Playing with Toys

The Animated Geographies of Children’s Material Culture

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The work presented in this thesis is entirely the candidate's own

[Signature]
This PhD thesis develops a relational approach to the study of childhood and children. Drawing on the ecumenical approaches of non-representational theory, material culture studies and hybrid geographies, it explores the assemblages of human and nonhuman entities through which childhood comes into being. More specifically, this thesis considers the socio-material assemblages involving children and toys, principally through an ethnographic study of children's everyday practices with this particular type of object. To this end, it addresses a paucity of empirical work conducted with child consumers. To unpack how and why these (often highly commodified) objects matter to children, I address the precise contributions of toys to relational agency in terms of the creative capabilities they possess. Toys, like objects in general, motivate particular inferences, interpretations and responses. These are a function of three broadly conceived prompts to object agency: the sensual and material properties of the toy itself; and the socio-material relations in which the toy is embedded. Through a series of case studies involving cuddly toys, model aeroplanes, trading cards, Bratz fashion dolls, Harry Potter media, dollhouses and video games, I trace the various agencies of toys. This discussion of object agency is then extended through an examination of toys as technologies, which are productive in terms of the co-configuration of imaginative spaces of play in and of the everyday. In this regard, I address magical lands, miniature worlds and virtual spaces of play. By attending to the intimate, embodied ways in which toys matter to children, this thesis examines children's engagements with consumer cultures. In so doing it presents an alter-tale to contemporary debates about the demoralised character of contemporary childhoods and children.
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For Mum, Gran and Grandad: thank you for my happy childhood memories!

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Toys

Woody: Buzz, you've had a big fall, you must not be thinking clearly.

Buzz: No Woody. For the first time I am thinking clearly. I'm not a space ranger. I'm just a toy, a stupid little insignificant toy.

Woody: Woah, hey, wait a minute, being a toy is a lot better than being a space ranger.

Buzz: Yeah right.

Woody: No it is! Look, over in that house is a kid who thinks you are the greatest and it's not because you're a space ranger pal. It's because you're a TOY!

Toy Story: Walt Disney Pictures, 2005
An Alter-Tale
Her face that she was no more than ten years old, but the angry scowl and scrunched self-consciousness looked more like a teenager, wracked with adolescent angst. Her clothes were too old for her – a low-slung miniskirt and high cut top, exposing a plump little midriff. And across her little girl’s chest was printed a message to the world: ‘I ♥ my attitude problem’.

In the building behind her were some of Western civilisation’s greatest treasures – paintings by Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo – which presumably her parents had dragged her across Europe (maybe across the world) to see. She clearly wasn’t remotely interested. I suspect the only thing that small lost soul wanted to do was curl up in front of a widescreen TV and lose herself in something mindless – a cartoon, maybe, or one of the endless American sitcoms on the Disney Channel. Her feelings about life were written all over her: anger, self-obsession, boredom, lack of engagement – the multiple trademarks of the brat.’ (Palmer, 2006:1)

The above account introduces Palmer’s (2006) polemic thesis on the ‘toxic’ condition of twenty-first century childhood. It is representative of contemporary popular and academic debate about the demoralised character of modern childhood and children. Such accounts tell a tale of disenchantment, conceived as an alienation from the world that manifests from a lack of engagement in ‘organic’, ‘authentic’, ‘spontaneous’ play (Bennett, 2001). Seemingly ‘age-old’ play activities – ‘running, climbing, pretending, making, sharing’ – have been replaced by a ‘solitary, sedentary screen based lifestyle’ (Palmer, 2006:48). Central to this tale of disenchantment is the retreat of children from outdoor space and a diminishing engagement with nature, along with the rich, independent, explorative play these afford. It is argued that children have been robbed of innocence and autonomy by the increasingly influential market, whose cultural products are motivated by economic interests, rather than a desire to enlighten, inspire and educate. Traditional values, discipline and patterns of social relations have been displaced by an acquisitive throwaway mentality and a desire for immediate gratification (Kline, 1993; Schor, 2004).
This image of disenchantment is in part fuelled by a nostalgia for toys and forms of play characteristic of days gone by. This nostalgia is an admixture of adult imagination and memory, a romanticism shrouded in the mysticism and innocence of childhood (Cross, 2004; Philo, 2003). Child's play is reified as archaic and magical, casting children as natural and enviable sojourners of imagination and figures of utopian dreaming (Stevens, 2007; Warner, 2006). Toys enjoy an intimate association with such reified notions of childhood and play. This is illustrated by the prolific examples of enchanting narratives concerning toys coming alive within children's literature (Kuznets, 1994). Given this utopian discourse, play is presented as possessing timeless qualities, and has been employed as an analogy for various social desires and ideals (Stevens, 2007).

Palmer's account illustrates the important role materiality plays in ideal constructions of childhood and children. She deliberately employs particular items of material culture to provoke 'material culture shock' (Sofaer Derevenski, 2000), an incongruity created by the juxtaposition of seemingly discordant, incompatible material entities, for instance the innocent child and the sexualised dress. Toys feature heavily in anxious accounts of contemporary childhood. It is argued that toy guns and videogames encourage violence and aggression (Anderson and Dill, 2000; Wegener-Spohring, 1994), that fashion dolls flaunt sexualised images (Rogers, 1999; Warner, 2005), and that interactive toys, and character based toys stifle creativity (Kline, 1993; Thrift, 2003). Concern also extends beyond form to the materials from which toys are constructed. This concern is infused with a poetics that reminisces about 'authentic' associations with nature, and finds particular expression in debates about the relative preferences of (natural) wood and (chemical) plastic (Barthes, 1957). Anxiety about the character of contemporary toys is intensified by their increasing commercialisation. As a sacralised realm, childhood is seen to conflict with the profane sphere of the market (Cook, 2004a; Langer, 2004).

While popular concern about the character of modern toys has sharpened, academic analysis of their social context has lagged. They remain strangely absent in research on child development, in accounts of children's geographies
and from the diverse subject matter addressed by material culture studies. Child consumers also remain virtually invisible in theories of consumption (Cook, 2008). This neglect appears all the more remarkable when set in the context of global toy markets, which form part of the now vast children's culture industry. According to a 2004 Keynote Market Report, the traditional toys and games market in the UK was worth £2.1 billion at retail selling prices in 2003. This figure was predicted to rise by 15.8 percent by 2008. These figures exclude sales of computer games and consoles, which alone represented a market value of £1.43 billion in 2000. The 2000 Keynote Market Report on Electronic Games estimated that this figure would increase beyond £2 billion by 2005. While the two largest toy companies—Mattel and Hasbro—are both US owned, the UK toy market is a major player in the global toy industry, being the largest toy market in the European Union (Keynote, 2004a).

Two main factors account for the academic oversight of toys. Firstly, popular culture generally, and children's culture specifically, are accorded a low status of credibility within academia (Cross, 1997; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). Secondly, toys are explicitly associated with play, which is placed in opposition to the rational concerns of Western societies, and thus overlooked as an irrelevant aspect of people's social worlds (Stevens, 2007; Thrift, 1997). Where academic engagement with toys exists, it is often characterised by symbolic analysis, which treats toys as texts, reading them for ideological content (see Dietz, 1998; du Cille, 1994; Wilkinson, 1974; Willis, 1991). This structural approach assumes the effects of toys in an a priori manner, and gives little consideration to the potential gap in ideology and reception.

This thesis directly addresses the academic neglect of toys. In its broadest sense, 'toy' refers to a plaything, however, as Fleming (1996) notes, an object's identity as a toy is not given, stable or intrinsically fixed in a unitary way. Rather, an object's recognition as a toy depends upon its social and economic setting, culturally derived associations and representations in which it appears, and the prior experience of its user. As such, it exists as an historically contingent artefact, with its meaning in any particular era being critically bound to the dominant conception of childhood of that same historical moment (Calvert, 1992). Taking this fluidity of meaning as a starting point, this study did not seek
to define what a toy is in advance. Rather it is founded upon a practically derived notion of the toy, developed through the children's own everyday domestic engagements and practices. When asked to introduce their toys, the children initially presented a vast collection of objects of material culture, including items of clothing, found objects, collectibles, and a variety of home entertainment equipment. As the research sessions progressed, the children intuitively came to focus on a notion of the toy as an object with which there is active engagement in playful practice. This practically derived definition of the toy expands upon commercially oriented definitions, allowing the inclusion of books, videogames, scale model kits, made objects, and household objects that enjoy a temporary status as a toy, being drawn into playful practice in a momentary fashion.

In addressing the academic neglect of toys, this thesis presents an alter-tale to the story of disenchanted alienation that opened this chapter. It tells a series of contemporary stories about children's domestic practices of play that accentuate the meaningfulness of toys in children's everyday lives. It explores how the affective force of these relations can foster a generous comportment toward the world that enables the configuration of enchanting imaginative spaces in and of the everyday (Bennett, 2001). The search for such an alter-tale is situated in relation to recent moves toward affirmative modes of critique within social and political theory (Bennett, 2001; Coles, 1997; Connolly, 1999; Orlie, 1997). This is a form of critical thinking that questions extant habits of objective, moralistic judgement. It questions obligation as an effective motivation for action, recognising the politically debilitating effects of moralistic judgement in terms of its contribution to the disenchanted conditions it describes. As Bennett (2001:4) explains, it 'inflects the self as a creature of loss and thus discourages discernment of the marvellous vitality of bodies human and nonhuman, natural and artifactual'. In contrast, affirmative critique opens up new possibilities and potentialities for the future through the cultivation of affective attachment. For instance, Bennett offers the affective force of enchanted moments as a means through which to nurture a spirit of ethical generosity towards others and the world we inhabit. This thesis expands on Bennett's assertion that enchantment, as comportment, may be fostered through a 'greater expression to the sense of play' and a honing of 'sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things'
By engaging with play and attending to the specific materialities of toys – their sensuous, tactile nature – this thesis elucidates the affective force of everyday moments and spaces. Based on empirical research, this represents a critical response to less grounded commentaries on the demoralised and disenchanted character of contemporary childhoods.

This thesis moves beyond a purely representational approach to toys, looking to recent work on the non-(or more-than-) representational within Cultural Geography. This is not to discount the significance of the representational; indeed the work presented here remains attentive to the historical and semiotic fields of meaning in which toys operate. Rather, it is my concern to argue that there is 'something more' we could and should be doing (Horton and Krafft, 2006a).

Non-representational theory's concern to valorise the seemingly mundane and the practical lends itself to this study (Thrift, 1997; 2000a). To enact the shift from a structural approach this thesis plays rather than reads, examining and participating in children's everyday playful practices with toys. Practice is necessarily embodied, unfolding within and through webs of intersubjective and interobjective relations. Concern with embodiment radically decentres the human subject by emphasising how bodies are never still and discrete entities, but rather are always in flux, always becoming. To fully comprehend the body in this fluid manner, it is necessary to appreciate what the body is becoming-with, the hybrid assemblages in and through which it is configured. Concern with these assemblages stresses the role of non-human agency, by drawing attention to how agency is relational and performed, rather than pre-given (Latour, 2005).

In seeking to develop a depth of understanding of how and why toys matter to children, this thesis examines the embodied, tactile, sensory, affective relations children share with these objects of material culture. The overarching concern of this thesis is to trace the specific contributions of toys to relational agency. This animates toys, evoking the liveliness of the relations they share with children. A principle argument developed by this thesis is that toys may be usefully conceived as technologies. This figuration stresses how they are
productive in the sense of motivating inferences, interpretations and responses. These effects are the product of the various kinds of object agency different toys embody. It is shown how the specific materialities of particular toys afford them transitory forms of power and influence. Discussion of children's intercorporeal relations with toys is extended to consider how, through relational configurations of objects and subjects, imaginative spaces of play can be enacted in and of the everyday.

This analysis is based on empirical qualitative research that was conducted in London and Surrey, in south-east England between April 2006 and November 2007. This involved the conduct of a series of domestic ethnographies across six households, engaging with the practices of ten children in total. This empirical work was further supplemented by 'desk research', which examined various trade publications, and company websites and financial reports.

This thesis usefully advances three areas of debate in human geographical enquiry, spanning theoretical, philosophical and methodological concerns. One area of debate advanced is children's geographies. The thesis contributes to this burgeoning field in three main ways. Firstly, it asserts and explores the heterogeneous assembly of children's social worlds. This critical intervention advances the development of a new ecumenical framework for the study of children and childhood that moves beyond reductive approaches founded on a dichotomy of nature and culture. Secondly, a focus on domestic geographies of play counterbalances the overwhelming dominance of studies of children's use of outdoor spaces. Thirdly, through the examination of playful practices, a further series of fantastic, imaginative landscapes of consumption are also opened to investigation. The thesis thereby contributes to a growing body of work on child consumers (Buckingham, 2000; Cook, 2004b; Kline, 1993). Importantly, through a material culture approach, this work tempers an overemphasis on market influence that is witnessed in much work in this area. By drawing attention to the relational agency of toys, this thesis navigates between the dichotomy of structure and agency that has divided work on children's consumption to date.
A second area of debate advanced by this thesis is material geographies. It contributes to this vast, myriad field in three main ways. Firstly, it directly addresses a neglected category of material culture. Secondly, through an emphasis on practices of use this thesis contributes to, and advances a growing interest in brands and branding (Arvidsson, 2006; Holt, 2006a; Lury, 2004). It advances existing work in three important ways: by examining children's everyday engagements with global brands, in particular Bratz and Harry Potter; by considering the importance of materiality to engagements with brands; and by offering discussion of the associated practice of character merchandising, which is yet to be addressed outside of the field of marketing and consumer behaviour despite its rapidly expanding economic and social effects. Thirdly, this thesis critically advances material geographies by bringing together different bodies of work concerned with non-human agency. This includes literatures already well known within geography, such as actor network thought, material culture studies and engagements with affect. It also engages with literatures less presented within the discipline, such as anthropological interest in captivation, and archaeological concern with material form (Chapman, 2000; Gell, 1992; 1998; Saunders, 1999). This study puts these different bodies of work in conversation with each other to develop an appreciation of multifarious object agencies. This adds texture to understandings of relational agency, which can tend towards ontological monism (Lorimer, 2007). This advancement is important for understanding people's affective attachments with the world in which they live. Such understanding is developed through an attention to tactile and sensory geographies, and an engagement with ergonomics.

Finally, this thesis contributes to current methodological debates within the new social studies of childhood and Cultural Geography (Crang, 2003; 2005; Greene and Hogan, 2005; Lorimer, 2005). It achieves this through the development of an innovative multi-strand methodology, which is framed by a concern to question how non-cognitive and profoundly practical knowledge can be investigated. In response to calls to expand the realms of sensate life registered by empirical research, this thesis politicises the use of the body as a research tool and the use of the researcher as an active research participant. In relation to this, the thesis also engages with ethical debates. It expands the concept of ethical research beyond adherence to formalised codes, to include the adoption
of an ethical sensibility that is responsive to the affective dimensions of intercorporeal relations.

**Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant academic literature relating to three broadly defined areas of work – children’s geographies, material geographies, and academic concern with toys - to situate and contextualise the present study. Themes of consumption and consumer cultures, and non-representational geographies run through these three engagements. Taken together, these areas and themes stress the co-fabricated nature of our social worlds. Critiquing the lack of empirical work on children’s domestic geographies of play and the lack of engagement with the materiality of toys, this chapter outlines how the thesis attempts to fill this gap by attending to the precise contributions of toys to relational agency.

In chapter 3 I discuss the research strategy adopted to address children’s co-fabricated worlds. Through an exploration of momentary events in the field, I reveal how I encountered the many and varied practices in which toys are used by children through the use of domestic ethnography that was ethnomethodologically informed. More specifically, this incorporated the use of creative tasks, observant participation and video ethnography. I explore the ethical implications of adopting a relational approach to examining children’s social worlds and the reconfigured politics of knowledge production that the above methodology fosters.

Chapter 4 uses three case studies to begin to explore the agencies of toy objects. These case studies are framed in relation to the metaphor of animation, which is used to evoke a quality of liveliness, and employed throughout the thesis as both an empirical theme and a representational strategy. The first case study focuses on cuddly toys, and explores that cuddliness in relation to the materialities of anthropomorphism concerned with touch and transference. The second focuses on model aeroplane making and explores these processes of production in relation to ideas of distributed agency, possession and enchantment. The third case study focuses on trading cards (especially Yu-Gi-Oh! and Shoot Out cards)
and moves away from the moral debates that frame these cards in relation to exchange value, to explore the mutations of value enacted in children’s practices of collection.

Chapter 5 considers children’s negotiations with a commercialised space of childhood in relation to their appropriation of branded toys. Through a case study focusing on Bratz fashion dolls, the issue of the singularity, multiplicity and fractionality of objects (Law, 2002; 2004a; Mol, 2002) is addressed. Here a concern with flow between intertextual media (Lash and Lury, 2007) is countered by attention to ‘stickiness’ and how the material qualities of particular branded entities matter. This is addressed through discussion of the particular materiality of the fashion doll, in terms of its relation to the human body and its role in constructions of an extended self. A second case study focussing on Harry Potter and the concept of authenticity demonstrates how the experiential qualities of different media matter.

Chapter 6 addresses the role of the toy in the creation of imaginative spaces of play in and of the everyday. The theme of Harry Potter is continued from the previous chapter and explored in relation to the use of the book as an absent presence in the creation of magical worlds. This is complemented by a case study focussing on the dollhouse and its role in the creation of miniature spaces of play. This is set in the context of Susan Stewart’s (2003) work on the miniature. Her concern with distanced display and gazing is contrasted with the children’s embodied playful practice, which is explored through the concept of interiority and the children’s creation of spatial textures. Finally, I discuss how ‘a geography of small things’ prompts us to reconsider relations between space, time and scale anew.

Continuing along similar conceptual lines, chapter 7 turns to look at the virtual spaces of play created through the use of videogames, focussing on a particular case study of Sony’s PlayStation2. To stress how such spaces are configured in and of the everyday, I attend to circuits of knowledge and skill that work across mediated and non-mediated spaces. This concern is then extended through exploration of players’ relations with technological interfaces in the non-mediated world, and processes of identification as witnessed in variable
relations to on-screen avatars. Finally, the physicality and sociality of gameplay in the non-mediated world is explored to contribute to a blurring of the boundaries between mediated and non-mediated space. In tandem with its predecessor, this chapter problematises the conceptual distance between reality and play and the worlds they inhabit.

Finally, by way of conclusion, chapter 8 addresses four cross-cutting themes that run throughout the thesis. The first of these is the co-fabricated nature of our everyday worlds, which is centred on a radical decentring of the human subject. This draws attention to embodiment, technologies of being and affect. Attention is then turned to consumption and consumer cultures as I outline how the thesis contributes to a growing interest in child consumers and also speaks to the study of consumption more generally through a focus on practices and the development of a corporeal geography of consumption. I then discuss the important role of non-representational thinking in this thesis, how it contributes to an understanding of play and playing, and how, in turn, the thesis contributes to non-representational geographies. Finally, I assert the alter-tale presented by this thesis and address the parameters of this particular study.
Toys and the Material Geographies of Children’s Culture
This chapter contextualises the arguments developed in this thesis by reviewing academic literature relevant to the study of the material geographies of children's culture. It is organised according to three main areas of interest - children's geographies, material geographies, and the study of toys and videogames – which are woven together by two running themes – consumption and consumer cultures, and non-representational geographies. Taken together, these areas and themes stress the co-fabricated character of our social worlds.

There are two overarching concerns of the chapter. Firstly, it critiques the paucity of empirical work on children's domestic geographies of play and the lack of engagement with the materiality of toys. Secondly, it emphasises how the present study directly addresses this dearth by attending to the precise contributions of toys to relational agency in terms of the creative capacities that differing toys, as non-human actants, offer.

**Children's Geographies**

Children's geographies is a rapidly expanding, multifarious area of research that contributes to the broader interdisciplinary field of the 'new social studies of childhood' (James et al, 1998). The development of this broader field represented an epistemological break from the sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1990). The dominance of socialisation theory within Sociology meant children were previously understood and approached as incompetent and incomplete beings who were shaped into fully human adults by the process of socialisation. It was the forces of socialisation – the family and school – that received attention rather than the children themselves. The new social studies of childhood recognises children as human 'beings', rather than human 'becomings', paying explicit attention to children's daily practices of living. The realisation of children as competent social actors has been informed by examination of the socially constructed nature of childhood (Aries, 1962; Burton, 1989). The labour of division involved in this social construction of a separate phase of life is accomplished in part through spatial practices, such as the introduction of compulsory schooling. This accounts for the emerging interest in the spatiality of childhood beyond geography, as evidenced in sociological and anthropological contributions to Holloway and Valentine's (2000a) edited collection, *Children's Geographies*. This collection emphasises
the importance of geographical studies of children by highlighting the difference that place makes to understandings of children and childhood, the importance of the different sites of everyday life in the making and remaking of children's lives and identities, and the role of spatial imagery in ideologies of childhood. The home is one particular site and spatial discourse that has been addressed (Christensen et al, 2000; Holloway and Valentine, 2000b; James, 1998). This thesis contributes to this work, responding to the trend of the increasing domestication of childhood. This trend is argued to be a result of two parallel developments: a drastic decline in children's personal freedom, which is an outcome of the rising tide of fear about children's safety in public space (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997); and technological change, which is seen to compel children to an indoor, solitary, sedentary screen-based lifestyle (Palmer, 2006).

Children's domestic geographies

Nava (1992) places the trend of increasing domestication in a wider context, charting its course over the past two centuries. She discusses the separation of workplace and home space associated with the Industrial Revolution. During this time, the 'domestic' took on an unprecedented symbolic resonance. The home became a moral haven in a rapidly changing, volatile and incomprehensible world. Changing (bourgeoisie) family ideals were integral to this demarcation of the public sphere and the private space of the home. Sennett (1977:20) explains that '[a]s the family became a refuge from the terrors of society, it gradually became a moral yardstick with which to measure the public realm of the capital city'.

Children were central to this 'modern domestic ideal', which was based on the nuclear family. Zelizer (1985) charts the transformation in the economic and sentimental value of children that this moral process of domestication entailed. It is during this time that the economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless' child, who has become essentialised in contemporary understandings of childhood, emerged. The introduction of child labour laws and compulsory education gradually ushered children into a new unproductive and domesticated world of childhood. These moralist ideas about the proper place of
children were reinforced by emerging childrearing experts, who cautioned that separation from the mother was damaging to children's mental health (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b). The enduring impact of these ideas is seen in resistance to 'working mothers', and the practice of working parents making arrangements that reproduce home environments, like the use of nannies and childminders (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b). These changing ideals have not, however, been undisputed. This is evidenced by simultaneous concerns that place value on the stimulation provided by collective care environments, which place children outside the home.

The privatisation of childhood within the domestic sphere has not been matched by empirical work on children's lives within the home. The present study directly addresses this neglect by conducting ethnographic research within children's homes, examining their everyday domestic practices with toys. It builds on work within geography that has addressed the home as a subject of study, such as studies examining parenting cultures (see Holloway, 1998; Valentine, 1997a). These studies draw upon feminist critique, which has always emphasised the importance of the domestic sphere, combining specific feminist concern with the operation of power in households with an interest in children. Control is a central issue in this work; the control and regulation of the child's body and mind through regimes of discipline, learning, development, maturation and skill. (Control is also a central issue in work concerned with the space of the school; see Dixon, 1997; Fielding, 2000.) Rather than simply seeing the home as a restorative and benign haven, this work emphasises the home as a site of potential conflict. It addresses the frustrations and anxieties associated with home life, which much literature on the home, especially within environmental psychology, fails to convey (Sibley, 1997).

Christensen et al (2000) discuss how disputes over time and space are linked to tensions underlying the values attached to the rights, privileges and independence of family members, and those which promote togetherness. They stress how children are proactive within the discourse of power, exercising control over time. By moving in and out of particular spaces they can resist displacement of their own agendas by those of their parents. Spending time alone in the home is important to children's perceptions and experience of
independence. However, it is also ambiguous because it is not always voluntarily chosen. It can be a form of punishment where children are socially excluded from peers. Such work has a tendency to refer to how children move to the space of the bedroom to escape the parental gaze without addressing what happens behind this closed door. (Journalists have been less timid than academic researchers in this respect, see Bedell, 2001.) Although the home has been addressed as a subject of study, the home as a site of study is still relatively unknown (see Nilsen and Rogers (2005) as an exception). Recruiting and interviewing children about their daily domestic practices is still largely conducted in ‘external’ institutions like schools, or in the case of Sibley (1997), is based on archival material. My work intervenes here by conducting research with children in their homes.

Children’s geographies of play

The idea of the home as the ‘proper’ space for children is reflected in the construction and externalisation of risk by both parents and children. As perceptions of public space are becoming more threatening, the boundary between home and outdoors is becoming more strongly defined. Harden (2000) examines the features of these perceptions of risk and the forms of restriction (legal, parental and material) that accompany them. They are shown to embody contemporary Western ideas about childhood as a time of innocence and dependence. The notion of children being ‘out of place’ in public space is not limited to ideas of children’s vulnerability. Valentine (1996) examines how contradictory ideas about children as either ‘angels’ (at risk in adult controlled space) or ‘devils’ (whose unruly behaviour risks the hegemony of adult controlled space) produce different concerns about children’s use of public space in the global North. Although these contradictory ideas stem from different historical roots, they reproduce the same spatial ideology. Given the strength of this ideology and the level of contemporary debate it has generated, many studies have examined children’s use of outdoor space. These studies have examined the social geographies of children’s outdoor play (Thomson and Philo, 2004), intergenerational change in children’s use of neighbourhoods (Gaster, 1991; Tandy, 1999), variations in children’s independent mobility according to differences in locality, gender, age and class (O’Brien et al, 2000; Valentine and
McKendrick, 1997), children’s negotiations of parental restrictions on access to public space (Harden, 2000; Valentine, 1997b), restrictions imposed by the presence of other children differentiated by gender and age (Karsten, 2003; Tucker, 2003), children’s microgeographies of outdoor space (Jones, 2000a; Matthews et al, 1998), and discourses of curfew (Collins and Kearns, 2001; Matthews et al, 1999).

Concerns about children’s use of public space are generally made in reference to urban space. Urban street culture has featured prominently in the sociology of youth since the work of the Birmingham School Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s (Corrigan, 1979; Hall and Jefferson, 1976). A growing interest in children’s rural geographies is beginning to address this urban bias (see Halfacree, 2004.)

The recent history of children’s geographies of play in the global North cannot be reduced to a trend towards curtailment and impoverishment. There has also been a move towards the diversification and commodification of ‘indoor’ play. To this end, Children’s Geographers have examined the spaces of the youth club (Skelton, 2000), the after school club (Smith and Barker, 2000) and commercialised leisure spaces (McKendrick et al, 2000). While the latter are a direct reaction to ‘spectacles of fear’ about dangerous streets, they do not simply induce a loss of children’s freedom to public space. Since the 1990s, the development of ‘add on’ indoor and outdoor playgrounds and ‘stand alone’ indoor soft play centres has asserted children’s right to play space in parts of the built environment previously perceived as adult domains (McKendrick et al, 2000; 2003). Attention has also turned to the domestic sphere in relation to a wider concern with the domestication of technology (Silverstone, 1994). This began with studies about television viewing practices (Buckingham, 1993; Gillespie, 1995), but, especially within geography, has more recently become overwhelmingly concerned with the Internet and ICTs.

This move has been prompted by concern about media breaching the ‘safety’ of the private sphere. Discourses akin to those shaping the meaning of public space are currently shaping the meaning, and consequently the use, of cyberspace. Again, children are seen as innocent and vulnerable beings at risk in this adult
controlled space (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b). However, as previous studies of the domestic have shown, the home has always been a porous site. Holloway (1998) and Valentine (1997a) have examined the role of state intervention and the norms and practices of a locality in shaping parenting cultures; Sibley (1997) discusses how regimes external to the home, such as working and school hours, effect intra-household relations; and McNamee (1998) examines how the use of videogames is influenced by wider socio-spatial relations, such as forms of masculinity. (This work chimes with studies examining the porous spatiality of the school, see Dixon, 1997; Holloway et al, 2000.) Studies of children’s use of ICT emphasise this porosity by attending to the role of children’s social networks in their use of ICT, both at home and at school. Rather than playing to perceived notions of vulnerability, this work stresses children’s technical competence relative to that of their parents, and how this has induced (re)negotiations of power within the home (Valentine et al, 2000).

The above discussion highlights how studies of children’s geographies have tended to place children in particular environments. In contrast, this study addresses children’s creations of new, imaginary spaces of play, which have been neglected due to their shifting, transient and indefinable nature. It brings together an understanding of how children negotiate the use of time and space to create spaces where play may unfold (Punch, 2000), and an appreciation of the dialogical relations between people and objects to examine the configuration of imaginative spaces of play. Here I am inspired by non-representational theory’s evocation of the political, which is concerned with ‘dispositions that are open to the moment, able to take hold of accidents and slips, able to draw on skills that conjure up other wheres’ (Thrift, 2004a:97).

While the ‘new social studies of childhood’ have sought to move beyond a preoccupation with the forces of socialisation, by paying explicit attention to children’s everyday practices of living, they have done little to advance conceptualisations of play in this regard. Studies and ethnographies of children’s play have looked beyond play itself to examine such issues as the performativity of gender and generation (see Karsten, 2003; Thorne, 1993; Tucker, 2003), and children’s independent spatial mobility (Tandy, 1999).
Alternatively they have framed play in a reductive sense in terms of a resistance to adult culture (Corrigan; 1979; Evaldsson and Corsaro, 1998; Hall and Jefferson; 1976). This approach constructs play as the preserve of children. As a consequence, there is no engagement with broader conceptualisations of play within studies of the urban realm, for example Benjamin's (1999a) work on the *flâneur*, Borden's (2001) examination of skateboarding, or Steven's (2007) exploration of urban design.

However, these two strands of study are similar in their preoccupation with resistance. The city is said to provide a wealth of conditions for play: diversity and density of actions and people, sensory intensity and unfamiliarity, unexpected juxtapositions and overlaps of meaning (Stevens, 2007). The potentialities of these conditions tease with possibilities, inciting playful behaviour. Play has thus been used within urban studies to reveal the potentials that public space offers, exposing non-functional understandings of its use, and the potential this presents to urban design (Borden, 2001; Stevens, 2007).

Within this context, emphasis is placed on the non-instrumental characteristics of play. This couches it in a framework of resistance. It is employed as a rhetorical construction, a counterpoint to behaviour that is deemed everyday, conventional and rational. Within Western metaphysics more generally, it is understood in opposition to seriousness, morality and productivity, and the social relations these value structures help reproduce. Schechner (1993:27) writes, ‘[i]n the West, play is a rotten category, an activity tainted by unreality, inauthenticity, duplicity, make-believe, looseness, fooling around and inconsequentiality’.

Several commentators have directly sought to address the question of play and resistance. Stevens (2007) asserts that play should be defined not merely oppositionally, but dialectically within the everyday, and Thrift (1997) writes of play eluding rather than resisting power. Despite their best efforts however, a sense of resistance remains as their understanding of play is formulated through comparison to something ‘Other’, with which it remains in tension.
This sense of 'Otherness' can also be traced in Bauman's (1993) exposition of play in his discussion of postmodern ethics. Describing play's temporal and spatial character, he writes:

'...play is securely protected behind its temporal and spatial walls. Play has its beginning and its end, both well marked – with a bell, a whistle, a starter shot, a finishing line, the rise and the fall of the curtain. It does not begin before it begins and it does not go on after it ended. Play has its place – the race course, tennis court, dance hall, sports stadium, discothèque, church, chessboard – all well marked: by stage frame, fence, guarded entries. Play does not spill over, contaminate, reach the other parts one would wish to or has to keep clean; it can be isolated, confined in limits so that it does not affect or disturb what it should not; it could be even kept secret... Time has 'direction' only inside the play...Playing is not cumulative. Nothing accrues... Each new play is an absolute beginning – the result of the last one does not affect its result, as wide open as the last play was when it started' (170-171).

For Bauman, play is kept separate from the time and space of the everyday. Here contradictions arise with the future oriented linear trajectory that consumes accounts of play from the developmental psychology perspective. In such accounts play must be cumulative as it is interpreted in terms of aiding cognitive development and socialisation. With its emphasis on examining children's everyday practices of living, the 'new social studies of childhood' should be well placed to address such contradictions and elaborate on the nature of the phenomenon of play.

In this regard, the present study draws upon the work of Huizinga (1949), who talks of his preference for the name Homo Ludens – Man the Player - over the name Homo Sapiens for our species. He writes how play is older than culture, presupposing human society. This questions the primary place productivity and rationality assume in positions on play. Lefebvre (1996) seemingly follows Huizinga's logic understanding everyday urban life to be creative and playful, framing rational labour as the special, fragmented domain. It is work rather
than play that is thought to carve out a space and time for itself, operating according to its own special logic, producing its own social relations. It is this everyday, rather than exceptional logic of play that is adopted by this thesis.

In seeking to advance conceptualisations of play, the present study also draws upon certain feminist and cultural geographies (Pile and Keith, 1997) that have started to problematise resistance as it is commonly inflected according to notions of the powerful and the dominated in society. In particular I draw upon Malbon’s (1999) differing inflection of resistance as playful vitality. In his study of clubbing he attends to situations in which an alternate conception of self may be fostered, and how this acts as a source of vitality and provides a sense of personal worth. This matter of vitality is specifically addressed in chapter 6.

**Children’s consumer cultures**

Work on children’s use of electronic media evidences a change in the landscapes of consumption addressed by academics with an interest in children. As children have come to constitute an important market for home based leisure, studies of children as consumers – their preferences, culture and practices – have grown at a fast rate since the late 1980s (Cook, 2004a; Kline, 1993; Schor, 2004; Seiter, 1993). Concern with this ‘new’ consumer market has been marked by dedicated special issues of journals, such as the *Journal of Consumer Culture* (Cook, 2004b) and *Childhood* (Cook, 2005).

Childhood is a cultural space constituted by consumption. In most regions of the world the media and consumer culture are now inescapable facts of contemporary childhood. Children enter the world prefigured as consumers, born into regimes of consumption (Buckingham, 2007; Cook, 2008; Martens et al, 2004). Children themselves come to realise childhood through the commodity form. By charting historical developments in children’s retail, Cook (2003) shows how the child consumer is developed through age emulation and a longing to be older. This is grounded in the child’s phenomenal experience of the retail environment, which is structured according to age-space separation. The aspiration to be older can only be met through consumption. The incorporation of children into the market is part of a broader social logic.
through which capitalism reconstitutes life stages as markets. The 1950s gave rise to the construction of teenagers through consumption of an age-specific culture. More recently there has been the emergence of lifestyles for seniors (Langer, 2004).

Work on children's consumption spans a range of academic disciplines: anthropology, education, geography, history, marketing, media and cultural theory, psychology and sociology. Socially and culturally oriented scholars have studied how children have participated in modern consumer culture, and have been generative of its growth since the early twentieth century (Cook, 2004a; Cross, 1997); how commercial industries target children as consumers (Kline, 1993); how children both use media and are subject to its influences (Buckingham, 2000); how children actively engage in consumer activity (Zelizer, 2002); and how globalising consumption and media contribute to a globalising childhood (Buckingham, 2007). These various studies are yet to coalesce into a body of knowledge or field of study. They are identified with one another due to categorical association, rather than shared theory, methods or approach. This means there is little critique of work in this area as studies are not put into conversation with one another. In addition this work has not been situated in relation to consumption in general. Given its disaggregated nature, work on children's consumption is unable to critique the underlying presumptions and models of consumption theory (Cook, 2008).

Despite the high visibility of products of the children's culture industry, children and childhood are absent in theories of consumption and consumer culture (Cook, 2008; Langer, 2004; Martens et al, 2004). Where the child is present, it tends to serve as a means to universalise theory by making claims to the naturalness of the consuming global subject. Attention is largely directed to the temporally static adult world, in which status display, pleasure seeking and meaning making take place by and for adults, for personal edification (Cook, 2008). A notable exception is Miller's (1998a) examination of how consumption is embedded in rituals of love, sacrifice and devotion for family members. However, Miller does not examine children's practices and experiences per se, focusing instead on parental and conjugal relations. Rather than informing the construction of theories of consumption, the child is made to fit the already
formulated conceptual structure. Cook (2008) and Martens et al (2004) oppose this neglect, outlining how studies of children’s consumption could offer a critique of these general theories. They could address how consumer culture reproduces and transforms itself through the lifecycle and over generations; provide insight into social reproduction and social change; emphasise that personal indulgence and status seeking do not represent the full spectrum of motivations to consume, by drawing attention to the issue of co-consumption; and help understanding of tensions between autonomous individual consumption, lifestyle and identity formation, by stressing the role of children in the reflexive narration of parental self identity.

For Cook (2008), the invisibility of the child consumer stems from the assumption that it is adults who primarily, if not exclusively, engage in economic activity, including consumer practices. Neoclassical economics is well known for positing the (adult) male, *homo economicus*, as the ideal typification of its economic actor. Cook discusses how this model unintentionally migrated over to cultural approaches to consumption theory and contributes to continued fixation with the individual economic actor. In much research and writing about consumption, desire and identity are understood as personal practices undertaken for cultural reasons, but located in identifiable individuals. Within studies of children’s consumption, two constructs of the child that fit this individualised form of thinking have arisen (Cook, 2004a; 2008). On the one hand there are scholars who posit the child as manipulable and subject to exploitation by advertising and marketing (Kline, 1993). On the other hand there are those who see the child as active and empowered by consumer culture (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). Both approaches focus on what the child does or does not know or do, as if they act alone.

Underlying the construct of the exploited child is what Cook (2004a) terms the ‘invasion’ theory of commodification. This is the idea that commodities have invaded the previously untouched social realm of childhood. This notion generates tension between the ‘profane’ market and ‘sacred’ childhood as two opposing forms of value (Langer, 2004). The value embodied in the sentimental worth of children conflicts with the kind enforced by the equalising rationality of market calculation. Cook (2004a) investigates the tension between these
forms of value, discussing how a separation of culture and markets is impossible because markets arise within, and are informed by specific, historically embedded social relations, which impose meaning on commercial activity. Children's consumer culture is a space where children and commerce exist in relation to each other. Cook posits the interplay between sentiment and exchange as the driving force behind the emergence and growth of children's commercial industries. These industries have sought a temporary compromise between opposing valuations through two means.

Firstly, there is the redefinition of commodities as beneficial or functional for children. Products are inscribed with qualities associated with the sacred child, the developing child and the fun-seeking child. Langer (2004) explains how the children's culture industry insists on, and appropriates children's intimate connection to the world of imagination. This is then sold back to children (and parents) in commodity form. The children's culture industry acts as the conduit to the world of imagination, which becomes accessible only through consumption of the right products. Through this process, the industry locates itself within the sacralised realm of childhood, rather than at the ambivalent point of intersection between children and commerce. The link between children, play and toys situates toyshops and toymakers as part of the enchanted landscape of childhood, naturalising and sacralising the children's market. The problem of legitimisation is shifted from the issue of whether or not children should be consumers to how the things they consume are produced. The aura of fun and enchantment is only sustained if the conditions of production remain hidden.

Secondly, there is a redefinition of children as competent persons who desire consumer goods. The discursive construct of 'the child consumer' sees the child not as an object of economic activity (as was the case with the child labourer) but as a subject in and of market relations. Desire becomes naturalised because it is framed as originating from within the child. The child's 'right' to consume preceded the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by decades. Manufacturers and advertisers had begun to target children directly as individual consumers by the 1930s (Cook, 2004a). The recognition of children as legitimate, individualised consumers was an important step toward the
contemporary realisation of children as competent social actors. Historically, childhood had been rendered structurally invisible. Marketing practices initiated 'pediocularity' (Cook, 2003; 2004a), seeing the world through the child's eyes.

Given the anxiety-laden relationship between childhood and the market, studies of children's consumption have been dominated by a 'continuous flow of critique' (Martens et al, 2004). Research that approaches the child consumer as active and empowered positions itself as a response to these negative interpretations. This work emphasises the need to examine the meaning systems of child consumers, but it is surprising how little empirical work has been conducted with children. There has been a reliance on data generated from pictorial or documentary evidence (see Clark and Higonnet, 1998; Cook, 2003) or direct readings of meaning from consumer goods (see Toffoletti, 2007; Wilkinson, 1974). As a consequence, 'relatively little is known about how children engage in practices of consumption or what the significance of this is to their everyday lives and broader issues of social organisation' (Martens et al, 2004: 161). It also means children are treated as a homogenous social group, rather than as a group diverse in age, abilities, sense of self or agency, and knowledge and experience of material culture (Martens et al, 2004). Only differences in gender have been acknowledged to any extent (see McNamee, 1998; Messner, 2000). For Martens et al (2004), this neglect is due to a reliance on a 'production of consumption' approach which characterises the relationship between production and consumption as one in which production simply stipulates consumer behaviour. It employs a narrow definition of consumption based on the market to the exclusion of the user. It is evident in commentaries centred on the textual messages encoded in and embodied by consumer goods, for example studies examining the troubling features of war toys, and toys deemed to be sexist such as Barbie dolls. (This work is discussed in greater detail in the 'Toys and Videogames' section of this chapter.)

Martens et al (2004) suggest engaging with material culture as a more effective means to examine child consumers. Best (1988:208) explains, '[w]e should be watching children playing with toys, talking to children about their play... Culture emerges in actions, not artefacts, and we ought to be where the action
This study draws on a material culture approach to consumption studies. It counters an overemphasis on the role of the market in meaning making practices, stressing the importance of what happens to commodities after purchase. (This is explored in more detail in the ‘Material Geographies’ section of this chapter.) This work also draws on a recent trend within the sociology of consumption for approaches that emphasise ‘ordinary consumption’, which is routine, conventional, repetitive and inconspicuous. These approaches critique a previous overemphasis on highly visible forms of consumption, and on the spectacular and symbolic value of goods, rather than their practical use. It thus emphasises consumption as practice (see Gregson, 2007; Warde, 2005).

This approach navigates a position between studies that address the child consumer as either exploited or empowered. Cook (2004c) stresses how children’s consumption cannot be engaged with as an either/or proposition. A structural approach to childhood and an emphasis on children’s agency each represent a point along a continuum. In practice, commercially imposed meaning and personal identity creation are blended together early in the life course. Scholars have also complicated the relationship between the child and the market by stressing how adults, particularly parents (or guardians) intervene in this relationship. Cook (2004a) discusses how parents determine the extent to which a child can participate in decisions regarding consumption; Martens et al (2004) discuss how parents cultivate ways of consuming within their offspring; and McKendrick et al (2000; 2003) discuss how parents are recognised as important potential audiences by children’s commercial industries. This study contributes to this work by paying attention to sibling dynamics and peer group communication. In so doing it counters a tendency to focus on the relationship between the child and the market.

Children’s material geographies

Although there is an emerging interest in the ‘commercial panorama of consumer goods’ (Cook, 2004a:1) targeted at the children’s market, there is still little sense of how constructions of childhood are practised in a more-than-discursive manner. In chapter 1 I illustrated the importance of materiality in ideal constructions of childhood and children through reference to Sofaer
Derevenski’s (2000:3) notion of ‘material culture shock’. Sofaer Derevenski uses a photographic image of a child holding a gun to forcefully demonstrate this role of materiality. The juxtaposition of a child (conceived as innocent, passive and protected) with a lethal weapon (conceived as worldly, aggressive and violent) creates incongruity. The importance of materiality to constructions of childhood is also seen in Calvert’s (1992) historical study of children’s material culture, in which he uses objects to track changes in cultural constructions of childhood occurring in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. He writes:

“The link between artefacts and cultural constructs makes the study of material culture an important method for gaining access to cultural beliefs and assumptions so basic that they are rarely verbalised and to social fears too emotionally laden for direct discussion’ (1992:4).

Similarly, Gagen (2000) explores the materiality of twentieth century playgrounds, examining the embodiment of a nationalised childhood through built form.

Things are, at least tacitly, present in chief accounts of children’s geographies and cultures. We could think of the bicycles and dens in Roger Hart’s (1978) examination of children’s experience of place; the skateboards and go-karts in Colin Ward’s (1979) discussion of the child in the city; or the marbles and sticks in the work of Iona and Peter Opie (1984; 1997) on children’s games. However, seminal accounts of childhood do not provide a vigorous, detailed sense of how constructions of childhood are achieved in practice. Kraftl (2006:490) explains:

‘It is not yet clear how buildings, windows, door-handles, paintbrushes, blackboards and chairs, take part in the achievements of learning, and by extension the construction of idea(l)s like childhood’.

Interest in children’s material cultures has been largely concerned with the symbolic, representational nature of children’s spaces and artefacts. Children’s bedrooms (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002), toys (Kline, 1993) and girls’ fashion
shops (Russell and Tyler, 2002) have been treated as cultural texts, which can be read for clues as to the conceptualisation and treatment of the children who might use them. Such work evades the lived vitality and messier meanings that constitute things and their use and the formation of practical and localised, rather than national constructions of childhood. In contrast, Kraftl (2006) examines the role of school architecture in the localised construction of childhood central to 'alternative' Steiner education.

A growing materialised sensibility within geography and the social sciences is beginning to influence work by those with an interest in children and challenge the privileged position of the symbolic within childhood studies. This is seen in Prout's (2000) edited collection, *The Body, Childhood and Society*, and in an emerging interest in children's negotiations with fashion (Boden et al, 2004; 2005). This shift towards the material is important, not least because material things are fundamental to our everyday experiences and relations. To paraphrase Horton and Kraftl (2006a:73):

> `we are always already surrounded by material things; ...we continually do things with or through material things; ...material things 'act back' and continually affect and/or effect us; ... things can really matter or mean something, and have value (in every sense of the word)`.

Evasiveness about materiality causes important features of how contemporary childhoods are constructed and experienced to be occluded. For instance, in a study of children's use of rural space, Jones (2000a) illustrates how children's engagements with specific elements of the material environment – puddles, ice, mud, conkers – allow for a differential relation to place and space from that of adults. Place's (2000) study of the penetration of children's bodies in hospital intensive care units forcefully illustrates how children's experiences of childhood take place with and through material artefacts, technologies and machines. Also, in a journalistic study of tomboys, Moorhead (2007) discusses how these young girls' dismissal of the pink frills and dolls of girlhood in favour of football kits and Scalextric is central to their experience of childhood, not least in the impact it has on familial relations and friendships.
Effacing the heterogeneous assembly of children's worlds causes us to neglect the manner in which children form alliances with material entities as a means to exercise agential powers. This is recognised by Prout (2005), who declares that we should address children as 'heterogeneous engineers', examining how, as they emerge through interactional processes, they enrol and orchestrate all kinds of human and non-human entities. In this sense artefacts are not merely props for social interaction, but are embedded in and are part of the social. Thus we need to locate the relationship between the body and society in the dense networked heterogeneity that is social life (Latour, 2005). We need to trace the processes by which heterogeneous entities mutually enrol, constitute and order each other. For Prout, childhood should be seen as a collection of different, sometimes competing and sometimes conflicting, heterogeneous orderings. These can be fragile, but they can also become stabilised and widespread. New sets of connections can prompt new forms of childhood to arise. This has been seen recently in relation to children and new technologies, and children and chemicals (such as food additives and medication like Ritalin). To understand contemporary childhood we need to consider these socio-material-technical dimensions. As Prout suggests, new networks may overlap or co-exist with old ones, or they may conflict, sparking contemporary debate and even moral panic, as illustrated by Palmer's (2006) book, *Toxic Childhood*.

Concern with such assemblages has prompted Prout to call for a new framework for the study of children and childhood. Initially childhood studies were characterised by biological accounts of childhood. These are still evident where a developmental perspective is adopted; however, they have been largely displaced by social constructionist views of childhood (James et al, 1998; Prout, 2005). While these alternative views have opened new areas of questioning and illuminated new aspects of children's lives, they restrict any continuing role for biology in understandings of childhood because they privilege discourse as the medium through which childhood is constructed. Compromises between these two approaches have proved hard to stabilise because they are undercut by definitions of nature and culture which are mutually exclusive (Prout, 2005). As Prout (2005:144) asserts, the future of childhood studies rests on finding ways of treating childhood as a 'nature-culture' because '[childhood] is cultural,
biological, social, individual, historical, technological, spatial, material, discursive...and more'. Childhood studies need to move beyond dichotomies and adopt an approach that is relational. It is not enough to simply combine different frameworks; rather we need to fundamentally alter the basic parameters of our approach. We need to problematise oppositions by examining how they are produced (Latour, 2005), tracing the connections and mediations through which childhood comes into being. This requires a symmetrical or ecumenical approach, which regards both human and non-human entities as potentially important. Rather than making a priori assumptions about what is determinant, what matters is left open to empirical enquiry. This can be seen in recent work on children and ICTs, which illustrates that neither the child nor ICT can be essentialised as a stable entity because they shift according to their situational assemblage (Holloway and Valentine, 2001).

While the impetus for a relational approach stems largely from the perspective of Actor Network Theory, this is not the only 'field' to take this view. An ecumenical approach can also be seen in relation to 'activity theory' within developmental psychology (Engeström et al, 1999). It also frames the work of material culture scholars such as Daniel Miller and anthropologists such as Alfred Gell. I elaborate upon this work in the following section in which I establish the ecumenical framework of the present study.

**Material Geographies**

The oversight of the material aspects of children's everyday lives may be read as symptomatic of a broader neglect of matter and materiality within the 'new' Cultural Geography. This omission has been marked by high profile calls for a re-materialisation of Social and Cultural Geography, which assert that concern for the representational aspects of life has precluded sustained consideration of how things are practically used and lived with (see Jackson, 2000; Philo, 2000). The concern is not to prompt an indiscriminate shift of focus, which assumes the a priori importance of materiality. Rather, following Miller (1998b), these commentators emphasise the need to be attentive to when, where and how materiality makes a difference.
Whatmore (2006) has contextualised these calls for re-materialisation by drawing attention to the continuing presence of matter during the cultural turn. Referring primarily to the material geographies pertaining to vital connections between the *geo* (earth) and the *bio* (life), she protests against the need for (yet another) wholesale turn. She urges us to employ the language of materialist returns, arguing that recent material geographies are a product of repetition, ‘turning seemingly familiar matters over and over, like pebbles on a beach – rather than a product of sudden encounter or violent rupture’ (Whatmore, 2006:601). This perspective is strengthened by the multiple approaches taken to materiality, seen in a diverse array of work relating to the postcolonial (Cook and Harrison, 2003), the feminist (Nash, 2004), the urban (Lees, 2002), the performative (Dewsbury et al, 2002a) and landscape (Wylie, 2002). Social and Cultural Geography is now populated by a wide range of materialisms: Marxism (Mitchell, 1996), the relational materialism of Actor Network Theory (Hitchings, 2003), the affective materialism of non-representational theories (Anderson, 2004), corporeal feminism (Longhurst, 2000) and material culture studies (Gregson and Beale, 2004) to name but a few. This is exemplified by a special issue of the journal *Geoforum* (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004a). The vast array of topics that afford this multifarious engagement are suggested by the six papers collated in this issue, which address textural landscapes of migration, women’s clothing, political identities, the design of everyday objects, complementary and alternative medicine, and boredom. The difference between these materialisms precludes any simple postulation of matter and materiality, provoking geographical engagement with the question of materiality itself (see Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Kearnes, 2003). This is discussed further under the heading ‘Vital materialisms’.

The multiple approaches to the material and materiality are each marked by the academic exchange that informs them. In its materialist endeavour geography has engaged with, among others, science and technology studies, performance studies, feminist studies, archaeology and anthropology. Specific, although not limited to geography, is concern with how qualities of space-time are influenced by processual movements of matter and how materialities themselves have specific spatialities and temporalities (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004b). No one material geography can hope to engage with the range of materialisms now
addressed. However, several of the distinct theoretical resources drawn upon by material geographies are particularly relevant to the study considered in this thesis.

**Actor Network Thought**

The present study draws upon the relational materialism of Actor Network Theory (hereafter referred to as ANT) to employ an ecumenical approach in the study of children and material culture. It examines the shifting, heterogeneous assemblages from which children emerge, and exposes the contributions of toys to the dislocal social agency these assemblages embody.

