adults that the brand was appropriate for children. Buckingham and Sefton-Green discuss *Pokémon* in relation to its extension across television, magazines, toys and videogames, the multi-platform overlap between virtual and physical objects being an unavoidable aspect of the franchise.<sup>203</sup> David Surman writes of the design of *Pokémon* characters as they move through various evolutionary stages, familiar to players of the series. The first stage, as distinct from the 'repose' and 'counter-pose' incarnations of their second and third evolutions, is defined by its toy-like appearance, its 'to-be-held-ness'. In the figure of Oddish, a first evolution plant-*Pokémon*, Surman sees 'the perfect expression of a "toy" *Pokémon*, connoting pure cuteness, minimal and spherical, with a head of bright green leaves'.<sup>204</sup> Like the various brands Lash and Lury consider, the multimedia children's franchise can be distinguished from traditional conceptions of media engagement, in not being so much 'read' as 'done'.<sup>205</sup> A

201 Engelhardt, 'The Shortcake Strategy', 73.

202 Sheff, *Game Over*, 8–9.

203 Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 'Structure, Agency, and Pedagogy in Children's Media Culture'.

204 David Surman, 'Pokémon 151: Complicating *Kawaii*' in Larissa Hjorth and Dean Chan, eds, *Gaming Cultures and Place in Asia-Pacific* (London: Routledge, 2009), 169.

205 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture Industry*, 8.

comparable point is made by Buckingham and Sefton-Green, defining the *Pokémon* series in anthropological terms as a 'cultural practice', something which one does not so much read or watch, but as 'something you *do*'.<sup>206</sup>

Other precedents for *Disney Infinity* exist in the Corporation's historic practices. Disney theme parks are unreal spaces in which characters from Disney animation come to life and guests are encouraged to interact with them. Similar reification of fictional characters is evident in Disney live shows, such as the long-running *Disney on Ice* which began in the early 1980s, and award-winning musicals based on *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Lion King* (1994) and *Aladdin*. There are strong precedents within the corporation encouraging not only the blurring of boundaries between animated character and the real world, but also the animated character and the child as potential *Disney Infinity* player. Much Disney merchandise involves dress up, most visibly in recent years through the Disney Princess range and its masculine Marvel superhero equivalent, although this trend is not new. DeCordova writes of how the address to children of the Mickey Mouse films and merchandise entailed the child consumer putting on costumes, becoming a mouse, consistent with enduring parallels between children and animality. This was part of the studio's self-serving reassurance that their products reinforced traditional conceptions of childhood. The author makes the point that such practices detracted from the studio's otherwise aggressive modernity, which ran counter to reformers' preference for a childhood located in the past.<sup>207</sup> More recently Maurya Wickstrom writes of the 'mimetic absorption' of Disney characters, through installations in Disney stores, in clothes emblazoned with animated characters, or playsuits whereby children can dress up as Snow White or Pocahontas. An example Wickstrom cites, ironically involving a Times Square advert for Disney rival Warner Bros, features a young woman wearing a Tweetybird shirt while mimicking the character's expression. Interrogating the exchange between commodity and consumer, the author comes remarkably close to describing the relationship between player, toy and avatar: 'The girl touches

206 Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 'Structure, Agency, and Pedagogy in Children's Media Culture', 12.

207 deCordova, 'The Mickey in Macy's Window', 211–213.

and copies the commodity and absorbs its power. But the commodity is also copying her, the human, and acquiring her power.<sup>208</sup> Reflecting the significance of children's brand-centred mimetic play to Disney's 'magical capitalism', the cover of the edited collection in which this chapter appears features two young children dressed as Minnie Mouse and Cinderella.<sup>209</sup> Forgacs also writes of the inscription of the child in the Disney animated character, the cuteness of which derives from an infantile child-like, baby-like appearance, including large eyes, round heads and fat bodies, calculated to produce a nurturing response in adults.<sup>210</sup> Disney characters have never been simply watched. From the studio's early stages they have been figures to enact. *Disney Infinity* can be understood in this context, as continuing the relationship between child, product and character, fixing them in an avatarial relationship whereby, to use the problematic vernacular of video-game cultures, the player 'becomes' the character, moving them through space, earning points, levelling up.

