FROM THE PHYSICAL TO THE DIGITAL PLAYGROUND:
CHILD FOLKLORE IN THE COVID ERA

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Abstract

In the fall of 2019, the places of childhood in North America became increasingly prohibited to the very populations they served. In response, children migrated more purposely to the digital playground. In this dissertation, I argue that children's social interactions and cultural production have changed in appearance and organization within the virtual space but remain fundamentally rooted in the same folkloric traditions originally seen in the physical world. I base my argument on the premise that children's technological practices do not occur outside of, nor are they separated from the cultural practices that occur on the physical playground, but that children's social and cultural lives are transmediated (Terrell, 2015). Very little research has endeavoured to explore the evolution of folklore in an increasingly digital age. This dissertation attempts to ignite a re-examination of the intimate relationship between technology and folklore and shine a light on the often-overlooked digital participation of children. Using transmediated sociality theories, I argue that children's play traditions and folklore harmoniously interact with popular culture and technology, while their online practices act as an extension of this playground folk tradition. Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia informs the analysis of children's folklore from the physical to the digital playground and is the impetus for the concept of *heterotopic transmediated play.* The term considers the playground to be a discursive space that upsets and transforms the various spaces that converge within its boundaries, producing a form of play that is simultaneously fluid and placeless yet also stable and grounded. Folklore, as explored through the case studies of play, fandom, YouTube parodies, and TikTok dances, functions as the symbolic 'glue' for appropriating popular culture into play practices and children's navigation of the digital space.

Keywords: children, folklore, popular culture, COVID-19, heterotopia

DEDICATION

This work is in dedication to the children of the Coronavirus pandemic. Despite complete cultural upheaval, children have used their adaptiveness and creativity to harness the power of tradition and folklore to preserve cultural and community ties. It is by your inspiration and imagination that this work came to fruition. I would also like to dedicate this work to my family and community of support, to which I am eternally indebted.

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Introduction

"Won't let this virus have my day!"

On April 23, 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed, community centres were shut down, and playgrounds were declared off-limits, young YouTuber Sayler @Saylor's World posted a DIY music video to express her emotions and connect with her peers. In her video titled 'JoJo Siwa Boomerang- Life at Home Version #kidsquarentine #parody,' Sayler turned to the digital playground to participate in traditional folklore and remain connected to her cultural practices and community of peers. Sayler's video uses structural patterns reminiscent of the playground to recreate social interactions dependent on physical proximity. Non-verbal cues such as dance – traditionally used to signal group unity – are recreated online to produce the same effect. The video reimagines the social interaction of groups of young children creating dances to accompany songs, mirroring the traditional folklore of the playground. Safely isolated from the others, each girl is instantly placed within an ensemble through their identical dance moves. As Sayler participates in a choreographed dance carried out by each of her friends on their own separate screens, she demonstrates the survival of playground folklore in the digital space and the collective strength of children during the pandemic (*Figure 1*).

Parody and remix are standard folk practices seen on the playground as a form of both fan participation and play. Sayler identifies herself as a JoJo Siwa fan and participates in the folk tradition of dismantling popular culture texts and recreating them as something child-owned and child-produced. By posting the remix to YouTube, Sayler invites continual collaboration with her friends and the larger JoJo Siwa fan community. Here, we see a melding of folklore practices with popular culture references and distribution.

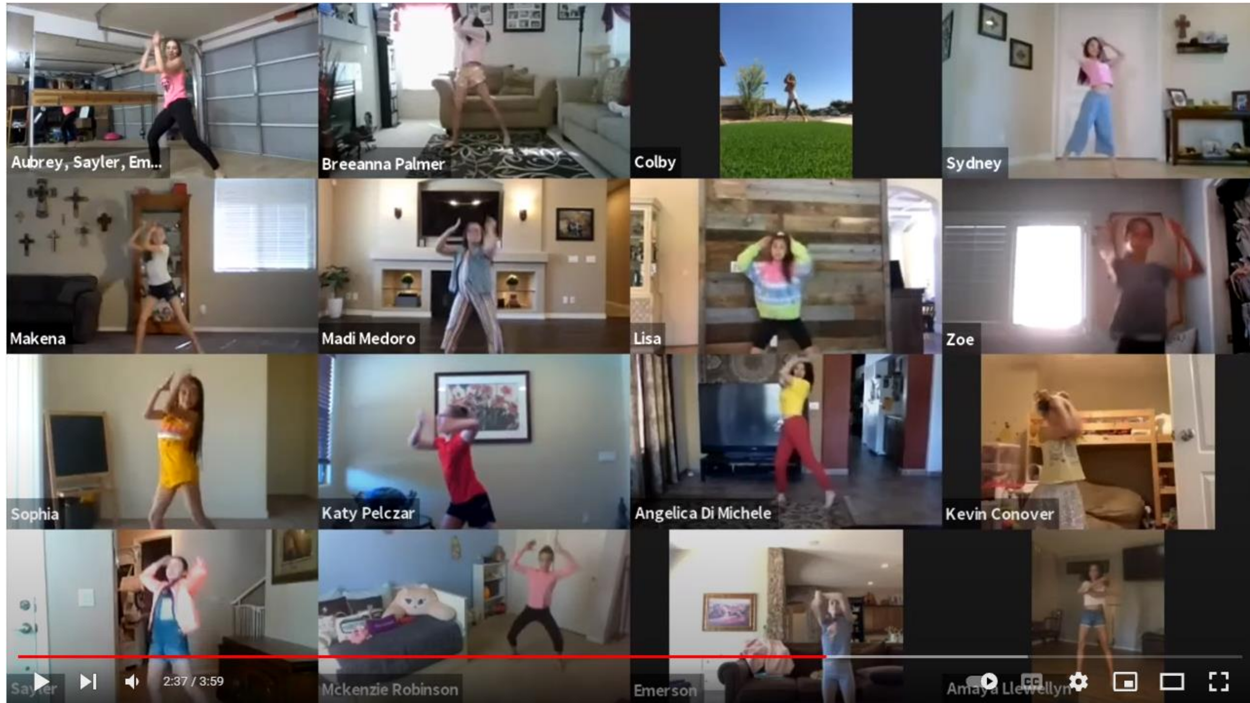

Figure 1: With Sayler in the bottom left-hand corner, she and her friends perform a synchronized choreography to her Boomerang remix. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukMDqOeA0Ng&ab_channel=Sayler%27sWorld.

I don't really care what you throw my way
I'm a come back like a boomerang
Won't let this virus have my day
I'm a come back like a boomerang

In her lyrics, Sayler describes the resilience of both children and folklore. Like a boomerang, folklore comes back from the edges of extinction through the incorporation of popular culture references and its evolving relevance to children's lives. Folklore as a binding feature of childhood social development has remained constant throughout the pandemic, but it also has been adapted and transformed to better suit current communication styles facilitated by technology. Through familiar playground games of performance and remix, Sayler and her friends showcase the migration of children's folklore from the physical playground to the digital. Her message of hope resonates with children coping with pandemic-related stress because it

speaks to the collective experience and recreates traditional forms of childhood social interaction.

The performative medium of video allows performer and audience to directly experience some of the non-verbal communication missing from text and audio-based interactions. Sayler's interaction with the camera and her fellow dancers recreates the appearance of a close physical performance while abiding by social-distancing measures. To cope with feelings of loneliness and isolation, Sayler and her friends transfer familiar means of social connection, through folklore, to the online space.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, I found myself especially intrigued by the relationship between children's allegedly diminishing folklore and their increased use of popular culture technologies. Technology – often described as the lurking threat to children's traditional forms of play, communication, and creativity (Plowman, et al., 2010)– was now being touted as the essential resource needed for children's education, entertainment, and communication. As children's visibility and presence on digital entertainment platforms increased, I noticed remarkable similarities to their practices in the physical world. Children were not forsaking their folklore but harnessing it as a foundation for online navigation and community stability, as this dissertation argues.

Children's play and customs have generally been thought of as 'natural' (Bronner, 2011). Folkloric traditions are home-grown out in the fields, on the streets, in playgrounds, where socializing, imagining, and storytelling occur undisturbed by technology and social media. Children's folklore evokes images of children skipping, clapping, and running, set in contrast to the socially alienating quality of sitting in front of an iPad or computer screen. Still, the customs and face-to-face traditions of childhood culture are typically described as ephemeral,

spontaneous, and fleeting instead of the permanence, artificiality, and forethought that are associated with technology. It is hard to shake the association of childhood folk culture as an activity played out on the physical rather than the digital playground.

In this dissertation, I argue that children's social interactions and cultural production have changed in appearance and organization within the virtual space but remain fundamentally rooted in the same folkloric traditions that were originally seen in the physical world. I base my argument on the premise that children's technological practices do not occur outside of, nor are they separated from the cultural practices that occur on the physical playground, but that children's social and cultural lives are transmediated. Transmediation refers to the ways that children shift between modes, sign systems, and domains as they participate in daily activities (Terrell, 2015). Using transmediated sociality theories I argue, children's play traditions and folklore harmoniously interact with popular culture and technology, while their online practices act as an extension of this playground folk tradition. This theoretical paper examines multiple sites of cultural participation as case studies for the transmediation of children's folk practices. These case studies follow the migration of folklore from the physical playground to the digital playground beginning with the media-referenced play of the school yard, fan play characteristic of fandom, kid influencer videos of YouTube, and ending with the viral dance challenges of TikTok that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each site is meant to explore a specific example of the cultural participation of a subset of children rather than widespread practices that can be applied generally.

By applying Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia to the physical and virtual places and spaces of childhood, children's appropriative and productive practices are viewed as fluid and adaptive. The distinction between place and space is one based on occupation; the body

is only capable of occupying a single place but is capable of existing in multiple, overlapping spaces (1986:25). Folklore functions as the symbolic ‘glue’ for appropriating popular culture into play practices and children’s navigation of the digital space. Popular media texts function as a tool for traditional play innovation. At the same time, playground traditions are used to ‘playify’ the digital space and ease the transition between physical and digital play. While deeply intertwined, popular culture and folklore are distinct cultural texts, as will be elucidated throughout the dissertation. Folklore refers to the enduring traditions and systems of text that are passed from one generation to the next, coming to define a community. Whereas popular culture refers to the cultural texts that are most widely accessible and appeal to the largest audience for a given moment in history. As the texts of folklore and popular culture are incorporated in the daily lives of children, they weave between one another, each adding additional layers of social meaning to the other, until the two are completely enmeshed.

In studying the lives of children, particularly their folk lives, the main site for research is the intimate spaces of childhood – playgrounds, bedrooms, schools, etc. However, during the years 2019-2022, gaining access to these spaces was impossible for researchers. In the fall of 2019, I received ethics approval to collect data on Toronto public school playgrounds, just weeks before the first cases of the Coronavirus in Canada were announced. As the spaces designated for children became barred to me, they became increasingly restricted for children as well. As adult researchers studying the social lives of children, we clumsily attempt to enter spaces that we have had little opportunity to inhabit for any extended period since our own childhoods. The COVID-19 lockdown provided a unique research opportunity as children flocked to online public spaces primarily occupied by young adults like me. Having grown up during the technological boom of the ‘90s and the advent of social media, platforms such as YouTube,

Facebook, and Instagram were digital spaces I frequented regularly. My position as both a consumer and producer on these sites provided a lens for viewing children's private, ephemeral traditions with some semblance of clarity. The experiences of COVID-19, which children were expressing through their videos, were collective experiences that I was also experiencing. Attempting to stave off the adverse effects of social isolation and normalizing myself to new daily routines helped me recognize the strategies children were actively pursuing to achieve the same effects.

While direct observation and in-depth discussion, techniques so integral to ethnography, would have been ideal for understanding children's complex relationships with popular and folk cultures, face-to-face encounters were unavailable to me. Thick description, a concept proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973), which describes the physical behaviours of social action and the context in which they are produced, was achieved by recognizing the semiotic details of cultural texts. To avoid becoming merely descriptive, analysis of children's cultural participation involved combining attention to context with a focus on meaning. I made use of social semiotics and multimodality theories to identify the social dimensions of meaning-making across different delivery channels and material texts. Specific sites of childhood (playground, fandom, YouTube, TikTok) were conceived as cultural texts that could be examined as case studies that exemplify the concept of folklore-popular culture transmediaton. I chose the lens of folklore over simply popular culture to emphasize the social dimension inherent to popular consumption. A social semiotic approach assumes that "meanings derive from social action and interaction using semiotic resources as tools" (Jewitt et al., 2016:58). That is, the modes and sign systems used to make meaning from textual material cannot be separated from the cultural-historical body of its user or the social context of its use. Within the context of childhood, popular culture and folklore

represent an array of modes that include sets of semiotic resources that are readily recognized by members of the community. Popular culture utilizes many modes (images, film, music, print, clothing, material culture, etc.) to reach audiences and acquire economic capital. To fully comprehend the meanings attributed to popular culture texts by children, I began to explore how these texts were acted upon and used for social purposes. One discursive mode that I employed as a lens through which to view popular culture texts was children's folklore.

Folklore and Cultural Studies

In *The People in the Playground* (1993), Iona Opie writes that "By now, folklorists are familiar with the circulation of folklore into and out of the media, and are reconciled to it" (14). The words "reconciled to it" imply an unspecified moment in the history of folklore studies in which the 'invasion' of media culture into folklore was both unchangeable and regrettable. The generally held opinion (by Opie and others) is that folklore and popular culture are two separate and opposable entities that clash and resist one another as society evolves.

Folklore has traditionally been tied to the act of oral transmission, resulting in culture and folklore studies ignoring "the fact that a variety of media communications are open to individuals for the transmission of cultural materials" (Smith, 1986:31). Writing in 1986, Paul Smith recommended a multi-media approach to the study of the transmission and reinforcement of culture and later suggested that "the very nature of folklore … is not static but evolves to meet the needs of an ever-changing world" (1991:257). Despite this proclamation very little research has endeavoured to explore the evolution of folklore in an increasingly digital age. This dissertation attempts to ignite a re-examination of the intimate relationship between technology and folklore and shine a light on the often-overlooked digital participation of children. One scholar who has attempted to investigate the complicated relationship between folklore and

technology is Simon Bronner. Using a multi-media approach, Bronner (2011) conceived of the digital space as a folk system that enables the enacting and altering of tradition both digitally and locally. Bronner recognizes the semiotic use of the Internet as being integral to the technical use of its programs. In reimagining the concept of tradition, from a product of the past (and thus removed from technological advancement) to a defining feature of modernity, Bronner considers the digital space as a folk system built for the unofficial sharing and creation of tradition. He describes using digital platforms as "both an essential tool of everyday life and a cultural practice" (2011:400), ultimately disrupting prior cultural binaries used to distinguish technology and folk.

Peter Narváez (1992) suggests that both folklore and cultural studies are intertwined within the domain of popular culture. He and Martin Laba describe this relationship as the *folklore-popular culture continuum* (1986). They argue that advances in popular culture directly result in changes to folk communities. Narváez further states that for folklorists to understand the changing landscape of folk communities, research must focus on "the expressive uses of communications media, mass-produced goods, and mass-mediated texts in small group contexts" (1992:20). He strengthens this argument by stating that "newly introduced technologies, goods, and texts may affect folkloric elements in culture by supplanting them; altering or transforming their content and/or structure; modifying their social functions and significance. In addition, they may generate new folkloric forms" (20). Narváez and Laba (1986) argue that both folklore and popular culture are governed by a respect for tradition and a need for innovation. This interweaving between folk tradition and popular innovation is explained using the conservative/creative nature of children's culture as introduced by founding folklorist William Wells Newell in 1883 and later termed 'Newell's Paradox' by Gary Alan Fine (1980).

Newell differentiates children's folk cultures from those of adults by focusing on children's inventiveness in generating new and modifying old folk traditions and their conservativism or reluctance to change or abandon enduring folklore (Fine, 1980). Newell identifies several ways in which these seemingly paradoxical factors can operate simultaneously. Firstly, folk traditions are not random but reflect the needs of the community. Enduring social needs, such as education, family, and biological maturation, follow conservativism as they follow similar scripts throughout time. Emergent social needs, such as the social isolation requirements of COVID-19, follow innovation. Secondly, folk traditions survive through dissemination. While folklore has traditionally spread through oral, face-to-face interactions, folklorists have increasingly recognized the role mass media has played in the diffusion of lore (Blank, 2014; Bronner, 2011; Dundes, 2005). I theorize children have used the digital space, or "folk Web," to disseminate lore globally through increased access to technology, circumventing adult-gate keepers who have primarily controlled media outlets. For example, sisters Tammy, age 12, and Addy Buman, 8, started a Facebook page, 'Going on a Bear Hunt a Teddy Bear Hunt that is!!!!' for children to share pictures of teddy bears in windows from across the country (Fortin, 2020). Tammy and Addy digitalized folk practices by combining teddy bear play, scavenger hunts, and Facebooking to connect with their peers. This example illustrates the new folk traditions that have been invented in the digital space and enduring lore being diffused in new and innovative ways.

The concept of tradition takes on a much broader meaning within the context of the *folklore-popular culture continuum,* as a term capable of applying to folklore and popular culture (Laba, 1986). The term shifts and evolves to encompass the practices that define groups as rooted in patterns of response that connect and bond them based on general interests rather than

centring on historical artifacts and rituals. These patterns of response become traditional to the groups that enact them and who come to recognize them as enduring qualities of their communities. Narváez and Laba (1986) identify childlore as “a well-documented area of folklore-popular culture amalgamation” (2). However, there has been little research exploring children’s folk traditions in the digital space. This dissertation attempts to fill this gap. Children’s shifting playframes and traditions can be repositioned as faithfully connected to the past yet also appropriately modern by considering the innovation inherent in folklore. Children’s preservation of past traditions through innovative folklore occurs as children utilize technology as a form of folk transmission. This theoretical paper sets out to firmly establish popular culture as a source of folk tradition and folklore as an enduring feature of popular culture within the lives of children.

Given the infancy of folklore studies within the digital space, no single terminology has been used consistently and methodologically to explain this social phenomenon. The present research looks specifically at how digital entertainment platforms mediate traditional real-world childhood folklore. As such, I use the term ‘digital folklore’ to refer to traditional folklore practices that are transformed and repurposed by young people for digital communications, rather than ‘Internet folklore,’ which refers to folkloric practices that are created and circulated solely in the digital realm (Bronner, 2011; Dundes, 2005). As a mediator for face-to-face interactions, folklore has always been central to user behaviour on digital platforms, from the dispersal of stories, email chains, and jokes to new language practices and cult phenomena (such as TikTok dances, which will be discussed in Chapter four). Bruce McClelland (2000) considers the fluid motion in which real-world folk practices enter the digital domain as a blurring of the actual and the virtual (182).

Trevor Blank (2014) argues that this blurring of the actual and virtual makes it impossible for the digital 'field' to be separated from the traditional research fields of folklorists. While they are fundamentally different due to their physical natures, "Both have folk groups, customs, lingo and dialects, neighbourhoods, crimes, relationships, games, discussion groups, displays of emotion, banking, commerce, and various other forms of communication and education" (11). Similarly, Kirshenblatt-Gimbleet (1995) writes that "the very technologies that threaten to displace oral traditions are also the instruments for preserving them" (70). She further notes that "mass culture uses folk culture" to reach a popular status (1998:307). It is unsurprising, then, to see that technological devices are being reimagined and reworked to serve the semiotic interests of not just the individual but the community.

Folklore communication has always been used to unite groups based on common interests, such as in the fan communities explored in Chapter two. The viral nature of modern folk culture means that the transmission of folklore goes beyond orality, and its reach extends beyond the locality. Folklore is a product of collaboration and, as a folk artifact, traverses time and space, reaching a level of anonymity that is commonly seen in virtual communications. Collective authorship invites correction and appropriation of the text by other members of the community. This collaborative nature of online communication allows all users to contribute to the creation of folk artifacts, reflecting the same mechanisms of community evident in real-world folk cultures, such as the Harlem Shake videos produced in the early 2000s, which will be reviewed in Chapter four.

Digital folklore is a product of mass communication between users around the world, effectively erasing geographical boundaries and raising online folk culture to a global popular culture level. This process of globalization is accompanied by the less viral phenomenon of the

glocalization of multiple small online communities (Melnikova et al., 2020). Each community has its own culture, traditions, modes of communication, and folklore, which tend to draw from real-world cultural texts and artifacts and converge with new media resources. Such a combination increases social recognition and communicative significance within the digital folk system. In the context of the case studies chosen, children utilize new media resources within the folk Web to unite in shared experiences, produce hybrid forms of play, and adapt traditional playground folklore for the digital playscape.

To better understand the relationship between children's traditional playground folklore and their digital folklore I employ the cultural thinking of Raymond Williams (1958). Williams distinguishes between residual, dominant[1], and emergent aspects of culture to highlight how the 'present' is composed of cultural elements with differing histories. He defines residual as the conscious or unconscious influence of old cultural practices on modern ones that are built into the infrastructure of the dominant culture. He differentiates residual from archaic by defining archaic as outdated and mostly abandoned cultural practices. Playing house can be seen as an enduring stable text of children's pretend play, a residual cultural practice of the past. The introduction of superhero families (Willett et al., 2013) and families of talking animals reflect the blending of modern commercial narratives of the dominant culture with traditional folklore. An example of archaic children's lore may be exemplified in the decline of funerals in pretend play, an activity that has drastically decreased with the reduction of child mortality (Wells, 2015).

[1] While he provides definitions of residual and emerging cultures, Williams does not define dominant culture, perhaps because he presumed his readers would have enough cultural awareness to recognize the practices and ideas of the dominant culture in which they are immersed. Specific aspects of the dominant culture of Western childhood may include capitalistic enterprise and a focus on individuality.

Williams describes emergent culture as the new cultural ideas and practices continuously created in society by groups and individuals. While sometimes relying on residual culture, these practices are alternative or oppositional to the dominant culture. This form of culture is seen in children's acts of parody in which they mimic the dominant culture, often using residual cultures, such as overtly sexual clapping songs and the use of violent imagery in their chasing games. Children's use of technology to disseminate traditional lore, as seen in Sayler's YouTube video, demonstrates the blending of emergent and residual cultures.

To understand the varied ways children engage with popular culture, I investigate the convergence of emergent and residual cultures and trace the migration of children's folklore from the physical to the digital playground. I theorize children interact with popular culture as a form of fan participation, in ways that sustain traditional folklore and make their voices heard within industry and institutional settings. I use specific instances of childhood cultural participation to illustrate that it is within the context of transmediated sociality and heterotopia that popular culture engagement becomes a form of folk engagement as folk spaces and commercial spaces converge and intertwine.

Heterotopic Transmediated Play

Childhood culture has become increasingly intertwined with popular culture as folklore and media fuse both on– and offline. Children engage with numerous modes of popular culture as they read, inscribe, and rewrite cultural texts for their own purposes. Children's daily multimodal practices move fluidly across domains as they participate in what Jennifer Terrell (2015) refers to as *transmediated sociality*. Transmediated sociality describes the multitude of interactions that "take place across several types of media" (879). It captures the seamless manner with which children weave together cultural texts from different media in shaping their

folklore. Transmediated sociality provides a framework within which children's folklore can be understood as a semiotic resource for the navigation of the multimodality of popular culture.

Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2004) developed the concept of *transmediated worlds* to describe the worlds constructed and maintained across various media for the characters of a single franchise. Jennifer Terrell complicates this definition by considering the transmediated world as inhabitable by real groups of people, not just fictional characters (2015:880). Transmedia play refers to the experience of participating in these transmediated worlds (Herr-Stephenson & Alper, 2013). It involves the appropriation and extension of transmedia storylines as well as the experimentation with non-narrative media elements. The physical and the digital playgrounds represent transmediated worlds, wherein transmedia play is enacted, as the rules that govern them, the language that binds them, and the members that constitute them move between modes to express group membership, determine cultural norms and expectations, and transmit cultural texts and lore. Transmediated worlds exist across multiple media, both physical and virtual, "and are no more fictional than geographically bounded communities" (Terrell, 2015:880). I theorize that the same semiotic resources that define residual folklore and stabilize emergent popular culture are implemented across these "worlds" in the physical and digital playgrounds through enduring patterns of play, social organization, and communication. I consider the placelessness of transmediated worlds and the semiotic resources that ground them through the lens of heterotopia.

In Foucault's (1986) influential essay, 'Of Other Spaces,' *heterotopias* represent transgressive spaces that exist within multiple worlds as a part of and detached from the 'real' and governed by different rules. For Foucault, heterotopic spaces contain many layers of meaning that are not immediately discernable as the body shifts seamlessly between worlds,

governed by seemingly unbreakable oppositions: “These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example, between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work” (Foucault, 1986:23). These oppositions are very much present in the heterotopic places of childhood and are compounded by the oppositions between imaginary space and ‘real’ space, between physical space and digital space, between residual space and emergent space, between commercial space and folk space, and so on. These oppositions become increasingly opaque when we consider the multiple and competing spaces that can co-exist in a single place.

The sites that most interest Foucault are the “ones that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (1986:24). He presents utopias as perfected versions of society that exist in a placeless and unreal form. Within the context of childhood, this dissertation locates this utopia within the concept of childhood innocence and images of a romanticized childhood removed from time and space. An idealized version of both the child’s body (white, male, middle-class, able-bodied) and the places of childhood (Western, middle-class, outdoors) leave all other actual spaces of childhood to become distortions of this utopia. This idealized image of childhood is further complicated by the commercial image of the digital child, a child with financial influence over family economics, reliable access to digital devices, and possessing the agency and expertise to navigate such devices. This utopia is shattered by the performances of actual children.

In this way, the notion of heterotopia can be conceived in two ways within the context of children’s transmediated sociality. First, heterotopia can be understood as the process of world blending where the rules, customs, and expectations of different spaces collide. Worlds or spaces

that are incompatible are transformed and rejigged to fit the ‘real’ places of childhood. Secondly, heterotopias exist as detached and reflective of utopias, meaning that childhood culture will always exist in juxtaposition and in opposition to idyllic representations of childhood. Through what I term *heterotopic transmediated play*, children combine the residual with the emergent in the process of transmediated world blending, changing and repurposing commercial content while reinvigorating and innovating folkloric traditions and practices. At the same time, by engaging in heterotopic transmediated play, children resist dominant adult culture and transgress barriers imposed by adult regulation and surveillance.

Transmedia play, as I understand it, is the collision of two languages – the top-down, evolving language of popular culture enshrined in economic and political power, and the bottom-up, enduring language of the folk. Heterotopic transmediated play is the result of this collision occurring in spaces in which the ‘real’ and the imagined can coexist, and where social orders can be contested and overthrown. It is a testament to the power of the folk to carve out space within the dominant culture, even an increasingly digitalized one with no ‘real’ place. Heterotopic transmediated play is an exaggeration of transmedia play; the space for innovation and conservativism that play offers is opened even further by weakening the boundaries and rules that contain it. Like transmedia play, heterotopic transmediated play abides by the patterns of the playground, but unlike transmedia play (whose patterns tend to restrict it to the physical world), heterotopic transmediated play inverts these patterns and builds a flexible, movable world, one structured according to the logic of contradiction and capable of surviving placelessness.

Popular culture balances the contradictory forces Foucault describes as utopia and heterotopia by, on the one hand, prioritizing the homogenizing utopian narratives that reach more consumers, producing a greater economic return and more seamlessly coexisting with the

dominant ideology. On the other hand, it incites a need in consumers to appropriate, rework, and reimagine their favourite content. Heterotopic transmediated play allows the child's body to break free from the social and cultural restraints of place; it bridges the precarious divide between culture and nature, between the virtual and the physical; and exists in the unstable space between them. This break from the embodiment of law and order not only occurs through acts of transgression but through the ordinary, everyday folkloric practices of children, such as singing, dancing, chasing, and games of pretend play.

Heterotopic transmediated play may still provide scripts for 'proper' play that are at once both utopian and counterhegemonic. It is revealing, as it exposes both the building and denial of rules, the conforming to and breaking with tradition, and the desperate hold to physical spaces and exuberant exploration of the unknown and the placeless. The ubiquity of the utopian representation also ensures that as it enters a heterotopia, it will be responded to, broken down, and reproduced to meet the diverse needs of consumers. The shifting needs of the people collide with the stable texts of the industry, transforming them into popular culture texts that contain a multitude of meanings and pleasures. Heterotopias dismantle utopias, producing a collective need among consumers to rewrite cultural texts and produce something meaningful for them. As such, children process the reflected utopia through a heterotopia to resist and evade disciplinary and ideological efforts, fracture homogeneity, raid intellectual property, and innovate tradition. This battle over meaning occurs within the 'real' places of consumption, places that are often erected by the very industries being dismantled. Children's genderbending-costuming demonstrates a respect for the folk practice of dress-up and pretend play while breaking with the utopian ideal that girls dress as feminine characters and boys dress as masculine characters. This

heterotopic transmediated play is further complicated as it is performed on the playground and posted to digital entertainment platforms.

Meaning is always socially produced and reproduces the social forces imposed on the body. Foucault describes heterotopia as "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (1986:25). This quality is most pertinent to my suppositions of the playground and digital entertainment platforms as heterotopic sites of transmediated sociality. The sites for physical play and digital play, for folk engagement and media participation, for obedience and rebellion, for innovation and conservativism, all converge in the 'real' places of childhood culture. Transmediated play spaces are discursive spaces of childhood that exist within the 'real,' that upset and therefore transform them. They are sites that are at once seemingly incompatible, but that perfectly describe the paradoxical nature of children's play. Foucault's definition of place is a site that a body is capable of occupying at a single time, whereas spaces are sites capable of being simultaneously occupied. I wish to stress that spaces are multiple, overlapping, and can take contradictory forms in transmediated heterotopic play. The playground is such a place that acts as a site of adult surveillance and control and a site for childhood cultural production and ownership. Heterotopias absorb competing spaces, twisting and transforming them into new spaces with new meanings and functions. As the body moves through space, heterotopias are extended, and social structures (such as folklore) are reproduced in unexpected places. Although the body may appear to be where we are most individual and rooted in the physical, it is also the site of transmediation and cultural expression. In this dissertation, I trace some of the ways in which children's bodies – and the spaces they inhabit – continue to be sites of struggle between discipline and agency, innovation and conservativism, work and play.

In his book *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), Roland Barthes complicates the notion of place by dividing the body into two; the physical body of anatomy and physiology; and the body of bliss that lives in the recesses of our mind, one that is connected to erotic relations and is entirely separate from the first body (16). Using the metaphor of 'reading with the body,' Barthes makes the act of reading materialistic in that he conflates mind with body. Barthes' distinction is useful in understanding the body as occupying non-physical spaces. Using Foucault's and Barthes' conceptions of space, I argue that the body responds to the environments created in digital spaces by reproducing the physical reactions elicited by 'real' places. In this way, non-physical spaces gain the characteristics of tangible places, generating the same instances of occupancy and engagement. People occupy space within the digitalscape, giving it a sense of 'placeness.' This 'placeness' becomes a surrogate for the physical spaces the body occupies as semiotic acts occur digitally. Organized by the same social structures (in this case folklore) that define physical places, the digital space is now capable of producing the same forms of meaning-making and social interaction, only in a virtual way. The ability to occupy space in the digitalscape denies the geographical distance inherent to online use and creates the possibility for non-physical spaces to converge with or replace physical ones, as was accomplished by children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The politics of heterotopia are that of everyday life. It is concerned with the daily negotiations of power between and among unequal social structures. It is always working towards redistributing power to the subordinate and enlarging the space within which grassroots power operates. The child's body exists between and betwixt spaces of control, yet it is the site where the social is most overtly represented and used to produce meaning and perpetuate tradition. A space is enlarged as its social structures are extended to other places. Whereas once

meaning-making was sustained through folklore on the playground, now children have enlarged their heterotopic space by extending their folklore to the digitalscape. Engagement with popular culture texts has gained new meaning and urgency during the pandemic. Popular culture has become not just a tool for meaning-making and community foundation (fandom) but a necessary place for interaction — a place for community and culture to persist. The success of digital platforms as legitimated spaces of community engagement lies in the semiotic uses of the product. Its folk nature positions it as an extension of the playground heterotopia. Their use in the pandemic has become an essential tool for social living. The products of popular culture are being used for purposes of collective coping, community maintenance, and cultural survival. Rather than tools to make sense of everyday life, they have become the spaces in which everyday life is enacted. When utilized by the folk, the progressive potential of digital platforms is to become a replacement for physical places of community.

The abstract space becomes an extension of 'real' places as it is brought into the heterotopia; textual structures replicate social structures, and social structures mould to the limits of textual structures. The editing tools required for stitching together audio sound bites and 30-seconds of choreographed dance on TikTok model the fleeting dance routines of children on the playground singing a popular chorus and ignoring the multiple verses of a song. In addition, children happily perform popular TikTok choreography limited by the time restraints of the app without bothering to carry on the choreography to the rest of the song.

As media resources become more accessible to children, certain children have greater opportunities for cultural participation and popular culture production. This dissertation provides many instances of children transitioning from being mere consumers to successful media producers. The case studies examined consider specific examples of a subset of children with

extensive excess to popular culture materials and digital devices, thus their cultural practices cannot necessarily be generalized to the larger childhood population. Furthermore, I use a broad definition of childhood to include all young people below the age of majority. Expanding the definition of childhood to include youth recognizes the shared folklore that exists within communities of young people, and the continual constraints on cultural production placed on them by the dominant adult culture. With the assistance of digital entertainment platforms, young people are better able to communicate their perspectives effectively and showcase authentic representations of their own lives. However, it is crucial to avoid romanticism here; children may have access to new communication resources, but that doesn't necessarily mean greater agency or social power (Buckingham, 2018). Children's media cultures and play cultures are sustained by children and evolve through children's agency but are by no means autonomous. On the contrary, these cultures, which include the active participation of children, "are negotiated in and through relationships with adult determined structures, resources and forms of regulation and surveillance" (Willett et al., 2013:222). The agency exhibited by children on media platforms is already present on physical playgrounds, as are the constraints. Constraints that govern adult-designed places, such as surveillance, rules, and regulations, create barriers that children must evade, resist, negotiate, and dismantle. As children construct meaning and produce cultural products, they are constantly working against or in accordance with the social, technological, political, and physical structures of the dominant adult culture. Within the virtual space, children may appear to be engaging in new forms of communication and participation but are engaging in a sophisticated extension of cultural activities designed to navigate the consistent constraints of childhood. What appears to be new may not be. Media create an additional space where children extend their folk communication and participation in cultural meaning-making. Commercial

industries and playgrounds are heavily regulated spaces in which the welfare and education of children are paramount, with adults often determining what social behaviour is deemed appropriate. The romanticization of children’s digital participation (Sumskaya & Lozoyskaya, 2019) ignores the deep-rooted constraints on children’s participation that have persisted for generations, and the sophisticated negotiations children perform to navigate structures erected, designed, and controlled by adults.