Although originating in science and technology studies, ANT is now fairly well understood within geography. Geographers have been particularly keen to consider the spatial applications of an actor network approach (Murdoch, 1998). ANT has perhaps found its greatest expression in geographical concerns with more-than-human worlds (see Whatmore, 2002; 2006). A growing bodily sensibility within geography has drawn attention to corporeal involvements in a world that is not comprised of the indifferent stuff 'out there', but is co-fabricated in relation to more-than-human, socio-material assemblages. Humans are but one form of socio-material assemblage among many. The hybrid geographies (Whatmore, 1999; 2002) crafted from our more-than-human worlds attend to how the 'material and social intertwine in all manner of promiscuous combinations' (Thrift, 1996:24). It should be noted that efforts to work against the humanist commitments of cultural geography have not been limited to the philosophical resource of ANT. They have also drawn inspiration from feminist science studies (Haraway, 1997), corporeal materialisms (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 1968) and relational ontologies (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

To signal a commitment to addressing neither humans nor non-humans as givens, but as socio-material assemblages, ANT uses the term 'actant' to refer to both. It is understood that no actant is ever acting alone because they are embroiled in an 'actor-network'. Entities, human or non-human, are a product of the relationships in which they are located. These relationships are shifting,
thus the status of an entity is performed rather than fixed. 'Humans and non-
humans take on form by redistributing the competencies and performances of
the multitudes of actors that they hold onto and that hold onto them' (Latour,
1996:225). The term 'actant' also signals a commitment to treating agency as a
practical, relational achievement, rather than a basic biological attribute.
Entities demonstrate agency with respect to one another. The relation mobilises,
thus action is dislocal, not pertaining to any specific site. '[A]ction is borrowed,
distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated' (Latour,
2005:46).

A dislocal understanding of action prompts actor network theorists not to look
for causal links between entities, but to concern themselves with 'translations',
connections that do not transport causality one way, but induce two entities into
co-existing. 'When a force manipulates another, it does not mean that it is a
cause generating effects; it can also be an occasion for other things to start
acting' (Latour, 2005:60). Thus, dislocated action leads to controversial
accounts of agency. By mapping these controversies actor network theorists are
able to give agency form and force. Here agencies are presented as doing
something, through which they leave a trace that makes them visible. While the
entity doing the action is given a figure, be that ideo-, bio-, techno-, or anthro-
morphic, the figuration is not important because a single actant may appear as
different figures. It is how it acts that is significant.

Hitchings (2003) attends to conflicting (and complementary) accounts of
agency in his relational examination of gardens and gardeners by heeding
Latour's (1993) call to 'follow the actors' participating in action. When following
people, plants were portrayed as a passive 'skeleton' providing structure to the
gardeners' designs. When following plants – by talking to gardeners whilst in
close proximity to plants – they were found to each have their own strategies for
survival, which must be negotiated by the gardener. The existence of different
accounts is an outcome of the relational, performative nature of agency.
Successful performances of agential status depend on the denial of other
potential performances. For example, gardeners expressed their agency in
relation to plants by effacing the intense labour involved in the ordering of their
gardens.
ANT unshackles agency from the human subject by breaking from the assumption that it is predicated on particular cognitive and linguistic competences. Agency is imagined not only as cognitive, but as emotive and embodied (Law, 2004a). ANT does not attempt to reconcile the dichotomy of object and subject by establishing symmetry between humans and non-humans. Rather, it states that who or what participates in action should be thoroughly explored:

'So who is pulling the strings? Well, the puppets do in addition to their puppeteers. It does not mean that the puppets are controlling their handlers... It simply means that the interesting question at this point is not to decide who is acting and how but to shift from a certainty about action to an uncertainty about action — but to decide what is acting and how' (Latour, 2005:60, original emphasis).

This approach retains incommensurability between the different modes of action of objects and humans, stressing that the different types of forces underpinning collective action are able to weave together because they are different.

Although confusing given its title, ANT is not a theory (Latour, 1999; Law, 1999). Rather than being a way of thinking, its main exponents suggest it is a way of being; a sensitivity to the excess of generative forces that circulate and surround us. It is a way of being that allows for the indefinite, opening space for:

'a sense of the world as an unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that work to produce particular realities...the world is not a structure, something we can map with social science charts. We might think of it instead as a maelstrom or a tide-rip. Imagine it filled with currents, eddies, flows, vortices, unpredictable changes, storms, and with moments of lull and calm' (Law, 2004a:7).
In an engagement with ontological politics and social science method, Law (2004a) exposes and challenges the assumed singularity, anteriority, independence, definiteness and externality of reality.

My concern with children's material culture contrasts with a focus on the institutional context of action in geography's engagements with ANT (see O'Neill and Whatmore (2000) on businessmen; Murdoch and Marsden (1995) on politicians; Davies (2000) on film makers; and Woods (1998) on lobbyists). This focus is understandable because deliberate network construction – lending to more visible relations – is more likely in such contexts as jobs literally depend on it. The institution also provides a boundary for an approach that can drift empirically. However, critique of ANT has much to do with how it has been employed within the discipline, rather than being restricted to its essence (Hitchings, 2003; Murdoch, 1997). Conveying the topologies of power within these large institutional networks requires a necessary, but problematic reduction. Any contestations within the exercise of power are downplayed, causing the actions of certain actants to be privileged at the expense of others. Within this institutional context there is also a tendency for people to be reduced to Machiavellian calculative strategists. A sense of humanity is lost as the language of 'strategy' portrays actants as operating in deliberate, determined ways.

I adopt an alternative approach employed by Hitchings (2003). Rather than following wider networks, I focus on single links between children and toys. This allows me to attend to the precise contributions of toys to relational agency in terms of the creative capacities they offer, and offers space for ambivalent accounts of power. By exploring children's domestic playful practices I am able to engage with the emotion and subjectivity of human actants, allowing their humanity and love for their possessions to emerge. My engagement with domestic space and humanity regarding object relations also draws inspiration from the ecumenical approach of material culture studies.
Material Culture Studies

Although closely allied to the discipline of anthropology, material culture studies is an interdisciplinary field (Miller and Tilley, 1996). Coherence is found in a common emphasis on the mutuality between people and the material world, seen through explorations of how things shape practice and are simultaneously shaped by practice. As Graves-Brown (2000) contends, culture neither exists in the mind, nor independently in the world around us. It is an emergent property of the relationship between people and things. This challenges a view of the material world as merely a stage and of objects as props assuming any value chosen by human actors.

A congruence of interests between material culture and consumption is evident in anthropological work (see Miller, 1987; 1995; 1998b), and has been carried over into the use of this approach within geography (see Cook et al, 2004; Gregson, 2007; Gregson and Beale, 2004). This study of how children use toys is informed by the importance of what happens to commodities after purchase emphasised by this work. Miller (1987:190) describes this 'second phase of consumption' as:

‘the start of a long and complex process, by which the consumer works upon the object purchased and recontextualises it, until it is often no longer recognisable as having any relation to the world of the abstract’.

In response to Appadurai's (1986) call to study the 'social life of things', there has been sustained effort to trace the biographies and geographies of things beyond the moment and space of purchase. Such work explores the range of people, places and objects that these things have been related to and the knowledge that travels with them. It includes research on the production, exhibition and consumption of particular products (du Gay et al, 1997; Hebdige, 1988); work reconnecting producers and consumers of commodities (Cook et al, 2004); work on transnational geographies (Crang et al, 2003); research on collections of objects (Hill, 2007); and accounts of the lives of 'second-hand'
things (Gregson and Crewe, 2003) and practices of disposal (Gregson et al, 2007).

Within geography there is a particular concern with how the use of things relates to the production and consumption of space. Material culture provides resources for active inhabitation of the world and tools for re-appropriating landscapes that are produced by distant forces. This has been explored both in relation to public urban space (Spinney, 2006) and private domestic space (Rose, 2003). In such accounts things are not just passive recipients of cultural values and meanings, but have the power to transform space and our experience of it. Thrift (2003) examines how technological changes in material culture are changing the very nature of our geographies, creating 'intelligent spaces' with the capacity to act. This thesis contributes to this work by examining how imaginative spaces are configured through the use of toys.

The present study draws on a growing interest in the material culture of the home (Attfield, 2000; Miller, 2001a; Pink, 2004). This has become a key topic of study given the growing significance of the private sphere. Miller (2001a) explains that the intimate relationship we share with our home acts as a foundation for our increasingly mobile, hectic lives. He also asserts the home as the primary site of consuming practice. Work on appropriation in the home reveals the strains and contradictions of household relations that lie behind the apparent normative order of home life. These revelations emerge due to the ethnographic character of such work. While material culture studies is not constituted by ethnography – rather it is eclectic in its methods, employing approaches from history, archaeology, design and literature – an ethnographic approach is particularly pertinent to the study under consideration.

A key concern of the present study is 'why some things matter' in particular ways to particular people. It draws on an understanding that to engage with the degree to which some things matter to people it is necessary to appreciate the 'humility of things' (Miller, 2005). As Miller's (2001a) edited collection of essays on domestic material culture illustrates, the consequences of minor routines are often hidden as these practices are regarded as inconsequential. However, as Rose (2003) demonstrates in relation to family photographs, easily undertaken
forms of reordering bear significance on personal, intimate feelings. Objects are often important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but because we are not aware of them. This allows them to exist as unchallenged mechanisms for social reproduction and ideological domination (Miller, 1998b; 2005). Numerous studies of toys have discussed their effects in relation to social and ideological reproduction (Rogers, 1999; Wilkinson, 1974). However, these have relied on symbolic analysis, which reduces the material to overly abstract theoretical models such as formalism or structuralism derived from linguistic analogy. This approach treats objects as signs, displacing the degree to which things may matter by overlooking fundamental properties for users (Miller, 1998b). In contrast, the present study draws on material culture studies’ concern with the role of materiality and the significance of material form in the meaningfulness of things. This is not limited to physicalist attention, but is understood in relation to social significance. Miller (1998b:9) explains that ‘through dwelling upon the more mundane sensual and material qualities of the object, we are able to unpack the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values that are objectified through these forms, in part, because of the particular qualities they possess’. Rather than assuming the effects of a toy on a child, this study examines children’s practices of toy use.

To this end, it employs an ethnographic approach because this enables deeper involvement with people’s lives. It is possible to attend to the discrepancies between what people say matters to them in their consciously constructed narratives about the spectacular and the memorialised, and what they actually give their attention to in the routine practices of everyday living (Gregson, 2007; Miller, 2001a). Moving away from the tradition of formal and structural analysis, this approach allows us to see what matters to those being studied, rather than what is deemed important by those doing the studying (Gregson, 2007; Miller, 2001a). (The particular ethnographic approach employed in this study is explored in detail in chapter 3.) In this context the consumer is not individualised, but is encountered amidst the heterogeneous household unit. This allows us to see the

‘many conflicts between the agency expressed by individuals, by the family, the household, and not least...the house itself, that make the
private more a turbulent sea of constant negotiation than simply some haven for the self' (Miller, 2001a:4, my emphasis).

In this quote, Miller draws attention to the agency of objects within mutual relations between people and material culture. He addresses this agency in relation to the house itself as a possessing form, emphasising how the power of objects can be situated in their mundane application (Miller, 2001b).

My study deliberately attends to the agency of toys as performed in their relations with children to develop a depth of understanding of why and how they matter. It draws inspiration from this concern with how object agency functions in 'ordinary consumption' (Martens et al, 2004). A concern with object agency is also found in geographical studies of material culture. For example, in a study of amulets, Hill (2007) explores how mundane objects are given magical power through the ritual of everyday performance. Similarly, Sansi-Roca (2005) attends to the agency of 'religious' stones generated by the object's 'untranscended materiality' or obstinate presence. A haunting presence, manifesting from the past lives of things, is common to these studies of agency. I draw upon this theme in an examination of the absent presence of Barbie in collections of Bratz dolls in chapter 5. It is this concern with object agency that I now turn to directly.

The agency of objects

Concern with the mutuality between people and things, and the agency objects perform in these relations is not restricted to material culture studies within anthropology. We can also look to Alfred Gell's engagement with art objects – ranging from 'primitive' Marquesan carvings to the work of Western artists like Marcel Duchamp – and his thesis on enchantment and technology. I draw upon this work to add texture to understandings of relational agency, which can tend towards ontological monism (Lorimer, 2007).

For Gell (1998), art objects of all forms mediate a technology to 'enmesh' their audience in relations and intentionalities sought by their makers. Similar to material culture studies, there is a rejection of a semiotic approach. Gell is keen
to illustrate how the technical virtuosity of art objects themselves is central to the effacious agency they demonstrate. Art objects are understood as technologies in the sense that they are productive of effects, motivating inferences, interpretations and responses. Gell focuses on the particular technological capability of enchantment (Gell, 1992) or captivation (Gell, 1998). (This is explored in greater detail in chapters 4 and 6.) Akin to ANT, the attribution of agency rests on its effects. It is understood that an agent cannot be recognised before they act because it is the act of doing that leaves a trace, making them visible. Again agency is understood as relational, being a function of the 'social-relational matrix' in which objects are embedded. However, the networks in which Gell's art objects are positioned are networks of human social agency. Gell's theory has been characterised as a theory of inferred intentionality where the products of people become an individual's distributed personhood and extended mind. Human agency is translated into effects provoked by the objects they make (Miller, 2005). Whereas actor network theorists like Latour look to the agency of non-humans, Gell looks through objects to the embedded human agency he infers they contain. This causes Gell (1998) to be more conservative than actor network theorists in his dealings with relational networks. He attends to causal chains rather than unfolding networks, representing these in a formulaic manner, using one headed arrows to connote unidirectional causality. This contrasts sharply with Latour's (2005) concern with translation and concatenations of actants.

Critique of Gell's work is also offered by Pinney and Thomas' (2001) edited collection, Beyond Aesthetics. This collection of essays takes Gell's (1998) Art and Agency as a key point of reference, both extending particular ideas and dissenting from certain aspects of his argument. Two main challenges to his work centre on his attempt to exclude linguistic meaning from the interpretation of art and his oversight of the politics of art. His concern with captivation forms a key theme of the book and is extended both within the domain of tribal art (Bolton, 2001; Campbell, 2001; D'Alleva, 2001), and beyond it in Miller's (2001c) discussion of Trinidadian websites. This theme is also extended by Harrison's (2006) account of Aboriginal spearheads produced in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Here it is extended to a colonial context and engages with questions of authenticity. (Benjamin (1999a) has also
explored captivation and intoxication with regard to a fascination with technology.)

One of my particular concerns with Gell's work is an extrapolation that the productivity of objects, as technologies, is a function of the particular kinds of agency the object embodies. This has been developed as a central concern of this thesis. In his (1998) account of decorative art he discusses how captivation is exerted by the index (or object) in and of itself, rather than being the outcome of the prior human agency of the artist. While Gell chooses to prioritise a particular kind of agency related to an object's origination, he states that there is no generic form of agency and no limit to the type of action that may be involved in its doing. This point is reiterated by his assertion that not all art objects are productive of this specific form of agency. There are objects that may fall under the auspices of the anthropology of art that have no significance as 'works of art' because nobody attends to their making as a particularly salient feature of their agency. This is not to say that they do not perform agency, rather their agency may take a different form.

To examine the particular kinds of agency that toy objects embody, this study embraces Gell's discussion of 'distributed personhood' and the 'extended mind', along with his discussion of enchantment and captivation (see my discussion of model aeroplanes in chapter 4). Inspired by his notion of different object agencies, it also looks beyond his work to explore alternative forms of effacious agency. Responding to Miller's call to dwell upon the mundane and sensual qualities of objects, I also look to work within archaeology, which is particularly concerned with material form. Saunders (1999) explores how properties of materials matter through an examination of the 'aesthetic of brilliance' in relation to pearls, glass and precious metals. Through discussion of the different valuations accorded to these materials by Europeans and Amerindians, he asserts how material properties matter to different people for different reasons.

In his study of the relations between people and objects in the prehistory of South-Eastern Europe, Chapman (2000) discusses the importance of material properties to processes of enchainment. This involves the creation of chains of personal relations through the exchange of artefacts. Initially this centred on
practices of fragmentation, where larger objects were broken down into smaller pieces to be exchanged. With the introduction of metals, which were harder to fragment, there was a shift to practices of accumulation. Sets of small goods were manufactured so that they could be divided and (re)combined to enable the continuation of relations based on part-whole symbolism. MacGregor (1999) draws attention to the material properties of objects as he discusses the need to consider our sensory perception of artefacts to deepen interpretations of their biographies. To this end, Rainbird (1999) discusses the need to consider different types of objects (such as pottery and tombs) in relation to one another because object biographies are often entangled. (Gell (1998) also explores how objects are shaped in relation to other objects in an 'inter-artefactual domain'.) In a polemic argument, Ingold (2007:2) urges us to attend specifically to composite materials, 'the tangible stuff of craftsmen and manufacturers'. He stresses that material properties are not inherent in a substance, but emerge in its involvement with its surroundings, which may comprise people, but necessarily comprises media such as air. Objects are understood as 'hives of activity, pulsing with the flows of materials that keep them alive' (Ingold, 2007:12). While Ingold positions his materials approach in contrast to attempts to seek out the agency of things, I draw upon his argument to elucidate how materials can be another source of object agency.

Vital materialisms

The ability of the material world to captivate has also found expression in emerging geographies of enchantment, concerned with moments, events and encounters that reveal the power of objects and sites to delight and enrapture. This work elaborates on Jane Bennett's (2001:5) exposition of enchantment as:

'a mood of fullness, plentitude, or liveliness, a sense of having one's nerves or circulation or concentration powers turned up or recharged – a shot in the arm, a fleeting return to childlike excitement about life'.

Enchanting geographies draw together work on affect and materiality to address how enchantment is evident in many of the material aspects and secular spaces
of modern everyday life. This includes, but is not limited to film and tourist sites (Smith, 2007), shop window displays (Edwards, 2007), domestic gardens (Bhatti et al, 2009), telecommunications technology (Geoghegan, 2007), tourist souvenirs (Ramsay, 2009) and taxidermy animals (Patchett, 2007). Similar to the relational approaches of ANT and Gell, this work focuses on what matter does rather than what it is. While much of this work addresses the positive register of enchantment, McEwan (2008) has explored its more disturbing elements in a discussion of ghosts and haunting.

This enchanted materialism shares similarities with a broader affective materialism. Drawing on non-representational theory's engagement with affect, this work thinks through the matter of immaterialities (Anderson, 2004). Before expanding on the concept of affect itself, it is worth noting the broader concerns of non-representational theory (hereafter NRT) with which this thesis engages, so as to set discussion of affect in a wider context. These broader concerns may be characterised as an engagement with mundane everyday practices; the momentary way in which the world unfolds; practical, non-cognitive, pre-reflective ways of knowing and doing; and a radical decentring of the human subject.

Non-representational theory values mundane everyday practices in and for themselves (Thrift, 1997; 2000a). It provides a non-intentionalist account of the world, concerning itself with the moment by moment way we conduct our everyday social lives, without sustained contemplation or deliberation (Thrift, 1997; 2000a). It draws on a conception of the world in which the event is primary (Thrift, 2004a). It thus foregrounds openness and potentiality as it understands each actual event to lie amidst many alternatives, possibilities that exceed actualities. Events are not the predictable outcome of earlier events as each event embodies surplus, which allows it to surprise. This is not to say there is never repetition or the semblance of order. The potential of an event is always constrained because it takes place within networks of power that have been constructed to ensure iteration. The capacity to surprise may therefore remain latent, but is nevertheless present (Thrift, 2000a).
NRT understands the present in its own right (Thrift, 2000a), concerning itself with performative presentations and manifestations rather than representations and meaning (Thrift, 1997). It provides a guide to the part of our everyday geographies that is practised rather than cognitive (Thrift, 1997). It thus reconfigures what counts as explanation and knowledge (Thrift, 1997; 2000a), valorising the sensate, that which is felt and sensed by the embodied being (Harrison, 2000). It invents new relations between thought and life (Thrift, 2004), layering affect into thinking. The non-cognitive – practical and intuitive – is not separated from the cognitive; it is not external to it, but rather woven into it (Harrison, 2000; Harker, 2005). This reconfiguration of knowledge prompts calls for modesty, questioning how much we can know, and what counts as expertise (Thrift, 2004a). This changes the ethos of engagement with the world, opening new roles for the researcher and new ways of practising research. This issue is explored in detail in chapter 3.

A further tenet of NRT is its radical decentring of the human subject. Following Rose (1996), we may think of the human subject as a discontinuous surface, which is the target of nonhuman and inhuman forces that exceed its corporeality. This surface is a process involving a bewildering host of proximal relations. Such an understanding of the human subject allows space for the exposition of the way the nonhuman or inhuman participates in action. The particular commitment of this thesis to NRT is discussed in chapter 8. Having outlined the broad tenets of this body of work I shall now return to matter of affect.

While there is no universal definition of affect (see Thrift (2004b) for discussion of its use across divergent literatures), geographical work has drawn explicitly on Massumi’s (2002) articulation of affect as emergent intensity. While the term ‘affect’ is often used interchangeably with related terms like ‘feeling’ and ‘emotion’, non-representational work focuses on a conception of affect as transpersonal ‘broad tendencies and lines of force’ (Thrift, 2004b:60), which are differentiated from intimate, individualised ways of being. Affects are bodily capacities to affect and be affected that animate or dampen the space-times of experience of everyday life (Anderson, 2006; Clough and Halley, 2007; Stewart, 2007). Affect is understood to emerge from relations between (human and non-
human) bodies and the encounters that those relations are entangled in (Anderson, 2006; Harker, 2005). It does not reside in either subject or object, but rather inhabits the passage between them. It takes place in the in-between of the relation through various processes of translocal movement, such as circulation, flow, transmission and contagion (Anderson, 2006). Affect is excessive in its movement, 'a ceaselessly oscillating foreground/background' (Seigworth, 2000:232, cited in Anderson, 2006).

Through a discussion of hope, Anderson (2006) develops a theory of affect, which provides a concise articulation of the related modalities of affect, feeling and emotion. Feelings are corporeal expressions of the movement of affect; 'proprioceptive and visceral shifts in the background habits, and postures, of the body' (2006:736), such as the coiled visceral tension of frustration. They are literal impingements of affect on the body, which act as an instantaneous assessment of its force. Emotions are subjective; intensity that is personally owned. They are (sociolinguistic) qualifications of affect, which are named retrospectively of their experience. The relation between these different modalities has no a priori direction or causality. They fold into each other, weaving together to construct space-times of experience (Anderson, 2006; Clough and Halley, 2007).

Despite this enfolding, affect exceeds its expression or qualification because it is tied to the presence of abundant virtualities that are folded into what becomes actual. Feelings and emotions are produced through actualisations, and therefore, can never coincide with the totality of affective movement. This prompts the expression and qualification of affect to be seen as frictional processes of capture and closure (Anderson, 2006). An articulation of affect as an excessive open system posits the world as 'emergent eventuality', a lively sphere of plentitude that never comes to rest or resolve, being always-already animated by the presence of potentiality and possibility (Dewsbury et al, 2002b:439).

This idea of excess has also been used to think through how qualities associated with immateriality are internal to matter; how materialities express intensive qualities that exceed the sensible or intelligible (Anderson and Wylie, 2009). As
Massumi (2002:35) writes '[a]ctually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them'. Affect has been examined in relation to a range of various materialities, including those of music (Anderson, 2006), cities (Thrift, 2004b), pencil cases (Harker, 2005) and lost clothing (Bissell, 2009). The idea of abundant excess also informs Crouch's (2001; 2003) work on the processes of 'becoming'; processes that involve the reconstitution or reconfiguration of life resulting from a shared intimacy with material spatialities. These processes are examined in relation to the particular material spatialities of allotment gardening and recreational caravanning. Becoming is opening up to the unexpected in the excess of multiple possibilities existing within particular combinations of spaces, things and moments.

In relation to the notion of abundant excess, Anderson (2004; 2006) keenly stresses that the assumption of a constant 'more to life' risks erasing types of relation that enact forms of suffering and misery. Through discussion of hope (2006) and boredom (2004) he illustrates how the affectivities of different types of relation can be witnessed in a lessening of life that occurs in depleted, rather than energetically enhanced, space-times. For instance, boredom, which takes place when the 'more' does not occur, lessens the immanent vitality of our background bodily feeling, suspending the body's capacity to affect and be affected. As a result, space-time is stilled and slowed, feeding back into the body's incapacity. Engagement with the affectivities of different types of relation is also found beyond geography. In Ordinary Affects, Kathleen Stewart (2007) traces the range of affects, from the funny through to the traumatic, experienced within everyday life in contemporary America. This series of brief vignettes addresses a panoply of 'things' and 'spaces', including old letters and makeshift shrines, yard sales and traffic jams. Clough and Halley's (2007) edited collection, The Affective Turn, also examines the different facets of affect, addressing such issues as the trauma of cultural displacement and the political economy of affective labour.

Anderson (2004; 2006) illustrates how affects are necessarily entangled in the circulation and displacement of other affects, feelings and emotions. He emphasises how movements of affects are 'not cumulative, teleological or comprehensive', but rather swerve and spiral around each other (2004:747). For
instance, hope is described as emerging from diminishment, which takes place through a series of affective expressions including boredom, loneliness and lethargy (Anderson, 2006). Similarly, boredom is set in the context of affectivities of joy, hope and despair. Despite being still and static, boredom discloses an enabling will-to-connect differently and has a power to set things in motion (Anderson, 2004).

Notwithstanding an emerging interest in expressions and qualifications of affect that diminish and destroy, an attunement to the openness of matter remains central to the broader idea of 'vital materialisms'. It is realised that the reality of materiality is never exhausted as it stands in a complex present related to, and dependent on an indeterminate potentiality (Massumi, 2002) and the complex times and spaces of the absent (Law and Mol, 2001). In addition to the idea of excess, Anderson and Wylie (2009) address this complexity and indeterminacy of matter through the 'material imaginations' of turbulence and interrogation. Drawing on relational theories of matter and materiality (such as the work of actor network theorists, the relational ontologies of Deleuze and Guattari, and the material semiotics of Serres), the idea of turbulence attends to the continual gathering and distribution of multiple, differential relations, from which materialities emerge. It is stressed that matter may 'take-place' in any state or element, with its properties and capacities being an effect of its assembly. The idea of interrogation draws upon Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh and Lingis' phenomenology of perception to cast matter as provocation to sense and perception.

Understanding the complexity of matter and materialities in terms of their openness, and enchanting, affective potential provides useful and critical insight into how what matters to individuals may be constituted. However, it requires an ethological attunement to the minutae of practice (Anderson, 2006), which may be understood as a generous sensibility to the world (Bennett, 2001; McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2004a). It requires us to 'slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects' that affect us (Stewart, 2007:4). This issue is addressed in greater detail in chapter 3 through methodological discussion.
Differences and similarities can be drawn between the different approaches to matter and materiality outlined here. However, common to all is a move away from matter as an inert, blank canvas to a focus on the processes whereby things achieve specific capacities and effects. In summary, material geographies are motivated by questions about the intimacy of subject-object relations, and how liveliness and agency are distributed between humans and non-humans.

**Toys and Videogames**

Toys remain strangely absent from the diverse subject matter addressed by studies concerned with the material. In part, this is due to their association with play, which is commonly understood as gratuitous, set apart from ‘real’, ‘ordinary’ life (Bauman, 1993). As a result, play is frequently overlooked as an irrelevant aspect of people’s social worlds. An object’s ‘identification as a toy relegates the significance of the artefact to the level of curiosity’ (Sofaer Derevenski, 2000:7). In this section I offer an account of (the limited) academic engagement with toys to date to contextualise the approach taken by this thesis. While videogames were encountered as but one toy among many in this study, they are afforded their own subsection in this chapter given the existence of a dedicated field of videogame theory.

*The developmental psychology perspective*

The truism that ‘play is the work of children, and toys are their tools’ (Cross, 1997:vi) has informed almost a century of work within the field of child development. This work is not interested in the toy per se because it focuses on the phenomenon of play, which is framed as a process of cultural and social learning, and emotional, cognitive and physical development. Toys are present as objects children act upon, causing their character to be abstracted. They are used as markers in developmental progressions of play, gradually disappearing in the sequential transitions that demonstrate a child’s social and intellectual advancement. This is referred to as a process of decontextualisation, whereby the child progresses from the manipulation of actual objects to engagement with
imaginary objects (Gottfried, 1985). The subjects of this research are preschoolers or children in their first years of primary education.

Traditionally, concern centred on the role of the social environment in children's development. This approach has since been complemented by moves to include the role of the physical environment. Bradley (1985) reports that this stimulated interest in the significance of toys, games and play materials as contexts for intellectual development. Erwin (1993) provides a summary of various empirical studies examining the relationship between the presence and availability of different types of toy and social behaviour. Within these studies, the specific functions of toys are not considered, or at least not reported. Rather, toys are categorised according to typologies, such as social (e.g. playing cards) and isolate (e.g. puzzles). The focus of these studies is social behaviour, which is posited as an index of intellectual development. Toys are conceptualised as mediators of social interaction. Within this framework of intellectual advancement, different toys are deemed appropriate, and in some cases necessary, for different stages of development. Tudor-Hart (1955) describes how toys encountered at the 'wrong' stage are potentially harmful in the sense of prohibiting progression, and are thus labelled 'bad'. This basic categorisation of toys as 'good' or 'bad' continues to permeate popular understandings of toys (see McClary, 2004). For instance, it is employed in discourses surrounding educational toys and media-driven toys. While the former are 'good' in relation to their capacity to stimulate development (Nadesan, 2002), the latter are 'bad' because they inhibit children's imaginative capabilities and prohibit parent-child interaction (Kline, 1989).

Almquist (1994) questions the distinction between educational toys and their counterparts, which are non-educational by implication. This essay is part of a collection edited by Goldstein (1994), which is distinct in its emphasis on the mutual relations between toys, play and child development. It examines how individual differences between children, such as gender, influence the type and effects of play, how different styles of play influence how toys are used, and how the toy itself may influence play. For instance, the contribution by Pelligrini and Jones (1994) rejects a unidirectional view of the role of toys in social interaction, favouring a transactional view in which children and toys influence each other.
This perspective raises the profile of the toy from that of tool upon which to act, but the precise nature and character of the toy still remains abstract in their account. The essay focuses on the role of play and toys in the development of language. This is evidence of developmental psychology's enduring assumption that cognition is the dominant modality of experience. A preoccupation with cognitive development is witnessed in this work's quantitative character and its reliance on measurements and modelling tactics. This fixation denies the existence of broader meanings and emotions attached to toys. The present qualitative study directly intervenes in this limitation. By attending to embodied practices of toy use it addresses sentimental and sensuous meanings of toys, offering accounts of agency that are emotive and embodied as well as cognitive.

The toy as historically contingent artefact

Theorising childhood as a social discourse prompts an understanding of the toy as a historically contingent artefact. Its meaning in any particular era is critically bound to the dominant conception of childhood of that same historical moment. The meaning of toys is not only influenced by discourses of childhood, it is also implicit in the social practices sustaining them. Historians have traced the social history of toys, using rich illustrations and poetic text to 'bring the story of toys instantly to life and evoke nostalgic memories of every childhood' (Culff, 1969:i; Fraser, 1966). They evidence the contemporary romanticism and enchantment surrounding toys. This is specifically addressed in Kuznets's (1994) examination of narratives employed in toy literature.

Social commentators have used the history of toys to chart changing cultural ideals about childrearing and the nature of childhood (Calvert, 1992; Cross, 1997; Fleming, 1996). Three critical moments are identified in the history of toys. The first is the secularisation of toy-like objects in the Renaissance period. Prior to this the ritualistic object and plaything are blurred. In the Renaissance, a prolonged childhood was established, at least among the upper classes, which was based on an emerging understanding of children as distinct from adults. This prompted the small scale craft production of toys in the sixteenth century. The second significant moment occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when the social and educational purposes of toys were
clearly articulated in educational movements based on the theories of John Locke. The third is the materialisation of the 'modern' toy with the emergence of a playful image of the child. Economic and social changes stimulated the domestication of home space and a changing ideal of family life centred on the child. A reduction of family size prompted the rise of the solitary child and a need for distractions in the absence of siblings. Toys became celebratory of a romantic notion of playful childhood, filling the time and space set aside for the free development of imagination. Social biographies of toys have also been used to articulate changes in wider social and cultural values and beliefs beyond childhood (Formanek-Brunell, 1993).

Accounts of the history of toys tend towards a linear discussion of changing social discourses and ideals (see Cross, 1997; Fleming, 1996). In contrast, Sutton-Smith (1986) emphasises that different ideals about childhood and childrearing do not succeed and replace one another; rather elements of each may persist. In his book, *Toys as Culture*, he presents four narratives of the toy associated with the modern family, technology and science, educational history and practice, and the marketplace to stress how toys are enmeshed in a complex web of social discourses. This theme is also present in Nadesan's (2002) examination of the discourse of 'brain science' in relation to contemporary growth in sales of 'educational toys'. This work brings together scientific discourse employing neuropsychology, educational discourse concerned with intellectual development, and discourse surrounding technological advancement in the service of the marketplace. The present study actively addresses the discursive figure of the child consumer (Cook, 2004a) and its influence on contemporary understandings of children's toys and play.

*Toys as instruments of socialisation*

New articulations of childhood are accompanied by new strategies of control and discipline. With the move to a 'socialising mode' of childrearing in the nineteenth century, disciplinary practices became less a process of conquering and more a process of guiding, teaching children to conform to particular cultural and social norms (Fleming, 1996; Nadesan, 2002). A number of scholars have examined elements of children's culture as instruments of
socialisation (Dixon, 1990; Klugman, 1999; Wilkinson, 1974). Toys are deemed important in this regard as children engage with them before they can read and understand spoken language (Bloom, 2004; Dixon, 1990; Hespos and Spiekle, 2004).

This approach to children's culture has been mainly developed through feminist theory's concern with how gender is constructed through children's texts (Clark and Higonnet, 1999) and toys (Klugman, 1999). The Barbie doll in particular, has been condemned for conveying certain gender and feminine ideals, based on beauty, passivity and heterosexuality (Rogers, 1999). Other social categories, such as race and ethnicity (du Cille, 1994; Wilkinson, 1974), and class (Cross, 1997) have also been addressed. As instruments of socialisation, toys have also been viewed as reflections of the socio-historical and ideological context of society. Whilst many studies adopting this approach are condemnatory in character, others seek out positive messages carried by particular toys. For instance, Tosa (1997) relates Barbie's varied curriculum vitae - showing a progression from fashion model (1959) to ballerina and air stewardess (1961), to business executive (1985), to astronaut (1986) and then presidential candidate (1992) – to the growing independence and self-empowerment of American women. Concern about the ideological content of toys extends beyond academia, as demonstrated by contemporary popular debate about the violent content and negative effects of war toys and 'shoot-'em-up' videogames (Palmer, 2006).

These examinations of children's culture adopt a method of analysis that approaches toys as texts, reading them for the particular messages they transmit. Little consideration is given to the potential gap in ideology and reception. This is especially problematic since the authors, producers and critics of these cultural products are almost never members of presumed audiences (Clark and Higonnet, 1999). Although not offering a contrary, Sutton-Smith (1986) rebukes this approach as a form of prejudice. A number of accounts rely on the observations and testimonies of parents (Klugman, 1999) rather than rigorous empirical study. Even attempts to offer alternative readings have relied on a semiotic approach (Toffoletti, 2007), or have looked to recollections of childhood play (Rand, 1995) or adult practices of collecting (Spiegel, 2001). A
notable exception is Wegener-Spohring's (1994) account of what play with war toys involves and means to children. This alternative approach allows parental fears about war toys and aggressive play to be unpacked. Taking inspiration from the work of Fleming (1996), I attend directly to children’s use of toys through empirical study, rather than assuming their effects in an *a priori* manner. While each toy has its own history and set of cultural reference points that influence its meaning, they do not determine it. Fleming emphasises the need to be sensitive to the historical and semiotic structuring of the field of meaning in which toys operate, but conceptualises the toy as an ‘effect’ to stress the interplay between the meanings acting upon the toy and the simultaneous meanings generated by the toy itself.

*Toys in consumer culture*

Discussing the historical study of toys, Burton (1997) suggests that academic analysis of the social context of toys has lagged while popular consciousness of the issue has sharpened. Toys constitute a restricted field of study, evidenced in the disparate nature of toy research. Very little is known about toys and their uses. However, drawing on personal childhood experiences and for some, continued engagement with toys through parenthood, people often offer themselves as an authority on the subject (Strom, 1969; Sutton-Smith, 1986).

At the core of much contemporary popular debate about toys and the nature of children’s play is concern about the increasing commodification of childhood, commercialisation of children’s culture, and the seemingly autonomous character of the market (Cook, 2004a). Two recurrent, interrelated themes can be identified in work examining children’s consumer culture: morality and nostalgia. In relation to morality, Kline (1993:12) explains, '[t]he consumerist vector of our society sometimes appears disturbing when we see it reflected and expressed in children’s behaviour'. This relates to a concern that traditional values, discipline and sensibilities are being lost, because contemporary marketing has displaced parents as mediators of culture. Specifically, there is concern about children’s loss of innocence due to their increased exposure to adult themes of sex and violence (Postman, 1983), their adoption of a materialistic philosophy as expressed in the contemporary ‘I want’ culture, and
their loss of imaginative capabilities as the commercial character of contemporary children's (media) culture diminishes the richness of play (Kline, 1989).

Cross (1997) and Fleming (1996) set changes in toy manufacturing, marketing and retailing within the broader context of the history of modern consumer society to temper such arguments. They illustrate how changes in the toy industry and the nature of toys are read in isolation from the changing structure of post-industrial economies and the changing values of society. Changes in the toy industry are the culmination of a century long development. From their beginnings, toys have shared an intimate relationship with commerce. For instance, dolls began their long history as advertisers of the latest women's fashions (Cross, 1997). It was a changing discourse of childhood and a shift to a child centred approach to parenting that allowed children their own material culture of play. Fleming (1996) has charted the rise of the contemporary 'I want' demand, stressing how it is not simply a side effect of commodification because it depends on a changing relationship between parent and child for part of its effect. Chan (2004) draws attention to the role of the socialising forces of the school and the family in shaping children's perceptions and attitudes toward material possessions and children's expressions of anti-materialistic value orientation.

A strong sense of nostalgia obscures continuities in the history of the toy industry. This is a particular form of nostalgia for a way things never were and for an alternate sense of being that can never be recaptured. Jones (2003) and Philo (2003) discuss this nostalgia as an admixture of adult imagination and memory. It is a nostalgia cloaked in the mysticism and the innocence of childhood. Cross (2004) explores the irony of this innocence, questioning its character and society's obsession with it in this age of consumption. Nostalgic impulses are particularly evident in the recent growth of 'retro' toys (Mintel, 2002a) and adult cultures of toy collecting. These collecting cultures sustain the iconic status of certain toys, such as Dinky toys (Richardson and Richardson, 2000; Trench, 1986), Barbie (Jacobs, 1994; Tosa, 1997) and Action Man (Harrison, 2003; Taylor, 2003). For collectors, the toy possesses two primary functions. One is its aesthetic quality, expressed in practices of display. (Burton
Moral debate about the relationship between children's culture and consumer society is fuelled by this nostalgia for an 'authentic' and 'traditional' childhood. The present study intervenes in this debate. Taking inspiration from Fleming's (1996) notion of the child as (re)constructor, and a broader literature on the (re)appropriation of commodities (Hebdige, 1988; Miller, 1992; 1998c) this study confronts tales of children's loss of creative functions, and the nature of their engagements with violence (see chapter 7) and representations of sexuality (see chapter 5). This approach allows the child to be conceived as more than a mere sponge of prescribed meanings and a follower of scripted play, while acknowledging that this reworking of meaning is not without constraint. Attention to the (re)appropriation of meaning prevents denial of children's experience (Strom, 1969). A willingness to engage with children has long been a trait of cultural industries and is seen as an essential step in their development (Kline, 1993). Through their products, the cultural industries validate children's emotional and fantastic experiences, which have tended to be effaced in academic studies of toys.

**Videogames**

As toys, videogames are unique in the fact that they are now an established cultural form with its own history, worthy of academic attention (Buckingham, 2006; Poole, 2000; Wolf and Perron, 2003). This is marked by the international journal *Game Studies* and comprehensive publications such as Wolf and Perron's (2003) *The Videogame Theory Reader*.

The theme of remediation is a common feature of videogame studies. This is not altogether surprising given the prevalence of what Kinder (1991) refers to as 'transmedia intertextuality', different media operating in parallel to exploit a franchise. For instance, a film and multiplatform game version of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was simultaneously released in November 2001. Initially the direction of crossover was from film and television to videogame,
with games operating as but one spin-off product in a vast proliferation. However, in the 1990s films began to be inspired by videogames, for example, Super Mario Bros (1993), Street Fighter (1994) and Mortal Kombat: the movie (1995). Stylistic devices and tropes borrowed from cinema are clearly evident in games in terms of genre (predominantly science fiction, horror and action adventure), stylistic landscapes, cutscenes (short ‘pre-rendered’ audio-visual sequences) and point-of-view structures (see King and Krzywinska (2003) for specific examples). Connections between videogames and cinema are not restricted to the stylistic. The development and production of videogames has also taken on the characteristics and scale of the film industry. According to Sony’s Annual Report (2000), for the year ending March 2000, sales and operating revenue for the Sony Corporation, which is home to both Sony Pictures and the PlayStation platform, totalled $4.6 billion from pictures and $5.9 billion from games (King and Krzywinska, 2003).

The first wave of game scholars was preoccupied with narratology, studying games through recourse to existing literary and Humanities based methods for understanding texts (Atkins, 2003; Carr, 2006; Rehak, 2003). The computer was approached as a media form rather than a game. While videogames share a number of elements with other media forms, there is growing consensus that the videogame is ‘an artistic genre of its own, a unique aesthetic field of possibilities, which must be judged on its own terms’ (Aarseth, 1997:106-7). Denial of this causes videogames to be trivialised in relation to other cultural forms that have achieved prestige as forms of expression. The uniqueness of videogames rests in their facilitation of ‘interactivity’, a distinctive mode of relating to audio-visual representations. In focussing on the game’s textual properties, narratology struggles to account for this interactivity. Text and user are constructed as separate entities. This representational approach has been strongly criticised, for instance, Aarseth (2004:54) explains:

‘The sheer number of students trained in film and literary studies will ensure that the slanted and crude misapplication of ‘narrative’ theory to games will continue and probably overwhelm game scholarship for a long time to come’.
(See Aarseth (1997) for discussion of the problematic definition of 'interactivity'.)

Representational approaches to the study of videogames provide little idea about what it might be like to play a game, and how we move between actual interface operation and navigation of mediated space. A new wave of scholars is emphasising the experiential properties of videogames, stressing that the pleasure of gaming is not principally visual. This shift encompasses a turn to ludology. Ludologists attend to the structural qualities that distinguish videogames from other forms of mediated experience, focusing on the 'rule set' of the game and how it structures the experience of gameplay. They approach games as activities rather than static texts, looking to theories of play, such as Caillois's typologies of play and Turner's examination of play in relation to ritual (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006).

Concern with interactivity has tended to focus on the concept of immersion – the degree to which a player is ‘caught up’ in the game – not least because this has been a key concern for game developers (Lahti, 2003). The ability to judge the possible levels of immersion generated by a game has also become significant in a legal context in which games are labelled addictive, inductive of hallucinatory trances and blamed as a source of crime. The turn of academic attention to the concept of interactivity has prompted recognition of how videogames, as an audio-visual cultural form, radically reconfigure the role of aesthetic engagement as it has been traditionally understood (Darley, 2000). This challenges the theories of established disciplines such as art theory and literary theory (Buckingham, 2006).

Concern with the experiential properties of videogames has prompted two emerging lines of research: an interest in the social dimensions of gaming; and a focus on the embodied nature of gameplay. Research that addresses games as texts or predominantly visual forms has ignored the social aspects of gameplay by limiting focus to the relation between individual mind and screen. Approaches drawing on research traditions within the Social Sciences and audience based research are beginning to address this neglect. This is not limited to collaborative play (Schott and Kambouri, 2006), but also addresses
the interpersonal interaction involved in the wider culture of gaming (Buckingham, 2006; Crawford and Rutter, 2007). Such work is important for counteracting claims about the antisocial characteristics that gaming, as an isolated activity, is thought to breed. As representational approaches to videogames construct the text and user as separate entities, central concepts such as ‘gameplay’ – the complex interaction between player and game – remain underdeveloped. In response, recent studies have asserted the importance of gameplay as an embodied and technologically mediated experience (Bayliss, 2007; Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). This work emphasises the cybernetic character of gameplay, drawing on phenomenology to examine the relations between player, interface and avatar. Through its concern with embodied practices of toy use, this thesis draws on these recent strands of work. In return it contributes to studies of videogames by directly attending to the material technologies involved in gameplay, which have tended to be excluded from the general discourses that have emerged around interactivity and immersion (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006).

In Summary

In this chapter I have outlined a paucity of empirical work on children’s domestic geographies of play and a lack of engagement with the materiality of toys. In doing so, I have asserted how the present study directly addresses this dearth by attending to embodied practices of play within the home and the creative capacities, or agential powers, of toys as nonhuman actants. The co-fabricated character of our social worlds forms an overarching theme for this chapter. This was particularly emphasised in discussion of material geographies and a concern for object agencies. However, it is also expressed in relation to the centrality of commodities in our everyday lifeworlds. In terms of a concern with agential power, it is worth noting the particular consensual approach to theory adopted by this thesis so as to recognise its implications for a theory of object agency.

As demonstrated in this chapter, this thesis finds insight and inspiration in multiple theoretical resources. Here it adopts the concept of co-fabrication not only as a theoretical tool for understanding the complexity of our social worlds,
but also as a metaphorical methodological device for approaching theory. It weaves the commonalities of different theoretical resources together, bringing them to bear in subtle and creative ways. Here the aim is not to develop a resolute theory of object agency in and for itself. Rather, it is to elucidate an understanding of object agency for the purpose of unpacking the meaningfulness of toys in children’s everyday lives. Thus, it seizes upon the understanding of agency as doing, as a practical relational achievement, within actor network thought as a means to trace its presence in everyday lived practices. It brings a notion of there being no generic form of agency, traced from Gell’s work, together with ANT’s notion of agency as emotive and embodied as well as cognitive, to develop a concept of object agencies. A concern with material form seen in material culture studies and archaeology, is set alongside an engagement with the matter of immaterialities from vital materialisms, to extend this understanding of the different forms agency may take. Gell’s concern with enchantment and captivation is also applied to develop a sense of the different ways in which agency may find expression. Material culture’s concern with humility is thrown into the mix to permit an appreciation of how agential power may be traced through the mundane application of things. This entangling of theoretical resources allows a depth of understanding of the form(s) agency may take and its means of expression to emerge.

However, this consensual approach to theory does mean that differences between theoretical resources, such as their dissimilar conceptualisations of the relations between the human and non-human, are not brought to bear. The contradictions between ANT’s ontological monism, material culture studies’ specificity of the human and non-human, and the concern with materiality in and of itself within vital materialisms, is not worked through in any explicit way. This would be the challenge if one were concerned with advancing a resolute theory of object agency. There are also implications in terms of the specific vocabulary adopted to discuss agential power. This thesis employs that of provocation due to its focus on the single link between the child and the toy.

Staying with the theme of co-fabrication, I now wish to turn its implications for empirical research. Realisation of the co-fabricated character of our social worlds necessitates an ecumenical approach to the study of children and
childhood. In the following chapter I consider how the concept of heterogeneous
geographies may offer such a framework through an account of the research
practice upon which this thesis is based.
Researching Co-Fabricated Worlds
In this chapter I consider how the concept of heterogeneous geographies may offer a framework for the study of (children's) socio-material worlds through an account of the research practice upon which this thesis is based. More substantively, it explores how 'non-representational' ideas and approaches may be employed to inform our empirical engagements within this theoretical framework, through an interrogation of established methodologies. It is suggested that detailed empirical examination of embodied practice and haptic knowledges is a useful starting point for addressing heterogeneous assemblages.

To explore children's everyday socio-material worlds I adopted a four-fold methodology, comprising domestic ethnography (observant participation and the use of creative tasks), autoethnography, video ethnography and 'desk research' involving trade magazines, market reports and web searches. The methodological account offered here is framed according to three sets of challenges presented by the research practice. Firstly, it addresses challenges presented by conducting research within the private sphere of the home. I begin with a discussion of the reasoning behind the choice of domestic ethnography and the challenges it presented in terms of recruitment, and in the negotiation of norms of hospitality, spatial time binds and intra-household dynamics. I then offer a brief account of how work in the home was supplemented by 'desk research' concerning the historical and semiotic structuring of toys.

Secondly, the methodological account addresses the challenge of developing a form of ethnographic practice that attends explicitly to embodied performances and practices. I set the concern to develop such an ethnographic practice in the context of recent calls for methodological creativity within geography, and then discuss how performance and ethnomethodology may be employed in its development. Following this I provide an account of my methodological practice in which I address the structure of the research sessions, the use of creative tasks, and how particular trajectories offered by ethnomethodology were employed. I then discuss how the different components of the research practice were brought together in the creation of shared knowledge, a process which reconfigures the politics of knowledge production.
Thirdly, the methodological account addresses ethical challenges confronted when working with children and when addressing the co-constitutive roles of non-human objects in performance and practice. I discuss the formulation of a 'research ethics framework' and how this was negotiated in practice. Attention is then turned to 'best practice' and the need to adopt a flexible role as a researcher. I then discuss the adoption of an ethical sensibility that was responsive to the affective dimensions of corporeal relations between human and non-human bodies as they emerged in unfolding events. This is followed by a discussion of how 'being ethical' extended beyond the research encounter into considerations of representation. Finally I draw the chapter to a close by considering the relation between the material and the discursive and suggesting how the research practice developed here is of import to children’s geographies, consumption studies and material culture studies.

**Domestic Ethnography**

To begin to appreciate the relations between children and their toys I wanted an approach that allowed for a deeper involvement with these relations than that offered by talk alone. I wanted to see these relations as they played out in the routine practices of everyday living in the 'naturalistic' setting of the home. To this end, I employed domestic ethnography. This was largely inspired by the ethnographic approach of the contributors to Miller's (2001a) edited collection, *Home Possessions: material culture behind closed doors*. Although ethnography was originally developed by anthropologists as a means to describe and understand 'other' cultures, there has been a shift towards ethnography 'at home'. Ethnography has also been adopted and adapted as a research method beyond anthropology. Examples within geography include Crang’s (1994) ethnography of working practices in a themed restaurant, Malbon’s (1999) ethnography of clubbing, Laurier et al’s (2001) ethnography of neighbourhood cafes and Gregson’s (2007) domestic ethnography of household practices of holding and ridding. Ethnography is increasingly being regarded as a key research method for exploring children's social worlds (Emond, 2005). For instance, it has been used in the study of play (Thorne, 1993), early education (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000), fashion (Pole, 2007) and life on the street (Young and Barrett, 2001). In relation to the move to see children as social actors,
ethnography provides a useful means of understanding the ways in which children's social worlds are shaped and controlled by them by allowing researchers to get alongside them in their environments. Children become the instructors, teaching the language and ways of their social group. As Emond (2005:135-6) writes, '[e]thnography allows the researcher to gain insight into what factors are significant to these children under study rather than assuming what we as researchers see as significant in childhood'.

Working within the private sphere of the home offered a particular set of challenges, in addition to those encountered in research with children. I begin by outlining these, before moving on to discussion of the structure of the ethnographic work.