The *Disney Infinity* franchise also reflects the Corporation's ownership of a broad range of intellectual property. Pixar figurines, whose likeness is more easily translated into a computer-generated environment, currently overshadows more traditional cell-animation characters. *Toy Story* features prominently in the series, notable for the film's reproduction of the historic trope of inanimate toys becoming alive. Jessie the Cowgirl appears alongside Buzz Lightyear as a double act playset. As with *Snow White* in the 1930s, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh observe that the Roundup toys, themselves collectable merchandise within the diegesis of the film, were on store shelves way before the film's release.<sup>211</sup> This suggests Wasko and Shanadi's distinction between merchandise, tie-ins and product placements<sup>212</sup> has

208 Maurya Wickstrom, 'The Lion King, Mimesis, and Disney's Magical Capitalism', in Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch, eds, *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press), 103–105.

209 Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch, eds, *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press).

210 Forgacs, 'Disney Animation and the Business of Childhood', 364–365.

211 Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, *Researching Children's Popular Culture*, 76.

212 Wasko and Shanadi, 'More Than Just Rings', 23.

become increasingly blurred. The pre-release of the toys in advance of the movie meant that their on-screen digital appearance constituted a potential self-reflexive animation of the toy in the audience's hand. In this regard, a trip to the cinema entails a sense of anticipation similar to the moment before a new *Disney Infinity* character is placed on the Infinity Base. Bryman notes the need for long-running series to introduce new characters in order to expand upon the range of merchandise available,<sup>213</sup> and the *Disney Infinity* franchise is organised to facilitate an expanding range of playable characters, figurines, avatars. The author does mention late in their chapter the then-recent revival of the Marvel franchise as evidence of another series attempting to capitalise upon the lucrative potential of merchandisable characters,<sup>214</sup> now part of the Disney portfolio. But *Star Wars* and Disney are repeatedly considered alongside one another as representative of such trends.<sup>215</sup> Joining classic Disney, Pixar and Marvel, *Star Wars* represents the latest addition to the toys-to-life range. As seen in discussion of childness and cinema, the Lucas franchise is a frequent point of reference in criticism of merchandise and recent trends in Hollywood. Discussing the science fiction franchise's various paratexts, Jonathan Gray points to the privileged position of the action figure which, as with Disney merchandise, has a symbolic and promotional value as well as more obvious significance in revenue generation. This is a product which defined the films' themes, sustaining the franchise between episodes and trilogies, while conscripting the child as a participant in the intergalactic battle unfolding within the series' universe. At the same time, the licensing of characters with only minor involvement in the series provides players the space to define original personalities and construct new narratives in a form of physical fan fiction through play.<sup>216</sup> Gray argues for the centrality of toys to the ways fans engage with the *Star Wars* franchise, and *Disney Infinity* similarly allows participants 'past the barrier of spectatorship

213 Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society*, 91.

214 Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society*, 98.

215 Ibid. 80, 81, 85, 89.

216 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (London: New York University Press, 2010), 181–182.

into the *Star Wars* universe.’<sup>217</sup> The substantial range of videogames the series has produced is also noted.<sup>218</sup> One fan-favoured character rescued from potential obscurity through the interaction of toy, play and film is Boba Fett, a figure whose popularity Gray attributes to the fact that in various ways he made ‘a really cool toy’.<sup>219</sup> One version of the latest cycle of *Disney Infinity*, themed around the *Star Wars* franchise, features a Boba Fett figure with the starter pack, reflecting the character’s continued popularity and toyetic significance.