Children enact their agency by deciding what commercial content is appropriated on the playground and how it is transformed for that particular social context, and which online spaces they will occupy and what content they will upload. Media provide resources for play, but both the resource and the space in which they are explored are not neutral. Producing and participating in heterotopic transmediated play on the physical playground and recreating folklore on the digital playground involves numerous social structures merging and competing. These oppositional spaces remain oppositional because, “we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (Foucault, 1986:23). In other words, as the child’s body exists simultaneously within and among multiple spaces, disruption is always present, for it is impossible for one world to subsume another or leave no trace of its collision with this other world. Children are agentive; they inhabit these structures but are also able to contribute to systemic change and adapt the structures to fit their own interests.

The shared language, experiences, and understanding cultivated in folk communities are mobilized in the spaces that converge and extend beyond the physical heterotopia. Children find

a firm footing in online spaces because of the semiotic uses that reinforce ties to a shared folk culture. Semiotic uses have a strong reinforcement system because textual meaning is dependent on the determinants of popularity. It follows, then, that if cultural products are to be made popular, they must, at least partially, abide by the standards already laid out by potential consumers.

Popular culture representations of childhood are firmly situated within what Stuart Hall would call 'the culture of the powerful.' This is a culture motivated by economic profit and reproduces the status quo. In the Global North, the culture of the powerful privileges representations that conform to notions of heteronormativity, the universality of whiteness, the myth of childhood innocence, economic structures of dominance, and a capitalist formula for success. My decision to focus on the cultural production of white, Western, middle-class young people is not to disregard other forms of childhood but to acknowledge and dissect the cycles of discourse produced by the culture of the powerful and recognize the constraints on production and expectations of adherence to utopian childhood ideals placed on all children and youth. The culture of the powerful ensures that the cultural work produced by children who conform to representations of childhood receive prominent visibility (not the least of which is encouraged by increased access to digital devices and sophisticated social media algorithms, discussed in more detail in Chapters three and four).

For my purposes, the playground acts as a funhouse mirror for the social organizations of the dominant culture, one in which economic and consumption practices are replicated, parodied, and transformed for the new environment. Within a heterotopia, children's engagement with transmedia texts can be understood as an inversion of the dominant and the ideal and an extension of society's technological advances. Additionally, the imaginative space has always

been a place beyond control and free from policing (McNamee, 2000:485). Children have extended the power of that placeless space to traverse adult-controlled sites and inform their cultural consumption practices. The term heterotopic transmediated play applies a semiotic dimension to the analysis of transmedia texts and contextualizes the processes underway as children perform transmediated sociality within transmediated worlds. The physical and digital playground is a joint space where the modes of popular culture and folklore meld, thickening and deepening the meanings children construct from the multiple worlds they inhabit. Through the invasion of digital spaces and the evasion of adult controls, children are engaging in forms of transmediated sociality and heterotopic transmediated play to lay claim to popular culture.

Organization of the Thesis

As children increasingly rely on digital platforms for meaning-making, there is little differentiation between physical folklore and digital lore. Each is intertwined in a ritual routine – "Everyday practices and media practices cannot be separated" (Johansen, 2018:6). Cultural practices and the material artifacts that support them must be understood through their interrelations and connections. In the context of heterotopias, children and peer groups move in and out of transmediated social settings and practices; children's play traditions and lore are saturated with popular culture references and seamlessly migrate to the virtual realm through the digital folk system and its accompanying cultural practices. Today, childhood culture encompasses heterotopic transmediated play that brings together media characters, toys and narratives with traditional games, folklore, and interactions in complex mergers of playground culture, digital literacies, consumer practices, and fandom. By minimizing the gap between texts and lived experiences, popular culture and folklore become more and more difficult to parse, as this dissertation will explore through multiple case studies. The meanings of children's popular

culture exist only in their consumption; popular texts need to be considered through their relations with children's social lives, for this is how their popularity is assured. Similarly, folklore must prove valuable to children's social lives for learning, social relations, and identity construction, to avoid extinction. Thus, popular culture and folklore are essential for one another's survival. The purpose of this research is not to demonstrate that digital mediation is directly correlated with changes in children's sociality but to illustrate the folkloric traditions of childhood culture that permeate the digital playground and are grounded in the new ways children connect, interact, and relate with one another in the folk Web. In other words, digital mediation is not responsible for a foundational change in the nature of children's social relations but, rather, provides a productive site in which conservative practices are combined with innovative tools to create new forms of cultural participation.

This dissertation tracks the process of children's transmediated sociality as their folk culture and popular culture converge and expand within childhood spaces, from digital media entering the physical playgrounds to traditional lore extending to the digital playground. By examining multiple sites of cultural participation as case studies, this research project does not intend to highlight the generalized experiences of children but the unique instances of folklore-popular culture amalgamations. Chapter one considers the physical playground as the initial site of convergence between media texts of popular culture and stable texts of the playground. In identifying the playground as a heterotopic space, children's play is viewed as both fluid and fixed. Using the term *heterotopic transmediated play*, this chapter examines how children's contemporary playground play functions as a form of folk tradition and as an additional delivery channel for transmedia texts. As the boundaries between folk and pop blur, the distinctions between consumers and producers weaken, producing official sites of fandom.

Marking fandom as occurring at the intersections of folklore and popular culture, Chapter two explores the creation of popular culture through the consumptive practices of the populace. As children incorporate popular culture texts into their folk practices, these texts are given meaning, and the foundations of fandom are formed. The fan activities of cosplay and filklore (fan music-making) will be used to trace the folkloric function of fan engagement, and the enduring and intimate connection children have with popular culture. Economic value is often used as a barometer for distinguishing commercial and folk texts; this assumption is problematized through fandom and further dismantled as children enter the digital playground and monetize their play.

Chapter three examines the impact of kid influencers and their innovative use of playground folklore within digital spaces. Recognizing digital media as a folk system, children's culture, traditions, and products are being created, preserved, and transmitted over digital entertainment platforms, such as YouTube. Kid influencer JoJo Siwa and her fan following illustrate the stable presence of folklore in online interactions and children's negotiations between physical and digital spaces, as well as commercial and cultural enterprises. As physical playgrounds extend into digital playgrounds, digital playgrounds have – in certain circumstances – come to replace them.

Chapter four examines the conditions of COVID-19 that forced children to abandon physical playgrounds and adopt digital platforms as spaces for folklore transmission, community preservation, and collective coping. Identifying folklore as the 'social glue' used during pandemics, children's viral TikTok dance challenges reinforce the intimate relationship between folklore and popular culture. While technology has altered the landscape of childhood, it has not changed the fundamental makeup of children's social interactions.

These chapters illustrate the unique balance of folklore and popular culture, and tradition and innovation, which marks childhood culture as adaptive, inventive, and enduring.

Chapter One: Transmedia Storytelling and the Convergence of Childlore and Popular Culture

Walk by any park, schoolyard, or playground, and you will hear the familiar sounds of clapping songs and games of chase intertwined with the unfamiliar names of YouTube celebrities and the stories of recent blockbusters. At times, the fleeting mention of a one-hit-wonder or the obsessive coveting of a trend item that is left forgotten in the corner a week later appears at odds with the centuries-old traditions that captivated our attention as children and somehow retain the same power for children today. This desire for innovation confronted with the need for conservatism produces a seemingly symbiotic relationship between the popular and the folk. The ephemerality of popular culture and the stability of folklore are as incompatible as they are dependent on one another. Popular culture cannot seem to move forward without referring to the past, while folklore cannot persist without adapting to the present. Definitions of 'new' and 'traditional' blend and shift as children sing about telephone operators and Hello Kitty or fight dragons and corrupt AIs. On the playground, what is traditional, natural, and folk becomes indistinguishable from what is new, digital, and popular.

As children rapidly adopt digital technologies to mediate social interactions and actively participate in childhood culture, both popular and academic concerns have been raised regarding the impact of these technologies on children's social relationships and existing folklore (Blackwell et al., 2014; Craig and Cunningham, 2017, Evans et al., 2018). Regardless of the conclusions on either side of the argument, the same sentiment is expressed: technology drastically affects children's social relationships. Here, it is important to differentiate between the concepts of 'social relationship' and 'social relation.' Social relationships are structured by social norms and conventions relating to interactions and behaviour, as demonstrated in the

conventional relationships of mother-daughter or teacher-student (Fiske, 1991). Social relations are the different mechanisms influencing interactions and behaviours when constructing a relationship, such as the conventions of sharing and fairness in friendship (Fiske, 1991). I argue that the social relationships children sustain and create within the digital space rely on the same folk traditions that tie people together, the same mechanisms of social relations provided by playground folklore. Digital mediation is a contemporary version of the communicative forms and functions of the folk system, and the playground has been reconfigured as another medium for children's growing digital engagements. The following chapters will argue that digital mediation offers children new ways of interacting with one another: such interactions are grounded in the mechanisms of social relations exhibited in playground folklore. I will begin with the case study of the physical playground as a habitat of folklore and an emerging transmediated environment.

The present chapter combines aspects of both folklore studies and media studies to focus on the convergence between media texts of popular culture and stable texts of the playground. The analysis is contextualized within the research of Opie and Opie (1959), Sutton-Smith (1970; 2008; 2009), Jenkins (2006; 2011), and Bishop and Curtis (2001). I considering the social semiotics of children's folklore and the practice of transmedia storytelling in the creation of what I term *heterotopic transmediated play.* The term considers the playground to be a discursive space that upsets and transforms the various spaces that converge within its boundaries, producing a form of play that is simultaneously fluid and placeless yet also stable and grounded. This research project was conducted at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as such I examine the playground practices observed by Willett (2013), Burn and Richards (2014), and Marsh (2008). The results of this analysis illustrate that contemporary playground play exhibits the

traditional folkloric function of oral transmission and cultural preservation while simultaneously acting as an additional delivery channel for transmedia texts. The research also exemplifies the multimodal, dialogical, and reciprocal nature of children's play and the subtle ways in which children draw on various cultural resources to forge their own meanings on the playground.

Folklore

The makeup of children's folklore is fundamentally social. In understanding the child as a competent participant, creator of their own knowledge, and capable of generating and sustaining cultural products of childhood, an important area of study has documented the unique cultural production of lore in childhood. Folklore studies acknowledge that "every group bound by common interests and purposes… possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore" (Blatt, 1993: 28). However, folklorists have not always acknowledged the traditions of children, considering the stories and games of children as non-serious and trivial; Brian Sutton-Smith (1970) refers to this as the triviality barrier. Perhaps the first to break the barrier, Peter and Iona Opie (1959) conducted the most extensive and rigorous examination of children's folklore, claiming:

> The modern school child, when out of sight and on his own, appears to be rich in language, well versed in custom, a respecter of the details of his own code, and a practicing authority on traditional self amusements. Moreover, a generation which cares for the traditions and entertainments which have been passed down to it not one which is less good than its predecessor. (Opie & Opie, 1959: ix)

For the Opies, children's folklore is a form of culture consisting of games, songs, stories, rituals, and materials that remain a stable fixture of the community and are passed from one child to another. Childlore practices seamlessly absorb popular culture, and Peter and Iona Opie do an

exceptional job illustrating schoolyard folklore-popular culture amalgamations in their book *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959). The Opies documented the appearance of many celebrities in the games, rhymes, and songs of children, including Charlie Chaplin, Shirley Temple, Betty Grable, Roy Rogers, and Marilyn Monroe. The Opies speculated that many of the children had never actually seen these personalities; however, removed from their original contexts, the Hollywood stars gained a new life in the oral traditions of the small groups.

The Opies' work on children's folklore holds great significance in the field for several reasons. They were among the first to speculate that children possessed a culture of their own that existed independently from adults. Second, they suggested that children's peer relationships consisted of teaching practices and a complex system of learning: "Children's lore is thus to a great extent independent of the teachings and wishes of parents and their surrogates" (Opie & Opie, 1959:169). Lastly, the Opies shifted the study of childlore from the realm of adult nostalgia and recollections to understanding children's traditions from their own perspectives. This child-centred approach was influenced by the pioneering work of American folklorist Dorothy Howard, whose 1938 dissertation research involved collecting rhymes directly from children (Tucker, 2008).

M. V. Osorina (1986) suggests that folklore can be understood as a language in that it functions as a form of transmitting information and regulating group activity. As a language, folklore encompasses many items; jokes, games, riddles, songs, material objects (i.e., cootie catchers), stories, etc. Children's lore and games serve to validate the culture in which they exist and, at times, and in various ways, to question, oppose, and negotiate it. Childlore can operate as a means by which to educate children about social norms and encourage conformity, with previous studies citing numerous examples of rhymes and songs that celebrate gender

stereotypes and heteronormativity (Thorne, 1993). In viewing children's folklore as the nexus of social and cultural engagement, it can also be understood as 'story as performance' (Langellier & Peterson, 2011). Children embody folklore as it is passed from child to child, and it is used as an identifying form of communication. It is also situated in particular material conditions, as evidenced by how "folklore items adapt themselves to the culture and the times as they migrate throughout the world and endure over centuries" (Blatt, 1993:50). (This adaptive tendency will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter four with regards to children's coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.)

Children's folklore also acts as a discursive regulator, "used for asserting group norms and applying sanctions against deviant behaviour, for adjusting interrelations of boys and girls and choosing games, for the distribution of roles in a game and observations of its rules, and the regulation of the group's relation to the surrounding world, particularly the world of adults" (Osorina, 1986:66). Children's folklore can also act as a form of legitimation and critique, and "can provide ammunition for resistance to the relations of power in the playground and are the means by which they [girls] may seize power in the discourse" (Grugeon, 2000:106). The idea of young people resisting notions of childhood innocence projected onto them by adults and creating a space in which they can question the power dynamics existing between adults and children is best illustrated by the following rhyme collected by Sutton-Smith (2008):

> On top of Mount Egmont, all covered in sand
> I shot my poor teacher, with a grey rubber band
> I shot her with pleasure; I shot her with pride
> I couldn't have missed her; she was 40 feet wide,
> I went to her funeral; I went to her grave
> Some people threw flowers; I threw a grenade
> Her coffin went up; her coffin went down
> Her coffin went splat all over the ground
> I looked in her coffin; she still wasn't dead
> So, I got my bazooka and blew off her head.

While adults may like to believe that children's minds are consistently occupied with pleasant and acceptable thoughts, there are often hidden feelings and intentions embedded in pretend games that are personal, secret, and privately enjoyed by children (Couper, 2019). Proprietors of the above rhyme push against the utopian representations of childhood innocence and the expectations of adults, who were never meant to be the intended audiences of childhood lore. In addition to evoking images of violence, children also experiment with ideas around intimacy and romance, with the following clapping song acting as a mask for cursing and transgressing notions of childhood sexuality.

> Miss Susie had a steamboat,
> The steamboat had a bell, ding, ding.
> When Miss Susie went to heaven,
> The steamboat went to…
>
> Hell...o Operator,
> Please give me Number 9,
> And if you disconnect me,
> I'll kick you from…
>
> Behind the yellow curtain,
> There was a piece of glass,
> When Miss Susie sat upon it,
> She cut her little…
>
> Ass…k me no more questions,
> I'll tell you no more lies,
> The boys are in the bathroom,
> Pulling down their…
>
> Flies are in the city,
> Bees are in the park,
> Miss Susie and her boyfriend are kissing,
> In the D-A-R-K!
>
> Dark is like the movies,
> A movie's like a show,
> A show is like a tv screen,
> And that is all I know.

I know I know my ma,
I know I know my pa.
I know I know my sister with the 80-meter bra.

I saw her in the ocean,
I saw her in the sea,
I saw her skinny dipping,
Ooops, pardon me.

My mother is Godzilla,
My father is King Kong,
My sister is the idiot who wrote this stupid song.

While describing intimate behaviour, the folkloric song also highlights the historical settings in which the song has travelled. The line 'Hello Operator, please give me number 9' preserves the long-outdated reference to the need for a switchboard operator to connect a telephone call manually. We then see the advent of television sets becoming staples within the home with the line, 'A show is like a TV screen, and that is all I know.' The final stanza, a more recent addition to the song, is an excellent example of the evolution of playground folklore through the amalgamation of residual and emergent cultural content. Godzilla and King Kong represent classic characters from the worlds of comics, film, and television.

Folklore has been conceptualized as both a "series of persisting cultural objects" and a "mode of communicative action" (Bauman & Briggs, 1990:79). Multiformity is a defining characteristic of folklore as it encompasses both the enduring history of oral transmission, as seen in its residual culture, and the innovative nature of performance, as seen in its emergent culture. Children's folklore exhibits a compelling dynamic between conservativism and innovation: the "Newell paradox" as defined in the introduction. While children highly value conservatism as a form of social cohesion, innovation can also be seen as a form of power. Children readily incorporate new media material into their play and lore to accrue cultural capital and demonstrate their prowess in adult cultures. As children amalgamate media texts with

residual folklore practices, contemporary references become modes of discourse and resources for social action. Outdated references are replaced by current ones, seamlessly fitting into pre-existing folkloric structures while simultaneously modifying the meaning attributed to the popular culture text.

Studying the connection between children's folklore and popular culture, the meaning of tradition shifts from a fixed and unchanging feature of folk cultures to a "dialectical process with culture":

> in other words, as a process of both continuity and change, stability and variation, dynamism and conservatism, both through time and across space. This led to the perception that, rather than such-and-such a tradition dying out, traditions have often been modified and altered. (Bishop & Curtis, 2001:10)

The view that folklore exists within a dialectical conversation with culture has led many scholars to acknowledge the critical contribution mass media makes to children's play traditions and folklore. It also recognizes the complex negotiation between multimodal semiotic resources children utilize as they meld these two cultural forms. That children often claim to be unaware of media origins and influences (Burn & Richards, 2014) further supports the notion that children's appropriation of popular culture is not merely a performance of media culture but, rather, an example of orally transmitted lore and play owned and produced by children, further supporting the blending of worlds integral to heterotopic transmediated play.

John McDowell (1995) adds to the conversation by describing the dialectical process with culture that occurs within folklore as a process of activation rather than transmission. He argues that traditional items and practices of the playground function primarily as a guide to innovative folklore creation activated by popular culture. This chapter considers children's media

cultures, where multimodal materials increasingly permeate children's worlds, as semiotic resources utilized to innovate and reimagine folklore texts to better fit the increasingly transmediated lives of children.

Transmedia Storytelling on the Playground

Transmediated sociality emerges from Henry Jenkins' (2006b) research on transmedia storytelling and convergence culture. For individuals to participate in a transmedia landscape the narrative and world-building structures that define such sites also need to be transmediated, producing a unique blend of social organization and digital facilitation. Jenkins uses 'convergence culture' to describe this collision of old and new media; a space in which the grassroots of folk culture intersect with corporate media, and content producers and content consumers interact in unpredictable ways (2). How children appropriate and use both media content and folklore emphasizes the heterotopia of the playground and the paradoxical inclination of children to be both conservative and innovative. Convergence is critical for understanding children's heterotopic transmediated play for two reasons. First, children can enter the placeless spaces of popular culture through any number of commercial channels, increasing the presence of popular culture in the 'real' spaces of childhood. Second, with access to a single device, children can traverse the barriers of place and connect globally while remaining tied to localized patterns of community. The convergence of children's social and technological practices leads to the transmediated sociality of childhood culture as the playground mode no longer meets the social needs of children. Children's interactions become transmediated as the physical playground is transformed into an additional medium for the semiotics of popular culture to be, literally, played out.

Convergence represents a cultural shift in which consumers are encouraged to cross media platforms and establish knowledge communities that transcend physical barriers and congregate around media-specific engagement (Jenkins, 2006b). Transmediated sociality involves the exploitation of multimodal semiotics, the cooperation of potentially competing modes, and depends on the migratory behaviours of children who intend to participate in these knowledge communities; it occurs within the individual child and through their social interactions with others. I use the case study of the playground to illustrate how the heterotopia lends itself to establishing social conventions, irrespective of time and space, that define a community and inform their negotiation between spaces and oppositions. The semiotic affordances encountered within the spaces of popular culture are absorbed into the arsenal of resources for proper community participation, rooting the placelessness of digital media to the physical space of the playground. Understanding the delivery system of media as a semiotic multimodality, the social nature of contemporary media consumption can be identified within the 'real' places of knowledge communities, like those seen on the playground.

Heterotopic spaces allow for segments of language, music, imagery, and action from media sources to be seamlessly integrated into established playground practices, generating a space for opposition and contradiction to flourish. The unstable relationship constructed between worlds is then utilized to make the placeless culturally and geographically fixed. Childhood is defined by the paradoxical, as incompatible discourse modes provide the foundation on which cultural participation and community standards are made. Rebekah Willett (2013) observed children using their knowledge of a wide array of practices and texts from several sources – home, school, movies, videogames, books, and current events – to create meaning appropriate to the very specific social space of the playground. These texts acted as a shared store of cultural references

for participating in the playground culture and, more specifically, friend groups. Children use heterotopic transmediated play to establish knowledge communities, construct a shared language, and participate in transmedia activities.

Transmedia storytelling has emerged as a new aesthetic in response to media convergence, which is dependent on the active participation of knowledge communities, often with the success of a product hinging on multimodality. Henry Jenkins (2003) defines transmedia storytelling as follows:

> each medium does what it does best so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through gameplay. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't have to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice versa. As Pokémon does so well, any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. (2003)

Transmedia storytelling is a narrative structure or world-building instrument that systematically disperses integral fiction elements across multiple delivery channels (Jenkins, 2007). The transmission of information and expansion of source material intrinsic to transmedia storytelling positions it as, fundamentally, a folk practice. The borders that contain each segment of information within its respective medium break down as the story is elaborated on through transmedia. This blending of worlds and combining of spaces is seemingly effortless in the placeless space of digital media, but requires heterotopias to be enacted within the real. The heterotopia of the playground, as a case study for transmediation, provides a platform for children's folklore to act as an additional delivery channel for the story to be circulated and internalized within the knowledge communities of children. At the centre of this claim is the

notion of social semiotics. Individual consumers read the cultural texts around them and transform them into semiotic resources that they use to make sense of their everyday lives. On the playground, folklore provides an enormously effective means by which cultural texts traverse places and evolve and travel orally. Jenkins (2006b) identifies a specific moment within convergence culture, when songs circulate well beyond their points of origin, lose all attachment to their original author, are repurposed and reimagined for a range of different interests, and finally, become a part of the texture of folk culture. As the semiotic resources of popular culture modes are recruited as tools to revitalize and adapt existing lore, the heterotopia of the playground assists in the contradictory practice of innovation and preservation.

This direct interaction with the interpretation and reproduction of transmedia storytelling exists within a *participatory culture* where consumers "take the resources offered by a text and push it in a range of directions which are neither preprogrammed nor authorized by the producers" (Jenkins, 2011). For Jenkins, a participatory culture encourages cultural participation by lowering the barriers to participation and providing strong social incentives to produce and share. Children, acting within a participatory culture, engage in a practice of innovation and conservativism as the emergent content of transmedia is incorporated into the traditional folklore practices of the playground. The presumed opposition between commercial spaces and folk spaces are overcome as the child's body sits at the intersection of residual and emergent culture, producing a form of play that allows for the simultaneous participation in the traditional and the innovative, the fixed and the placeless, and the productive and the consumptive. By fixing transmedia storytelling to the physical, heterotopic transmediated play provides a platform for the embodiment of commercial stories and inversion of utopian representations. As children re-enact, retell, and reappropriate transmedia stories, their bodies, as existing within the real,

function to subvert, challenge, and transform the idyllic representations of childhood presented in the media.

Transmedia storytelling is perhaps most effectively executed in children's media franchises like Pokémon, Marvel superheroes, and Harry Potter. David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green (2003) explain, "Pokémon is something you do, not just something you read or watch or consume" (1). Pokémon is not just done through the card game, but played in videogames, performed at costumed conventions, and elaborated on in the playground. Therefore, it is difficult to attribute an original source text to the franchise with so many subsequent spinoffs. As stated by Nintendo, Pokémon was designed to be a cross-media enterprise very early on, lending itself to transmedia consumption (2003). There are several hundred different species of Pokémon, each with multiple evolutionary forms with elaborate skills, histories, rivalries, and attachments. No one text includes all the relevant information regarding the various species' stats, backgrounds, and plots. The child, as a consumer, is required to assemble Pokémon knowledge from multiple media platforms and contribute to the broader community of knowledge amongst their friends. By sharing their expertise with peers, children generate an immense body of knowledge collected from multiple sources and expanded on in new and imaginative ways through play. Buckingham and Sefton-Green explain:

> Children may watch the television cartoon, for example, as a way of gathering knowledge that they can later utilise in playing the computer game or in trading cards, and vice versa. The text of Pokémon is not designed merely to be consumed in the passive sense of the word. In order to be part of the Pokémon culture, and to learn what you need to know, you must actively seek out new information and new products and, crucially, engage with others in doing so. (2003:16)

Buckingham and Sefton-Green identify two significant aspects of Pokémon that lend themselves to transmedia consumption: their *portability* and *diversity* (2003:16). Pokémon is portable in its ability to be easily transferred between and among media and social contexts. Any knowledge gathered in the consumption of one medium can be utilized in another. For example, information obtained by watching the television show can be used when playing the video game. Pokémon has a diverse function within social contexts. Children can experience the franchise alone while watching television or playing the videogame, or collectively while trading cards or battling each other online. Children can experience it at home while playing with their favourite Pokémon plushie, in the car playing on a Switch, or in the playground while re-enacting a Pokémon battle. Children can participate in the franchise intensely by exploring all modalities of the transmedia landscape or, more casually, by simply watching the television show. The portability and diversity of the franchise fit seamlessly into the diverse spaces and routines of children's everyday lives.

Pokémon as a franchise, designed and produced by adults, prescribes appropriate forms of play that align with the utopian representation of the digital child, a child willing and able to participate in the transmedia franchise and with enough agentic power to influence the buying patterns of the family. While the 'doing' required for participation in the Pokémon franchise is exhibited through the child's agency, the terms that participation employs are primarily determined by adult structures beyond their control. The franchise designers primarily dictate the parameters involved in collecting cards, playing video games, and watching TV. It is, therefore, presumed that the rules that govern these cultural practices are not open to negotiation. Within the heterotopia of the playground, however, children may break free from the cultural prescriptions of play and subsume some of the structural power from the industry through the

design and implementation of an array of transmediated play activities. Children create new and exciting ways to transform their knowledge of a media source into physical games, fantasy narratives, musical productions, parodies, etc. – in effect, shattering the utopian representations of proper Pokémon play predicated on spending. In constructing their own structures of play on the playground, cultural capital replaces economic capital. The body of knowledge generated from media references is seen as a systemic 'economy of dignity,' whereby children manage and negotiate access to social activities through tokens and scripts deemed meaningful to the knowledge community (Pugh, 2009). As described in Bishop's and Curtis' (2001) observations, narratives and structures of specific computer games appear in boys' imaginative play, becoming a part of their shared lore, demonstrating the balancing act children perform between opposing worlds. This display of child agency in heterotopic transmediated play breaks down the distinction between power allocation as reserved for producers and enacted on consumers.

Essentially, to be a part of Pokémon culture, a certain level of active participation, both interpersonally and socially, is required for the phenomenon to exist. Media texts like Pokémon *require* transmediated sociality and are made most visible through heterotopic transmediated play. Activities of various kinds are not only necessary for meaning and pleasure to be produced, but transmediated sociality is the primary mechanism through which the entire franchise is sustained and made profitable. It is the process by which media is made folk that ensures its position within popular culture. The Pokémon franchise provides an interesting dynamic between structural constraints placed on the consumption practices of children and the inherent agency of heterotopic transmediated play.

Children participate in multiple knowledge communities on the playground, some centring on a particular brand, such as Pokémon or, more recently, Paw Patrol and DC Superhero

Girls. Meeting the definition of a knowledge community, children draw on their combined semiotic resources to expand their knowledge and hone their expertise both individually and collectively. Members of the community of knowledge generate narratives, characters, and actions that become embedded in the world of the franchise for those consumers. The new material created by children becomes a fixture of the playground as it is combined with existing lore through heterotopic transmediated play. Jenkins argues that transmedia storytelling is most effective when each medium is doing what it is best designed for. As a medium of transmedia storytelling, the physical playground provides a platform where the child can physically embody the story through play.

The playground exists as a space for the control of the child's body by two competing entities. First, the worlds of education and child advocacy wish to encourage and contrive clean, safe, educational play, according to Romantic notions of childhood innocence. Second, the world of child entertainment promotes and markets dirty, trendy consumer play in reflection of the utopian image of the digital child. Within the heterotopia of the playground, these competing utopias are inverted and shattered as 'real' children occupy both spaces. Transmedia texts undergo a transformation of ownership as children embed cultural texts into childhood spaces and gain additional semiotic resources for navigating the worlds of popular culture.

The playground, as a heterotopia, is a space adults construct in an attempt to colonize the child's body and produce a utopia for idyllic forms of play. By enforcing control over the physical activities and daily practices of children, adults in effect prescribe their own cultural value systems and potentially diminish the traditions of children. Playgrounds consisting of manufactured structures, mowed lawns, enclosed sandboxes, and tarmacked grounds centre around a removal of dirt and insistence on cleanliness. If order is clean, if adulthood is clean,

then children and their traditional play forms are by implication dirty. For Mary Douglas (2003), dirt within a Western context threatens social control, as its presence fractures the conceptual categories of civility and rationality. She compares the bourgeois body – clean, orderly, and nonthreatening – to the working-class body – shouting, protesting, dirty, and threatening. Dirt that exists on the working-class body is both literal, as a mark of manual labour and poverty, and metaphorical as it highlights injustices and the inverted reflection of the clean spaces of privilege. Child bodies also bear the unattractive mark of dirt by physically appearing on freshly washed clothes, under fingernails, and in secret hiding spots, and metaphorically by referring to a child body's unruliness, disobedience, and inappropriate behaviour.

On the playground, order and disorder balance each other precariously; the aim of play for many children is to push rules to the extreme, to play on the borderline of appropriate and inappropriate, safe and unsafe, clean and dirty. This insecure equilibrium between adult control, on the one hand, and child agency on the other, is not confined to the structures of children's folklore itself, but can be extended to the social function of the heterotopic space of the playground. The playground, as a space designed and monitored by adults to control the child's body and promote clean, 'traditional,' educational play, exists simultaneously as a space occupied by children and utilized for dirty, transgressive, consumer play. As a place between worlds, its social function has multiplied from a place to corral unsupervised children and provide activities for healthy development to a space that supports fandom and children's continual engagement with transmedia material.

The design of playgrounds to 'clean' the child's body, like all strategies of control, has only been successful up to a point. Its comparative failure is evidenced by the divided concerns of parents, educators, and child advocates. The playground is seen as a place of learning,

friendship, and exercise, as well as a place for bullying, misbehaving, and participating in consumerism, and more recently, a place for the rapid transmission of disease, another characteristic of dirty spaces. As a heterotopic space, the playground cannot be divided from its oppositions; it exists as a contradiction and one in which heterotopic transmedia play is both placeless and situated within a 'real' semiotic context. Heterotopic transmediated play lifts the corner of the carpet and makes visible the dirt adults have attempted to scrub from pristine playgrounds. The norms that have been naturalized and thus made invisible are most effective for exerting control (McNamee, 2000); bringing these norms to the surface through subversive semiotic practices 'dirties' the process and highlights the agency children possess within a heterotopia.

Converging with a new modality, popular culture texts gain additional layers of meaning as they are processed within the heterotopia of the playground and children act out their favourite characters and narratives and rewrite texts to suit the new social context. The additions made to a franchise through the transmedia storytelling of the playground may not reach the mass audiences of film and television. However, for the knowledge community participating, the characters, narratives, and world features designed, imagined, and implemented become part of the fabric of the cultural text. The process of transmedia storytelling on the playground reflects the heterotopia of the playground and the oppositions between the residual and emergent, the folk and the popular, and the adult-produced and child-created.

Play in the Heterotopic Space

Within a heterotopic context, transmedia play gains flexibility, moveability, and power; the interweaving of popular culture and folklore texts produces something that is both familiar and new and capable of shifting its affordances between spaces. Heterotopic transmediated play

characterizes the innumerable examples of bricolage children use to superimpose the imaginary and the virtual on the physical environment of the playground while coopting the rules and the patterns of a place for the placeless, as demonstrated in digital interactions. It also encompasses the transgressive practice of manipulating, dismantling, and rebuilding cultural texts within the transmedia space. As Sutton-Smith (2009) states, "play is a deconstruction of the world in which children live. If the world is a text, the play is a reader's response to that text. There are endless possible reader responses to the Orthodox text of growing up in childhood" (166).

Tradition is fluid. Folklore undergoes a process of 'ware and repair' as it travels through time and space ensuring a dependency on the relevance of popular culture readings (Opies, 1959). Jackie Marsh and Chris Richards (2013) describe the playground as a 'cultural borderland' in which old texts containing folkloric traditions 'mash-up' or 'remix' with new texts containing media elements. A layering of texts occurs as the deeply sedimented cultural texts of folklore experience an evolution with the addition of "new ephemeral characteristics, meanings, and connections" (15). This process of remixing becomes a folklore practice in and of itself as popular culture is continually funnelled into the playground experiences of children. These cultural borderlands exist between and betwixt worlds of influence that sustain the heterotopia of the playground. The combining of these texts emerges from transmediated and heterotopic spaces (playground, bedroom, classroom, etc.) where meaning is made from the use of multimodal semiotic resources. Thus, popular culture is appropriated and transformed within these spaces rather than simply reflected (Corsaro, 2015). For Foucault, heterotopias are real places that sit at the nexus of multiple spaces and contest their utopian double. Here I suggest that the physical playground, as a site designed according to utopian ideals, acts as a place of multimodal engagement and subversive semiotics. By examining media-referenced play as

heterotopic transmediated play, children's folklore can be seen as a strategy for contesting spatial boundaries and bodily restrictions and engaging in transmedia storytelling. In response to my inability to utilize playgrounds as a research field during COVID-19, I analyze the playground observations of researchers, Rebekah Willett, Chis Burn, Andrew Richards, and Kathryn Marsh. Rebekah Willett (2013) proposes three ways that children incorporate media culture into their physical play: closely imitative; hybrid intertextual media referenced; and ambiguously referenced. I use these approaches to media-referenced play to theorize how children engage in heterotopic transmediated play on the playground.