Recruitment

The first challenge was how to get behind the closed door of the family home. A number of researchers have drawn attention to the need to negotiate ethnographic access via gatekeepers. This is particularly pertinent in relation to children given their legal status as minors in need of protection by responsible adults (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Holt, 2004). I began by conducting a brief pilot study with a child known to me personally, who was within the desired age range at the time of study. I opted to work with children aged nine to eleven years old for three reasons. Firstly, this is an age group well presented in accounts of children’s outdoor play. As such, this study of domestic play complements this work by extending our understanding of the everyday lives of children of this age. Secondly, psychological studies of children’s pretend play and play with toys have focussed on pre-school children, with some extension up to the age of eight. I wanted to contrast this by working with older children, stressing the continuing importance of toys and the imaginary in children’s lives. Thirdly, around the age of twelve, children’s independent spatial mobility tends to increase with the transition to secondary school. This means there is a shift from domestic play to ‘hanging out’ in outdoor spaces. This desired age range was extended through the inclusion of siblings in the study.
Post-pilot recruitment was initially via a local primary school, enacting a personal friend as gatekeeper. It then continued via personal networks. With the exception of the children from the pilot household, the child participants were not known to me personally. I began by expanding the pilot study to a more comprehensive case study, before initiating case studies with six other children. This then expanded further to include siblings, bringing the total of child participants to ten; five boys and five girls, ranging from eight to fourteen years old at the time of study. They lived in what may be termed ‘white British’ households, and whilst the occupation of their parents spanned different class distinctions, no disadvantage was felt materially (see Appendix A for the social characteristics of the research households). I make no strict claims for a representative sample. Employing an ethnographic approach, this study conducts an exploration of the animated geographies of children’s material culture through an intensive interrogation of a limited number of empirical examples. These case studies are used to indicate important dimensions of playful practice with toys, offering a series of generalisations regarding the character and activities of child consumers. Let me take a moment to introduce the children who participated in this study.

Meeting the children

Stephen is a ten year old football fan. Following in his dad’s footsteps, he is an avid supporter of Reading FC. His passion for the game finds a number of expressions, some of which will be explored in this thesis. He is also a fan of WWE wrestling, which he watches on television and was even lucky enough to see live – a treat for all the family. He shares his home with his parents, older sister Alison, and younger brother Matthew with whom he shares a room.

Like his brother, eight year old Matthew is football mad. He too is a Reading FC season ticket holder and shares a passion for WWE wrestling. The two brothers are often inseparable, forming a cheeky comedy duo. At times, their closeness can prove fractious resulting in squabbles and fights. Although they share a room they have a keen sense of their own possessions. They each have their own television, DVD player, Skybox and PlayStation2 console, which sit at the end of their respective beds.
Like her brothers, fourteen year old **Alison** has her own ‘entertainment package’, including a PlayStation2 console. While she happily joins her brothers in onscreen wrestling bouts or football matches, her favourite videogames belong to the karaoke themed SingStar range.

**Emily** epitomises the term ‘tween’. At nine years old, she aspires to be like the funky teenagers she loves to watch in the American shows broadcast on Nickelodeon and The Disney Channel. She shares a ‘passion for fashion’ with Bratz dolls and loves all things pink, including her pink Nintendo DS. As her bedroom is the small ‘box room’, a number of her toys are stored in the dining room of the house she shares with her parents and older brother Ben.

Twelve year old **Ben** is also a football fan, but his loyalty is devoted to Arsenal FC. Unlike his sister, his game console of choice is the PlayStation2. Their house is open to friends, who regularly stay for ‘sleepovers’.

**Katie** hates pink. It sums up everything she fights against being. She is an eleven year old tomboy, who is passionate about Portsmouth FC. She proudly talks about her experience of being a mascot for one of their matches. She expresses a softer side through her collection of various manifestations of A.A Milne’s character, Tigger. She lives with her mum, who shares her love for Tigger, and her dad, with whom she shares possession of a Nintendo DS games console.

**Sam**, who is ten years old, shares a love for aeroplane modelling with his stepfather. Their hobby is clearly evident in the home they share with Sam’s mother, in the display of completed models in a glass fronted cabinet and the modelling paraphernalia that threatens to overspill from various areas of storage. Sam’s parents are keen to develop his creative skills, not least because his engagement in craft based activities tends to calm his excessive energetic nature. He also enjoys playing football for a local team.

Ten year old, **Joshua** tends to have little free time, leading a very structured life, based around a long journey to school and his involvement in church
related activities. His mother restricts his television viewing, but he is allowed to watch Yu-Gi-Oh! from which he gains tips for playing with his Yu-Gi-Oh! trading cards. He also enjoys playing Pokemon games on his Nintendo Gameboy Advanced and collecting Shoot Out trading cards. He shares his home with his mother, sister and grandparents.

His twelve year old sister Bethany also has limited ‘free’ time due to her involvement in church based and extracurricular activities, which include playing the piano and the clarinet, and hockey. She also enjoys riding horses and helping out at the local stables, and loves to read ‘classic’ books in the privacy of her hammock or bed.

Eleven year old Devan also likes to read, and write stories. She has a passion for magic, which is expressed in her identification as a Harry Potter fan, and as a witch. She practices tarot card and palm reading, and spell casting. She participates in a range of extracurricular activities, which include drum lessons and pottery making. Examples of her pottery are on display in the apartment she shares with her mother, and in her second home, which belongs to her mother’s partner.

Research in the home

Constructing the home as a research site brings forth particular ethical and methodological demands and challenges (Gregson, 2007; Nilsen and Rogers, 2005). The concept of home implies more than a functional, objective, physical frame in which social practices occur. I had to be aware of and sensitive toward cultural meanings and habitual practices centred in and on the home. In modern Western societies there is a widely shared view of the home as a private place. This is represented by symbolic markers of the boundary between the public and the private, including the front door and the doorbell. As one crosses this threshold they become aware that they are entering a domain structured by particular cultural and social practices (Gregson, 2007). To represent the host of challenges faced in my domestic research, I draw attention to three areas of negotiation that were particularly pertinent: norms of hospitality, spatial time binds and intra-household power dynamics.
I had to negotiate norms of hospitality, bound up with the social conventions of visiting that were brought into play and exchanged (Gregson, 2007). For example, at the beginning of every session I would be welcomed with the offer of a cup of tea and something 'light' to eat by the parent. On the one hand, I felt it impolite to decline this generosity. This was reinforced when polite declines were met with a persistent offer. This practice seemed important in sustaining a relationship with the parental gatekeeper. On the other hand, this practice resulted in a delay to the start of the session from the child's point of view. They were kept waiting while the adults chatted. I attempted to draw the children into this practice by deflecting the question to them, enquiring if they were going to have a drink before responding to the adult. I was then able to turn this into a ritual where the three parties sat down together. I was able to weave conversation with the child about what they had done that week with parental questions about how the research was going or more general chat about the wellbeing of family members. Frequently, this resulted in the children engaging in the ongoing nature of the research and my research career more broadly, and prompted conversation between the parent and the child about things that they had thought about telling me during the week. Moving beyond the cultural conventions framing the visitor marks a key transition for the ethnographer (Gregson, 2007). While visitors are treated politely, they are also treated with reserve and held at a distance. If the ethnographer is not able to achieve this important transition ethnographic research loses its distinctiveness in terms of the 'intimacy' of social relations it fosters and draws upon. As Gregson (2007) writes, the household tends to 'still' itself as a mark of respect for the visitor. This places limitations on those wishing to observe and position themselves in the enactment of everyday practices. To assist the transition from visitor, I positioned myself as someone who could be asked to help out in various activities (Gregson, 2007). I helped the children tidy up, I helped them with their homework and in some instances, upon the children's request, I 'baby-sat' while their parents were out. This reciprocal practice allowed for a fuller participation in the household.

I also had to negotiate what Nilsen and Rogers (2005) refer to as spatial time binds. Sessions had to be arranged around extracurricular activities the children
participated in. This was more challenging in relation to some households than others. In several cases this was also complicated by the division of the children's time between two households, which related to their particular familial structures. In the case of Devan, she was keen to shown me the toy collection at her second home, so one of the sessions was relocated to this site. This meant entering negotiations with another parental gatekeeper. This session had to be structured at a particular time so that she could demonstrate her drum playing because of the agreement she had with the neighbours in relation to the timing of this activity. Given the importance the research placed on the children’s experiences and everyday practices, I also wanted to respect routines such as television viewing. Again, this was more pertinent to particular households than others, for example, Emily liked to watch particular shows after school, so we arranged sessions around these viewing times. In the case of Katie, her viewing practices were structured into particular sessions as she was keen to share this practice with me. Homework provided another form of time bind. I was conscious about setting task based activities in relation to homework, and so worked to create an atmosphere where there was no fear of reprisal if the tasks were not completed. This meant allowing time within sessions for their completion.

The negotiation of intra-household dynamics was played out in relation to three main themes: parent-child relationships, sibling relationships and spaces. Researchers who strive to position children as social actors are confronted with the challenge that opportunities for children to assert their autonomy and subjectivity vary according to where the research is located and who is present. As the home is an important site for negotiations of adult-child power relations (Mayall, 1994; Sibley, 1997) accessing and using the family home as a research site challenges and highlights these power relations. I aimed to ensure the child’s autonomy through the practice of freely given informed consent. Prior to conducting the initial sessions in a household I was apprehensive about how I could continue to ensure the child’s autonomy given the presence of parents. In most cases, parents advocated their child’s autonomy and subjectivity as a research participant by distancing themselves from the research process. Usually it was the mother who was home during the sessions. They allowed their children to suggest the date and time of research sessions and disappeared into
the background when I was present in the home, continuing with household chores or chatting to friends on the phone. A number of parents expressed that they welcomed this ‘free’ time.

I was confronted by my own anticipations of how best to ensure autonomy when working with Sam. Given discussions about ensuring confidentiality both within the literature on researching children (Nilsen and Rogers, 2005) and between the parents, children and myself in our initial meetings, I had expected the children to want to find a space out of earshot from other members of the household during our sessions. However, Sam opted to remain in the front room where his mother was watching television. I was apprehensive about the impact this would have on his responses to the tasks and my questions. On the whole the presence of his mother, and on some occasions his step-father, proved fruitful. When prompted by Sam, they would enter into and extend discussion. Their presence comforted him. This was witnessed by the contrast in his behaviour when, prompted by his mother, we relocated upstairs to his bedroom during one session. Throughout this time he appeared distracted, constantly looking out of the window to see if his step-father had returned home.

The close proximity of parents did prove challenging in relation to the disciplining of behaviour. I aimed to adopt a ‘least-adult’ role (Holt, 2004) in my relations with the children. (This is addressed further in the later discussion on ethics). To this end, I preferred to allow more unruly or energetic behaviour to play out, or make suggestions for alternative actions, rather than imposing restrictions. This was in contrast to parental tendencies to instantly and directly intervene. I often felt uneasy when such behaviour began to unfold because I felt like I was being watched by the parents. This sensation increased when parents opted to intervene on my behalf, and led to one particularly excruciating moment:

[Sam has been ‘acting up’ throughout the session, which has been conducted in the front room where his mother has been watching television.] In his usual enthusiastic tone, Sam asks when I am next coming round to visit. I pause, acutely aware of the presence of parents in the room. It is as if a tension has swept in and filled the
space between the figures in this space. I feel compelled to check my continued status in the house given the disruption I feel my presence is having. “I think I need to check with your mum if it’s still okay for me to come round,” I reply. As I say this it occurs to me that his parents may understand my words to be a request for intervention in his behaviour, which was not intended. My reply descends into a telling off for Sam by his mother, which I find excruciating to witness and be drawn into. I remain motionless in the hope that this will deny my presence. His mother tells him to apologise to me. He apologises to his mother, his step-father and even the cat, but not to me, making the experience even more painful. With his parents’ insistence he apologises and in response to his mother’s questions, says he is keen to continue. I feel I should speak. “I like working with you Sam, but it would be good if we could just get on with our stuff without your parents worrying about what we are doing.” In an attempt to maintain enthusiasm, I ask Sam what he would like to do in the next session.

(Field Diary Extract, 23rd January 2007)

A sense of embarrassment was felt by all parties involved in instances of rebuke. Several parents enquired as to whether their familial situation was 'normal' (Punch, 2007). This question expressed feeling that their parenting practices were on display and being assessed. I would always deflect the question by smiling reassuringly. Parents also expressed a sense of intrusion in relation to the children using the camcorder in the house when I was not present. Minor tensions in the parent-child relationship can be witnessed at times when parents request that they are not filmed.

As Punch (2001) discusses, children's autonomy is relative and shifting in nature. At times I had to help re-negotiate the child's autonomy. For instance, one parent tended to attempt to monopolise my attention on some occasions.

Once [the child] has finished photographing the possessions in the bedroom we head downstairs to take a few extra snaps. [The parent] corners me and engages me in conversation taking my attention
away from [the child]. At various points [the child] behaves as though trying to win back attention: turning the radio on, which they are instantly told to turn off; flicking through their homework and making comments about it, which prompts questions as to why it has not been completed; and picking up particular items to show me. I feel obliged to accept [the parent’s] offer to engage in conversation as my presence in the house relies on building some kind of rapport, but I feel awkward about not paying [the child] as much attention as I would like. I use one of the items shown to me by [the child] to draw them into the adult conversation and then ask if that was one of the things they wanted to photograph. This enables me to deflect attention back to the task in hand.

(Field Diary Extract, 5th April 2007)

I was also called upon to help children re-negotiate autonomy in relation to their siblings by ensuring their opinions were voiced and heard. When working in a household where more than one child was participating in the research I would ensure they each had times when they were the subject of my attention. Either individual sessions would be arranged for each child, as was the case with Stephen and Matthew. These would be interspersed with sessions where the three of us would play together as the two boys were used to engaging in joint activity. Alternatively, longer sessions would be divided equally between the two children, as was the case with Bethany and Joshua. On a few occasions I was called upon to act as ‘referee’ when playfights between brothers began to border upon the raucous, but the power struggles between siblings were less conflictive than cautioned by the literature on the ethics of interviewing siblings together (see Bushin, 2007; Punch, 2007).

Another way in which intra-household power dynamics were played out was through access to and the use of different spaces within the house. Nilsen and Rogers (2005) talk of the multiple thresholds within the home. Gregson (2007) also talks about how being positioned as a visitor places limits on movements round, in and through English homes. In practice I found that expected thresholds were not as straightforwardly evident as suggested in this literature. Different conditions of entry are applicable to different rooms in different
households. The parental bedroom was one room in particular I expected to be out of bounds to both the children of the household and the researcher. This was true in some households, as represented by the children's requests to their parents to enter this room to retrieve particular items to show me. These items would be brought to me, rather than me being taken to see them. I was actively confronted by this expectation when working with Emily:

I tell Emily she can take the camera upstairs if she likes because she seems to be hesitant. As there is no signal for me to follow I remain in the lounge. Her mum comes and takes a seat on the sofa and tells me I can follow her up if I like. I head up the stairs not really sure where I'm going. I spot a pink room with cuddly toys and guess this must be Emily's, but she's not in there. Confused I stick my head round the door of the room with the football paraphernalia and model cars, which I assume belongs to her brother. There's no sign of her. I wander along the landing bewildered. The door to the bathroom is open so it's unlikely she's in there. As no-one is around I stick my head into the parental bedroom, feeling uncomfortable about this intrusion. Emily is standing by the computer in the corner of the room taking a photograph of her homework. She beckons me in.

(Field Diary Extract, 9th February 2007)

I later discovered that this room is open not only to the children of the household, but also to their friends whenever they wish to use the computer. Katie was also happy to show me into her parents' bedroom to show me her mother's cuddly toys. Different households also placed different restrictions on access to the rooms of older siblings. In some households they were out of bounds to the younger children, in others this boundary was much more fluid and was only enforced if tensions between the siblings arose.

Drawing on tacit cultural knowledge I also imposed thresholds myself. For instance, the interior door mat acted as a boundary marker, prompting me to instantly wipe my feet upon entry and then wait to be ushered forward into an interior room, which was usually the lounge area (Gregson, 2007). I would
always wait for the child to invite me to follow them around the other rooms of the house.

Several researchers have written about the different spaces within the home in relation to confidentiality (Bushin, 2007; Nilsen and Rogers, 2005). Given the nature of the research and the fact that playful practices often unfolded in parental view, the children's choice of space(s) in which to conduct the research were more readily influenced by decisions regarding the appropriateness of the space for a particular task in relation to the furniture present or the level of background noise. The use of space had to be negotiated with other users as exclusive use was not guaranteed (Bushin, 2007). For example, when conducting interviews in a shared bedroom, interruptions had to be managed to allow space for the interview to proceed. At times, some parents would demand that a room was cleared so that they could have exclusive use of the room, or that the volume of the television or games console was turned down so that the space could be shared. The children always made the decision about the space used so as not to reinforce the lack of control they may have over space and privacy in the home. Some children used the presence of the researcher to negotiate the use of certain spaces. The dining room table was one common example. Several of the children asserted that this was the most appropriate space for a particular task, and used the research as a means to dominate this area. In Sam's case, he was able to negotiate with his step-father and reach a compromise where the step-father was able to continue storing his craft materials at one of the table, while the other end was cleared for Sam's use. The nature of the space used structured the character of the research undertaken (Punch, 2007). The dining room table added a sense of formality to proceedings and so was often reserved for the more structured creative tasks. The doors to rooms were always left open so that parents could easily check on activity in a non-intrusive fashion at any time.

Conducting 'desk research' beyond the home

As commodities, toys are situated in a vast commodified space of childhood that, despite extending well beyond the home, influences their use to varying degrees within this private sphere. I therefore wanted to develop understanding
of the industry that produces toys, and the markets they operate in. To develop understanding of the toy industry — its major players, the main features of the market, how it operates, and trends in buying behaviour — I looked to publications on the history and structure of the toy industry (for example Clark, 2007), and market research. With regard to the latter I looked at two types of publication. Firstly, Key Note Business Ratio Reports, which provide company profiles and an industry overview (Key Note 2004b; 2004c). Secondly, market reports published by Mintel (2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2006) and Key Note (2000; 2004a; 2005), which provide information on sales markets, promotion, distribution, retailing, spending and buying behaviour, as well as information on key market features, recent developments in the market, and market strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). I also attended key industry events like the London Toy Fair and the Brand Licensing Expo. To understand the market context of the chosen case study toys in terms of their promotion, distribution and retailing, I looked to trade magazines. In particular I trawled back copies of *Toys 'N' Playthings*, the UK magazine for the toy industry and *Licensing Today Worldwide*, for references to the chosen toys and closely related products. This was supplemented by reference to *Playthings*, the US trade magazine, and *World Toy News*, which provides market surveys and statistics.

Through this work I also developed a sense of the historical and semiotic structuring of the field of meaning in which toys operate. To further my knowledge of the intertextual, semiotic culture within which toys are produced and situated, I looked to popular publications on specific toys and categories of toy (for example King, 1997; Mahoney, 2000; Tosa, 1997) to learn about their histories, and scanned retail catalogues to gain a sense of the breadth of product ranges. I also visited relevant company websites and those relating to industry organisations, such as the British Association of Toy Retailers (BATR). To further my knowledge about the discursive fields in which toys operate I also studied popular media reports. Finally, I looked at toy instruction manuals to gain a sense of how particular toys have developed technologically and their specific ergonomic features.
Playing with Ethnography

Recently, geographers have issued calls for greater creativity in relation to research design and methods (Crang, 2005; Latham, 2003; Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 2000b). These calls are founded on the assertion that we need to be doing 'something more' to expose the 'ongoing, processual, excessiveness of the world and life' (Horton and Kraftl, 2006a:89). A gap has emerged between theory, which has attended to the body, and empirical practice, which has struggled to engage its 'in excess' embodiment. This gap is a result of 'methodological timidity' (Latham, 2003:1993), a failure to employ our theoretical talk in the interrogation of established methodologies. As Thrift (2000b:3) explains:

'Cultural geographers have, over time, allied themselves with a number of qualitative methods, and most notably in-depth interviews and ethnographic 'procedures'. But what is surprising is how narrow this range of skills is, how wedded they still are to the notion of bringing back the 'data', and then re-presenting it (nicely packaged up as a few supposedly illustrative quotations), and the narrow realms of sensate life they register.'

This is not to deny the existence of any methodologically innovative research (see Laurier et al, 2001; McCormack, 2004; Spinney, 2006). However, there persists a heavy reliance on 'more conventional, representationally oriented methods' (Latham, 2003:1994). My intention here is not to decry the use of such methods, or to downplay the importance of talk. Rather I wish to suggest that there is something more that we can do. This is not to usurp everything that has gone before, but to suggest how we might approach empirically the concept of embodied practice.

Before proposing how we might attend to this concept, I wish to set my concern with embodied practice in some theoretical context by highlighting three contemporary lines of thought that have pointed towards its significance. Firstly, within ethnographic practice there has been a shift from paradigms of experience and interpretation to paradigms of dialogue and polyphony (Clifford,
This latter model brings to the fore the contingent nature of the ethnographic encounter, placing the ethnographer within a web of intersubjective relations. Culture is no longer conceived as an assemblage of texts to be interpreted, but is understood as performed. This requires us to address the embodied performances of the various actors involved in the encounter. Secondly, there has been the development of non-representational theory within geography. This move is an attempt to displace the prevailing emphasis on representation and interpretation within the Social Sciences and Humanities. Here, the world is seen as momentary, always in the making, rather than as a primarily discursive phenomenon. Thus there is a shift to theories of practice, which amplify the flow and contingency of social life (Thrift, 1996; 1997; 2000a). Thirdly, there is the rise of the interdisciplinary sensory studies (Bull et al, 2006), which seeks to enhance our understanding of the role of the senses in history, culture and aesthetics. Focusing on the multiplicity of senses challenges the hegemony of vision and the privileging of discourse in contemporary theory. It thus supplants older paradigms of cultural interpretation and challenges conventional theories of representation.

These three lines of thought all point to performance. They stress the momentary, contingent and complex nature of the world. To understand this world, one cannot stand outside it; it is not reflected to us. Rather, it comes into being through us, through our embodied relations and practices. Performance has become a key metaphor in the Social Sciences and Humanities, both as a means to theorise everyday practice and as a means to 'get at' practical skills. I draw upon the metaphor of performance to discuss in greater detail how we can approach embodiment on an empirical level. Here I refer to two different approaches to embodied practice: concern with the expressive function of the corporeal body as seen in discussions of the performance of research relations; and concern with the corporeal body's generative potential as evidenced in embodied ethnographies. Finally, to address the relations shared with material objects in our embodied practice I turn to ethnomethodology.
Performance and research relations

'Research with children raises particular ethical issues given children's socio-spatial marginalisation in society... It can be argued that research relations have frequently been exploitative, mirroring and reproducing unequal societal power relations between adults and children.' (Holt, 2004:14)

This concern has prompted calls for the empowerment of children, which assert the child's right to have a voice and to be heard. In response to this, practitioners of the new social studies of childhood have sought to develop strategies to promote empowering research relations. The practices of reflexivity and dialogue have been central to these strategies (Christensen, 2004). This issue of socio-spatial marginalisation is representative of a more general conundrum - a broader 'geography of position' - faced by geographers. Reflexivity is charged with the task of marking our geographical knowledges as situated and partial. It is recognised that differences persist between the researcher and the researched in terms of understanding, and that the researcher's presence influences the research encounter in terms of the understanding sought and gained. While the bodily presence of the researcher is acknowledged here, the role of the materiality of the body is often neglected if not denied. Here, agency is equated with (heard) voice, refuting the possibility that it may be exercised via other means such as embodied action.

Two exceptions to this neglect are the works of Holt (2004) and Parr (1998), which draw attention to the embodied practice of research. They adopt an approach that views the body, in its undeniably material state, as immersed in particular sites. Drawing upon the work of critical feminists, particularly Judith Butler's (1990) conceptualisation of performativity, they de-centre the notion of a complete coherent subject by attending to the inherently unstable nature of identity positions. Parr in particular talks of negotiating her body in association with the bodies of her informants, illustrating how the body - its practices and presentations - can be used to manipulate the situation of the research encounter. This approach reconceptualises identities as fluid, context-specific and performed, and thus open to contestation.
Reframing the research encounter as performance causes us to deconstruct the notion of hierarchical relations between researcher and researched, adults and children. It is seen that power relations cannot be reduced to powerful and powerless along essentialised lines of difference. Rather, power is fluid; it is performed, and thus open to negotiation. We therefore need to attend to context-specific moments, 'research performances' (Holt, 2004), which bare witness to the relative and shifting nature of agency and autonomy. Rather than allowing us to become fixated with difference, this approach encourages us to recognise that research relations (and adult-child relations) can be punctuated by connection. The issue of (dis)connection between the world of the child and the world of the adult has received significant attention in the literature of the new social studies of childhood. I shall consider this issue further later in the chapter when discussing the politics of knowledge production. Having discussed the metaphor of performance in the context of research relations, I now wish to address how it may be applied to research activities.

Performance and research activity

Embodiment is both expressive and generative (Harrison, 2000). Parr and Holt privilege the former in their accounts of embodied research practice. Negotiations of the researcher's body in association with other bodies are deemed significant because they determine how the body, the researcher, is received. Parr's concern to explore other communication channels pertaining to the corporeal body, rather than relying on speech, is borne less from a desire to engage with non-cognitive knowledge than to interact with people with whom communication via conversation is difficult. As Crang (2003:499) explains, 'there is rather less on the actual processes of learning through our bodies' responses and situations - that is, haptic knowledges'.

The generative potential of embodiment is significant to, and can be exploited in, research practice. If the nature of being is performative and embodied, it is always emergent. Horton and Kraftl (2006a:77) explain, 'this embodiment – and this being-in-the-world – is always becoming: bodies are always in flux; always-ongoing; never still'. The body, the subject, is never fully determined;
not bounded, but provisional, relational and enacted, in constant dialogue with objects, environments, spaces, times and ideas. 'It is from the active, productive, and continual weaving of the multiplicity of bits and pieces that we emerge' (Harrison, 2000:502).

This multiplicity results in complexity, but this complexity is so fundamental to our being, so commonplace, so everyday, that it is taken-for-granted; it is lived not deliberated. As Horton and Kraftl (2006a:78) contend, 'our (always bodily) encounters with the world are always complex, personal, and not always sayable, noticed, understood or available for reflection or representation'. It is this realisation that has prompted Thrift (2000b) to urge us to take radical action to move beyond the 'repressed place' of the discursive. He draws our attention to the possibilities of performance, which may be understood as:

'a set of creative, sensory and affective acts that take place in the now... [that]...draws attention to the parts of the world that are too fast and too excessive to theorise and too complex to write down, explain fully, chart or map' (Morton, 2005:664).

Here there is an emphasis on world-making, on production rather than reproduction. While the use of performance holds great potential for an engagement with the profoundly practical, this does not mean that we need to reject our representationally oriented methodological skills. I join Latham in believing that we can be a little more modest than Thrift suggests. Instead of rejecting our more conventional methods we can imbue them with a sense of the creative and the practical. 'Pushed in the appropriate direction there is no reason why these methods cannot be made to dance a little' (Latham, 2003:2000).

Recent calls for 'touchy-feely' (Crang, 2003; 2005) methods have ignored existing currents within ethnographic fieldwork that can be built upon and extended. The senses have always been at the heart of ethnographic fieldwork, but the visual bias of the West gave primacy to observation, rather than sensory participation (Stoller, 1989). Participant observation, the linchpin of ethnography, is somewhat of an oxymoron, implying simultaneous objective
detachment and emotional and sensory involvement. Within the traditional ethnographic paradigm of experience and interpretation, the scientific validity of the lone ethnographer was in large part premised on firsthand experience, which is inherently intersubjective and embodied. However, authoritative interpretation was understood to require detached observation. Thus, the mark of the scientifically validated authoritative ethnographer was the ability to separate thought from feeling and action. The latter was a fundamental part of the ethnographic experience, but was relegated to separate accounts of fieldwork (see Rabinow (1977) as an example), a sub-genre that was classified as subjective, 'soft' and unscientific.

There continues to be tension between detached observation and embodied participation in the practice of ethnography, resulting in variation in where the emphasis of activity is placed. The current influence of the metaphor of performance has prompted and helped to validate explicitly embodied ethnographies (see Jackson, 2004; Wacquant, 1995; 1998). Here ethnography is based upon an ontology of being in which the 'thing' being studied is understood as fluid, fragile and incomplete, and therefore not amenable to representation. An experience is not there for the taking, but is provisional, open to potential, coming into being through us, through our enactment in and of the world. Thus, it is necessary for us to do it, to experience it for ourselves. Concern with the active participation of the ethnographer has given rise to the use of the term 'observant participation'. This linguistic shift marks a reorientation to the embodied immersion and sensory experience of those engaged in the ethnographic encounter. Geographers have recently actively participated in, and sought to evoke, the act of playing (Harker, 2005) and the performance of traditional Irish music (Morton, 2005) and French folk dancing (Revill, 2004). An engagement with, and presentation of, all the senses rather than just the verbal and the visual is key to these studies.

The need to do rather than observe also stems from the belief that social practice, as it comes into being through us and brings us into being, generates 'an intuitive knowledge...that, if not exactly subconscious, is in certain respects nonconscious, noncognitively oriented, or...profoundly practical' (Latham, 2003:2001). Practices 'make sense, if not necessarily a rational explanation or a
recognisable meaning’ (Morton, 2005:662). Thus, they must be read, experienced, through the body. This embodied information cannot be captured, cannot be re-presented in a static form, and therefore must be experienced in real time. Practice brings about ephemeral spaces and times that only exist as they are being played out. The best one can hope to achieve is to evoke a sense of the event and the liveliness that took place. Morton (2005:668) explains, we must ‘frame research in a way that allows exploration and understanding, rather than observation and description’. This argument sits in relation to a longer debate about the ‘inadequacies’, the partial and situated nature, of representation.

The performance orientated ethnographies of Morton and Revill focus on the role of corporeal bodies in practice. The co-constitutive role of objects in such performances is often overshadowed or neglected. My concern with the co-fabricated character of our social worlds has prompted me to also look to ethnomethodology, with its concern for the in-depth examination of mundane practice, to inform my ethnographic approach.

**Developing an ethnomethodologically informed ethnography**

Theoretically, philosophically and conceptually, the subject and object are realised as provisional, relational and enacted. Hetherington (2003:1938) states ‘meaning is generated not by either subject or object but in the space between them’. This is rarely made explicit in empirical accounts of embodied performance. However, to ignore the contingent role of objects (in both their physical and social forms) is to ignore the specificity and complexity of practice. As bodies are always in motion they are never entirely separable from other bodies – a term used here in its generic sense to also refer to objects (Harker, 2005). As discussed in chapter 2, in recent social and cultural theory an understanding of matter, including objects, as inert and passive has been displaced. It is recognised that matter continually affects and/or effects us. It is through attention to practice that the relational nature of the subject and object, and their provisional agencies are realised. O’Connor’s (2005) examination of the practice of glassblowing is an exception to this tendency of neglect. O’Connor discusses how, through repeated practice and with increasing proficiency, an instrument of use can recede from consciousness and become an
extension of the body. She attends to the sensations evoked in practice, the non-cognitive that both precedes and exceeds the cognitive. These sensations, of the fluid, unbounded body, form the basis of the intuitive knowledge mentioned previously. This brings us back to the need to actually do practice in order to understand it. Understanding must take on a different character when understanding things like our participants, through our own increased proficiency, means to miss most of what is going on.

Ethnomethodology offers a way to develop such understanding. It takes the commonplace action of everyday social life as its object of study, looking at what is unseen because it is so obvious. It displaces the sense of obviousness to wonder at the unspectacular. It makes the intelligibility of everyday routine 'anthropologically strange' (Laurier, 2004). Ethnomethodology awakens a 'sharpened curiosity' about the seemingly banal and mundane (Laurier, 2004:12), which it satisfies through 'micro-spatial analyses' (Laurier and Philo, 2006a:198). Micro-spatial analysis attends to the mechanics of embodied practice, and thus addresses the bodily (often pre-reflective and non-cognitive) accomplishment of ordinary tasks. This is aptly demonstrated in Sudnow's (1978) examination of playing jazz piano in Ways of the Hand, and in Robillard's (1999) discussion of living with paralysis in Meaning of a Disability.

Ethnomethodology contends that the significance of small things is often overlooked in an attempt to ground social order in the suitably big objects such as capitalism and globalisation. For instance, ethnomethodological studies of cafés have attended to the use of tables, chairs, newspapers and napkins to explain the constitution of their conviviality (Laurier et al, 2001; Laurier and Philo, 2006a). The conviviality of cafes has attracted the attention of social theorists, such as Habermas (1989), leading them to construct a privileged position for the café in the development of modernity (Laurier et al, 2001; Laurier and Philo, 2006a). Ethnomethodological studies are set in contrast to such theories of the public sphere, through a concern that conventional social analyses construct a highly abstracted version of the processes through which the fabric of social life is created, experienced and sustained (Pollner and Emerson, 2001). In explicitly addressing the socio-material ordering of practices, ethnomethodology recovers the located rationalities of ordinary
activities (Laurier et al, 2001). It looks at how the normative is created, experienced and sustained, 're-specifying' what we already know (Laurier, 2004; Laurier and Philo, 2006a). Through description of the mundane, ethnomethodology actively addresses knowledge that is profoundly practical; that which is lived not deliberated. It offers a way of talking and writing about the relational configurations between corporeal bodies and objects that bring everyday practice into being. (See Pollner and Emerson (2001) for an account of the relation between ethnomethodology and ethnography; and Laurier and Philo (2006a; 2006b) for the relation between ethnomethodology and non-representational theory.)

Specifically, ethnomethodology offers two trajectories for the exposition of the commonsensical and the study of relational configurations: 'making the strange familiar' and 'making the familiar strange'. 'Making the strange familiar' is achieved through active participation in the practice under scrutiny. By becoming competent practitioners – acquiring familiarity with 'local' knowledge and practices – we can fill in gaps in meaning with (embodied) information that is not accessible to the novice and not readily reflected upon and communicated by competent participants (Pollner and Emerson, 2001; Sudnow, 1978). This technique is akin to observant participation employed within ethnographic fieldwork, using field diaries to record information pertaining to embodied participation.

While active participation presents great potential for understanding practice that is embedded in the non-cognitive and the pre-intentional, it is also possible to facilitate cognitive reflection upon practice. This is where the second ethnomethodological trajectory – 'making the familiar strange' – can assist us. In early ethnomethodological studies, Garfinkel (1963; 1964; 1967), the father of this field, sought to make the assumptions embedded in everyday practice – its 'seen but un-noticed features' (Laurier, 2004) - visible by destabilising ordinary activities. He achieved this through the use of breaching experiments, interventions in the socio-material order of the everyday, which sharpen observations of the ordinary functioning of a locale.
In the following section I elaborate how these ethnomethodological trajectories were brought together with a notion of performance oriented ethnography in my research practice. To relay the complementary nature of these approaches, I discuss how the understanding(s) they generated were layered to create co-constructed relational knowledges. This account of my research practice is framed by the structure of the domestic ethnography as it unfolded in 'the field', and thus begins by addressing my use of creative tasks with the children.

**Constructing Relational Knowledges**

As a visitor to the home, and in all but one (household) case, a stranger to the child, I could not simply demand to participate in the children's playful practices immediately. I needed a means of introduction to the children, to their home space and to their personal possessions. I needed time to establish rapport and to prove my interest in the children's experiences so that they would feel comfortable engaging in practice before and with me. I therefore initiated each ethnography with the use of creative tasks. Following an initial meeting, the children were encouraged to create an annotated photograph album. This was then supplemented with the compilation of a week long activity diary.

**Creative tasks**

There is an array of literature providing insightful and rigorous discussion of contemporary visual methods (see Pink (2001) and Rose (2001) as examples). Child focused researchers have adopted and adapted these approaches (Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Burke, 2005; Punch, 2002; Young and Barrett, 2001), for example, there is an extensive body of literature emerging on projects involving child photographers as visual anthropologists (see Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) for an overview). There are two key features to this work. The first is recognition of the importance of the visual in self-expression. The second is a commitment to the democratisation of perspective or voice. While the camera was conventionally regarded as a colonising tool in anthropological and ethnographic work, it has since been employed in challenges to a gaze that was at one time almost exclusively white and European (Rohde, 1998) and male
(Spence and Solomon, 1995). This challenge is now being extended to an adultist gaze (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). ‘Toy’ cameras have been around since the late 1880s, since the Kodak Brownie camera was marketed to children as well as their parents (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). Consumer culture has continued to develop self-referential tools. Contemporary examples include the Little Tikes My Real Digital Camera and My Real Movie-Maker Digital Video Camera, the Fisher-Price Kid Tough Digital Camera, and the V-Tech Kidizoom multimedia digital camera, all of which specify they are suitable for children aged three years old and over. In-built cameras in mobile phones are also a popular contemporary device. All of the children had prior experience of taking photographs. In a number of instances, the effect of local visual cultures (Pink, 2001; Punch, 2002) could be seen in their photographic practices. Some children actively framed objects in particular ways, moving them from their place of storage.

The task of creating an annotated photograph album was usually structured over two research sessions. In the first the child would take control of a camera, photographing their material culture collections. This was often focussed heavily, although not exclusively, on the space of the child’s bedroom. The aim was not for the child to undertake an autoethnography of the room (Riggins, 1994), but rather to select particular items that mattered to them in some way. This positioned the child as an expert and researcher of their own collections. The camera allowed the child to control the process, choosing what they wanted to depict and what they would feel comfortable talking about (Young and Barrett, 2001). Some representations of collections were more comprehensive than others. The children were given the choice of using a disposable camera or a digital camera, the former proving the most popular. I would follow the children as they photographed, observing how they went about the selection process. Some children worked systematically around the room, while others worked in a much more sporadic manner. I encouraged the children to talk about the items as they snapped them. The level of conversation varied between the different children, with some restricting their commentary to denotative features while others elaborated with connotative descriptions.
The task had several purposes. It provided a means for the children to introduce me to their home, giving them the opportunity to show me where their toys were stored, displayed and played with. It enabled me to get to know the child by establishing what was of value to them, which was important in establishing a sense of rapport. Placing the emphasis on things (and then the photographic images in the following session) created a more relaxed atmosphere for these initial sessions since eye contact did not need to be maintained (Burke, 2005). It also provided the children with a visual record of their material culture, which they valued. It emphasised the worthiness of their possessions and the practices they are involved in.

In the following session, the children were presented with their photographs as they had been given to me by the developers of the film. We then sat down together to compile an album from A4 sheets of paper and the photographs the children chose to include. Photo elicitation (Burke, 2005) was used to explore the meaning of the images with the child. In some instances, children would go and fetch the object depicted by the image while talking about it, either to demonstrate particular features to me or to examine it closely for detail. The photographs were then stuck to the paper, and annotations based on the conversation from the photo elicitation added. In one case I offered to scribe annotations as they were dictated and their placing directed because one child expressed that he did not enjoy writing. The children were given free reign over the placing of the photographs and the content and placing of the annotations. They choose which photographs to annotate and then arranged the sheets in the order they wished them to appear in the album. The sheets were then bound with card covers, the colour of which was chosen by the child (see Figure 3.1). A copy of the album was made after the session, with the original album then returned to the child at our next meeting.

I was not only interested in the content of the photographs, but the ways in which different images were looked at, and categorised and arranged (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). For instance, the attention paid to certain photographs indicated the level of significance of the depicted object in the children's lives. This may be displayed through the order in which photographs are addressed or the length of time spent talking about one item. There was also evidence of what
Figure 3.1  Bethany's Annotated Photograph Album

Source: Bethany's annotated photograph album

I have always enjoyed reading, but 5 yrs ago I couldn't. I have almost beaten my brother with the number of books I have read.

These books are part of 2 different collections. I read one lot during the day (the classics) and the others when I am just going to bed (Animal ark).
Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) term 'genre-blending', which questions the 'single-item-ness' of various popular culture items. This allows us to understand children as active meaning makers and can provide an 'insider' point of view that challenges certain adult notions of children's play. For instance, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh write that drawing attention to how different toys co-exist for children may combat the tendency of adults to focus on particular items of popular culture in either celebratory or condemnatory ways (as is seen in work on Barbie). To give a specific example, Stephen grouped together the photographs of his PlayStation2 console, football themed videogames, football themed 'Shoot Out' trading cards, leather football and football boots, placing them at the front of his album. This move emphasised the importance of 'playing' football to his sense of identity. When placed alongside material generated via other methods and techniques, this initiated an insight into his videogame play, seeing it as something that went beyond a relationship with the screen. This is explored in chapter 7; here it suffices to say that this insight provides a response to contemporary debates about the negative effects of videogame play as it places gaming in a broader context.

In preparation for the third research session, the children were asked to keep an activity diary for a week. It was explained that they could use words, pictures or a combination of the two to keep a record of the different activities they engaged in. They were provided with formatted sheets for this task, however one child opted to type her diary using the new family computer (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). In our next meeting, the diary was used as a basis for discussion. This task was important for exploring how the schedule of the household impacts on play, the frequency and duration of interaction with different toys, the use of toys in interaction with other members of the household and friends, the kinds of activity in which the toys are used, and broader hobbies, interests and activities beyond the home that influence the use of toys.

Following the completion of these two tasks the children were encouraged to guide the direction of the subsequent research sessions. The subsequent sessions thus included a combination of different types of activity: further interview based sessions where children were keen to further discuss and demonstrate particular toys; and my active involvement in particular playful
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity Diary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Saturday| After Lunch – Mowed the lawn  
3:00 - Piano practice for 25 mins  
3:30 - Clarinet practice for 20 mins  
5:30 - Walked 1/2 of a mile on my way to mass  
6:00 - Served for 1hr at mass.  
7:30 - Watched Joseph on television |
| Sunday  | 8:30 to 1:00 - Riding at horse ranches  
1:45 - Clarinet for 20 mins  
2:10 - Piano for 25 mins  
3:30 - Top Golf for 2hrs  
5:45 - Mended paddling pot  
6:20 - Cleaned rabbit and guinea pig  
7:00 - Read |

**Figure 3.2** Bethany’s Activity Diary  
*Source: Bethany’s activity diary*
**Day 1 Wednesday**
Tara came round after she left we setup the computer with mum then I watched a DVD on the computer at night then went to bed.

**Day 2 Thursday**
Played football with my dog, watched TV like Disney Channel then some other programs then watched some DVD’s then went to bed.

**Day 3 Friday**
Got up went on the computer then watched a bit of TV Disney Channel then did nothing else for the day.

**Day 4 Saturday**
At 10:30am my friend came round to give me MSN then she went home at 2:00pm, I was still on MSN then I watched a DVD then went to bed.
practices with toys, such as playing board games, exchanging trading cards, watching TV and DVDs, conducting magic, and videogaming. The children were also offered the opportunity to conduct video work. This took two forms: the child being loaned a camcorder for an agreed period, enabling them to film footage in their own time (see footage of doll play in chapter 5 and magical practices and dollhouse play in chapter 6); and filming practices that were conducted either with my help (see The Gromit Show in chapter 4) or that placed me in front of the camera with the children during designated research sessions (see footage of videogaming in chapter 7). This video footage was then reviewed in following research sessions. (A schedule of the research sessions conducted with each child is provided in Appendix B). The children were given basic instructions on the use of the camcorder (a Canon 940 MV model), such as how to start recording, how to zoom in and out, how to replay recorded footage and how to charge its battery. They were also offered the use of a small tripod. Where the camcorder was used in my absence, it allowed me to learn about imaginative spaces (see chapter 6) that were not directly accessible to me as my presence would have inhibited their configuration (Young and Barrett, 2001).

As with the practices of still photography, the effect of local visual cultures could be seen in their work. Devan was used to creating her own video footage, making films with her Sylvanians (small animal figures) and a 'stunt car' (a pedal car) she bought at a car boot sale. Several of the children adopted a video diary style, while others adopted the house tour technique (made famous in MTV's Cribs). The children were provided with a personal copy of their footage on DVD. My use of video ethnography draws particular inspiration from Pink's (2004) use of video to research domestic sensory practices (see also Pink, 2001; 2006).

*Making the strange familiar and the familiar strange*

I adopted two techniques in the attempt to make the children's 'strange' [here read unfamiliar] everyday practices familiar to me: nostalgic reciprocity and active participation. As discussed in the previous chapter, children's culture is a hyper moral arena steeped in adult nostalgia. I adopted an autoethnographic sensibility as a means to manage my own nostalgic impulses. Schneider (2005) describes the term autoethnography as an approach to Social Science in which
the experience of the researcher is recognised as a salient part of the research process. It involves exploring our own experiences, our own geographies, as a research subject. In this sense it differs from a broader concern within ethnographic practice for researchers to explore their positionality as a means to address the partiality of the ethnographic process (Clifford, 1986; Tedlock, 2000).

I used my research diary to trace nostalgic musings, recording the nostalgic times and spaces that my research experiences took me to. It thus acted as a record of an ‘expanded field’ (I. Cook, 2001). This allowed me to critically assess the possible influence of nostalgic musings on my understanding and decision making. This is especially important given the subject matter of the research. As Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002: 40) suggest,

‘The fact that children’s culture is so inflected by issues of ephemerality, memory work, and nostalgia means that it is all the more significant that we understand the position of the researcher and our own childhood experiences’.

Rather than seeking to be objective and suppress these musings, I wanted to explore these nostalgic spaces, appropriating my musings in an informative and enabling manner. I employed them in gestures towards reciprocity, sharing my own experiences with research subjects, and looking for strands of commonality, not just difference. This exchange of information was not only important for establishing rapport, but also in the development of a dialogic and collaborative research process. My autoethnographic gaze was not directed inward - which often causes autoethnography to be derided as self-indulgent and anecdotal (Moss, 2001) – but rather directed inward with an outward purview as my ‘self-knowledge’ was actively used to engage with others.

Active observant participation also helped to me to make sense of the children’s playful practices. I experienced the muscular sensations involved in practices such as videogaming. I was invigorated by the proximal relations shared in various playful practices. I experienced the excitement of not knowing what was going to happen next. I began to appreciate the level of detailed knowledge and
skill required by particular practices as I became frustrated with my own incompetences and failings. I discovered the commitment involved in mastering these practices as I strove to improve. I also experienced the tactility of specific objects as I touched them — held them close, stroked them or gripped them.

To make the familiar strange, I adopted the principle of disrupting the everyday socio-material order. This can inform techniques for the creation of a space in which our participants and ourselves can reflect upon, or at least become aware of routine and mundane practices. Latham (2003) uses the diary-photograph and the diary-interview method to encourage his participants to become ‘proxy observers’ of their own everyday geographies. I employed video ethnography in a similar vein to make the familiar unfamiliar, the banal extraordinary and the tacit recognisable. Video was used to capture movement and kinesic variables, which were then replayed to the participant and used as a stimulus to which they could respond. This encouraged them to become proxy observers of their own mundane sensory and material practice. It was also used to record my embodied interactions in the same way, sitting alongside and speaking to my participatory (as opposed to observational) field notes. The dual techniques of active participation and becoming a proxy observer acted as a multi-layered approach that prised open practices to a greater degree. Deeper understanding of our own practice allows us to share our experiences with our participants in a more intimate and intricate manner. This approach was especially useful with regard to the practice of videogaming where it was used to draw attention to and develop understanding of the children’s intuitive engagements with games console handsets (which is explored in greater detail in chapter 7).

*Playing and learning together*

As mentioned previously, significant attention has been paid to the matter of connection and disconnection between the world of the child and the world of the adult. The matter of the ‘geography of position’ is not unique to the adult-child relation, but emblematic of research more broadly. However, it possesses a special charge in relation to children because of their perceived vulnerability and the unique fact that at one stage in our life we have experienced this realm of being. As Philo (2003:9) explains:
'We have all 'been there' in one way or another, creating the potential for some small measure of empathy – some sense of recognition, sharing and mutual understanding, even if slight – with the children whom we encounter in our adult lives'.

Philo refers to this small measure of empathy as a 'fragment of connection'. Thinking through how we may attend to the material and sensory body prompts us to realise material fragments of connection between the adult and the child. Attention to embodiment – seeing the body as always in action – cautions us to be wary of neat categorisations of adult and child, which rely upon the subdivision of bodies that are in a state of continual flux. As Horton and Kraftl (2006a; 2006b) suggest, rather than speaking of 'growing up' we should attend to the process of 'going on', we can recognise the 'Other' within us (Katz, 1992).

This does not mean assuming transparency between adult and child, researcher and researched. Our experience of an event is personal and partial, and thus cannot represent the experience of another. However, we can move to a 'space of betweenness' (Katz, 1992) where our partialities – our relational knowledges (Harker, 2005) - meet. Our relational knowledges may be complementary, they may be contradictory, but they can inform each other. As Katz suggests, in this space of betweenness we can engage our differences in enabling ways; we can share, learn and transform. We can bring our experiences together, allowing them to speak for themselves, and to speak to each other, a practice that may encourage the audience to also speak to them. Knowledge is actively created – performed – in the shared space of betweenness. The research becomes framed as a shared process of knowledge creation, reconfiguring the politics of knowledge production (see Woodyer, 2008).

**Ethical Negotiations**

Ethical considerations provided a third challenge in relation to research practice. Before entering the field I had to assure my institution and (to a lesser extent) my funding body (the Economic and Social Research Council) that due care and consideration had been taken with regard to research ethics. Particular
reference had to be made to the specific considerations of conducting research with children. Assurances made prior to the fieldwork then had to be negotiated once in the ‘field’. My concern with researching the co-fabricated character of our social worlds prompted further ethical consideration with regard to the affective dimensions of corporeal relations between humans and non-humans. My account of these ethical challenges is framed around three means of ‘being ethical’: adherence to (and negotiations of) standardised ethical codes; assuming a flexible role in relation to the children; and adopting a more ‘generous’ ethical sensibility.

**Negotiating ethical codes**

Prior to meeting the children, I established a ‘research ethics framework’ (see Appendix C), which outlined ‘the moral principles guiding the research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond’ (ESRC, 2005:7). This framework drew upon the standard codes outlined by the National Children’s Bureau (NCB, 2003), the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002), the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and the Social Research Association (SRA, 2003), in addition to those outlined by my institution (RHUL, 2002) and my funding body (ESRC, 2005). Central to this framework were the notions of freely given informed consent and the right to withdraw, privacy, child protection, the avoidance of harm, and best practice. In line with ethical standards, I obtained an enhanced disclosure check by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) prior to my entry into ‘the field’.

From the outset, it became apparent that the question of research ethics would be subject to continued review. Freely given informed consent refers to ‘the process of voluntarily agreeing to participate in a research project based upon complete disclosure of all relevant information and the recipient’s understanding of this’ (NCB, 2003:2). Initially I had hoped that approaching children prior to their parents by making contact through the school would limit any parental persuasion to participate. The children were given the choice to opt in to the research, rather than to opt out (Gregson, 2007). This choice would then be subject to consent from the parents. Following a change in recruitment strategy, this process of opting in was altered as initial contact was made with
parents. I briefly explained that I was doing a research project looking at children's use of toys and that I was wondering if I could talk to their child to see if they would be prepared to meet with me to chat about it. Upon approval I spoke to the child, but rather than arranging dates and times of a meeting there and then, I gave them the opportunity to think about it and decide on a date and time that would be convenient to them. From the start, the onus was put on the child's right to make the decision. I then spoke to the child again in a follow-up phone call, where I confirmed a time to meet them at their home. It was also confirmed that this had been discussed with their parents. At this stage it was stressed that meeting to chat about the project did not equate to consent to participate. At the initial meeting, which was conducted with the children of the household and at least one parent, I outlined the nature and the purpose of the research, who was funding it, the extent and nature of the commitment involved, and how information would be recorded and what would happen to it. This information was primarily conveyed to the children, using language that was appropriate to their understanding. Along with their parents, they were encouraged to ask questions at any point. The parents were provided with a written summary of this information, which contained my contact details, should they wish to discuss concerns at any point. The collaborative and unfolding nature of the research was explained. The children were shown examples of the materials completed in the pilot study to give them a clear idea of what was involved. They commonly expressed their enthusiasm for the creative tasks by discussing what they would photograph, how they would arrange their photographs differently, what they would like to film, or what they would like to chat about, be that particular toys, hobbies or activities. The initial meeting was important for establishing the child's enthusiasm to participate as a means of gauging any parental influence or persuasion (Nilsen and Rogers, 2005). It was explained that even if they gave their consent to participate, they had the right to withdraw at anytime, without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences. One child, Emily, opted to exercise this right before I felt the research sessions had run their course. She later decided to opt back in because she wanted to do some more video work with her Bratz dolls.

It quickly became apparent that to ensure ethical considerability (McCormack, 2003) ethical issues needed to be addressed in a situated manner (Cloke et al,
2000). For instance, given the collaborative and unfolding nature of the research, complete disclosure of the direction of the research could not be given. While Cloke et al (2000) see this as a limitation to informed consent, I saw this as an opportunity to extend the possibility of informed consent by creating space for children’s engagement with research questions (see Woodyer, 2008).