The toy box level of *Disney Infinity* represents a similar form of fan activity, bringing together characters from different franchises, joined only in their affiliation with the Disney Corporation. In this customisable zone, Hulk can battle Elsa, Mickey can race Davey Jones, Dash can embark on missions with Tonto. Much as the spaces of *Little Big Planet*, this might be considered a child-space version of the ‘global village-as-playground’ of ‘networked play communities’ discussed by Celia Pearce and Artemesia. These are zones where global corporations, the exemplars of high modern late capitalism, own the communities, spaces and bodies. But also zones where players have the potential to transcend the institutional limitations within which their play is performed, where corporations have all the power, and yet, in other respects, as Pearce and Artemesia observe, have none.<sup>220</sup> This both and neither represents an alternative perspective to Buckingham and Sefton-Green’s discussion of pedagogy as a means of negotiating the tension between structure and agency within children’s ludic culture.<sup>221</sup> When played as an online game, *Disney Infinity* might also be considered in terms of Lash and Lury’s mobilisation of the economic sociological theory of ‘global microstructures’, ‘forms of market coordination in which

217 Ibid. 176.

218 Ibid. 194–195.

219 Ibid. 183.

220 Celia Pearce and Artemesia, *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds* (London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009), 279–281.

221 Buckingham and Sefton-Green, ‘Structure, Agency, and Pedagogy in Children’s Media Culture’.

participants, although not in a situation of face-to-face interaction, are oriented, above all, towards one another'. Such situations are reflected in the online play of *Disney Infinity* which 'involve actors who are geographically distant to each other, but nonetheless observe one another in relation to an object'. It is possible to regard the online avatar as embodiment of this process, as well as of the collapse between object and media which is the focus of their analysis. Figures, 'objects of the global culture industry', literally, virtually, 'come to act as life-forms, give faces to and animate the markets of the global culture industry'.<sup>222</sup> As such, *Disney Infinity* and the toys-to-life cycle represents an exemplary instance whereby, 'the global culture industry is animated'.<sup>223</sup>

222 Lash and Lury, *Global Culture Industry*, 18–19.

223 Ibid. 21.



## Conclusion

This study has explored relations between modernity, screen media and children's culture. The fact that film, television and digital games are, in various ways, products of modernity is largely uncontested. These are cultural forms which emerged within the modern era; they are the product of modern technologies, they are controlled by capitalist institutions, mass produced, mass marketed and integrated into the experience of modern citizenship. That the textual experiences these media generate for spectators, viewers and players are reflections of or engagements with the experiences of modernity is an uncontentious proposition. Cinema's fascination with spectacle, transportation, the city; television's preoccupation with the family home and suburban ways of living; and digital games' concern with science fiction themes of body augmentation, technological weaponry and displays of pyrotechnics suggest modernity continues to be a recurring theme within contemporary media. More contentious is the claim that childhood is also a modern invention. However, histories suggest modernity not only gave rise to our current concepts of childhood, as well as the institutions through which children are positioned, but produced a childhood which in many ways stands in opposition to modernity itself. Children were removed from the factory and city-based workforce. Children were excluded from processes of enfranchisement. Children were relegated to the non-vocational schoolroom. Symbolically, children came to be associated with animals and nature, with irrationality and religion, with past times, traditions and cultures. Like the family home in which children were located, childhood came to represent a refuge from the stresses of the adult modern world, a moment of simplicity, sanctuary and innocence from modern knowledge and understandings. The result is a tendency for children's media to obfuscate its origins in modernity. Technically sophisticated animated feature films tell ancient folk tales set in fantastical medieval worlds. Television

shows impart traditional stories involving a retreat from the modern world into a mythical kingdom filled with unspoiled landscapes, magical creatures and pre-industrial technologies. Complex videogames are designed to look like homemade diorama constructed from string, cardboard, cotton reels and other domestic odds-and-ends.