Closely Imitative Play

Children's play reflects the cultures surrounding them, and through closely imitative play, children can question and subvert those cultures. Kathryn Marsh (2008), in her analysis of musical play on the playground, argues that "parody songs and related parodic movement aptly represent children's subversion of adult culture in their play" (171). She notes that while the play is closely imitative, it enables children to mock the concerns of adults, thus experimenting with the power that adults appear to exert over them. Engaging in closely imitative play, children take advantage of the heterotopia of the playground to blend the worlds of adulthood and childhood and perform acts of transgression. Drawing on popular culture references in their play and social interactions, children can dismantle and conform to the adult world while simultaneously constructing and maintaining knowledge communities.

As children select and recreate cultural texts to parody, they simultaneously emulate and mock adult culture. This form of admiration and ridicule is an excellent example of the ability of children to be both conservative and dynamic in their play. Parodies act as the starting point for children to begin to explore their power as "songs and rhymes fearlessly take on the taboos and

terrors of the adult world and turn them into things that can be safely mocked" (Sherman & Weisskopf, 1995:11). Mockery is a form of liberation for children; topics such as sex, death, and bodily functions are demystified through folklore. The power of parody lies in the fact that it can be performed in front of adults, for even if the parody features fantasies of violence or sexual content, it isn't 'for real.' Children actively subvert the utopian image of childhood innocence by pushing the boundaries of acceptability while remaining in the confines of 'play.' When children enter the spaces and topics that adults fear, adults often exhibit an adverse reaction (such as fear, embarrassment, or anger), a reaction many children enjoy and initially attempt to elicit as they experiment with their limited degree of power.

Willett et al. (2013) describe a play scenario in which children, on an elementary school playground in the United Kingdom, recreated elements of the British TV talk show *The Jeremy Kyle Show.* The show centres around the assessment and resolution of familial conflicts and issues of guests, with the host Jeremy Kyle inciting confrontation and exploring taboo topics such as sex, substance abuse, violence, and unconventional romantic relationships. The researchers suggest that the functions of this form of play are multiple and complex but include the desire to reinforce normative discourses around gender and sexuality, and to construct collective morals concerning what it means to be a good citizen. The 'guests' of the children's parody were a mother-daughter pair struggling with the realities of teen pregnancy and drug addiction. This close imitative play involved exploring moral dilemmas and issues of right and wrong and provided a space where the children could freely explore topics often deemed inappropriate. Parody provides an additional lens through which cultural texts can be performed and understood. Participating in the game represents heterotopic transmediated play as the children appropriate transmedia texts and blend the worlds of popular and folk, fantasy and

reality, and adulthood and childhood. The playground becomes a 'real' place where the spaces of daytime television and pretend play, cultural critique and imitative behaviour, and entertainment and social learning collide and converge. The result is transgressive behaviour that threatens adult control and the moral 'cleanliness' of the space.

In transmedia storytelling, narratives and characters designed to inform audience members gain additional layers as they are transformed into sources of child entertainment and cultural critique. As observed by Willett et al. (2013), the game was reported as occurring on multiple occasions with multiple children playing the host, Jeremy Kyle. Not all the children participating in the game, as either guests or audience members, had seen the television show, but they were all aware of the game. Through a process of semiotic democracy participation in the game produced independent entry for consumers into the franchise and a source for additional content to be added to each subsequent playthrough. Through heterotopic transmediated play, the playground is transformed into a transmedia storytelling platform.

Popular songs, television programs, and advertising represent the shared culture of the masses. Rather than consume this commercial culture uncritically, children engage in practices that reframe the material to best suit their needs and provide them with a means to examine the world of adults thoroughly. Through heterotopic transmediated play, children gain a modicum of power to construct their own images of self in distorted reflection of the utopia imagined by the adults who create the places they occupy. To parody a media text does not necessarily mean that the child dislikes the product; it simply provides them with the heterotopic transmediated space to explore, disagree, and prepare them for entry into adult culture. The text is given additional layers of meaning as it is transduced from one mode to another, transformed into a new genre suitable for the playground, and expanded on within the parameters of transmedia storytelling.

Hybrid Intertextual Media Referenced Play

Marsh (2010) argues, the "merging of the real and virtual, the online and offline worlds, is creating interesting hybrid practices as children move fluidly across boundaries" (41-2). This merging is characteristic of Willett's (2013) hybrid intertextual media referenced play, which involves children changing a resource or combining different resources to create a cultural artifact or practice suitable for the playground context. Children select components from a media source, including characters, actions, structures, rules, representations, and narratives, which are then adapted to playground cultures (Burn & Richards, 2014). Recognizing that boundaries contain each space within a silo, Marsh argues that children's social practices allow those boundaries to be traversed. I would add to this claim by stating that for boundaries to be crossed and spaces hybridized, the act must occur within a heterotopia. Children utilize the heterotopia of the playground to occupy multiple spaces while remaining rooted in a 'real' place.

Andrew Burn and Chris Richards (2014) note that creating hybrid intertextual media referenced play involves children recontextualizing the original text so that it can work on the playground. These recontextualizations involve time, space, and social constraints that need to be managed and appropriately addressed. Foucault's (1986) fourth principle of heterotopia states that it coincides with an abrupt shift in our relationship with time. The workings of the playground revolve around the strict scheduling of time, which produces constraints on the various ways in which transmediation is enacted within the space. Time and space place additional constraints on play because the transmediation needs to fit within the physical structures available on the playground and the length of scheduled playtime, producing a reworking of narratives or reimagining of the physical space. The physical design of the playground and the minute structuring of time imposed on the space are influenced by child

hygiene ideals. Adults structure the time and space of play to conform to utopian principles, ultimately creating opportunities in which those principles are both met and actively dismantled. In enforcing 'clean' play within the utilitarian space of playgrounds, heterotopic transmediated play needs to take into consideration the social context and the pro-social rules of school spaces. Children of different ages share the playground space, which adults oversee; thus, children address age differences in their play and incorporate adults, with or without their knowledge.

Play scenarios collected by Willett et al. (2013), include media references in the game titles (*Star Wars* and *Call of Duty*), as well as references to characters, actions, settings, and plots that include pretend technological GPS devices and advanced military weaponry. *Call of Duty* was first introduced as a first-person shooter videogame that followed American and British paratroopers and the Red Army during WWII and eventually included books, merchandising and a feature film. As the transmedia text entered the playground as an additional storytelling platform, it was subjected to the principles of heterotopia. The overt expectations of clean, safe play that underlie the organization of the space were met with the fifth principle of heterotopia, that the space functions based on an exclusionary principle and in reflection of its comparative utopia. While the primary enemies within the game involve the opposing army, on the playground, enemies now included unassuming adults who readily shut down games involving imaginary weaponry. In Willett et al.'s (2013) research, children stayed consistent with the game's design by battling both 'real' and imagined 'armed' enemies while also quickly abandoning props and stances that suggested military weapons. An additional enemy was introduced to the transmedia storytelling of the game when it was remixed with playground folklore that involved the hiding of threatening gestures from adult surveillance. Adults as uninvited spectators of heterotopic transmediated play were at once actively excluded from

participation and simultaneously integral to game design. To conform to idyllic representations of play, children disguised and hid their dirty, violent war games from adults, barring them from full access to the heterotopia, and produced an inverted utopia where children hunted, attacked, and killed adults in the context of play.

The heterotopic transmediated play of *Call of Duty* involved the transgression of children who were consuming mature content for teens and disobeying the playground rules enforced by adults. This act of transgression became an essential feature of the game as it was recreated for the playground medium. Children reimagined the game's enemies by considering the social rules of the playground and the mechanisms of evasion consistent in its lore. The game also involved blending the worlds of advanced military operations, teen gaming culture, and folklore involving historically layered games of war, espionage, and colonization. Heterotopias, while remaining independent places, will always function in relation to the spaces that remain. Folklore collects historically meaningful events and weaves them into the evolving space, making them suitable for the present environment; as such, the procedures of nation-building, patriotism, and citizenship leave their trace within the semiotics of the playground. The playground, as both a product of colonization and a space for the colonizing and cleaning of the child body, produces instances in which those practices are reproduced (war games) and inverted (the imagined overpowering of those in power, adults).

Burn and Richards (2014) also observed a game based on *Aladdin*, which altered the Disney narrative to accommodate the dominant pro-social rule of fair play present on the playground. *Aladdin* is a traditional transmedia storytelling franchise of the Disney world, existing in film, TV, books, computer games, and amusement rides. The original story of *Aladdin* is a Middle Eastern folktale and a part of *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights.*

Much like the later Disney adaptation, it centres around the antics of a street urchin who, with the help of a magical genie, attempts to win the love of the beautiful princess. Within the heterotopia of the playground, the transmedia story needs to be recontextualized to fit the social group and the rules of the playground. In one instance, the children decided to have several genies in the game because they deemed it unfair for only one person to possess magical abilities. These children contributed to the storytelling of *Aladdin* by incorporating playground lore, in the form of fantasy and fair play, to their performance and reimagination of the Disney classic. For these children, an additional layer of meaning was added to the telling of *Aladdin* through heterotopic transmediated play. One genie became many, and the playground became an active platform for transmedia storytelling and participation in Disney fan culture.

Umberto Eco (1986) argues that "in order to transform a work into a cult object, one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship to the whole" (198). This act of cult creation is consistent with the mechanisms of heterotopic transmediated play that occur on the playground when children take consumer content, break it down, reimagine it and incorporate it into their existing play schemes and folklore, turning it into a cultural product created by and for children. For example, in 2015, 3-year-old Caiden Henson made headlines when he decided to dress as Princess Elsa from Disney's *Frozen* for Halloween (Peters, 2015). Through the traditional childhood activity of dress-up, Caiden took ownership of the popular culture character of Elsa, breaking her down and reimagining her as an important figure in boy play and gender expression. In redefining Elsa as something other than a commercial product of girlhood, Caiden and others shed light on the enduring ways children use play and lore to resist heteronormativity and transform popular culture for their own purposes. Through costuming, children breakdown the gendered barriers of

princess play to reinscribe the popular culture material as something other than what its producers intended. Applications of heterotopia are aptly illustrated in the princess play of boys. As the commercial products of Disney are incorporated into playground culture, elements of the franchise are transformed and repurposed, producing a hybrid play form that blends the worlds of dress-up with the commercial world that is Disney Princesses. The gender transgression inherent in the play functions as an intentional resistance to dominant adult assumptions of gender expression and an inversion of utopian representations of masculine play.

This form of heterotopic transmediated play is further deepened as popular culture adopts the transgressive behaviours of children and sanctions them as appropriate forms of play. In 2017, Disney introduced their first male princess on the television show *Star vs. The Forces of Evil* (Fischer, 2017). Complete with a ball gown and chest hair, the character of Princess Marco Diaz encompasses the complex transmediated relationship existing between children's folklore and popular culture. The popular folk practices of children are appropriated by commercial industries and resold to children as products that are relevant and meaningful. As a 'real' place that combines spaces and grounds the placeless, heterotopias operate on a bidirectional discourse of influence. Just as heterotopias function in relation to all other spaces, all other spaces function in relation to heterotopias. Most significantly, the spaces that produce utopias are directly impacted by the heterotopias that shatter their reflection. The commercial industry, most notably Disney, is responsible for constructing and perpetuating a romantic image of childhood innocence and digital 'nativeness.' Their story content, marketing style, and transmedia environments present a white, middle-class, Western, and digitally savvy childhood. The heterotopias that exist in opposition to these images enter the transmediated domain producing transgressions that, in effect, dirty the sanitized body the child entertainment industry has

constructed. As notions of power and normality are disrupted within the heterotopia, their effects are felt within the spaces with which they collide. Princess Marco Diaz is the result of the heterotopic bleeding into the utopian, producing something commercially branded and folk grounded.

Ambiguously Referenced Play

The category 'ambiguously referenced play' includes general references to broader cultural forms and residual oral traditions or stable texts. Willett et al. (2013) found evidence of ambiguously referenced play on the playground, which drew on various figures in media (e.g. fairies, princesses, superheroes, spies, cowboys, zombies, magic etc.). In observations and interviews, children often did not specify the media sources from which they drew inspiration for their play but instead had a general understanding of the cultural form of princess or cop and robber. These representations of cultural forms are developed through experiences with a range of media, possibly including the folklore already cemented on the playground. While ambiguously referenced play commonly includes general cultural references, it can also consist of specific ones. For example, Willett et al. (2013) found references to Cinderella, which is a particular text but exists in a range of media formats, including children's residual oral tradition. As documented by the Opies, many of these ambiguous references have been a part of playground folklore and games for decades, if not centuries.

The sedimented representations of familiar story characters on the playground provide an avenue in which franchise characters and narratives can seamlessly arrive on the playground through transmedia storytelling. Many traditional games include familiar characters, such as those represented in the game of house or tag. In the game of house, common representations of families emerge, including mothers, fathers, and babies. These representations broaden based on

the media texts of the time. Playing house now can include a family of superheroes (Willett et al., 2013) in addition to a family of royalty, which may have been influenced by the content of children's fairy tales and storybooks. The concept of chasing and catching, central to the game of tag, has evolved from 'cowboys and Indians' to 'cops and robbers' and to mythical creatures and children with powers (Burn & Richards, 2014) popularized by franchises such as *Harry Potter*, *Frozen*, and *The Power Puff Girls*. The enduring game of dress-up also enjoys new acceptance within popular culture domains as the activity is recognized for its social function in gender experimentation and fan participation.

In their practices of heterotopic transmediated play and recontextualizing of semiotic resources, children draw from specific media texts, enduring narratives, and longstanding practices of the playground to construct meaning and fully participate in childhood culture. Foundational structures of the playground that have withstood the test of time, such as chasing games, are mixed with characters, actions, and plots from a range of sources. For example, Burn and Richards (2014) and Small (2015) recorded a game that involved the basic structure of tag where one child was designated as the catcher, and the other children had to evade capture. This game was remixed with the *Harry Potter* franchise and resulted in the catcher being referred to as the evil dementor and the children as students of Hogwarts. This form of transmedia storytelling reflects the work of authors of fan fiction who include more Hogwarts students in the adventures of Harry, Hermione, and Ron. By reconfiguring safe, clean, familiar games as opportunities to participate in commercialization and consumption practices, children remain precariously balanced between folk space and popular space, digital space and physical space, and clean space and dirty space. This juxtaposition of the seemingly opposing spaces of the heterotopia is effortlessly navigated as children perform acts of conservativism and innovation to

revitalize stable lore and contextualize emerging popular content. The *Harry Potter* text is dismantled and re-read as a cooperative chasing game, while the enduring folklore of tag is modernized through transmediation. Through the residual patterns of play that exist within the physical space of the playground, transmedia texts are embodied, and the placelessness of the digital is made 'real.'

Willett et al. (2013) observed children incorporating different narratives into their play when simultaneously playing together and separately. This play scenario was not considered an instance of confusion or misunderstanding but rather a means to create individual play personas and negotiate their continual group cohesion. This form of play is reminiscent of the definition of knowledge communities in which consumers participate both individually and collectively in acquiring and providing knowledge to the community. The children recorded by Willett et al. (2013) used a variety of textual resources, specifically *The Incredibles* and *7 Samurai*, as a way of indicating the playground lore and references that defined their group and helped them hold space against competing claims upon it. The children identified their community of knowledge through stories about superhero families protecting themselves and knowledge of a range of sophisticated fighting skills. Knowledge of superhero media was used as an exclusionary device and a defining feature of this particular fan community. The children participated in transmedia storytelling by providing an avenue in which friends who were unaware of a specific franchise could enter the cultural experience, and favourite narratives could be expanded on and modified to fit the playground context. The shifting, placeless spaces of 'superheroes' and 'samurais' that float within the transmediated landscape of popular culture are fixed and grounded within the 'real' as they are embodied by 'real' children, in a 'real' place. This act of heterotopic

transmediated play highlights the importance of folklore for establishing a community and place and applying a fixative to the fleeting content of popular culture.

Considering the underlying purpose of media-referenced play, Bauman and Briggs (1990) argue, “because the process is transformational, we must now determine what the recontextualized text brings with it from its earlier context(s) and what emergent form, function, and meaning it is given as it is recentered” (75). Media references are not simply carried to the playground for entertainment purposes; children connect with these characters and narratives and appropriate them for their own semiotic means. As cultural texts are appropriated within the space of heterotopia, the process will always leave a trace, disrupting the utopia from which it is acquired and producing a ripple effect in the spaces in which it navigates. On the playground, identity and representation are produced within the social fabric of cultural texts. Through a process of ‘cultural rehearsal,’ production and consumption become blurred as children contribute to the transmedia storytelling of popular franchises, as illustrated in boys’ princess play (Willett, et al., 2013). Heterotopic transmediated play demonstrates the dynamically active relationship between production, appropriation, play and the environment. Children as players/appropriators exercise agency over the heterotopic space to determine what and how cultural texts will be used and modified for the specific context of the playground.

Conclusion

In the case study of the playground, I use Willett’s (2013) media-referenced play styles to illuminate the ways that children appropriate the semiotic resources of popular culture through transmediated heterotopic play. In reading cultural texts, children exert agency within the commercial market by retrofitting the heterotopic space of the playground to accommodate the demands of transmedia storytelling, producing unique cultural artifacts of childhood. While the

emergence of modern mass media was feared to result in the end of vital folk culture traditions, contemporary children's play reaffirms the ever-evolving nature of culture. Like the older folk culture of storytelling and singing, this new media-enriched childhood culture encourages broad participation, a sharing of knowledge, and a preservation of the past.

The images of childhood innocence and digital expertise represented in popular culture are responsible for constructing a utopian childhood, capable of being achieved within the contrived space of the playground. The messy bodies of unsupervised children are made clean and contained within the fences of the playground, resulting in the construction of a heterotopia designed to house and control a portion of the population. The heterotopia works to undermine the utopian image its space was designed to cultivate by breaking down the structures in place to keep the child's body clean and safe. These structures include adult expectations for obedience, civility, and respect, but are juxtaposed by expectations for creativity, spontaneity, and individuality.

A playground is built on paradox, opposition, and transgression, providing the ultimate space for the amalgamation of opposing forces, between the folk and the popular, the physical and the virtual, the natural and the commercial, and the clean and dirty. Children's participation in transmedia play becomes heterotopic as it is enacted by 'real' children in 'real' places. The discursive acts of heterotopic transmediated play occur between and betwixt spaces but rooted in the 'real' place of the playground, resulting in the appropriation and transformation of the multiple spaces it occupies. As placeless popular culture texts are pulled into the 'real' through folk practices, a dialectical conversation between producers and consumers is revealed.

The semiotic resources of the multimodality of popular culture are repurposed to fit the social needs of children and fit harmoniously within the pre-existing structures of folklore. This

process entails a certain degree of world blending and transgression on the part of the actors who employ it, assuring that a heterotopic space is necessary. Once media content has been absorbed into children's vernacular and knowledge repertoires, it will be passed from one child to another in the same way that folklore is transmitted. Acting in ways similar to transmedia storytelling, the content generated within a single medium can stand on its own and be amalgamated into the whole story. New content created on the playground can stand alone but is also absorbed into the folklore of the playground and the transmedia story for that particular knowledge community. This convergence makes the separation of folk culture for the folklorist and popular culture for the sociologist barely tenable.

A dialogic approach to studying children's play occurs when the sedimented text of the playground and folkloristic notions of transmission and recreation are perceived as constitutional to the active participation of consumers in commercial practices. Within the heterotopic space of the playground, children undergo a complex negotiation with the rewriting of emergent and residual texts of the playground. Through an act of transmediation, children fuse the semiotic resources of both multimodalities to produce a form of play that encourages innovation and respects tradition. This process of heterotopic transmediated play reaches new heights as it is implemented in large organizational structures. The second principle of heterotopias is that they shift in their function as society evolves. Folk cultures have eroded the barriers between producers and consumers and propelled the global reach of fan communities, and as a result the function of the playground has shifted to an official space of fandom.

The following chapter will examine the playground as a place of fandom, and fan participation as a form of folk engagement that bridges the assumed gap between the physical and the virtual, and the popular and the folk. As 'the folk' is increasingly fleshed out in popular

culture texts, and knowledge communities utilize folk practices to position themselves as popular culture producers, a form of global heterotopic transmediated play is enacted.

Chapter Two: The Heterotopia of Fandom

The relationship among the material, textual, and semiotic components that comprise popular culture are at their core contradictory. They involve a collision between the top-down profit-motivated decisions of an economically driven industry and the bottom-up interests of the audiences that consume their content. As evidenced by the number of toys, films, apps, and other products that fail to resonate with the populace, the interests of the people do not always align with the interests of the industry. For a commodity or text to become popular, it must achieve mass consensus. Popular culture cannot be understood through consumption alone but must include the active process of meaning-making that is involved in a person's acts of reading, embodying, and seeking pleasure from the textual material (Fiske, 2010:19). Popular culture is created, sustained, and transformed by the folk, not manufactured, produced, and sold by the industry. And the site most invested in producing popular culture through folk means is fandom. In the case study of fandom, the cross-roads of popular culture and folklore are contextualized in the research of Jenkins (2006b, 2012, 2018), Fiske (2010), Belk (1970), and Llyod (1967).

The industry is tasked with producing cultural resources and textual repertoires that consumers will either use or reject as they construct *their* popular culture. The folk makes popular culture, but this is not to say that it is folklore. Folklore consists of the enduring traditions and systems of text that come to define a community. Cultural texts, which may or may not become popular, are momentarily incorporated into folklore for as long as their semiotic use holds relevance for the consumer. To define popular culture, then, is to say that it is the cultural texts that are most widely accessible and appeal to the largest audience for a given moment in history. However, the simplicity of this definition is decidedly deceptive, for popular culture embeds itself into the very fabric of society, intertwining with tradition and folklore and

formulating connections and networks among like-minded individuals. To that end, it is necessary to identify the folk nature of popular culture that both sustains it and creates communities around it.

Audiences evolve from consumers to producers: producers of meanings, pleasures, and cultural texts (Fiske, 2010:20); I would add to this list, the producers of community. In the case study of fandom, I argue the commodity or text is transformed by users into a discursive structure of potential meaning used as a semiotic resource for cultural participation and community building. Through a folklore lens, consumption is not simply buying and using but producing and circulating meaning, the sustaining force behind popular culture, and is most heavily championed by fan culture. In *Textual Poachers* (2012), Henry Jenkins recognizes fan culture as composed of a specific social group that constructs meaning, community and identity from materials others have deemed trivial and worthless. Jenkins describes fan culture as complex, multidimensional, and consisting of multiple forms of participation and levels of engagement. This subculture is characterized by the appropriation of media content in the construction of alternative texts and social identities (Jenkins, 2012:2). Membership in a specific fan community is not contingent on traditional geographical and generational boundaries but instead is identified through particular forms of consumption and cultural preferences.

The strong social aspect of popular culture ensures that it remains a fluid, unstable structure that shifts with the demands of everyday life, producing different semiotic resources to meet the necessities of the moment. These consistent reformulations are made within a structure of heterotopia. These two structures merge and inform one another as the folk consume popular culture, and popular culture is constituted by the folk. Heterotopias are fluid sites wherein bodies are able to shift between worlds, transgressing and upsetting the spaces that they inhabit

(Foucault, 1986:25). The ephemeral and placeless space of popular culture is given substance and meaning as it collides with the real-world places of consumption and is embodied by consumers. Indeed, I would argue that only when commercial culture passes through heterotopias are fandoms created, for it is through appropriation, resistance, and transgression that fan play occurs. Within the heterotopia of the playground, for example, children demonstrate their position as fans by exercising their freedom of choice, shifting between social categories, and claiming often contradictory positions within the popular culture environment. Fandom represents a specific site of transmediated heterotopic play contingent on active popular culture consumption, a practice that may not be generalizable to all childhood experiences. Through their consumption of popular culture, certain children are able to reject their position as subjugated subjects within a colonized playpen, constructing their own systems of meaning and forms of cultural participation.

Science fiction and fantasy conventions, also known as cons, are important spaces where the traditions of fan communities and fandom are practiced. As this case study explores, they serve as heterotopic sites wherein the products of industry converge with the meaning-making practices of the folk. Within these spaces, communities are formed, sustained, and transformed through the community-making practices that have circulated for centuries. Fandom evolves out of folkdom. Folkdom being the spaces that exist at the intersection of popular culture and folklore. Fans of various popular culture texts congregate within the heterotopia of the convention creating collective meaning through a network of emergent and residual texts, objects, and performances. Two defining practices of fandom that evolve from folkdom are the performances of cosplay and filklore. Cosplay, the tradition of costuming and performing as a popular culture character, and filklore, the tradition of using song and music to rework popular

culture texts, evolve out of a long history of folk tradition and, while used officially at conventions to designate one's affiliation with a fandom, have been used unofficially for centuries by children to define their culture.

Despite the importance of folk practices to the networking and community building of fandom, fan culture has received little scholarly attention from anthropologists and folklorists. Festivals, public celebrations, and community performances are among the oldest and most common areas of focus in folklore studies (e.g., Glassie, 1975; Magliocco, 2001, 2006; Noyes, 2003; Santino, 2004; Ware, 2001, 2006; Weems, 2008; Wojcik, 1995), but what little research has been done to study fandom from a folklore perspective has not advanced to study fandom in the modern age (Bacon-Smith 1992, 2000; Hale, 2014; Joseph-Witham, 1996; Narváez, 2007). Even less research ties the folk practices of children to the folk practices of fandom, despite the many similarities. Much like the case study for the heterotopia of the playground, the heterotopia of the convention is a collision of the emergent and the residual, the virtual and the real, and the popular and the folk. Both children's and adult's fan engagement with cultural texts can be understood as heterotopic transmediated play.

By considering children's fan play as a form of heterotopic transmediated play, I illustrate how children's identities as fans are embodied through play and power and that, as a subculture, child fans are not passive receptors of media but makers of their own popular culture. Contessa Small (2015) defines fan play as "the repetitious, customary, and co-creative play activities, events, materials, and behaviours of fans" (180). Children's fan play, both on the physical and digital playground, will be explored through their interpretation of cosplay as superhero play and their recreation of filklore through Wizard Rock. Fan play involves a sophisticated interweaving of shifting interests and stable traditions. Through their fan play and

their own vernacular construction of the commercial text, children engage popular culture in the practices that define them, and in the process, children wrestle cultural texts away from the commercial industry. While sometimes complementary to the values, beliefs and opinions of industry and adult management, children's appropriations and re-interpretations also frequently resist and condemn corporate domination and adult pressures. Henry Jenkins (2012) considers fanfiction to be a fight by the folk to reclaim the traditional stories reproduced by commercial corporations. Children take up arms in this fight as they transgender Batman, homosexualize Harry Potter, and weaponize the Teletubbies, for example. Amy Harmon (1997) argues this fight marks "a return to the folk tradition of participatory storytelling" (para. 8).

Likewise, children's fan play activities showcase their ability to appropriate cultural texts, transforming them and reworking them for their own purposes. The spaces that converge within a heterotopia are simultaneously compatible and incompatible; the oppositional spaces of popular culture and folklore converge in fandom. Fan play encompasses the traditional and innovative ways fans celebrate and engage with cultural texts, both individually and collectively. Fan play results in new forms of emergent folk culture. Fandom studies provide an alternative perspective to study media consumers, both young and old, by foregrounding their active participation within networked communities and the creative transformations, appropriations, and negotiations audiences have with mass-media texts. By amalgamating popular culture ideologies with community ideals, folklore consumers speak back to the text and assert their own cultural agenda about what media they want to consume. This chapter will provide a particular perspective on children's play, informed by media and cultural studies scholarship about fandom and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006b, 2012, 2018; Small, 2015). To illustrate how children

participate in fandom through heterotopic transmediated play, I will explore the comparable lore in childhood culture, commercial narratives, and traditional adult fan behaviour.

Folking Popular Culture

Media producers have enormous control over the cultural agenda by determining the stories, performers, and topics deemed suitable for child audiences. However, the participation of child fans on playgrounds illustrates the expanding capacity of children to set and transform cultural and political agendas, often reframing and critiquing the very franchises they fan over. Looking beyond the physical products produced by fans, children's fan play reflects the ways that sharing, exploring, and 'playing' with media content are active practices that create meaning, even when they do not produce new kinds of media texts. While children's engagement with child entertainment has often been overlooked as a quality of childhood, they are most certainly fans that regularly participate in fandom.

The word 'fan' has a broad meaning which loosely encompasses anyone who has an affective bond with a particular product that can be expressed simply by consuming the text. Fandom, on the other hand, "refers to those who claim a common identity and a shared culture with other fans" (Jenkins, 2018:16). While being a fan can be a solitary experience, participation in fandom is better understood as membership to an expansive subculture. Fandoms centre around various media objects but share traditions and practices that can be traced back to grassroot folk cultures. Jenkins defines these fandom communities as sites of informal learning and examples of participatory cultures.

Participatory cultures have provided the skills and space for consumers to produce their own semiotic resources, meanings, and cultural texts. The San Diego Comic-Con, arguably the most popular science fiction and fantasy convention, in 2019 "attracted over 130,000 attendees

and 2,500 members of the media from over 30 countries" (Lindahl & Hersko, 2021). The event is a spectacular celebration of fan efforts where cosplay, filking, and fan-produced work take centre stage. Multiple fandom communities gather at Comic-Con each year to share their knowledge, sell their work, and engage in a shared experience.

While participatory culture predates the digital, the emergence of digital networks has altered the ways in which these cultures operate. Fandom's reach has expanded in the digital era, creating spaces, irrespective of place, for meaningful exchanges that otherwise may never have occurred. The digital space also offers new and creative means for fan expression and meaning-making, such as Wattpad, the world's largest social storytelling platform. Jenkins (2006b) argues that with the emergence of digital platforms and tools, the masses are gaining an agency more akin to traditional folk cultures, with some differences. The tools previously reserved for official producers of popular culture have gradually become available to the populace, providing a similar means of production and distribution for fan communities.

Where traditional folk cultures were restricted to face-to-face communications and using the tools and resources at hand for cultural production, digital networks have created highly fluid social contexts, where content can be produced at a higher calibre and distributed beyond the community in which it was produced. (The different forms of participation offered by digital networks will be explored more fully in Chapter three). Fandom sits at the precarious intersection of consumption and production; its occurrence within heterotopias ensures that the oppositions that converge within the space prove compatible. The folk semiotic resources of sharing, communicating, teaching, and producing intermingle with the commercial resources of production, distribution, and monetization. As a form of heterotopic transmediated play, fan play embodies the traditions of folk cultures while 'poaching' the texts and tools of mass production.

Jenkins finds the term 'textual poaching' in the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), who proposes the concept of the fan as a reader of popular texts who appropriates and transforms the experience of watching TV and reading literature into a complex participatory culture (Jenkins, 2012:23). Through the practice of textual poaching, fans construct cultural and social identities through the narratives and images of mass culture. Far from simply replicating popular texts, fans carve a unique culture out of the material by articulating opinions and concerns that may run counter to the dominant media. Michel de Certeau characterizes poaching as active reading, which occurs as readers take control over the meaning of the text through appropriation and transmediation, as exemplified in children's heterotopic transmediated play. Poaching is a useful term for understanding the process underway as cultural texts become popular culture within the heterotopia. Fans create dedicated spaces within the places of authority and poach the material they find most exciting; they are like hunters hidden in blinds where the game can be assessed, measured, and tested before being poached. Within the heterotopia of the school playground, children use the existing play structures, scheduled playtime, and constant surveillance to evade, resist, and transform the expectations of a 'student' and the romantic image of childhood. The structures and institutions erected to support dominant ideologies are simultaneously used to hide, shelter, and bolster the unwanted poacher. Much like the child's imagination that has no designated place in the 'real' world and must create its own space through poaching, fandom exists in a placeless space that must coopt the places of industry to reach community levels. Convention centres, in this way, become stages for costuming and role-playing; sports fields become arenas for magical warfare; and the home becomes a studio for artistic production.

Jenkins further draws from the work of de Certeau to define popular reading as "a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards

according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience" (2012:26). This definition parallels the descriptions used for play and how children draw on a variety of texts in the act of bricolage, borrowing, combining, and transforming elements across media to construct remixes that fit the social context of the playground. It is also reminiscent of William Corsaro's (2015) *interpretive reproduction* as the notion of poaching is, first and foremost, a theory of appropriation. Like childhood culture, fan culture is comprised not simply of poachers but nomads: individuals are not constrained by a single popular text but constantly consume new media, acquiring new material and making new meanings.

Jenkins (2012) thoughtfully points out that the term poaching brings the potentially conflicting interests of producers and consumers to the forefront. There is an inherent power differential between 'landowners' and 'poachers,' as he argues, yet fans are able to challenge the legal constraints placed on their pleasure. While producers may have more control over the social and cultural agenda, consumers influence which cultural texts will be incorporated into popular culture and which will not. Fans place more significance on the meanings they create in contrast to those generated by producers but not always in ways that oppose the traditional narrative. Fans select texts from a vast cultural industry based on whether they connect to their previously held cultural and social interests. This tendency means that "there is already some degree of compatibility between the ideological construction of the text and the ideological commitments of the fans" (2012:34), making some media content more readily integrated into the existing folklore of the community.

As cultural texts travel through the heterotopia to become popular culture, consumers become producers and texts are reworked to fit the everyday needs of audiences. Fans

demonstrate their ownership and connection to media content through the dismissal of institutional authority and intellectual property rights. The resistance of power integral to heterotopias becomes a defining feature of fandom and an essential tool for popular culture making. A text made popular must, then, contain both the forces of utopia and heterotopia, the opportunities for grassroots folk engagement to accept, confront, or evade dominant ideologies. Consumers participate in fandom at the intersection of industry production and everyday life. Fandom is made by the folk, not imposed upon them by industry producers. To engage in fandom is to engage in folk practices. Fan participation is folk engagement, and as consumers, fandom becomes a collective form that speaks back to industry producers to initiate a sustained global form of heterotopic transmediated play. Through the texts and commodities of popular culture, consumers are provided with semiotic, cultural, and material resources with which they can produce their own commodities, both material and cultural. Fandom is spurred by the production and circulation of products and meanings created by and for the knowledge communities of consumers: the popular culture makers. In making popular culture, consumers, as de Certeau (1984) puts it, make do with what they have. And what they have are the textual and material resources of industry and the semiotic and linguistic resources of community. The creation of popular culture lies not so much in the production of commodities but in the utility and appropriation of commodities in consumers' everyday lives.