The stylised code of ethical practice I established at the inception of the research acted as a frame of reference rather than a code to be rigidly applied. Codes focus on particular ethical moments and can become a substitute for the active engagement of the researcher with ethics as an ongoing social practice (Christensen and Prout, 2002). Drawing on an understanding of children as active participants in societal life, this research constitutes children as active participants in the research process. This presented ethical issues that could not be responded to by reference to a standardised code. Fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and communication was an essential feature of this work. This entailed listening and responding to children’s perspectives, experiences and wishes, as a means to enable the children to protect their own interests through the research (Roberts, 2000). I shall illustrate this need for flexibility by highlighting specific instances when ethical questions arose.

In the initial meetings, the concept of anonymity was explained to the children. The children were asked to select pseudonyms, which would be used both for the labelling of material and within reports. Rather than demanding a name on the spot, they were given time to think of a suitable name. As they began work on their photograph albums in the first session, several children expressed concern that their individual efforts would not be recognised if they could not put their own name to the work. This was informed by local cultural practices pertaining to the display of children’s school work or handicraft. This was seen as a privilege and an honour (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5). The children took pride in their completed photograph albums, as expressed in their eagerness to show them to their parents. Several of the children designed front covers for their albums in their own time (see Figure 3.6). These albums were generally stored along with project work completed at school.

This prompted further discussion of anonymity in relation to the materials produced and beyond this moment to how these might be used in the thesis,
Figure 3.4  Emily’s Schoolwork on the fridge

Source: Emily’s annotated photograph album
**Figure 3.5** Katie’s Handiwork on the kitchen cupboard door

*Source: Photograph taken by Katie*
Figure 3.6  Taking Pride in Research Tasks by designing a front cover

Source: Photograph taken by Stephen
presentations and publications. Although they expressed slight embarrassment at the prospect of their image being displayed on a big screen for an audience, this was overridden by conjoined excitement. In this instance they wanted people to know who they were; they wanted their moment of fame. We discussed how they might feel about the use of these images as time passed and they grew older, changing their habits of use. Would they be embarrassed if people saw the material then? Again, this was believed to be outweighed by the benefits of participating, which were understood as having fun, marking one's particular accumulation of possessions, being filmed and learning how to create video footage. This was particularly expressed in relation to publications, where the children thought it would be ‘cool’ to see their name in print. ‘How many people can say they have that?’ The children’s wishes were raised with the parents, who were happy that the right to anonymity could be waived. A journal article containing discussion of Stephen and Matthew’s gaming practice was published prior to completion of the thesis. As promised, I returned to the household with a copy of the article which they could keep, and a copy of the journal issue itself so they could see how it had been produced. They flicked through to the part where their names were printed, which was shown to their older sister and their mum. This fact of inclusion marked their contribution to the research and their perspectives and experiences in general as being valued.

I did not take the children’s waive of anonymity as a once and for all decision, but rather continually reviewed it in relation to the material produced. For instance, I remained aware that material may prompt intra-household conflict to arise. In reality, only one instance relating to the associated ethical matter of confidentiality (Holt, 2004) arose. One child requested that a particular section be edited out of their video footage as it contained some mild swearing and they wanted to show the material to their parents.

At this point it should be noted that the above experience was not true for all the children. One parent expressed concern about photographs of her children being reproduced due to the family’s particular familial situation. I chose not to pry into the details of this matter. In any event, these children expressed no interest in doing any video work and their photographs were focussed on toys, rather than themselves.
Adopting a flexible role

Flexibility also had to be adopted in relation to the role I assumed in research encounters with the children. Within accounts of ethnographic research, researchers have drawn attention to the need to adopt an atypical adult role (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Emond, 2005; Holt, 2004). Children are always in a structural relationship to the adults around them. To gain access to their social worlds, it is necessary for the researcher to avoid reproducing these unequal hierarchical relations by performing their identity in non-dominant ways. This involves contesting institutional and societal norms and expectations placed on adult behaviour. In practical terms, I always dressed casually for research sessions, typically wearing jeans and a t-shirt or jumper, and removed my trainers on entry to the home. As Emond (2005) writes, the role adopted should be comfortable for the researcher so as not to be false and patronising. To this end, I drew upon elements of my own character that may be described as playful and in some senses unconventional in relation to adult behaviour. I would readily sit on the floor when playing or talking with the child or would sit cross-legged when working at the table. I would be attentive to and appreciative of their particular argot and local cultures of communication (Christensen and Prout, 2002), actively learning about them with the children, but not attempting to replicate them in a patronising fashion. I avoided promoting an authoritarian role by suspending beliefs as to appropriate behaviour and attempting to be non-judgemental. In the initial research sessions some of the children, particularly the boys, actively tested this role (Christensen and Prout, 2002; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000) through the use of behaviour that would usually be regarded as silly and inappropriate and met with adult disapproval. This included what may be called ‘poo-poo’ humour (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000), putting on funny voices or making seemingly nonsensical gestures or noises, or even hiding in cardboard boxes. Depending on the situation I would respond with a wry smile, laughter or follow their lead, as the following field diary extract demonstrates.

Sam takes a total of five photographs before declaring “Done!” For a moment I’m dumb struck. “You can use as many snaps as you like. Is there nothing else you’d like to take a picture of?” I ask. “No,”
simple response. He sits on a yellow plastic seat under his cabin bed, before deciding to climb into the empty cardboard box next to it. He then finds an open packet of balloons on the wooden trunk next to the box. He takes one from the packet and tries to inflate it several times to no avail. I decide to play along, not wanting to force the issue of the photographs. “Maybe it would help to stretch it first,” I offer. Sam starts stretching the balloon in my direction as if he is going to ping it at me. He has a mischievous, perhaps defiant look in his eyes. I try to deflect the behaviour by offering to have a go with one of the other balloons. As he offers no resistance, I take a fresh balloon and inflate it... He crawls out of the box to take possession of the balloon before taking control of the disposal camera once again. (Field Diary Extract, 11th January 2007)

Such playful behaviour was structured to comprise a transitory ritual for acceptance (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000). Managing this position was an ongoing practice. On very few occasions, I felt the need to make direct interventions in the children’s behaviour to safeguard their wellbeing. For instance, on one occasion, whilst acting out wrestling moves upstairs, one child climbed up onto the banister of the stairs as part of his triumphant celebration to the imaginary crowd. I immediately intervened, requesting that he climbed down because I thought it was dangerous to be playing so close to the stairs.

Following the lead of Punch (2001), I endeavoured to let the children decide the role they wanted me to play in any given situation, by responding to their behaviour towards me. At times they actively appropriated adult skills by asking me how to spell particular words when annotating their photographs, by asking me to separate the parts of a game so it could be packed away or by asking for assistance when recording video footage. This role was interspersed with one of the ‘incompetent adult’ (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000) when children took me under their wing to teach me how to play particular videogames. I was also enrolled as a playmate with an abandonment of adult behaviour, embroiled in the likes of a heroic rescue attempt of a furry friend:
Matthew is annotating his photograph album. He leaves the dining room table to go and get Mousee from the lounge, but finds he is not in his usual location. "Where's Mousee?!” He scrabbles around on the floor as if looking for him, not just on all fours, but on his front. He comes across his sunglasses. "Ah ha, my investigative glasses!" Adorning the glasses, which impede his vision in this light, he continues his search. The glasses then get thrown aside so he can conduct some 007 style moves. Now he is saving Mousee. From who, I'm not quite sure. He crawls around under the table and around my chair. "Where could he be?" he asks me. "Maybe upstairs?" He gets to his feet and turns back to look at me, as if willing me to join him. "Let's go then!" I declare. So up we go, crawling on all fours in 007 mode. We're on a mission to save Mousee!

(Field Diary Extract, 19th January 2007)

The above field diary entry highlights the co-constitutive role of objects in performance. Given my concern with the co-fabricated character of our social worlds, I actively sought to cultivate an ethical sensibility that was responsive to the affective dimensions of corporeal relations between human and non-human bodies as they emerged in unfolding events.

 Ethical generosity

The field of ethics has been extended significantly in recent years. In part, this has occurred through a sustained challenge to the primacy of the human as the reference point of geographical imaginations (Jones, 2000b; Whatmore, 2002). It has also occurred through attention to the importance of understandings of affect to an articulation of ethics (Massumi, 2002; McCormack, 2003).

These two currents of work question the privileging of cognitive and linguistic competences in the fashioning of the ethical subject by drawing attention to how humans are thoroughly entwined with an extralinguistic world. Two key issues are raised by the recognition of this connective multiplicity. Firstly, cognitive processes and rationalities are recognised as embodied and practiced. This has been emphasised through feminist concerns with corporeality and the
materially situated self (Grosz, 1994). These stress that the body is not a passive container of social being, but rather is a living assemblage of biological materials and processes, which both register and orient our senses to the world. This understanding prompts us to recognise the significance of embodied capacities in shaping ethical competence. As the capacities of cognition and communication mark the abstracted ideal of human distinctiveness, this understanding also undermines the privileged ethical status of humans (Whatmore, 1997), which is the second of the key issues raised. A notion of ethics centred on cognitive faculties such as reasoning is based on an opposition between objects and subjects. In attending to the corporeal connectivities between them it is possible to redefine the political and ethical subject. The non-human is released from its relegation to the status of object with no ethical standing (Whatmore, 1997). This is not an anti-humanist position as it remains faithful to the multiplicity from which human corporeality emerges and is exceeded by (McCormack, 2003). Such an understanding of ethics moves us further still beyond the limitations of understanding ethics as a standardised code. This restricted understanding of ethics is premised on instrumental reason (Whatmore, 1997) and assumes that only a prescriptive model can ensure responsibility (Bennett, 2001). In extending the ethical field we are engaging in processes of ‘refining the perceptual toolkits necessary to build moral stances’ (Thrift, 2004a:93).

In my own quest of refinement I have drawn particular inspiration from Bennett’s (2001) notion of an ‘ethical generosity’ and McCormack’s (2003) discussion of geographical ethics in spaces of affect, bringing these together with Whatmore’s (1997) concept of relational ethics. My desire to cultivate an ethical sensibility that was responsive to the affective dimensions of the encounters with my research participants was stimulated by two concerns. Firstly, there was the recognition that the actions of everyday life ‘do not spring from judgement and reasoning, but from an immediate coping with what is confronting us’ (Varela, 1999:5, cited in Thrift, 2004a). For instance, my desire to adopt a flexible role in relation to the children was spurred by a preordained ethical strategy (Christensen and Prout, 2002) concerned with ensuring best practice and the rights of the child as a social actor. However, its
implementation relied on responding to children and their material culture in
the moment. It required being attuned and responsive to the relations and
movements that catalysed affects as they flowed between human and non-
human bodies (Harker, 2005; McCormack, 2003). As Thrift (2004a) writes, we
need to work on the faculty of judgement as it is actually exercised, that is in the
immediate present. Much of what happens in a world of activities and relations
happens before it is registered by conscious thought. Affect remains attentive to
sensibilities that play out before reflective thinking comes into play but are
nevertheless felt as ways of going on in the world. These ethical actions that are
implicated in and emergent from the diverse sensibilities of embodiment are
true ethical actions (Varela, 1999). They represent the most common form of
ethical behaviour, and purport to the existence of ethics in the absence of a
code-centred model of command ethics (Bennett, 2001). Cognitive judgement is
a secondary effect of an ethical sensibility to affective moments (Thrift, 2004a).
To be responsive to the relations and movements that catalyse affects in spaces
with objects it is necessary to take the matter of the event as it emerges
seriously. It is necessary to cultivate an ‘ethos of awareness’ (Thrift, 2004a), a
generosity or openness to the world in the moment (Bennett, 2001). There is a
need to become faithful to the intensity of the event, attending to its potential to
open up new modes of thinking, feeling and moving (Dewsbury, 2000), to
prompt transformations of the self (McCormack, 2003) and new becomings
(Crouch, 2001; 2003). In the moment I was not responding to just that which
was cognitively recognised, but to that which was ‘felt’ (Harker, 2005). If
something felt right I would ‘go with the flow’. At times when something just did
not feel right I would adjust my behaviour, often in an immediate, instinctive,
rather than reflective manner.

The second concern prompting my desire to cultivate this form of ethical
sensibility was my concern with exploring the relational nature of the subject
and object and the provisional agencies that emerge from these relations. I
cultivated an ethical generosity towards the relational nature of subjects and
objects, listening, watching and feeling how they were performed. This was
variously effected through the use of video techniques, talk, shared play,
observation, and personal recollection and practices of use. The balance of these
methods and techniques varied in relation to different toys, informed by the
child's lead as to the most appropriate forms of exploration. By drawing together different methods I was able to adopt multiple perspectives, which rather than being triangulated, were layered to create a depth of understanding. The recognition of webs of connectivity translates into acknowledged responsibilities. Whatmore (1997) examines how collectivities built from the human and non-human constitute the topography of a political and ethical community. If we are to conceptualise children as 'heterogeneous engineers' it is necessary to redefine the political and ethical status of toys, appreciating their role in the heterogeneous networks that are enrolled in the application of agential powers.

McCormack (2003:502) declares that attending to and through affect

'shifts the burden of the ethical from the effort to do justice to individual subjects, and towards a commitment to develop a fidelity to the event as that through which new spaces of thinking and moving may come into being'.

He maintains that this fidelity requires us to relinquish the imperative to go beyond or behind a surface understanding of or immersion in an event. The intensity of responding to different surfaces of attention can be as important as the depth of insight offered. What one folds into an encounter is as important as what one finds out. This means becoming less concerned with doing justice to the experience of other participants through providing representations of their voice and experiences. This prevents one from becoming faithful to the relations and movements that play out through the enactment of practice. There is a need to balance recognition of practice with not thinking too much about it. The moment at which an imperative to expose meaning takes over is the moment an encounter with a pre-cognitive practice ceases to become ethical because the processes that animate practice are devalued. On the one hand, to 'hear' the children (Roberts, 2000) and appreciate their experiences I had to become less concerned with representing them. However, while McCormack actively resists illustrating how participants make reflective, after-the-fact sense of encounters and events, I actively drew the children into the process of understanding how directly attending to corporeal relations develops our sense of how and why
some things matter. In this vein, I was not restricting or foreclosing the field of ethical sensibility or potential, but rather forging a new political and ethical space (Thrift, 2004a); a 'space of betweeness' where relational knowledges meet. Going behind and beyond the event was important to ensure that affect was not reduced to the non-cognitive and pre-reflective (Anderson, 2006; Massumi, 2002). It is as important to thinking and judgement as it is to feelings (Harker, 2005). This is emphasised by Connolly's (2002) hybrids of affect and thinking: 'affectively imbued thoughts' and 'thought imbued intensities' (Anderson, 2006). He writes of thinking as a complex, layered activity, involving the interplay of cognitive, sensual and affective faculties. Thrift (2004b) also writes of affect as a form of thinking. I was concerned with thinking through and beyond affect as it was experienced in the moment, to consider its implications in social relations and processes of identity construction. It is also important to note that engagements with toys are not limited to the pre-reflective or non-cognitive. Toys are at once material and discursive entities. While there is a need to approach toys themselves to prevent them from disappearing in advance in theoretical discourse, there is also a need to be sensitive to the positioning of toys within historical and semiotic patterns of meaning (Fleming, 1996). This is discussed further in the concluding section of this chapter.

Being ethical beyond the encounter

I have discussed how an ethical framework was established at the inception of the research and how this was extended to the adoption of an ethical sensibility in research encounters. The ethical also continued beyond the encounter in the processes of analysis and writing. I wanted to remain faithful to the richness of the relations between the children and their toys as they had been encountered in the 'field'. To this end, I drew inspiration from Hitchings' (2003) approach of focusing on single links within wider networks. Initially, each child's case study was analysed on its own terms to establish a clear sense of what particular things mattered to the child and why. I then looked across case studies for overlapping themes, compiling material on particular toys (such as the PlayStation2 games console), particular types of toy (such as videogame
consoles more generally) and different types of commodity (such as branded goods).

My concern for preserving the richness of relations was then translated into the process of writing, throughout which I was concerned with evoking a sense of the encounter and the liveliness that took place. As McCormack (2003:502) notes, the presenting of an event is an element of the ethical process in and of itself. 'The lines of this writing are its own process of becoming faithful to relations and movements that crossed a threshold of intensity'. To this end, I have employed field diary extracts, stills taken from video footage and moving images in my writing. These are presented together with direct quotations and visual material produced by the children. Precedents for the use of diary entries describing the researcher's embodied experience can be found in the work of Crouch (2003), Morton (2005) and Revill (2005). The use of this kind of extract is a logical outcome of thinking in terms of practice. Extracts will necessarily always be reductive (McCormack, 2003), but they give a flavour of much more complex experiences. Supplementing and complementing them with visual and moving images deepens understanding of moments that have passed and try to evade capture.

In an attempt to animate the geographies of children's material culture, this material is layered in different ways in different chapters. In chapters 4 and 5, the full range of different materials is used. In chapter 6 direct quotation of a narrative developed in the children's 'magical' play is presented in the form of a script and set alongside video footage. A different narrative developed in doll play is introduced by video footage and represented in full as a comic strip. This draws upon the children's strategic use of specific literary devices, such as 'meanwhile'. In chapter 7 stills, moving images and descriptions of my own embodied experience are layered to explore practices of videogaming.

In this thesis I have attempted to weave 'a narrative that brings together actions, events, meaning frameworks and objects' (Gregson et al, 2007:199) to develop in-depth understanding of why and how toys matter to children. Individual case studies are used to evoke the richness of the relations between children and their toys. Here I draw on Gregson et al's (2007) representational tactic of
telling stories about particular households. Where appropriate these are integrated with examples from other households. These case studies of one example in one household in one part of England are used to think about the character of contemporary children’s relations with consumer culture and commodities. Playing with toys is a hugely diverse activity. This thesis examines the typical acts of playing with toys that led me to create this edifice. While the thesis does not purport to offer the only possible theoretical explanation of children’s playful practices with toys, nor to account for the bulk of playful practices that may occur, a series of generalisations regarding children’s creativity, their passionate engagement with socio-material worlds and their active negotiation of the commodified space of childhood may be extended from the case studies presented (see Crang (1994) and Miller (1998a) for a similar argument and approach). These generalisations are addressed in chapter 8.

In Summary

In setting out this methodological and ethical agenda my aim has not been to celebrate the non-cognitive as more authentic than the cognitive. The cognitive and non-cognitive should not be separated. As Deleuze (1988: 97) writes, the ‘unthought’ is ‘not external to thought, but lies at its very heart’ (cited in Harrison, 2000: 497). Nor has it been my intention to privilege the material above the discursive. The representational and the non-representational should not be conceptualised as discrete (see Cresswell (2006) and Revill (2004) for discussions of the relations between the two, in the context of ballroom dancing and the French folk scene respectively). Indeed, in terms of consuming toys, one cannot fully understand their use without reference to the intertextual, semiotic culture within which they are produced and situated (Fleming, 1996), hence my use of ‘desk research’. The aim of my research strategy was not to establish a dualistic approach to the discursive and the material, but to ‘[recognise] their close intertwining in the constitution of the body and experience’ (Moss and Dyck, 1996: 739).

In this chapter I have discussed how embodied – material and sensory – practice was approached empirically. By drawing on new and emerging lines of academic inquiry, it is possible to interrogate our established methodologies.
This does not mean rejecting our more conventional representationally oriented methods, nor does it mean striving for innovation for its own sake. The impetus behind the development of this methodological agenda was the need to develop an appropriate method of inquiry for the particular research questions I am addressing. We cannot expect to explore non-cognitively oriented and profoundly practical knowledge through cognitively oriented, discursive practices alone. Examination of embodied practice offers the means to address the heterogeneous assemblages that comprise our socio-material worlds.

I conclude by suggesting how the form of research practice developed here is of import to a range of fields, particularly children's geographies, consumption studies and material culture studies. As discussed in chapter 2, the concept of heterogeneous geographies offers a new ecumenical framework for the study of childhood (Woodyer, 2008). We can no longer deny the materiality of the child's body; embodiment is implicated in everything children see, feel, think and do (Horton and Kraftl, 2006a). By politicising the body as a research tool we can begin to address and understand the role of the body and its materiality in children's constructions of social relations, meanings and experiences. We can examine how the heterogeneous entities comprising children's socio-material worlds mutually enrol, constitute and order each other. This expands our understanding of children's agency through consideration of how they form alliances with material things as a means to exercise agential powers (Prout, 2005). The research strategy presented in this chapter directly addresses how heterogeneous geographies may be approached empirically. Engaging embodied practice also offers a new perspective on adult-child and researcher-participant relations by emphasising how bodies 'go on' rather than 'grow up'. (See Woodyer (2008) for discussion of how Children's Geographies may speak back to the lines of academic inquiry addressed in this chapter.)

Recently, attempts have been made to rethink consumption in relation to theories of practice (Warde, 2005). Gregson (2007:33) develops the idea that consumption is but a moment of practice through the notion of meta-practices – practices that 'go in relation to and as part of other forms of routine behaviour, doings, sayings, and know-how with things'. Thus, consumption is not just a moment in practices, but also a conjunction of meta-practices, for instance, she
refers to the acquisition, holding, sorting and ridding involved in domestic appropriation (see also Gregson et al, 2007). Attending to consumption in terms of practice allows for exploration of the habitual and the utilitarian, as well as the expressive and the contemplative (Warde, 2005). (This is discussed further in chapter 8.) The research strategy outlined in this chapter offers a means of approaching practice, opening the study of consumption to questions of embodiment, affect and emotion.

Finally, empirical examination of embodied practice affords a means to address a concern for the mundane sensual and material qualities of the object within material culture studies. It allows the study of material culture to be opened further to questions of ergonomics (Bridger, 2009) and tactility (Attfield, 2000), as well as other forms of sensuous engagement (Rodaway, 1994). Such work could inform and draw upon a growing concern with haptic geographies (Hetherington, 2003; Obrador-Pons, 2007; Paterson, 2006). The matter of ergonomics and haptics is addressed in chapter 7 in relation to videogaming.
Animating Toys
In this chapter I initiate an examination of the specific contributions of toys to relational agency, a concern which forms the substantive core of this thesis. This examination is framed around the empirical theme of animation. The verb 'to animate' is derived from the Latin verb, *animare*, which means 'to give life to' (Wells, 1998). Attending to agential powers enlivens the inanimate object of the toy; it is seen to be 'doing' something. As discussed in chapter 2, agency is understood in terms of *doing*, the attribution of agency rests on its *effects*. It is in the act of doing that the agent leaves a trace that makes them visible. In this sense, toys may be thought of as technologies because they are productive. They motivate inferences, interpretations and responses. These effects are the product of the different kinds of agency the toy object embodies. In this chapter I begin to trace the agency of particular toys by examining the effects and responses they provoke. In using the idea of animation to evoke the liveliness of objects I am not attempting to humanise them by imputing intentionality. Rather, I am drawing on Law's (2004a) understanding that agency may be emotive and embodied, as well as cognitive.

I present three case studies that engage with the concept of animation in different ways. Firstly, I attend to a toy which is animated in a conventional sense, brought to life in Aardman Studio's claymation series, *Wallace and Gromit*. I examine how a 'plush' version of Gromit, which is representative of a wider category of cuddly toys, is actively brought to life by his owner through a process of anthropomorphism. In so doing, I attend to the relation between these two forms of animation. Secondly, I attend to model planes, which are given life through manufacture by their owner. I examine how different forms of agency may be traced through different features of this production process. Thirdly, I examine how trading cards are brought to life in practices of collecting, as children enact various mutations in value. Different cards are seen to provoke different shifting interpretations of value depending on the particular images and symbols they depict.

Through these case studies it is seen that the agential powers by which particular toys are animated are a function of three broadly conceived prompts to agency. The first prompt is the sensual and material qualities of the toy itself, which is discussed here in terms of textility and paedomorphic features, and
their provocation of anthropomorphic thinking. The second prompt is the 'socio-relational matrix' in which the toy is embedded, which is addressed in relation to ideas of distributed personhood, possession and enchantment, with regard to model planes. The third prompt is the representational qualities of the toy, which is explored in relation to the images carried by trading cards and the systems of meaning they operate in.

Toys have long been associated with the concept of animism, a belief in the idea that non-human entities have souls like their human counterparts, and are therefore capable of influencing human events. This association is exemplified by the development of the interactive toy. Before introducing the case studies that form the main part of this chapter, I offer a brief account of this association to contextualise my particular concern with object agency and animation. Interactive toys appear to embody an obvious example of object agency. However, where present in the research households, these toys remained relatively unanimated in relation to the children. In the following section, I introduce empirical material to illustrate this lack of animated behaviour, offering it as a contrast to animated behaviour of different types of toy that would at first glance appear to offer less obvious forms of object agency. This encourages scepticism about agency just in terms of interactivity, and serves to highlight the importance of the research strategy adopted by this thesis.

From Ritual Objects to the Tamagotchi

‘...a bizarre clamour resounded in the cabinet, and all the sharp, shrill voices exclaimed with all their weak might: “To arms! To arms!” At the same time, the castle bells started ringing, and murmurs came from all sides: “Mayday! Mayday! Let’s get up! It’s the enemy! Battle, battle, battle!”

Marie turned around. The cabinet was miraculously lit and it was filled with a loud hubbub. All the harlequins, the Pierrots, the Punchinello, and the jumping jacks were on the move, scurrying hither and yon, exhorting one another, while the dolls were shredding linen and preparing remedies for the wounded.
Finally, Nutcracker himself flung away his covers and with two feet together he leaped off the bed and onto the floor, yelling: Crack! Crack! Crack! Stupid heap of mice! Get back to your holes or I'll take care of you on the spot!"
(Dumas, 1845, transl. Neugroschel, 2007:89-90)

As the above quote taken from Dumas's (1845) *The Tale of the Nutcracker* illustrates, the animism of toys has long been a trope employed in not only children's literature, but literature more generally. The theme has also been brought to the big screen by the likes of the family favourites *Pinocchio* and *Toy Story*, and in a more sinister form in *Child's Play*.

As Kuznets (1994) shows in an account of the history of toys, how they emerge in narrative and how they appear as objects are connected. From their inception, toys have held an ambiguous position in the human psyche. Historians of toys and archaeologists have drawn attention to the blurred boundaries between ritual objects and children's toys (Fraser, 1966; Sofaer Derevenski, 2000). Small objects found at burial sites have often been assumed to be toys, but the purpose of primitive replicas is hard to determine. Many of these figures may not have been playthings, but rather idols or fetishes. The root word for doll in a number of Asian cultures is the same as that for idol and fetish. Within Japanese culture, dolls continue to have ritualistic connections as demonstrated by the celebration of doll ceremonies. In this cultural context, dolls are understood to serve a double function, being both a plaything and a means of protection, warding off the likes of illness (Fraser, 1966).

Ambiguity was also prompted by the use of mechanisation to create toys and automata. The European medieval church associated mechanical objects with the devil because of their 'magical' abilities. Despite the heightened interest in scientific experimentation and technological innovation that came with the Industrial Revolution, suspicion of animism continues to be found in nineteenth century tales of evil toy makers or mad scientists like Victor Frankenstein (Kuznets, 1994). Anxiety about animism has since been revived in late twentieth century narratives concerning robotry and can be seen in recent debates surrounding interactive toys.
Interactive toys, which are variously referred to as 'smart' or 'adaptive' toys, boast the ability to interact physically with their environment in a reactive fashion (Allen, 2004; Billard, 2003; Thrift, 2003). This advancement forcefully challenges the commonly perceived polarity of people and objects, as the latter are invested with an immediate and readily recognisable form of agency. The advancement of artificial agency has prompted reflection on what life itself might mean. 'Smart toys' are re-describing the boundaries between human and non-human, and redefining what counts as consciousness. Turkle (1996:83) discusses how these toys have cued a new category location of 'conscious but not alive' in children's minds, 'the machine has been expanded to include having a psychology' (cited in Thrift, 2003).

On the one hand this agency suggests that toys, as objects, are above the textual closure that sits at the core of contemporary debates concerning toys (Fleming, 1996). On the other hand, new expressions of anxiety regarding the animism of toys have arisen. It is feared that the child's own creative capabilities are inhibited as 'smart toys' lead and frame play. Thrift (2003) acknowledges the apprehension surrounding such potential constraints, but emphasises the possibilities of this growing autonomy. While conceding that the increased agency of the object necessarily reconfigures the object's user, he proposes that this does not reduce the ability of the child to fantasise by offering preformed imaginative solutions. He suggests that these 'smart toys' may produce more, rather than less expressive possibilities. He also suggests 'smart toys' may encourage new styles of learning and thinking because these toys are able to adapt to the particular learning styles of children on a scale that is not feasible for mass socialisation systems.

General advancements in interactivity are bound up with the historical development of toys. Toys have been used as test beds for many of the information technology innovations of contemporary capitalism and the defence industry. As Thrift (2003:389) exclaims, '[t]oys are the touchstone for a digital infrastructure that works'. They act as a particularly stringent test bed because of the demands children make in relation to 'playability'. They demand hardware, software and interfaces that work in a reliable and efficient manner.
If a toy does not meet their expectations it is quickly cast aside. Despite this demand, it is not so surprising that technological and communicative innovations are found in humble toys. Toy companies like LEGO, Mattel, Hasbro and Bandai have become huge national corporations with profits to invest in new and ever more imaginative products. This development has been coupled with massive growth in the buying power of many children and parents in recent years (Mintel, 2002a; Thrift, 2003). A growing concern with haptics, intelligent spaces and embodied cognition, has prompted academic attention to turn to interactive toys (see Allen, 2004; Billard, 2003; Thrift, 2003).

The Tamagotchi, manufactured by the Japanese company Bandai, is generally agreed to be the first commercially successful interactive toy. In its original mode the Tamagotchi was a virtual pet housed in a cheap wristwatch, which consisted of a small LCD screen and three buttons. In its more recent form it is a small handheld gadget with metal keychain. The Tamagotchi simulates the life cycle of a pet, and requires feeding and nurturing to 'survive'. This is accomplished by pressing the right combination of buttons. In essence, it is a primitive reactive intelligence. The pet changes its behaviour patterns as the life cycle proceeds and in relation to its use. Released in the UK in May 1997, the Tamagotchi found immediate commercial success with 40 million being sold around the world by the end of the year. As a new craze it embedded itself in popular culture history, and has continued to achieve recognition in terms of sales and industry awards. The range has been extended to include a boys' version in the form of Digimon, released in 1998, which won Innovative Toy of the Year. This was followed by an accompanying television show in 2000. Following this was the launch of the Connexion range, which features infrared communication functions, enabling the toy to be friends with other Tamagotchi. Tamagotchi Connexion Version 2 won Toy of the Year 2005 (Tamagotchi.com, 2008).

'Smart' toys would appear to offer an obvious example of object agency. However, irrespective of their commercial success, Tamagotchi, and 'smart toys' as a whole, were only evidently present in one of the research households. Despite commanding nurture, these virtual pets were met with a lack of concern on the child owner's behalf, as these field diary extracts illustrate:
Something beeps. There are three Tamagotchi on the table. Christine [the mother] picks up the one that beeped. It has to be fed. Food delivered, she returns it to the table, but then picks it up again to play a game with it. At no point during the session do the children interact with them. Christine explains that she has to look after them because they are neglected by the boys.

(Field Diary Extract, 4th April 2006)

This lack of concern was exemplified by the boys' absence of remorse when they are informed that their virtual pet has died due to their inattention. The children happily moved from one character to another. If they failed to care for their virtual pet, bringing about its demise, they simply had to use the point of a pencil to press the small reset button and a new friend would appear. The ease of this reset offered little incentive for sustained engagement.

In terms of my work, the Tamagotchi did not offer a powerful account of object agency. In relation to the children, a sense of liveliness was absent, as it failed to provoke a response, despite its audible attempts to call the children to action. This lack of effect questions its agency, as it is through effects, through the traces of 'doing', that agency is attributed. While 'smart toys' may be able to respond to their environment in a reactive fashion, they were not seen to affect their environment and the children inhabiting it. This illustrates that object agency cannot be reduced to interactive capabilities, indeed, as will be shown through the proceeding case studies, different forms of agency were more clearly evident and strongly felt. This explains why, despite receiving attention in academic literature, interactive toys do not feature in this thesis with regard to my empirical concern with animation. The agency of an object cannot be assumed a priori, rather it has to be traced by attending to the embodied relations in which it shares. I now turn to the case studies that begin to present the myriad ways in which toys actively became animated, expressing qualities of liveliness, during the research.
Animating Cuddly Toys: anthropomorphism

To initiate discussion of the animation of toys in the households under study I want to turn to one of the humblest of toys, the cuddly toy (which assumes a multitude of guises), and examine a particular kind of animism – anthropomorphism - that was more prevalent than that associated with engineered artificial agency. In this chapter I develop my earlier discussion (in chapter 2) of how the mundane sensual and material properties of things may matter, in the sense that they provoke effects, by exploring the particular features of non-human forms that lend to anthropomorphic thinking. I discuss how anthropomorphic thinking is facilitated by closeness. In relation to cuddly toys, closeness is facilitated by two means. Mentally, it is expedited by the toy functioning as a transitional object, and physically, it is provoked by the toy’s textility, which prompts a close physical relationship with the body. This assists the toy in its role as a transitional object. The closeness fostered with the cuddly toy grants it a sense of humanity. This is further conveyed by the specific paedomorphic features of the toy.

I begin this discussion by outlining what I understand by the term anthropomorphism and how it has been commonly approached in anthropological and scientific literature, and more recently in geographical and marketing literature. Its treatment can be crudely characterised as a debate between anthropomorphism as the perceptual misattribution of life and its existence as an abiding feature of human cognition. My concern is not to evaluate the validity of anthropomorphism, but rather to place the emphasis on factors that influence its expression. This is an element neglected in the current literature addressing this phenomenon (Gell, 1998; Serpell, 2003).

Anthropomorphism as a form of animism

The terms ‘animism’ and ‘anthropomorphism’ are often conflated (see Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Gell, 1998). While they are both concerned with the attribution of life to natural and/or inanimate phenomena, anthropomorphism is specifically concerned with the tendency to extrapolate human behaviour from supposedly inanimate entities. It involves imputing human attributes such
as thoughts, feelings and motivations to the non-human (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; de Waal, 2001; Gell, 1998; Serpell, 2003). The term itself is derived from the Greek for 'human form' (de Waal, 2001). While noting this difference, theories of animism can still be employed to inform thinking on anthropomorphism.

The concept of animism was initially developed by E.B Tylor in his 1871 work *Primitive Culture*. As such it is one of anthropology's earliest concepts; 'a 19th-century representation of an ethnographically researchable practice particularly conspicuous among indigenous peoples' (Bird-David, 1999:67). The concept was shaped by the nineteenth century positivistic spiritual/materialist dichotomy within which it was developed. Tylor sought explanation for the attribution of life to animal, vegetable and mineral in a purported difference of mentalities between primitive and civilized peoples. Thus, cognitive underdevelopment was read into the practice of animism (Bird-David, 1999; Gell, 1998).

'For Tylor, this extension of animism was due to the particular mentality of the primitive, who, like an infant, cannot distinguish the animate and the inanimate. Since the first beings of which the child commences to have an idea are men, that is, himself and those around him, it is upon this model of human nature that he tends to think of everything...Now the primitive thinks like a child. Consequently, he also is inclined to endow all things, even inanimate ones, with a nature analogous to his own' (Durkheim, 1915:53, cited in Bird-David, 1999).

In this sense, the concept of animism functioned as a classificatory device that served to separate behaviour that could be understood and sympathised with by Western civilised peoples from that which was found to be superstitious and perverse (Gell, 1998). Discussions of anthropomorphism in scientific literature have also tended to dwell upon its lack of validity as a means to understand the behaviour of the non-human. Specifically, this is witnessed in discussions of anthropomorphism as a technique for describing and interpreting animal behaviour (de Waal, 2001; Serpell, 2003). Tylor's concept of animism has had a lasting influence on anthropological theory. His influence is seen in the
theoretical trend running through the work of Durkheim (1915) on religion and of Levi-Strauss (1962; 1966) on totemism and the savage mind to Guthrie's (1993) work on anthropomorphism, which examines contemporary examples of the phenomenon from 'the West' (Bird-David, 1999). Despite continued ethnographic engagement with the practice of animism, the historically situated term has not been subjected to sustained critical revision.

However, critique is offered by Gell's (1998) discussion of the worship of indexes of divine presence such as idols. He explains that the attribution of life to non-living things cannot rest on people making perceptual mistakes because worshippers are cognizant of the difference between the categories of living and non-living. To attribute animism does not necessarily imply the thing is 'alive' in a biological sense. This is illustrated by the furore surrounding instances of statues bleeding. The furore is generated by the unexpected ability of a non-human entity to display a biological activity. Similarly, automata are deemed remarkable because they are able to move and speak despite not being alive. In the act of anthropomorphising we are able to discriminate between category locations whilst attending to them in a fluid manner.

More recent work on anthropomorphism, which examines the phenomenon beyond a religious context, recognises anthropomorphic thinking to be an abiding feature of human cognition. Serpell (2003) explores the genesis of anthropomorphism in relation to the evolution of the human mind. Referring to the work of the archaeologist Mithen (1996), he discusses how anthropomorphic thinking stems from 'social intelligence'. This is the capacity of using self knowledge or personal insight to understand and anticipate the behaviour of others. It is this capacity that is employed as a heuristic tool in biological studies that employ anthropomorphic thinking. In this context anthropomorphism is understood as a means for people to make better sense of the world around them by using what they are familiar with – knowledge of themselves (de Waal, 2001). Guthrie (1993) recognised this principle, positing animistic thinking as a natural perceptual strategy for animal survival. He understands anthropomorphic thinking to be prompted by doubt. When in doubt, it is always better to assume something is alive than to take the risk of assuming it is not. However, as Bird-David (1999:71) writes,
'we use such [animistic] expressions more, and more consistently, when we regularly and closely engage with things we are not doubtful about: plants we grow, cars we love, computers we use'.

Given this tendency, I share the belief that anthropomorphic thinking originates from the socially biased character of our cognitive skills. These skills have evolved within and for a social kind of engagement. When we anthropomorphise, we do not first personify non-human beings and then socialise with them, but personify them as, when and because we socialise with them (Bird-David, 1999). The tendency to anthropomorphise things with which we regularly and closely engage is seen in geographical literature on anthropomorphism, for example, in studies examining the phenomenon in relation to pet-keeping (Fox, 2006). It is also seen in marketing literature on anthropomorphism, in studies examining the phenomenon in relation to brands, including discussion of cars (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007), and in studies examining perceptions of technology, focusing on computers (Moon, 2001). Marketeers are seen to encourage the tendency of consumers to anthropomorphise brands and products. In both the geographical and marketing literature, anthropomorphism is understood as a means of comfort, providing people with relationships and companionship.

Bird-David's (1999) discussion of animism as relational epistemology adds credence to the argument that anthropomorphism is facilitated by closeness between people and things. A key aspect of his discussion is how people learn about things through being in a state of relatedness. One gets to know things as they change through the vicissitudes over the time of the engagement with them. He talks of a 'we-ness', which absorbs the differences 'otherness' highlights. While relational epistemologies of this kind enjoy authoritative status in cultures of 'primitive peoples', they are not limited to them. He explains, '[w]hen we animate the computers we use, the plants we grow, and the cars we drive, we relationally frame them' (1999:78). From this perspective, anthropomorphic expressions pertaining to cuddly toys are a function of the close relationships they share with the children. Without further ado, I shall illustrate these expressions.
Witnessing anthropomorphism

The exemplar of the cuddly toy, the teddy bear, is a familiar child’s companion, whose history is well documented (see Brown, 2006; King, 1997; Pfeiffer, 2003). These lovable characters also stand as an exemplar of toys in general and act as a symbol of childhood. They receive far more attention and command attention for much longer than any other toys (Jaffe, 2006). Cuddly toys often form people’s first experience of toy ownership, prompting close attachment. This may persist well into adulthood, as the following extract from my field diary illustrates:

I stand with the sacks of cuddly toys in front of me. These have been stored away in the loft for some time, over a decade in fact. One sack is tied up, with a paper label saying ‘cuddly toys’ attached. The label has a cross in the corner denoting that these toys are destined for the car boot sale. The other sacks are open allowing toys to spill out onto the floor. My task is to add toys to the car boot pile. This should be easy, I haven’t played or even had contact with these toys for years now, and yet I’m hesitant. I pull the toys out of the first sack, one by one, recalling each of their names and chuckling at my unimaginative nature. It pains me to add them to the pile, somehow feeling that I’m betraying them... And then I come across Boris, a dungaree wearing badger. There’s no debate about his continued presence. Holding him in one hand, stroking his fur with the other, I look into his face. I begin to question some of my earlier judgements and am prompted to retrieve several of my cuddly friends from the car boot pile.

(Field Diary Extract, 9th June 2006)

Within the toy industry cuddly toys comprise the ‘plush’ category. A recent edition of the trade publication Toys ‘N’ Playthings (2008) noted that there has never been such a wide choice of plush toys available. At the extreme end of the scale, Selfridges are set to offer a ‘supremely decadent’ bear from Steiff, the original manufacturer of the teddy bear. The bear comes complete with emerald
and diamond eyes and a twenty-four carat gold snout, retailing at £43,000. The growth in the choice of plush toys available on the market has been stimulated by the development of licensed plush, which is a continually growing area of the category. Alongside licensing, there has also been a move to incorporate special features to plush product to add value. This is seen in the development of such toys as the talking, bouncing and tumbling Tiggers, owned by Katie. Customers can also add their own value to plush product by customising bears and other cuddly entities thanks to the development of Bear Factory outlets.

Real lasting value is added to plush product after the point of sale when cuddly toys are voluntarily endowed with human qualities by their owners. The most immediate example of anthropomorphism was the naming of cuddly toys. On one occasion I was lucky enough to witness the process of attributing a name. As Joshua introduced me to the different cuddly toys sitting on his bed he informed me that one particular ‘teddy’ in the form of a lion, was not yet named. In that moment he decided to name the lion Aslan because he looked like the character Aslan from the film, Narnia, based on the books by C.S Lewis. This attribution of a name was confirmed by its documentation in Joshua’s annotated photograph album (see Figure 4.1).

The names of other cuddly toys were more directly influenced by popular media. The cuddly toy in whose presence I spent the most time was the soft dog Gromit. Gromit began life as a licensed plush prompted by Nick Park’s clay creations which shot to fame in the claymation productions recounting the (mis)adventures of Wallace and Gromit. Although a name for this particular toy was already provided, the continued use of this name and the attribution of an age - which his owner, Matthew, determined by the number of films Gromit had appeared in – was an expression of anthropomorphism. Matthew did not refer to Gromit’s character as having been depicted in these films. Rather Gromit was referred to as a ‘social agent’ who had appeared in these productions. Gromit was ascribed further agency in Matthew’s discussions of why he had not been photographed for inclusion in his annotated photograph album. Apparently, Gromit did not like his photograph being taken because he thought he was fat (however, as will be seen, he was happy to be filmed). He was also ascribed
Figure 4.1 Naming Aslan

*Source: Joshua’s annotated photograph album*
feelings during the wrestling bouts he engaged in with Matthew, as this field diary extract recounts:

As Matthew leaps he turns his body to the side so as not to land squarely on Gromit. He scoops him up in his arms, looks into his face and declares that he would never hurt him.

(Field Diary Extract, 12th January 2007)

Gromit’s existence as licensed product did not restrict his ability to possess an individualised personality, as seen in the antics he participated in with his owner (see Figure 4.2 and Track 1). These did not follow a script provided by the media productions, but rather unfolded in the interactions between Gromit and Matthew, and the other characters, both human and furry, around them. Beginning life as a mass produced entity, this one of many had come to form a personal relationship with his owner, and had been ‘singularised’ in the process (Kopytoff, 1986).

Of all the toys present in the homes visited, cuddly toys were the ones actively brought to life in human form. Joshua recounted this process of ‘coming alive’ according to a common literary trope:

T: do they [his cuddly toys] just sit on your bed, or do you ever play with them?
J: yeah I play with them
T: what kind of things do you do when you play with them?
J: they come alive at night
T: yeah?
J: I believe that anyway

('Interview' with Joshua, 19th May 2007)

It was also actively performed before me, in the form of The Gromit Show, a series of mini productions performed for the video camera by Matthew, and subsequently imitated by his brother (see Figure 4.3 and Track 2). During a research session Matthew brought a collection of cuddly toys down to the lounge, where we had been playing on the PlayStation. Gromit had been by his
Figure 4.2 *Gromit's Antics*, in which he takes on an individualised personality.

*Source: Stills from video footage of Matthew and Stephen's gameplay*
Figure 4.3  An abridged presentation of The Gromit Show

Source: Stills taken from Matthew’s video footage
side up to this point, featuring in the video footage of the gaming practices that unfolded between us and his brother. He gathered the toys at the end of the sofa, squatting down behind the arm. He then rested Gromit and a succession of his 'friends' on top of the arm, using it as a stage, reminiscent of a Punch and Judy show. I was asked to squat at the other end of the sofa with the camcorder to capture the unfolding action. There was no pre-planned script. The enterprise had been a sudden inspiration, no doubt sparked by Gromit's contributions to the gaming footage, and probably influenced by Gromit's role as a 'film star'. The action was lively, to the extent that it distracted his older brother from his gaming, drawing him into the production and prompting him to ask if he could produce his own version.

At this lively point I should pause to note that while cuddly toys were present in every home, they were not always referred to and with the exception of Joshua and Katie (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5), they were not deliberately photographed. Until my introduction to Gromit they had been conspicuous by their apparent absence. By this I mean they were there in the home but were easy to miss because no attention was drawn to them. It was by chance that I noticed the giraffe poking out between the metal bars of Sam's cabin bed, tucked partly under the pillow and tangled in the bedclothes. This lack of attention was seen again with Emily, whose cuddly toys could be seen in the photograph of her cabin bed, but were not referred to in her annotations (see Figure 4.6).

One possible reason for this relative absence is the child's notion that they may be 'too old' for teddy bears. Having a cuddly companion to snuggle up to at night is seen as childish. The children in this study were at a transitional age. As the youngest of the participants, Matthew may have been less responsive to this threat to identity, although the lack of Gromit's photograph may be an expression of his negotiation with the process of 'growing up'. In this sense cuddly toys may be understood as a kind of transitional object. They are involved in two separate stages of transition. The first stage of transition sees the cuddly toy becoming an extension of the mother to mitigate the growing separation of parent and child. The second stage of transition, with which Matthew may have been grappling, is then reached as the child becomes less dependent on their cuddly companion, eventually casting it to one side.
Figure 4.4  Joshua's Cuddly Toys, which were directly referred to

Source: Joshua's annotated photograph album
Figure 4.5 Katie’s Big Tigger, photographed as an example of her Tigger collection

*Source: Katie’s annotated photograph album*
Figure 4.6 Emily’s (Absent) Cuddly Toys, which are not referred to in the annotations: ‘This is my cabin bed. It was bumpy at first but I got used to it’.

Source: Emily’s annotated photograph album
The theory of the transitional object was originally devised by D.W Winnicott during the course of his clinical practice in child psychology in the 1950s. He observed babies' appropriation of a piece of cloth as a means of coping in the absence of the mother's breast. He surmised it to be one of the earliest steps in the maturation of the child adjusting to separation from its mother. The cloth is understood as mediating the process of ontogenesis through which the child first becomes aware of itself as a separate entity and a first step towards the formation of an individual (Winnicott, 1971).

Closeness and the transitional object

As a child's first toy, cuddly toys function to mitigate a growing separation of child and mother by becoming a friendly and comforting companion that is able to accompany the child everywhere. Here it stands as an extension of the parental relationship. As Jaffe (2006) remarks, there is often panic in the event that the child and toy become separated. On more than one occasion Gromit acted as Matthew’s faithful companion, never far from his side (see Figure 4.7). In addition to sharing in his owner's hobbies, acting as a wrestling partner and an attentive football fan during PlayStation gaming, Gromit also acted as a copilot of the Commander 5 spaceship (otherwise known as a spinning desk chair) and sat by Matthew’s side while I chatted to him about his activity diary.

The matter of objects as extensions of people will be discussed further in the following two case studies in this chapter. Here it suffices to note the nature of the relation offered by cuddly toys. They provide a form of unconditional love (Jaffe, 2006). As Serpell (2003) discusses in his study of pet-keepers, regardless of whether imputing feelings and emotions to animals (and here this may be extended to non-living animals) is fictitious or not, the belief in it allows relationships to be meaningful. The tendency of pet-keepers to anthropomorphise their pets is prompted by the feelings of social support they gain from them. This support is defined as information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed and a member of a network of mutual obligation. In a similar fashion, cuddly toys offer a form of social support through their ability to offer comfort (see Figure 4.8 and Track 3). We can draw on Gell's (1998) discussion of the agency of religious idols, in which he
Figure 4.7  **Constant Companions**, Matthew and Gromit, never far from each other

*Source: Still taken from video footage of Stephen and Matthew’s gameplay*
Figure 4.8  **Seeking Comfort**, from Gromit following defeat in gameplay

*Source: Stills from video footage of Matthew and Stephen’s gameplay*
employs the analogy of doll play to expand on the nature of this support and the relationship it spurns. Gell explains that while the doll does not respond actively in play it is none the less 'active' as a patient with respect to the agency of another. Dolls never produce any behaviour that is not under the control of the play-mother. The child knows this perfectly well, but it does not prevent them having the liveliest sensation that the doll is an alter ego and a significant social other. It is the very passivity of the doll that makes doll play totally satisfying. The doll does just whatever the child wants. In some cases this may even involve it being naughty so that the play-mother can rebuke its behaviour. The doll's 'thoughts' and inner life, which are attributed to it while play is in progress, are a reflex of the child's own thoughts. The child thinks for the doll as well as doing everything else. As Newson and Newson (1979:90) observe, '[i]t is the very ambiguity of being a sort-of-person rather than an actual person which allows the child such freedom to make...the creature whatever he wishes'. In accordance with this, Gromit never grumbled when he was thrown about, spun around or leapt on (see Figure 4.9 and Track 4).

Winnicott's discussion of cloth as a transitional object points to a particular feature of cuddly toys that facilitates the close relationship they share with children. As a plaything made from cloth, the cuddly toy shares certain attributes of the child's blanket. It is to this particular feature of the cuddly toy that I now turn.

Textility

To date, accounts of anthropomorphism have tended to efface explanations of what a thing must be or do to count as animate or anthropomorphic. As Aggarwal and McGill (2007) acknowledge, not all products are anthropomorphised, and those that are subject to this phenomenon are not anthropomorphised with equal ease. The event of anthropomorphism is seen to depend on the object's possession of specific features that convey a sense of humanity. Returning to my account of the difficulties faced when choosing cuddly toys for the car boot sale, Boris the badger prompted me to do several things: reach out and pick him up, stroke his fur and look into his eyes. These
Figure 4.9  Gromit doesn't Grumble, even when thrown about, leapt on, punched and kicked in wrestling bouts

Source: Stills from video footage of Matthew’s wrestling
actions point to the particular properties of cuddly toys that lend to anthropomorphic thinking.

When Margarete Steiff created her first teddy bear it did not resemble the wild bear that inspired its inception. The furry friend was inspired by the story of how former US president, Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt took pity on a young bear whilst out hunting, refusing to shoot her. Made out of a new plush material, mohair, the bear was soft and stood on its hind legs, leaving the front legs to operate as arms. It sat on its bottom like a toddler, reaching out to be picked up. Its facial features were friendly with large clear eyes, a small snout and slight grin (Jaffe, 2006).

A particular feature of cuddly toys lending to anthropomorphism is the feel of their 'fur'. This may at first sound strange given that coverage by fur is not a human trait. However, studies of textiles have discussed how the closeness they share with the body is important to senses of individuality (Ash, 1996; Attfield, 2000; Banerjee and Miller, 2003). Attfield (2000:123) writes:

'textiles present a particularly apposite object type to illustrate how things are used to mediate the interior mental world of the individual, the body and the exterior objective world beyond the self through which a sense of identity is constructed and transacted within social relations'.