At the same time, historical periods, media cultures and the discursive practices whereby identity is formed are complex, contradictory and multiple. Modernity is not a monolithic entity, historically, socially or culturally, and often seems at odds with its own defining characteristics. While emerging from modernity, much modern media originates in pre-industrial forms of entertainment. Cinema frequently employs discourses of magic and wonder, which seem to belong to a different era, and immersion in film narrative is founded on a wilful ignorance of the technologies through which the still image becomes animated. Like cinema, much television has its roots in theatrical culture, and the popularity and critical acclaim surrounding nature documentaries, costume dramas, talent competitions and literary adaptations indicates a complex relationship between the modernity of the medium and the experiences such media generate. Although conspicuously grounded in contemporary technologies, digital games set in quasi-medieval fantasy locations, which involve collecting magical creatures, mining and crafting a landscape devoid of human culture, or rescuing princesses from castles, suggest a retreat from modernity at odds with their own reliance on current technologies and telecommunication systems. In a similar sense, children are not simply ejected from modernity. While physically separated from the workplace, education systems were in part designed to prepare the child for their future role within capitalist structures. Despite their exclusion from the workforce, children were and continue to be targeted by advertisers, as consumers in their own right or as a valuable influence on the family economy. Frequently defined in agrarian, pastoral, or pre-industrial terms, children are also the recipients of books, toys and games that embody contemporary technologies and methods of production. Childhood is symbolically located in the past, but children also constitute an investment in the future. Children feature in promotional culture which entails an inscription of childhood innocence, wonder and delight onto mass produced objects as a means of effacing

the mechanics of their production. Such strategies can be applied across a range of consumer goods, from Christmas books to microcomputers to smart televisions. The child functions both as a distraction from capitalist industry, and as a guarantee that the product represents the newest thing on the market. The child affords a retreat from modernity, alongside an unthreatening engagement with the tensions, complexities and pleasures of modern life. Childhood, and the culture the concept generates, is a site where modernity is not so much repressed as negotiated. Returning to an analogy introduced in the opening chapter, in its liquidity childhood exemplifies modernity, while also evading modernity's impulse to classify, categorise, regulate, fix and control. The malleability of childhood, and the mixed messages of modernity, results in some fascinating combinations. Children's media and culture reflects a constant friction between childhood, modernity, history, technology, animality, humanity, the past, the present and the future. In some respects children's culture constitutes a collision between two formations which, in their dominant articulation, ought not to go together. Films, television and digital games for children attempt a reconciliation of this antithetical relationship, but also reveal and draw upon alternative articulations both of media and of childhood.

Throughout the history of modernity, from the printing press to the PlayStation 4, adult pedagogues, moralists and entrepreneurs have been keen to provide media for children, in order to instruct, educate and entertain. With few exceptions, where there is media, there is media for children. As an implied audience young people have facilitated the articulation of adult anxieties concerning the social and cultural impact of cinema, television and interactive digital games. Moral panics, as well as a belief in the improving potential of popular media, have resulted in the development of texts addressing children in a manner considered appropriate. Short films intended to impart moral messages, television designed to teach numeracy and literacy, digital activities made to develop IT skills, reflect the belief that effectively constructed media can be a beneficial influence on the lives of young people. In some cases, this is as much a matter of context as content. The development of separate screening times for child cinemagoers, the convention of specific hours in the television schedule for children's shows, even the relocation of the arcade cabinet from the pool hall to the

pizza restaurant or the colourful design of a games console contribute to the establishment of children's media. Another recurring factor in the orientation of children's screen media has been the circulation of ancillary products. The potential for toys, games, clothing, food products, sticker albums and trading cards to generate extra revenue for the culture industry is evident, and many examples of children's media appear to originate more in consumer products than in the screen texts from which they seemingly derive. Merchandise also functions to assure concerned adults that films, television programmes and digital games are designed for children through their associations with more traditional children's cultures. The Mickey Mouse in the cinema lobby, the Teletubby doll in the toy store, the Elsa figurine in the game shop, all serve such reassuring functions.