The products of fan participation in childhood are difficult to study – they have no designated place, only the momentary spaces carved out within adult-controlled places. They are scattered and dispersed across the messy, tumbling, ephemeral childhood experience. They blend in with the sanctioned activities of the playground, camouflaged to meet the expectations of closely watching supervisors. De Certeau argues that in achieving commercial success,

industries, paradoxically, provide the necessary resources for their own subversion (1984:40). To control the child's body, adults erect places to house and supervise these bodies, in turn constructing shared spaces for children to congregate in large numbers and collectively participate in dirty, transgressive behaviour. In producing commercial texts and commodities, the industry has therefore provided consumers with the characters, plots, places, and tools needed to create their own fan-produced works. Fans engage in the folk practice of 'making do,' constructing community spaces within and against commercial places. Since children and fans lack their own places, they must construct their own heterotopic spaces within a network of already established structures and forces. Consumers, in this way, must make do with what is at their disposal and, more specifically, what is marketed to them as the target market. With the industry resources of prefabricated children's costumes and Disney princess texts, 3-year-old Caiden, as discussed in Chapter one, transgresses prescribed forms of boy play to declare his fan affiliation with the *Frozen* franchise and rework the popular culture texts to meet his needs better. Children take the utopian image of childhood as the primary texts made available to them and strip them of their hegemony to produce something meaningful.

Jenkins (2018) identifies five distinct dimensions of fan culture, which can readily be seen in the heterotopic transmediated play children engage in on the playground. Those dimensions include (1) the community's relationship to a particular mode of reception; (2) inclusionary activities for other audiences; (3) the interpretive function of the community; (4) traditions of cultural production; and (5) fan culture's separation from mainstream culture. Jenkins explores each of these dimensions in action to demonstrate the influence of socio-historical contexts and the continual negotiation of meaning within the community. When

considering these dimensions of participation in comparison to aspects of social play on the playground, there are many similarities.

I theorize that children's heterotopic transmediated play is an example of Jenkins' fan participation, within the case study of fandom, in that childhood culture has a strong relationship with the modes of reception designed to attract and entertain children. Heterotopias "function in relation to all the space that remains" (Foucault, 1986:26). Heterotopias do not exist in a vacuum but reflect the shifting and changing aspects of the world around them – the playground, in this way, functions in reflection and connection to the surrounding spaces of childhood. As discussed in Chapter one, the children's entertainment industry has long recognized the benefits of transmedia storytelling, providing an array of avenues for commercial franchises to enter the playground. Fantasy narratives slip perfectly into the socio-dramatic play of children, while videogames are actively reworked for physical embodiment, and toys are seamlessly integrated into the child's environment.

Many of the activities seen on the playground are designed as inclusionary. Children, in this way, build their social activities on traditional playground folk activities, providing a space for other content users to incorporate additional fan material or expand their already evolving media-referenced play. Many examples of children's contemporary games, songs, and stories include references to multiple media sources, combining to create a fusion of child interests. This can be seen in superhero play where DC's Batman works with Marvel's Iron Man and Nintendo's Pikachu to fight evil. The shifting dynamic of the playground allows children to participate in multiple fandoms and for emerging fandoms to find a home within the space. Heterotopic transmediated play is also a collective experience that highlights the individual voice. Within the group activity, children can showcase their individual knowledge and

interpretations of the cultural product. During a group dance routine of the Spice Girls, for example, children can perform as their favourite singer, voicing their preference by participating or refusing to participate if the singer is unavailable.

Through their play and lore, children express their varying interpretations of a cultural product. The playground provides a space where children can voice their opinions about the same subject matter, resulting in rich discussion and complicated play. Children express their individual interpretations through character role-playing, narrative building, game incorporation, etc. Cultural texts gain substance and meaning as they are integrated into the folk practices of their consumers. Childhood culture and playground culture have a longstanding connection to traditional folk culture, which underscores children's fan participation within Foucault's "space that remains" (1986:26). The folk traditions of a community begin to define the traditions of a fandom. Semiotic resources converge within a heterotopia, producing tools that are both innovative and conservative, physical and digital, folk and commercial.

Jenkins describes the fourth dimension of fan culture as the traditions of cultural production. Children's playground folklore emerges out of traditions of cultural production. A significant amount of the language, clothing, objects, and activities that define childhood culture are produced by children. Often adults struggle to understand what children are saying as their cultural lexicon continues to evolve. What was 'awesome' becomes 'rad,' 'tubular,' 'cool,' 'sweet,' 'sick,' 'lit,' and 'GUCCI.' As children participate in the fan community, their forms of communication and cultural engagement reflect the social expectations and norms of the space. Children's cultural fan production relies on the semiotic tools and resources at their disposal, including songs, rhymes, games, dance, music, socio-dramatic play, drawing, and storytelling.

Childhood culture, like fan culture, is defined by its separation from mainstream adult culture. The spaces designed by adults for children to reproduce utopian images of innocence and purity become distorted reflections of those images as their occupants transform them into heterotopias. They become paradoxical sites of resistance and obedience, creativity and conformity. Fan participation, for many children, acts as a form of rebellion and transgression against both adult culture and its ideas of childhood and childhood innocence. Children use their fan participation to engage in topics and forms of entertainment restricted to them and as a tool for mocking, parodying, and critiquing mainstream adult culture. Resistance becomes a form of acceptance, critique a form of appreciation. While conducting interviews with children about their Harry Potter fan play, Contessa Small (2015) found that children sullied and altered Harry Potter titles to claim ownership over the child entertainment product. These included, "Harry Potty and the Philosopher's Toilet; Harry Potty and the Chamber of the Toilet; Harry Potty and the Prisoner of the Toilet; Harry Potty and the Goblet of Pee-Pee; Harry Potty and the Order of the Toilet; Harry Potty and the Half-Blood Toilet Paper" (245). The two girls demonstrated their knowledge of the Harry Potter series and fan appreciation while simultaneously making fun of the mainstream franchise and turning it into a product of childhood by using toilet humour.

Children's fan play generally occurs in a group setting, with the main appeal being the collective experience of playing with friends. Children bring their commercial interests to the playground to generate and maintain friendships and participate in social activities. Because of the long history folklore has on the playground, a platform for collective experiences has been established to ensure diverse and multiple forms of fan participation. Fans do not merely consume pre-produced stories and artifacts; they manufacture their own and produce additional cultural products, such as art, fanzines, songs, and videos. Fan participation is a form of

heterotopic transmediated play that transforms the consumption of media into the production of new texts that may come to define a culture and community.

Fan Culture

Fan-produced works, like oral storytelling, respond to the desires of their audience and reflect the traditions of the community. In this way, fan participation is folk engagement. Fan culture is capable of producing strong traditions and creating enduring works that resemble the permanence and flexibility of the folklore that sustains cultural communities. Fan artifacts can be understood as collective expressions; they reflect the social negotiation of meanings occurring within the fandom. While abiding by the conventions set forth by the fandom community, these fan texts also act as provocations for further fan elaborations. The flexibility inherent in fan-produced works allows the text to adapt to the particular needs of the creator, community, location, and historical context, often resulting in the same fan producing radically different versions of their artistic reaction to a favoured cultural product.

While the entertainment industries of the Global North produce a utopian image of childhood capable of reaching large audiences and generating increased revenue, they also incite a need to rework, rewrite, and reimagine popular culture. Narrow representations of gender, race, sexuality, occupation, culture, geography, and worldview demand that audiences respond in ways that shatter the utopian, reject the dominant hegemony, and redirect power in making popular culture. Fans produce and consume creative work not to relive their initial experience with the product but to participate in a collective experience and be a part of a community. As fans textually poach and reclaim media material for their own purposes, these ‘borrowed’ artifacts are transformed, creating cultural products altogether different from the originals and reflecting the fan community's standards, conventions, and desires. Fan culture involves the

convergence of popular culture and folk tradition within a heterotopia. While fanfiction represents the fusion of folk oral storytelling and contemporary media texts, other popular fusions of residual and emergent, folk and popular, include cosplay, which combines religious costuming and popular culture characters, and filklore, which combines communal folk singing and popular culture texts.

Cosplay

Fandom sits at the intersection of popular culture and folklore. As a form of folk engagement, fan activities simultaneously poach from popular culture texts that interest fans and the folk traditions that strengthen communities and define cultural participation. One fan activity that has become a defining feature of fandom and is built on folk practices of costuming is *cosplay*. The word cosplay comes from the combining of 'costume' with 'play.' First coined by game designer Takahashi Nobuyuki in 1983, he used the term to describe the costuming practices of fans at Science Fiction Conventions in America (Lamerichs, 2011). Cosplay, in its simplest terms, is when "fans of popular culture (e.g. television series, games, movies) produce their own costumes inspired by fictional characters" (2011: par.1.2). The activity involves storytelling, performance, embodiment, and pretense. Through cosplay, fans appropriate popular narratives by reproducing themselves in the likeness of characters and stories that hold the most meaning for them. This activity is performed in "close connection to the fan community and the fan's own identity" (Lamerichs, 2011: par.1.2). Like other forms of fan engagement (including fanfiction), cosplay draws on folk practices to interpret existing texts, embed them in real-life experiences, and remain connected to an established community.

Cosplay involves the identification with and embodiment of narrative content. Cosplayers have a dynamic relationship with both popular culture texts and folklore texts. Cosplayers do not

simply duplicate the characters they portray in an isolated act of transformation; instead, they bring their individual experiences and personalities to a communal performance. The characters chosen are thus signifiers of both personal preference and community membership. On the one hand, a costume signifies a fan's emotional attachment to a specific narrative or character. On the other, the costume signifies a fan's commitment to the fan community. While cosplay represents a fresh interpretation of popular culture texts by loyal fans, it also represents the modern iteration of centuries-old community folk costuming practices.

Cosplay consists of multiple iterations, including discrete representation, generic representation, and everyday cosplay, as I will describe below. Hale (2014) differentiates between what he describes as 'discrete representation' and 'generic representation.' Discrete representation is the most recognizable form of cosplay in which the cosplayer dresses and performs in a manner that is as authentic to the original as possible (2014:19). In participating in discrete representations of cosplay, the performance becomes a public signal of community membership, for which the efforts displayed through costuming and performance demonstrate a cosplayer's familiarity and commitment to a text. It is a declaration of personal identity as well as collective membership in the fandom. The close attention to detail (paramount to discrete representations) is only truly appreciated by those with enough knowledge to recognize them, marking them as part of the community.

Generic representation reproduces general character typologies rather than specific characters, such as vampires, witches, or pirates rather than Edward Cullen, Sabrina, or Captain Jack Sparrow (Hale, 2014:11). Independent of a source text, these generic personas are familiar and recognizable because of their ubiquitous presence in popular culture, mass media, and folklore. Their stereotypical descriptions produce immediate recognition in audiences who are

drawing from a shared reservoir of cultural references. Character types are recognized and elaborated on through costumes, actions, and speech patterns to produce a character uniquely tied to the cosplayer performing them. For example, Hale describes seeing a cosplayer dressed as a generic monster hunter, equipped with a knife, stake, and belt of skulls, but specifically on the hunt for Muppets (Hale, 2014:26). Elmo's decapitated body with Xed-out eyes lay impaled on the end of her stake, making her cosplay reference culturally generic but personally unique. The Muppet monster hunter is not from any source text but is used to indicate individuality and group membership to the macabre monster fandom.

The third iteration of cosplay Nettie Brock (2017) refers to as *everyday cosplay*, which includes the increasingly popular phenomenon of "Disneybounding." Brock describes everyday cosplay as a desire to incorporate the storytelling, performance, embodiment, and pretence of cosplay into the everyday practices of one's life. A Disneybounder will wear red, yellow, and blue with a headband as an homage to Snow White. Disneybounders separate themselves from traditional and discrete Disney cosplayers by adamantly denying that they are in costume and insisting that they are wearing regular clothes inspired by Disney characters. Brock describes them as "endeavouring to embody their perception of the character's soul, but as though that character lived in the 'real' twenty-first-century world" (2017:304). Rather than mould the self to the character by accurately reproducing costumes, actions, and speech patterns, everyday cosplayers attempt to mould the character to the self by reproducing the character in line with the style, daily activities, and personality of the cosplayer. Disneybounding represents a further blurring between what is 'real' and fantasy, what is popular culture and folk. Brock argues that Disneybounders choose to engage in this form of cosplay to increase their sense of social identity and relive their childhood Disney memories.

Cosplay has traditionally been examined, explained, and understood as operating solely within the bounds of fandom as a unique expression of fan appreciation, first emerging in the 1960s and 1970s when fans of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* began attending Sci-fi conventions in full costume (Lamerichs, 2011). However, costuming has served an important function in societies throughout history, becoming a fixture of contemporary folklore. Perhaps the most recognizable and widely practiced costuming tradition in Western culture is Halloween. The act of making and wearing costumes and masquerading in public with large groups of people is a time-honoured tradition practiced by both children and adults. The tradition of dressing in both homemade and store-bought costumes to participate in a collective cultural performance can be examined from a contemporary and a historical perspective. Costuming is an individual expression performed within and for the community, drawing on shared semiotic resources and cultural symbols, some centuries old. Likewise, the processes of tradition that have shaped both cosplay and Halloween are historical and rooted in folk practices.

Halloween traditions evolved out of the ancient Celtic pre-Christian practice of mumming, from the Danish word mumme, which means to parade in masks (Santino, 1983:5). The Gallic New Year celebrations of Samhain involved the donning of slaughtered animal skins to invoke the spirits of the sacred animals and to commune with ghostly ancestors. Villagers would prepare feasts for the coming spirits and lead them out of town by a masked procession (Belk, 1990). In 835, Pope Gregory IV, in an attempt to Christianize the folk tradition, renamed the celebration ‘All Hallows’ (All Saints) Day, also known as All Hallows Eve, and eventually Hallowe’en. Rather than masquerading as pagan animal spirits, the church encouraged patrons to dress as their favourite Saints (Belk, 1990).

It is not a stretch of the imagination to claim that Saints were the leading characters of popular culture in the past. Stories, songs, and art regularly depicted the lives, deeds, and physical descriptions of these enigmatic beings. These popular texts were consumed for various reasons, including entertainment, education, and community engagement. On All Hallows Eve, for example, people declared their membership to the Christian religion and their individual preference for Saints through costuming and travelling door-to-door soliciting soul-cakes. Much like today, people in the past consumed popular culture by incorporating it into their folk practices. The tradition of mumming persists in the folk traditions of today. Children enthusiastically dress as their favourite popular culture characters as they trick-or-treat for candy, and fans eagerly cosplay their favourite characters when participating in fandom. Today fans actively poach the tradition to experience the same folk function of individual expression and community participation. Cosplay is the redeployment of an ancient custom with a long folk history.

Mumming, trick-or-treating, and cosplay work for the individual as a public declaration of group membership combined with personal preference. Costuming is the embodiment of shared cultural symbols of a community and a form of communication that signals one's knowledge, appreciation, and transgression of cultural texts. The masquerading and carnival atmosphere of Halloween and cosplay allow those costumed to invert power structures, try on different identities, and make their voices heard. Children can act and dress as frightening creatures, unruly animals, and even adults. Their pleasures, charades, and gluttony are granted prominence on this most unholy of nights — a time when their relationship with popular culture is celebrated, recorded, and rewarded. Children's Halloween costuming can also be described as

discrete and generic representations as they disguise themselves as Darth Vader, Super Woman, and Hello Kitty or a ninja, zombie, and lion.

Much like children who transcend the normal rules of propriety on Halloween night, fans invert industry power structures by reclaiming intellectual property as their own. By infusing popular culture texts with personal preferences and individual interpretation, cosplayers rewrite cultural texts as fan production. Just as mumming is both a celebration of religion and community, cosplay is both a celebration of popular culture and fandom. It is a group endeavour that serves the interests of the community over the interests of the cultural industry that produced the texts that are fanned over. Through crossplay (dressing as a character of the opposite sex), hybrid intertextualizations (Spider-Bat Man), and reimaginations (killer Disney princesses), cosplayers rewrite cultural texts in ways that suit their individual needs.

Moreover, marginalized peoples have historically used costuming as a folk tradition to increase their visual presence in society and tell the story of their community. The queer community is an example of a marginalized group that has used costuming as a form of cultural declaration and collective expression. The San Francisco gay community has been identified as a primary inspiration for contemporary versions of Halloween with their drag performances and flamboyant costuming (Belk, 1990). With many of these groups, their mode of dress characterizes their daily existence. Much like the everyday cosplay of Disneybounders, skinheads, punks, and other marginalized communities also use a form of costume or uniform to communicate their community affiliations and reject institutionalized dress codes (Kirkpatrick, 2015). Institutionalized dress codes, as folk practices in and of themselves, can be seen in the ceremonial use of uniforms (e.g. military, clergy), occupational uniforms (e.g. police, doctors,

firefighters), and recreational uniforms (e.g. athletes, wedding party). Each of these categories can be tied to everyday cosplay.

Communal bonding, emotional displays, and collective engagement play a significant role in the folk tradition of costuming. While cosplay is most often described as transformative, a public display of a private persona (Hale, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2015; Lamerichs, 2011), it should be remembered that it is always a communal experience rooted in the folk practices of a community. Costuming involves the visual changing of the person's body but also the visible declaration of group membership and the valuing of tradition. Cosplay and Halloween are not just about dressing up; like uniform wearing, they are about commitment, communication, and community. It is a signal that can only be read correctly and appreciated by members of the same community. Documenting the ways in which folk costuming practices speak to and echo cosplay fandom and performance leads this discussion outwards to the consideration of other, related forms of costuming and play, suggesting that they all have a foundation in folklore. Such work generates an opportunity to creatively reconsider the intersections of popular culture and folklore and their emergence within childhood culture. The following section will explore children's superhero play as an example of playground fandom that relies equally on emergent popular culture texts and residual folklore texts.

Superhero Play

In considering cosplay as an extension of costuming folklore, traceable throughout history, it is also easily recognized in the folk practices of children. Narratives that embody the fundamentals of costuming and role-play hold particular significance in the play and folklore of both adults and children. The superhero genre, with its focus on disguise, secret identities, and costuming, emerges from the folktales of shapeshifters and ancient gods visiting Earth dressed in

the guise of mortals, or kings and queens traversing cities dressed as commoners (Atchison, 2012:13). The strategic use of costuming is not the only feature that attracts children to the genre. Superhero stories and the folktales that inspire them have always revolved around notions of power. Myths and epics tell the stories of powerful, omnipresent characters with inhuman capabilities (Coffin & Cohen, 1978). Fairy tales and legends, such as Cinderella and Hercules, tell stories of corruption and power reallocation. Children live in an array of institutions designed to control, regulate, and supervise their every action, provoking an immense sense of powerlessness in them. Scholars have argued that superheroes avenge the powerless, disrupting power hierarchies and serving as a model for children of the kind of control they would like to yield over their constrained environments (Kline, 1993; Marsh, 2000). The enduring nature of superheroes suggests that the narrative may fulfill a deep-seated need in humans to obtain some form of control over their lives. Children readily incorporate many aspects of the superhero genre into their own folk practices as they negotiate their place in the world and make meaning.

Superhero play recreates the mumming practices of the past while embodying the power play and costuming inherent to the superhero genre. While Spiderman is simultaneously Peter Parker (powerless) and Spiderman (powerful), children are both themselves (powerless) and their alter ego in play (powerful). During superhero play, children contend with both the fiction (the popular culture texts they are poaching) and the reality (the cultural activity they are performing). Within the heterotopia, distinct spaces of reality and fiction, powerful and powerless, and folklore and popular culture break down and merge.

Superhero play is a long-standing tradition on the playground, emerging in the late 1930s with the first issues of Superman (Boyd, 1997). Superhero play refers to "the active, physical play of children pretending to be media characters imbued with extraordinary abilities, including

superhuman strength or the ability to transform themselves into superhuman entities" (Boyd, 1997:1). As a form of play that has persisted for nearly a century, superhero play has become its own form of childhood folklore passed down from one generation to the next. As a folk practice it contains many folk elements that predate the advent of the modern superhero, including costuming, role-play, storytelling, fantasy, and rough-and-tumble play (R&T). Rough-and-tumble play, commonly used to describe play fighting, wrestling, and chasing behaviours, has historically been used in the poaching of popular culture material, from war games during the First and Second World Wars to Cowboys and Indians during the boom of Western cinema. The combination of bodily manipulation and fantasy enactment leads certain popular culture texts to be more seamlessly incorporated into folk practice. The violent, fantastical nature of the superhero genre fits the high energy, high action demands of R&T in conjunction with the traditions of costuming in childhood.

According to Brenda Boyd (1997), R&T serves three functions for children: affiliation, dominance, and social skill facilitation. R&T is a play practice used to form and maintain friendships, with most play sessions occurring between friends. It is often used as an indicator of social hierarchy within children's peer groups as youngsters choose to engage with other children of a similar build, strength, and stamina. Participating in R&T involves self-regulation and learning to read the social cues of one's partner. Superhero play combines the two folk traditions of R&T and dress-up. Playing dress-up is a formative play practice in childhood that often involves what Roger Caillois (1961) would call 'mimicry,' defined as "a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another" (19). Like cosplay, dress-up involves a combination of

storytelling, performance, embodiment, and pretense and is used to juxtapose incompatible spaces. By dressing-up as a firefighter, doctor, or police officer the child is both being and becoming; by dressing-up as a cat the child is both human and animal; and by dressing up as Wonder Woman the child is both a part of reality and fiction. In combining the traditions of R&T and dress up in superhero play, children create a play practice grounded in the folk practices of community. Superhero play is both an expression of individual preference and community membership. It is built on the stable texts of the playground and the poaching practices of cultural participation.

Children's superhero play can be an individual or collective experience. Like Disneybounders, children can develop intense attraction to a popular culture text and choose to wear a performative piece in their daily activities to stay connected to that character or world. It is not uncommon for a child to wear a favoured costume for days at a time regardless of whether the activity is play-based or mundane. In this form of everyday cosplay there is no separation of character and child but an amalgamation of the two, in which the popular culture character begins to form part of the child's identity, at least for this period in time. In research conducted by Zenna Kingdon (2018), she observed the 'real-life' superhero play of 4-year-old Jack. During dress-up play, Jack regularly chose to dress and perform as a police officer, an occupation in society he greatly admired and aspired to become. Kingdon describes Jack's play as a convergence of being, becoming, and having been (6). Jack's play draws information gathered from his previous experiences, his present interests, and his future aspirations. The three temporal spaces intersect within a heterotopia and inform his negotiations with peers, the classroom, and the larger society. Jack's aunt was a police officer: much of his play script was influenced by his conversations with her, his encounters with popular culture representations,

and the available costuming material at the childcare centre. Only when wearing the police helmet and uniformed top did Jack feel that he could truly embody the position of a police officer. The costume was an example of Hale's (2014) generic representation and provided the visible cues that Jack needed to declare his personal relationship with and preference for law enforcement and his temporary membership to the community his aunt was a part of. Jack regularly enlisted his peers to join his daily patrols, often targeting adults as 'baddies' that needed to be arrested (Kingdon, 2018:16). In the context of heterotopic transmediated play, Jack's play represents an inversion of power structures on the playground. Adults are the ones tasked with identifying poorly behaving children, reprimanding them, and correcting the behaviour. However, within the context of play, Jack the police officer was granted permission to chastise, discipline, and 'arrest' adults in the vicinity. As this example demonstrates, children exercise power by critically engaging with popular culture symbols (Dyson, 1997). Specifically, their understanding and affinity for superhero (or other types of) characters provides them with an avenue to test their physical limits, reverse power hierarchies, and reimagine folklore to fit the contemporary setting.

In research conducted by Jaye Thiel (2015), Jaye was enlisted by a group of young children to join in a complex superhero narrative game, complete with full costume regalia. Zack and his younger brother brought a trunkful of superhero costumes to the local community centre, stimulating a full day of superhero storytelling, performance, embodiment, and pretense. Zack would be referred to as Wolverine for the remainder of the day and found ways to exert his power not only as a superhero but also as "the kid who had something that others wanted" (2015:42). By recruiting others into his fantasy play (including adults) Zack demonstrated that his superhero alter ego was worthy of attention, legitimate, and essential to his expression of self

on that day. As more children joined Zack's play by donning their own costumes, they each brought their own knowledge of superheroes to their play, in the process creating new storylines that merged franchises, geographic locations, and character development.

Zack possessed a wealth of knowledge about DC and Universal Comics, while others introduced story elements that centred around the *Transformer* movies and *The Power Rangers* television show (Thiel, 2015:43). The children created an intellectually shared space using heterotopic transmediated play. Traditional games of chase, pretend play, drawing, and role-play were elaborated on to create a unique fan experience. The playground was transformed into a transmedia storytelling platform as different areas of the playground became New York East, New York South, Mexico, China, and Africa (44). As the team of superheroes traversed the globe, Zack and his friends were able to use superhero play, and the folk traditions it encompasses, to declare their fan affiliations, demonstrate their popular culture knowledge, and participate within a community of peers. Costuming, storytelling, role-play, pretend play, and R&T are historically enduring texts of the playground that children employ to engage with popular culture texts more fully. The presence of superhero costumes for Zack and his friends cemented their play as one grounded in the superhero universe and directly tied it to popular culture fandom, but it did not change the underlying community needs and traditions that motivated it.

In studying gendered role-play, Marsh (2000) introduced a 'Batman and Batwoman Head Quarters (HQ)' game in an inner-city school in Northern England, in a classroom of children aged 6 and 7 years old. During 10 days of observation, Marsh noted that the usual hegemonic discourses that typically constrained gendered role-play did not occur. Demonstrations of power and control were exhibited by both boys and girls while in the guise of Batman or Batwoman.

The HQ, a corner of the classroom that had been transformed into a 'bat cave' equipped with costumes, props, computers, and writing materials was used as a catalyst for powerful adventures for both males and females. The adventure narratives differed based on gender, Batwomen were generally concerned with rescuing victims and maintaining good relationships whilst Batmen were more focused on chasing and capturing villains; even so, the high energy nature of the play and the use of the body to tell stories was consistent for both genders. Much like their male peers, girls were seen "flying about, jumping off chairs, driving Batmobiles and capturing villains" (Marsh, 2000:219). In the context of heterotopic transmediated play, the girls in the study were able to embody the power of Batwoman and express their physical prowess, superhero knowledge, and propensity for adventure within the classroom space, rejecting utopian representations of girl play.

Wood, Litherland, and Reed (2020) found similar examples of empowerment in young girls cosplaying as Rey from *Star Wars.* Using social media posts of girls in Rey cosplay, the researchers contacted the families who posted to better understand how the character of Rey and dressing like her influenced the everyday lives and identities of girls, parents, and families. For these girls "the Rey costume was a totem for transformation" (2020:20). Entering the creative space of costuming meant escaping their everyday struggles and being able to 'channel' the power and strength of Rey. The girls were able to embody the branded qualities of Rey and communicate these qualities to adults who were familiar with the character. Parents reported feeling that their daughters – when in costume – behaved in ways that were atypical. One family stated: "She is self-confident, which in everyday life she is not. She is unafraid whereas in real life she is scared of many things" (2020:19). By embodying heroic qualities, performing heroic acts, and telling heroic stories, children engage with the heterotopic space of the playground to

position themselves as powerful, capable, and dominant. When combined with folklore, popular culture texts become symbols of evasion, transgression, and resistance. In the guise of Rey and Batwoman, these girls were able to transgress into the R&T play often performed by boys and announce themselves as members of superhero fandom. In costume, these girls were able to "deviate from cultural assumptions surrounding girls' 'natural' or inherent qualities" (2000:20) and use familiar folklore as a tool to consume popular culture material.

The three functions of R&T described by Boyd (1997) – affiliation, dominance, and social skill facilitation – can also be seen in cosplay, where costuming is used as a declaration of affiliation with both a popular culture text and a community. Dominance over the popular culture material is directly related to the social hierarchy that exists within the fandom, in which social interaction is the driving force of participation. Cosplay and superhero play are both rooted in folklore, meaning that they perform many of the same functions for their players. Following the assumption that children use their immediate resources as tools for making meaning, it is unsurprising then to see folklore as the primary means for popular culture consumption in children. However, the role of costuming and role-play in folklore has not been exclusively used by children throughout history, so as a means of community bonding and cultural appreciation the tradition has also been adopted by adult fans. Fandom sits at the intersection of folklore and popular culture; costuming (as seen in cosplay and superhero play) is just one example of the collective endeavors communities undertake to feel connected.

Filklore

Fan music-making, known as 'filking' in fandom, is a form of folk singing performed at fan conventions and encompasses the cultural processes involved in textual poaching. Filking draws on fan-shared cultural knowledge in a celebration of intense emotional commitment to a cultural product, the transformation of media texts into new cultural texts which serve fan

interests, and the sense of possession fans have over the material (Jenkins, 2012). Filklore, a play on the word folklore, involves borrowing from musical material and the skillful management of Bakhtin's (2004) heteroglossia, which contradicts the notion of original authorship as all language is endowed with meaning attributed to another. Creators of filk are keenly aware of the meanings previously inscribed on musical resources and use them to create juxtapositions. Filk closely resembles the characteristics of traditional folk singing and its role within social communities.

Filk encourages cultural participation and the reworking of textual materials, evolving with changing musical tastes and diverging interests. The connection between filk and folklore is alluded to by its very name. The term 'filk' came about when a typo on a conference program misspelled 'folk music' as 'filk music' (Jenkins, 2012:276). The fan community adopted the term because it signalled both the historical tradition of the practice while also recognizing it as a form of popular culture participation. Like folk music of the past, built on legends, fables and gossip, filk borrows from popular culture and recognizes the inherently folk nature of commercial products. A filk song Jenkins collected from Julia Ecklar both expresses the collective emotions of the *Star Trek* fan community and records their history with the franchise. First-generation fans of the Sci-fi series waited nearly two decades for a revival of their favourite television show. The song captures their disappointment in watching the lacklustre first film and the anticipation and relief felt by fans when they first saw *Star Trek II,* a film that met their expectations and reignited their passion.

> I was with the Midwest crowd
> Who stood in line for blocks.
> I cheered on the Reliant's end.
> I shed a tear for Spock's
> And we talked for three days running
> Of how Khan did push his luck.

> And I am saved!
> I am saved!
> I am saved!
> (Jenkins, 2012:250).

Filk represents the cultural expressions and beliefs of fandom while acting as a tool for social critique, group cohesion, and historical archiving. Franchise narratives, fan reactions, and fandom events are recorded in the lines of a filk song. Within a heterotopia, filk songs serve the same purpose as folk songs, designed to be sung collectively and used as a group identifier to detail the concerns and interests of the community. The International Folk Music Council defines folk songs as "the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are: (1) continuity which links the present with the past; (2) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (3) selection by the community which determines the form or forms in which the music survives" (Lloyd, 1967:15). The International Council also stresses that folk songs are "absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community" (15).

Anthropologists have found that songs and singing serve an essential function in communities across cultures and throughout history (Mills, 1974). As a recollection of communal experiences, folk songs traditionally centre around the "living, loving, toiling, and suffering" of the community (1974:29). Folk songs are unique to the communities that produce them, recounting daily activities, community signifiers, and important events. Folk songs are a means for communities to document their histories, pass knowledge on to the next generation, and remain united as a community. Mills identifies three components of the folk song tradition: economic factors, anonymity, and orality. She identifies folk songs as emerging out of communities of labour, in which the voice becomes a powerful tool for the powerless. Fans use songs to exert power over the wheel of the cultural industry by speaking back to mainstream

producers and voicing their opinions on the cultural texts that matter to them. In Julia Ecklar's song 'I am saved' she voices her displeasure with the first *Star Trek* film and threatens to engage in copyright infringement to make her own *Star Trek* films; "We know Spock's not dead! / If they will not bring him back / We'll make Khan films instead" (Jenkins, 2012:251). Similarly, children use songs to contest notions of childhood innocence and trespass into the world of adults. Song becomes a form of power as children loudly participate in a school-sanctioned activity (singing), but about a topic that is deemed 'inappropriate,' as an example from my childhood demonstrates below.

> We are the [my school] girls,
> We wear our hair in curls,
> We wear dungarees,
> To show our sexy knees,
> You know the boy next door,
> He got me on the floor,
> We did it once,
> We did it twice,
> He gave me a fifty p,
> To go behind the tree,
> You know, behind the tree,
> He stuck it into me,
> My mum was so surprised,
> To see my belly rise,
> My dad, he jumped for joy,
> It was a baby boy.

While the song demonstrates the ways in which the appropriate and inappropriate converge in the heterotopia of the playground, it also illustrates the migratory path of folklore, as songs are passed from one child to the next. The words 'dungarees' and 'fifty p' suggest that the song may have originated in England, though it was sung on a Canadian playground. Authorship and origin become irrelevant as children practice the song to transgress and reject utopian representations of childhood innocence.

Anonymity and orality are also important features of the folk song. Folk songs are generally community-made and community-circulated, which means songs cannot be attributed to an official first author and are generally transmitted by word of mouth. Consequently, a song gains more verses and authors as it circulates from singer to singer and place to place, demonstrating the genuine folk nature of the practice. While studying fans at Philcon in 1989, Jenkins (2012) found hundreds of verses present in a single song as new members contributed their own knowledge. In other cases, popular filk songs went through their own form of poaching as they were parodied and reimagined by other filkers. Filk songs are primarily performed at fandom conventions, ensuring that popular songs will be sung across the country and abroad, continually retrofitted for new contexts and occasions. Jenkins (2012) found that many filkers were unaware of the original version, the initial author of the song, or in what context it was introduced. The anonymity and orality characteristic of filk and folk songs is present in the enduring song traditions of the playground, where ownership is ambiguous and lyrics are passed from one generation to the next.

The poaching of popular musical culture to highlight the interests of a particular group is commonly seen on the playground. Song has historically been a part of playground folklore, and children can readily be seen adding their own verses to traditional playground songs as they make their way across the country or perform a dance routine to their own rendition of a popular song. Children engage in their own form of filking in an ongoing and spontaneous process of creation, one which is continually evolving within the heterotopia through innovation and contribution while remaining true to community traditions. In studying 8- and 9-year-old girls' language and lore on the playground, Elizabeth Grugeon (2000) found very similar characteristics in their singing games. Grugeon recognized the ephemeral essence of the songs as

well as their historical permanence. Like the filk sings documented by Jenkins (2012), the girls in Grugeon's study engaged with these musical texts as a collective performance of the community. All members participated for their own amusement, making the text uniquely tailored to the group's interests. At the time of her research, the television show *Teletubbies* was popular, and multiple versions of the playground folklore were popping up around the UK. The playground versions of these songs took on a much more violent agenda to the supposedly 'baby' TV show.