Such work helps unravel the importance of fur in this respect.

Within general theories of materiality and the material, textiles have been considered as just one type of thing among many in the general world of goods (Attfield, 2000; Miller, 1998b). Beyond specific disciplines and fields concerned with clothing and textiles, their particular physical properties have not been directly attended to (see Spooner, 1986). In contrast, Attfield (2000) considers the particular physical properties of cloth that produce certain types of relational effects in its role in social relations. She refers to Winnicott's description of the transitional object in which he states that it usually incorporates mobility, texture and warmth, giving examples of a piece of sheet, a
blanket, napkin or handkerchief. In addition he uses textile analogies to describe ‘the tendency on the part of the infant to weave other-than-me objects into the personal pattern’ (Winnicott, 1971:5, *my emphasis*). Attfield seizes on these features of his description to emphasise the specific qualities of textility and the role they play in the intimate relations established between people and things. For example, she explains how clothes make direct contact with the body and how domestic furnishings define the personal spaces the body inhabits, and thereby materialise the connection between the body and the outer world. This sentiment is echoed in Banerjee and Miller’s (2003) work on the sari. They contend that clothes are amongst our most personal possessions, acting as the main medium between our sense of our bodies and our sense of the external world. They recount a number of stories surrounding people’s engagements with saris, referring to how the sensual qualities of the sari may profoundly affect women’s experiences. One particular story tells how a villager’s soft worn sari was her main comfort during a fever. They contend that the degree of intimacy in the relationship between wearer and sari may lead to a sense of the sari itself as animated.

The importance of the textility of cuddly toys was stressed by Joshua who said he liked his cuddly toys because of their cuddliness. The softness of their feel encouraged an intimate relationship. He liked to sleep on them, which accounted for the flatness of a few of his ‘furry’ friends. The intimacy of the relationship shared between child and cuddly toy is expressed in this act of sleeping. They are connected with the child’s bed, the most private and personal of domestic spaces. This was true for the favourite ‘teddies’ in each household, from the giraffe tangled in Sam’s bedclothes to the teddies tucked up by Katie and Stephen’s pillows (see Figure 4.10). Unlike other toys they are held close to the body, making deliberate contact with the skin. Like clothes, they are amongst our most personal possessions. They too, as a type of transitional object, are a main medium between our sense of our self and our sense of the external world. Ash (1996:219) expresses the intimately personal nature of the relationship shared with clothes, which I suggest can be extended to cuddly toys:
Figure 4.10 **Night-time Companion**, a bear tucked up by the pillow
Source: Still taken from video footage of Stephen's gameplay
'Clothes relate to our feeling more than perhaps any other designed artefacts, and thus require 'subjective' as well as 'objective' analysis [...] clothes, their smell and texture, remind the spectator of the past presence of the person to whom they belonged, their inhabiting them, a moment when they wore them – or a moment in which they removed the item of clothing. The garment becomes imbued with the essence of the person'.

As a constant, intimate companion cuddly toys become imbued with the essence of their owner. This is seen in the difficulty of parting with them, as illustrated by my earlier field diary extract. The intensely personal experiences people share with clothes has much to do with textility. Ash discusses how fabric of different kinds provokes close relations with the body through the feel of its texture or the way fabric, on a scale unlike many other materials, absorbs smell.

A key concern for Attfield is the ephemeral, but yet resilient qualities of textiles, which mean they are not physically brittle and do not break if dropped. The resilience of textility allowed Gromit to be thrown around and to be leapt on without sustaining significant damage. He could bend and fold and his stuffing could be moved about, pushed this way and that way. This impermanent deformation enabled him to share in particular activities with Matthew, which was important to his role as constant companion. He did not remain completely unscathed in this, being a little worn in places, but this simply added to his appeal. As Jaffe (2006) notes, each cuddly toy, bearing bald patches, with limbs hanging loose, and having stuffing in poor shape, tells its own personal history. It tells the history of the intimate relationship shared. In contrasting sentimental value with the value of the commodity system, Stallybrass (1998:196, *my emphasis*) comments on the role of these 'imperfections':

‘The pawnbroker did not pay for personal or family memories. To the contrary. In the language of nineteenth century clothes-makers and repairers, the wrinkles in the elbows of a jacket or a sleeve were called 'memories'. Those wrinkles recorded the body that had inhabited the garment. *They memorialised the interaction, the mutual constitution, of person and thing*. But from the perspective
Clothes relate to our feeling more than perhaps any other designed artefacts, and thus require 'subjective' as well as 'objective' analysis [...] clothes, their smell and texture, remind the spectator of the past presence of the person to whom they belonged, their inhabiting them, a moment when they wore them — or a moment in which they removed the item of clothing. The garment becomes imbued with the essence of the person'.

As a constant, intimate companion cuddly toys become imbued with the essence of their owner. This is seen in the difficulty of parting with them, as illustrated by my earlier field diary extract. The intensely personal experiences people share with clothes has much to do with textility. Ash discusses how fabric of different kinds provokes close relations with the body through the feel of its texture or the way fabric, on a scale unlike many other materials, absorbs smell.

A key concern for Attfield is the ephemeral, but yet resilient qualities of textiles, which mean they are not physically brittle and do not break if dropped. The resilience of textility allowed Gromit to be thrown around and to be leapt on without sustaining significant damage. He could bend and fold and his stuffing could be moved about, pushed this way and that way. This impermanent deformation enabled him to share in particular activities with Matthew, which was important to his role as constant companion. He did not remain completely unscathed in this, being a little worn in places, but this simply added to his appeal. As Jaffe (2006) notes, each cuddly toy, bearing bald patches, with limbs hanging loose, and having stuffing in poor shape, tells its own personal history. It tells the history of the intimate relationship shared. In contrasting sentimental value with the value of the commodity system, Stallybrass (1998:196, my emphasis) comments on the role of these 'imperfections':

'The pawnbroker did not pay for personal or family memories. To the contrary. In the language of nineteenth century clothes-makers and repairers, the wrinkles in the elbows of a jacket or a sleeve were called 'memories'. Those wrinkles recorded the body that had inhabited the garment. They memorialised the interaction, the mutual constitution, of person and thing. But from the perspective
of commercial exchange, every wrinkle or 'memory' was a devaluation of the commodity.'

Gromit's worn patches added to the personalisation of this mass produced, licensed plush product. The importance of the traces of interaction, of the mutual constitution of child and 'teddy' is expressed in the great apprehension on the child's part when their cuddly companions are washed. During one research session Matthew's mother comments that Gromit is in need of a wash as he is 'looking a little grubby'. Matthew is quick to register his objections. Washing wipes traces, including smell, and changes the feel of the fabric. In our following session it became apparent that Matthew had lost his battle with his mother as she carried a wet Gromit into the lounge and attempted to hang him by his long ears on the door handle in a rather undignified manner. She acknowledged that he would not be dry by the time Matthew went to bed, and that this would cause upset as the two have been unwillingly parted.

The strength of relation between child and teddy is expressed by Jaffe (2006: 149), when she writes '[s]ome children have a favourite from which they can never be parted, no matter how worn and battered the toy becomes'. This was indeed true for Katie's mother, Karen, who to this day still owns her favourite cuddly toy that was unfortunate enough to once fall into the fire. Missing its fur and its facial features but for one eye, this bald creature, reminiscent of a wrinkled newborn pup, sits by her bed.

The closeness expressed between children and their cuddly toys grants these furry friends a sense of humanity. This is further conveyed by the paedomorphic features of the toys, to which I now turn.

*Paedomorphic features*

Several writers have explained how the selection of objects for anthropomorphism is often influenced by the presence of paedomorphic characteristics (de Waal, 2001; Serpell, 2003). These are features that are characteristic of infantile appearance and behaviour. In terms of an infantile appearance, cuddly toys are often endowed with enlarged eyes and rounded
faces. In terms of infantile behaviour, they sit with arms outstretched (or least have front legs that operate as arms), begging to be picked up and cuddled.

Scientific credence is afforded to this argument by the work of Lorenz (1950), Gould (1980) and Hinde and Barden (1985). In an essay first printed in *Natural History*, Gould examines the changing appearance of Mickey Mouse, which has seemingly reversed the expected pathway of the characteristic changes of form that occur during human growth. As the years have passed, he has assumed a more childlike appearance. Compared to adults, children have larger heads, larger eyes, smaller jaws, a more prominent bulging cranium, and smaller, pudgier legs and feet. This is due to the head end of the embryo being differentiated first and growing more rapidly than the foot end. Mickey's pant line has been lowered to give the appearance of shorter legs, his arms and legs have been thickened, his arms have been given joints to appear floppier, the size of his head has increased relative to his body, his eye size has increased, and his ears have been moved back on his head to give the appearance of a bulging cranium.

Drawing on Lorenz's argument that infantile characteristics trigger innate releasing mechanisms for affection and nurturing, Gould concludes that Disney engaged such principles (however unconsciously) to elicit growing emotional response to this character. This tendency is also seen in other Disney characters, such as Donald Duck, and may be recognised as part of a process of 'Bambification', which is a term used to describe the entertainment industry's tendency to strip animals of their nasty side (de Waal, 2001). Gould (1980: no pagination) discusses how Mickey's personality has softened from that of the 'rambunctious, even slightly sadistic fellow' as his appearance has changed.

In a short article in *Animal Behaviour*, Hinde and Barden (1985) relate this tendency toward infantile characteristics to teddy bears, charting changes in their appearance, based on a statistical analysis of bears presented in an exhibition at the Cambridge Folk Museum. These changes are summarised as a move towards larger foreheads and a shorter snout relative to the dimensions of the head as a whole. Gromit carried such paedomorphic features. The way he was stuffed meant that he would sit with his legs outstretched in front of him,
body upright and head facing forward. His wide-eyed, childlike expression drew you towards him, calling you to pick him up. When filming Gromit, Matthew tended to focus, and even zoom in on his face, particularly his bulging eyes, emphasising that these features were key to his anthropomorphised character (see Figure 4.11).

**Summary**

This case study shows that in the process of anthropomorphism agency is not simply ascribed to non-human forms by their human counterparts. The cuddly toys encountered in this study shared particular features capable of provoking anthropomorphic responses. In this sense they demonstrate a kind of agency that follows from their materials and form. To use Gell's (1998) vocabulary, they are indexes inciting responses. The following case study extends this notion of object agency, by examining how the particular social and material relations in which a toy is embedded may engender agential powers.

**Animating Model Aeroplanes: social and material networks**

In chapter 2 I discussed how both humans and non-humans are socio-material assemblages, which are a product of the relationships – or in Gell’s terms, the ‘socio-relational matrix’ – in which they are located. In this case study I draw on this idea to explore how model aeroplanes were brought to life during the research sessions. It is not my concern to detail the sequential stages of a production process that transformed multiple component parts into a finished object. Rather, I examine how these models were given life by being positioned within a complex web of relations from which they were configured and through which their shifting status, value and agency were performed. To address this complex web I examine three kinds of relations. Firstly, I examine the model's location in the familial relations of the household, which provoked sentiment. This is explored through discussion of the model aeroplanes as an index of distributed personhood. Initial concern with how the models embody their maker is extended to consider how the models embody a specific paternal relationship. The notion of possession is then introduced to explore the mother's negotiation of this male gendered relationship. Secondly, I consider
Figure 4.11 **Paedomorphic Features**, focused on by Matthew zooming in on Gromit’s face, his eyes in particular

*Source: Still from video footage of Matthew and Stephen’s gameplay*
the material relations between different models, and between component parts and assembled wholes, which provoked both anticipation and anxiety. I begin by discussing the model collection as an oeuvre, before stepping back from the completed models to consider how the status of component parts and boxes may be (temporarily) elevated through loss. Thirdly, I examine the relation between the model and the novice, which, framed by a sense of fragility, provoked enchantment.

Let me begin by setting the scene:

I walk down the short path to the front door of Sam’s house and knock on the door. All is quiet, too quiet. There is no sign of life in the house. I peer through the large window next to the front porch that looks in on the lounge-cum-dining area. Two figures sit close together at the dining room table, hunched over a small object. Even from here one can make out the outlines of the cluttered array of equipment that sits along the back edge of the table. Sam and his step-father are hard at work on their modelling. It seems a shame to disturb them since I have come to realise how much Sam enjoys this activity. This is evident in the way he constantly pesters his step-father about whether they can spend time working on the models that day, or inquiring, often in accusatory tones, whether he has finished the next stage of the process yet. I knock a little harder and see Sam rise from his seat and head towards the door.
(Field Diary Extract, 8th February 2007)

Building model aeroplanes was a hobby Sam shared with his stepfather, Craig. They specialised in models of military aircraft, typically of the scale 1:144. These models began life as pre-packaged kits, assemblages of small, grey plastic pieces, complete with any necessary transfers and step-by-step instructions. Through the effort of painting, drying, sticking, filling, filing, masking, spraying, more painting, varnishing, adding transfers and matting, these purchased, alienable kits were transformed into inalienable scale models. On completion, following between twenty and thirty hours work, the models were displayed in a glass fronted, mirror backed cabinet in the lounge (see Figure 4.12). I was
Figure 4.12 Sam’s Model Aeroplanes, moved from the mirror-backed cabinet to the table to be photographed. From left to right: ‘the Mig’, ‘the Messerschmitt’, ‘the Mustang’, ‘a Russian plane’, ‘a Spitfire’. Close up view below.

Source: Sam’s annotated photograph album
introduced to these miniature aeroplanes on my very first visit to the home by a very proud Sam. For Sam, the practice of modelling extended beyond these plastic scale models to a bright and colourful metal model of a Fokker Tri-plane that was kept high above eye-level on top of the cabinet (see Figure 4.13) and stockier wooden models of a non-specific aeroplane and racing car that were kept in the concealed cupboard adjoining the cabinet (see Figure 4.14). Sam also had a collection of the childhood favourites K'NEX and LEGO. The carefully organised display of the scale model aeroplanes contrasted heavily with the jumbled assortment of K'NEX and LEGO pieces that were, at the very most, only part assembled, and simply thrown together in a cardboard box, which was stored under his cabin bed (see Figure 4.15). Despite being purchased as construction kits, a number of these pieces were condemned to isolation as the boxes and instructions to the kits had been lost.

Provoking sentiment

Each child's collection of 'toys' included not only objects that had been purchased for consumption, but also objects that had been produced by the child's own hands. In addition to models, these objects included, but were not limited to pottery ornaments and talismans, clothing for Sylvanian Families, hand drawn pictures, rag dolls and various art works produced at school. To begin to understand the importance of such items within these households (and beyond) we can look to the work of anthropologists and archaeologists concerned with 'pre-industrial' societies where gift exchange is seen to prevail over capitalist modes of engagement (Chapman, 2000; Gell, 1998; Strathern, 1988).

In such contexts the production of artefacts is not understood in terms of an impersonal, alienable process. This is emphasised by Chapman's (2000) notion of objects being reproduced rather than produced. Such objects are not considered to be distinct and detached from their makers like the alienable goods of industrial capitalist societies. Rather the creation of an object contains within it an object of personhood: It is an extension and embodiment of its maker. As personhood is immediately distributed through these objects, it may be distributed both temporally and spatially through object exchange.
Figure 4.13  **Sam’s Metal Fokker Tri-Plane**, moved from the top of the cabinet to the table to be photographed. Close up view below.

Source: Sam’s annotated photograph album
Figure 4.14  **Sam’s Wooden Models**, moved from the cupboard to the table to be photographed. Close up view below

*Source: Sam’s annotated photograph album*
Figure 4.15  

Sam’s Jumbled LEGO and K’NEX, the disarray contrasting with the ordered storage and presentation of his model planes

Source: Photograph taken by Sam
Personhoods are then folded into one another because the exchange of inalienable objects means that an indissoluble link exists between the object, with its distinctive biography, and those who own or use it. Chapman refers to this as a process of enchainment. Recognition of this folding of object and subject is emphasised in Strathern's (1988) concept of the 'dividual'. In a critical comparison of Melanesian and Euro-American society, Strathern identifies the existence of the 'dividual' or multiple self, which sits in contrasts to the individual who is regarded as a single entity, bounded and integrated. The dividual is understood as a composite of relations; a figure who actively objectifies relationships and makes them known.

The models embodied their maker, be that Sam or Craig, and the paternal relationship they shared. They were enchained through both the act of exchange and the act of production. In terms of exchange, they were enchained by Craig giving Sam a model kit for his birthday. While this involved a purchased alienable object, this act expressed their relationship by the fact Craig had deliberately opted for a commodity that fed into their shared hobby. More significantly, their father-son relationship was embodied within the very fabric of the model aeroplanes through the shared process of their creation. While Sam and Craig produced separate models, which upon completion continued to be identified with a specific maker, it was common practice for them to (be allowed to) help the other with their respective model. Sam took pride in pointing out the painted detail – two small, red lights - he had added to Craig's model of a Hurricane fighter plane. On one occasion when Sam was talking about their models he picked out the masking material (that was now redundant since spraying was complete) from Craig's current construction. This was completed as a gesture to Craig who was unaware of the act until after the event. At the time of witnessing this act I was apprehensive as I had been given the impression that Sam was usually only permitted to work on the models when in the presence of Craig. However, upon being told of the gesture, Craig reacted in a gracious manner.

My brief observation of Craig and Sam at work together was pleasurable because I saw a glimpse of a different aspect to their relationship that I was not usually presented with. During our research sessions it was common to witness
battles of will between the two characters, as Craig struggled to impose authority over a hyperactive and at times disobedient child. The contrasting serenity that surrounded the modelling scene served to amplify the aeroplanes' embodiment of this relationship. The relationship was not only embodied in the models during times of active intervention, but also as they sat still and static, be that as primered white shells extending from wooden cocktail sticks held in polystyrene blocks, or as completed scale replicas. It was further expressed through the models' particular means of display (which will be discussed later) and the contrasting relationship Sam's biological father shared with this hobby. In addition to the tool boxes containing the many varied tools employed in the production of model aeroplanes, there was a smaller tool box that was used exclusively by Sam to carry his current model and any necessary equipment to his father's house when he went to visit. His father did not share this hobby, so Sam would only undertake basic construction tasks, rather than the various, intricate processes involved in painting during these visits.

It was not only a father-son relationship that was embodied in and expressed by these model planes. The relationship of Sally, Sam's mother, with the father-son duo was also expressed through her negotiations with this model collection. This is examined through the following discussion of possession.

Alongside the father-son relationship, masculinity was also on display in the cabinet. The set of model aeroplanes existed as a gendered collection. During my first encounter with the collection, Sally noticed a ship that she had not seen before had appeared in the cabinet:

"Is that a ship? Where did that come from?" she inquires. Craig chuckles and answers vaguely that it was a gift. Placed alongside the aeroplanes, it is now another boys' toy.

(Field Diary Extract, 4th January 2007)

The addition of the boat added to the gendered nature of the collection. This was further emphasised by the nature of the collection this ensemble displaced. The cabinet was previously home to Sally's collection of crystals, which have been exiled over time as the growing ensemble of 'boys' toys' has taken
possession. Together the family joked about how the aeroplanes were not only taking possession of the cabinet, but were gradually taking possession of the house. Craig described the kind of cabinet he would like for the models, larger and with a spotlight. Sam was grander in his designs, talking about how they needed to build a conservatory to house the new cabinet because it needs to be so much bigger. This possession extends beyond the completed models to include the number of kits stored under the bed in the parental bedroom that are yet to be constructed and the modelling equipment that clutters the dining table. This sense of possession was emphasised on one occasion when Sam went to the cupboard in the hallway looking for one of the kit boxes because he could not remember the name of one of his replicas. As he opened the cupboard door tins of paint tumbled, crashing to the floor. Not only did these objects now litter the floor, but the noise also distracted his mother from her television show.

Miller (2001b) talks of the notion of possession in relation to the home. Drawing on examples of the haunted house and the disliked décor of his own home, he discusses how the material home can exercise agency over its inhabitants. In this sense, the home comes to possess its occupants. Here possession refers to an unwelcome presence that needs to be exorcised by the act of appropriation; appropriating and thus taking control of that which possesses. The models, or the gendered collection as a whole, did not possess in this same sense. The models were talked about as if they were in control, the collection ever expanding. Yet it was the direct intervention of the father-son duo, through their appropriation of model kits that prompted this growth. This possession was not experienced as oppressive, even for Sally whose own collection of crystals had been displaced. She willingly accepted this displacement or possession for the very reason that the models were gendered and expressed a relationship between the males in the house to which she was an outsider. Her willing acceptance of the displacement of her own collection was an expression of happy negotiation. It was an expression of her relationship to, and love for the male duo. The presence exerted by the model aeroplanes was not to be exorcised, but rather encouraged.

I have shown how the model aeroplanes provoked sentiment through their location in the familial relations of (and, in the case of the biological father
beyond) the household in which they were crafted. This was achieved through their embodiment of a paternal relationship. Sentiment was not only experienced and expressed by the father-son duo, but also by the mother through her negotiation of this possessing collection of models. I now wish to turn from the models' location within social relations to their positioning within material relations and the provocations this engenders.

*Provoking anticipation and anxiety*

In the process of creation it is not only the objects that take on part of their maker. The maker also comes to embody qualities of skill. It was not only familial relationships that were on display in the cabinet, but also the abilities of these hobbyists, who actively sought to develop their skills, through repetition of procedures and techniques, and watching instructional DVDs. Sam talked of the problems of warping and streaking, and showed me how he had unintentionally melted the plastic inside one of his models by using too much adhesive to glue the component parts together. He also told me how they were looking to improve on one particular scale replica by creating another example as they could improve their use of the mottling technique. In this sense, the different models can be understood as comprising a larger distributed object, which is akin to the distributed person. These different components of this distributed object are folded into one another through the use of similar skills and practices.

As such, Sam and Craig's models can be related to Gell's (1998) description of the artist's oeuvre. The oeuvre embodies two forms of distribution or dispersion. The first is spatial, concerning the production and distribution of artworks in different places, and the second is temporal, involving the assignment of artworks to a chronological sequence. It was the latter that particularly concerned Gell, who developed an understanding of the oeuvre as a distributed object in *time*. His discussion is useful for understanding the relations between the planes within this set, and in relation to the continued development of the hobby.

The artist's oeuvre does not consist exclusively of finished works, each one of which stands as an independent entity. Rather works form lineages, as pieces
are descended from other works in the oeuvre. Even a finished work, produced as an end in itself, may be reconfigured as a preparatory study for later works. These lineages are not unidirectional as works do not just point forwards in time. Any piece is likely to be both preparation for later works and recapitulation of previous works. Thus, the oeuvre is configured by relations of protention (prospective in orientation) and relations of retention (retrospective in orientation). Gell distinguishes between strong and weak relations, the former being intentional in its preparation or replication.

Despite being produced as ends in themselves in the sense that they were not deliberate precursory models, none of the aeroplanes in Sam's 'oeuvre' were independent entities. Each one was pre-destined to become part of a set and was therefore enrolled in a web of relations before completion and display. Stored in their boxes and inner plastic packaging, the purchased kits sit still under the parental bed until moved to a space of greater prominence – the dining table – where, through active intervention, they take on a different form. While stored under the bed these kits take on a hopeful materialism (Bissell, 2009), expectant and promising in their anticipation of being constructed, turned from a series of faceless parts to a recognisable form. The unopened kits are not out of mind because they are out of sight. The models on display act as a reminder of their presence. Indeed their expectant presence under the bed adds to the sense of possession emitted from the models on display. The waiting kits had been chosen according to the role they would play in the set, whether that was as a new addition, an improved example of an existing model, or a demonstration of a different level of skill.

The plastic model aeroplanes can be understood as a 'set' (Chapman, 2000), which is but one component of an oeuvre that extended to the metal tri-plane and the wooden models, because Sam transferred skills across these different materials. His skills were not restricted to specific operations with particular tools, but also included a more general understanding and approach to model construction that relied on the ability to envisage the final product and to see the sequence of steps enabling this outcome. His use of technique extended further still, beyond physical models. Sam chose to design a toy during one of our sessions. Sitting at the dining table cluttered with modelling paraphernalia,
Sam took pen to paper and designed a plane. He began by outlining the shape of a plane with a thick black felt-tip pen, drawing a two-dimensional side-on view, referring to the model in process that sat on top of a polystyrene block. Having outlined the shape, Sam then coloured the plane purple before using the black pen to add a mottled effect (see Figure 4.16). As he dabbed the pen on the paper, he explained to me how they would create this effect on a model by dipping the paintbrush in the paint and then wiping a majority of the paint off with a tissue before dabbing the brush over the surface. On completion of the design, he again shows me examples of the mottling effect on his models. This design now formed part of the distributed object of the model aeroplane.

Having discussed how the models within the collection related to each other, I now want to take a step back from the completed models on display to consider the relationship between the model's component parts and its whole, and the shifting values this relationship constitutes. Individual parts were elevated to their greatest value through the event of the unexpected and the unwilled, the event of accidental loss. Bissell (2009) examines the capacity of lost objects of clothing found in the street to provoke affective relations, discussing how the unplaced transient materiality of the item of clothing contrasts sharply with the organised materiality of the urban environment. This contrast produces an affective material disjuncture. His discussion concerns the presence of the lost object itself, invoking the absence of an owner. In contrast, my concern here is with the absence of the lost object invoked by the emergence of a gap within the other component parts. The present parts become defined by this absence. For example, when showing me the wooden model plane, Sam introduces it as 'This is a plane, missing its cockpit' and similarly introduces the racing car as 'This is a racing car without wheels'. It is the defining absence that elevates the status of the single part. This absence comes to take on a pressing presence. The potential for this loss provoked anxiety, which was witnessed in the careful handling of loose parts. On more than one occasion Sam was rebuked for touching the models-in-progress as they rested on the table for fear that he would disturb loose parts and they would be displaced and lost. When he did touch them there was a considered gentleness to his touch, and he ensured each part was returned to its proper place. It was for this same reason, the fear of loss, that Sam was reminded he was not allowed to open the sealed plastic packaging of new kits.
Figure 4.16  Toy Plane Design, demonstrating a mottled effect

Source: Image designed by Sam
The very materiality of the kit was in and of itself a reminder of this potentiality. The smallness of the parts, causing them to be stored as larger plastic grids (see Figures 4.17 and 4.18), which must be disassembled, and the rattle of the bag, which contained larger, but loose pieces, provoked a sense of anxiety regarding loss.

When lost, the part experiences an initial elevation of status, before its significance diminishes. Given the nature of the tiny plastic parts, when distance accrues from the event of loss, they become meaningless due to their unidentifiable form. Within the kit, each part is numbered so it can be identified. Separated from the other components they have broken free from their stabilising network. They are severed from the structure of relations that serve to maintain the meaningful network of pieces. This discussion of lost parts prompts us to question the status of the parts in the jumbled assortment of components from K'NEX and LEGO kits. While playing in his bedroom during one of the research sessions, Sam inadvertently knocked the box containing the jumbled assortment from its resting place on top of a larger box. Brightly coloured, variously shaped pieces immediately spilled from their container spreading across the floor. This did not prompt any concern, let alone anxiety, from Sam. This points to the role of instructions and boxes in the configured object. On completion of the plastic model aeroplanes, the relevant box was thrown away, no longer necessary in the configuration of parts as a whole. Sam’s LEGO and K’NEX parts remained in their isolated or part assembled manner because the box and instructions were absent. In this instance it was the status of the box that shifted and elevated. Sam explained that he was not able to complete these models as he had no guide to follow. However, it should be noted that the loss of boxes and instructions did not mean that the K’NEX and LEGO parts became worthless. They were invested with a renewed sense of hopefulness through Sam’s plans to sort, bag, and therefore reconfigure the different parts.

Having discussed how the smallness of the model’s component parts exacerbated anxiety through the threat of loss, I now which to consider a further response they provoked, that being the enchantment of the novice.
Figure 4.17  Model Aeroplane Kit
Source: Photograph taken by author

Figure 4.18  Small Parts, close up of kit
Source: Photograph taken by author
The smallness of the component parts engendered a sense of fragility in the whole, which in turn produced an enchanted materialism. When Sam was taking photographs of his models he had to transfer them from the cabinet to the table due to the likeliness of glare from the mirrored back. I was very nervous about handling the models when helping him with this due to their delicate, light feel. His mother was also anxious about this process, asking him to be slow and careful so as not to squash them. This sense of fragility was amplified by the event of a propeller falling off one of the planes as it was lifted. This tiny piece immediately disappeared into its new surroundings on the carpeted floor. The enchanted materialism of the models was a product of the seemingly incomprehensible production process, just how these small parts were brought together. Contributing to this was the excess that was folded into the model (Anderson and Wylie, 2009), the potential of the many unexpected events that could have occurred to prevent the model from appearing as it did here in its completed form. Examples of possible unexpected events include mishaps such as warping and streaking as well as the loss of parts. Despite this excess, to my (untrained) eye, each model appeared perfect in form.

We can draw upon Alfred Gell's (1992; 1998) related concepts of captivation and the coupled ‘technology of enchantment’ and ‘enchantment of technology’ to understand the occurrence of this enchanted materialism. Gell outlines these concepts in relation to art objects, which are the outcome of skilled technical processes. Art objects may produce visual or cognitive disturbances through their aesthetics, but it is the object's existence as a physical token of the magical prowess of the maker that is of concern to Gell. It is the becoming of the object rather than the being of the object that Gell sees as the source of its power. This power rests partly on the art object's origination being inexplicable except as a magical occurrence, which is an effect of technical proficiency. Its production transcends the spectator's understanding. There is a mismatch between the spectator's internal awareness of his own powers as an agent and the conception he forms of the powers of the artist. The reception of the work occurs in the light of the possibility that the recipient could, technically, approach the same task. This thought occurs along with an awareness of the counterfactuality of the
apparently possible outcome occurring. The art object embodies an agency that is essentially undecipherable, which causes the spectator to become trapped within it. This moment of trapping occurs at the point of incommensurability. This is the point where we are trapped between two worlds: the world in which one ordinarily lives in which objects have rational explanations and knowable origins and the world of the art object which defeats explanation. Between these two worlds we become trapped in a logical bind. We must accept the work is part of 'our' world (it is here physically before us), while at the same time it cannot belong to this world because we cannot achieve the necessary congruence between our experience of agency and the agency which originated the art work. The creation of the object is understood to be miraculous rather than mysterious because we can understand the necessary steps undertaken in its production, we just cannot comprehend how these steps are achieved to the level evident by a human agent. Our captivation or enchantment is a product of 'the demoralisation produced by the spectacle of unimaginable virtuosity' that we experience in its presence (Gell, 1998:71).

Several stages in the construction of a model aeroplane were laid out before me, evident in the part assembled planes that awaited completion on the dining table. This at once made the production process visible and comprehensible, and remarkable. It emphasised the smallness of scale, the patient, repetitive procedure, and the attention to detail, all of which seemed unimaginable in relation to Sam's relentless and frenetic energy, and his seemingly low attention span. In this instance it was as much a mismatch between my conception of my abilities and those of the creator, as it was about the mismatch of my conception of the abilities of the actual creator and an imagined, ideal creator, which produced a sense of enchantment (see Figures 4.19 and 4.20).

More generally, the fact of craftsmanship enchanted. The time and effort of this craftsmanship that was embodied in the fabric of the model was captivating. It made you pause to consider and to reflect anew upon its fragility and how a person's time and effort may be crushed in a second. The concept of captivation is linked to the notion of distraction (Benjamin, 1999a; Gell, 1992; Harrison, 2006). For instance, Harrison (2006) discusses how the delicacy of aboriginal glass spearheads was able to distract collectors concerned with authenticity.
Figure 4.19  Detailed instructions
Source: Photograph taken by author

Figure 4.20  Small Transfers
Source: Photograph taken by author
from the colonial context within which they were manufactured. In a similar fashion, the delicacy and fragility of the models served to distract from the model's beginnings as a mass produced plastic kit that comes complete with step-by-step instructions. In the moment of captivation the models presented themselves simply as a handcrafted and thus inalienable object.

Summary

This case study shows how toys may demonstrate agency as a function of the web of social and material relations in which they are embedded. This agency is a practical achievement that is demonstrated in respect to others. It is the relation that mobilises. Given that relations can shift, it is seen that agency is performed, rather than fixed. As the discussion of lost parts highlights, particular objects are able to exert transitory power over others to achieve their own specific performances. The following case study extends the notion of object agency further still, by examining how the representational qualities of a toy may engender agential powers.

Animating Trading Cards: mutations of value

This case study continues the theme of the previous examples, but shifts the terms of debate from the qualities of the material thing in itself. By attending to trading cards, which carry images of characters and personalities, this case study considers how agency may be a function of the object's role as a carrier of a representation of something else. Different cards are seen to provoke different interpretations of value depending on the particular images and symbols they depict. While these values may temporally stabilise, they are not essentialised. They are determined by networks of relations, which can be reconfigured, prompting shifts in meaning (Bissell, 2009). This case study expands the notion of the 'socio-relational matrix', which was introduced with regard to the model planes, beyond familial relations and beyond the domestic space of the home.

Trading cards have been heavily criticised, both in popular media and academic literature, for the role they play in constructing exchange value as pedagogy in children's play (DT. Cook, 2001). I begin the case study with an account of
criticisms levied against trading cards in general, before turning attention to two particular types of trading card, Yu-Gi-Oh! and Shoot Out cards. Passing reference is also made to Doctor Who cards, which are not subject to sustained attention due to the limited references made to them by their owner. I introduce an account of children's engagements with trading cards, which, rather than being limited to the idea of exchange, examines the different mutations of value enacted by the children in their practices of collecting. These mutations of value disclose different forms of transitory power exercised by the cards.

*Exchange value as pedagogy*

Contemporary concern about the character of children's culture has been expressed through debates surrounding fads or crazes, which are posited as the archetype of acquisitive activity, privileging the realisation of economic exchange value as a goal of collecting (DT. Cook, 2001). Such collectible items epitomise the moral tension between children and markets, with exchange value seen as pedagogy in children's leisure. While these fads and crazes are not limited to trading cards, they have been criticised as popular components of this 'immoral' and corrupting trend. Such criticisms negate the fact that trading cards first emerged in late 1880s and are by no means a recent phenomenon. Originally introduced as a form of American advertising, trading cards quickly captured the imagination of the youth market. This prompted manufacturers to extend their association with cigarettes to confectionary. By the 1950s, trading cards were reflecting cultural pop idols and being produced as entertainment tie-ins (Nelson and Steinberg, 1997).

Theses cards are perceived by many as antithetical to the values immanent in play, generating an ethos of acquisition for its own sake (DT. Cook, 2001; Nelson and Steinberg, 1997). The collection of cards is said to focus on the realisation of profit, thereby drawing children into an impersonal arena of exchangeable, monetary value. This stimulates worries about lessons of self-interest, chicanery, and elevation of the monetary over the personal and the social being taught. The trading card market has been described as a stock market, with collection posited as a form of speculation. In a clear incitement to moral panic, these cards have also been referred to as 'cardboard crack' (DT.
Concern has also been raised regarding the violent, racial, sexualised and commercial content of particular trading cards (Nelson and Steinberg, 1997).

Although the account of children’s practices of collecting presented here seeks to counterbalance the focus on exchange value of popular media and academic literature, it is necessary to set this context as a backdrop to the children’s engagement with these cards. Such debates structured the children’s use of these cards to a certain degree. Devan told me how her Doctor Who cards had been confiscated from her at school by the teacher. She could only swap cards with her friends at school when the teachers were not looking. Many schools have banned children from bringing trading cards to school due to occurrences of theft (pers. coms. with teacher), curtailing the exchange of cards between friends. While Joshua – the owner of both Yu-Gi-Oh! and Shoot Out cards – and Stephen – the owner of Shoot Out cards – spoke of swapping cards with friends, actual occurrences of this activity appeared infrequent. Nevertheless exchange was an important feature in the children’s relationships with these card collections.

Joshua started collecting Yu-Gi-Oh! cards when he was given a card as a gift by a friend. This act of generosity enrolled Joshua into a network of potential exchange partners. A deciding factor in which type of card to collect from the many available on the market was the consideration of which cards peers collected, as this determined their exchangeability. ‘Swapsies’ was named as a good way for the children to get the cards they wanted. One of the activities children participated in was the sorting of cards to find ‘doubles’, which could then be swapped. The act of swapping was described as a simple process, whereby children would ask their friends which card they desired. If they had that card they would show it to their friend and then, in turn, ask them if they had the card they wanted. “If they’ve got double and I’ve got double then we just swap.”

Possession of doubles determined swapping. There was no talk of the differential value of cards according to scarcity in relation to swaps as suggested in previous accounts of trading card exchange. In such accounts exchange is
discussed in relation to investment potential, whereby deliberate production of scarcity constituted a central component of card value. Rarity of particular cards was acknowledged by Joshua, who proudly showed me his ‘Mystic Tomato’ Yu-Gi-Oh! card, declaring, “That, that’s the only Mystic Tomato in the world. It is. I own it.” Yet, despite its rarity, this particular card was only ranked as his eleventh favourite. (I have failed to find confirmation of this card’s rarity. It is available from several websites, ranging in price from $0.50-$6.75. Under the category of card rarity it is even listed as ‘common’ by toywiz.com.) The concealed storage of trading cards under pillows or their close guard in pockets emphasised the value placed upon them by their owners. However, as Joshua’s discussion of rarity illustrates, value was not simply determined by ranks ascribed by manufacturers. Rather, value was shifting, performed differently according to how the card is configured in relation to webs of connection at any one time. Before addressing these shifting values, let me introduce the cards of particular interest to this discussion.

**Yu-Gi-Oh! and Shoot Out cards**

Both Yu-Gi-Oh and Shoot Out cards are designed for gameplay, being produced as a *trading card game* (TCG). The Shoot Out TCG is the official TCG of the F.A. Premier League. Each card, measuring approximately 6cm by 9cm, carries an image of a player from one of the F.A. Premier League teams. This image is accompanied by information about the player, including the name and logo of their team, the player’s position (goalkeeper, defender, midfielder or striker), any special skills they possess (whether they are an excellent defender, midfielder or striker, a match winner, or a penalty specialist or saver) and their star rating ascribed by the game’s manufacturers. To accompany Shoot Out cards there is a Shoot Out Playing Pitch, an A3 sized piece of cardboard (that folds in half for ease of storage) on which there are three coloured lines; a blue line, red line and yellow line, which correspond to the three categories of player, which are defender, midfielder and striker respectively. On each line there is a series of spaces on which one can place their Shoot Out cards to create a team formation. The game is designed for two players, who each assume the role of football team manager, having to select a team, formation and game tactics. Once the eleven-a-side teams are placed on the playing pitch they are ready for a
Shoot Out, in which the winner is decided upon by the players adding up and comparing the star points on their cards. Each game of Shoot Out represents a match for the manager's team.

The Yu-Gi-Oh! TCG has a much more complex set of rules, represented by the different types of cards employed in its play. There are Monster, Spell and Trap cards. Each of these card types is then further divided into subcategories. For example, within the Monster categories there are normal, fusion, ritual and effect monsters, each with different capabilities. The intense study and assiduous application of these rules, along with the large number of characters to know and memorise, is said to exclude most parents from participation and understanding, as Joshua reiterated, "It's a bit complicated for adults really normally". He did play the game with his mother, but her loss for a forgone conclusion. The basic concept of the game is that 'two players Duel each other using a variety of Monster, Spell, and Trap Cards to defeat their opponent's monsters and be the first to drop the other's Life Points to 0' (Takahashi, 1996:iii). Both games are similar in that they are two-player and involve the trade off of points given on cards. Each 'character' depicted on a card has its own rating allowing for comparison between them, bonus points can also be accrued or life points of opponent's subtracted through tactical play.

*Enacting mutations of value*

The mutations of value enacted by the children both drew upon, and conflicted the official rating systems in which the cards were designed to operate. In some instances the cards were rated according to their use in gameplay. Joshua preferred Yu-Gi-Oh! cards (see Figure 4.21) over Pokemon cards because 'they have better things, they have mostly monsters in the packets', whereas Pokemon cards 'only have energies in packets and it's a waste of money if you only get energies in packets'. 'Like Yu-Gi-Ohls, you get loads of cards, normal cards, and only a few of Magic and Traps in the packets'. Yu-Gi-Oh! cards offered better value for money because it was easier to collect cards that were advantageous in game play. Joshua ranked the different types of cards comprising a Yu-Gi-Oh! game deck according to their use in gameplay. Monster cards were best because this is where the main action was: "The monster cards are the good ones
Figure 4.21  Joshua’s YU-GI-OH! Cards

Close up view below

*Source: Joshua’s annotated photograph album*
because you can attack the life points away from the... opponent". Comparison of the star ratings of different monsters formed the main part of the game. Joshua explained, "These are only trap cards, just, they don't have stars [like Spell cards]. But monsters have stars. The more stars the better normally... If the attack's higher than the defence of... the opposing monster... then the monster which's defence is lower is destroyed and sent to the graveyard and the [corresponding] life points are just gone [from the opponent]."

In a similar fashion, Joshua also ascribed value to his Shoot Out cards (see Figure 4.22) according to the ratings depicted on them by the manufacturers. Like Yu-Gi-Oh! cards, Shoot Out cards use stars to indicate the character's, in this instance football player's, level of ability. A five star rating is the best, then three, two and one. (There are no four star players.) In addition there are shiny cards, which are rated more highly than the same star equivalent. Joshua talked me through the rating system explaining how a five star shiny was the best 'cos they're extra special players and they're like excellent, it has a special symbol... like here it's five star match winner.' The symbols indicate that the represented player has excellent skills for his position – he is an 'excellent defender', 'excellent midfielder' or 'excellent striker' – or that he is a 'match winner. In addition there were 'penalty specialists' and 'penalty savers'. These shiny cards can earn players bonus points. Talk about his various 'shinys' dominated Joshua's discussion of his card collection. However, to say that Joshua's valuation of his cards was determined by the manufacturer's ratings alone is to misrepresent the situation.

An index of distributed personhood

Cards were also valued because of the particular individual players they represented. The Cristiano Ronaldo card was highly prized by Joshua, as was his Wayne Rooney card. Both are shiny match winner cards, however, this alone did not determine their value. There were many examples Joshua could have chosen to illustrate his points of discussion, yet he opted for these particular icons, who play for his favourite team. These cards were highly prized because they represented the distributed personhood of the famous, idolised player. This notion is forcefully demonstrated by a comment made by a collector of sports...
Figure 4.22  Joshua’s Shoot Out Cards
Close up view below

Source: Joshua’s annotated photograph album
cards in Baker and Gentry's (1996:134) study of child collectors. Six year old Stuart declared that he would be mad if someone hurt his sports card collection because 'it might wreak a pro basketball player'.

Gell (1998) has discussed how images of something are parts of that thing; the thing being a distributed object. He draws on Yrjo Hirn's (1971) idea that sensible, perceptible objects give off parts of themselves as rinds, skins, or vapours, which diffuse out into the ambience and are incorporated by the onlooker in the process of perception. This idea is traceable to the emanation theories of Epicurus and Lucretius, according to which every image of a thing constitutes a concrete part of the thing itself. Shadows, reflections, visions, and mental representations of distant objects are all caused by thin membranes, which continually detach themselves from the surfaces of all bodies and move onwards in all directions through space. This extraordinary notion is expressed in mundane ways in relation to family photographs. For example, mothers choose not to place photographs of their children in the parental bedroom as the presence of children in this room is deemed inappropriate (Rose, 2003). The Shoot Out cards acted as skins of the players they depicted, distributing that player's personhood, and thus enabling a network comprising children and idols to be configured. They allowed for a connection between children and their idols to be established, one that was personalised, particularly where children slept with their cards concealed under their pillows, or carried their cards upon their person, closely guarding them in their pocket.

A distributed object

Cards were also highly prized for depicting members of the child's favourite team. Collecting these particular cards was an expression of loyalty by the children. This practice extended beyond Shoot Out cards to official Premier League stickers. These stickers functioned in the same manner as the trading cards in terms of exchange, gathering of information, and the methods of evaluation. The only difference between them and the trading cards is the fact that the cards are designed as a game while the stickers are for use in the accompanying album. Individual cards were prized as parts of a set (Chapman, 2000), in terms of one's favourite team or even teams in general. Joshua talked
about having completed three teams in the previous season, Aston Villa, Liverpool and Newcastle. The completion of teams was seen as a goal, thus individual players that were inconsequential in and of themselves took on greater value as part of a wider whole, as a means to an end. In this sense, the individual cards operate as part of a larger distributed object, that rather than being temporally distributed like Sam’s ‘oeuvre’ of model planes, were spatially distributed in small packets, across a range of retail outlets (Gell, 1998).

The importance of sets was expressed in Stephen’s practice of producing his own cards and stickers. He searched the web for appropriate images of football players that were of the correct size, to print, cut out and stick in his album in the absence of stickers (see Figure 4.23). The mixture of official stickers and print outs was of little consequence, it was the completion of teams that was all important. He also searched the auction website, eBay, for Shoot Out cards that were missing from his collection. Rather than bidding for these items he would print out the picture of the card, cut it out and glue it to coloured card. He would then label it as a Shoot Out card and write the corresponding season on the reverse of the image (see Figure 4.24). His alternative use of the auction website stressed the kind of values that were placed on these cards, values that did not relate to conventional understandings of authenticity or investment potential. The prevalence of alternative evaluations was punctuated by the fact that Stephen saw player signatures as a feature that lessened the value of cards. This contradicted the higher prices that were commanded by these signed examples on the website. For Stephen, signatures detracted from the image of the player, and it was the image that was important, being a link to the idol represented. These home-made examples were never intended for exchange; rather their purpose was to complete a set, and ultimately a collection.

*Making associations*

Finally, possession of trading cards was a means of associating with others. This was achieved through the shared activities of ‘swapsies’, gameplay, and discussion of different cards and the information they relayed. Different cards were also able to exercise transitory power by being of interest to others beyond the issue of exchange, for instance, by carrying an image relating to a friend’s
Figure 4.23  **Stephen’s Merlin Sticker Album**, with an assortment of official and homemade stickers

*Source: Photograph taken by Stephen*
Figure 4.24  Stephen’s Homemade Shoot Out Cards

Source: Photograph taken by Stephen
favourite team. This provided the children with a means of interaction. The children used their Shoot Out cards in this manner to associate with me. At an early stage of discussion, both Joshua and Stephen asked which team I supported. My response, Arsenal, then appeared to structure the following discussion. When setting out his five favourite players, Stephen opted for four cards depicting images of Arsenal players, rather than big names such as Cristiano Ronaldo (a player idolised in his play of football themed PlayStation games, as can be seen in chapter 7) or players from his favourite team, Reading. In his discussion of team selection for gameplay, Joshua talked about Arsenal and Manchester United players (Manchester United being his favourite team):

"cos if they've got a strong team then I always change my tactics by putting Man U players on... If they're a Man U supporter I always put a better team on which is like Arsenal mixed with Man U or something like that because then I, then it would beat them, won't it?"

('Interview' with Joshua, 12th May 2007)

They were both keen to show me the Arsenal players they had in their respective collections of cards.

In this case study I have alerted the reader to five different systems of value within which trading cards operate. The first two are determined as part of the production process: a value system based on the production of scarcity (see Lash and Lury, 2007) and operating within that, a system based on a scheme of official ratings pertaining to the TCG. I have shown how a further three systems of value can be delineated within the children’s consuming practices: a system based on the cards’ representation of individual characters and personalities; a system based on the collection of sets; and a system based on the capacity to interact with other relevant parties. Appadurai (1986) offers a way of thinking about the relations between these various value systems. In the opening chapter of *The Social Life of Things*, he introduces the concept of a ‘politics of value’. Here the term ‘politics’ refers to the tensions between different sets of agreement, or frameworks, about ‘what is desirable, what a reasonable ‘exchange of sacrifices’ comprises, and who is permitted to exercise what kind of
effective demand in what circumstances' (1986:57). Tension results from the fact that not all parties share the same interests in any specific system of value. In the case of the trading cards, we can see that tension may occur not only between parties, but may be felt by an individual making judgements about which specific system determines a card's value in a particular moment in space and time. One critique of Appadurai's 'politics of value', however, is that it appears to restrict the terms of the relationship between different systems of value to one of confliction. Different frameworks can complement, and even reinforce one another. For instance, in terms of the Shoot Out cards, the Cristiano Ronaldo card is, in many cases, highly prized for bearing a representation of a footballing icon. The card is also highly valued with regard to the official rating scheme, being a five star shiny match winner.

The trading cards motivate the configuration of different systems of value through the ease with which they can be mixed and matched. Their particular materiality facilitated the various acts that comprised the children's collecting practices. Small and lightweight, it was possible for them to be ordered and then reordered again and again. Not only were they easily handled, they were also easily transported, and easily stored and concealed, slipping into a slim album or fitting into a child's pocket. Even when stored in an album, such as Joshua's, these cards could be reordered, easily slipping from their individual plastic pockets. This differed somewhat for the stickers, which once stuck in place in the accompanying album, could not be moved. However, in their singular form, they shared the material attributes of the cards. Their simple nature and manufacture from cardboard also allowed easy replication, which was particularly important to Stephen's practices of collecting.

Summary

This case study shows how objects may demonstrate agency as a result of carrying a representation of something else, in this case a representation of a Yu-Gi-Oh! character or a professional footballer. This agency is not fixed, but is performed in relation to different systems of value. The children's concern with these shifting meanings and values demonstrates that the use of trading cards is not principally concerned with economic exchange value and therefore does not
elevate the monetary over the personal or the social. This is particularly exemplified by Stephen's alternative use of the secondary market eBay. The cards acted as a means to express individual and collective identities, a means to facilitate social interactions, and a means to learn important social skills, such as the ability to negotiate and compromise. In addressing a type of toy criticised in popular media and academic literature, this case study further suggests how consideration of object agency can have wider implications for understanding contemporary childhoods and children's experiences of, and negotiations, with consumer culture.

In Summary

In this chapter I have traced the agency of a series of toys by attending to the effects of this agency in terms of the specific inferences, interpretations and responses these different toys motivate. I have demonstrated how these responses are variably a function of the sensual and material qualities of the toy itself, the socio-material relations in which the toy is embedded, and the representational qualities of the toy. Through an examination of these agential powers, toys become animated. In being seen to do something, they take on a lively quality. Here, the attribution of agency does not equate to an imputation of intentionality, rather, the concept of agency is expanded beyond just the cognitive.

Animation continues as an empirical theme through the proceeding chapters. In chapter 5, I apply an understanding of how children actively configure their own systems of value to two examples of branded toys. As branded commodities, these toys are embedded in a specific network of relations, in which the children intervene to create their own systems of meaning. Particular products within the branded ensemble become animated due to their specific materialities, which allow them to exert transitory power over the other goods within the brand. This prompts them to hold greater value and meaning for the child. In chapters 6 and 7, I draw on the idea of the toy as a technology to address how toys prompt certain playful practices. These co-configured practices are shown to be productive of different kinds of imaginative spaces. Here the idea of animation is extended beyond the toy, to space-times, through considerations of affect.
(Anderson, 2006), and to players, through consideration of playful vitality (Malbon, 1999). Animation is also employed as a representational strategy throughout the thesis, through the use of scripts of playful practice, comic strips and video footage.

The metaphor of animation is also of import to this study beyond a general sense of evoking liveliness. Through the creative process of ‘giving life to’ the inanimate, animation is understood to reveal something about the figure or object it enlivens (Lash and Lury, 2007; Wells, 1998). Wells (1998:10) suggests that animation can ‘redefine the everyday, subvert our accepted notions of ‘reality’, challenge the orthodox understanding and acceptance of our existence’. Thus, I understand animation to be a fitting means to challenge an orthodox understanding of our existence that is founded on the dualistic opposition of subject and object. This is an important goal in the examination of the co-fabricated character of children’s social worlds. In the following chapter, I set the children’s co-fabricated worlds more squarely in the context of a commercialised space of childhood, by turning attention to brands and branding. This builds upon discussion of the relationship between children and markets introduced with regard to trading cards.
5

Negotiating the Commercialised Space of Childhood
In chapter 2 I introduced childhood as a cultural space constituted by consumption and discussed the moral tension existing between childhood and the market, which are respectively constructed as 'sacred' and 'profane' spheres. In many cases brands epitomise this moral tension. Their relation to fast-paced entertainment product cycles casts them as potent symbols and stimulators of the contemporary 'I want' culture. These entertainment product cycles are characterised by their global reach, the incessant turnover of fashion cycles to which play is bound, the pervasiveness of the product universe into which children are drawn, and the immensity of corporate efforts to reconstitute childhood as something to be consumed (Langer, 2004). Child psychologists currently suggest that at six months old a baby forms mental images of corporate logos. By the age of three years old, one out of five children is said to be making specific requests for brand-name products (McDougall and Chantrey, 2004). This chapter takes children's negotiations with this branded space of childhood as its focus. Let me begin by introducing the economic, social and cultural context and significance of branding.