In terms of production, exhibition and distribution, the history of media for children is one in which adults have been very much in charge. Adult institutions have made the films, the television shows, the digital games. They have determined the content of matinee programmes and the television schedules, controlled the availability of cassettes and disks, have paid, or refused payment, at the box office and the checkout till. Adults have employed a range of methods to control children's screen media consumption, institutional and individual, from certification to parental locks to use of the off switch. Children's official culture, it must be reiterated, is not made by children themselves, a reality which potentially compromises its relationship with child audiences. Strategies adopted by texts aimed at young people to overcome this include the presence of child actors and presenters on screen, the discursive construction of adult producers as somehow child-like, or the inscription of the child-like into media aesthetics. Despite the evident power imbalance between adults and children, a factor which complicates any straightforward understanding of the relationship between children and screen media, young people are not wholly without agency. Adult prohibitions have been circumvented. Screenings for children which fail to please children will fail as children's media. Children have claimed culture not intended for their consumption as their own, sneaking into R rated movies, watching late-night television, frequenting the arcade after school. Young people have also impacted on the development of modern media in many ways, from nickelodeon screenings

to the repurposing of home computers as games machines. As enthusiastic consumers of film entertainment, as a television audience to be addressed as part of a public service remit, as active participants determining the function of new screen technologies, throughout the twentieth century and beyond, the child has been a recurring influence on media formations.

One of the preoccupations of this study has been the issue of definition. What is it that distinguishes children's films, television and digital games from the mainstream? This is a primary concern of children's literature scholarship, less present in other areas of children's culture. Interrogating the formation of children's cinema, television and digital games has involved mobilising a range of possible relationships between children and media. Media screened to children. Media made for children. Media consumed by children. Media reflecting textual continuities with traditional children's culture. Media marketed at children through the production of ancillary products. None of these configurations are unproblematic. None of the case studies discussed in this book conform to all of these requirements and, in some examples, their inclusion might be considered rather tenuous. The Children's Film Foundation provides a large number of films, subject to increasing academic and popular attention, which were made for children. However, studies of children's screenings suggest that even if these features were made for children, they did not constitute the majority of filmed material shown to matinee-goers of the period, and currently appear more of interest to historians and nostalgic adults than contemporary child audiences. Versions of the *Wallace and Gromit* franchise are consumed by viewers of all ages, and although certain spin offs appear more targeted at children, the feature film which was the focus of this particular volume is not amongst them. As with most big screen products of the Aardman Studios, this is a film seemingly aimed at a mixed audience, as indicated by the range of cultural capital it references. *Hook* is a film which seems barely interested in addressing children at all, while drawing on a classic of children's literature. Its inclusion is more illustrative of the problems, if not the impossibilities, of big budget films and the marginalisation of child characters and audiences in their production. The BBC adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* also appears to have been aimed at a family audience, with a range of nostalgic registers implicated in its

production, scheduling and intertextuality. There is much to suggest that *Teletubbies* was made for a young audience, and it contains many references to traditions of children's entertainment. The show was nevertheless enjoyed by a small yet notable demographic of adults, as evidenced by then-contemporary websites and magazine publications. *Horrible Histories* was broadcast on a children's channel, but has achieved mainstream popularity, most apparent in the show's nomination for the British Comedy Awards, and its re-edited broadcasting in the mainstream schedule. Of all the case studies considered in this publication, the most securely defined as children's media might be the CBeebies website, a space clearly aimed at young children, containing activities which appear unlikely to appeal to an older audience. In contrast, there is little evidence that *Little Big Planet*, or *Disney Infinity* are played predominantly by children, or that children necessarily constitute the core demographic for these series. Their inclusion is founded rather on their aesthetic, thematic and commercial continuities with other forms of children's culture.

In the majority of examples, and others cited across this study, children are not the sole, or even the primary audience for such media. With few exceptions these products are enjoyed by a broad spectrum of ages, even if they exhibit various alignments with mythologies of childhood and children's culture. To paraphrase Martin,<sup>1</sup> it appears that children's culture is popular culture. Much media commonly labelled as children's can more appropriately be considered targeted towards a general audience. The frequent ways in which the child and family audience are collapsed indicates an inclusive appeal to everyone instead of an exclusive relationship with young people. The function of the child of children's media in facilitating this inclusivity emerges from a number of relationships between media and audience. For want of a better word, the inoffensiveness of children's media, which due to various traditions and regulations is unlikely to contain sexual or violent content, drug use, bad language, or antisocial behaviour, may be part of its appeal. Conversely, children's culture might also prove attractive because of its unruly content, allowing for more scatological,