> I love you
> You love me
> Together we'll kill Dipsy
> With a dagger through his heart
> And a bullet through his head
> Sorry, Laa-Laa Dipsy's dead.

Or, alternatively:

> I hate Po,
> Po hates me,
> Tinky Winky killed Dipsy
> With a kick up the bum
> And a bullet through his head,
> Sorry, Laa-Laa Dipsy's dead.

Using the tune from the theme song of *Barney*, these girls explored dangerous adult themes while also making clear their position towards the popular show designed for very young children. While the two songs appear very similar, using the same tune and some of the same verses, there is a slight deviation between the individual renditions from the two schools. The deviations present in the two folk songs sung by these children illustrate the evolution fan songs undergo within the filk community. Certain language and imagery remain the same (killing, death, bullets) while others change (dagger and kicking).

Grugeon also remarks on how quickly popular culture and current events are absorbed and reproduced in children's play. Illustrating the subversive and transgressive actions of subordinate groups occupying heterotopias constructed and maintained by the dominant hegemony, the *Teletubbies* filk song represents the attempt of children to reject images of childhood innocence and juxtapose the spaces of child rebellion with the spaces of 'appropriate' media consumption. Children in this way assume creative control over the intellectual property of Ragdoll Productions and the BBC (the producers and distributors of the show), shifting their position from consumers to producers of cultural content. The need to undermine the utopian becomes a defining feature of heterotopias and an act influenced by the underlying structures of the space. Those underlying structures are folklore on the playground, hence the similar use of filklore in the deconstruction and reassembly of *Teletubbies* on two separate playgrounds.

Although composed of cultural elements produced by the entertainment industry (*Teletubbies* characters and the *Barney* theme song), the songs no longer belong to the entertainment industry as they are now incorporated into consumers' everyday lives. The result is a product of heterotopia, occupying multiple incompatible spaces, demonstrating subversive action, and grounded by the 'real' practices of children. Though presumed to be out of dislike for the television show, this act of reconstruction propels it into the domain of popular culture. The songs produced by filkers and children demonstrate that media consumers are not passive viewers but active participants interested in creating their own cultural artifacts that highlight their love or disdain for particular products. The communal quality of filk and playground songs sheds light on the lifestyles, ideals, and beliefs of the group that produced them, while also maintaining a common identity that reflects the group's diverse and ever-changing interests.

Filk truly highlights the relationship between fan culture and traditional folk practices. As explained by Sally Childs-Hefton in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins, 2012): "It is definitely the traditional music of a true folk group, yet that folk group is based in popular culture. And the music is both traditional and popular, both in genre and transmission. Filk is neither fish nor fowl, neither pure traditional nor pure popular" (274). Childs-Hefton describes the unique juxtaposition produced by a heterotopia as incompatible spaces blend and merge in surprisingly compatible ways. Filk is both residual and emergent, physical and digital, acceptable and transgressive. It is a product of fandom sitting at the intersection of folklore and popular culture. It shares features characteristically used to define folk music and children's folklore: orally transmitted; anonymity in authorship; produced by the disenfranchised; continuity with the musical tradition; variation in performance; and the evolution of lore based on current interests. These defining characteristics differentiate folk music from commercial music, which is ready-made for consumers and remains unremoved from further authorship. In the past, no one owned folk music or made money off music. However, contemporary music has become increasingly professionalized, and copyright law now allows ownership to be more rigidly asserted. Filk is turning commercial music into folk music again, transforming individual into communal authorship and economic value into cultural and social value. What filk suggests is that residual folk culture is capable of influencing what is often seen as an omnipotent commercial culture. The practices and traditions of folk culture provide avenues and means for cultural appropriation and meaning making. Folk culture has always been a culture of appropriation, resistance, and reimagination, as Chartier (1984) states:

> What is 'popular' is neither culture created for the people nor culture uprooted; it is a kind of specific relation with cultural objects…. The search for a specific and exclusively

> popular culture, often a disappointing quest, must be replaced by the search for the differentiated ways in which common material was used. What distinguishes cultural worlds is different kinds of use and different strategies of appropriation. (235)

Children participate in their own folk cultures on the playground and use filk song-making as a means for appropriating cultural texts, making popular culture, and as an expression of identity. Children's heterotopic transmediated play involves drawing on cultural resources not exclusively originating from their own folk community but rather appropriating material already in broad circulation within the dominant culture. Children's acts of appropriation reflect not only their general interests but their resistance to institutional authorities and notions of childhood innocence, as well as a rejection of gender and age hegemony. Like fan texts, children's play often does not achieve the status of a final, polished version but exists as a work-in-progress, open to revisions and re-appropriations. Children rely on residual cultural traditions, drawing on folk practices to rework commercial culture to better fit the community's interests and facilitate group cohesion. Fandom and children's play cultures possess similar forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions, and practices. Children and fans create cultural work that speaks to the special interests of their community members and construct their own folk culture through the appropriation of raw material from commercial culture.

Wizard Rock

A compelling example of children participating in filk writing and performing is in the new musical genre Wizard Rock. Children, the primary producers of Wizard Rock, write music and lyrics from the perspectives of different Harry Potter characters (Small, 2015). Participation in the writing and performing of these filk songs is purely based on the fact that these children, or Wizard Rockers, are fans of the series. The songs of Wizard Rock centre on the plotlines,

characters, and perspectives of the official Harry Potter universe and its accompanying fanfiction. In creating the wizarding world of Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling introduced the inspiration for Wizard Rock with her invented magical music scene. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,* readers learn about The Weird Sisters, a group of androgynous band members who embody teen angst and rebellion (Do Rozaio, 2011:265). While the band is only briefly mentioned in the narrative, the existence of a Wizard Rock band inspired an entirely new musical genre among fans.

The Wizard Rock community has a strong online presence with a digital encyclopedia dedicated to celebrating and documenting the musical phenomenon (wizrocklopedia.com) and hundreds of individual Wizard Rock bands performing on YouTube and other streaming sites (Small, 2015). Most Wizard Rocker band names make clever references to the Harry Potter series, such as "Harry and the Potter, The Whomping Willows, The Owl Post, The Mudbloods, The Remus Lupins, DJ Lovegood, and Tom Riddle and Friends" (2015:280). Like the filk songs Henry Jenkins documented at Sci-fi conventions, Wizard Rock songs are primarily original musical arrangements, or in some cases, new lyrics inserted into a popular song while maintaining the song's original musical score. There is no specific musical style attributable to the music of Wizard Rock, as the music can range from pop to jazz. Like filk, the defining feature of Wizard Rock is not its musical style or composition but instead its lyrical content. As Jenkins (2006b) has stated, fan communities actively engage in the practice of textual poaching, creating a precarious relationship with corporate entities regarding ownership. While folk is grounded in communal authorship and ownership, filk and Wizard Rock highlight the tension between "authorial/corporate and cultural/fan ownership of musical and narrative material" (Do Rozaio, 2011:267). Even though creative and commercial property rights surround Harry Potter

texts, fans nevertheless take ownership of the narrative and rework it to create new and meaningful texts.

Most of these fan-produced works do not generate a profit. However, where once filk occurred in small circles of friends and fans, Wizard Rock has optimized digital platforms for global distribution to reach a widely dispersed audience. While still primarily a communal act of cultural production, such poaching is transformed into new avenues for commercialization as fan bands produce original music "originating within the fan community and yet sold back to that community as a commodity" (Do Rozaio, 2011:267). In tying cultural texts to the community practices of consumers, popular culture is made and given substance within the heterotopia. This notion of placeness is complicated as the new material shifts from the 'real' places of childhood (playgrounds) to the unstable digital space. It is at this point that Wizard Rock distinguishes itself from the general filking community. Wizard Rock evolved from a geographically localized music scene to one characterized by virtual activity. Previously, "The commonly held understanding is that a music scene involves intense face-to-face interaction among music makers and fans with a shared enthusiasm for a particular music and its associated lifestyle" (Lee & Peterson, 2004:187). Without the support of radio stations, MTV, and clubs playing Wizard Rock, distribution has been the sole responsibility of fans, who often rely on forums, fan sites, and less conventional commercial approaches to circulate their music. The heterotopia of fandom becomes both fixed and fluid as the physical becomes irrelevant in this instance, and structures of practice such as performativity and oral transmission become guiding posts. Wizard Rock is performed by and for fans and has developed from fan collaboration and community, irrespective of location. While this form of interaction within the music scene is nothing new, music genres

have traversed the globe infiltrating many online networking sites. Wizard Rock, however, is based solely on fan responses to a children's literature series.

Wizard Rock band members consist of fans of all ages; however, they are primarily made up of gendered teenage groups, such as the boy group 'Harry and the Potters' and the girl group 'The Parselmouths' (Small, 2015). The music of Wizard Rock can range in sound from electronic to hip-hop and from metal to rap but tends to include a strong teen angst edge. Much like the struggles of the three main characters of the series, the lyrics of Wizard Rock focus on the trials and tribulations of growing up and finding oneself. Jace Crion of the Texas Wizard Rock band 'Talons and Tea Leaves' referred to the genre as 'wizard angst' (2015:283). Like fanfiction, Wizard Rockers write about the plots and characters of Harry Potter, often retelling particular scenes from another character's perspective. "For every Potter character, there is a corresponding wizard-rock band, singing from that character's perspective. Harry and the Potters (which features two 'Harry' brothers), for instance, have songs about saving Ginny Weasley from the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets as well as from romantic rival Dean Thomas" (Vineyard, 2007). Switchblade Kittens, a female punk band known for producing the first-ever Wizard Rock song 'Ode to Harry,' were also inspired by the writings of J.K. Rowling. The lead singer, Drama, describes her desire to write the song:

> I wrote the song because I love the Harry Potter books and because I thought Ginny Weasley was not getting a fair shake in book 2 [...] It is about loving Harry Potter through her eyes then. We released the song Christmas/ Chanukah of 2000 only on the Internet to our fans. We also gave it freely to any Harry Potter site that wanted it. It was something I wrote for all Potterheads and muggle nerds [a reference to Harry Potter fans]. Writing songs is what I do, so it just so happened that JK Rowling's writing inspired me, and I

> was so moved by it that it came out in song. That year there were 3 million downloads of 'Ode to Harry.' (Do Rozario, 2011:268)

The lyrics of Wizard Rock do not merely reiterate the official texts of Harry Potter but often reject aspects of the narrative, providing alternative points of view and contradicting character development. Much like fanfiction, Wizard Rock lyrics enter the areas Rowling only alludes to, or that exist outside the narrative. The teen Wrockers poach from the children's series and add to the texts "double entendres, taboos and descriptions of imagined sexual relationships, often with pop music nuances that reinforce youth themes" (Do Rozario, 2011:270). 'Into the Pensive,' inspired by a song produced by The Whomping Willows, writes about the secret love between schoolyard enemies Draco and Harry, exploring themes of homosexuality, teen sexuality, and gender identity. The song pushes the narrative to areas unexplored by Rowling and, in so doing, reflects the folk nature of the scene, with fans building off other fan-produced work. Heterotopias always produce subversion and transgression; these Wizard Rockers use folk singing to reject the heteronormative ideal presented by the utopia, distorting, and twisting it to better reflect the realities of the marginalized and speak back to dominant ideologies.

In addition to writing their own lyrics, many Wizard Rockers produce their own videos and share them on digital entertainment platforms. These videos include DIY renditions of MTV music videos that follow the events of the Harry Potter series or the style and structure of other popular music videos. A popular music video style for Wizard Rockers involves combining popular commercial songs with clip montages from the films, where the song chosen changes the meaning of a deliberately re-organized narrative event from the series. Wrockers also post live videos of their bands performing at various venues in celebration of the series, at bookstores or conventions. Through performance, the places of authority and hegemony are transformed into

spaces of heterotopia capable of inverting the dominant and seizing power from those that control the cultural agenda.

For Wizard Rockers, filk represents an avenue for generating new meaning from the original Harry Potter series. These children use the medium of song "to express the personal, social, and political, commenting on relevant topics ranging from love interests to genocide, human rights, censorship and media consolidation" (Small, 2015:286). Even with the rise in Wizard Rock's popularity, the music scene downplays its commercialism by focusing on its community filk roots. In *The Wizard Rockumentary* (2008), one fan and musician is quoted as saying: "Wizard Rock is not about self-promotion, fame, or fortune. It's about education and fun… Our mission is to work to celebrate reading and literature through Rock & Roll music… Fight evil. Read books" (Do Rozario, 2011:276). Rather than endorse the music industry, Wizard Rock promotes reading, literacy, and the power of education. Nevertheless, tensions exist between its commercial success and its community-oriented origins. Participatory culture in the digital age has further blurred the boundaries between folk and popular, producers and consumers of culture, between official/mainstream and fan creation, and between audience and creator.

Conclusion

Popular culture cannot be understood as representative of a single tradition; rather, it must be viewed as an intricate web of commercial, folk, material, and vernacular cultural expressions. What can be described as popular is determined by the consumption practices of the masses, not the production practices of the industry. As raw cultural material travels through the heterotopia of fandom and is endowed with meaning and incorporated into the everyday experiences of consumers, popular culture is made. By juxtaposing several spaces within the

‘real’ places of consumption, cultural texts become meaningful and perceived oppositions (folk/popular, natural/virtual, emergent/residual) become compatible. This chapter uses the case study of fandom to explore the theory of transmediated heterotopic play as a specific example of children’s community and consumptive practices. Through sophisticated forms of textual poaching, the boundaries between consumers and producers become blurred, and power structures are shaken. At the highest level of consumer poaching lies fandom, which sits at the intersection of folklore and popular culture. Through fan engagement, children reclaim commercial texts as traditional forms of lore, participating in the act of simultaneous destruction and rebuilding. By consuming and regurgitating cultural material, children ensure the continual success of the child entertainment industry and the survival of their folk traditions.

For the fan community, the poaching of texts is facilitated by century-old lore that solidifies community engagement. Cosplay, a performative feature of fandom, can be traced to the spiritual and religious costuming practices of the past. The communal singing of filklore at fan conventions has a longstanding tradition as folksongs unifying communities across history. These fan practices can be seen in the traditional and fandom practices of children on the playground, illustrating the unique relationship children and fans – or children as fans – have with folklore and popular culture. Within the heterotopia of the playground, children engage in fan participation as they combine elements of their favourite media content with established practices of childlore. Media fandom becomes a permanent culture, capable of surviving and evolving as it amalgamates with cultural practices and produces material artifacts valued by a community. The placelessness of cultural texts is given gravitas and purpose as they are tied to the ‘real’ places of consumption. In this way, Batman becomes more than a comic book hero,

rather a source of empowerment for girl superhero play, and Hogwarts becomes more than a school for Harry and Hermione, but a place to explore teen struggles musically.

The blurring of boundaries between what is strictly the domain of adults and children also applies to the arena of play (McDonnell, 1994). A growing phenomenon within the entertainment industry for international programming appeals equally to adults and children, such as *The Avengers* and *The Hunger Games.* Kathleen McDonnell writes, "These are trends, but they may also be cultural signals that the historic trend identified by Philippe Aries is reversing itself; the separate realms of adulthood and childhood, which became markedly distinct over the past several centuries, may be blending back into one another" (1994:42). Participation in fandom is one way adult fan communities adopt the play traditions that have defined childhood culture for centuries. Cosplay parallels the playful nature and folk function of playground superhero play just as Wizard Rock emerges from the traditions of convention filk songs and historical folk songs. Fanfiction, cosplay, and filking illustrate the conservative/innovative practices of playground lore that have been employed by fan communities as a tool to appropriate, transform and rework cultural texts. As Jenkins (2006a) points out, because fandom includes both adult and child members, a space has emerged for intergenerational conversation and a new form of teaching that involves child-to-parent rather than solely parent-to-child (205). Using the very resources designed to teach children, children have become the teachers. Heterotopias are the funhouse mirrors to the expectations and ideologies of the utopian. What is perceived as separate becomes deeply interdependent, what is owned by one group becomes the property of another, and what is historical in turn becomes contemporary.

Fandom scholar Francesca Coppa (2017) argues that the cultural products of fans are made for free, but not for nothing. While both are valuable, people who produce creative work for monetary value do different things than people who create with no hope of monetary reward. This clarification is particularly interesting as children's play becomes monetized in digital spaces such as YouTube and TikTok. Participation in fandom involves the labour of love. Fans create texts of fandom because they love the world created by the commercial product and want to engage with the characters; likewise, children participate in heterotopic transmediated play because they love the commercial product and want to incorporate it into their daily lives. While (most) children are not paid for their play, they do not play for nothing; they play because doing so helps strengthen peer attachments, explore gender and sexuality norms, and communicate their needs and desires with others. The uncompensated effort underway in the poaching of textual material is what is involved in the making of popular culture, whether by self-identified fans or not.

The division between the commercial and the folk as one of economic value is further dismantled as children's play is monetized on social media platforms. With the expanse of the digital age, a reliable system of distribution has emerged which has accelerated the folk process, further blurring the lines between the folk and the commercial and the boundaries of space and place. In the digital world, geography and physical proximity become irrelevant to community engagement. When children consume new tools and commercialized entertainment forms, the boundary between commercial and residual folk cultures quickly disintegrates and shifting control over production quality, distribution, and reach. When commercial culture borrows from folk culture, and folk culture borrows from commercial culture, the monopoly over the cultural agenda, impact, and profit is questioned. Chapter three will examine children's online fan

participation as a heterotopic reach for power and an important evolution in the definitions of childhood and folklore.

Chapter Three: Siwanators and the Rise of the Kid Influencer

Chapter two outlined some of the characteristics of folklore texts that enable them to be made into popular culture, but the presence of folkloric attributes does not, in itself, guarantee that a text will be accepted into the heterotopia of fandom. Consumers show discrimination among products, often taking the industry by surprise because as much as fandom is dependent on the characteristics of the texts, it is equally driven by the social conditions of the people (Fiske, 2010). The existing structures of the heterotopia, the semiotic resources currently being used, and the standards of community practices underlie this selection process. Of concern to consumers is the functionality rather than the quality of a product, and its applicability to the social context in which it is consumed. Popular culture is made where the spaces of capitalism and everyday life converge within the heterotopia. This means that the elusive and shifting criteria of relevance becomes paramount to the products incorporated into the evolving heterotopia and fluid experiences of everyday life. A product or resource becomes relevant only in its ability to address the needs of a community and assimilate into the pre-existing structures of meaning-making.

I use the case study of YouTube as a site for heterotopic transmediated play to demonstrate that the forms of sociality exhibited by children online are not fundamentally new but rooted in the folkloric practices designed and cultivated over centuries by their proprietors, children. I contextualize this analysis in the research of Burgess and Green (2018), Abidin (2015a; 2015b), Craig and Cunningham (2017), and Banet-Wiser (2018). Children's heterotopic transmediated play illustrates the shared transmediated nature of children's play and the heterotopia produced on the playground. This heterotopia is further extended into the spaces that converge within the 'real' places of child consumption and meaning making. As a virtual space

that collides and converges with the everyday play practices of children, digital entertainment platforms transform into places in which children's folk activities are reproduced and supported. The cross-media nature of both childhood and popular culture produces interactive spaces for heterotopic transmediated play. The placelessness of digital entertainment platforms such as YouTube are given stability and substance as they are grounded in the everyday practices of consumers. As illustrated in the previous chapter, raw cultural texts only become objects of fandom as they travel through the heterotopic and are reworked to meet the diverse needs of fans. Digital entertainment platforms experience a similar transformation as they are absorbed by the heterotopia and tied to the 'real' places of consumption.

I theorize that the digital spaces of heterotopia reproduce the same social structures as their physical counterparts. The digital space acts as a folk system in which the traditional folklore used to facilitate group cohesion and cultural/fan participation on the playground produces similar effects online. Communities of fans rework cultural texts and commodities to meet their folk needs and to subvert the dominant (adult) hegemony. The playground heterotopia – as a space for the blending of tradition with new media technologies and the blurring of producers with consumers – provides a guiding post for understanding the techniques certain children deploy within the folk Web. To better understand childhood culture and folklore, the digital playground must be considered alongside the physical playground. In this chapter, children's heterotopic transmediated play will be examined within the digital context as traditional folk practices are reimagined and rewritten for a new medium.

Children's use of the digital entertainment site YouTube illustrates a specific example of the extension of the playground heterotopia and the grounding of cultural products in the 'real' folk practices of children. The activities performed by children on the site are reproductions of

the same folklore practices involved in the identity-building and fan participation evident on the physical playground – with children blurring the boundaries between performing as active contributors and passive audience members, between innovators of content and conservators of tradition, and between folk communities and commercial industries. In blending media texts, technology, and traditional lore, children continue to make popular culture and participate in the subversive actions of the heterotopia. As such, an examination of YouTube kid influencer JoJo Siwa and her surrounding fandom demonstrates how the mutually intertwined practices of everyday life combined with the cultural products of capitalism illustrate, on the one hand, the pervasive nature of folklore and its ubiquity in the social practices of children and, on the other, the continual struggle over cultural power between the folk and the commercial industry. Children's digital and material practices, as a form of fandom, will be analyzed in terms of the cultural practices and artifacts produced by their peers and circulated within a digital folk system. YouTube, as a case study of heterotopia, becomes the site where the powers of production battle each other in the making of popular culture – child content creators on the one side and tycoons of industry, on the other.

Further, the digital dialogue between celebrities and fans on YouTube points to the specific transmediated manifestations of meaning ascribed through social practices of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2015), which form the grounds for the cycle of folklore that endures as a fundamental component of children's play culture. Through fan videos, children rework the folklore present in YouTube child star videos, demonstrating the cyclical pattern of folklore within a heterotopia as it is further transmediated for digital marketing and virtual fandom. Seen from this perspective, children's social practices are physical and digital, conservative and innovative, and individual and collective.

YouTube

Within the context of the digital folk system, the playground itself moves across platforms, converging, preserving, and transforming practices and lore across material and digital contexts. In the digital playground, children's online activities converge with existing childhood culture so that children engage with century-old lore and emerging play structures that are simultaneously 'real' and simulated, playful and commercial. Although gaming sites designed for children (e.g. Club Penguin, Nick, Stardoll, etc.) strictly structure children's engagement with the media, digital entertainment platforms (like the video-sharing platform YouTube) enable children to produce and share original content, explore and discover a range of affinity groups, and communicate with like-minded peers through follows, likes, and posts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, YouTube took on a more prominent role as a community space for children, and consequently, a field for my research. Within the context of this research project, YouTube is analyzed as a textual space in which folklore resides. As an extension of the playground heterotopia, YouTube functions as a semiotic tool for meaning making and will be explored through the lens of folklore studies (for a media studies examination of the site please see Burgess, 2011, and Strangelove, 2020).

To curtail the infection rate of the COVID-19 virus, governments around the world placed additional social controls on the child's body by restricting access to the primary places of childhood culture (playgrounds, schools, childcare centres, parks, recreation centres). Paradoxically, efforts to control the child's body produced increased opportunities to resist and threaten utopian ideals of childhood innocence. Overnight the online space, heavily policed by adults and often conceived of as a detriment to children's health and inferior to outdoor play, became the designated space for education, play, and peer interaction. Children congregating in the digital space engage in both an acceptance and refusal of social control. Children accept that

traditional childhood spaces are deemed dangerous and off-limits by connecting safely within online spaces heavily patrolled by adults. Consequently, the traditional spaces of childhood used for research purposes was also considered dangerous and off-limits, leading me to turn to the same digital entertainment platforms to conduct my research. Children enter these spaces often deemed inappropriate for young people (with +13 years restrictions) while engaging in economic work as seen with kid influencers. Kid influencers comprise a unique childhood experience that cannot be generalized to a majority, let alone a minority of childhoods. Within the digital space children are simultaneously conforming to and defying dominant ideology, conforming to protect themselves physically and defying to protect themselves mentally. Children have repositioned their bodies within the digitalscape to regain a sense of community and to cope with the damaging effects of social distancing.

Digital entertainment platforms as the designated digital playground cement social media as not simply a space of childhood trespassing but as a rightful place of childhood culture. Children's migration to the digital playground undermines social control initiatives by supervising adults on the playground who want to be in the vicinity of children's play, but also puts more money into the pockets of the commercial industry (adults) — the contradiction at the core of kid influencers. As children take over the virtual space as a place for childhood culture to play out, the industries of social control are also turning the space into an extension of the classroom. This redistribution of power and resources within the system may not be radical, but it alters the way that power is exercised and the nature of power itself.

Children use digital entertainment platforms to evade and mock adult discipline and construct heterotopic spaces free from the constant adult control they experience in the home and school, spaces where the power of cultural production, often exclusively held by adults, can be

wielded by children. To be made popular, texts of the cultural industries must not only be capable of producing multiple meanings but also of being used in equally polysemic ways. Digital entertainment platforms are especially appealing to consumers because the nature of their media enables them to be used as people wish to use them. Their semiotic uses dictate their technical uses, allowing for multiple forms of engagement. YouTube is a digital entertainment platform defined by its semiotic usage and its breadth for participation. The users, and conversely the contributors to the site range from large media conglomerates, media broadcasters, small-to-medium-sized businesses, cultural institutions, artists, fans, and amateur video makers (Burgess & Green, 2018:vii). Each of these participants holds democratic power in shaping and making YouTube a product of popular culture.

YouTube is the leading video-sharing platform with over two billion users, accounting for one-third of Internet users. The social media channel is localized in over 100 countries and can be accessed in 80 languages (YouTube Press, 2022). Children make up a significant number of the daily users of YouTube, with many having their own channels despite the minimum age requirement being 13 years of age (Tur-Viñes et al., 2018). Through personal communication devices, video viewing has become one of the primary activities engaged by many children under eight years of age (Araújo et al., 2017; Blackwell et al., 2014; Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013). YouTube has rapidly become the preferred viewing experience for children, with celebrity 'YouTubers' becoming the most popular figures in the current cultural landscape. In an ongoing study, Stine Liv Johansen (2018) found that "children and young teenagers use YouTube to nurture specific interests and to engage themselves in specific fan communities, which seem to resonate with the interests and everyday lives of the children" (7). She also notes that the content produced by children on YouTube has become a source for inspiring play and

modifying existing playground lore. The playground continues to be a central space for children's play culture, with media remixes taking centre stage. At the same time, YouTube is the digital playground where traditional play and folklore are appropriated and remixed for the new virtual space. Social media and video sharing extend the playground practices of peer bonding, transmedia play, and transgressive behaviour that occur beyond the adult gaze.

YouTube, although a platform for video sharing, is not in the video business but rather in the folk transmission business. YouTube gains revenue through usership and increasing exposure for paying ad companies; its success lies in its ability to be integrated into the everyday practices of consumers. Becoming an essential extension of the heterotopia, YouTube has emerged as a primary resource for folk communication, a space for communities to congregate, converse, and produce. However, the use of the site as a folk resource has not come without struggle. In contemporary society, the products of capitalism become the raw material – the semiotic resources – of folk cultures. Although the nature of the resource is limited in its technical use, it is not limited in the creative semiotic uses it can be made to do. This creates a struggle between the technology of the resource provided by the financial economy and the shifting needs of the cultural economy. This struggle occurs within the heterotopia, where the demands of capitalism collide and merge with the everyday needs of the folk. YouTube users must traverse the obstacles of intellectual property rights, copyright law, censorship, and privacy rights to use the product successfully. Technical uses and semiotic uses collide and resist one another. A fundamental limitation embedded in the functionality of the product, lies within YouTube's algorithms (for a media studies analysis of YouTube algorithms see Dolata, Feuerriegel, & Schwabe, 2022, and O'Neil, 2017). Following the rules of capitalism and the influencing forces of utopian childhood ideals, the algorithms of the system inform the visibility and thus popularity

of its content (Bishop, 2018). That is to say, for children on YouTube, the algorithm privileges and rewards children whose content closely conforms to hegemonic, romanticized, innocent, and commercialized images of childhood. While engineers are initially responsible for designing and writing a platform's algorithm, an algorithm is capable of learning and self-sharpening "causing unintended side effects and amplifying discrimination" (2018:71). When algorithms possess an inherent bias, this new "value system subsequently informs and manipulates relevant search results for users" (71). Who gains notoriety and what forms of childhood are given visibility are built into the workings of the system and align with the cultural agendas of the powerful. Thus, the very system that perpetuates the utopian image has provided the tools to upend this image as well as a strong incentive to conform to the parameters set out by the algorithm, an opposition characteristic of the heterotopia. Digital entertainment platforms are tools provided by cultural industries that are converted into semiotic resources by their users. Children, as users of digital entertainment platforms, reroute these resources into their folk practices of community, fandom, and cultural participation, but in the process must struggle with the forces of authority within the space.

This struggle over semiotic usage is what produces the high cultural generativity of YouTube, which is simultaneously "a high-volume website, a broadcast platform, a media archive, and a social network" (Burgess & Green, 2018:5). YouTube's value is not produced solely, or even partially, by top-down corporate activities but collectively through grassroots consumption, evaluation, and production. Folk semiotic usage is fundamental to YouTube's value proposition in both the financial economy and cultural economy. Its connection to the physical places of consumption ensures that it shifts and evolves with the changing needs of

consumers. The ‘everydayness’ produced by its folk usage maintains its relevance and economic potential while advancing its tools and structures.

While it may appear that folk content producers are largely winning the struggle over usage underway on YouTube, the cultures of industry have responded in a historically familiar fashion. The user-created content produced by folk communities that subvert and challenge the dominant is in turn being appropriated and exploited by traditional media industries. Much like the folk stories that were collected by the Brothers Grimm and sold by Disney, the folklore of children on YouTube is being poached by the child entertainment industry and marketed back to child consumers. However, there is one notable exception to this instance of industrialization: children are finding themselves on the lucrative side of consumption, garnering a new position of power in society as kid influencers. As a space that juxtaposes the top-down corporate demands of distribution with the bottom-up content creation of popular culture, YouTube exists as a heterotopia capable of sustaining the seemingly incompatible. YouTube demonstrates that within a heterotopia, participation is just as disruptive and uncomfortable as it is liberating.

YouTube is popular among children because it can be used to reproduce childhood culture, connect folk communities, and subsume control over the cultural and financial economies. Child YouTubers, an example of an extraordinary rather than an ordinary childhood experience, use the site as a symbol of the child entertainment industry so that creating content becomes a re-enactment of social relations, but the re-telling is from the point of view of the subordinate; it is content made by children, not simply for children. In the social conditions of the dominant, video content creation generates profits for the producers of industry (adults); on YouTube, the reverse is also true. This is not to say that all content produced on YouTube exists outside the mechanisms of the industry or the influences of an algorithm; some of the most

popular channels are corporate-owned. Within the heterotopia, however, children are able to gain access to the same tools, reproducing the same level of production, distribution, influence, and profit, thus beating the system at its own game. While children in the digital heterotopia subvert the powers of influence, the most successful do this by remaining somewhat faithful to the utopian image of childhood and taking advantage of the pre-existing algorithm. The most successful kid influencers are white, Western, and middle-class, for example. Success is dependent on reproducing the utopian but also speaking to the guerrilla demands of the heterotopic. This is achieved by carefully reproducing the innovative and conservative demands of 'real' world folklore. YouTube as an extension of the heterotopia remains relevant and functional because its textual structure can be related to its social structure. Occupying its space reproduces children's social relations with peers and adults, with one crucial inversion – on YouTube, children have access to the same power, recognition, and control as industry cultures.

Kid Influencers

YouTube has provided a space in which the amateurs of the folk can freely poach the professional tools of industry. Using Henry Jenkins' (2006b) concept of participatory culture, the activities children engage in on YouTube are founded on the fluid exchange of content between producers and consumers, as well as professionals and amateurs. The restrictions of traditional folk communities to face-to-face communication are being tested as digital platforms mimic aspects of real-world interaction. Understanding the digital space as a digital folk system, YouTube provides the consumers with the agency for content production and dissemination akin to traditional folklore but with the power reserved for cultures of industry. Production and transmission tools previously reserved for official popular culture producers have become available to grassroots communities within the folk Web. Where children were previously

viewed as passive consumers of media content, within the heterotopia of YouTube, a small subsection are now viewed by other children as successful content producers. Children's newly acquired positions as kid influencers, professional creators and brand ambassadors, however, raise many legal considerations, such as "the consideration of children as broadcasters, the questionable, or otherwise, support of their legal guardians, the presence of brands, the blurring of the advertising intention, the massive numbers of followers, the undeniable influence of these practices in the current audiovisual generation and their unstoppable upward trend" (Tur-Viñes et al., 2018:1213). While some children wield power within this space, they are still seen as vulnerable persons incapable of making rational decisions, so in need of guidance and supervision by legal guardians.

The term 'influencer' predates the Internet emerging out of Katz and Lazarsfeld's (2006) concept of 'personal influence' and refers to:

> [E]veryday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in "digital" and "physical" spaces, and monetize their following by integrating "advertorials" into their blog or social media posts and making physical appearances at events. (Abidin, 2015a)

Abidin's definition of kid influencers highlights the folk nature of the phenomenon. The everydayness of influencer content creates a sense of familiarity and community among followers who participate in the same cultural experiences. As children gain influence through video sharing, their social capital can turn into material capital, with a child earning $100 per post for every 1,000 followers (Pollack, 2019). In 2022, Forbes Magazine listed Nastya of Like Nastya as the highest-paid YouTube kid influencer, earning an estimated $28 million in the

previous year. With 3.8 billion views, Nastya's 87.5 million subscribers tune in each week to watch the 7-year-old play with everything from Barbie to Lego to Disney-branded toys (Brown & Freeman, 2022). YouTube has enabled young children to apply their skills at content creation, production, and dissemination to the digital playground. Children's skills reflect their inclination for creative content and communication styles while highlighting the preservation tactics undertaken to catalogue and transmit enduring childhood culture and lore.

Very young children and celebrity child Youtubers often post parentally controlled videos – videos that are directed, operated, edited, and published by parents. Parents' level of involvement in a child's YouTube presence must be considered when researching childhood culture in the digital space. Because of the curated nature of video posting, determining whether a post is a genuine or spontaneous example of children's play and lore comes into question. Within the context of social media sharing, the child's performance and the parents' curating criteria must be acknowledged as having a potential impact on the videos selected, the play scripts enacted, and the brands represented. The question around parent-directed play is coupled with the growing concern that children are being used as advertising machines, irrespective of whether the child is interested in being a corporate sponsor or celebrity figure.