The Branded Space of Childhood

Branding is obviously not specific to the children's culture industry. Notwithstanding geographical variability, we are now said to live in what Arvidsson (2005:236) refers to as 'a well nigh all encompassing brand-space'. This is a space where looking, acting and feeling are constantly invited to give attention to a particular brand. According to Arvidsson, estimates suggest the overall economic weight of brand value has increased continually in the last twenty years. In the 1980s, about twenty percent of most bid prices in mergers and acquisitions were motivated by brand value. Today that figure is closer to seventy percent in some sectors. In 2001, the value of the world's most precious brands was estimated to be $434 billion, which represents four percent of US GDP, and is triple their advertising expenditure. (This is according to Interbrand, whose brand valuation method has been established as standard practice.)

As an exemplary embodiment of the prevailing logic of capital, brands spread beyond the realm of consumer marketing to arenas such as management,
welfare, politics and education (Arvidsson, 2005; Lury, 2004). They are paradigmatic of the post-Fordist mode of production in the same way that factories were paradigmatic to Fordism. They are a capitalist response to the condition of post-modernity, which is characterised by an intensified mediatisation of the social and a sense of instability prompted by the reflexive, transitory and mobile nature of identity and community (Arvidsson, 2005). Branding generates profits by creating and then exploiting various sorts of social dependency within this insecure society (Holt, 2006b). People look to brands as a means to satisfy their desire for stable elements in a postmodern world where traditional sources of meaning such as religion and government have become devalued. The processes of identity production involved in these attempts at satisfaction are subsumed by capital as a source of surplus value (Arvidsson, 2005). Branding has opened up how the economy is organised, reintroducing the qualitative, in terms of culture and meaning, into the means of exchange. While the brand subsumes symbolic capital within the calculation of economic capital, it is not entirely a matter of the quantitative measurement of equivalence. The brand is an alternative device to money for the calibration of the market. It introduces multiple dimensions along which the suitability of goods can be established, which like price are not fixed, but variable. The management of the relations between these attributes is what produces the brand (Lury, 2004).

Brands have been fundamental to the market since traders first used them as a maker's mark that guaranteed quality for consumers who they did not see face-to-face (Arvidsson, 2005; Holt, 2006b). In the past twenty years, neoliberal globalisation has motivated a shift in the economic role of branding. The rationalisation of global supply chains made it increasingly difficult for firms to gain sustainable advantage in their product. This combined with the manufactured sameness of the machine age, requiring companies to find another means to differentiate their product. In the postmodern economy, trade in symbols and experiences proved a profitable area prompting firms to look to image based difference as a means to gain competitive advantage. Corporations became increasingly dependent on the circulation of images and sign values for profit, to the extent that the manufacture of goods no longer formed their central axis. Keeping the sign highly visible and highly valued became all
important. Brands became an efficient means through which multinational corporations could pursue expansion into new countries and new product markets (Holt, 2006b; Klein, 2000). The changing significance of the brand is acknowledged by developments in trademark legislation, which emphasise the brand as an object in its own right, rather than a symbol of something else, such as product quality (Arvidsson, 2005).

*Character merchandising*

The associated practice of character merchandising is a key means for companies to differentiate products that, while not limited to the children's culture industry, is pertinent to it. Mintel (2002a: 11) define character merchandising as 'the use of popular characters, predominantly those that appeal to children to promote the sale of consumer goods'. Its key target audience is children under the age of ten years old. This practice takes different forms. Firstly, there is license merchandising, the right to reproduce a character or logo on specific manufactured goods. Secondly, there is promotional merchandising, where a character is linked to a product for a specific period of time in order to boost sales or help establish a new line. Thirdly, there is publishing licensing, covering books and magazines devoted entirely to a particular character. Licensed characters often function as brands in their own right where the manufacturer is not clearly identified (Mintel, 2002a). In many cases brands look to character licensing as a means to appear fresh and exciting, and remain relevant to the target audience. For example, LEGO has exploited the popularity of the Harry Potter character, bringing products such as LEGO Hogwarts Castle to the market (Dammler and Middlemann-Motz, 2002).

Character merchandising soared in the mid to late 1990s, primarily in relation to hit movies like Disney's *Toy Story* and the new *Star Wars* trilogy, and television programmes, including the likes of *The Simpsons*. However, characters are derived from a variety of media including classic children's books (e.g. Winnie the Pooh), newspaper strip cartoons (e.g. Garfield), computer games (e.g. Lara Croft) and mobile content (e.g. The Crazy Frog) (Mintel, 2002a; 2006). The UK and US markets account for three quarters of the world market, which was estimated to be worth $180 billion in 2005 (NPD, 2007). In
2006, toys and games accounted for thirty three percent of the UK character market, and was an area of strong growth, along with the publishing and media sector, which shared an equal market percentage (Mintel, 2006).

**Academic engagements with branding**

Despite its economic and social significance, literature on branding outside of the academic field of marketing and consumer behaviour is somewhat limited. It is notably weak in terms of considering consumption, lacking empirical examination of consumer engagement with brands. To this end, it has tended to overgeneralise how brands and characters work within society. At the time of writing, academic attention to character merchandising appears to be non-existent. An interest in branding has only recently emerged within geography (Jackson et al, 2007; Pike, 2008). Here brands are understood to provide a unique opportunity to explore the spaces at the intersections between economic, social, political and cultural geographies.

While marketing and business literatures generally take a practical and often celebratory approach to brands, they have been routinely condemned in wider academic and popular circles. For instance, Klein (2000) denounces brands for colonising public space and demanding our constant attention. Brands are poignant symbols for the intersection between capitalism and consumerism, standing accused of preying on consumer anxieties and formulating false desires. This criticism possesses a special charge in relation to the children’s culture industry due to its relation to entertainment product cycles, which are thought to generate perceptual dissatisfaction. As Langer (2004:255) explains, these product cycles stimulate desire for the new and redefine what preceded it as junk.

'This process drains all meaning from the word ‘enough’, situating it as an anachronism from a bygone era when toys and games were finite resources passed down from older to younger siblings and cousins'.
It has given rise to 'commodi-toys', characterised by a capacity to stimulate rather than satisfy longing. They have a short but intense shelf-life as objects of desire. Satisfaction is endlessly postponed because 'each act of consumption is a beginning rather than an end, the first step in an endless series for which each particular toy is an advertisement' (Langer, 2004:255). Brands are also seen as too crass and too popular to deserve serious attention (Holt, 2006b). Academics have tended to study advertising rather than branding (see Goldman and Papson, 1992). Given this neglect, the social, political and cultural effects of brands and branding are yet to be assessed and specified, causing the heterogeneous ways in which brands and character properties work to be overlooked (Holt, 2006c; Lash and Lury, 2007).

Recent commentaries on branding have emphasised the need to look beyond the brand itself to consider how and why these particular expressions resonate so powerfully in society and culture. Holt (2006c) offers an understanding of iconic brands as ideological parasites and proselytisers of advanced capitalism. Through an examination of the Jack Daniels brand, he demonstrates how iconic brands enhance existing myth markets rather than contributing substantially to their formation. They rarely significantly rework existing symbolism, instead playing a supportive role to other ideology driving media.

'Iconic brands play a useful complementary role because commodities materialise myths in a different manner, allowing people to interact around these otherwise ephemeral and experientially distant myths in everyday life' (Holt, 2006c:374).

Brands become iconic when they are woven into potent ideological currents in society. It is therefore necessary to attend to the relationships between brands and other mass culture, tracing the trajectory of brands as intertextual constructions. Brand critics have distorted the ideological role of brands because they have ignored these relationships. This is not to say that corporate efforts to market brands are a benign force. They exploit profitable cultural veins via the techniques of ubiquity and proliferation. The social effects of brands come not from the manipulation of desires but the heavy handed expansion of ideological expression once resonant linkages have been.
established. In this sense brands are proselytisers of myths. ‘Encountering ‘Just Do It’ stories everywhere you look is politically narcotising, making it existentially difficult to question ‘Why do it?” (Holt, 2006c:375). An understanding of brands as parasites is reminiscent of the argument that advertising is embedded in, and feeds off cultural meanings pre-existing in contemporary society (Goldman and Papson, 1992).

**Branding and consumers**

Recent commentaries have been keen to stress the role of the consumer in branding practice. Whereas Fordist marketing attempted to control productivity, disciplining consumers and curtailing consumer practice to the reproduction of a standardised consumption norm, post-Fordist marketing offers brands as cultural resources for consumer practices (Arvidsson, 2005). Brand management comprises two techniques. On the one hand it works to inscribe certain ways of acting and relating to brands, so as to establish contours for the brand identity enacted. This includes creating intertextual links in media culture, through the likes of product placement and sponsorship. This makes the object of the brand resist certain uses and invite others, while not explicitly spelling out the social relations it may engage in. On the other hand, brand management involves the selective appropriation of consumer innovation. This means established contours must allow for a certain mobility of the brand.

Arvidsson (2005) employs Lazzarato’s concept of ‘immaterial labour’ to elaborate on the manner of this consumer productivity. This concept describes how consumers produce a social relation by employing a common ability to interact and socialise, and a common symbolic framework, which is understood as a set of shared knowledges and competencies. This is the same symbolic resource that is referred to in accounts of the embedded nature of branding (and advertising) in culture and society. Arvidsson refers to the social relation produced as the ‘ethical surplus’, a shared meaning and emotional involvement which surrounds the brand. In a similar vein, Moor (2003) draws on Hardt and Negri’s concept of ‘affective labour’, understood as work that is corporeal and somatic, concerned with the creation and manipulation of affect, and productive of social networks and forms of community. These models emphasise that
consumers are not passive victims in the branding process, but are actively engaged in the social construction of value. Consumer agency is exercised in the formation of identities, shared meanings and forms of (transitory) community, which produce a context for consumption. It is the creative autonomy of this productivity that makes it valuable. It functions as labour when it is subsumed under capital through feedback mechanisms like trend scouting (Arvidsson, 2005).

Lury (2004) also draws attention to the recursive loop of consumer activities in the production process. She emphasises how the brand relies on both pattern and randomness, which complement one another. To stay relevant to the consuming populace brands must evolve, relying on randomness for transformation. Brand management monitors the unintended effects of branded products in use, employing these elements in new directions of product development. Randomness is required to combat the sterility of pattern, which is based on repetition. However, some form of complementary organisation and pattern is required to ensure the randomness coheres enough to allow for communication. For Lury, the role afforded to consumers is tempered by the asymmetrical nature of the exchange between them and producers. As an interface between these two parties, the brand is a site of interactivity not interaction. These parties are at once connected and removed from each other. As trademark law only minimally acknowledges the implicatedness of the activities of consumers, it contributes to the asymmetrical nature of communication and to its abstraction from everyday life. Arvidsson (2005) expands this idea, discussing how the complexity of consumer agency is reduced to produce a desirable filtered plateau of the brand. Branding therefore comes to work against the productive potential of the social on which it ultimately builds.

Branding literature also addresses the volatile nature of connections between brands and consumers. Brand image is both the source of corporate wealth and corporate vulnerability. As brand value grows the corporation becomes more vulnerable to public attack. This has been witnessed in high profile cases concerning iconic brands, such as that condemning Nike for their use of child labour (see Goldman and Papson (1998) for discussion of 'sign wars', public attacks on Nike and their corporate responses to them). Companies involved in
the children's culture industry face significant vulnerability, specific to the 'intensely overdetermined moral space' in which their products are marketed (Langer, 2004). Such companies are trapped by their own promotional rhetoric of magic, fun and enchantment. Langer (2004:264) reports how the relocation of toy production to export processing zones (EPZs) is an ironic disjunction of global capitalism that means '[a]t the beginning of the twenty-first century, the 'dark secrets' from which children's innocence must be protected are not sexual, but industrial'. Although governments and multinational corporations share responsibility for EPZs, the latter are more compromised by any disjuncture between the aura of products and the conditions of their production. Once attached to a toy company, brands stand for, and strengthen belief in an enchanted childhood, which must be protected from disillusionment.

While the role of consumers in branding is recognised, there is a distinct lack of empirical examination of how consumers engage with brands in their everyday lives. As Holt (2006c) contends, a macro understanding of how brand expressions relate to contemporary social institutions and cultural discourses needs to be combined with a micro understanding of how brands are understood and used in everyday life worlds. This chapter begins to address this neglect by examining children's everyday engagements with two particular brands, namely Bratz and Harry Potter. Given the nature of branding practice, there is a need for an approach that locates the meanings and values attached to brands in a particular historical context. To this end, I discuss the contemporary significance of these brands and look beyond the brands themselves to consider the wider relations they internalise. Before moving on to the two chosen case studies, it is important to consider exactly what a brand is.

**Defining brands**

Various definitions of a brand are offered by different commentators. The definition I find most useful is: 'A brand is a set of perceptions in the mind of the consumer' (buildingbrands.com, 2008: no pagination). This definition makes it absolutely clear that a brand is very different from a product or service. It emphasises that a brand consists of a set of associations, which comprise the brand image, and are actively managed in the practice of brand management. I
also draw on Lury's (2004) description of the brand as a dynamic set of relations, which work on two levels. On one level there are the relations between the range of products and/or services in which the brand instantiates itself. On a different level there are the relations, or intertextual links, from which it emerges with respect to its environment. In this sense brands are the effects of hyperlinking (Lash and Lury, 2007). As a set of relations the brand is open, extending into and implicating social relations. It is not a matter of certainty, but rather an object of possibility.

The brand’s dynamism is fundamental to this possibility. This dynamism is seen as mixed, layered, heterogeneous images unfolding in time. This unfolding is organised in terms of an interactivity in which the recursive loop of information about the consumer plays a pivotal role. Here, time is not external to the object, but internal to it. The branded object does not exist in a steady state, but as a set of relations that is always coming into existence. To this end, the object’s state is embedded in a complex space and cannot be separated from it (Lash and Lury, 2007). Trademark law constitutes the object as dynamic. The current legal definition of a trademark makes it possible for the distinctiveness of the logo to be judged in terms of associations and not in relation to a fixed origin (Lury, 2004). While we may talk in terms of ‘the brand’ it is important to remember there is no single thing at issue, as this would misrepresent a complex artefact as an immediate ‘matter of fact’, effacing the diverse layers of activity that go into producing it (Lury, 2004).

Lash and Lury (2007) explain that as an entity constituted in and as relations, the brand stands in contrast to the commodity, which has no relationships and is determined from the outside. Rather than being mechanistic in this manner, the brand is vitalistic and can be likened to an organism. It evolves and therefore has a history and a memory, which form the brand’s identity. The products in which the brand actualises itself flow from this identity. The brand is therefore a stabilising force that locks together a constantly shifting series of products. The logo is central to this co-ordinating process, acting as a marker of brand identity. This identity presents the brand as having a personality, which underpins the affective relations it shares with consumers (Lash and Lury, 2007).
This definition of brands helps us understand the idea of brand loyalty. It is open to the fact that different people have different perceptions of a product or service, motivating different attachments and relations to it. It allows for the value of the brand to be built not merely on product quality, but to be based on values, commitments and forms of community sustained by consumers. As Arvidsson (2005) writes, brands enable a direct valorisation of people's ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings. Again it is possible to directly contrast the brand with the commodity. The commodity is produced; it is fixed and therefore determined and determinate in nature. As such, it can only be a source of reproduction. The brand, on the other hand, is the source of production. Whereas commodities work via the logic of identity, brands work through the logic of difference, relying on distinctiveness for their value and their ability to command a premium price (Lash and Lury, 2007).

The use of the term 'perceptions' in the chosen definition is significant. To perceive is to apprehend not only with the mind, but through the senses. This definition permits brands to be a source of sensory and affective associations as well as cognitive ones (Moor, 2003). This allows understanding of how a brand is built not only through effective communications or appealing logos, but through the total experience it offers. The brand is not a quality of a series of products, but a quality of experience. Lash and Lury (2007) elaborate on this feature by referring to brands as intensities.

Brands and materiality

In the sense that brands are intensities, they are virtuals. Intensities actualise themselves not as objects, but as events, thus the brand is an effect of performativity. The brand is an abstraction made concrete in specific products or services only as and when consumers take it seriously. To exist it has to be enacted. The immateriality of the brand is emphasised in accounts of its rise to power. For instance, Klein (2000) talks of the 'divestment of the world of things' initiated in the mid 1980s when management theorists developed the idea that successful corporations must primarily produce brands as opposed to products. The products that flourished in this new age were not those presented as
tangible commodities, but those presented as concepts. However, while the brand may have transcended the world of things, its reputation still depends on great product. The practice of 'label slapping' is condemned within the industry for its lack of regard to the intrinsic value of goods (Temple, 2007). The question of product quality is especially important in relation to branded goods targeted at the children's market. In a 2004 report, the British Association of Toy Retailers' (BATR) stresses that while the popularity of toys is cyclical, bound to the fashion cycle of brands, the success of a toy relies on its 'playability'. The following quote summarises the importance of product quality to the brand:

"Tweens question everything and traditional product loyalty means little if anything to them. Whereas we might put considerable trust in a name and forgive some problems, when tweens find fault with a brand, they will reject it; even if it subsequently cleans up its act, they will not forgive it' (Powell, 2006:62).

The development of the intertwined phenomena of the 'thingification of media' and the 'mediation of things' within the global culture industry points to a further reason to consider materiality when examining consumer's everyday engagements with brands (Lash and Lury, 2007). Examples of the thingification of media include films becoming computer games, and cartoon characters becoming collectibles. It is now the case that film and television related paraphernalia rival the primary media for visibility. Simulations have escaped the symbolic world to enter the 'real' world as hyperreality. Whereas in the symbolic realm, signification works through structure to produce meaning, in the material realm it works through brute force and immediacy. When media become things we enter a world not of interpretation, but of navigation. Our primary engagements are not with representational meanings, but with the operationality of things. We do them rather than read them (Lash and Lury, 2007).

A prime example of things becoming media in the children's culture industry is collectible toys such as Barbie providing inspiration for books, film and television media. These developments within the global culture industry have
given rise to an almost seamless convergence of toys, games and media in the commercial marketplace, which transfers into children's everyday lives. As Goldstein et al (2004:3) acknowledge, 'children's culture is now highly intertextual: every 'text' effectively draws upon and feeds into every other text'. Here 'texts' do not refer exclusively to narratives or something discursive in effect. Rather the term is used to emphasise the hyperlinked nature of contemporary children's culture, comprising films, television, toys, computer games, books and an associated array of related merchandise too vast to name. While character merchandising may have initially spawned goods which could be described as entertainment 'spin-offs' (Langer, 2004), it is now increasingly undertaken as a fully integrated marketing and promotional campaign, often on a global basis (Mintel, 2002a). Kline (1989:310) defines integrated marketing as a comprehensive strategic communication plan that

've orchestrates all available channels of communication, achieving a kind of synergy amongst them. This synergy is contained by the unified thematic framework (including the imagery, narratives, characters, and music) which establishes this concept. This concept gives shape to all executions in the strategy, including in-store display, interpersonal communication, advertising, and television programming'.

While the widespread shift to integrated marketing forcefully took hold in the 1990s, it can be traced back to the early days of the Disney Corporation (Mintel, 2002a). The 1920s Mickey Mouse cartoons gave birth to a fictional character that acted as a basis for an effective license. By 1933, Disney had sold over $10 million worth of licensed merchandise (Kline, 1989).

The social effects of integrated marketing

For critics of these webs of integrated marketing, this 'heavy handed' commodification of children's culture stifles the spontaneity and creativity inherent in 'natural' play. Kline (1989:311) writes:
‘Play, the most important modality of childhood learning is thus colonised by marketing objectives making the imagination the organ of corporate desire. The consumption ethos has become the vortex of children’s culture.’

Critics argue that it is marketing considerations rather than the child’s amusement and moral education that dominates the way children play. While moral concern regarding children’s incorporation into the marketplace is not limited to toys, games and media entangled in these synergistic systems of references, it finds particular expression in relation to them given their obviously commercialised nature. This commercialisation is argued to have adverse impacts on the quality of children’s televisual media and toy design (Kline, 1989). However, educational media such as the US series Sesame Street, which is now over thirty years old and produced by a not-for-profit company, also depend on global marketing for their success and survival. As with Star Wars, The Simpsons and Pokémon, there are global Sesame Street franchises, and an enormous range of related merchandise, including the hit commercial success, Tickle Me Elmo (Buckingham, 2007; Clark, 2007).

Moral concern regarding commercialised toys finds particular expression in debates about children’s diminishing imaginative capabilities. Critics argue that ‘[t]he creative accident of play is foreshortened’ as play scenarios become increasingly pre-scripted by media (Thrift, 2003: 401). These preformed scripts are said to dominate children’s time causing them to rarely think outside of the narrative that has been created. This is thought to prompt a loss of the ability to fantasise, and be creative and spontaneous, features which are commonly regarded as fundamental components of ‘authentic’ play. Critics hold developments in the marketing of established brands and characters to be indicative of the market’s exploitation of children’s toys and media. For instance, LEGO’s recent successes have chiefly come from construction kits that offer pre-formed narratives, such as the Star Wars, Harry Potter and Indiana Jones ranges. This is argued to diminish the brand’s association with free-form imaginative play (Thrift, 2003). Kline (1989) also writes about the ultimatum faced by Barbie, who despite years as a successful stand alone character, came to face the choice of becoming animated or fading away. She has since ‘come alive’
in animated television shows and feature length productions, has released singles and emblazoned a vast plethora of merchandise.

For Kline (1989: 315), the prevalence of preformed 'imaginative' scenarios means play has become highly ritualised:

'less an exploration and solidification of personal experiences and developing conceptual schema than a rearticulation of the fantasy world provided by market designers. Imaginative play has shifted one degree closer to mere imitation and assimilation'.

He argues that children's creative impulses are directed to internalising a desired orientation to toy products. An animated television series featuring a toy is a commercial disguised as a programme, which is problematic because children do not recognise the intent to sell hidden within it. Children seek to recreate the fantasy world depicted on the screen in their play. As the personalities of the characters are not integrated in the sense that each character has their own special ability, the purchase of multiple characters is necessary for the whole concept of this world to be reproduced. Thus, in their recreations, children are working for the toy manufacturer. For critics, integrated marketing represents a new stage of commodification that allows commercial imperatives to reach ever deeper into society and our everyday lives. Kline argues that this kind of synergistic media has consequences not only for the structure of play, but for the social interaction that surrounds it. It is specifically targeted to clear market segmentations based on gender and age. This results in a growing gender divide and causes parents and older siblings to be excluded from play as the simplified nature of the associated programming means it is not desired as family viewing. As knowledge of the fantasy worlds depicted in this media increasingly acts as a pre-requisite for collaborative play, the absence of family viewing means other family members do not know the fantasy world well enough to engage.

In this chapter I examine how children negotiate the commercialised space of childhood, appropriating specific elements of synergistic blends of toys and media in their playful practices. This is framed in relation to the importance of
considering materiality when addressing consumers' engagements with brands. Firstly, I examine children's engagements with Bratz fashion dolls, an example of the mediation of things. The Bratz brand originally came to life through plastic dolls, but has since expanded into a television series, animated and live action movies, and music. Secondly, I begin to examine children's engagements with Harry Potter, an example of the thingification of media. The Harry Potter character originated in a series of novels, before being adapted to the big screen in a series of films. A bewildering array of associated paraphernalia, including toys and collectibles, surrounds these two manifestations.

**Interruption: the choice of case studies**

During the research, an array of branded goods and character based products were encountered, ranging from Nike football boots to Top Trump cards, and plush Tiggers to Crayola Pens. Brands were everywhere in the children's collections of material culture, but each example appeared to work in a different way. The children appeared impervious to some brands, such as Crayola, whose pens were just another manifestation of a generic item. Here I deviate from Lury's (2004) understanding of the significance of brands in our everyday lives. She talks about the brand as a managerial device through which everyday life is programmed so as to evolve in ways that generate the right kind of attention to these relational entities. For Lury, the brand's significance lies in its ubiquity and mundaneness. It enters into the space between consciousness and action, thereby pre-structuring the acts of consumers. As such, significance is framed in terms of proprioception. In line with my concern for the children to structure my understanding of which toys matter to them in their everyday lives (as discussed in chapter 3) I reframed the significance of brands in terms of 'poignancy', addressing those that mattered in ostensive ways. Two particular phenomena stood out as being particularly pertinent to children's life worlds, namely the Bratz brand and the character property of Harry Potter.

Bratz dolls arrived on the UK toy scene in 2001. Owned by the American based firm MGA Entertainment, the dolls and associated products are distributed by Vivid Imaginations in the UK. Within just three years Bratz became a multibillion dollar brand, managing to usurp Barbie from her long held spot as
The best selling fashion doll. The brand now commands a majority share of the fashion doll market; reported to be nearly sixty-four percent in December 2006. The award winning brand is distributed in more than sixty-five countries, has four hundred and fifty licenses worldwide, and has been dubbed a ‘superbrand’ by Nick Austin, the CEO and co-founder of Vivid Imaginations (vividimaginations.co.uk, 2007). Besides the dolls themselves, which are now available in a variety of forms - Bratz, Bratz Kidz, Lil’ Bratz, Bratz Big Babyz and Bratz Babyz – and themes – including Bratz Rock Angelz, Bratz Party and Bratz Winter Adventure – the related paraphernalia includes various accessories, such as vehicles, Bratz Ponyz and Bratz Petz, an animated television series, CGI animation films, a live action movie, computer games, music CDs, books, apparel, jewellery, stationary, furniture, electronic goods, housewares and even a hamster cage. As this range suggests, Bratz is reported to be one of the five most active brands in the UK. The case study presented here draws on Emily’s engagements with the Bratz brand, drawing on material from her annotated photograph album and the discussion it prompted, video footage of both solo and collaborative Bratz play, and insights gleaned from time spent within the household. Emily’s affiliation with the brand is immediately apparent upon entering the family home. Her collection of dolls is proudly displayed on top of a wooden chest in the dining room and is clearly visible from the front door.

The Harry Potter phenomenon began with the release of the award winning Harry Potter books, authored by J.K. Rowling, which are now sold in over two hundred countries and have been translated into over fifty languages (bloomsbury.com, 2007). At the time of writing the first five books in the series have been transposed into blockbuster films produced by Warner Brothers Pictures. The first, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, released in 2001, became the second highest grossing film of all time (Toys ‘N’ Playthings, 2002). Over fifty licenses have been granted by Warner Brothers Consumer Products (WBCP), the owner of the worldwide film, licensing and merchandising rights for the Harry Potter property, who manage it as a brand. (Mintel (2006) report that WBCP are the second biggest licensor in the world behind Disney.) The Harry Potter range as a whole now includes collectibles, traditional toys and games, computer games, electric train sets, stationary, a stamp collection, apparel, jewellery, home décor, toiletries, party supplies and confectionary. The
Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park is also due to be opened in Universal’s Islands of Adventure theme park in late 2009 (License!, 2007). The success of the property stems from its universal appeal to all ages and both genders, generating a broad consumer base. Various Harry Potter manifestations were encountered in every one of the households visited during the research. The case study presented in this chapter draws on material from this mix of households, in the form of annotated albums and associated discussions, and insights from time spent in various homes. Particular attention is paid to Devan’s engagements with the property due to their intense nature and her identification as a Harry Potter fan. This discussion precedes a more in-depth look at Devan’s engagements with the character property, which also draws on video footage of her playful ‘magical’ practices, presented in the following chapter.

The Bratz Brand

To speak of intertextuality is to invoke flow. ‘Every play event is part of a broader flow of events that crosses one medium or ‘platform’ to another’ (Goldstein et al, 2004:3, *my emphasis*). The manufacturers of Bratz actively encourage intertextuality, as exemplified by The Bratz Rock Angelz fashion doll line. When released, each doll came packaged with the customary mix and match accessories, and themed poster displaying the various dolls in the range, and also a bonus CD featuring tracks from the accompanying Bratz Rock Angelz album and a preview of the forthcoming themed videogame. The bonus features are an example of Langer’s ‘commodi-toys’, acting as advertisements for other toys and media platforms. The dolls’ status as collectibles and a high turnover of themed ranges also fuels the desire for multiple purchases. The success of new products is taken to be a key driver in the brand’s increasing market share (vividimaginations.co.uk, 2007). Emily spoke of the difficulty of choosing which dolls to purchase given the vast choice on offer:

‘T: So how do you choose which ones you’re gonna buy if you’ve got any money, or how do you choose which ones you’re going to ask for?'
E: Well, it's quite hard really cos I go, "Oh mum, can I have this one?" and then on the way out of the Bratz aisle I see this other one and then, so if I want three and I don't have enough I have to decide between another one so I only get two, and erm, it's quite hard.’

('Interview' with Emily, 9th March 2007)

The organisation of the Bratz brand and its licensees ensure the brand is experienced as a pervasive brandscape, the kind of hyperreal world Lash and Lury (2007) depict. The Licensing Company, who represent the brand in the UK, organise and manage relations with the likes of Titan Publishing (responsible for the Bratz magazine), Paragon Publishing (responsible for storybooks and colouring books), MB and Hasbro (responsible for puzzles and games), THQ (responsible for videogames) and MV Sports (responsible for the Stylin' collection including a dance mat, mobile phone, digital camera and boombox). Vivid Imaginations also manufacture a range of Bratz goods, including a sticker maker, puzzles and board games. This integrated marketing activity ensures the brand is highly visible through techniques of ubiquity and proliferation. The vast range of products available is accompanied by a constant televisual presence in the form of the animated television series and advertising campaigns. In 2006, the company launched a fifty two weeks a year television ad presence, with a ten thousand plus TVR campaign spanning across twenty-two different product commercials. This was in addition to PR, promotions and high profile competitions (vividimaginations.co.uk, 2007). This assault continued into 2007, which saw a similarly scaled advertising plan, in addition to the promotion of a near sell out UK ‘Bratz Live’ tour, multiple DVD releases and a 'live action' movie. The company has also extended the brand through the use of a dedicated website, Bratz.com. This medium allows them to communicate directly with the consumer and integrate consumer feedback (Moor, 2003). MGA Entertainment's efforts to ensure intertextuality suggest a desire for the Bratz brand to be dematerialised from the dolls per se so it can flow across a range of material platforms. This offers the advantage of multiplying points of access for the consumer.
Flow across different material platforms was witnessed in Emily’s playful practices with her dolls. When discussing how she would film her play with her dolls, Emily referred explicitly to a series of scenes from one of the Bratz CGI animation films, *Bratz Genie Magic*, which she owned on DVD. She spoke in detail about particular scenes and thoughtfully considered how she could use her dolls, which were not specifically from the Genie Magic range, and her Bratz Genie bottle playset to act them out. For instance, she talked about how she could hold the doll above the bottle and then drop it behind the playset so it disappeared from view to suggest the character had magically entered it. Although this play never materialised in the video footage, the material that was recorded drew on themes and tropes repeatedly found within the Bratz animated television series. These included concerns with fashion, beauty and partying, and a storyline where best friends have a disagreement over a trivial matter and then realise that their friendship is more important and make up (see Figure 5.1 and Track 5). This plot is also repeatedly found in the numerous US ‘tween’ and teen oriented TV shows Emily loves to watch. (I shall consider the role of these shows in relation to the brand further in the next section).

**Fractionality and stickiness**

To think about the relations between these different components of the brand and how they cohere as something referred to as ‘Bratz’, we can turn to the concepts of multiplicity, singularity and fractionality as employed in the work of exponents of science and technology studies (see Law, 2002; 2004a; Mol, 2002). Such work applies the idea of a decentred subject to the object world. An object, like a subject, is not a coherent whole, but a multiple or assemblage. It comes in different versions and therefore has no single centre. Law (2002) demonstrates this in relation to the TSR2 aircraft, which is differently understood as a weapons system, a communications system, a navigation system, a map making system and a fuel system. These different versions or object positions interfere with each other and shuffle themselves together to make a single object. (See Mol (2002) for a similar discussion of the multiplicity of objects, explored in relation to the affliction atherosclerosis, which is enacted differently in different medical sites.) Overlaps between the different versions of an object allow them to cohere, producing singularity – the notion of a single,
Figure 5.1  Playing with Bratz Dolls

Source: Stills from Emily’s video footage of Bratz play
coherent aircraft - out of multiplicity. In this sense, the TSR2 aircraft (and atherosclerosis) are 'more than one - but less than many' (Mol, 2002:55). They are '[b]oth/and' (Law, 2002:4); both multiple and singular. Law (2002:3) introduces the metaphor of 'fractionality' to think about the relation between these two modes:

'In mathematics fractals are lines that occupy more than one dimension but less than two. If we take this as a metaphor without worrying too much about the mathematics, then we may imagine that fractal coherences are coherences that cannot be caught within or reduced to a single dimension. But neither do they exist as coherences in two or three separate and independent dimensions. In this way of thinking, a fractionally coherent subject or object is one that balances between plurality and singularity. It is *more than one,* *but less than many*' (original emphasis).

This metaphor avoids a dualism of the opposite poles of centres and dislocated fragments. Objects are not self-evidently singular, but rather their coherence or singularity is an effect. The reality of singularity is enacted. Here we are dealing not with a matter of epistemology, but with a matter of ontology. To explain how fractional coherence is achieved, Law (2002) exposes 'strategies of co-ordination', which are mechanisms that work to connect and co-ordinate disparate elements. I suggest that whereas intertextuality implies a flattening where all 'text's are equal, Law's metaphor of fractionality allows for the differential roles, or the various weighting of components to be seen, while also emphasising connection and flexibility.

We can think about the Bratz brand and brands more generally, in these terms. The array of branded goods comprises quite literally many and different things, from dolls, to televisual and print media, to hamster cages. Despite their differences, these many things manage to cohere as something referred to as 'Bratz'. It is the brand - the name, logo and image - that draws them together. The brand acts as a strategy for co-ordination. Each branded good becomes infused with a concept, a philosophy, an attitude, or in this case 'Bratitude'. This is achieved through careful positioning of the brand, creating explicit relations
with fashion and pop culture, which are the biggest areas of interest for the female `tween' market (Holmes, 2004; Mintel, 2006). The brand's famous tagline, 'a passion for fashion' exemplifies this association.

It is also strongly announced in the Bratz monthly magazine (see Figure 5.2), which incorporates celebrity gossip (including a section on 'celeb shopaholics'), fashion tips, film guides, quizzes (such as 'What's your perfect movie role?' and 'What's you're a-list job?' offering a choice of funky fashion designer, actress with Brat-itude, happenin' celeb hairdresser, sassy pop singer, make-up artist to the stars or writer for Bratz magazine), competitions offering prizes like GHD hair straighteners, free gifts like stick-on jewels and charm bracelets, and the obligatory Bratz product advertisements. An association with pop culture is further drawn through the Bratz music CDs and the live concert, and emphasised in the storylines of the DVDs. For example, in the case of Bratz: Rock Angelz, the characters form their own rock band. The DVD itself also includes a music video and behind the scenes featurette as bonus features. Bratz also has its own reality television show, Bratz Design Academy, on Nickelodeon, where pairs of fourteen year old friends face a series of creative catwalk challenges over a six week period to win the chance to travel to Los Angeles to work with the Bratz design team on Britain's next line of fashion dolls.

Through these intertextual links MGA Entertainment are working to establish the contours of the brand. These associations and relations need to be understood as part of the fractional Bratz object. They are entangled with the many and varied objects subsumed under the Bratz name. Indeed without them, the concept of Bratz would be meaningless. In this sense, we can think of the brand as a 'network-object' (Law and Mol, 2001), an object that holds itself together in a particular web of relations and associations. The network-object generates a form of spatiality – a network-space – in which the object can move. The co-ordinates of this space form the contours established through brand management. The singularity of the brand – as an entangled web of associations - is actively policed through the application of trademark law and the use of court orders to prohibit copyright infringement.
Figure 5.2  Bratz Magazine, a monthly edition

Source: Photograph taken by the author
In April 2005, MGA Entertainment filed a lawsuit against Mattel, the manufacturers of Barbie, alleging that their My Scene Barbie range duplicated the Bratz property's multi-ethnic looks, fashions and packaging. They accused the company of engaging in acts of unfair competition and intellectual property infringement intended to damage MGA's market share, confuse consumers and trade on MGA's goodwill (mgae.com, 2007). A press notice in the trade publication Toys 'N' Playthings (2004:33) announced:

‘MGA Entertainment, Inc is the owner of the intellectual property rights, including copyright, trade marks and registered designs, in Bratz dolls. In recent years, some importers, distributors and retailers have made concerted efforts to undermine the unique position of the Bratz dolls in the UK and worldwide toy market by flooding the UK toy market with goods that clearly infringe MGA's intellectual property rights...MGA and Vivid wish to make it clear that any importer, distributor or retailer of goods, in relation to which MGA or Vivid owns or has the right to enforce the intellectual property rights, will be pursued by MGA or Vivid'.

MGA Entertainment has also been pursued by Mattel in relation to such matters. At the time of writing the legal case involving Carter Bryant, the designer of the Bratz doll, who was a Mattel employee before moving to MGA, is still ongoing.

As this legal action demonstrates, there is a further element that is fundamental to the positioning of the Bratz brand – Barbie. Barbie needs little introduction being an iconic brand in her own right (see Rogers, 1999). Explicit attention has been drawn to the relationship between the two brands by the popular media and their reporting of the brands' comparative market shares. Comparisons have been made between the shapes of the dolls and the different sensibilities they represent. Bratz dolls are said to be more realistically shaped than Barbie dolls as they have curvier figures and are two and a half inches shorter. Extrapolations of Barbie's height if she were real vary according to source, but range from five foot eleven inches to six foot two inches. While Bratz dolls have less realistic facial features, – big pouty lips and oversized doe shaped eyes,
reminiscent of Manga cartoon characters – their ethnic features – skin tones, hair colours and names - represent diversity and are more in touch with the changing demographics of the US and UK markets. Whereas Barbie aimed to be a role model with her various career choices (including being a doctor and an astronaut), Bratz dolls do not have careers per se. Isaac Larian, MGA’s founder, explains:

‘Barbie gave the message that in order to be good and successful as a woman you had to be a lawyer, a nurse, a president. Today’s generation of girls just don’t see the world that way. These girls have no limits to their ambitions, so we don’t tell her what those ambitions will be’ (Extract from an interview with Isaac Larian conducted 25th January 2005, cited in Warner, 2005).

Emily herself drew comparisons between the two brands. Initially this referred to product quality as she discussed how Bratz dolls were less likely to break if ‘chewed by a dog’ for example. The discussion then took a more ‘sinister’ turn as she discussed her decision to part with her Barbie collection.

‘T: So why did you decide to get rid of your Barbies and get Bratz instead?

E: I just didn’t like them any more, and like my friends come round and they goes, [in a derogatory tone] “Do you still like Barbies?” Just I swear I didn’t then, and like I was getting really, really embarrassed because they was just mocking me [laughs] and erm, when I sold a couple at the first car boot sale I was over the moon because I got rid of some, and then I said to Maisy [a younger friend of the family] take as many Barbies, I don’t care what you take, just take it. Of course I wouldn’t let her take these [Bratz dolls], but just take any Barbies you want cos they’re mocking me everywhere I go, like I keep on having dreams about evil Barbies [laughs]. It’s really weird, like they’re mocking me in my dreams’

('Interview' with Emily, 9th March 2007)
Here Emily is invoking a 'politics of value' based on a credibility hierarchy (Mintel, 2006). Barbie was no longer 'cool' as she lacked 'street cred'. Peer pressure is recognised as an important influence in children's brand choices (Mintel, 2002a). Given this politics of value, it is particularly interesting to find Barbie branded goods - a pink, plastic VW beetle, convertible, jeep and trap, each branded with the Barbie logo - sitting among Emily's collection of Bratz dolls (see Figure 5.3). This occurrence emphasises how Barbie is a very real 'absent presence' in relation to the Bratz brand. The term 'absent presence' enables us to understand how 'the constancy of object presence depends on simultaneous absence or alterity' (Law and Mol, 2001:616). Law and Mol (2001) employ the metaphor of fire to call attention to the flickering relation between presence and absence. The shape of an object not only depends on that which is absent, but also upon making it absent. The coherence or singularity of Bratz depends on its comparative relation to Barbie. It is understood as precisely what Barbie is not, through the particular positioning of the Bratz brand. Barbie needs to be absent from young girls' collections of fashion dolls if Bratz dolls, and the brand as a whole, are to cohere. However, there is no doubt that the Bratz brand has benefited from the publicity surrounding media comparisons of the two brands. Company representatives themselves frequently make direct comparisons as the aforementioned interview with Isaac Larian, MGA founder, illustrates. Barbie is made absent by being crafted as a haunting presence. Her presence haunts both the young girls who continue to own her into their tween years, and MGA Entertainment as Mattel attempt to reinvigorate the Barbie brand. (For example, in 2002, Mattel launched My Scene Barbie, which was then followed with Barbie Fashion Fever in 2004. Both ranges were designed to introduce more fashionable clothing options to the existing Barbie brand.) The haunting nature of Barbie's presence begs the question as to how Emily could justify the inclusion of Barbie accessories in her Bratz collection. I contend the acceptability of this inclusion points to the key role played by the doll within the Bratz brand.

While flexibility and flow between 'texts' is evident, to suggest that intertextuality proliferates unbounded flow is too simplistic. Here I draw upon Law's notion of fractionality to understand the fundamental role played by the doll in relation to the brand concept without losing sight of the multiplicity of
Figure 5.3 Emily's Collection of Bratz Dolls

Source: Emily's annotated photograph album
objects that are coordinated around it and feed into it. Emily demonstrated a strong sense of a core and periphery of the Bratz brandscape based around the dolls' position within it. Emily referred directly only to her collection of dolls and the posters depicting them (see Figure 5.4) when photographing her possessions. Although her Bratz DVDs were photographed they were categorised in the context of her annotated album as examples of her favourite DVDs and sat alongside the film *High School Musical*, rather than being related to her Bratz collection (see Figure 5.5). The other Bratz products distributed around the home – fridge magnets (see Figure 5.6) and velvet pictures (see Figure 5.7) - were not mentioned, not even when they appeared in the background of photographs. She also explained that it was her mother who had chosen to display the posters on her wardrobe. The video footage created by Emily was also telling in this respect, as again only the dolls were featured, whether that was as a static display of her collection or as characters in action. The accompanying Bratz related goods appeared incidental.

The dolls acted as a ‘sticky’ object in the flowing intertextual Bratz brandscape. Drawing on Sartre's notion of stickiness as clinging (Douglas, 1966), stickiness acts as a metaphor for the mechanism whereby the dolls act as a core that attracts other forms of branded goods. While the manufacturers were keen to dematerialise the brand, Emily had a strong sense that the particular materiality of the dolls mattered. The primacy of the dolls was evidenced in their obvious display. The associated accessories were stored in a large tin and kept with the dolls, being integral to them. When talking about different dolls Emily would retrieve them from the chest and sit with them in her lap, stroking their hair. Throughout the video footage of doll play both Emily and her friend Courtney can be seen repeatedly stroking and plaiting the hair of the dolls, and fiddling with their outfits (see Figure 5.8 and Track 6). The changing of outfits and accessories was an important feature of playful practices with these dolls, as illustrated by the constant presence of naked dolls within the collection. There was a particular sensory relationship the girls shared with these dolls. The knowledge Emily demonstrated about the Bratz range as a whole pertained to the particular dolls she owned. The materiality of the dolls functioned as a means of navigation in the vast hyperreal brandscape, providing a starting point from which to depart and return to.
Figure 5.4  **Bratz Poster**, blu-tacked to the wardrobe door

*Source: Emily's annotated photograph album*
Figure 5.5  **Emily's Favourite DVDs**, including Bratz DVDs

*Source: Emily's annotated photograph album*
Figure 5.6  Bratz Fridge Magnet

Source: Emily's annotated photograph album. An enlarged section of Figure 3.4
Figure 5.7 *Bratz Velvet Picture*, captured unintentionally in the top right-hand corner

*Source: Emily's annotated photograph album*
Figure 5.8  Playing with the Dolls' Hair

Source: Stills from Emily's video footage of Bratz play
It is the particular materiality of the Bratz dolls that enabled the Barbie vehicles to sit alongside them unproblematically. The Barbie doll itself, and images of the doll, encapsulate the Barbie brand. Outwards from this core, the connotative power of the brand diffuses. Thus Emily was able to negotiate a 'configurational variance' (Law and Mol, 2001) of the Bratz brand through incorporation of these vehicles. The multiplicity of the decentred object enables fluidity; it enables the shape of the object to be changed. Law and Mol (2000) describe how fluidity manifests in the changing shape of the Zimbabwe bush pump, which looks different and works differently from one village to the next. Its shape is changed gradually and incrementally through practices that cause associations to shift and move. Bits break off and are replaced with alternative bits that do not seem to fit, and other components that were not part of the original design are added. Emily's inclusion of Barbie accessories motivates fluidity, shifting associations. It is an example of the consumer's negotiation of the contours set by brand management. This emphasises the unfixed nature of object singularity.

The importance of the doll's materiality can also be seen in its particular dialectical relationship with the child consumer's body. It is to this issue I now turn.

Extension of the self

'I pause, wondering if my eyes are deceiving me. Can it be? I'm faced with a real life-size Bratz doll. I'm used to seeing Emily in her school uniform – grey trousers, a red sweatshirt with the protruding white collar of the polo shirt worn underneath, and hair drawn back in a ponytail. Now she stands before me wearing black combat trousers tucked into her socks [a popular trend at this time], oversized accessories and make up, with shiny, long, straightened hair. Dressed in these up-to-date trends she looks like an enlarged version of the small doll she holds in her hand'.
(Field Diary Extract, 30th October, 2007).

To examine Emily's relationship with the Bratz brand, and in particular the Bratz doll further, I refer to Belk's (1988;1995) concept of the collector's self
being extended by the collection. The choice and assembly of objects to form a
collection is a self-expressive creative act that tells us something about the
collector. Common to discussions of this idea is an understanding that collecting
contributes to the collector's sense of past. The objects within the collection act
as packages of memories, which can transport the collector back to different
times and spaces as they recall moments of acquisition. Emily's collection of
Bratz dolls functions as an extension of the self that rather than looking
backward, looks forward and plays with a desired future.

These plastic creations enable tween girls to emulate the teens they aspire to be.
The tween is a commercially constructed market persona that develops the child
consumer through age emulation and a longing to be older. Desire is created
through a fine grained age progression that is objectified in the commodity
form. Cook (2003) examines how this longing to be older has become grounded
in the child's phenomenal experience of the retail environment, which offers a
gendered, spatial biography of commercialised childhood. For instance,
children's clothing departments and stores segregate different age brackets and
designate an appropriate path to follow that allows the child to avoid the
embarrassment of walking through the younger departments. It instead leads
them through the older sections, which act as an aspirational space designed to
invoke a longing for progression up the 'age prestige ladder'. Children's clothing
and fashion is a key arena in which this longing is met through consumption.
Children's demands for a sense of autonomy and personhood are encoded in
looking older (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). The tween girl is the recipient of a
trickle down effect in fashion. This is not in the same sense of the trickle down
of upper class to lower class style and prestige that Veblen (1970) or Simmel
(1971) discuss. Rather, it concerns the trickle down of teenage and adult styles, a
trend referred to as 'adultification' by Boden et al (2004). Within the children's
culture industry, this trend is referred to as the phenomenon of 'kids getting
older younger' (KGOY). It is understood that today's children are qualitatively
different from those of previous generations in terms of their attitudes and
motivations. They are more independent, sophisticated and confident (Mintel,
2003). Nic Jones (2007), the managing director of marketing agency Jammy Rascals, explains this phenomenon does not have a bearing on developmental
facts, but rather it results from the increasing infiltration of the media into
children's everyday lives. Each successive generation is becoming more media savvy than the previous one, enabling them to have greater knowledge and a deeper perception of the world than those of a generation before. Aspects of popular culture, such as television and print media, and celebrities, are key sources of information for children about the role of fashion and the consumption of image (Boden et al, 2004). As girls are becoming increasingly fashion conscious at a younger age, the Bratz brand has managed to widen the age bracket of the fashion doll market by explicitly associating itself with fashion and pop culture, effectively keeping these girls in the toy market. It is able to make the arena of fashion accessible by materialising it in this particular commodity form. (This is akin to the materialisation of myth that Holt (2006c) discusses).

The brand plays an important role in Emily's practices of forging an identity. The significant relationship between consumption and identity is now widely recognised (see for example Gidden's (1991) concept of the 'project of the self') and has been articulated in relation to body and dress (Entwistle, 2001). (See Boden et al (2004) for focussed discussion on the key role of fashion in relation to children's identity and social belonging.) Dress marks the boundary between self and other, and acts as a visual metaphor for identity. On the one hand dress is a discursive phenomenon and social experience. It is structured by social forces and is subject to social and moral pressures (Entwistle, 2001). By articulating knowledge about fashion through her practices with Bratz dolls, Emily was able to co-create and share in a sense of community, based around 'coolness' and mutual appreciation of particular styles with her friends. Fashion acts as a common framework from which collaborative play can develop.

The fact that dress is also structured by moral pressures is seen in the condemnatory comments made about the Bratz brand regarding the premature sexualisation of young girls it encourages. The use of make up and the provocative nature of some of the outfits have sparked criticism. Such moral debates about the appropriateness of the brand have effaced children's own concerns about respectability in relation to clothing (Boden et al, 2005). Dress is not only a social experience, but also a personal, embodied one. A skirt or trousers can be uncomfortable if too tight around the waist, a jumper can feel
itchy, shoes can pinch or rub and the fit or cut of a top can raise issues about exposure of the body. Dress is thus both a discursive and practical phenomenon. The dressed body is not a passive object acted upon by social forces, but rather is actively produced through particular everyday considerations and practices (Entwistle, 2001). To be active in relation to fashion is to be both conservative - following the consensus of 'accepted' and popular styles – and creative – developing a sense of individualism. Bratz dolls allow young girls to edge on the side of conservatism and respectability in relation to their own clothing, while playing with fashion and experimenting with styles in the safer sphere of doll play. In this space experimentalism is less likely to be met with social exclusion.

The embodied nature of dress means it acts as an extension of the body. Entwistle (2001) explains that dress and the body operate dialectically. (This relationship is effaced in theories of the body, which overlook dress, and in theories of fashion and dress, which neglect the body.) Dress works a body, giving it social meaning, while the body gives life and fullness to dress. This dialectical relationship is recognised in the significance of the materiality of the doll. Young girls are not simply acquiring Bratz clothing and accessories, but rather are acquiring dolls dressed in this clothing. Playful practices involve not the mixing and matching of outfits, but the dressing of dolls in these outfits. The body of the plastic doll matters. It is fundamental to the project of fashioning the self through extension from the doll. This plastic body exists in relation to the child's fleshy body. Young girls are able to transcend their own body, projecting into the future, through this plastic body here in the present. They are able to fashion a future self.

Playful practices with the dolls cannot be reduced to demonstrations of emulation alone. As Lash and Lury (2007) suggest, the brand incorporates multiple temporalities. It both engages with the future and the present. This is recognised in two ways. Firstly, it can be seen in relation to the life-sized accessories that are packaged with the dolls. These are designed to be worn by the children and act as a conduit between the doll and the child, who is located in the here-and-now. This connection between doll and child is expressed in the quote opening this section, where, referring to Emily's appearance, I liken her to an enlarged version of a Bratz doll. Through the brand the children are not only
able to project a desired, aspirational image, but they also able to articulate an identity in the present. Emily is a fashion conscious nine year old girl, who enjoys participating in pop culture, singing, dancing and acting. The Bratz brand enables Emily to indulge these personal interests. She identified with the passions of the characters, as exemplified in storylines where they form their own band, and indulged her desire to act by acting through the dolls, making them take on different characters to those scripted by the manufacturers.