1 Martin, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, 15.

grotesque or confrontational material than permitted in polite adult entertainment. Children's culture might allow adults a nostalgic engagement with their own childhood memories, a process facilitated by recurring narratives, characters, themes and brands across the history of children's media. Children's culture may allow symbolic escape from adult responsibilities and preoccupations, an indulgence in fantasy, surrealism and the absurd, the quaint, the cute, the whimsical. Various ideas of childhood are entailed in these speculative processes. Child as innocent, child as trickster, childhood as an idyllic period of freedom, imagination, escape, children as quaint, cute, whimsical, are implicated across media made for children, and the pleasures it provides for all ages. There is also the valued role of children's culture in allowing adults to engage with children through enjoyment of the same film, television show, website or videogame. This is the sense of childness reintroduced by Hollindale, a concept which has proven extremely valuable to this study. At times it seems 'media of childness' rather than children's media is the more appropriate focus of this book.

Many pleasures associated with media for children are clearly enjoyed by people of all ages. Adults have historically appreciated films, radio, television and digital media discursively marked as being for young people. The significant overlap between the tastes of adults, children, teenagers, adolescents and people in later stages of life, suggests the arbitrary manner in which categories of age are aligned with categories of culture. Actual consumption practices, as much as they can be determined, consistently defy such boundaries, indicating the permeable nature of such alignments and the distortive homogenisation of aged identities upon which they are founded. Adults as well as children wilfully transgress the borders of age-approved culture. Children enjoy mainstream films and prime time television shows, while adults enjoy television cartoons, animated feature films and literary adaptations. This reveals the constructed nature of the concept of 'media for children' but also the institutions of childhood and adulthood, groups which share more commonalities than Western culture often acknowledges. The meanings associated with childhood, which adults have projected upon children, remain of relevance to adults' lives. Consumption of media imbued with childness might be considered a safe way in which adults can tap into these otherwise universal qualities, while



maintaining the valuable boundaries and privileges of adulthood. This critical perspective on the 'child within all of us' implies the processes of modernity are as restrictive of the adult majority as child minorities.

Various current developments, too recent to be considered in this volume, suggest the continued broad popularity of media associated with children's culture. A television adaptation of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, based on a collection of darkly comic children's books, has recently premiered and is being heavily promoted across a range of online sites. *The Lego Batman Movie* appeared in cinemas in early 2017 and seems to be aimed towards the same popular audience of 2014's *The Lego Movie*. A recent *Sight and Sound* article claimed animation to be the most popular film genre, trumping even comic book hero franchises. *Sing*, a film about a talent contest set in a city populated with anthropomorphised animals, recently premiered. A notable sequence in the film sees a housewife construct a complex mechanical arrangement using household objects, designed to take care of her husband and many children while she is away at rehearsals. The CGI movie *Sausage Party* has also been released on DVD, while a *South Park* videogame, *The Fractured but Whole*, is due to appear in stores soon. Both film, game and the Comedy Central series itself represent media aimed at mature audiences which generate comic frisson through their aesthetic proximity to media for children, in stark juxtaposition to the bad language, violence and gross-out humour they contain. This suggests another, more ironic, knowing, transgressive function of childness operates in media for adults. The Nintendo Switch was released, a system which combines the console's use of the television screen with the portability of the company's hand held devices. In offering consumers a choice between black or colourful neon models, the device seems aimed at both mature and child players. Finally, despite seeming to represent the pinnacle of a century of convergence between screen media and ancillary products, during the production of the manuscript for this book *Disney Infinity* was cancelled, just as the Disney and Warner Brothers stores ceased trading. The reason for this is hard to determine but it does appear that, despite belonging to the same conglomerate, the different intellectual properties owned by the Disney Corporation do not necessarily play well together.



All this shows the continued complexities of distinguishing media for children from media for adults, the ways in which children's cultures continue to engage with issues of modernity, and the extent to which childness persists as an aesthetic and thematic concern of popular film, television and digital games.



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