Although there is often a large team working with them, kid influencers are, at least partially, responsible for designing, editing, and sharing content generated by and for children (Keiles, 2019). They also employ sophisticated strategies to connect with thousands and contribute to affinity groups and transmedia landscapes. In reaching global success, the labour of love often attributed to children's play and lore reaches a quasi-professional level as their cultural traditions become commodified. Children's spontaneous contribution to childhood culture and popular culture franchises are transformed as play becomes work. Within this

context, the content generated by children must be viewed critically through the commercial interests of the brands that sponsor them and the professional obligations that kid influencers hold to the brands to promote the product and to their followers to provide constant originality of content (Tur-Viñes et al., 2018). A popular form of fan video making for children on YouTube includes product reviews and unboxing videos, suggesting a robust commercial disposition circulating within the fan community. Unboxing videos record the excitement and vicarious play of children unwrapping new toys. The monetization associated with children's play raises concerns regarding child exploitation and child labour. Those involved in the production and distribution of child videos profit from the work of children, and the demands for a child to remain successful mirror those of industry responsibilities. The income of a child like Nastya from Like Nastya moves fan videos from "child's play to child labour" (Wohlwend, 2017:14).

In a heterotopia, children acquire power and produce their own cultural material but the heterotopias in which they operate "function in relation to the space that remains" (Foucault, 1986:26). Regardless of their business savvy, digital proficiency, and/or cultural ingenuity, children are still considered in relation to the definitions of childhood produced by educational, medical, legal, domestic, and entertainment spaces. David Craig and Stuart Cunningham (2017) recognize the lack of agency attributed to children when "Child advocates regard all unboxing, even non-branded videos, unequivocally as marketing and discount the possibility that these videos may also be instructional, educational or simply communicative, fostering peer-to-peer interactions between child creators and viewers" (81). The technical and semiotic affordances of digital entertainment platforms have redefined play and creative labour in the childhood context, repositioning children's activities more in line with the definitions of adulthood. Successful YouTube videos, defined by their number of views, take advantage of the technical use of the

product in producing an abundance of high-quality content, distribution on a global scale, emphasizing ownership over production, communication with customers, and utilization of sophisticated analytics. Success is also achieved by taking advantage of the semiotic use of the product. Primed to be exploited by a privileged form of childhood, a child YouTuber's success is contingent on technological access and parental assistance. There is also a need to be sponsored by commercial brands that promote what they see as the most profitable form of childhood, one historically constructed as Western, white, middle-class, male and 'cute.' These affordances are evolving as a dialogue between corporations and consumers continues, but it is a slow process. Children have evolved from being digital users playing with friends and family online into kid influencers who share a stake in YouTube's profits. This evolution in the activities of children can also be seen in the evolution of the space itself.

YouTube has created a digital folk environment, through its community engagement, and cultural transmission, that increases media audiences' visibility, strengthening their communication methods and tools for cultural production (Jenkins, 2018). While firmly connected through a digital folk system, fan communities are simultaneously more fragmented and dispersed than ever before, making it more difficult for media producers to target their audience or anticipate fan desires. Media franchises have seized folk traditions (such as home videos of children playing) as the perfect advertising avenue for digital entertainment users by directly infiltrating the fan community through kid influencers. Within this heterotopic space, the line is blurred between advertising and folklore through the brand alliances between the commercial industry and social media influencers. In the new advertising context, children engage in recognizable play practices and use language familiar to their audience, strengthening community bonds and reimagining traditional lore for new media. While there is much data on

influencer marketing's effects and strategies (Craig & Cunningham, 2017; Tur-Viñes et al., 2018), there is little research concerning the affective bonds children have with popular YouTube stars and their shared cultural practices (Abidin, 2015a), practices that are more consistent with folklore culture than capitalist, consumerist culture. For example, the folk practice of parody that has evolved into its own YouTube genre. The following section will explore YouTube as a case study for the shared cultural practices of kid influencer JoJo Siwa and her fans.

JoJo

Big bow, big personality, and big success describe the candy-coloured YouTube kid influencer who has been called "a singular star with more spunk than Shirley Temple and the merchandising power of both Olsen twins" (Keiles, 2019). Joelle Joanie Siwa, better known as JoJo to her fans, is the embodiment of the playground folk song 'What are little girls made of?' For JoJo and her primarily female fans, between the ages of 4 and 13, being a girl is characterized by rainbows, unicorns, sweetness, and 'everything nice.'

JoJo Siwa, a Nebraska girl born in the age of social media in 2003, got her start as the youngest contestant on *Abby's Ultimate Dance Competition*, where her sass and never-ending energy made her a fan favourite. Her success on the show landed her a spot on the series *Dance Moms,* opening the door to her YouTube career. At the age of 12, Siwa began posting videos to her YouTube channel that included Q&As for fans of *Dance Moms*, Internet challenges and a series of videos where she poured juice over her head. Over the next three years, Siwa slowly increased the editing and intimacy of her videos, becoming "one of the most-followed people on the platform" (Harris, 2020). Her main YouTube channel currently has 12.2 million subscribers, with her videos receiving a combined total of 3.7 billion views. Siwa established herself as a celebrity personality when she released her debut single 'Boomerang' just days after her

thirteenth birthday. The song and accompanying music video, which address bullying and the daily struggles of children in a school setting, draw on playground life and prime her for immediate entry into children's folklore practices. The video reached 9 million views in just one month, was certified platinum in 2017 by the Recording Industry Association of America and, to date, has been viewed over 947 million times on YouTube (Harris, 2020). Siwa has proved her success beyond YouTube by creating a children's commercial product empire and winning the Kid's Choice Award four years in a row (Yasharoff, 2020).

Girl Power

Fandoms are produced within a heterotopia, and as discussed in Chapter two, popular culture balances the heterotopian with the utopian. Heterotopias are produced as distorted reflections of the perfected versions of society that exist in the placeless, unreal form of the utopia (Foucault, 1986:3). Recognizing that the cultural industry reproduces texts that conform to well-circulated utopian images, JoJo's popularity can be tied to how well she fits this image. The utopian image of childhood is a romanticized representation of white, Western, middle-class, digital-savvy children. JoJo encompasses all these descriptors, including an important characteristic of the popular feminist.

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) describes popular feminism as the media visibility and accessibility of popular images of feminism, perhaps most aptly described as 'Girl Power!' While JoJo is 'everything nice,' she is also a strong advocate for empowering young girls with character-licensed shirts stating, 'Girl Power!,' and a popular song titled 'Every Girl's a Super Girl.' Banet-Weiser stresses that popular feminism cannot be analyzed without understanding how it is constructed within capitalist practices. Expressions of popular feminism are entangled with consumptive practices. To be a feminist, according to global companies such as Covergirl

and Dove, means purchasing their products (2018:11). JoJo is no different and contributes to an increasingly popular image of children as the ultimate consumers. The success of the child entertainment market depends on constructions of children as consumers and influencers over the family's purchasing power. JoJo's popularity, therefore, cannot be disentangled from capitalist practices and representations of the utopian child. Part of JoJo's success is her maintenance of the status quo; her depictions of traditional expressions of girlhood and girl culture coincided with utopian images produced by the industries of culture – until recently.

In January 2021, Siwa shocked fans and openly transgressed the heteronormative standards of child entertainment by coming out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. She refers to herself as pansexual, queer, and gay, refuting binaries and refusing to be labelled. The child entertainment industry is a highly regulated space in which representations of sexual orientation and sexual relations are minimized and often expressed as heterosexuality. Demonstrating the subversion and transgression characteristic of playground heterotopias, Siwa upends heterosexual representations associated with hyper-femininity and shatters the utopian image of non-sexual/heterosexual childhoods. Siwa has incorporated her sexual orientation into her representation of girlhood by combining aesthetics, dancing, and same-sex partnering.

Siwa was the first contestant to dance with a same-sex partner in the thirtieth season of *Dancing with The Stars*. In perhaps her most well-received dance routine, Siwa and dance partner Jenna Johnson Chmerkovskiy reimagined the story of Cinderella. Dressed as Prince Charming, Siwa twirls Jenna across the floor, participating in the same transgressive actions as Caiden when he dresses as Princess Elsa (Peters, 2015). Through the traditional childhood activity of dress-up – combined with Siwa's traditional mode of entertainment, dance – Siwa appropriates and repurposes Prince Charming as a representation for queer, trans, and non-binary

viewers. Siwa uses common play elements (costuming, dancing, remixing) to create progressive child entertainment that distorts the reflection of the utopian childhood. The commercial industry, including Siwa, contributes to the perpetuation of romantic images of childhood innocence removed from the lived experiences of 'real' children. Using the commercial industry, Siwa shatters the utopian image and redefines her own hyper-feminine representation.

Banet-Weiser (2018) describes popular feminism as existing in a feedback loop, where popularity is related to visibility. The more popular an image is, the more visibility it will receive, increasing its popularity and producing more visibility (12). This feedback loop can also be used to describe the circulation of utopian images within popular culture. Popularity ensures consumption, and consumption ensures revenue, guaranteeing that the utopian image will persist. But as discussed in Chapter two, this popularity also produces a heterotopia in the shape of fandom, where the utopia is shattered as fans rework and reimagine texts for their own purposes. Siwa moves within this feedback loop, as her image conforms to utopian representations (white, Western, middle-class, digitally savvy, cute). However, after reaching a high level of visibility and popularity, Siwa is in a privileged position to "come out" and retain popularity and industry support. Siwa would not have garnered the same industry support and subsequent visibility had she come out at the beginning of her career because of the presumed profitability of the utopian ideal. Using her current visibility, she rewrites industry standards and participates in the same heterotopic transmediated play as fans, reimagining cultural texts (including herself) for new purposes. As a representation of the utopian and a participant of the heterotopic, Siwa exemplifies the bi-directional discourse of influence as her 'real' life experiences intersect with her media portrayal. JoJo Siwa signifies a step towards dismantling default representations of the child as non-sexual/heterosexual.

What differentiates Siwa from earlier child stars, besides her coming out, is the complete transparency she shares with her fans and the ways in which the recording of her life has been stitched together across multiple platforms, each subsequently perpetuating the other. Siwa's online presence flows across almost every possible form of popular culture media, including YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, film, television, CDs, books, computer games, posters, clothing, toys, food, and home décor. After signing a contract with the kid's fashion accessory boutique Claire's, Siwa made an overall talent deal with Nickelodeon, which covered her singing, dancing, and video posting. Her likeness was used for the cartoon series *The JoJo & BowBow Show Show* and character licenced for all childhood culture products (Keiles, 2019). The recording of her daily life suggests that Siwa exists as a transmediated persona. Siwa captures fan attention through the transmediated sociality she exhibits in each of her videos. Posting at least nine self-recorded videos a week across social media, Siwa invites viewers into her home to listen to her inner thoughts, meet her family, and observe her daily activities.

The fusion of traditional childhood practices with digital interaction has produced *transmediated selves* - the blurring of online and offline identities to the point of indistinction (Elwell, 2014). Based on transmedia scholarship, the separation of playground expressions and online expressions "becomes increasingly meaningless as both are folded into the expanding 'in-betweenness' [and] identity itself becomes a porous membrane between the digital and the analog" (2014:244). JoJo Siwa is an exemplification of the transmediated self as the camera documents her daily life. As her followers enact their fandom both on and off-line, they illustrate the disintegration of digital boundaries in constructing the childhood self. Transmedia is concerned with both the transitional nature of media across platforms and the transitional nature of self from platform to platform and from online to offline (Humphrey, 2019). The blending of

digital and physical expressions of self is illustrative of the heterotopic transmediated play children engage in within the heterotopia of the playground and fandom.

In studying lifestyle influencers in Singapore, Crystal Abidin (2015b) coined the term *perceived interconnectedness* to describe the impression of intimacy created between influencers and their followers. Influencers in Singapore use the word 'follower' over 'fan' to reject the hierarchical distance implied by the relationship between celebrities and fans. Abidin argues that influencers create an impression of intimacy by portraying an overall sense of ordinary everydayness to close this distance further. Rather than appearing removed from the community, influencers project a shared cultural membership with their followers. One technique influencers use is to invite audiences into their personal spaces, activities, and lives (Marwick & boyd, 2011). In videos produced by JoJo, viewers enter her bedroom, living room, bathroom, and backyard, recreating the experience of a playdate or sleepover. The experience is familiar on a personal level, and not a consumer level, producing a sense of intimacy.

Abidin describes intimacy as "how familiar and close followers feel to an influencer" (2015b). Influencers elicit a sense of commonality that is recognizable, relatable, and reciprocal. Within the digital heterotopia, familiar spaces of childhood collide, reducing the barriers between celebrity and fan and producing a democratic space in which intimacy and interconnectedness are co-constructed by influencers and followers. This breakdown of distinct hierarchies is facilitated by shared cultural membership and folklore. In a study conducted by Frans Folkvord et al. (2019), researchers found that viewing YouTube videos had become an integral component of childhood culture and that the degree of bonding children displayed with a particular influencer predicted the amount of time spent consuming their videos. Drawing from Durkheim, Daniel Smith (2014) argues that YouTube celebrity has reached a level of sacredness in the age

of the individual, in which “we are all fans of our own lives” (260). Rather than assume that viewing such videos creates uncritical consumption among children, perhaps we can think of it as a process of identification in which children can participate in a particular affinity space. Although many children recognize the advertising tactics involved in the YouTube viewing experience, I argue that the perceived shared cultural values, attitudes, traditions, and perceptions between influencers and their audiences create a collective understanding akin to folk culture.

Kid influencers let other children be a part of their personal lives by inviting them into their homes and sharing intimate stories and fantasies. The friendship-like relationship that develops can be understood as perceived interconnectedness (Abidin, 2015b). This ‘friendship’ is strengthened by the two-way communication embedded in the social media platform. Fans can connect with JoJo by commenting on her videos. She can respond by actively reaching out to her audiences for content suggestions and their own experiences with a product. This identification process is further reinforced through cultural narratives and traditional play. Children’s YouTube videos perform a similar function to word-of-mouth folklore transmission within the folk Web, resulting in a higher audience response than traditional marketing actions (Folkvord et al., 2019) and the prospering of enduring lore in the online space. The line between the physical and the digital is increasingly blurred, and with that, so too is “the delineation between content and advertising” (Evans et al., 2018:343). Social media and influencer marketing equally rely on folk culture poaching to connect with existing cultural groups and form new ones. As children’s folklore is marketed back to the community by kid influencers (as will be explored in more detail below), the influencers themselves and their unique identities are subsumed into the traditional folklore, which in turn fuels their success.

The perceived interconnection between Siwa and her followers, better known as Siwanators, is shaped and sustained through fan affinity and childhood culture. Siwa relies on the traditions of playground folklore to anchor herself within the world of children, regardless of her own age, and connect with fans as a potential playmate rather than an untouchable celebrity. In the DIY style of her videos, child fans recognize the continual balance between conservatism and innovation central to their own playground remixes. The bonds Siwa creates with her young fans resemble the relationship between a child and her babysitter. This bond is reinforced through a series of YouTube videos where Siwa babysits different children in her life, including North West, the daughter of celebrities Kim Kardashian and Kanye West.

In the YouTube video 'Babysitting Mini JoJo Siwa!!!' (viewed over 75 million times in February 2022), Siwa plays traditional games with a two-year-old girl dressed exactly like her. In the video, Siwa is the dream babysitter, playing endless games and letting Mini JoJo eat candy and pick out toys from her merchandise room. The games include hide-and-seek, jumping on the bed, playing with toys, and running around. Besides featuring a room filled with floor-to-ceiling shelves of every JoJo-related product and a slide in the bedroom, the video consists of typical activities a child might enjoy while being babysat. The camera follows Siwa as she expertly entertains Mini JoJo and maintains the kind of energy any caretaker would be jealous of. Fans watching the video can recognize the experience of being babysat and reposition themselves as a Mini JoJo.

The video begins with a young girl knocking on JoJo's door, claiming to be 'Mini JoJo,' and demanding to be babysat. The girl is wearing a traditional JoJo outfit, courtesy of Siwa's clothing line 'JoJo's Closet,' topped with a matching pink JoJo bow. As a means of emulating their favourite stars and stating their membership to a fandom, many fans will dress in a similar

fashion and own any affiliated products. Viewers can project themselves into the position of Mini JoJo as a fellow Siwanator owning fan-related merchandise. Mini JoJo appears to be a regular Siwa fan, like other viewers, making it easier to believe that one-day JoJo Siwa might babysit them. Through the process of identification, fans' own babysitting experiences are reflected back to them. The affinity space of babysitting occupied by both Siwa and her fans reinforces Williams' (1958) notion of "culture as ordinary." The video feels authentic and elicits an intimate bond with the celebrity because it is filmed in Siwa's house and relies on traditional games.

Journalist Emma Brockes (2020) described her daughters' obsession with JoJo in the article *JoJo Siwa has Taken Over Our Home, But I'm Staging a Fight Back,* stating, "And when they ask, 'Can we go on a playdate with her?' I'm actually relieved. I'd rather they thought of her as a girl in the neighbourhood than as an unreachable star they aspire to be." Rather than request tickets to her next concert or a copy of her newest album, these JoJo fans want to have a playdate with her. The idea seems possible given the number of videos she has of babysitting and the unscripted nature of her play scenarios. Siwa's videos document her life instead of focusing on her celebrity performances. Fans are invited into her bedroom, told secrets, and accompany her while she babysits, all the while identifying with her references to childhood culture. The intimate nature of her videos and her use of recognizable play traditions and folklore (i.e., singing, dancing, hide-and-seek, and make-believe) make her relatable, much like a peer. The discourse pattern of childhood folklore travels from children's homes to the videos of Siwa back into the homes of the fans consuming her videos. Within a heterotopia, traditional boundaries are weakened, and the incompatible spaces of the digital and the physical, the commercial and the folk, the public and the private become compatible. At the nexus of play traditions and digital

merchandising, folklore discourse is transformed for commercial purposes and then reinscribed onto the child fan's historical body. Through this discourse cycle, Siwa profits off the traditions of childhood culture, and her fans can occupy the same affinity space as their idol.

Siwa also references the creative stylings of children's play and imagination in videos that draw on traditional games, stories, and folklore. In a nod to childhood culture, Siwa reinforces the sentiment that she is a friend, not simply an influencer. She demonstrates her propensity for conservativism and innovation in her kitchen experiment videos. In these YouTube videos, she engages in the century-old tradition of making mudpies and homemade concoctions but on an extreme scale. In her YouTube video titled 'Buying every slime at Target,' Siwa refers to the childhood fascination with all things dirty, slimy, and icky when she plays with and combines an extensive array of colourful slimes. Siwa replicates the child's experience of reveling in being messy despite adult pleas for child cleanliness.

Slime has become a staple of children's toys and an enduring feature of childhood culture. In the 1950s, wallpaper cleaner 'Kutal' was remarketed as a child's toy called 'Play-Doh' (Hatala, 2019). This quintessential childhood product was quickly followed by 'Silly Putty,' 'Wham-O's Super Stuff,' and 'Slime.' The bright-green slime was originally marketed to boys and packaged in a garbage can. The product was continually rebranded with traditional boy entertainment franchises such as Ghostbusters and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Faircloth, 2017). Slime became further entrenched in childhood culture in the Nickelodeon show 'Uh-Oh,' where contestants were drenched in slime. Playing with the beloved childhood toy, Siwa allows for co-playing to occur as fans play with slime alongside her or vicariously through her. Slime is recognizable to her fans as a childhood product and relatively affordable, given the number of homemade recipes available.

Siwa also participates in the growing trend of female influencers who reclaim the typically male marketed toy as something entirely female. The current social media trend of slime videos is not about grossness but "a current fascination with unicorns in the beauty industry" (Faircloth, 2017). Slime comes in an array of bright rainbow colours or soft pastels filled with glitter, beads, and cotton balls. Rather than the stuff at the bottom of a trash can or running down the walls of a cave, slime is the stuff of rainbows and unicorn poop. Even Siwa's slime plays into her 'everything nice' aesthetic and strengthens her connection with her girl fans. Siwa brings the shopping experience of Target and its slime products into recognizable play scenarios, creating relatable experiences that draw on traditional play scripts and familiar lore. It is unclear whether Siwa's video is sponsored by Target, though her clothing line is sold there. The ambiguity, however, strikes the perfect balance between advertising and entertainment, enticing fans to form an even greater bond with the kid influencer by purchasing her favourite slime at their local shop. With its 17.6 million views, the video highlights the teen's fun-loving and child-like personality, as well as her connection to playground folklore traditions. She takes the tradition of playing with Play-Doh and Slime and innovates the experience by amplifying the amount of slime she uses and firmly repositioning the toy as a child product for girls and boys. She illustrates the complex relationship between childhood culture and popular culture, further complicating it with her demonstration of technology as a constant factor in children's everyday activities.

JoJo Bows

JoJo Siwa's lifestyle brand also succeeds in poaching childhood folk traditions that resonate with her child audience. As fans of Siwa move in and out of transmediated social settings and the heterotopia of fandom, the folklore travelling within the digital folk system is

reappropriated for the physical playground space. Siwa's personal brand is absorbed into the traditional folklore as a form of fan participation, which fuels her success. The cycle of discourse for childhood folklore ensures a blurring of the digital and physical playground as cultural texts and lore are circulated through influencer brands and fandom. Siwa's transmedia brand marketing, and private exposure of her every-day activities result in fans experiencing an intimate association with the teen celebrity. However, "the most popular object of identification and intimate connection both for Siwa and her fans is the oversized hair bow" (Andreallo, 2020:52).

From Siwa's first appearance in entertainment, her mother, Jessalyn Siwa, ensured that she was always wearing a large, colourful, handmade bow (Keiles, 2019). The bow was introduced as a signature look with the hopes of making Siwa memorable and contributing to the narrative of hyper-femininity and childhood innocence. The bow is more than a hair accessory; rather, it has become a part of Siwa's identity and a stand-in for the social ideals she represents. In preschool, Siwa was known as "JoJo with the bow bow" (Palmer, 2017). The bow is a cultural object that Siwa identifies with and, for fans, a token of one's admiration for the teen and the values she promotes. In an interview on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* (2019), Siwa stated:

> You know, for me, the bow is a cute, fun hair accessory, right? And to everyone, that's what it looks like. But really, what it is if you're wearing a JoJo bow, you're a Siwanator, and if you're a Siwanator, you are someone who is strong, confident, powerful. You believe in yourself, you believe in everyone, you love everyone, you support everyone. So, say you're at school, and you don't have anyone to sit with at lunch, and you see

> there's a kid wearing a JoJo bow, you know that you can sit with them because they're a Siwanator.

Siwa recognizes the bow as a symbol of power, confidence, and kindness, and markets it as a symbol of fandom and these aspirational ideals. The bow represents girl power, signifying Siwa's position within popular feminism and reinforcing a white, Western, middle-class representation of girlhood, which is practiced through consumerism and a heavy reliance on images of childhood innocence.

In keeping with the folk narrative of 'girls are made of everything nice,' the JoJo bow is a signal of hyper-femininity and childhood innocence. The bows are brightly coloured and heavily decorated with rhinestones, glitter, and sequins, staying in line with the unicorn beauty aesthetic marketed to young girls. The bows are also oversized, suggesting that the wearer is too small, bringing attention to the small stature of many of her fans, while simultaneously placing the 5'9" Siwa in the category of a little girl. The size of the bow signals a child's innocence and is "reminiscent of children wearing their parent's shoes or clothes in role-play at home" (Andreallo, 2020:62). The bow's fun colours and comical size also indicate the playability associated with the hair accessory placing it in the world of costuming and imagination. As such, the JoJo bow has become a socially meaningful object for both Siwa and her fans and a tool for identity performance and fan participation on the physical playground.

JoJo's bows are not the first iteration of bows to be included in playground folklore. In a 1944 *Life* magazine article entitled 'High School Fads,' bows were described as socially significant symbols of sexual availability (Andreallo, 2020). Depending on the placement of the bow, the wearer was able to communicate their romantic status: bow on the top meant unattached; bow in the back meant uninterested; bow on the right meant in love; and bow on the

left meant ‘going steady’ (Laughead, 1994). This article illustrates the history of the bow as a social symbol and cultural object of status in the schoolyard. For fans of JoJo Siwa, the bow acts as a tool for mimicry, mirroring the influencer, and indicates a wearer’s status as a Siwanator. It represents the nexus of tradition, fandom, and gender expression. With over 80 million JoJo bows sold, fans have appropriated Siwa’s signature look as a cultural artifact of girl fandom and playground social interaction.

In a *Kidsday* news report, 5th grader Sophie Divaris (2018) talks about her love for JoJo and her status as a Siwanator: “I have 29 JoJo Siwa bows. I wear a JoJo bow everywhere I go. I also try never to miss a JoJo blog.” Quoting lyrics from Siwa’s song ‘Every Girl’s a Super Girl,’ Sophie describes Siwanators: “We look up to each other, looking out for one another, it’s a real kind of power, and we’re making it ours.” The JoJo bow provides a close link between the fans and the celebrity and between fans within the community. According to Jackie Stacey (1994), fan objects become the catalyst through which “the interplay between self and ideal” is contextualized within the fan experience (174). JoJo’s bows symbolize female empowerment, friendship, and confidence for fans. Those ideals can be internalized and used as a barometer for future friendships and social interactions on the playground. Fan objects do not merely provide the means to mirror the celebrity but act as a conduit for celebrity narratives and identifications to become embedded in the everyday activities of fans (Cavicchis, 1998). The adoption of traditional folklore facilitates the self-identification that occurs within fandom by celebrities. Siwa’s playful nature and reliance on childhood culture tradition encourage a seamless melding of JoJo fan participation and playground folklore.

On the playground, the sea of oversized bows has become a tool for negotiating friendships, a form of fandom expression and social capital. Costumes have long been a symbol

of unity and solidarity, as discussed in Chapter two, and a key component of contemporary fandom. The JoJo bow provides an avenue for which fellow Siwanators can congregate and occupy a more visible and, thus, more powerful place in society. In this way, fan-play becomes a form of power as it is enacted within the heterotopia of the playground. This form of social capital garnered through expressions of JoJo fandom has not gone unnoticed by adults. For parents, teachers, and school administrators, the bows represent expense, exclusivity, and impracticality rather than power, confidence, and kindness.

Reaching the level of child fandom of predecessors *Pokémon, Tamagotchi,* and *Beyblades,* JoJo bows have been banned from many schools in the UK (Ehlen, 2017). The reasons for the ban range from a class distraction that breaks school uniform policies to a tactic for exclusionary behaviour and status of one's wealth. In response to the first concern, Claire's has released a line of JoJo bows in red, white, navy, and black to better coordinate with school colours (Palmer, 2017). Siwa herself has spoken out against the ban, stating that "it is a bad thing" and that JoJo bows are a symbol of "power, confidence, and believing-ness" (Harris, 2020). However, as a product of popular feminism, the bow is intricately tied to capitalist practices and the utopian middle-class view of childhood. As discussed, popular culture is intertwined with children's everyday practices within a heterotopia through heterotopic transmediated play, and cultural texts and artifacts take on new meanings, sometimes in contrast to the original intent. Siwa initially described the bow as an indication of acceptance and friendship. However, when combined with cultural norms and group indicators of the playground, the bow has the potential to symbolize exclusivity, economic capital, and female bullying.

As a signifying social object, the JoJo bow immediately communicates the wearer's cultural identity as a female and JoJo fandom member. The fan object reinforces the intimate bond between celebrity and fan while also acting as a tool for fan identification, maintenance, and negotiation. Fandom is “a particular identity that affects and shapes its members, in ways beyond shared media consumption” (Busse & Gary, 2011:426). On the playground, the bow is endowed with folklore, changing the object's social significance and the accompanying behaviour of the wearer. From the physical playground, the JoJo bow makes its way back to the digital playground through fan videos. Serious fans of Siwa are invited to join the Bow Club, which includes a subscription service to the JoJo Siwa Box, featuring “exclusive apparel and accessories for Siwanators of all ages” (thejojobox.com). JoJo promotes this product by making unboxing videos. In her video ‘Unboxing my Own JoJo Box’ (2017), JoJo excitedly looks through the products to reveal an exclusive ‘OG’ Bow fashioned after the original bow she wore in baby photos. Bow Club members post their own unboxing fan videos to pay tribute to the celebrity and adopt the kid influencer genre of unboxing as a childhood activity.

Self-proclaimed Siwanator, @HelloHailey, posts a series of videos to YouTube where she unboxes the bows she receives as a member of the JoJo Bow Club. Seated in front of a wall of JoJo posters and JoJo bows, Hailey describes the box’s content and tries to guess which JoJo music video inspired the design. In her video ‘Unboxing the JoJo Bow Club #25!’ (2019) Hailey expresses her love for JoJo and guesses that the rainbow-coloured bow with a rhinestone ice-cream cone on it is inspired by the JoJo song ‘I Want Candy in Sweetland.’ Dressed in a colour coordinated bow, Hello Hailey demonstrates the grassroots appropriation of the unboxing genre and her self-identification with kid influencer JoJo Siwa. Within the heterotopia of fandom, multiple spaces converge as Hello Hailey recreates JoJo videos, participates in girlhood, declares

her affiliation with JoJo fandom, and transmediates herself across the physical/digital barrier. Her videos represent childhood culture within the digital space and the fluid nature of folklore. The JoJo bow is more than a fashion accessory, marketing ploy or fan object; as Siwa describes it, it is ‘a sign’ (Palmer, 2017). A sign of the transmediated sociality of playground folklore. It is a cultural artifact reimagined for social interactions on the playground and imbued with the cultural significance attributed to it as it migrates through the transmediated folk landscape.

Siwa Fan Parodies

Digital entertainment platforms are also performance platforms, that enable participants to engage in digital expressions representative of the communicative elements present in face-to-face interactions (Buccitelli, 2012). In recognizing the creative dynamics of performance inherent to folklore in digital environments, YouTube can be viewed as an extension of the heterotopia of real-world cultural participation and fan engagement. While immediate reaction does not often occur in digital environments, as they would offline, audiences react to performative displays in various ways. The responses can range from a simple indication of approval or disapproval through ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ buttons to elaborate video responses and antagonistic remarks from outrage inciters known as trolls. Fan videos made in response to both official and amateur videos continue a cycle of folk discourse, creating a digital back and forth as well as cultural texts for fandom and childhood culture. In watching and creating videos, children find fellow fans and contribute to the cultural production of fan material. In the social media space, fans can respond to celebrity YouTubers with videos that pay tribute to their filming styles, content, and narratives. Fan videos are a form of participatory culture where meaning is made collectively as well as individually.

As discussed in Chapter one, parody is a ubiquitous genre of expression within both playground folklore and participatory culture (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019: Jenkins, 2006b). Within the context of JoJo Siwa fan parodies, the term parody is used in its catch-all variation when it refers to “any work that draws on a previous one, regardless of its stance toward the original” (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019:8). As fans of JoJo Siwa select and recreate her media content, they simultaneously emulate and make fun of her boisterous style. This combination of admiration and ridicule reflects the innovation and conservativism in children’s play, as well as the complexity involved in being a fan. In responding to both celebrity- and fan-produced videos, children are able to experience the community of fandom while expressing individuality and use traditional folklore of the playground to produce original content. Child fan videos therefore demonstrate a second level of appropriation as popular culture texts are poached for playground play and repositioned as forms of fan participation through fan videos. In the YouTube video ‘The Grimmettes Parody Their Favourite Youtubers! JoJo Siwa, Miranda Sings and Sofie Dossi’ posted by @GrimmettesToyShow, the girls in the video express their fandom through the critical lens of parody to make public their fantasy play.

The video depicts three girls between nine – twelve years of age performing as their favourite YouTube celebrities. The child, whose room appears to be the video set, is dressed as JoJo Siwa, wearing an outfit made up entirely of JoJo clothing topped with a side pony and large JoJo bow. She introduces herself using JoJo’s iconic opening line, “Hey everybody! It’s JoJo here!” The walls of her room are plastered with JoJo posters and a rack of over twenty JoJo bows. ‘JoJo’ is soon joined by fellow YouTubers ‘Miranda Sings’ and ‘Sofie Dossi.’ The girl performing as Miranda Sings has her pants pulled high up on her waist, red lipstick smeared across her mouth, and an attitude and voice mimicking the sombre YouTube star. The girl

pretending to be Sofie Dossi enters the room, walking in a backbend with curly hair extensions emulating the flexibility and hairstyle of the celebrity teen contortionist.

As illustrated in Chapter two, role-playing and costuming are enduring forms of folkloric children's play and an example of fan participation. Children and fans alike use costuming as an outward symbol of their interests and a presentation of their imaginative fantasies. The girls in this video participate in an elaborate from of cosplay as they faithfully emulate the celebrities for fellow fans. The costumes in this video are not only used as a means of identification but also as an indication of fan knowledge, merchandise collection, and heterotopic transmediated play. The costuming also references the costuming present in the YouTubers' collaboration videos. In the JoJo Siwa video 'Miranda Sings Gave Me A Makeover,' Miranda removes JoJo's signature bow and rainbow clothing and replaces them with an outfit matching hers: a messy red lip and a brown wig. In response, JoJo made the YouTube video 'Turning Miranda Sings into JoJo Siwa,' in which she makes Miranda wear her merchandise clothing, signature side pony and bow, and dance to her music. In the video 'Sofie Dossi! I Switched Lives with Miranda Sings,' Sofie and Miranda dress each other in their signature looks and perform as though they were the other. Costuming in childhood culture is in this way poached by celebrity YouTubers and transformed into 'makeover' genre videos, which are subsequently marketed to child fans and re-reappropriated by children in their own YouTube video making. Within the heterotopia of fandom, influencer genres converge with traditional playground play to the point that the two become indistinguishable and readily reproduced in the digital play of fans.

The girls in the parody each mimic aspects of the celebrity performance, including dress, style of speech, and gimmicks, pushing parody into the realm of fandom. The girl playing JoJo invites her friends into her 'merch room' and encourages them to pour jugs of water over their

heads, referencing a series of videos in which JoJo pours juice on herself. The girl pretending to be Miranda periodically leans into the camera and whispers to her audience about her disdain for JoJo, recreating Miranda Sings' audience interaction and fake rivalry with Siwa. The girl role-playing Sofie Dossi demonstrates her flexibility and comments on the motivation behind Dossi's videos by stating, "So, the reason I came in here, walking in backwards, is because I can!" The girls use the folkloric tradition of costuming and role-play while simultaneously drawing on the folklore references in the celebrity YouTube genre of makeovers. The folklore tradition of role-playing is reappropriated as a celebrity YouTube genre, which then cycles through the discourse of digital folklore and is again expressed through children's play and fan participation.