The second way the brand engages with the present is through its relation to contemporary mediatised representations and understandings of female sexuality. This is an issue effaced in moral debates about the sexualised nature of the brand, which have failed to place the brand in the context of changing mediatised femininities articulated in television shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed*, cartoons such as *Kim Possible* and *The Powerpuff Girls*, and films such as *Charlie’s Angels* (see Laurie et al (1999) on ‘new’ femininities more generally). Warner (2005) sets these new femininities in the context of broader economic and psychological changes effecting women in the past five decades. These changes have resulted in a changing attitude toward what is appropriate and acceptable for women, which is marked by their changing role and practices as consumers. Brands such as Nike and Avon have tapped into these trends as they have overhauled their image and products (see Warner, 2005). It is these same trends that the Bratz brand has tapped into with its up-to-date representations of young girls as fun-loving, confident, adventurous and fashion conscious.

In addition to being a consumer of Bratz, Emily is an avid fan of *Charmed*, watching it religiously. She is able to recite its various showing times on different channels without any prompts, and keeps a framed picture of the three main characters, Piper, Phoebe and Paige, on the cabinet facing her bed (see Figure 5.7). These characters are female figures Emily looks up to. She is able to play out the mediatised femininities they present through her Bratz dolls. (See Feasley (2006) for a more in-depth discussion of the representations of femininity and sexuality within *Charmed*.) This is part of the process of negotiating her own sense of identity through performative constitutions of gender related to fashion, lifestyle and (br)attitude, and of a femininity based
around 'sisterhood'. The content of Emily's playful practices is socially and historically specific (Laurie et al, 1999). As Lash and Lury (2007) state, time is internal to the brand. As a set of relations, the brand's state is embedded in a complex space and time and cannot be separated from it. Once upon a time the Barbie doll initiated the 'teening' of childhood (Cook and Kaiser, 2004), causing the brand to spark the kind of criticism now levied against Bratz (see Rogers, 1999). However, the age range with which Barbie is associated has lowered as she is no longer deemed relevant by this market segment. Times are changing, as Holmes (2004:54-56) explains:

'Even though there is a crossover on ages between Barbie and Bratz, essentially the two ranges appeal to different age groups. The average age of the Barbie consumer has dropped in the past few years, almost bordering on preschool and infant.'

The age based succession from Barbie to Bratz is overlooked in commentaries that pit the two brands in opposition.

Summary

This case study shows how the concept of 'fractionality' may be usefully applied to the study of brands. While emphasising connection and flexibility, it also allows for an understanding of the differential roles and weighting of various components of the brand. This case study shows how a brandscape may be configured around a strong sense of a core and periphery. The materiality of the brand's different components is shown to be significant in this regard. The materiality of the Bratz dolls mattered, in terms of the dialectical relationship the doll shared with the child's body, and the sensuous relationships it fostered with the brand. This case study also shows the importance of placing brands in wider relations with other mass culture - in this case Barbie and television programmes such as Charmed - and tracing their trajectories as intertextual constructions. It has been shown that the concepts of the 'network-object' and an 'absent presence' may be usefully applied in an examination of a brand's web of associations. The following case study extends
the notion of a brand's fractionality through the consideration of constructions of authenticity.

**Authentic Harry: the blurring of brandscape cores**

Another way to think about the differential weighting of intertextual products is in relation to the concept of authenticity. Let me begin this discussion by briefly outlining what is meant by this concept. Authenticity is 'a form of cultural discrimination projected onto objects' (Spooner, 1986:226). As such, it does not inhere in an object as an essential attribute, but derives from our concern with it. While certain objective, material attributes of an object are involved in the determination of its authenticity, it cannot be explained by them alone. Its authenticity may also be influenced by subjective criteria, cultural choice and social mechanisms. Different criteria may be applied by different groups or individuals in the assessment of authenticity. This is demonstrated by Lewis and Bridger's (2001) discussion of how forged paintings by Tom Keating came to be valuable as 'authentic fakes' by a famous forger. It is also seen in Attfield's (2000) discussion of how reproduction furniture may come to have greater affinity with notions of authenticity than original, classic examples. (See Spooner (1986) or Benjamin (1999b) for discussion about the particular relevance of 'authenticity' in contemporary (Western) societies.)

This case study explores children's assessments of authenticity in relation to branded Harry Potter products. This exploration is structured around two expressions of authenticity. Firstly, I consider the idea of authenticity in relation to fan cultures, and how the identification of Harry Potter books as the 'primary mode of manifestation' permits them transitory power over other goods within the branded ensemble. Secondly, I consider how the experiential qualities of different Harry Potter media – primarily the book and the film – are also important to the exercise of transitory agential power.

*Fan cultures and the 'primary mode of manifestation'*

The Harry Potter phenomenon began in 1997 with the release of J.K Rowling's first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (known as *Harry Potter*...
and the Sorcerer’s Stone in the US). This book, and the six that followed, are situated in the context of the UK’s rich heritage of successful characters invented by authors (Mintel, 2002a). Examples include Beatrix Potter’s series of tales (the story of which was brought to the big screen in the David Kirschner’s 2006 film, Miss Potter), Enid Blyton’s Noddy, Allcroft’s Thomas the Tank Engine and A.A Milne’s Winnie the Pooh. While television and film are exalted as being pivotal to the establishment of successful characters, the Harry Potter brand has benefited from being associated with the book series due to the perceived wholesome nature and educational worth of this form (Mintel, 2002a).

The brand’s ‘primary mode of manifestation’ (Phillips, 2002) in its print media form is of particular significance to Harry Potter fan cultures (see Gray et al, 2007; Jenkins, 1992; 2006; Lewis, 1992; Sandvoss, 2005; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995). Jenkins (1992) explains that a fan is a reader who transforms the experience of reading texts, watching television programmes, or playing computer games (see Burn, 2006a) into a rich and complex participatory culture. They construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images. This appropriation is referred to as textual ‘poaching’ (a term drawn from the work of Michel de Certeau). Devan readily identified herself as a Harry Potter fan, expressing this status in two main ways. Firstly, she did this through the articulation of ‘expertise’ and criticism. In this regard, she employed the concept of authenticity in debate about the relative worth of the Harry Potter books and their subsequent adaptations as blockbuster films. Secondly, she expressed her fan status through a form of disdain directed at the industry producing the films and the surrounding merchandise. (Here on in, the different book and film titles will be referred to generically as ‘the book’ and ‘the film’.)

In Devan’s eyes, the book was the authentic script from which the film deviated. She talked about parts of the book that are omitted in the film and about details that are obscured, which, in her mind, made the film as a stand alone text difficult to follow. She also spoke about details of characters being altered or elements of their background being effaced, thus making identification with them through the film more difficult. These views are echoed by fans who post
messages on the Warner Brothers' Harry Potter website (www.boards.harrypotter.warnerbros.com, 2007). Responses to the question, 'Harry Potter: books or movies, which one is better?' included:

'the books are more good than the movie. the books have all the information about the real story but the movies cut a lot of the scenes' (posted 29th July 2007, my emphasis)

'definitely the books! think of the movies as a remake. the original is usually better. the books have all the information. I mean when you watch the movies, they're good but they have nothing from the books in them. and the books are obviously more detailed' (posted 22nd June 2007, my emphasis)

'the books are way better not only do they leave too much out but they put stuff in the wrong order' (posted 25th April 2007)

As Lash and Lury (2007) and Phillips (2002) suggest, the first medium of exposure typically comes to define the core attributes of the property. Steve Kloves, the films' screen writer, acknowledged the problems faced in adapting one media form to another:

'I'd be lying if I said you're not aware that you're adapting the most beloved book in the world. I understand the apprehension; people feel protective of the book, but we feel incredibly protective of it, too' (cited in Toys 'N' Playthings, 2001).

Through intimate knowledge of the text Devan was able to critically evaluate the film. In a few instances, this evaluation extended to discrepancies existing between the different books in the series, although comparisons between the book and the film were much more prevalent. Devan enjoyed discussing and debating evaluations and interpretations in online chat rooms dedicated to this topic. She also liked to write alternative endings and spin-off stories which she posted online. This is an example of a fan using popular expertise as a resource and a basis for critical reworkings of textual materials as suggested by Jenkins
In her exercise of expertise, Devan is seeking to demonstrate her individuality and to establish membership of a select group. A sense of individuality is asserted through claims of superior knowledge and the expression of a particular interest and passion. However, her individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through discussions with other readers. She enjoys sharing and revelling in her 'expert' knowledge with others, with whom she comes to feel an affiliation. Through these 'expert' discussions, Devan expands the experience of the book beyond its initial consumption through private reading, producing meanings that are more fully integrated into her life. Both Jenkins (1992) and Ruecker (2002) have discussed how reading may be a social, interpersonal process as well as a personal one. Spooner (1986:227) explains that 'our lives unfold as a continuous dialectic between our sociability and our selfishness, or the conflict between our need to belong and feel secure and our need to express individuality'. As Devan demonstrates, both of these desires are evident in concerns with authenticity.

The notion of authenticity that Devan constructed around the original manifestation of the book was also articulated through a form of disdain aimed at the industry producing the intertextual world of Harry Potter. Within fan studies, it is recognised that fans resist the industry that produces the primary text they choose to engage with (Jenkins, 1992). I use the word 'disdain' rather than 'resistance' in relation to Devan's animosity, as the latter implies action of a more strategic nature than that displayed in this instance. Rather than being aimed at the producers of the primary text, Devan's disdain was directed at the producers of the film for their lack of attention to detail, which implied they were not as protective of the 'authentic' script as suggested by the screenwriter. There was a sense that the film had diluted something of the essence of Harry Potter. This may be likened to a broader sense of inauthenticity prompted by commercialisation. As discussed in chapter 1, this is seen in contemporary concern about (sacred) children's engagements with the (profane) market. Kozinets (2001:82) writes about the existence of such feelings among Star Trek fans, who assert that 'the philosophy [of the original text] is more important than the merchandise'. The meaningful nature of the primary text to fans means they find it difficult to comprehend understandings of it as a commercial property that exists only to be exploited.
Franchising and merchandising are seen to be in contrast with fandom. An understanding of merchandised goods as ‘inauthentic’ was witnessed in Devan’s lack of them. However, she did use the same kind of objects as those existing as merchandise in her playful practices, such as magic wands. Rather than seeking them in their commercialised form she chose to make her own: “Sometimes I spend three hours making a wand out of wood and putting herbs in it and things”. The author of the books, J.K. Rowling, has also publicly expressed her disdain for Harry Potter merchandise:

‘How do I feel about it? Honestly, I think it’s pretty well known, if I could have stopped the merchandising I would have done. And twice a year I sit down with Warner Brothers and we have conversations about merchandising and I can only say you should have seen some of the stuff that was stopped: Moaning Myrtle lavatory seat alarms [Myrtle is a ghost who lives in the girls’ bathroom at Harry’s boarding school, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry] and worse...I think the books will always be more important than the bits of plastic’ (Extract from Jeremy Paxman’s Interview with J.K. Rowling, shown on the BBC June 2003, transcript available from bloomsbury.com).

Warner Brothers Consumer Products (WBCP), the owners of the licensing and merchandising rights for the Harry Potter brand, acknowledged the existence of a distinct consumer segment dedicated to the book as the brand’s ‘primary mode of manifestation’ in their early marketing programmes. They produced a tailored marketing programme that was literary based. This market was said to be:

‘well versed in the literature, lore and unique laws and physics that govern the world of Harry Potter. These kids are less needy of consumer products; products need to be incredibly faithful and loyal to what occurs in the literature’ (Cooney, 2004: no pagination).
To accommodate this segment WBCP devised a programme using artwork by the illustrator Mary GrandPre, described as imagery that 'almost walks right out of the book'. This marketing programme is targeted at fans such as Devan. It was contrasted by an alternative programme targeted at a second consumer segment, comprised of younger children, said to love all things Harry Potter, be that books, movies or toys. This programme was entertainment based, using visuals from the films (Cooney, 2004), and attracted the world's largest toy manufacturers, Mattel and Hasbro, who alongside LEGO and EA (Electronic Arts), launched movie related merchandise to coincide with the release of the first film in 2001. According to Toys ‘N’ Playthings (2001) Mattel’s advertising and marketing activities – over nine hundred TVRs, four press campaigns targeting comics, a poster campaign, promotional activity and an extensive PR campaign involving an unveiling event – acted as a support programme for the film marketing. For the release of the fifth film WBCP introduced a comprehensive merchandising style guide to target the different market segments, relating to age, gender and wider interests, of its very broad consumer base (see Pomphrey, 2006). It is the vast range of paraphernalia that such comprehensive marketing programmes inspire that prompts concerns about corporate exploitation and inauthenticity.

In Kozinets’ (2001) discussion of the inauthenticity of merchandise the primary text is evoked as existing independently of its producers and is thereby untainted by their touch. Harry Potter works differently. The books gain a sense of authenticity due to their association with a particular author. Various commentaries suggest that a concern with origin is commonly employed in assessments of authenticity. Benjamin (1999b) discusses this in relation to a concern with the object’s presence in time and space and how it acts as testimony to the history that it has experienced. Spooner (1986) specifies the nature of this concern with history as a concern with an object’s place in the history of a craft. In this sense, an object’s material attributes of being handmade or its ability to express the survival of traditional relations of production become important. The importance of origin to understandings of authenticity is seen in our desire to reconstruct the context of an object’s place in history where such information is sketchy. Lash and Lury (2007) also refer to the association between authenticity and craft through discussion of how
authenticity may be manipulated by establishing a certain kind of artistic rarity, which sits in relation to a subject or an author.

The books gain a sense of authenticity because they are associated with the craft of J.K. Rowling, which by her own admission involves blood, sweat and tears. All of the children I spoke to about Harry Potter were able to name J.K. Rowling as the author of the books. In contrast, they could not name Warner Brothers Pictures as the producers of the film, and in some cases were unable to name the leading actors. The films were more anonymous to the children, which made them appear as less of a crafted entity. (This is not to suggest that film-making is not a craft, but rather it is not necessarily recognised as a craft by these children.) An understanding of the book as a more authentic, crafted entity was assisted in the lack of a formal marketing plan for the first book. Its release was simply marked by a standard Bloomsbury press release and a single review in the Scotsman newspaper. It achieved its popular status through personal recommendation and playground conversations. This adds a sense of 'purity' to the phenomenon. (See Lewis and Bridger (2001) for a discussion of how 'low cost buzz' rather than 'high priced hype' contributed to a sense of authenticity surrounding the film The Blair Witch Project.) It should be noted, however, that the fourth book in the series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, was dubbed 'The Goblet of Hype' by the British press due to the level of commercial hype that surrounded its release. Brown (2002:13) explains, '[w]hat started as a word-of-mouth phenomenon is being appropriated by the all-consuming monster of mass marketing'.

Having examined constructions of authenticity in relation to fan cultures and their identification of Harry Potter books as the brand's 'primary mode of manifestation', I now wish to consider how the experiential qualities of different Harry Potter media are bound up in assessments of authenticity.

Experiential qualities of different media: engagement or disburdenment?

In discussing the particular experiential qualities of different media, comparison is again drawn between the Harry Potter books and films. The experiential qualities of the book are shown to be central to practices of fandom and thus of
its ability to exercise agential power over other components of the Harry Potter brand. However, the particular materialities of the film enabled it transitory power over the book with respect to certain other children, who 'liked' Harry Potter, but did not readily identify themselves as fans. I begin with a discussion of the experiential qualities of the book, drawing explicitly on the work of Ruecker (2002). On the basis of a study of frequent readers, Ruecker outlines the various pleasures afforded by engagements with books. These pleasures are classified according to the physical, affective, cognitive, interpersonal and cultural factors that stimulate them. I relate Ruecker's discussion to the ways in which Bethany and Devan talked about their engagements with books and practices of reading. I then compare the experiential qualities of the book to those of the film, through discussion of Matthew and Katie's preference for the latter.

Ruecker (2002) explains that readers are able to form strong emotional attachments to books because of the experience they offer. Physically, readers enjoy books for being static and quiet. Bethany explained that during the day she liked to take a book to the quiet of her hammock, where she could escape the hubbub of her busy household. She also liked to curl up in bed with her book in the evening. In this context, reading is a relaxing, private and self-directed activity. The participants of Ruecker's study expressed a strong feeling that books are personal. They are associated with intimate spaces of relaxation, such as the bed (or hammock) and the bath. As well as offering a private experience, the books also offered more opportunity for exploring characters in terms of their thoughts, feelings and motivations than the film did. There is a significant difference in the amount of content a film and a book can convey. As already mentioned, Devan complained about the misrepresentation of characters and plot lines in the films. The depth of understanding facilitated by the book, coupled with the private nature of reading, allows for an intimate relationship with the Harry Potter brand.

As Ruecker suggests, the book may act as a 'friend', you share a 'history' with it. This is reinforced by the type of engagement the book demands. The virtue of reading lays in its demand of both a time commitment and concentration. One has to create the fictive world in their own mind. The gratification gained from a
book is therefore less immediate than that got from other media. Reading involves not only an emotional involvement, but also a moral one, calling for mental engagement, interpretation and imagination. Bethany and Devan spoke of the enjoyment offered by imagining what different characters looked like, imagining how they felt, and imagining what it would be like to actually be in these fictive worlds. In a BBC interview with Jeremy Paxman, J.K. Rowling also explained how reading facilitates limitless imagination in a way film does not:

‘they [the Harry Potter films] are going to get really even more expensive, and I mean I shudder to think what they say when they see Book Five. Because I think they are starting to feel I am writing stuff just to see if they can do it. Which of course I’m not. But I know there are headaches about the scale of the world that I’m writing’

(Jeremy Paxman’s Interview with J.K. Rowling, shown on the BBC June 2003, available from bloomsbury.com).

The Harry Potter films are designed to represent imagination rather than inspire it, as they lay the fictive world and its characters bare for all to see. This sentiment was expressed in discussions about particular mental images of characters inspired by the book, how they compared to those of other readers, and how they compared to the appearance of characters on screen. The desire of readers to read the book before seeing the film was an expression of the film’s definitive nature. They wanted to picture the world in their own mind first, before being shown how it definitively was. As Ruecker suggests, reading can stimulate thinking. The materiality of the book is important in this regard as it easily allows the reader to pause and to contemplate. In contrast, Benjamin (1999b) writes of the inability of the film to be arrested and the constant sudden change it imposes. ‘I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images’ (Duhamel, 1930:52, cited in Benjamin, 1999b:231). Film is thus categorised as a distracting medium. It is linked to ‘disburdenment’ rather than engagement (Maycroft, 2004).

Books demand an active engagement, not only intellectually, but also physically. The reader has to hold the book and turn the pages, both of which are central to its experiential qualities. Ruecker (2002:137) explains that holding the book
whilst reading allows for an affective engagement with it. ‘Somehow reading a book seems more tangible; somehow you can really feel yourself in the book; it seems more real, more permanent.’ Devan explained how she escaped the boredom of a train journey by becoming absorbed in her Harry Potter book. She had become so engrossed with the story that she read the final book, all 607 pages, in just five hours. This example also illustrates the significance of the book’s portability and the physical freedom of movement whilst reading that it allows. The effort of turning the pages of a book oneself is significant in that it allows the pace of reading to be easily controlled. The participants of Ruecker’s study spoke of the importance of being able to suspend and resume the experience of reading. The turning of pages also allows for ease of reference to particular sections. Readers can move backwards and forwards in the text, clarifying details. The depth of understanding this allows permits greater identification with the story, and an extension of the self into the texture of the environment. These experiential qualities of the book were particularly pertinent to Devan’s engagement with the Harry Potter brand, being central to her identification as a fan.

This is not to deny the sense of enjoyment that Devan was able to gain through watching the films. As expressions of her favourite stories, they provided her with another means of access to the brand (Lash and Lury, 2007). Fans of the book recognise the role of the film in increasing the popularity of the stories and thus encouraging viewers to read the books. This popularity and the chat it provokes provide more opportunities for fans to articulate their expertise. It also offers a greater population from which to recruit people to their fan cultures, expanding their sense of social belonging (Jenkins, 1992).

Other children, however, had a different relationship with the film, favouring this medium over the book. Although Matthew recognised the book as the ‘primary mode of manifestation’, he preferred to watch the films:

‘because you don’t just erm like hear things, you also see things, cos when you’re reading you just like hear what you’re saying then when you end up seeing the films you just watch and hear’.

(‘Interview’ with Matthew, 6th November 2007)
He appreciated the films for their multi-modal immediacy. For Matthew, the differences between the book and the film did not matter. He could appreciate the two media as individual, yet linking elements. While the book was recognised as the original script, a sense of its authenticity was of little concern as the film was appreciated for its spectacular nature. This effectively blurred the brand’s core in Matthew’s eyes. His favourite elements of the Harry Potter stories were the awesome fights and the fiery dragons, which were shown in all their horrific glory on screen. He had a different means of identifying with the brand to Devan, who was concerned with the details of the magical environment and the representations of educational practices and settings. This was evidenced in the particular forms her practices of textual poaching took. (These are explored in detail in the following chapter.)

Matthew was more concerned with the relationship between the film and the videogame (in his case the PlayStation format) than that between the book and the film. He appreciated the continuity between them:

“because it [the film] like tells you what to do [in the game]. So you like see the films and when you get up to that bit you know what to do”.

('Interview' with Matthew, 6th November 2007)

In this sense, the film acted as an authentic script forming the foundations of the game. This digital vehicle was Matthew’s means of entering the magical world. The film provided an overview of this world, which he could then explore in detail by navigating the game’s digital terrain. He was less concerned with discursive exploration and speculation, than an urgent, more direct and instructional mode of communication and form of interactivity (Schott and Kambouri, 2006). The same was true for Katie, who said she lacked the patience to read the books. She enjoyed watching the films and playing Harry Potter games on her Nintendo DS, a practice she often undertook in the company of others in the lounge, or whilst the television played in the background. For Matthew and Katie, it was not intricate detail that was important, but rather immediate experience. From this perspective, control is central to both
discursive and digital experiences of Harry Potter. However, for Matthew and Katie, the experience of Harry Potter was less about exploiting a freely given sense of control in relation to physically manipulating the book, than about seeking to respond to events as they unfold in the moment, trying to impose a sense of control over them. Here the film was important as it acted as forewarning to what may be coming next. (The experience of gameplay is explored in more detail in chapter 7.)

Summary

This case study reinforces the importance of considering a brand's fractionality by attending to children's assessments and constructions of authenticity. It shows that the brand's first medium of exposure is afforded agential power by virtue of its relations to origins and craft. However, the seemingly straightforward determination of a brand's core is complicated by the particular experiential qualities of different media comprising the brand. Here, again, materialities are seen to matter to considerations of fractionality. In some cases, the particular experiential qualities of the book — linked to emotional attachment, moral investment and physical engagement — afford it transitory agential power, not least in relation to fan cultures. However, for others, the multi-modal immediacy and spectacular nature of the film afford it agential power, forming their sense of the brand's core. This is further complicated by notions of interactivity linked to the videogame. These complex relations further emphasise the shifting, performative nature of object agency.

In Summary

In this chapter I have addressed the lack of empirical examination of consumer engagement with brands, and in so doing, have emphasised its importance. Whereas existing academic literature on branding has tended to overgeneralise how brands and characters work within society, this chapter begins to examine how brands and character properties work in heterogeneous ways. I contribute a micro understanding of how brands are understood and used in everyday life worlds to broader macro understandings of how brand expressions relate to contemporary cultural discourses. I have stressed the importance of questioning
the notion of unbounded flow between intertextual material platforms, and
offered the metaphor of fractionality as a means of emphasising connection and
flexibility while simultaneously attending to the differential roles and various
weighting of different branded entities. While a brand may be usefully defined
as a set of perceptions in the mind of the consumer, I have emphasised the need
to consider materiality when examining consumers' everyday engagements with
brands and characters. I have shown how the particular materialities of
different branded goods afford them transitory agential power in relation to
other branded entities. To this end, I have shown the importance of examining
consumers' physical engagements and tactile relationships with things. (This
matter is addressed more directly in chapter 7.)

In attending directly to children's everyday engagements with brands, I have
stressed how children actively appropriate elements of synergistic blends of
toys, games and media, making judgements and discriminations, combining
and reworking in myriad ways. This counters claims of imaginative inactivity
asserted by critics of integrated marketing. As Goldstein et al (2004:3) argue,
rather than requiring passivity, integrated marketing requires energetic activity,
which includes '[d]iscovering an object and its uses, learning the means by
which to communicate with others via this object, sharing in and eventually
creating new meanings around this object'. This was forcefully demonstrated by
Devan's fan based practices. Within intertextual worlds, children draw on
knowledge and expertise derived from different media and work flexibly across
these media and modes of communication. These activities may be described as
'heuristic activities par excellence' (Goldstein et al, 2004:3), resulting in the
development of 'multiliteracies' (Grügeon, 2004).

Media use is embedded in contexts and relationships of everyday life. It is
shown that through selected 'reading', toys and media offer important symbolic
resources with which children can define their own meanings and identities
(Buckingham, 2007). Such arguments about children's appropriation of
marketed toys chime with wider arguments about consumption as the re-
appropriation of commodities (see Miller, 1992; 1998c). The following chapter
extends these arguments regarding children's creativity through an in-depth
examination of Devan's wider practices of magical play and her particular
practices of textual poaching. This is framed in relation to the co-configuration of imaginative spaces of play, a process in which toys are conceived as productive technologies.
Configuring Imaginative Spaces of Play
In chapter 4 I initiated discussion of how objects perform various forms of agency, which may be recognised by tracing the effects or responses particular objects provoke. These responses were seen to be a function of the specific material and sensual properties, and representational qualities of objects, and their positioning within a network of socio-material relations. It was shown that the shifting nature of these relations causes networks of meaning to be reconfigured, prompting differential agency to be performed. In chapter 5 I extended this discussion by attending to the use of toys that are embedded in a specific network of relations due to their existence as branded commodities. I examined how children intervene in the relations of the brand, negotiating and reconfiguring this industry inspired network to create their own networks of meaning. Toys were seen to play a central role in these interventions. The particular materialities of specific toys within the branded ensemble enable them to exert transitory power over other goods within the brand, prompting them to hold greater value and meaning for the child.

In this chapter, I encourage you to suspend temporarily all cynicism as I invite you to join me on a journey. A journey that begins in an inconspicuous room, in an ordinary two-bedroom apartment, located in an unassuming street in South London. From here we will travel to the mystical, enchanted world of Ethrole Castle. After we have traversed this magical land, I will take your hand once again to lead you through the imaginative world of the miniature. Via these journeys, I extend my preceding discussion of object agency by examining toys as technologies in the sense that they are productive of certain forms of action we call play. As toys prompt playful practices, they structure them in particular ways, often enrolling other objects in the process.

Imaginative spaces are co-configured in and through these playful practices. To date, these spaces have been neglected because of their shifting, transient and indefinable nature. Instead, studies have tended to place children in particular environments, be that the home (Christensen et al, 2000; Mayall, 1994), school (Dixon, 1997; Fielding, 2000), neighbourhood (Skelton, 2000; Tandy, 1999), street (Matthews et al, 1999; Valentine, 1996), city (Beazley, 2000; Ward, 1979), country (Jones, 2000a; Valentine, 1997c), playground (Gagen, 2000; McKendrick et al, 2000), or more recently, cyberspace (Holloway et al, 2000;
Holloway and Valentine, 2001). While attention has been paid to how children may negotiate the use of time and space to create spaces where play may unfold, the imaginary character of such spaces is yet to be fully explored. In this chapter I present two case studies that examine the character of imaginative spaces of play by exploring the intercorporeal relations from which they are co-configured. Firstly, I attend to a magical space of play that is co-configured in relation to a book, which acts as an absent presence in playful practices. Secondly, I explore a miniature space of play that is co-configured in relation to a dollhouse, which enrols a host of other objects in the playful practices it prompts.

Through an appreciation of how children and toys co-configure such imaginative spaces, this chapter problematises the conceptual distance between the world of the 'real' and the world of play. This conceptual distance is based on understandings of play as non-instrumental, irrational and unproductive. As such play is located outside of the "no-joking-matter pastimes with which life aimed at survival is punctuated" (Bauman, 1993: 170). Play is defined by what it is not, acting as a counterpoint to everyday conventional, rational behaviour. This chapter problematises the conceptual distance between reality and play by illustrating three ways in which the imaginative and the real are folded together. Firstly, I examine how a space-time in which the imaginative can unfold is enframed in the everyday through relational configurations. Secondly, I demonstrate how imaginative spaces unfold through a certain mode of inhabitation of the everyday. Thirdly, I explore how elements of the 'real' world are folded into the imaginative space of the miniature through their use as a referential field from which a sense of scale can be established. I begin by setting this chapter in the context of recent work on enchantment, phantasmagoria and spectro-geographies, which attend to the imaginary and extraordinary as it is experienced in ordinary, mundane spaces. In relation to this work, I emphasise the need to attend to the generative potential of embodied practice to understand how imaginative spaces are sensed in and of the everyday.
Co-configuring Imaginative Spaces of Play

‘[D]ance can...be considered as the fabrication of a ‘different world’ of meaning, made with the body. It is perhaps the most direct way in which the body-subject sketches out an imaginary sphere. The word imaginary is used here in the sense ‘as-if’, suggesting a field or potential space’ (Radley, 1995:12, cited in Thrift, 1997).

For Thrift (1997), dance is an expressive body-practice that brings play into focus. As the above quote suggests, as an example of play, dance contains within it ‘the capacity to hint at different experiential frames’ (Thrift, 1997:150). In his conceptual examination of dance, Thrift draws on a classical definition of play as ‘as-ifness’. He refers to Bauman (1993:170-171), who explains:

‘Play may be serious, and often it is, and is at its best when it is; but even then it is ‘not for real’; it is enacted ‘as-if’ it were real, this ‘as-ifness’ quality being precisely what sets it apart from ‘real reality’.

Here play is understood as ‘a process of performative experiment’ concerned with the ‘discovery of new configurations and twists of ideas and experience’ (Schechner, 1993:145). Such an understanding places play beyond the rational auspices of Western societies. It is seen as gratuitous and free, serving no useful purpose and escaping command. Thrift’s elucidation of the imaginary sphere to which dance may transport us relies on this separation of the world of the real and the world of play. He privileges the expressive features of embodiment to transport us to an imaginary sphere beyond the real, beyond the humdrum space of the everyday. Alternatively, I argue that by emphasising the generative, intercorporeal aspect of embodiment, it is possible to see how an imaginary sphere is configured in and of the everyday.

Recent work on enchantment and phantasmagoria offers a different perspective to that of Thrift. This work seeks out the extraordinary as it is experienced, practised and sustained in the ordinary, (re)enchanting the ‘routine’ spaces and times through which we make our lives. In The Enchantment of Modern Life Bennett (2001) discusses how narratives that stress the disenchanted of
modernity confine enchantment to a divine space. In contrast, Bennett (2001:4) draws attention to the power of the contemporary world to enchant in the spaces of the secular: ‘To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday’. She stresses the possibility of cultivating a comportment that allows one to become attuned to moments of enchantment, offering deliberate strategies through which this may be achieved. These include giving ‘greater expression to the sense of play’ and honing ‘sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things’ (2001:4). In Phantasmagoria Warner (2006) also questions narratives stressing the disenchanted nature of modernity by drawing attention to modern society’s continuing interest in other worlds and will to believe in the extraordinary. She outlines the ‘logic of the imaginary’ - the conventions and instruments of the imagination - employed in ordinary, secular spaces, addressing the importance of children and toys in this regard.

A concern with seeking out the extraordinary as it is experienced and practised in the ordinary is also central to emerging ‘spectro-geographies’ (Maddern and Adey, 2008). These geographies share a concern with how things and sites may be charged with magical qualities as a result of the folding together of different times and spaces. They attend to the ‘just perceptible’, attempting to make sense of the indeterminate. In so doing, they attend to the non-rational and affectual. I draw particular inspiration from Holloway’s (2003; 2006) work on spiritual practice and the space of the séance.

Holloway challenges the duality of the divine and the secular, the sacred and the profane, by examining how sacred space-times are enacted in and of the everyday. He attends to the corporeal, embodied practices through which the sacred is sensed in space and place. A space-time where spiritual insight can be gained is enframed in the everyday through relational configurations of bodies and objects. He writes of the bodily movement and comportment of meditative practice, and interaction with objects such as incense, candles and mantelpieces. Belief in the spiritual is grounded upon this embodied practice, the action of the body in and towards the world. ‘Seemingly everyday objects are patterned into a relational topology of sense, movements, rhythms and affective actions’ (2003:1967). Spiritual insight is a result of a collective becoming in which the
body makes belief. Through this relationality, the everyday is reconfigured and revalued. By attending to the revaluation of the actuality of lived corporeal experience, Holloway is able to show how spiritual being is not only configured in the everyday, but is also a mode of inhabitation of the everyday. It is a 'certain appropriation' of the everyday world, a particular way of doing things that allows 'yourself to be open to what will come to you' (Holloway, 2003:1972). This may be likened to Bennett's generous comportment through which one attunes the self to enchantment. The challenge to the duality of the sacred and the profane offered by Holloway exposes how the distinction between these two spheres 'only emerges from the very practice of its making' (2003:1968), it has to be 'necessarily and continually enacted' (2003:1963).

I argue that imaginative spaces of play are enacted in a way that mirrors the enactment of sacred spaces of spiritual practice posited by Holloway. A space-time in which imaginative spaces may evolve is enframed by particular relational configurations of children and toys. Within these configurations people and objects are in constant dialogue, relational and enacted. This relation or association mobilises entities, be they human or non-human, prompting them to act (Gell, 1998; Latour, 2005). Holloway emphasises the mutual agency of the human and the non-human in these configurations by conceiving of the interwoven objects as co-subjects of the emergent spacings and timings. It is this reciprocation that allows imaginative spaces to be created.

I adopt a non-reductionist approach to these 'enchanted' imaginative spaces, maintaining a position that does not deny the 'reality' of spaces for believers (see Holloway, 2006). Devan embodied a belief in the magical in a particularly strong manner. She believes in magic, not the kind performed by magicians on stage, but the existence of real wizards and witches who live in an actual magical world. She explained:

'we've got loads of proof that magic's real cos my friend read a book, which I hadn't read and then said that in the book there was a flower called a moonflower and I described it to her and told her all the things it did and she said, 'Look at the description in the book', and she said it was pretty close to what I'd said... And once we tried to do
a lumous spell to make light and, like a really big one, and we looked up to the sky and the clouds just cleared and the sun came out.’

('Interview' with Devan, 27th April 2007)

Devan presented sustained engagements with imaginative play, not only in relation to the magical, but also in relation to the miniature. For this reason, the two case studies presented in this chapter draw on the playful practices she shared with her friends. I use her intense empirical examples to illustrate key dimensions in the creation of imaginative spaces of play, namely their co-configured character, dependent on reciprocal practice of the human and non-human. Despite this emphasis on Devan it should be noted that the creation of imaginative spaces of play was not limited to her and her friends. For instance, in chapter 3 I recounted Matthew’s playful practice with his investigative glasses as he went in search for Mousee, in chapter 5 I eluded to Emily’s creation of magical spaces with her Bratz genie bottle, and in the following chapter I discuss Stephen’s engagements with his PlayStation2 as a means to examine a further example of an imaginative space of play – the virtual. Now, without further ado I wish to turn to the first of the relational configurations considered in this chapter. Grab my hand and hold tight, we’re off to Magic Land!

**Journeying to Magic Land**

Devan explains: “Me and Claire are just going to go to Magic Land.”

Today they are playing in Devan’s bedroom, although on previous visits Devan has spoken about journeying to Magic Land while in her lounge, from the school playground, and with a group of friends in the local park.

Devan turns to Claire: “Where shall we go?”

Claire suggests: “Diagon Alley?”

Devan responds: “Yeah, okay, I need to get some books on rune language.”
As accomplished travellers, Devan and Claire instantaneously place themselves in a book shop in Magic Land.

Stepping up to the shop assistant, Devan inquires: "Do you sell, erm, books by, erm, Rhianna Rune?"

It appears several suggestions are made, prompting Claire to explain: "Well... we want something like a book that educates."

The enquiry is drawn to a close as Devan explains they already own the books on offer. They bid farewell to the shop assistant and turn to each other.

Devan offers: "I'll go and check on the children."

BANG

"Hogwarts!"

A scurrying of feet ensues.

Arriving in a room in Hogwarts, Devan greets the two young children: "What did you do today?"

There is a pause for response.

Devan says: "You went on a school trip? Nice. Say hello to Claire."

Again, a pause for response.

In a cheerful tone Claire replies: "Hello."

"Accio Buggy!" Devan summons the pushchair by magic spell.

Devan beckons to the children: "Okay then, come on."

We leave the scene here, and rejoin the girls as they discuss their next move in Magic Land.

Devan suggests: "Shall we go to Ethrole Castle?"

Claire responds: "Yeah, we should power shoot."

Devan exclaims: "Yeah, that's what I was about to say."

BANG

"Ethrole Castle!"

Scurrying ensues.

Devan suggests: "Let's go to power control lessons. Why don't we go for the higher group?" Then she pauses: "We
don't barely know how to do it, let's just practice. Let's see if the hall's free."
They run up and down the room to reach the hall.
Devan says: "Okay, let's try."
Claire offers: "What about the green force field?"
The two girls face each other.
Devan: "Okay, side, back..."
Claire: "Oh mine's not strong enough."
Devan: "We need to do it for longer."
Claire: "We need to wait till there's a tingle in our fingers."
They repeat the process.
Claire: "I'm starting to get it!"
Devan: "My face is red!"
Claire: "Okay, ready. I've got it, ready?"
Devan: "Yep"
POW
Devan falls back against the bed with force, claiming:
"Aargh, you got my left leg"

(I refer the reader to Figure 6.1 and Track 7, which illustrate Devan and her friend practising the generation of force fields.)

*Interruption: the wider magical context*

Devan's creation of an imaginary magic land should be set within a wider context, that sees it in relation to a general interest in magic and spiritualism, which is expressed both within and beyond Devan's social circle (MacKian, 2007). One of Devan's prized possessions is her witch's cupboard, which sits on top of a chest of drawers in the witches' corner of her bedroom (see Figure 6.2). This wooden chest is home to crystals and gems, a special dice, jars of homemade potions, various talismans and a small book of spells. The opposite corner of the room, the story corner, is home to ideas for a story she once wrote about a magic broom (see Figure 6.3). These ideas, along with illustrations, are etched on the wall. The adjoining wall displays Harry Potter film posters and crests she has made for the different houses from which her newly created school of magic
Figure 6.1 Practising Force Fields

Source: Stills from Devan’s video footage of magical play
Figure 6.2  Devan’s Witches’ Corner, containing her Witch’s Cupboard, home to crystals, gems, potions, talismans and spell books. The magical globe is used on visits to Ethrole Castle to sort school children into different house teams.

Source: Photograph taken by Devan
Figure 6.3  Devan’s Story Corner

Source: Photograph taken by Devan
is comprised (see Figure 6.4). At her other house, belonging to her mother’s partner, she has a small area in the back garden where she grows herbs to use in her potions, and a selection of tarot cards and books on such things as homeopathy, palm reading and divination.

Devan is not alone in her passion for magic. Within the UK toy industry, the magic category has experienced a growth in sales in recent years (Naish, 2003). This growth has undoubtedly been prompted by the success of Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings. According to NPD statistics, (NPD being a global provider of consumer and retail market research information) when the first Harry Potter film was released in 2001, Harry held the top spot as the best selling license in Toys, in October and November of that year, with 3.2% of the UK’s Total Traditional Toys market. This success has continued with subsequent instalments of the Harry Potter tales (Toys ‘N’ Playthings, 2002). Nielsen BookScan, the independent book trade monitoring service reports that UK sales figures, across all outlets, for Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows in the first 24 hours of release reached 2.65 million copies. This makes it the fastest selling book in history; its predecessor being Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, which sold just over 2 million in the first 24 hours (Bloomsbury.com, 2007).

The book as a technology of play

Through an examination of particular relational configurations involving children and books I will show how a space-time where a magical world can be created is enframed. To attend to the active role played by toy objects within this enframing I conceive of the book as a technology of play. In so doing, I draw upon Alfred Gell’s (1992) concept of art objects functioning as a ‘technology of enchantment’. Here it is worth briefly recapping his argument, which was originally introduced in chapter 4 in relation to the provocation of effect offered by the fragility of model aeroplanes. Gell explores how art objects, ranging from Marquesan motifs to the work of Duchamp, possess the power to enchant their viewer. This power is seen to stem from the technical and creative processes of production that the object embodies. These processes of production, enacted by the artist, are incommensurable to the audience. This results in a mismatch in the viewer’s conception of the artist’s ability and what they themselves would be
Figure 6.4 Devan's House Crests, for her United Deculas School of Magic.
Source: Photograph taken by Devan
able to achieve. This mismatch, this incommensurability, generates a particular kind of object agency for art objects, an efficacy resulting from the ability to enchant. In a similar sense to the art object functioning as a technology of enchantment, the book functions as a technology of play in that it is productive, prompting playful practices through which imaginative, magical spaces are configured. I explore three functions of the book within relational configurations: metaphorical, abstract and practical. By addressing these multiple functions I am able to advance Holloway’s discussion of co-configured space-times by demonstrating how we need to be attendant not only to co-subjects that are visibly present, but also co-subjects that may exist, and mediate as absent presences.

Firstly, the book serves a metaphorical function as the procreator or progenitor of magical beings. Devan explained:

“In Magic Land there was a book shop and ... [a] book opened and two flowers came out and then two children were born, me and my friend, and then we went and we chose a family we wanted in this world and then we were born and we forgot about it until nursery.”

(‘Interview’ with Devan, 27th April 2007)

At nursery the girls were reminded of their magical conception when they discovered a hole in the building that connected to Magic Land. Here the book figures as a (re)productive agent. It is crucial to the construction of a narrative that permits belief in the self as magical being, acting as a point of origin for the unfolding story of their lives. As a point of origin, the book lends a sense of authenticity to Devan’s magical practices and play, providing them with a sense of internal consistency (Goldman and Smith, 1998). The book’s metaphorical function enacts the appropriation of roles for Devan and her friend, initiating a certain perspective on the world that is situated within an imaginary framework (Harris, 2000). This enframing of the body in relation to the book makes belief. Through this relational configuration, both the book and the body are connected to a field of imaginative potential. The body becomes magical having been procreated by an object; the book becomes magical having procreated.
Secondly, the book serves a more literal, albeit still abstract function, as the purveyor of knowledge about the existence of Magic Land.

"[We] believe that there's all these places ... different places in books, and some of them are real cos the worlds, they go into like a ball or something and travel through to, erm, this world, and they [the places] go in the author's head and they [the author] write things down. But it's [the place] actually real somewhere. But on the way, like the ball bounces into houses and things, and it may go wrong so the author writes down some wrong things, but most of it's right."

('Interview' with Devan, 27th April 2007)

Here we should note how the author's agency is diminished. The story comes to the writer, rather than being created by them. Devan paints a picture of the writer as a peculiar kind of ethnographer, who reports on this magical world, via the vehicle of a bouncing ball, which enters the mind and implants knowledge about this other world. It is the book, as a material vessel, that is the agent, rather than the author. It is a container of the magical world, which is waiting to be 'set free'. With a little investment, in the form of reading, it may act as a gateway to new places and new experiences. As such, it may foster a certain appropriation of the world, a different mode of inhabitation, by opening the self to alternative possibilities.

Thirdly, the book serves a practical function as the facilitator of a language and culture of magic, providing knowledge about specific aspects of Magic Land. Devan's practices of play were punctuated with reference to elements of the Harry Potter tales: Diagon Alley, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, The Leaky Cauldron and The Great Hall; floo powder and apparition. Importantly, Devan was adamant that the phenomenon of Harry Potter had not influenced her play practices. This stems from her belief in a pre-existing Magic Land that is independent and anterior to J.K Rowling's novels. Talking about Star Trek fans, Penley (1992) explains how identification in fantasy does not just go through the character. Rather the reader can also identify with the scene and express an abiding love for the universe depicted. They feel as if they are part of that universe; they want it to be our universe. This was the manner in
which Devan identified with Harry Potter. In her discussions and playful practices no reference was made to any of the characters, rather attention was focused on the places within the story with some reference made to the specific means of travel between them, such as the use of floo powder and apparition.

From this perspective, the Harry Potter novels do not present a script to be followed, but rather elements that are sparks for inspiration. As Grugeon (2004) suggests, media influences need not deaden the imagination, but rather feed and extend the possibilities for new narratives, and even allow the development of new skills and roles. Such an extension of narrative was evident in Devan’s practice. Discussing the role of Harry Potter in her play, she explained:

“Also we go to Ethrole Castle. That’s not in the [Harry Potter] book... We travel there. It’s on an island and we have to go with these divers and we swim there, and then we go to the castle and we do things like power control and disguise.”

(‘Interview’ with Devan, 27th April 2007)

Ethrole Castle of Enchantment and Mysticism, to use its full title, is a school for more advanced witches and warlocks, where students learn to use feelings rather than wands to generate magic. This can be a dangerous business, as Devan explains in relation to the generation of ‘force fields’:

“[Y]ou wouldn’t touch the other person, just go like that [push your hands and arms outwards in front of you] and the force field gets pushed on someone else... I got loads of cuts and bruises. My friend put the force field like, I’m here and the force field reached here, bounced forward and I’d fallen on the ... floor and like twisted my ankle and had cuts on my elbows and my knee.”

(‘Interview’ with Devan, 27th April 2007)

Relational configurations with books, both specific titles and a generic form, make belief in magic and inspire the creation of specific magical spaces and places. However, as Devan’s discussion of force fields begins to suggest, in examining the character of imaginative spaces of play it is necessary to attend to
not only intercorporeal relations with objects, but also intercorporeal relations between players, and the embodied affects these relations induce.

The vital character of imaginative spaces of play

In relation to force fields, we can clearly see how affect and embodiment are crucial to the production of imaginative spaces of play. From this perspective it can be seen that imaginative spaces, like Holloway's sacred spaces, are sensed in the everyday as a result of intercorporeal practice. As Holloway (2006) asserts, these spaces quiver with an affective energy. Magical space is produced through experiencing and feeling bodies, which produce affective forces through being in relation. In this particular instance, affective force is produced through the corporeal excesses of rhythmic comportment and the haptic sensuality of proximity. Affect is felt as the expectant tension of the anticipating body, a body willing something to happen. It structures the encounter between these bodies, disposing them for action in a particular way (Thrift, 2004b). These bodies become open to the possibilities of an imaginative field of potential.

To paraphrase Anderson (2006), the affect and feelings produced through these intercorporeal relations create a transpersonal sense of life that animates the space-time in which they are experienced. Thus, the sensations and vitality resulting from intercorporeal relations are immanent to the making of an enchanted magical space. As Holloway (2006:186) argues, enchantment is 'an affective register that informs the space of its realisation'. Enchanted spaces - be they magical or spiritual - are 'sensuous spaces that cannot be reduced to societal processes, structures, or belief itself'. It is the act of embodied practice that makes believe, the action of the body in and towards the world (Holloway, 2003).

In discussing the difficulty of accessing Magic Land, Devan emphasises the importance of the affectual in the creation of magical spaces:

"the thing is, when we first joined magic you can't hear what's going on in Magic Land and then you can't see what's mostly going on, and then it develops as you get more advanced... [W]hen you're in
Ethrole Castle it's even harder, erm, so I've had to translate for my friends."

('Interview' with Devan, 27th April 2007)

Here Devan is describing a process of ‘tuning in’ to the imaginative play through which magical spaces unfold. Accessing Magic Land is reliant on a sensory receptivity concerned with being-in-the-world (Bennett, 2001). One is required to adopt an openness to the world in the moment, responding to not only that which is cognitively recognised, but also that which is ‘felt’. This involves being responsive to the subtlety of gestures, including shifts in posture and complicit glances (Harker, 2005). To understand this process of ‘tuning in’ we can look to theories of ‘flow’. Drawing on the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1975), Malbon understands ‘flow’ as the matching of challenges with competencies. As sensations of competency increase within play, a sense of flow becomes possible. This flow facilitates the loss of a sense of the self as a separate entity, as the player becomes part of, or strongly identifies with something outside and beyond, yet also including the self. A sense of being is subsumed by a sense of becoming. As the player becomes competent in responding to affective sensibilities, they experience a shared intimacy with others, allowing energy to flow through them. They develop a felt understanding that enables them to ‘go with the flow’.

In developing this line of thought it is not my intention to deny a role for speech resources or explicit signals for action (see Goldman and Smith, 1998). These were clearly seen in the video footage of Devan and her friend practising the creation of force fields. However, magical spaces are relational, bodily enacted and corporeally sensed. These sensations can be life giving and life affirming (Holloway, 2006). As Malbon (1999) states, vitality can be experienced through play, through a sensation of ‘flow’. This subjective experience of vitality is the intrinsic value of play, which lends it significance in the lives of individuals.

Play is also significant because of its extrinsic value, which involves its relationships with the ways in which individuals and groups function outside of specific moments of play. Identification may extend well beyond moments of flow, into the individual’s sense of self identity (Jackson, 2004; Malbon, 1999).
This rings true for Devan, who has a strong sense of identity as a witch, defining herself in contrast to 'muggles' (non-magic people). She explained how it was possible to tell if somebody was a witch:

“we can tell if someone’s magic cos they have a hand pattern that looks, well like that [she shows me the palm of her hand] and you have that... It has to be exactly the right marks and some people have them”.

('Interview' with Devan, 27th April 2007)

More specifically she is a witch who practises 'old' magic, embroiling her in relational configurations with such things as potions, crystals and talismans. She explained that the difference between old magic and new magic is that:

“modern magic doesn’t involve chanting or herbs and this is more involved with like things that muggles might not call magic... Muggles’ definition of magic isn’t like magical things. It’s more like anything that can’t be real”.

('Interview' with Devan, 27th April 2007)

Devan also identified herself as witch who was accomplished to the extent that she was able to teach others:

D: ...me and Amity used to show others how to do it and, and then Amity didn’t do it as much so I taught most people and nearly everyday I teach them magic...
T: so is it quite hard to teach people how to do it then?
D: yeah cos lots of people go like, ‘I can’t remember’ or don’t pay attention [laughs]. Not many people, well a few people find me bossy and I try not to be bossy. Lots of people don’t mind it.

('Interview' with Devan, 27th April 2007)

This can be taken as an example of how media influences may allow the development of new roles and skills, as suggested by Grugeon (2004). This case
study also demonstrates how children creatively absorb intertextual material into their play culture, which requires considerable knowledge of ‘texts’, such as an understanding of settings and plots. This reiterates the idea that rather than inhibiting the imagination, intertextuality feeds into and extends possibilities for new narratives, which was introduced in the previous chapter.

Summary

This case study shows how magical spaces are enacted in and of the everyday. A space-time where the magical can be experienced is enframed in the everyday through relational configurations of bodies and books. The latter are shown to act as absent presences in these configurations, functioning in a metaphorical, abstract and practical sense. Books inspire a mode of inhabitation of the everyday that opens the self to the possibility of the magical. Once inspired, this mode of inhabitation is fostered through relations between experiencing, feeling, affective bodies. It is thus shown that magical spaces are corporeally sensed in and of the everyday. By attending to the intercorporeal relations through which magical spaces are co-configured, it is possible to examine the vital character of imaginative spaces of play and begin to appreciate the significance of play in our everyday lives.

I now turn to a different imaginative space of play – the space of the miniature – which, embodies a different system of belief and involves the evocation a different series of sensations.

Navigating the Miniature World

In this case study I examine a second relational configuration – that between the child and the dollhouse - which enframes a space-time where a miniature space of play can unfold. Here a different system of belief to that pertaining to the magical world is in operation. Devan and her friend readily recognised miniature practices of make-believe as pretence. This is marked by the fact that belief in this differential world is contained in the moment of play, rather than obviously extending beyond it to inform senses of self identity. However, the world of the miniature is similar to that of the magical in that it is configured in
and of the everyday. With regard to this case study, I explore this notion through the concept of interiority.