The fan video reproduces the home-video filming style reminiscent of all three YouTubers, where content is primarily filmed in their homes. YouTube is frequently discussed "through a distinction between two logics of cultural production that contribute to its complex cultural fabric: 'professional' (i.e. traditional media) and 'amateur' (i.e. independent individuals)" (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019: 5). The children's parody challenges this distinction as their amateur filming closely parallels the filming style of these home-grown celebrities. Using the phone to film in the private space of the bedroom has become a staple of kid YouTubers, blurring private and public spaces and contributing to the perceived interconnectedness of the fan/influencer relationship. YouTube fan videos further blur the distinction between professional and amateur as the 'labour of love' associated with fan-produced works is combined with the potential for a video to go viral. Within the commercialized space of YouTube, there is the opportunity to professionalize, as demonstrated by JoJo Siwa, Miranda Sings, and Sofie Dossi. While the fan video parodies these YouTube influencers, it also taps into the same entrepreneurial ethos that garnered them notoriety in the first place. Fan videos cater to both the

communal aspirations of participating in a fan community and the commercial aspirations of becoming a kid influencer, evidenced by the username of the fan video: Grimmettes Toy Show.

On the playground, parody in turn solidifies social bonds through cultural recognition and transgressive action. Within the digital folk system, parody additionally provides a means to emulate YouTube stars more closely and potentially reach a similar level of fame. The potential to become a kid influencer changes the dynamic of the typical playground activity as the exhibitionist performance is marketed to voyeuristic observers. The commercialization present in YouTube fan videos does not negate the grassroots cultural production of traditional fan play because of the ties to playground folklore. The blending of commercialism and playground play is representative of the heterotopia of fandom and the precarious position of power. Within this space, children have access to the same tools of production, distribution, and reach as the cultures of industry. Children's play becomes a highly monetized form of work that is enveloped in the traditions of childhood culture. As a form of play, children reproduce the paid efforts of influencers with the hopes of achieving a similar status of professionalism. The very act of pursuing paid employment undermines adult measures to 'protect' the child and dismantles notions of childhood innocence. Popular culture always involves acts of appropriation and transgression, and as children make kid influencers popular, they reject notions of childhood innocence and skirt regulations prohibiting employment. As the girls of Gimmettes Toy Show post fan videos, they shift seamlessly between traditional play styles from the physical to the digital playground and redefine what it means to be a child and a fan.

YouTube and other social media platforms have changed the way children connect with each other and enact identity. This has, in turn, changed the primary producers of influential media texts (Yarosh et al., 2016). Whereas in the past, child fandom revolved around content

produced by media giants such as Disney, Nickelodeon, MTV and Warner Brothers, the new media age increasingly includes content created and produced by other children and distributed using accessible resources. This strengthens the connection between traditional playground folklore and popular culture texts. Yarosh et al. (2016) claim that adults use YouTube to archive and collect memories of everyday life, humorous moments, and special events, while children and teens see the platform as a stage. YouTube is an extension of the playground in which the performance of dancing, singing, storytelling, role-playing, and pretend play contribute to a child's transmediated self and fan participation. Recognizing online performativity and audience reactions as similar to offline social interactions requires a heterotopia in which the boundaries between the digital performance context and the actual world are blurred. Children rely on traditional folklore narratives, games, play scripts, and communication styles when forming personal and community bonds online, suggesting that folklorists should not let the unfamiliarity of the digital environment blind them to the folk undercurrents enabling children's online social activities.

Conclusion

Digital platforms, such as YouTube, constitute a unique communicative environment that encourages innovative cultural and linguistic phenomena while acting as a folk system designed to perpetuate tradition. The communication medium provides tools for the preservation and transmission of existing folklore and stimulates user creativity to express thoughts and ideas in a new form. The migration of traditional playground lore to the digital realm is a consequence of the transmediated sociality of children's cultural participation. Children's identities are tied to their membership in childhood culture, richly permeated with tradition passed from one generation to the next. The communication practices and group rituals used to maintain child

communities are extended from the heterotopia of the playground to carve out their own space online. Just as the physical playground has become inseparable from the evolution of childhood culture, so too has the digital playground.

As YouTube proves, children are extending their practices to the virtual playground. They are transmitting their culture, traditions, folklore, and fan creations through the digital folk system. With the folk Web steeped in traditional communicative practices and lore, it is not surprising that children are engaging in folk performances and producing cultural products parallel to those seen in the offline world. With more than 500 hours of content posted to YouTube every minute (YouTube Press, 2022), a dialogic discourse has occurred involving non-commercial products and commercial texts that have been appropriated, remixed, and recirculated by dedicated fans in a process reminiscent of the heterotopic transmediated play children engage in on the playground.

This chapter makes a case for exploring childhood folklore and play traditions in the digital space, using the online networking site YouTube. I have presented children's online fandom participation to illustrate digital entertainment platforms as extensions of the physical playground for children in the digital age. The interconnectedness of JoJo Siwa and her fans suggests that folklore is at the root of child entertainment success and children's fan participation. Costuming, parody, and messy play are regularly observed on the playground and find their way back into children's play and cultural meaning making through celebrity emulation and transmediated communications. Popular YouTube videos gain notoriety as the recognizable traditions of childhood culture are branded and marketed back to peers resulting in video responses that draw on the same folklore and have the potential for commercial success. Traditional hierarchies of power are dismantled within the heterotopia, producing bodies capable

of transitioning between play and work, amateur and professional content creators, and producer and consumer. As a signal of fan membership and knowledge of playground practices, the parodies produced by fans inspire new re-tellings and reappropriations. From this perspective, folklore can be considered the traditional pattern, formula, or structure children use to connect with popular culture, interpret it, and respond to it.

As the digital playground merges with the daily practices of children, especially with the spread of COVID-19, its ambiguous, shifting space is grounded in the 'real' places of childhood, and in some cases, replaces them. The playground and convention centres as heterotopias complicate the distinction between place and space and provide interesting examples of the geographical and textual negotiations of fans. Within the physical boundaries of the playground and the Con, both interest and geography play an integral role in the function of the heterotopia and the creation of a fan community. What grounds a playground fan community is not simply media interest, but the social and cultural practices established by young people within the 'real' places of childhood. The games and folklore of the playground have endured because of their versatility as a form of fan participation. As children were gradually prohibited from the places of childhood in the wake of the 2019 Coronavirus pandemic, digital spaces proved crucial to facilitating social interaction and sustaining a sense of community. In the following chapter, children's online folk practices will be explored as the notion of 'place' becomes ever more tenuous and the need for community engagement ever more pressing, during the ongoing pandemic.

Chapter Four: Dancing Through the Pandemic

As outlined in the previous chapters, folklore has been a consistent semiotic resource children employ to make meaning. As heterotopias of the playground extend into the digital space – in effect replacing the physical places of childhood during the COVID-19 pandemic – folklore proves essential for maintaining cultural identity and remaining connected to social networks. In the past, children's heterotopias were rooted in physical places, their access to power contingent on the physical use of the body and face-to-face interactions with adults. As children's heterotopias extend into the digital space, this modicum of power is disrupted, displaced, and reinscribed on the transmediated body of the child. Today, children make the most out of the digital playground by reproducing playground rituals and routines digitally to preserve the heterotopic spaces carved out of childhood places. Any power gained on the playground has been rerouted to digital spaces, further blurring the line between consumer and producer, and between work and play. Particularly, this chapter uses the case study of TikTok to examine the power of sexuality and gender expression of girlhood as the platform is co-opted as a reservoir of folklore, rituals, and representations of girl culture. This analysis is situated within the research of Jenkins (2020), Goffman (1990), and Kennedy (2020).

Children are participating in heterotopic transmediated play capable of surviving the shift from physical places to digital spaces because of the functional juxtaposition of their original use. Children's heterotopic transmediated play represents a folk effort by children to reclaim a place of their own within the dominant culture and within a digital space produced, monitored, and populated by adults. The convergence of semiotic resources present in children's playground heterotopic transmediated play eases the transition of children's participation between modes. The boundaries and patterns of physical play are inverted and transformed into a flexible,

moveable practice that can shift between spaces and survive placelessness. Recently, TikTok has emerged as a vital childhood space for a population of children during the pandemic and a central location where childhood is performed and rewarded. Much like the kid influencers examined in Chapter three, playful efforts of a subsection of children to remain connected to their culture and community gain an additional layer of power as they are monetized and popularized within the space.

To stem the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, governments fully or partially closed many child-designated spaces, including schools, parks, recreation centres, and playgrounds. At the height of the first wave of the pandemic in April 2020, 95% of countries closed their schools in response to the rate of transmission, impacting the daily lives of nearly 1.725 billion children worldwide (Smith, 2020:2). Children's play, learning, and socialization behaviours are characterized by close proximity and less-than-perfect hygiene activities. For this reason, schools and other child-centred spaces are often targeted in non-medical intervention strategies to delay the spread of infection (Brooks et al., 2020b; Litvinova et al., 2019). The need to recreate routine in children's daily lives, reinforce consistent teaching practices, despite school closures through online education (Wang et al., 2020), and find alternatives for supporting child peer culture and social networks became (and continues to be) an urgent necessity. Research suggests that children are more vulnerable to psychological distress than adults when daily routines are disrupted, and an overall worry over a lack of safety permeates their day-to-day experiences (Bartlett et al., 2020). As a result of the outbreak, children have been physically separated from their peer support networks, inundated with anxiety-inducing media information, and forced to continuously adjust their routines to the evolving situation (Dalton et al., 2020).

There is a growing fear among child experts that children will become collateral damage during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brooks et al., 2020a; Wasmuth, 2020). Institutions designed to support children through development were closed, as were the places children use to develop their social and physical growth (playgrounds, extracurricular events, etc.). Even spending time with extended family and peers within the home space was considered dangerous. It has been hypothesized that the closure of childhood institutions "will have a significant and long-lasting impact on their mental health that will outweigh the impact of losing a few months of education" (Wasmuth, 2020:2). Children were deprived of the social interactions necessary for healthy development. Subsequently, children with access to digital devices took it upon themselves to seek unconventional means for sustaining friendships, preserving cultural rituals, and cultivating coping strategies.

This case study will explore how children are converging media culture with childhood culture by extending their playground folklore to the video-sharing platform TikTok. Research on children and pandemics has historically focused on the educational and professional attainments of those affected (Meyers and Thomasson, 2017; Smith, 2020; Sprang and Silman, 2013, Witten et al., 2009). In addition, research on children during the COVID-19 pandemic has focused almost exclusively on academic achievement and the damaging effects of digital entertainment platforms on children's mental health (Ellis et al., 2020; Ruiz-Eugenlo, 2020). Research has ignored the potential benefits of digital entertainment platforms for children's social well-being, and the long-standing tradition folklore has played in helping children process traumatic events and maintain a cultural identity during times of social separation. Therefore, this chapter aims to illuminate the benefits digital entertainment platforms have on children's social well-being, resiliency, and cultural preservation.

Folk cultures demand social interaction and community engagement; when denied in traditional spaces, the folk find new spaces to inhabit and extend their heterotopia. During COVID-19, that space for children occurs on digital entertainment platforms, most notably TikTok. When folk culture is transported to spaces outside of the social formation that produced it, there is always a trace of its ancestry. Connections to the past and recreations of tradition are witnessed as playground folklore is rerouted to the new digital spaces of childhood. TikTok dance trends represent a form of heterotopic transmediated play that reveal a lineage rooted in playground performance remixes and contagion play. Folk culture is social culture as I have discussed; folk traditions are social experiences produced and reproduced communally rather than experienced privately. The social conditions of folklore produce a sense of community and ensure the extinction of folklore in isolation. As children found themselves isolated from their community during the COVID-19 pandemic, they found ways to transform their private experiences into public ones to revive their community 'folkness.' Folklore has been a consistent semiotic resource for children learning to navigate and participate in a complex social world.

Viral Folklore

The words 'contagious' and 'contaminated' are terms frequently used in North American discourse to describe the spread of both positive and negative attributes. Society tends to attach these words to more than disease transmission (Kitta, 2019). Emotions are often described as contagious; someone may have a contagious laugh or display a cycle of negative thinking that tends to infect those around them (see Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). The terms can also be used to describe children's folklore that passes from one child to another, travelling through playgrounds, becoming either an enduring tradition or a fleeting trend. The terms 'virus' or 'viral' have also been co-opted from scientific terminology to describe cultural phenomena that

spread quickly through human transmission. As discussed in Chapter three, there is a new virality to modern folklore as its transmission goes beyond orality, and its reach extends beyond locality. Folklore traverses time and space as a product of collaboration, reaching a level of anonymity and authorlessness akin to an infectious disease that has reached a point of growth in which contact tracing is no longer feasible. Like a virus, folklore adapts to the changing environment to protect itself from extinction. Heterotopic transmediated play represents a mutation in folklore to respond to and absorb the ever-shifting landscape of popular culture—an effort by residual cultures to become emergent.

The term 'peer contagion' is used to describe a mutual process of learning between an individual and a peer and often centres around folklore and childhood cultural practices (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). Much like an asymptomatic disease carrier unwittingly infecting a social contact, peer contagion often occurs outside of the participants' awareness. Individuals may not realize that they are influencing their peers by engaging in relationship behaviours that encourage conformity and the immediate need for companionship. Much research on peer contagion focuses on the mutual exchange of information and encouragement of behaviours and emotions that would be defined as deviant, such as bullying, drug use, aggression, weapon carrying, depression, and disordered eating (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). A primary mode of deviancy training, a mechanism of peer contagion, involves the use of storytelling and folklore. Stories of past deviant acts, 'it happened to a friend of a friend,' and what-if scenarios provide a give-and-take exchange between peers to spread deviant thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, and to participate in the viral nature of folklore.

While the transmission of folklore is contagious by nature, so are some of its most popular playground topics. As Priscilla Wald (2008) argues, outbreak narratives and contagion

games are crucial in understanding and processing information about disease and disease transmission. Common outbreak narratives include superstitions about 'patient zero' and supernatural stories of transmissible conditions, such as vampirism and lycanthropy. Perhaps the most common contagion game is cooties. Contagion folklore provides the lay public with a forum in which to learn new information, discuss their concerns, offer alternative explanations, and ultimately choose to deny or accept these explanations (Kitta, 2019). They also provide folklorists with an understanding of the effects tradition has on a society's general knowledge of disease and the coping strategies involved in combatting fear and anxiety in response to it. Based on the lore surrounding a disease, it is clear that some illnesses are more feared than others. For example, polio triggers more fear responses than chickenpox, which is largely considered a nuisance or a childhood rite of passage (Kitta, 2012).

As disease spreads, so too does folklore about the disease. Based on the information conveyed through folklore, contagion routes and survival rates can be impacted, stigmas can be promoted, and safety measures can be invented, influencing the perception of the disease and its consequences. Myths and folklore surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic, for example, resulted in misinformation about who was at risk, disease transmission, and the quality of life for those infected. How narratives and folklore are formed can "turn individuals, groups, and places into legends, changing the victim(s) into the embodiment of the contagion and/or contamination" (Kitta, 2019:17). At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus was dubbed by the North American public the 'Wuhan virus' or the 'China virus' as both a means to track the location of the first documented case and to participate in discriminatory and xenophobic behaviour (Vazquez, 2020). While both previous examples show the negative results of disease folklore, there are also ways in which encasing a disease in a narrative or folkloric form assists in coping

with the outbreak and gaining a better understanding of its transmission, anatomical structure, and appropriate safety responses. Children have historically come to understand and adapt to pandemics through folklore. In a world currently governed by restrictions, children attempt to control the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on their daily lives, social networks, and cultural activities by engaging in folklore. Folklore acts as a countermeasure to the social distancing effects and breakdown of neighbourhood cohesion caused by the disease, a practice that has been utilized by children in prior pandemics (Vollet, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children actively sought to solve or alter their current stressful situation by transferring their social spaces to the digital realm and employing playground folklore to reinscribe their cultural space and maintain a social network. A long history of 'contagion' play and illness talk has prepared children for understanding the intricacies behind lockdown measures. Simultaneously, playground social networking strategies have been easily rerouted to the digitalscape because of an already established heterotopic tie, enacting a collective coping strategy against social isolation. Folklore has been adapted into a coping strategy for children to control their changing environment and stabilize their new social interactions. Children have co-opted playground traditions to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on daily living and reproduce feelings of community while socially isolating. As discussed in Chapter two, children's cultural productions are informed by the semiotic resources at their disposal. Children's language creation, therefore, evolves with historical and cultural shifts in the zeitgeist. During the pandemic, young people developed new words to cope with the evolving situation. 'Covidiot' referred to someone who ignored public health advice; 'coronacation' was used to describe the shut down of schools for children; 'maskne,' a mash-up of mask and acne, describes the breakouts caused by wearing a mask for a prolonged period. Miley Cyrus has even

renamed the virus itself as 'the rona' (Davis, 2020). This new vocabulary has helped young people articulate their worries and remain connected around a shared set of cultural reference points that act as a kind of "lexical social glue" (Lawson, 2020). In the absence of traditional forms of social contact, shared talk reproduces folk forms of meaning in a digital environment. Coronavirus terminology has traversed the globe in ways traditional folklore would be unable to, reflecting the transmediated lives of children today.

As an extension and replacement of physical places, the heterotopia of digital entertainment platforms compensates for community engagement and acts as a space for collective coping. As the pandemic continues to impact the lives of children, understanding the language and traditions surrounding it becomes ever more pressing. Following the viral logic of disease, another form of folklore that has infected young people during COVID-19 are viral TikTok dance challenges, which may be considered the newest iteration of contagion play. The same mechanisms of social relations provided by playground folklore are used to sustain and create social relationships in the digital space.

Viral TikTok Dances

Social media sites create spaces for new forms of play, learning, entertainment, communication, and social interaction. Media transform communicative practices by expanding the possibility of transmission and transgressing spatial and temporal constraints (Schulz, 2004). Much like YouTube in the previous chapter, TikTok is used as a case study for the migration of traditional playground folklore from the physical to the digital playground through heterotopic transmediated play. Informed by the technical use of digital entertainment platforms and contributing to their semiotic use, children have reconfigured the digital playground as the primary space for social interaction, coping, and cultural participation during the COVID-19

pandemic. In these circumstances, children have used TikTok to remain emotionally connected to their cultural identities and engage in a new form of contagion play.

During the lockdown, TikTok has emerged as the dominant social media platform for communication among young people. The video-sharing social network, developed by China in 2016, allows users to post short video clips with accompanying audio of themselves and others engaged in various activities. At the time of writing, it is estimated that there are over 1 billion monthly TikTok users worldwide (Dean, 2022). More than 25% of global TikTok users are between the ages of 10-19 years of age (Dean, 2022), with 63% percent of Americans between 12-16 using the platform on a weekly basis (Rodriquez, 2021). As social-distancing measures were put in place worldwide, TikTok witnessed a rapid increase in users. There was a 34% increase in downloads of the app in the first week of lockdown in the UK (Kale, 2020) and a 27% increase in the US (Stassen, 2020). The consensus among these reports is that the disruption of daily life for young people caused by the COVID-19 outbreak was responsible for the exponential rise in TikTok use. With traditional means of folk transmission inaccessible during times of social isolation and peer distancing, TikTok began to function as a digital folk system that children and youth utilized to stay socially connected to their peers, communities, and childhood culture and to combat the adverse effects of boredom, fear, and uncertainty. Like YouTube, the technical uses of the platform inform the semiotic uses of the content and privilege certain childhoods over others. TikTok is unique because of its algorithmically-curated interface, known as the For You Page (FYP) (Lee & Mieczkowski, et al., 2022). Lee and colleagues describe this interface using the metaphor of a crystal capable of "*reflecting* user self-concepts that are both *multifaceted* and *dynamic*… and recognizing parts of themselves *refracted* in other users (2022:11). The metaphor aptly describes the perceived interconnected between JoJo Siwa

and her fans in which shared folk elements are reflected back to users instilling a shared affinity space and common point of reference. The FYP also taps into the cultures of influence that privilege utopian childhoods that are easily recognized, consumed, and dismantled through meaning-making (for a more in-depth discussion of TikTok algorithms see Bhandri & Bimo, 2022). Within the context of this case study, only "viral" TikTok videos posted by young people will be discussed; videos highly visible with the FYP interface because of recognizable characteristics pertaining to both child folk culture and Western utopian images of childhood.

TikTok dances are a form of heterotopic transmediated play that combine the localized act of folk dancing with the global transmission of popular culture, positioning the child body as grounded and placeless. By borrowing from playground traditions of remix, performance, and play, youth have also traversed the boundaries of space to extend childhood traditions into the digital environment and transgressed notions of childhood by extending childhood traditions into teenhood to engage in a collective expression of culture.

Being a fan of a popular song no longer involves simply memorizing the lyrics but also involves learning the TikTok dance that goes along with it. TikTok 'dance challenges' involve a user, primarily in their youth, creating choreography to a segment of a popular song consisting of short and tight moves that fit the app's vertical frame. If approved by peers, the choreography is then mimicked by millions of other TikTok users, ostensibly creating a viral chain reaction that generates an international folk dance performed asynchronously around the world. Combining original content with appropriated content is known as 'stitching' on the digital entertainment platform. This process is reminiscent of both the childhood folk act of playground remixing and the folk practice of quilting and stitching various pieces of material together. The popularity of these digitalized folk experiences has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic and opened

the door for others who have largely been excluded from this form of performance remix. Dancing, lip-syncing, and creating musical remixes have been occurring on playgrounds for over a century but have predominantly remained a staple of childhood culture, and more specifically, girl culture. With limited access to peers and obvious social benefits, parents have been invited into the coveted child space as backup dancers, and youth have co-opted the tradition to showcase their dance abilities and participate in a growing folk activity that extends beyond physical boundaries and age restrictions. The viral and contagious nature of TikTok dances is a testament to the app's effectiveness as a folk transmission system and cultural participation tool. With appropriation and dance being such a fundamental aspect of the app, the ubiquity of spontaneous playground dance performances in childhood has migrated to the youth domain, providing further evidence of the convergence of childhood culture and popular culture.

While highlighting the appropriative nature of fan and childhood culture, TikTok also illustrates the dialogic relationship between popular culture and grassroots traditions. By appropriating popular songs to highlight a user's danceability, amateurs gain notoriety as professional influencers and celebrity artists gain additional exposure and profitable fan material. Reproducing the blurry boundaries between consumers and producers, and play and work inherent to YouTube kid influencers, TikTok dances further support the heterotopic atmosphere that allows children's physical interactions to be digitalized, their play to be monetized, and their folklore to be adapted.

The digitalization of playground dance traditions and the contagious nature of the play did not begin with TikTok, however. In 2013 a global dance phenomenon emerged on YouTube, known as the 'Harlem Shake.' The Harlem Shake brilliantly illustrates the contagious and viral nature of folklore as well as the transition of individual performance to international folk dance.

Additionally, it highlights the seamless move between spatial boundaries (physical to virtual) inherent to heterotopias. A Harlem Shake video begins with a single individual dancing uncontrollably to American DJ Baauer's electronic song of the same name, amidst a group of people engaged in an array of mundane activities. The video then cuts to everyone on-screen dancing in a frenzied, uncontrollable fashion. The trend illustrates a kind of musical infection in which viral dancing infects those in the vicinity in addition to those viewing the video, who subsequently post their own interpretations of the trend. The Harlem Shake also demonstrates the process of an individual performance transforming into a collective folk experience. First, there is only a single dancer in the room; almost instantaneously, that individual performance becomes a collective performance involving everyone present. As the dance became a global trend, the individual performance by the video creators (19-year-old YouTuber Filthy Frank and his friends) transformed into a global performance with an ensemble of thousands performing the same dance to the same song (Keating, 2013). The contagion play illustrated by the Harlem Shake demonstrates how folklore can be used to connect people and generate feelings of community across digital devices.

Folklore represents individually or collectively produced traditions that circulate beyond the original source of production, gaining anonymity, cultural acceptance, and passing from generation to generation. Like folk songs defined by their anonymity, orality, and their essential function as a recollection of communal experiences and community maintenance, folk dancing represents a syncretic folk art in which music, movement, and theatricality are combined to form a culturally meaningful activity. Folk dancing has historically been examined based on genre and theme. Genres "are considered a historical category generalizing the origin and development of folk dancing of a definite historical period" (Zhornitskaia, 1979:83). Folk dancing specifies the

function of dancing in the cultural lives of people (1979:83). During specific periods of social development, folk dancing evolves to meet the needs of the community. An analysis of online dancing as a form of folk dancing helps us to understand the social and cultural basis of the genre of viral dance videos and thereby makes it possible to tie the dance to specific social structures and cultural developments. Like fandom, folk dancing has been imbedded into popular culture to become its own stand-alone tradition in the form of 'viral dance videos.' The genre emerges out of folk-dance traditions in which replication and conformity are central, and embodies the viral nature of folk transmission, but within the social and cultural context of the modern age. Digital technologies extend the tradition beyond national boundaries to include international participation. Folk traditions seen in fandom use similar methods of transmission but stay culturally tied to fan communities; children have appropriated this method to reproduce folk dancing of the playground and re-establish childhood community ties. The genre of folk contagion games has also been incorporated into the modern folk dance through the infectious nature of the performance and its contingency on viewer appropriation.

Replication and conformity are at the heart of both the Harlem Shake and TikTok dance trends. It is only through video responses that the individual performance becomes a culturally meaningful folk dance. Through the childhood tradition of popular culture appropriation, young people are poaching the choreography of their peers to participate in a collective presentation of self and culture. During the lockdown, following the rules of the trend, including dance choreography, duration, and soundtrack, individual users would share in a collective folk performance that reinforced social cohesion and peer communication. Henry Jenkins (2004) has described young people as 'pop cosmopolitans' who interact with global popular media as a means of "seeking to escape the gravitational pull of their local communities in order to enter a

broader sphere of cultural experience" (117). I would counter this by suggesting that during times of social isolation and restriction from cultural landscapes, engagement with digital entertainment platforms and digital remixes acts as a means to reconnect with local peer communities, which is further reinforced by traditional forms of community building. For young people, these traditional forms include playground folk dancing, performance remixes and contagion play. Social media apps like TikTok have enhanced remix culture and established a global level of co-production, which is essential to its most well-known phenomena. Imitation and interaction are inherent in the TikTok dance trend, and they can be understood as a historically layered and culturally emergent performance. Through this performance, the individual body is both unique and part of a global ensemble existing within a multiplicity of space.

The public nature of TikTok shares many similarities to playground performances. The number of visible reactions to a video is often substantially less than the number of people who have viewed it. During performative play, children often perform for an un-named audience. The audience is both no one and everyone in the vicinity. Children will dance and act for themselves but in a public space with an unsaid invitation for onlookers. Goffman (1959) identified two impression management modes: 'front stage' and 'back stage' performances. Front stage identity performances occur in public and are informed by the context's social norms and expectations. Back stage identity performances occur in private and represent a personal expression of self, free from inhibitions. The playground as a heterotopia that invites contradictions acts as an expression of both front stage and back stage performances. During performative play, children's private play experiences are displayed within the public space. Scholar Elizabeth Grugeon (2000) observed girls combining front and back stage performances as they absorbed popular

culture into their folklore. In observing schoolgirls perform a popular song by the Spice Girls on the playground, Grugeon writes:

> There was a spontaneous rendering of the Spice Girls' song 'Wannabe' – a large group of girls performed to an imaginary audience. The words and movements of the song were impressively imitated and sung with gusto. Like the cancan, this was much more of a performance than a game. Their games tended to be played holding hands in inward-looking and private circles with no need for any outside audience. (2000:111)

Posting a dance video to TikTok is similar in nature, as the videos are produced as a form of play and published within the public space. Technology erodes the boundaries between front and back stage performances, in turn providing an avenue for existing folklore to enter the digital folk system and open the possibility for new constructions of the self (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019). The staging and sharing of the performative child self in online contexts highlight the child's transmediation and the folkloric function of video making, editing, and posting. Thought of in this way, children use digital entertainment platforms to combine typical approaches to playground performance directed at and broadcasted on a global digital stage. Front stage and back stage divisions are blurred: "home spaces become public areas; hidden habits like grooming are broadcast; taboo props like toilets are made acceptable and included as part of the stage; and the messiness of video making is reflected openly in finished commodities" (Yarosh et al., 2016:1434). Children's techniques, narratives, genres, and play in TikTok videos engage the remixing of media texts, playground folklore, and technology. These remixes reflect the heterotopic transmediated worlds children occupy and the ways in which media engagement and fan participation require a process of affinity, extension, and reimagination of folklore content.

Playground performance remixes have existed on playgrounds for centuries, primarily providing an avenue for learning, practicing and playing out gender conventions. Participation in girlhood often occurs on the playground through gendered play and folk traditions such as singing, dancing, handclapping, and skipping. Judith Butler (1990) has argued that through "bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds," gender is performed and enacted (140). Girls have found a home in TikTok because of the app's design to support dance and musical performances, as evidenced by the videos of the top TikTok influencers. TikTok becomes an extension of the playground heterotopia by providing an opportunity for collective cultural participation and the same un-named audience, which is both no one and every user of the app. Engaging in intimate forms of play on the playground involves a complex negotiation between privacy and surveillance. In researching gendered performances on the playground, Chris Richards (2012) observed the various ways in which girls incorporated the prospect of viewership into their play. On the playground, girls perform for themselves, teachers, and potential male onlookers to learn the "'doing, being and feeling' of girlhood and the 'rewards' it allows" (Richards, 2012:382).

These same incentives are present as girls, and their social practices, dominate the social media platform. Females account for 61% of TikTok users in the United States (Ceci, 2022a). While young women make up most users, they are also the most successful on the app for gaining followers and monetizing their performances. Charli D'Amelio, a 16-year-old TikTok user with over 135.6 million followers, earned her popularity by engaging in the playground tradition of blending back and front stage performances. Her most popular videos consist of dance challenges and lip syncs, common social practices of girlhood. She blurs the line between public and private as she dances for the camera in her bedroom, bathroom, and backyard. Girls'

‘bedroom culture’ has been transformed from a private space enjoyed by intimate same-sex friend groups to one of public performance and global interaction (Kennedy, 2020). The popular expression ‘Dance like nobody is watching’ has transformed into ‘Dance like everybody is watching’ as bathrooms, bedrooms, and kitchens are repurposed into stages and music video sets. By participating in and creating TikTok dance trends, D’Amelio and others contribute to the blurring of individual and collective performances, becoming a part of an international folk dance that removes the social isolation barriers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

TikTok has reached exponential success during the pandemic because of its aptitude for recreating collective experiences during isolation. By relying on the traditional forms of social interaction in childhood, young people have repurposed folklore as a coping strategy to socialize with peers and feel a part of a collective. TikTok dance trends provide an excellent example of the digitalization of folklore and the performative value of girl culture. In the first half of 2020, when lockdown measures were put into full effect, New Zealand-based singer BENEE’s song ‘Supaloney’ became popular on the digital entertainment platform. This was because of its acute reference to the feelings of many suffering from the effects of social isolation (supaloney) and because of the viral choreography created by TikTok user @zoifishh. The choreography 19-year-old Zoi Lerma created for the song has obvious references to playground handclapping games as the dancer pantomimes lyrics. The dance consists of mostly upper-body movements that mime the actions of the lyrics. The word “loser” in the song is accompanied by the hand gesture of an ‘L’ made with the thumb and forefinger, a gesture many children would recognize on the playground. Lyrics like “while you’re out there drinkin’ / I’m just here thinkin’” are accompanied by a pantomime of drinking (fist clasped with thumb and pinky extended beside an open mouth) and thinking (tapping head with forefingers). Both of these movements are

commonly seen in handclapping games to illustrate the same actions. Like handclapping games that travel across playgrounds and include hundreds of diverse performers, @zoifishh's choreography has been reproduced by roughly 8 million others, including kid influencer Charli D'Amelio (Moore & Haasch, 2021).

Choreography is not the only folk element that is being poached from playgrounds. The remix song 'The Boat Beat' by Ricky Desktop illustrates both the mediazation of folklore and the transformation of childhood traditions into the realm of teenhood. 'The Boat Beat,' which has been widely reproduced with accompanying choreography on TikTok, is a remix of the traditional nursery rhythm 'row, row, row your boat.' The song begins with a chorus of children singing the traditional song, which is then altered by an electronic drop beat after the line 'life is like a dream.' The rest of the song is accompanied by an electric base, in the process completely changing the song's genre and demographic. The introduction of 'The Boat Beat' encompasses childhood; the rhyme is sung acapella by children with simple hand choreography that pantomimes the lyrics. The second half of the song encompasses teenhood and the pop genre; the electronic base is accompanied by aggressive 'pop, lock, and drop' dance moves with performers making rude, sexual, and angry facial expressions. The Boat Beat trend has been reproduced 3.9 million times on TikTok, demonstrating the increasing appeal of childhood folk traditions for young people in the digitalscape. Participation in the global ensemble of TikTok reproduces forms of collaboration, co-creation, and social interactions enacted in folk dancing and playground folk traditions.

As with folk dancing and playground folklore, authorship becomes irrelevant as a performance is assessed by the algorithm and adopted and adapted by multiple creators. Consider the 'Renegade' dance routine reported to have kicked off the TikTok dance trend (Lang, 2020).

The Renegade dance challenge includes mostly upper-body dance movements to the song 'Lottery' by K CAMP and has been reproduced by users 20.6 million times on TikTok. The choreography, which appeared at the beginning of 2020, rapidly circulated across TikTok, with few appropriators crediting or knowing who the original choreographer was. The original choreography was created by 14-year-old TikTok user @jalaiahharmon. Jalaiah brought attention to folklore's viral nature and the historical practice of popular culture, taking and benefitting from content made by Black creators (Lang, 2020). Jalaiah has since received acknowledgement for her contributions to popular and youth cultures, appearing on the Ellen DeGeneres Show and performing her signature choreography at the opening of the 2021 NBA All-Star Games. Jalaiah enacts her power as an owner and producer within the heterotopia of TikTok, illustrating the subversive actions of the subordinate to usurp the monopolizing power of the cultures of industry. Her ability to protest uncredited appropriation and demand visibility in turn dismantles the utopian childhood image and TikTok algorithm that privileges representations of white childhoods.

While the creators of folklore are gaining more recognition in the virtual world of TikTok, those traditionally on the sidelines of playground dance performances, primarily adults, are now entering the space of girl culture and being featured centre stage. Girl culture has always depended on secrecy and exclusivity; even public performances like playground remixes have primarily been reserved for girls, with little attention being paid to potential audience members. Highly choreographed and stylized playground performances involving dance and song were rarely sustained by any boys in Richards' (2012) playground observations. Boys' involvement most consistently involved disruption or mockery, maintaining stringent gendered representations that designated dance and song performances as strictly feminine displays. In the

schoolyards observed by Richards, "if not in others, boys did not, on the whole, 'take to the stage'" (382). One of the attractions of girl culture is the secret code embedded in their rituals and traditions designed to exclude both boys and adults. While boys have remained largely disinterested in playground dance remixes, apart from particular instances of boy band popularity, adults have always remained at the periphery of such forms of play.

Occasionally invited as audience members, adults are routinely tested for their responses to conventional performances of femininity and overt forms of sexuality. Girls use dance moves to transgress notions of childhood sexuality and demonstrate their power to make adults uncomfortable within their space. TikTok is the communication of girlhood, a reservoir of folklore, rituals, and representations of girl culture. Practices traditionally protected by playground alcoves and bedroom walls are now on full display for millions to observe. Conversations about sex, bullying, and beauty standards, as well as experimentation with sexuality and gender performance, once actively hidden from adults, are now easily accessible to anyone who cares to listen. This raw exposé led to many concerns from parents about their daughters' exposure to graphic content, lack of privacy, and overt sexual behaviour. Articles with sensationalist titles like 'How 'Supercharged Catnip' TikTok is Fueling the Sexualization of Young Girls and Exploitation of Teens' (Hall, 2020) and 'How TikTok Teens are Ending up on Pornhub' (Dickson, 2020) have led many parents to fear the app and restrict its usage. Extending the surveillance practices of the physical playground to the digital playground, adults look to continue to censor and control child bodies in ways that correspond with utopian images of childhood innocence. These adult fears have always arisen as girls use their bodies as vehicles for performance. In the days of Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, The Spice Girls, and even Hannah Montana, adults policed girls' performances based on the level of sexuality presented in their

videos and stage performances. As the stage for such performances gets bigger, so do the concerns for childhood innocence. However, with the onset of the Coronavirus, these concerns and news titles practically disappeared as parents were actively recruited for lip-syncing and dance videos and celebrity adults likewise took up the challenge.

Thanks to the social isolating measures of the pandemic, parents have been welcomed into the childhood space and taught the secret language of dance remixing through TikTok dance trends. With limited access to peers, siblings and parents became the necessary backup dancers and creative collaborators for children struggling to remain connected to their cultural traditions and folklore. Dance challenges became the symbol of social connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they connected those living together and those living apart. Parents have wholly joined the international folk-dance children have been participating in for generations. Using the song 'Blinding Lights' by The Weekend, TikTok user @macdaddyz, also known as Greg Dahll, created a dance trend that parents wholeheartedly endorsed. Dahll and two of his male friends created a choreography involving sweeping arm movements, running and a lift which has been recreated roughly 11.1 million times. The dance requires at least three people to perform the lift at the end, so parents have been regularly recruited to ensure a proper recreation of the original. One family that has fully embraced the lip-syncing and dancing of childhood is the McFarland family, whose recreation of Greg Dahll's 'Blinding Lights' choreography went viral at the beginning of the pandemic. The performance by a father and his two adult sons demonstrates both the taboo and unconventional introduction of adults into childhood culture and the collective desire to connect during times of social isolation. The performance further supports the conditions of heterotopia in which the dominant culture is resisted and transgressed. On the physical playground, children are somewhat able to enforce age restrictions and exclusion from childhood

culture. Cultural spaces collided as the playground extended into the adult-occupied digitalscape, leaving a trace of this collision. In the case of TikTok, adults are seen participating in childhood culture. At the same time, children's popularity and visibility create increased agency and power in terms of their voices being heard and their play monetized.

TikTok has been pivotal in dismantling the gender assumptions that have historically been so strictly enforced on playgrounds. To say that boys often do not join in on playground dance performances is not to say that they do not want to or that dance plays no part in boy culture or development. The success of male choreographers on TikTok indicates that the door to girlhood was just waiting to be ripped off its hinges and the users of TikTok were all too ready to do so. One of the most sophisticated and complex TikTok dances trending in 2020 was Guam native Brain Esperon's choreography to Cardi B. and Meghan Thee Stallion's song WAP. Through high kicks and aggressive splits, he shows that performance remixes also belong to the world of boys. With roughly 4.1 million people recreating his dance moves, including Cardi B. herself, Esperon breaks down assumptions about 'proper' gender displays and gender binaries around play.

While Brain Esperon may be a professional choreographer, other boys without professional training are enthusiastically joining in the trend. Noah Schnapp, the actor who plays Will on *Stranger Things,* has performed TikTok's favourite dance challenges in his kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. Engaging in the same blurring of private and public (which becomes even more enticing when celebrities do it), he recreates the fun, collective experience of playground remixes. He has also choreographed his own dance to the song 'Do It Again' by J Boog. His dance moves include upper body arm movements that coincide with the beat of the song. His dance has proved a success, becoming a trend itself, with roughly 4 million performers recreating it, including influencers Jason Derulo and Charli D'Amelio.

In this way, the private and intimate practices of girlhood have been transformed into public and communal affairs, which invite those often on the outskirts of playground performance remixes to take centre stage. Boys and adults have found social engagement and peer acceptance through TikTok dance trends. The historical effects of gender performances have been dismantled within the heterotopia and reimagined as a global phenomenon, irrespective of age or gender. Demonstrating the shift in power characteristic of heterotopias, children during the pandemic are setting the cultural agenda of dance performances rather than the cultures of industry. The communal and viral nature of the trend also reaffirms folklore as a tool for collective coping and a vital semiotic resource for young people struggling with the effects of social isolation.

The appropriation of popular culture into playground play and folklore has always precipitated a reappropriation of grassroots creativity back into popular culture; TikTok is no exception. Children's traditional play, narratives, fantasies, and folklore have historically been used as sources of inspiration for the creation of contemporary children's entertainment, from The Grimm Brothers and Disney to JoJo Siwa and kid influencers. TikTok, an app designed for amateur music video making and bedroom performances, has provided a unique opportunity for celebrity music artists to engage with fan material on an intimate and profitable level. The power of a trending dance challenge goes beyond global connectivity and includes international success for an artist whose lyrics provide the perfect soundbite for a performance remix.

American singer, rapper, and songwriter Doja Cat owes much of the success of her song 'Say So' to 17-year-old TikTok user @yodelinghaley. Haley Sharpe filmed herself dancing to Doja Cat's song in true girlhood fashion in front of her bathroom mirror, complete with multiple outfit changes. The choreography includes easy-to-learn arm rolls and punches and instantly catapulted the Doja song to TikTok fame. Now, there are nearly 12 million videos of people

performing Sharpe's choreography, and the teen's appropriation has not gone unnoticed by the artist herself. In creating a dialogue traditionally unavailable to fans, Sharpe made a caption for her dance video stating that she would love to be in a future Doja Cat music video. Paying tribute to the teen appropriator, Doja agreed and invited Sharpe to appear in the official 'Say So' music video, where Doja herself performed Sharpe's choreography. Both @yodelinghaley and Doja Cat increased their celebrity status and fan following through this collaboration while illustrating the cyclical nature of popular culture to grassroots appropriation back to popular culture entertainment.

The cultural transaction taking place between fans and celebrities on TikTok foregrounds the complex interchange between popular culture and folk culture. In the case of 'Say So,' @yodelinghaley did not pay to use Doja Cat's song, as it was an already published sound bite on TikTok, but she did succeed in increasing her celebrity status and ability to monetize her performance on the app. On the flipside, Doja Cat did not pay Haley Sharpe to choreograph a dance to her song and share it with her existing fan base. But as a result, her song skyrocketed in popularity leading to more downloads on Spotify and more revenue for the artist. A symbiotic relationship seems to have emerged in which the amateur success of influencers, contingent on pre-existing musical content, increase the commercial success of professional artists. A cycle of influence is at play as popular culture feeds grassroots creativity, spawning more popular culture, and producing more grassroots creativity. Ownership becomes something that is fluid, shifting, and readily accessible. But what happens when due credit is not paid, and a section of this cycle isn't acknowledged?

In June 2020, controversy surrounded the release of Jason Derulo's song 'Savage Love' because of its appropriative nature. The song is a remix of the beat 'Siren Jam' by 17-year-old

New Zealander Joshua Styla, who found popularity on his TikTok account @jawsh_685. Embodying grassroots creativity, Styla found musical success by breaking down industry gatekeeping and self-producing an anthem celebrating his island heritage and roots. Inspired by the siren speakers attached to bikes and cars that blasted music in his neighbourhood, Styla published a song that was soon to become a #1 hit in 17 countries. Catapulting Styla into the TikTok hall of fame, the dance accompanying the beat became a viral sensation in the summer of 2020. The choreography created for Styla's beat has not been traced back to an original creator, demonstrating the erosion of authorship folklore endures as it is transmitted and continually reappropriated. Yet, it has been used in over 42.6 million TikTok videos.

Recognizing the international success of the track and the established fandom connected to the TikTok dance, artist Jason Derulo appropriated the beat for his next hit song, 'Savage Love.' To create excitement about the release of his new single, Derulo leaked a snippet of the song to TikTok without crediting Styla, illustrating the precarious balance between imitation and plagiarism in remix culture. The backlash that followed highlights the power of grassroots creators to stand up to major industry conglomerates and demand recognition, an avenue not often available to communities whose traditions and creative endeavours have historically been colonized by the structures of popular culture. Styla later received full credit, and the leak on TikTok reinvigorated one of the most viral dance trends in TikTok history. Fully embracing the folk nature of TikTok and cyclical reappropriation, Derulo elevated the amateur filmmaking of TikTok videos to official music entertainment by creating a music video for the song out of a compilation of fan TikTok performances.

With the addition of Derulo's lyrics, the trend continues to be successful, with 5 million more videos having been produced. The choreography involves simple, repetitive upper body

movements that even children as young as two can master. The trend's wide success led many celebrities to learn the choreography, including Jennifer Lopez, Jessica Alba, Jimmy Fallon, and Lizzo. The song's official release was accompanied by a music video that consisted of fans worldwide participating in the international folk dance created for Styla's 'Siren Jam' beat. Remaining in a vertical screen, consistent with the app, Derulo records himself on his phone singing the lyrics to 'Savage Love' and dancing to the original 'Siren Jam' choreography. Videos of himself are interspersed with fan videos, illustrating a beautiful synergy between fan content and popular culture. The precarious relationship between the two creators, Joshua Styla and Jason Derulo, in turn pays tribute to shifting power dynamics within the heterotopia and the appropriative nature of popular culture. Fan resources go beyond paying for records and merchandise and include inspiration for content production and the potential for collaboration.

Folk music has historically had a tenuous relationship with the producers of popular culture. For example, singer-song writer Bob Dylan has been noted as participating in the practice of appropriation in the process of transforming traditional Southern rural American folk music to popular culture. Barry Shank goes so far as to state that:

> [T]he history of American popular music is, in large part, a history of illusions and masks, of whites pretending to be blacks, of women pretending to men, of sophisticated stage performers pretending to be rubes (and, of course, vice versa) … the artificial authenticity of American popular music has successfully linked performers and audiences in the remaking of tradition, in the creation of changing sames, in the collective construction of identities and histories. (2002:98-99)

Bob Dylan's music represents a complicated dialogue between grassroots folk creation and corporate media, in which popular music becomes its own entity with only vague traces of its

folk origins. Borrowing musical material from folk mining communities (like the one he grew up in) and Southern Black American traditions, Dylan follows in the footsteps of Elvis Presley in commercializing the folk tradition, while providing little to no credit to those who came before. Dylan's music represents the paradox inherent in popular folk music. Folk music is authorless – since it is passed from one singer to the next – but when interacting with the top-down language of popular culture, enshrined in economic and political power, a single voice or a single person is credited with the music. In contrast, TikTok represents an intersection between folk creations and popular culture texts. Folk songs and dances intersperse with commercially produced material to produce texts that blur the line between play and work, appreciation and appropriation, consumers and producers, and folk and commercial. TikTok performers and audiences are remaking tradition as playground folk traditions simultaneously exist in the physical places of childhood and the placeless space of digital entertainment platforms.

Folk traditions of the masses have always been in dialogue with popular culture, and TikTok has provided a window of unprecedented transparency into the circulation of pop to folk to pop again. I do not expect the TikTok dance trend to diminish once lockdown measures are lifted, but I do expect it's popularity to wane as the folk traditions that stabilizes it continues to evolve. As the playground heterotopia is extended to the digitalscape, folk practices will continue to circulate within the multiplicity of spaces that encompass childhood places.

Conclusion

As of July 29, 2022, over 575 million people have been infected with the Coronavirus, and over 6.4 million have died (Worldometer, 2022). To reduce the spread of the disease, governments, despite economic hardships, implemented national social distancing regulations, which altogether shut down society. Based on past pandemics that have witnessed a decrease in

the spread of a disease through school closures, countries around the world closed school doors and prohibited access to other critical child-designated spaces. A population of children have taken it upon themselves to mitigate these isolating effects by transporting their folk traditions of contagion play, folk dance, and performance remix into the digital space. By extending the heterotopia of the playground to digital entertainment platforms, children establish social media sites as official places of childhood. Children's active engagement with digital entertainment platforms and their reconstruction of playground culture is a testament to their resilience in the face of calamity.

Through children's engagement with the social media site TikTok, we are witnessing collective coping strategies that children employ to guard against the negative impacts of social isolation and home confinement. During the COVID-19 outbreak, children relied on folklore by means of viral dance videos to reconstruct social networks, contribute to global conversations, and cope with psychological distress. The current pandemic has produced unprecedently rich and compelling data about the convergence of childhood culture and popular culture and the enduring quality of folklore as a tool of adaptation. Viewing TikTok dance challenges as pandemic-related folklore can help reshape the process of studying childhood resilience, children's coping, and the relationship children have with social media. Breaking down the complex negotiations of power observed within the heterotopia of TikTok sheds light on the cyclical relationship folk culture has with popular culture and the enduring community-building standards inherent in its construction.

Children's participation in international conversations that are important to them is a protective measure and a right of childhood. By highlighting the collective responses children have had towards the COVID-19 pandemic, steps can be made to incorporate their natural forms

of resilience into educational and mental health initiatives. Despite the growing controversy surrounding the effects of social media on children's well-being, researchers agree that its increasing accessibility and popularity have changed the nature and ways with which children interact (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and necessitated children's reliance on technology but has not fundamentally altered the base composition of children's social interactions, ones that are rooted in play and folklore.

Conclusion

In the introductory chapter to this dissertation, I proposed the theory that children's contemporary social interactions and cultural production are fundamentally rooted in folklore. I described the relationship between children's playground folklore and popular culture as cyclical and co-dependent. This symbiotic relationship, at first glance, appears counter intuitive. Children's folklore is described as an autonomous culture produced, transmitted, and archived by children *for* children without intervention from adults. By contrast, popular culture is often characterized by economic consumption with production, distribution, and marketing decisions made solely by adults and confined by the technologies that mediate them. The apparent stark division between child folklore and popular culture feeds into myths concerning the threat, debasement, and corruption of children's 'traditional' play forms and presumed innocence. In viewing lore and media as separate phenomena, one is presumed capable of subsuming the other. As a product of children, child folklore is most often construed as being inferior to the international accessibility and reach of mass media and entertainment and thus, by implication, at constant risk of becoming obsolete. Thus, the fields of research that concern themselves with these areas of focus seem to be equally divided. As the Opies were the first to realize, the relationship between these two cultures is considerably more complicated.

In this dissertation, I reconcile the allegedly paradoxical nature of folk culture and popular culture through Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia. I employ heterotopia to explain the multiple layers of meaning produced by the convergence of seemingly incompatible spaces: the physical and digital playgrounds. The playground is a heterotopic space where different modes are conceptually linked, enabling the child to shift seamlessly from one mode to another to read culture and recreate technological and commercial texts that are meaningful to

them. Within this heterotopic space, children engage in transmediated play that is simultaneously fluid, innovative, and placeless, as well as stable, conservative, and grounded. Children's popular and play cultures are each sustained by children and are by no means independent from one another. On the contrary, they are simultaneously negotiated through adult-determined institutions of production, distribution, and consumption, not to mention childhood structures of communication, community, and imagination. The economic incentives of the popular are intimately tied to the social functioning of childhood communities. Childhood entertainment commodities or texts require elements that children can extract in making meaning of their identities and social relations; otherwise, they will be rejected and fail to be made popular. Popular culture relies on folk traditions to be incorporated into the daily practices of children. In contrast, folklore relies on popular culture to remain relevant in the social lives of children. Popular culture and folklore are thus always in process; their meanings can never be understood fully through text alone because they are made meaningful primarily through social relations and intertextual negotiations by the young people themselves.

Newell's Paradox

The folk Web is not just a place for the simulation of campfire stories or playground shenanigans, but a context in which traditional lore is adapted and new folklore is produced by young people. The interactions designed for digital entertainment platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok, become folk practices. In addition, the content of emails, text messages, and posts become cultural texts, and (young) people's anonymous digital interactions become comparable to face-to-face communications. As an expression of tradition, folklore is the primary mode through which communities are formed and cultural membership is performed. This timeless form of communication is tangled up with the Web as fan communities form and communicate

within digital spaces, and children engage in childhood culture through the screen. “The Internet incorporates the symbolic and projective functions that folklore distinctively provides” (Bronner, 2011:403) to assist in supplying a cultural frame of reference to perpetuate tradition and encourage innovation. Understanding the digital space as a folk system, therefore, upends fears that children’s increasing screen time will diminish their cultural traditions and creativity, or that as a solitary practice, it will alienate and isolate children, resulting in poor social development and provoking anti-social behaviour. In contrast, as a social connection tool, the digital space as a folk system enables global transmission and rigorous preservation while simultaneously producing new cultural spaces and inventive lore that traverses digital and physical playgrounds. In shifting the perspective of the digital space from a social networking tool to a folk system, I used Bronner’s interpretation of folk Web practices to illustrate how playground folklore is transported and transformed to the digital realm through acts of heterotopic transmediated play. I follow this migration through multiple sites of disruption in the form of case studies. These case studies include the physical playground, fandom, YouTube, and TikTok.

My research reveals that children’s folklore and playground traditions are not in decline, and that popular culture does not interfere with children’s imaginative and traditional practices. Instead, it reveals that the preservation and evolution of folklore are dependent on popular culture texts, and that children’s cultural participation in the digital realm is founded on traditional folk means of communication and organization. Due to the accessibility of mass media and entertainment, popular texts have become essential resources for children to make meaning in their lives and, combined with folk practices, have become a core feature of childhood culture in general. Due to the social organizing powers and pervasiveness of folklore in children’s daily lives, these stable texts have migrated to the digital domain as a form of

cultural identification and means of communication. It would be a mistake to attempt to separate pop and folk into two neatly divided influences, just as it would be a mistake to separate cultural texts from their social function. By ignoring the similar division of conservative and innovative, children are revealed to appropriate, co-create, and transmit both popular and folk traditions through converging heterotopic spaces.

By way of innovation, contemporary folklore has remained faithfully connected to the past and is essential in navigating an increasingly digital world. As digital communication devices become ever-present entities in the lives of children and function as the primary modes of cultural participation, digital platforms have evolved into a folk system designed to facilitate the primary function of lore: information that is to be transmitted, communicated, and handed down to the next generation. This dissertation is a theoretical experiment that sheds light on the discourses of play that are both perpetuated and repeatedly transformed as stable cultural practices of childhood. These discourses, which include parody, dance routines, symbolic gestures, role-play, and identity formation collide with social and technological innovations to produce meaning composed of childhood folklore and popular culture. During times of cultural upheaval, formulaic elements of folklore – dancing, singing, remixes, parodies, etc. – are recruited because of their adaptability and susceptibility to being reconfigured and combined with new patterns and content. This form of innovative playwork has exploded on digital entertainment platforms as physical playgrounds were removed from the play spaces available to children. Through digitalization, the landscape of play has evolved and altogether transformed during the Coronavirus pandemic, as Chapter five argues. The heterotopia of the physical playground has been extended to the digital playground.

Children's play and folklore respond and contribute to the structural changes informing the conditions of childhood. Changes in child safety regulations have digitalized social interactions among children, complicating the relationship between new and old media, and highlighting the dynamic negotiation between innovation and conservatism necessary for adaptation. Ironically, as play receded from the supervised public spaces of playgrounds, schools, and parks due to COVID-19 restrictions, it publicized the secret, intimate spaces of play through technologically assisted communication practices. An important structural element revealed through this analysis is the complex interplay between the media institutions that regulate and produce popular digital entertainment platforms and the consumption practices of children. As children incorporate social media into their daily social interactions, they deepen the relationship between popular culture and child folklore to a point where the two cannot be disentangled. Engaging with cultural texts ultimately requires intertextual knowledge that traverses presumed cultural barriers and draws on inherited forms of meaning-making.

This dissertation has demonstrated the conservative and innovative nature of childhood culture through case studies of heterotopic transmediated play – media-referenced play, superhero play, Wizard Rock, YouTube parodies, and TikTok dances. The paradox implicit in children's inclination to both rules and improvisation, collaboration and competition, ritual and creativity reminds us that the arbitrary division between inventiveness and conservatism is merely an illusion. Just as children fervently consume technology and popular media, they also share and preserve their traditions. Newell's paradox persists because all too often, researchers, whether consciously or unconsciously, focus on the traditional, universal, and constant *or* the inventive, creative, and emergent. As this dissertation argues, separating the popular from the folk unweaves a delicate braid of cultural and material history and diminishes the power children

hold in the market. The innovation and conservatism characteristic of childhood culture guarantees a continual reworking of traditional materials and appropriation of popular culture, suggesting that the field of children's folklore needs a definition that encompasses both the inventive preservation of traditional texts and the creation of new texts from traditional resources. By recognizing the active role folklore plays in a cultural text becoming popular, researchers reposition children as active contributors rather than empty vessels or passive transmitters. Children have a dialectical relationship with the media, one in which cultural content is welcomed, resisted, and rejected. They sift through textual information they perceive as relevant to their contemporary lives, a task which, on the surface, appears as play but requires the efforts of work.

Play and Work

Traditionally, consumption has been viewed as a trivial by-product of production, contributing to the dismissal of and general indifference towards children's engagement with popular culture. Sutton-Smith (1970) defines this as the triviality barrier. Children's agency is stripped from them as their spaces of cultural participation are reduced to static transitional periods of occupancy towards becoming adults. My research illuminates the multitude of ways children's social interactions constitute popular culture as they construct meaning within their peer cultures. This sense of power that children exhibit as they actively influence and rework commercial interests is closely related to the concepts of play and work. The relationship of play to gain and work to profit are, in practice, very much the same. Understanding their similarities requires a denial of the differences that are put in place to distinguish the labour of children from the labour of adults. Play is often associated with children, whereas work is reserved for adults – with children often actively barred from it. In this view, play is constructed as a mere form of

entertainment, an implied sign of children's intellectual inferiority and inability to successfully contribute to the market. It is a form of cultural participation isolated to the workings of childhood culture with no real impact on the daily lives of adults. Work, however, is seen as a consequential act. Work is a means of engaging with the world to serve the community and the market. It is a political process involving the power to transform the world and one's place within it; therefore, it is appropriately thought of as reserved for adults. It is these distinctions between work and play, established and maintained by an adult-centric culture, that I object to in this dissertation.

Play is not conceptually oppositional to work, for they are not mutually exclusive concepts, as I demonstrate. The difference between play and work is one of modality, for both are forms of cultural participation (Sutton-Smith, 2009). Play may be a more ambiguous modality than the more direct results of work, but it is not unrelated to it nor opposed to it. Children move easily along the modal scale from private experiences of play to more overt labours of love, each influencing the other – the folk informing the popular and the popular informing the folk. Children don superhero costumes and sing Harry Potter songs to announce their community affiliations and contribute to a growing fandom culture. JoJo Siwa uses play to achieve success in the adult-controlled market and stimulate parody play among her fans. These play schemes may well amalgamate with other play forms for her fans, eventually, in some cases, translating into economic success within popular culture. As part of the changing landscape of childhood, kid influencers bring the seemingly disparate worlds of play and work together, reconfiguring the power children hold in the market and their ownership of popular culture. Similarly, girls in TikTok videos reposition their sexuality and folk culture from something that is private and intimate to one that is public and economic, with some young

TikTokers earning as much as 17.5 million a year for their bedroom dances (Ceci, 2022b). in specific instances, children have transformed their traditional play into a commodity with the assistance of digital entertainment platforms and into a form of work that has had a powerful effect on childhood and popular culture landscapes.

The success of both JoJo and TikTok dance trends is reliant on the play from which they emerged. Their work requires intertextual knowledge from their viewers, not only a general knowledge of dancing but a more specific knowledge of playground folklore and play. Digital entertainment platforms have become an essential component of the child experience, with obvious attractions for both producers and consumers. As explored in Chapter three, the popularity of kid influencers can be attributed to this seamless blending of work and play. It seems paradoxical for a popular culture commodity to serve the interests of both producers and consumers, even as these interests come into conflict with one another, which they are wont to do. As consumers become producers, some children can effectively enter the domain of adult work, using their play as the springboard to do so.

Through video posting, children appropriate commercial imaginaries for their own purposes, blending adult and corporate expectations with playground culture and lore. As children play in virtual worlds, they reproduce valued ways of participating in playground culture that can both endorse and conflict with the official perspectives of popular media franchises. Participation in heterotopias, like YouTube and TikTok, blurs the boundaries between simulated play and 'real' play as children play, make friends, and perform valued cultural practices, gaining fan community membership and potential reputations as kid influencers. The transmediated sociality children engage in on the playground is reinvigorated as additional advertising as children play for larger and larger audiences. In this way, children's heterotopic

transmediated play becomes a form of folklore *and* popular culture as it is monetized and reappropriated for commercial purposes.

I do not want to diminish the accomplishments involved in the shift to seeing children's play as work and garnering the same success as adult-produced enterprises. But we need to be wary of what forms of childhood are being privileged. These include a focus on childhoods that have access to parents' disposable income and ample opportunity to participate in digital media. The cultural products of childhood examined in this dissertation focus primarily on children who reproduce dominant representations of childhood (Western, white, middle-class) and with access and support from digital and commercial structures to attain success within popular culture. There is not one 'popular' childhood that cancels out an 'unpopular' childhood. The inability for popular entertainment and social media to adequately represent all childhoods is a failure, but it is a productive failure. By limiting the representation of 'what childhood is' through utopian images, one can actively resist, reject, and dismantle that representation through cultural participation. Digital entertainment platforms reduce the barriers to commercial instruments providing an avenue by which 'unpopular' childhoods gain visibility and popularity. These users challenge and expose the white, heteronormative, and middle-class privileges of current popular representations of childhood. TikTok and YouTube have become prominent heterotopic spaces for children of colour and children from majority countries to take up space. JoJo herself has upended utopian representations of childhood by coming out on the international stage. Using her visibility to redefine 'appropriate' images of childhood sexuality she empowers fans.

Participatory Culture

Newness is a central component of popular culture: the desire for the 'new' propels the innovative predisposition of tradition and the economic imperatives of capitalism. The secrecy

surrounding the military espionage of boys miming weapons viewed in media regulated for older consumption; the incorporation of new commercial content into centuries' old costuming traditions; the increasing level of excess present in kid influencer videos; the sexual exhibitionism by girls performing for an unnamed audience; the dismissal of previously loved games as 'childish:' these are all indications that folklore experiences the same demands for newness that are inherent to popular culture, which is most effectively achieved through participatory action.

Participatory culture, as described by Henry Jenkins (2006b), highlights the interactive relationship consumers have with media producers and can be used to study the improvisatory practices of children on physical and virtual playgrounds. The incorporation of popular culture into traditional play and lore was analysed in many forms throughout this dissertation, primarily through children's tendency to appropriate or 'poach.' For the fan community, poached texts are amalgamated with culturally stable texts, which provide a foundation for future encounters with popular culture, influencing how it will be perceived and subsequently used. Cosplay and filklore are examples used to explore the heterotopia of fandom. Within the heterotopia of the playground, children engage in fan participation as they combine elements of their favourite media content with the established practices of childlore. Media fandom becomes a permanent culture, capable of surviving and evolving as it amalgamates cultural practices and produces material artifacts valued by a community. As children take control of a text's meaning, they borrow cultural material, including narratives, concepts, characters, sounds, and images, and rework them for more practical or pleasurable purposes. An example of this cycle of poaching involves JoJo Siwa's appropriation of infant bows. Siwa reinscribes the discourse of childhood

innocence with meanings of friendship and girl power, which are then actively rewritten on the playground as children redeploy JoJo bows to exclude children from play.

Digital entertainment platforms offer a unique form of participatory culture. Consumers are invited to participate in the collective construction of meaning and they can benefit from the economic gains of production. Much of the pleasure derived from the popular culture product is the consumer's permission (and encouragement) to insert themselves into the processes of production and reconstruct the social conventions, rules, and boundaries that define the conditions of childhood. Children evade and resist dominant ideologies through the creative use of textual conventions, such as using the technical tools of a device to produce counterhegemonic representations of childhood. As seen, for example, in the pleasure girls take in participating in exhibition practices on TikTok and JoJo Siwa dancing as Prince Charming with a female partner on *Dancing With The Stars.* Kid influencers legitimize their playwork through monetary gains. The fact that such pleasures serve both the economic interests of producers and the cultural interests of consumers further reveals the deep ties that exist between popular culture and folklore.

As engagement with digital entertainment platforms becomes a stable practice of childhood, children's participation is actively called upon in the co-construction of popular culture, using the same intertextual knowledge and social conventions as their favourite celebrities. The raw nature of the most popular texts requires effortful reading by their consumers, guided by childhood conventions but not determined by them. Part of the pleasure they take comes from recognizing the text in spite of the departures it makes from convention. As children demonstrate their agency within the industry, the social conventions designed to regulate their behaviour are negotiated, ignored, and overthrown. Forced isolation has spurred

children to occupy new digital spaces and enter a public, virtual domain from which they were previously excluded. With its scheduled playdates and monitored interactions, conventional visions of childhood have been modified to meet the current social needs of children living through the pandemic, and digital entertainment platforms have provided the perfect opportunity to do so. This modification occurs partly in the shift to child-designated virtual spaces but most significantly in the more visible position that children have occupied as producers of popular culture.

As this dissertation has argued, children use their expertise of popular culture and their affinity for innovation and conservatism to navigate a nexus of social forces and determinations and produce meaning and cultural texts that are relevant to their individual identity and community relations. Describing children's engagement with media texts in terms of economic consumption is far too limited and passive a perspective to adequately capture the complex interplay of participation, appropriation, and readership taking place. In the case of the digital playground, the dialogue between folklore and popular culture intrinsic to proper participation is seen here, not only in the forms of participation intended by the platform but in the poaching of cultural material for physical play and fan emulation, as demonstrated in playground transmedia storytelling, Wizard Rock, superhero play, and YouTube fan parodies. Children's ability to repurpose cultural texts and transfigure social conventions dispels the myth that popular culture is an entirely destructive force in the lives of children. The endless onslaught of capitalist imperialism is resisted and actively undermined by children's imagination, innovation, and traditional play.

Looking Forward

In understanding digital participation as a cultural activity and the digital space as a digital folk system, it can be deduced that certain generations are immersed in the culture at an early age, and others are not. Researchers currently are attempting to reconcile the childhoods of their pasts with the digitalized childhoods of children today. Recognizing folk traditions and meaning making processes as intricately linked to advances in technology and the swiftly moving pace of popular culture, children's perceptions of the world are likely fundamentally different from those who study them. By increasing our understanding of how children's play and culture have adapted and evolved in response to societal and technological changes, we can update our pedagogical practices and commercial decisions regarding children.

The study of childlore has remained firmly in the analog. The primary focus has traditionally been on the playground manifestations of children's folklore with only fleeting references to the popular culture that is embodied through physical play. Extensive work has been undertaken in media studies (Grimes, 2021) to explore children's evolving relationships with technology and digital texts, but connections to folklore and traditional communication practices among children have been overlooked. What little work has been done to investigate the relationship between childhood folklore and popular culture has been extended to the examination of children's fan practices. Children's engagement with popular culture has often been viewed in the context of play with little consideration for the sophisticated forms of fan participation they display and the parallel practices of community engagement evident in their folklore. There needs to be a concerted effort by childhood scholars and folklorists to bring the study of childlore into the 21st century, to consider the wealth of semiotic modes children have at their disposal to preserve, innovate, and reimagine tradition.

Digital entertainment platforms are being used by children to extend their physical play, transmediate social interaction, and create intimate bonds between celebrities and fan communities. In childhood fandom, folklore functions as a reference point through which fans can identify recognizable narratives and play scripts, which spur the creation of digital remixes and fan response videos. Through negotiations with playground culture, media texts, merchandise, and technology, children use media and media-related products to perform and negotiate their cultural identity and fan membership. Children's online social activities should be understood as part of – or manifestations of – traditional porous texts, which are ascribed meaning through centuries of innovation and conservativism practiced on the playground. Children's play and meaning making practices, whether physical or digital, reflect the folkloric communication practices characteristic of childhood culture and the fan activities involved in identity construction. Children's transmedia play must be understood as connected practices of a heterotopia made possible through the nexus of social and technological structures, media and playground texts, and the symbolic and material artifacts that make up the childhood experience. All these elements are intertwined: media and popular culture inspire play; media and popular culture are composed of playground lore; and media and lore are used for fan participation and identity building.

As children's play, folklore, and spaces transform and evolve, they remain fundamentally the same. More research is needed to investigate this process: studies that compare playgrounds and bedrooms; or the semiotics of physical play and digital play; or the properties of monetized user-generated content (UGC) and recreational UGC; or the simultaneous evolution of grassroots folklore and commercial folklore. Children are gaining expertise over digital devices and memetic information faster than adults, producing a childhood culture unfamiliar to even

researchers' recollections of childhoods past. As children enter the popular domains for adult digital expression, an opportunity is presented for which cultural material can be shared between generations. Research is needed to explore this emerging discourse, the historical practices that inform it, and the consumer needs that propel it.

COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity to investigate the relationship between the folk and the popular. In response to lockdown measures, the mediatization of children's play and social practices has been expedited. Folklore is blending with popular culture at unprecedented speed producing innovations to traditional forms of transmission, appropriation, and meaning making. The resiliency of folklore and the transformative power of technology must be examined in order to fully comprehend the trajectories of childhood. The adaptive responses of children to social isolation and routine disruption have produced a new 'normal.' The consequences and processes of this reality deserve extensive investigation. How has play evolved? How have the definitions of friendship and intimate activities changed? What is the distinction between private and public? What material culture has become a new staple of childhood? Are the social and cultural effects of the Coronavirus pandemic long-lasting? Childhood is a period defined by transition and transformation, making it remarkably resilient to cultural upheaval while simultaneously receptive to advances in communication practices, cultural forms of participation, and innovations in tradition.

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