In my engagement with the miniature I draw particular inspiration from the work of Susan Stewart (2003). In her book, *On Longing*, Stewart presents a study of narrative, scale and significance. She examines the relation of narrative to its object, questioning how we can describe something and how this description relates to the invention of the very thing it describes. As part of this study, Stewart addresses the miniature as a cultural product, a sense of scale that is forever described in relation to an anthropocentric universe. She examines how the experience of the miniature is the experience of interiority, which is understood in terms of an impression of containment and enclosure. Stewart's work is of particular relevance to this case study as she directly engages with the dollhouse as an example of a miniature object, discussing 'its promise as an infinitely profound interiority', being a house within a house (2003:61). For Stewart, the dollhouse is particularly interesting because, despite its miniature scale, it is cognitively gigantic. Referring to the grand dollhouse of Queen Mary, housed within Windsor Castle, she explains how attention can only be directed to one location within it at a time. For Stewart, the dollhouse cannot be known sensually as it is 'consumed by the eye' (2003:62).

The analysis presented here both shares and critiques some of Stewart's arguments. I draw on her discussion of interiority to explain the children's experience of the miniature and share her concern with how the miniature transforms the everyday. However, I critique the way she frames the separation and connection of the worlds of the miniature and the everyday as part of my concern to reduce the conceptual distance between reality and play. I also offer a challenge to her particular form of engagement with the dollhouse, which emphasises distanced display and gazing. In contrast, I offer an account of embodied and sensory engagement, which is based on the dollhouse's active use in play, rather than passive display. I discuss how the children produce a sensibility of miniature space that is appreciated through bodily perception. Again, it is seen that, through the creation of spatial textures, this imaginative space is corporeally *sensed*.
In terms of empirical material, I refer primarily to Devan’s playful practice involving a plastic dollhouse. However, the arguments presented here have also been informed by three other sets of playful practice. Two of these sets concern engagements with Sylvanian Families: Devan’s contemporary engagements with these woodland creatures; and my own memory of embodied engagements with them as a child. The third set of playful practice that informs this analysis concerns Bethany’s engagements with three wooden dollhouses. She claimed personal ownership of one of these dollhouses, which was stored in her bedroom. The other two belonged to her mother and grandmother respectively, and were stored in one of the living areas within their shared house. Each dollhouse was furnished with a multitude of complementary accessories, which were composites of wood and porcelain.

As a means of introducing the particular miniature space of play with which this case study is concerned, I refer the reader to Figure 6.5 and Track 8. These visuals begin to illustrate the playful practices that unfolded between Devan, her friend, Amity, and the plastic dollhouse in question. We join them at the beginning of an almost hour long narrative, which is represented in full by the comic strip, ‘A Day in the World of the Miniature’, presented on the following two pages (see Figure 6.6). Here we can see how a narrative that is initially concerned with exploring family life within the domestic space of the home, expands to include a range of places and becomes ever more fantastical with the occurrence of an earthquake, a kidnapping, a monster attack and an explosion. The reasoning behind the presentation of the children’s narrative as a comic strip will become more apparent as the case study develops. Here it suffices to say that its use was inspired by the children’s adoption of literary devices, such as ‘meanwhile’ and ‘back at the hideout’, which I felt were reminiscent of this particular mode of presentation and animation.

The call to action

In this case study, I consider four ways in which the dollhouse may be conceived as a technology play: its provocation of delight and intrigue; the way it structures the play that unfolds around it; how it inspires the creation of a miniature landscape; and its provocation of the experience of interiority. I begin
Figure 6.5  Miniature Play

Source: Stills from Devan’s video footage of dollhouse play
Figure 6.6 A Day in the World of the Miniature

Source: Stills from Devan’s video footage of dollhouse play

One day....

...a mother comforts her child

EARTHQUAKE

Doctor, please help!

BABY KIDNAPPED

I’m the Police...

“Meanwhile”...

“Meanwhile”...

“Meanwhile”...

at the kidnappers’ hideout

at the kidnappers’ hideout

the search begins on the M1

the search begins on the M1

continued over the page
"They're all safe, and they live happily ever after!"
by attending to the capacity of the dollhouse to inspire delight and intrigue. This feature of the miniature can be framed in three main ways: in relation to its scale and whimsical nature; its ability to make the familiar remarkable; and its capacity to arrest time.

Sitting still and silent on the melamine shelf, the plastic dollhouse is inconspicuous amongst the plethora of small trinkets and curiosities, which threaten to overwhelm the observer through their plenitude and miscellany. On closer inspection of this assortment, the dollhouse takes on a sweet and beautiful quality as its miniaturist nature begins to impress on the viewer through its juxtaposition with a small pink clock. As the dollhouse stands no taller than forty centimetres, this juxtaposition confuses sensible reasoning. However, the perfection of its representation of a quaint suburban property suppresses a sense of the grotesque that such an experience may provoke. The possibly gaudy nature of its synthetic materials (an issue to which I shall return) is offset by its whimsical character: the white picket fence, pink tiled roof and climbing greenery. This depiction takes inspiration from Stewart's (2003) discussion of the 'delirium of description' that the miniature engenders. A sense of scale is established through constant correspondence to our anthropocentric world.

Devan lifts the dollhouse from the shelf and places it on her bed. It has been relocated for ease of access, opened to reveal its interior. Devan arranges the furniture inside including a baby's cot no bigger than a cotton reel and a sofa no bigger than a bar of soap. Sunlight streams into the room from the window behind Devan's bed, illuminating the dollhouse, channelling through its tiny windows (see Figure 6.7). The placing of the dollhouse on the bed exaggerates its miniature scale. The bed becomes a gigantic platform spanning beyond the dollhouse's foundations, standing in stark contrast to the tiny bed contained within its walls. This contrast is amplified by the matching colour of the two beds' covers. It is as if one has been directly scaled up from the other. This alignment of the metaphorical sign to a sign from the physical world makes the former remarkable (Stewart, 2003). However, through such comparison we also begin to marvel at the latter. As Stewart (2003:46) claims:
Figure 6.7 Sunlit Dollhouse

Source: Still from Devan's video footage of dollhouse play
[T]he miniature has the capacity to make its context remarkable; its fantastic qualities are related to what lies outside it in such a way as to transform the total context.

Thus, a child's single bed becomes a gigantic expanse of land. This is a feature of the miniature we will revisit as the case study continues, for instance, in the demonstration of how a child's touch has the power to wreak havoc and destroy a two storey building.

The kind of dollhouse to which Stewart refers embodies a particular temporality, which is linked to the 'infinite time of reverie' (2003:65). The stillness of the miniature affords it the capacity to arrest time, to 'create an 'other' time, a type of transcendent time which negates change and the flux of lived reality'. This is seen clearly in relation to dollhouses that represent past ways of life in the present. This temporality is reinforced by the perceived temporality of the dominant material from which such houses are made – the temporality of wood. As Barthes (1957:55) explains, '[w]ood makes essential objects, objects for all time'. This temporality is bound up with nostalgic musings for craft and pre-industrial labour, which are understood as unique and authentic forms of production. Barthes writes how this notion of craft contrasts with a notion of plastic's chemical manufacture. He constructs a hierarchy of the cultural affordances of materials through comparison of what he deems to be their essential qualities. Plastic is portrayed as a 'disgraced material', which sounds hollow and flat, and whose colours are chemical and aggressive. These cultural affordances find particular expression in relation to children's toys:

'Current toys are made of a graceless material, the product of chemistry, not of nature. Many are now moulded from complicated mixtures; the plastic material of which they are made has an appearance at once gross and hygienic, it destroys all the pleasure, the sweetness, the humanity of touch. A sign which fills one with consternation is the gradual disappearance of wood, in spite of its being an ideal material because of its firmness and its softness, and the natural warmth of its touch'. (Barthes, 1957:54)
Here wood is afforded a poetic quality. The natural qualities it assumes appeal to a romantic notion of a natural, innocent childhood. Barthes (1957:54) explains that the wooden toy 'does not sever the child from close contact with the tree'. The consternation that plastic faces is partly a function of the threat it is thought to pose to nature through the possibility of 'plasticizing' the whole world (Barthes, 1957). Barthes describes how this possibility has even been extended to life itself through plastic's surgical incorporation into the human body. The debate about the preferential material for toys continues today, some fifty years since Barthes' argument was published in *Mythologies*. Wooden toys continue to be associated with classic characters, traditional toy shops and lasting quality (Myall, 2007).

So what of the plastic dollhouse? I referred earlier to the possibly gaudy nature of the synthetic materials from which Devan's dollhouse has been manufactured. This comment was informed by Barthes' particular portrayal of plastic's qualities. More recently, other commentators have offered contrasting accounts of plastic. For instance, Thrift (2008) examines this manufactured material as a 'technology of allure', a notion based on the aesthetic pleasure it offers. Here the chemical, aggressive colours of plastic are recast as 'glamorous' and afforded a sense of bewitching beauty or charm. Shove et al (2007:109) also draw attention to accounts of plastic's warmth, charm and aesthetic beauty, and how:

'Plastics and plastic products contributed to the colouring of everyday life and to a regime of manufacturing and marketing in which the capacity to be colourful was an important attraction and an increasingly necessary condition'.

While plastics are not the only material to contribute to what has been referred to as the 'chromatic revolution' (Shove et al, 2007), they can deliver colour 'par excellence'. Thrift (2008) explains how GE Plastics now has more than one million coloured plastics in its custom colour bank. Since 1995, it has also introduced more than twenty visual effects into its compounds and resins, producing the so called 'special effects plastics'. He discusses how these
coloured materials can be combined with other surfaces to create alluring environments, offering the designer New York Prada store as an example.

Whether or not the colour of the plastic dollhouse acted as a 'technology of allure' with regard to Devan, it can be seen that the dollhouse did not suffer from the loss of enchanting potential that Barthes emphasises. The children regaled in the dollhouse's use. This use speaks of a different temporality for the dollhouse. Stewart (2003:54) writes how arrested life 'always bears the hesitation of a beginning, a hesitation that speaks the movement which is its contrary'. This hesitation is a wonder of possibility. The dollhouse's intended use further enhanced the delight inspired by its miniature scale, as it promised to exploit this possibility. Rather than sitting still and silent, the dollhouse is animated by its inhabitation. In this sense, it acts as both a target of and for agency.

Devan's movement of the dollhouse from the shelf to the bed rouses it from its sedentary, passive posture. Through the process of 'setting up', Devan calls the house into action, prompting it to participate in the playful practices of doll play that will shortly begin to unfold. With the furniture arranged, she looks for people to populate her house, delving into a wicker basket containing an ad hoc assembly of plastic dolls. From the plethora of branded characters (including Simpson, Disney, Star Wars LEGO and Animal Hospital characters) she selects a series of anonymous figures, a mother, daughter, baby and pet dog. In the absence of an anonymous father figure, a recognisable father form, a Homer Simpson figure, is chosen and placed along with the other family members in the house. With the dollhouse and figures roused from their idleness and called into action, Devan turns to her friend to inquire, "Do you wanna come and play the game?"

**Interruption: the wider miniature context**

Delight in the miniature is by no means a new phenomenon, or a phenomenon restricted to children's toys. Books have long provided a sense of the miniature, both in their content and their form. The earliest small book was the *Diurnale Moguntinum*, which was printed by Peter Schoeffer in Mainz in 1468. In the
fifteenth century, small books of hours, which measured two square inches and were set in gold, were made for the merchant princes of Florence and Venice (Stewart, 2003). In terms of content, there are numerous literary works that take the miniature as their subject, many of which are now considered as classic tales. These works include Jonathon Swift's (1726) Gulliver's Travels, Charlotte Yonge's (1855) The History of Sir Thomas Thumb, and more recently, Mary Norton's (1952) The Borrowers. Each of these has also been brought to the big screen. Miniature toys, such as Dinky Toys, have also long enjoyed popularity (Richardson and Richardson, 2000).

Delight in the miniature is also experienced through its making. This is seen in the hobbies of making dollhouses, miniature railways and scale models. The dollhouse hobby began to take off in Britain in the early 1980s. Its increasing popularity can be seen in the development of ready to assemble dollhouse kits and a plethora of mass-produced accessories, and the increasing number of practical guides to the hobby (see Nisbett (1997) and Penny and Penny (1998) as examples). Devan participated in this making of the miniature, making various items for her Sylvanian Families. This making of the miniature was also seen in discussion of Sam's modelling practices in chapter 4.

*The dollhouse as structure*

It is not only the two friends who converse via the question 'Do you wanna come and play the game?' As Latour (2005) suggests, we need to pay attention to how objects talk, we need to make their activity visible, for they are not passive in relation to calls to action. From the many figures Devan could have chosen, she opted to assemble a representative family. Before play has begun, the dollhouse is suggestive of appropriate inhabitants. The figures, which lacked identity as part of the ad hoc mix, take on meaning as a family in the family home. Here the two components, house and figures, can be understood as parts of a whole (Chapman, 2000), the whole being a domestic ideal. This creation of a family home then influences the initiation of narrative, as it begins with a mother comforting her baby, an action appropriate for and routine in such a domestic setting.
The dollhouse goes on to structure the movement of figures around and about it. The figures are not moved around inside the house to any great extent due to the dimensions making access difficult, especially when play is evolving between two players. Figures tend to be held level with either the upper or lower level of the structure. The dollhouse also creates boundaries and barriers to movement. When doors are closed figures cannot move freely between rooms. It also frames an extended interior, which spills out from the open access rooms, and an exterior, which is the area beyond the outer walls. The extended interior is evidenced through the interaction of figures in this area and the temporary placement of features, such as the bath, here so that they can be more easily engaged with. The front door marks the boundary between these two spaces, as figures have to ring the doorbell and wait to be greeted before being able to enter the interior (see Figure 6.8 and Track 9).

As play unfolds a number of secondary sites are developed, which together act as a series of targets for action. Initially if the narrative involved figures leaving the domestic setting of the house, the figure would leave the 'scene' and this subsequent action would not be explored. The secondary sites or targets were created when the players wished to explore the action that would occur in other places. The second site created was a hide out, where the children were held after they were kidnapped from the house. Rather than exploring this action in an abstract area, Devan employed a cardboard box to act as a target. The figures are then moved on and around this when in this designated location. The third site was a car, which was formed from a book acting as a platform on which the figures were aligned in two by two rows facing forward, in seated positions where bendable limbs would allow. This transformation of book to car was reinforced by the narration, which involved an imitation of travel news on the radio. The fourth site was the city, the only target to be situated outside of Devan's bedroom, which comprised the kitchen tabletop (see Figure 6.9 and Track 10).

While the narrative steers away from the domestic setting, the dollhouse continues to act as the primary target of agency because action returns to the house as the narrative is brought to an end. The figures that have been desperately searching for each other following the kidnapping, enduring a
Dolls are held level with the upper level of the dollhouse.

An extended interior spills out from the open access rooms.

The front door marks a boundary between interior and exterior.
Figure 6.9  Multiple Sites of Play

Source: Stills from Devan's video footage of dollhouse play

The Kidnappers' Hideout

The car

Climbing the mountain to get to the City
monster attack and an explosion, are reunited as they all travel back to the house. Play is brought to a close with the line: “Meanwhile, somebody fixed up the house for them all, they’re all safe, and they live happily ever after”. Here, the dollhouse occupies a hierarchical position, which is a function of its agency as the initiator and facilitator of play. Its immediate metonymical quality, which is integral to its role as a technology of play, differentiates it from the abstract substitute objects that are enacted as secondary sites or targets.

Inhabiting the miniature: spatial textures

The series of sites outlined above should not be understood in merely topological terms as a network or assemblage. Devan and her friend were active in the construction of a miniature landscape, an entity, which as Rose and Wylie (2006a) suggests, expresses and is comprised of something other, something more than connective properties. A topological sensibility or ontology exists in a state of tension vis-à-vis concepts of landscape. This tension is the product of several factors, but of particular concern here is landscape's historical association as an areal and topographical term. In contrast to topological geographies, landscape is animated by perspective, contours and texture. The children sought to introduce such elements into their miniature space of play, through narration, sound effects and the use of objects.

While the term 'landscape' is useful for expressing the topographical, rather than simply topological features of the miniature space of play, the historical associations that lend it to this function are also problematic. Landscape appears to encapsulate a notion of fixity, and to be concerned with the production of meaning and the creation of dominating power (Cresswell, 2003). It is a concept burdened with a historical association with the visual, which associates it with a particular kind of knowledge - distal knowledge. Hetherington (2003) explains that this is a broad, detached understanding based on knowledge at a distance or a concern for the bigger picture. It is concerned with an ontology of being in which the thing being known is assumed to be in a stable and finished state and therefore amenable to representation. It posits a clear distinction between subject and object as singular and coherent entities.
Recently, attempts have been made to bring the tension between the topological and the topographical to the fore and to find ways of bringing landscape and practice together, examining landscape as something that is lived rather than gazed upon (see Rose and Wylie, 2006b; Cresswell, 2003; Cloke and Jones, 2001; Wylie, 2002; 2005). Despite these attempts I hereon in opt for the term ‘spatial textures’ rather than landscape to describe the topographical elements introduced by the children. Here I draw on Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of a ‘texture of space’, which refers to the experience of the surface and material tactility of space. In his examination of skateboarding, Borden (2001) draws upon Lefebvre to explore the skateboarders’ exploitation of the city’s texture. The texture of the city refers to the physical minutiae of this urban space, the micro-conception of architectural element. Through a proximal knowledge (Hetherington, 2003) of the urban environment, the skateboarders are able to weave their compositions within the city. In turn, they inscribe upon the city through the physical acts of scratching and scraping, and the creation of soundscapes, producing yet another layer of texture. Central to both Lefebvre’s and Borden’s work is an insistence that space is not static or fixed, and cannot be reduced to the status of message. Texture implies a meaning that is lived, not read. Taking inspiration from this work, I draw on the association of the word ‘texture’ with the feel of a substance and its composition. Etymologically, ‘texture’ derives from the Latin texere, meaning ‘to weave’, which came to mean the thing woven - textile - and the feel of the weave - texture. My concern with ‘feel’ is its expression of an embodied relation, which I extend beyond Lefebvre’s tactility to incorporate the various elements that may combine to produce a sensibility of space that is appreciated through bodily perception.

The children sought to introduce contours to their miniature world through the use of objects. A belt was used as an environmental obstacle to be negotiated. While its exact nature was not defined, the way it was laid out in a meandering fashion was suggestive of a river (see Figure 6.10). When attempting to reach ‘the city’ (the fourth site or target, created by the kitchen table), the metal table leg had to be scaled in order for the figures to reach the higher summit of the table top. A sense of these elements as topographical features is reinforced by
Figure 6.10  

**Topographical Features**, a belt inferring the presence of a river

*Source: Still from Devan’s video footage of dollhouse play*
the statement, "Didn't say anything about this on the map", uttered by one of the characters.

Even greater depth was then added to this contoured landscape through the introduction of differential lighting, sounds (other than the voices conversing) and vibrations. Despite the bright sunlight streaming in through the bedroom window and illuminating the dollhouse, the girls made reference to the consuming darkness of the environment: "I can't see you it's so dark". They created a soundscape for their world, using sound effects to suggest action: the clunk of a door locking, the 'bring bring' of a phone ringing, the 'ding dong' of a door bell, the 'woof woof' of a dog barking, the 'broom broom' of a car moving and the snoring of sleeping characters. The camcorder was also integral to the configuration of this space, with it being shaken to suggest that the ground was trembling. This was reinforced by the disarray of figures and the shaking and subsequent fall of the dollhouse (see Figure 6.11 and Track 11).

The creation of spatial textures is suggestive of a different experience of the dollhouse to that discussed by Stewart. For her, the dollhouse is consumed by the eye. Although the dollhouse is miniature in scalar terms, Stewart discusses how, in a cognitive sense, the dollhouse is gigantic because attention can only be directed to one location within it at any one time. She writes, 'the miniature universe of the dollhouse cannot be known sensually; it is inaccessible to the languages of the body and thus is the most abstract of all miniature forms' (2003:63). She elaborates on one's approach to the dollhouse, writing, '[a]ll senses must be reduced to the visual, a sense which in its transcendence remains ironically and tragically remote' (2003:67). It should be noted that the dollhouses Stewart speaks of are grander in scale than the humble plastic version used by Devan and her friend. However, in terms of the miniature more generally, Stewart discusses how a reduction in scale reduces the sensory dimensions of an object. The children's inhabitation of a miniature space of play required an embodied relationship with this world. This prompted the children to create sensual and visceral elements. The children's embodied relationship with the dollhouse challenges Stewart's argument that the dollhouse is consumed only by the eye and cannot be known sensually. As with the magical, it is seen that imaginative space is corporeally sensed in the everyday through
Figure 6.11  

Vibrations

Source: Stills from Devan's video footage of dollhouse play
relational configurations and of the everyday through a certain mode of
inhabitation. This challenge prompts me to return to the matter of the relation
between the space of the miniature and the space of the everyday. By exploring
the experience of interiority provoked by the miniature it is possible to again
reduce the conceptual distance between reality and play and the worlds they
inhabit.

**Provoking the experience of interiority**

Stewart explains how, in narrative, a sense of scale is achieved by establishing a
referential field which can be continuously referred to. This referential field is
comprised of that with which we are familiar, from our everyday
anthropocentric lives – ‘the concrete objects in the sensual world’ (Stewart,
2003:45). As previously mentioned, these constant correspondences cause
writing about the miniature to achieve a ‘delirium of description’. This constant
comparison with the anthropocentric universe engenders a sense of
containment for the miniature, configuring the dialectic between the miniature
and our familiar anthropocentric world as a dialectic between ‘inside’ and
‘outside’. Thus, as Stewart claims, the experience of the miniature is an
experience of interiority.

McCarthy (2005) explains that interiority is an abstract quality that enables the
recognition and definition of an interior. It is a categorisation rather than a
relation to spatial, architectural form. Interiority adheres to conditions that are
intimate with, but yet defy the specificity of particular interiors. It may coincide
with the ‘inside’ of architectural form, but this is incidental. McCarthy
(2005:114) uses the example of the horizon as an interior to dislocate interiority
from an absolute understanding of insideness. Speaking of the horizon, she
writes:

'It defines an enclosure. In its familiar sense, it marks a limit to the
space of what can be seen, which is to say, it organises this visual
space into an interior'.
This sense of enclosure prompts interiority to be associated with sentiments of reassurance and safety (McCarthy, 2005). The miniature’s sense of containment allowed scary and threatening narratives – such as kidnapping, earthquakes and monster attacks - to be ‘domesticated’ and thus explored without fear by the children. This aspect of containment and domestication is seen in H.G. Wells’ *Little Wars*, where he describes how his miniature war games are ‘saner’ than those of the British Army by reason of their proportion and size (Stewart, 2003).

Discussing interiority in relation to enclosure and containment suggests a separation of the miniature world from the everyday world. This is inflected in Stewart’s discussion of these worlds as parallel, rather than intersecting:

“The beginning of narrative time here is not an extension of the time of everyday life; it is the beginning of an entirely new temporal world, a fantasy world parallel to (and hence never intersecting) the world of everyday reality’ (2003:57).

While ‘parallel’ may invoke notions of correspondence and simultaneity, a definition of ‘parallel’ as it relates to planes is suggestive of a separation by distance. In contrast to Stewart, I argue that the separation of the miniature and the everyday is repudiated by the folding of the latter into the former. The relationship between the ‘inside’ of the miniature and the ‘outside’ of the everyday ‘real’ world is one of necessary implication. As a categorisation the ‘inside’ is dependent on the ‘outside’ for definition.

McCarthy (2005:115-6) explains how interiority and exteriority implicate each other:

‘Interiority is hence conscious of its partiality while deluding itself with an image of coherence and completeness...They [interiority and exteriority] need each other and are derived from processes of exchange between each other’.

The folding of these two worlds can be emphasised by explicitly attending to the boundary between them. As a categorisation and abstract quality, interiority is
not fixed. Thus, the boundaries that construct it may be redefined and renegotiated. The boundary that defines and differentiates interiority and exteriority is also the point at which they potentially collapse into each other. In this sense we can think of the boundary as a starting point. Rather than being 'that at which something stops...[t]he boundary is that at which something begins its presencing' (Heidegger, 1971:154, cited in McCarthy, 2005).

One may expect that when presented directly and materially with the miniature rather than its representation in narrative such continuous explicit reference is less necessary as the differentiation of scale is more immediate. However, within the children's play a continuing tension or dialectic between the 'inside' of the miniature and the 'outside' of the physical world was evident. Elements of this familiar world were folded into the miniature and transformed in the process. For instance, this dialectic materialised when a kitchen table became an awesome mountain and when a child became a giant monster (see Figure 6.12 and Track 12). This comparison and subsequent transformation, is integral to the process by which the interior is constructed and interiority is experienced. It also clearly demonstrates the folding rather than parallel existence of the space of the miniature and the space of the everyday.

Before summarising this case study I wish to extend this discussion of the relation between the miniature and the everyday by considering how the miniature, and the small more generally, are relational effects.

A geography of small things

Readers of the journal cultural geographies may realise that the title of this section is inspired by Jane Jacobs's (2006) 'A geography of big things', a paper that was originally presented as the cultural geographies Annual Lecture, at the 2005 meeting of The Association of American Geographers in Denver. This paper challenges the predetermination of seemingly self-evident 'big things' – in this case, the residential highrise – by attending to how they are variously made and unmade. This approach to 'big things' looks past the formally defined thing to attend to the diverse relations that bring it into being and work to sustain it as a coherent thing in itself. Big, and by implication small, are thus understood
Figure 6.12 Transforming the Everyday

Source: Still from Devan’s video footage of dollhouse play
as relational effects. Jacobs contends that attending to these effects is a key responsibility of geographers. Taking heed, I draw this case study to a close with a consideration of 'a geography of small things'. Defined by a scalar relationship, the miniature presents itself as a geographically defined phenomenon. It encompasses a particular relationship between the fundamental geographical concepts of space, time and scale.

Stewart discusses how the reduction in scale presented by the miniature skews the time and space relations of the everyday anthropocentric life world. Here I return to her invocation of the miniature as 'the infinite time of reverie'. In relation to the miniature, time is arrested because the miniature object is placed within a still context of infinite detail. This multiplication of detail enables space to assume significance over time. Stewart (2003:65) explains:

'It is difficult for much to happen in such depiction since each scene of action multiplies in spatial significance in such a way as to fill the page with contextual information'.

Thus, for Stewart, the miniature tends towards tableau rather than narrative.

The skew effect of the miniature on the space and time relations of the everyday suggests implications for the relation between these two worlds. Through an examination of the dollhouse in use I have been able to show how these two worlds are not separate, as Stewart suggests, but rather are folded into one another. This prompts us to question what happens to miniature time as it is presented by Stewart, when the still becomes animated through use. A tendency toward the tableau is evident in the unfolding of various sites beyond the dollhouse, suggesting that the miniature does indeed unfold in space. However, the miniature world configured by the children and the dollhouse also unfolded through the spoken narrative of the children, and thus unfolded through time. The children managed this differential unfolding between narrative and tableau by introducing such literary devices as the vocalising of 'meanwhile' and 'back at the hideout'. This allowed them to explore action unfolding in one site, and then signal the move to another. For example, they could explore the parents' distress induced by the disappearance of their children as it unfolded in the
house, and then by saying aloud, "meanwhile", they could move to the hideout and explore what was happening to the children who were held captive. It was the use of this literary device that inspired the comic strip style presentation of the children’s narrative of dollhouse play. The management of multiple sites in this manner facilitated a containability of the miniature world. It allowed them to switch between sites without creating disjuncture in the narrative and served a connective function, linking disparate sites. The use of this device does facilitate a temporary halt of time in one site to allow exploration of action in another. However, the overall progression of time is slowed rather than arrested. While the miniature may be seen to manipulate the time and space relations of the everyday, it does not make the everyday anterior and exterior to itself. Rather, as previously discussed, the world of the miniature and the world of the everyday are folded into one another.

This folding of worlds, of spaces and times, prompts us to reconsider the constitution of scale. Recently, the concept of scale has drawn increased levels of attention through the intense scalar debate played out in the pages of the journal *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Here human geographers have questioned its usefulness and relevance as an ontological and epistemological structure, with some going as far as calling for its disposal (see Collinge, 2006; Escobar, 2007; Jonas, 2006; Jones et al, 2007; Leitner and Miller, 2007; Marston et al, 2005). This debate highlights a growing number of theorists who are dissatisfied with a dominant conception of scale as ‘a nested hierarchy of differently sized and bounded spaces’ (Marston et al, 2005:416-7). Scalar hierarchies have become entangled with a series of affiliated binaries, including the spatial local-global. Attempts to reconsider or dispose of scale have thus focussed their energy on the spatial relations and practices which may inform understanding of these particular scales and the entangled space between them. In their endeavours, they have looked to relational ontologies, such as Schatzki’s (2002) ‘site ontology’, de Landa’s (2006) ‘assemblage theory’ and Deleuze’s (1994) distinction of the ‘actual’ and the ‘virtual’.

The relational configurations of the miniature, as presented here, also challenge the perceived rigidities of scale, and prompt us to consider afresh our ‘scalar imaginaries’. The miniature does not exist as a small bounded space, set within
a larger space comprised of bigger things. While the miniature may facilitate the experience of interiority, which suggests enclosure and bounded-ness, this interiority is derived from constant tension and exchange with exteriority. A sense of scale is only achieved through constant referral to an established referential field. Through this referral the two worlds are folded into one. The miniature is not only set in relation to the larger everyday, but possesses the capacity to reconstitute it through its relation. It makes the mundane objects and sensations of the everyday remarkable. A child's single bed can become a gigantic expanse of land, a kitchen table can become an awesome mountain and a child's touch has the power to wreak havoc and destroy a two storey building. This reiterates Law's (2004b: 61) understanding of size and scale as specific accomplishments, rather than something that is given. Scale is specific to each location, 'if [something] is bigger or smaller then it is because it can be made bigger or smaller at this site or that'. As Jacobs (2006) contends, in different settings, different assemblages of relations gather to variously make the big and the small. These alliances are precarious, causing the big and the small to be unmade just as they are made. In exposing how size and scale are relational effects, the miniature proves itself to be a geographical concern. With growing interest in such things as nanotechnologies, a geography of small things is timely.

Summary

This case study reinforces an understanding of the toy as a technology of play by demonstrating how the dollhouse provokes delight and the experience of interiority, and structures playful practices and the spaces in and through which they unfold. It has been shown that a miniature space of play is co-configured in the everyday in relation to the dollhouse. This space is also configured of the everyday through a particular mode of inhabitation that involves assigning alternative meanings to everyday objects and the creation of spatial textures. In attending to how children produce a sensibility of space that is appreciated through bodily perception, it is again realised that imaginative space is corporeally sensed. A further means of problematising the conceptual distance between the world of the real and the world of play is introduced through discussion of the experience of interiority. It is shown how the familiar world of
the everyday is folded into the space of the miniature and transformed as a consequence.

In Summary

This chapter extends the previous discussion of object agency by addressing toys as technologies of play, being productive of playful practices and the imaginative spaces they create in their unfolding. This productivity is a function of the object agencies embodied by particular toys. In this chapter I have variously addressed the agencies pertaining to the metaphorical, abstract and practical conveyance of magical lands, materials of manufacture, size and scale, and metonymical qualities. The exploration of imaginative spaces of play offers an important contribution to children's geographies, which have tended to place children in particular environments, rather than examining the imaginary character of the times and spaces they create for themselves. This intervention is timely given the recent successes of the imaginative mythologies of J.K. Rowling, Tolkein and Philip Pulman, both within and beyond children's culture. Given that children are cast as natural and enviable sojourners (Warner, 2006) it seems fitting that geographical attention to imaginary worlds should begin with their imaginative creations and explorations.

To aid recognition of imaginative spaces as a topic worthy of serious academic attention, this chapter problematises the conceptual distance between 'reality' and 'play' and the worlds they inhabit. This is achieved by illustrating three ways in which the imaginative and the real are folded together. Firstly, it has been shown how relational configurations of child and toy enframe a space-time where imaginative spaces - be they magical or miniature in character - can evolve in the everyday. Secondly, it has been shown that particular modes of inhabitation and certain ways of appropriating things and spaces, configure the imaginative of the everyday. Thirdly, it has been shown how the space of the miniature and the space of the everyday are necessarily folded together. The notion of the imaginary being entangled with the everyday is already well established in fiction, and can be seen in relation to the magical and the miniature in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* respectively.
An emphasis on embodied practice is common to the exploration of both magical and miniature spaces. These imaginative spaces are produced through experiencing and feeling bodies. The affective forces that flow between bodies, and bodies and objects inform the spaces of their realisation. A particular embodied appropriation of the materialities of space enables the inhabitation of imaginative spaces. It may also produce the experience of vitality, which is an intrinsic value of play. The magical case study also pointed toward the wider significance of play, beyond its momentary unfolding by informing a person’s sense of identity. The miniature case study extends this notion of wider significance by attending to the broader implications of work on imaginative spaces of play for geographical scholarship. Addressing ‘a geography of small things’ prompts us to reconsider relations between space, time and scale anew.

I started by inviting you on a journey, a journey from an inconspicuous, mundane room to mystical and enchanting imaginative worlds. Rather than bidding you farewell, I urge you to travel further, for the journey has only just begun. The toy, as a technology of play, is also implicated in the co-configuration of virtual spaces. It is this kind of imaginative space I turn to address in the following chapter.
Traversing Virtual Spaces of Play
In this chapter I continue my previous exploration of imaginative spaces of play by addressing a third kind of imaginative space – the virtual. More specifically, I am concerned with the virtual spaces that are co-configured through relations between children and videogames. In examining these co-configurations it is possible to further reduce the conceptual distance between reality and play and the worlds they inhabit. Focusing on how virtual play is configured in and of the everyday subjects the virtual to empirical scrutiny, allowing us to question the conceptual distance between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’, which in many instances are invoked as oppositional worlds.

To examine how children traverse the boundaries between ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ space I again draw on the idea of the toy as a technology of play. In this instance, the productivity of the toy is understood to be a function of a particular kind of object agency that is understood in terms of ergonomics, and is examined through consideration of fluidity between technology, mind and body (or lack of it). To explore this intimate relationship between child and toy, I borrow the concept of ‘immersion’ from videogame theory, which is used to refer to attentive states (Carr, 2006; McMahan, 2003; Murray, 1997). By examining the differential levels of immersion exhibited by individual players, the reasons behind their manifestation, and the ways in which this is expressed, it is possible to explore the relational configurations of the virtual in and of the everyday. The concept of immersion can be sub-divided into two categories: the ‘diegetic level’, where the player is caught up in the world of the game, and the ‘non-diegetic level’, which refers to the player’s love of the game and the strategy that goes into it. McMahan (2003) refers to these levels in terms of ‘presence’ and ‘engagement’ respectively. I alternate between discussions of these two forms of immersion, which are interrelated, to develop an in-depth sense of children’s engagements with the virtual and its relation to ‘real’ spaces of the everyday.

Within videogame theory discussion of immersion typically refers to three-dimensional adventure games. These discussions usually involve comparisons of these games with their two-dimensional predecessors as a means to examine how developments in computer graphics are facilitating increasing levels of presence. This chapter is concerned with ‘simulation’ games, more specifically,
football games – primarily Pro Evolution Soccer 6 and FIFA 07 – and wrestling games – WWE SmackDown vs RAW 2007. Each of these games was the latest edition in their respective series at the time of study. Simulation games differ from adventure games in a number of ways. Of specific importance to this discussion of immersion are the differences in perspective and the identity of the avatar, which is the graphic representation of the user in mediated space. While the use of perspective may vary between adventure games, and in some cases may vary within a single game, first person shooter games are often addressed as its conventions are used as the standards for a sense of presence. This egocentric viewpoint – seeing the virtual environment through the eyes of the avatar, contrasts with the exocentric viewpoint of the simulation games addressed here. These employ a third person perspective, where one’s own avatars are viewed in the same manner as one views those of another participant, albeit with changing angles of view. Whereas the first person perspective seeks to place the player as the avatar in adventure games, the avatars in the simulation games addressed here are digital representations of real life footballers and wrestlers, many of whom are well known celebrities, separate from their existence in the virtual world. This study, then, also subjects the achievement of immersion as it is regularly discussed within videogame theory to empirical scrutiny. This scrutiny is further reinforced by the fact that discussions of immersion in videogame theory tend to rely on what the game invites players to do (Carr, 2006). In contrast, this study attends to what actual players do in response to the game’s invitations.

I begin by situating this chapter in relation to geographical engagements with the virtual and virtuality. I then discuss my choice of case study material before dividing the substantive body of the chapter into three sections. The first addresses the circuits between mediated and non-mediated spaces through which knowledge and skills flow, situating gaming in the context of wider practices. The second addresses the fluidity between mind, body and technology as it is expressed through embodied relations to the handset and the avatar. The third continues the theme of embodiment, addressing embodied performances in non-mediated space, which produce an intense and affective space of gameplay.
Virtual Geographies

The evolution of the digital world is charged with generating 'an entirely new dimension to geography'. Batty (1997:351) writes:

‘the future subject matter and method of geography will be very different as place and space and time itself become virtual in an age where the digital permeates all human activity’.

Entire geographies, which bear little resemblance to the 'geography of reality', are now constituted within the computer. At the same time, 'real' geographies, such as the traditional boundaries posed by constraints of space and time, are being dramatically changed through the advent of virtual communications (Batty, 1997). Concern about the social and geographical significance of new technologies of computer mediated communication has given rise to 'Virtual Geography'. The Internet has traditionally enjoyed a privileged position in the study of Virtual Geography. However, a series of writings challenge this positioning by emphasising how the Internet cannot be taken as a generalised model for all computer mediated communication. For instance, Crang et al (1999) emphasise the diversity of both the constitution and character of virtual geographies. This is reiterated by the range of technologies addressed in their edited collection, which includes not only the Internet, but also optics, the telephone, CCTV, and science fiction texts. Within this expanding field of interest videogames remain absent. This omission is strange given that videogames inspired the term 'cyberspace', which was first introduced to our cultural vocabulary by William Gibson's novel, *Neuromancer* (Lahti, 2003). This relationship has become effaced as the term has become synonymous with the use of computers for communications. Videogames have also played an important role in the development of computing more generally. They represent the cutting edge of graphics, which made computers user friendly. It is also videogames that propelled computers into the public consciousness (Batty, 1997).

Discussions of the virtual frequently position it in opposition to the 'real'. This is because simulation is the dominant dimension through which virtual
technologies are popularly conceived. In this framing the virtual is often positioned as a copy, 'always striving towards but never quite achieving a mimetic replication of the real' (Crang et al, 1999:6). A particular concern of virtual geographies is the need to avoid falling into what Imken (1999) refers to as 'cyberbole' – this is an overdrawn opposition of the real and the virtual. To this end, geographers have sought to embed the virtual in the 'real' world by emphasising its social and institutional contexts (see Larner, 1999; Wakeford, 1999), and by placing it within wider historical geographies of virtuality (see Hillis, 1999; Stein, 1999). The need to embed the virtual in the real is also a central theme of Miller and Slater's (2000) work on the Internet. Through an ethnographic study of Internet use in Trinidad, they stress how the Internet is not a 'placeless cyberspace', but is rather a communicative technology that is encountered from, and rooted in, particular places, embedded within mundane social structures and relations. For instance, they demonstrate how this media is seen in terms of conventionally 'Trini' forms of sociality involving particular styles of chat and hanging around, and how it has been assimilated into various everyday practices. Email now complements the telephone for family contact in the context of diasporic relations, and websites supplement the television for religious evangelism. This approach to the virtual replicates a means of addressing technology more widely (see MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999). By emphasising how technologies are not self contained entities, but are instead embedded in social relations, discourses and sites, and in turn are also in part constitutive of these social dimensions, it is possible to forgo any simple technological determinism. This dialectic of the social and the technological is also a feature of Science and Technology Studies (see Haraway, 1997; Latour, 2005).

This approach to the virtual contrasts with that adopted by videogame studies, which have been overwhelmingly concerned with the representational context of games. This is a function of a particular cognitive approach to game studies, which draws on the likes of literary and film theory for an analytical framework. It is only recently that studies have begun to address gaming as a social activity, and explore the wider culture of gaming in which it is positioned (see Buckingham, 2006; Schott and Kambouri, 2006). This recent work complements studies of gaming beyond the field of videogame studies, which
has examined the practice in relation to social constructs of gender (see Cassell and Jenkins, 2000; McNamee, 1998). Together, these studies may be taken as embedding the virtual space of videogames in the ‘real’ world.

While it is my concern to question the conceptual distance between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ I adopt a different approach to that outlined above. Rather than seeking to stand ‘outside’ the virtual to see its grounded reality, I adopt an approach that engages with both the space of the ‘real’ world in which the practice of gaming takes place and the representational space of the game itself. My particular concern is how videogame users traverse the boundary between these two spaces, and how they make sense of the relationship between them in their everyday practices. To this end, my primary interest lies not with videogames per se, but rather their use with the consoles on which they are played, which together are approached as a toy, a particular object of material culture that facilitates access to virtual spaces of play. To stress the central role this approach accords to gaming technology - comprising both software and hardware - as a mediator between these two spaces, I refer to the virtual space of the game itself as the ‘mediated’ space of play. By implication, the everyday space of play in which the practice of gaming unfolds is understood as ‘non-mediated’ space (McMahan, 2003).

A variety of virtual spaces

During the fieldwork I was introduced to a number of virtual spaces, including networking sites, the world of Pokémon, and a virtual kitchen. These virtual spaces were accessed via a multitude of technological media: home PCs, static games consoles (such as the Nintendo GameCube and the Sony PlayStation), and handheld consoles (such as the various Nintendo GameBoy and DS systems, and the Sony PSP). Through their specific ergonomics, these technologies facilitate different forms of sociality between machine and user, and between multiple users. This was emphasised by a particular event that occurred during a research session conducted in the home of Emily and Ben. The two children, their mother and I had gathered around the widescreen television in the lounge to watch the video footage Emily had recorded whilst borrowing the camcorder for a weekend. We came to a clip of Ben and his
friends playing computer games in his room. Ben and his friend, Carl, were sitting at one end of the bed engaged with a racing game on his SonyPlaystation2 console. They exchanged talk about game tactics and passed the handset between them (see Figure 7.1). A second friend, Chris, was slouched on the bed behind them glued to the screen of his handheld Sony PSP (see Figure 7.2). This scene prompted the following dialogue between Ben and his mother:

Ben: I find Chris so rude though cos he just comes and sits there playing his PSP and ignores everything, which is a bit out. Look!
Mother: But that's Chris all over.
Ben: Yeah, but I told him go and, help us do this, and he said, "No, I'm playing my PSP". At one point I wanted to ban him from here.

('Interview' with Ben and Emily, 13th March 2007)

This scene is later followed by a second clip of Ben playing with his PlayStation2. This time he is playing alone, sitting under his bed covers. The action is being filmed by his friend Thomas. Emily walks into the room playing on her handheld Nintendo DS (see Figure 7.3). The light tinkling sound of her Stuart Little game jars with the heavy sound of car engines coming from Ben's television set. Emily briefly chats to Thomas as she plays, before she exits the room, looking down at the screen as she walks.

This example illustrates some of the key features of the different forms of sociality facilitated by the ergonomics of different games consoles. The PlayStation2 console is attached via a cable to a television set. Players interact with the game via a handset, which is attached to the console via a second cable. (Wireless handsets are now available on the market, but were not present in any of the households at the time of study.) A third cable connects the console to an external power supply (see Figure 7.4). This means of connection situates the console and the player in a particular spatial arrangement. The console and television have to be positioned according to distance to a plug socket, and the player has to position themselves in relation to the screen, with a maximum
Figure 7.1  Collaborative PlayStation Play

Source: Still from Emily’s video diary
Figure 7.2  Isolated PSP Play

Source: Still from Emily's video diary
Figure 7.3  Mobile Nintendo DS Play

Source: Still from Emily's video diary
Figure 7.4  The (Static) Sony PlayStation Setup

Source: Adapted from a diagram in the Sony PlayStation Manual (2006)
distance between console and player specified by the length of the connecting
cable. This contrasts with the handheld Nintendo DS, which, due to its internal
power supply and integrated controls is mobile. Emily was free to walk as she
played, free to take up temporary position in a variety of rooms in the house. It
should be noted that it is often usual for players to adopt a sedentary position
whilst playing, like Chris does with his handheld Sony PSP. However, the
incorporation of screen and controls in a single unit does mean that players can
adopt a greater variety of sedentary positions. For example, Devan would
sometimes lie on her back, holding the console in the air, whilst playing (see
Figure 7.5). The single unit of handheld consoles means that, unlike static
consoles, they are usually reserved for one player games, as aptly demonstrated
by Chris. They do not tend to foster collaborative play as it is difficult for more
than one person to see the screen at a time and for the controls to be shared.
(Handheld games consoles do come equipped with infrared capabilities which
facilitate the exchange of information between them, but the children in this
study did not make use of this feature. The same is true of the ‘net’ capabilities
of static consoles.)

In this chapter, I focus on one particular technology – Sony’s PlayStation2 – for
two reasons. The first is the wealth of material that it generated during the
fieldwork. This was in part because of its sedentary nature. To play on the
PlayStation (as with the Nintendo GameCube) was often a clear choice. It meant
moving to a particular room, which, in instances involving multiple players,
would quickly become dominated by the sounds and actions of the gameplay.
Handheld games did not command the same level or duration of attention.
Gameplay would occur in and around other household activities. For instance,
Katie would play on her Nintendo DS whilst sitting on the sofa next to her
mother who was watching television. She would often switch between gameplay,
television viewing and chatter. The second reason for the choice of the
PlayStation is the certain form of sociality it fostered. I was able to easily
interact in gameplay with the children. The importance of this aspect will
become clear as the chapter develops.

For the purposes of clarity, the chapter will primarily draw on the gameplay that
unfolded in one particular household, that which was home to Stephen and
Figure 7.5  Flexible Nintendo DS Play

Source: Still from Devan’s video diary
Matthew. Both brothers were avid PlayStation2 users. Each boy had their own console, which sat at the end of their bed. These beds were placed parallel to each other, with a dividing distance of no more than a metre, in the bedroom they shared. The following extract from Matthew's activity diary describes the role of the Playstation (and in this case, the game Pro Evolution Soccer) in their daily routines:


Monday: Get breakfast. Get changed to go to school. Go to school. Come home, get changed, have tea. Play on Pro Evolution Soccer. Watch TV, play on Pro Evolution Soccer. Get supper, watch TV, go to bed.

The rest of the week continues in a similar manner, and is typical for both brothers. During the research sessions we also used the 'family' console, which was located in the lounge, connected to the widescreen television. I now ask you to accompany me into a series of forays with the virtual.

**Traversing the Virtual**

You join us at the Madjeski Stadium on a clear sunny day. The boys take up their positions, sitting cross-legged in front of the widescreen TV, each cradling a handset in their hands. Today Reading and Arsenal are going head to head. Stephen currently reigns as the undefeated champion of FIFA 07, but as they kick off it is all to play for. They gaze at the screen, their tiny movements made in relation to the handset barely discernable. Then thirteen virtual minutes into the game, "he's through on goal..."


Tierry Henry steps up to take the kick. Quiet anticipation descends. A gentle tap of the button...
Stephen jumps to his feet, pointing down at his brother, who slouches over. “Oo la oo la oo la,” he chants before breaking into song, “I saved a penalty, I saved a penalty!”

He jumps back down to the floor as play continues. Seventy minutes pass by in a flash. A blur of chants, arm gestures and jumps, free kicks, passes and saves. This ‘ninety minute’ match unfolds in just fifteen minutes of ‘real’ time. Half time is bypassed by the tap of a button. Reading are winning three nil.

“Lauren passes to Hleb.” Now Ljungberg’s in control. They’re making their attack, pushing forwards in the dying seconds. Can they claw one back? Maybe, possibly... But the final whistle’s blown. Stephen jumps to his feet, punching the air triumphantly. “Yeah!!!!! Oooopps” He is leapt upon by his brother, who pulls him to the ground. Stephen yelps. “He’s just mad because he lost.” They wrestle each other. Then Matthew manages to get his brother in a headlock causing him to surrender, “Aaaaaahhhh, get offffffff”

With the Madjeski Stadium left behind we rejoin Stephen in a crowded arena in his bedroom. Last man standing match. On the way to the ring, from West Newbury, Massachusetts, weighing in at 248lbs, John Cena! [Music booms] And the opponent from Ontario, Canada, weighing in at 249lbs... Stephen taps a button. The wrestlers face each other in the ring. Ding ding. Cena launches at his opponent knocking him to the ground. He then jumps to his feet, pulls up his opponent and pushes him into the corner ropes, before pulling him towards him and slamming him to the mat again. Matthew bounds into the room and dives onto Stephen’s bed. Stephen’s gaze remains fixed on the screen. Matthew scoops up his teddy and walks out to the landing area just beyond the bedroom. He slams the teddy into the ground and jumps, body outstretched on top of him. This catches Stephen’s attention. Pausing the onscreen action, he grabs a second teddy and joins his brother. They conspire to enact a tag team match, the boys versus the bears. They take it in turn to parade around the landing, banging their chests and punching the air, rousing the imaginary crowd. As they...
swagger they provide a rhythmic beat, “Introducing the tag team champions of the world!” They move to the spare room where they are able to use bunk beds as ropes. Ding ding ding. “Ahhh ohhh, he goes for the head.” Stephen grabs his opponent by the throat and slams him to the ground before stamping on his torso. Picking up his opponent, he throws him over his head and they both fall to the floor. “One, two, three, four, five...” Matthew offers his brother his hand from the ropes. “Six, seven, eight...” Stephen stumbles to his feet and tags his brother’s hand, prompting him to leap into the ring and take over.

Engagement: the flow of knowledge and skill

The concept of immersion covers a range of attentive states, which involve the feeling of submersion. In relation to videogames, it is motivated by a combination of their playable and representational qualities. The concept is not unique to videogame theory, but is rather borrowed from other fields of study, including literary theory, virtual reality analysis and presence theory (Carr, 2006; McMahan, 2003). These particular origins induce subtle differences in understandings of the term. The term ‘immersion’ is often used synonymously with ‘presence’, which is a particular attentive state defined loosely as ‘the feeling of being there’, being in a synthetic environment in a non-mediated manner (McMahan, 2003). It refers to a particular form of psychological submersion, which Murray (1997:98-99) describes as being similar to the physical experience of being submerged in water:

‘the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. We enjoy the movement out of our familiar world, the feeling of alertness that comes from being in this new place, and the delight that comes from learning to move within it’.

This preoccupation with mental absorption as imaginative investment effaces the other forms of investment players may engage in beyond the diegetic level. ‘Diegesis’ originates from the Greek term for ‘recounted story’, and is
conventionally used in videogame theory to refer to the virtual environment of any given game, which is determined by unique rules, limits, goals and 'history' (Rehak, 2003). This effacement has prompted McMahan (2003) to draw attention to alternative senses of immersion that may be engendered in relation to videogames. She reserves the use of the term 'presence' for discussion of immersion on the diegetic level, and introduces the term 'engagement' to attend to how players may appreciate and get caught up in the game on a non-diegetic level. This refers to a more critical, deliberate mode of participation, a distanced strategic stance (Carr, 2006), which is concerned with gaining points, devising winning strategies and demonstrating prowess to other players. This section concerns itself with the matter of engagement, considering how wider knowledge practices and skills are drawn upon in and further developed through the practice of gaming.

Engaging knowledge

Stephen demonstrated a clear appreciation of his football based videogames at a non-diegetic level. He was active in his accumulation of layers of meaning that had strategic value. These included an understanding of team tactics and game plans, information relating to various football players and teams. He also enjoyed showing his prowess to other players, namely his younger brother and me. To understand Stephen's engagement it is necessary to situate his gaming practice in relation to a passion for football more generally, and the various practices and social relations through which this passion is engendered and expressed. In this respect, we can draw on work on virtual geographies that seeks to position virtual technologies in social, institutional and historical contexts.

Along with his father and brother, Stephen holds a season ticket for Reading FC, and regularly watches them play, both home and away. He actively draws on knowledge gained from experience of these live matches and the practice of following a team's performance in their respective league. (At the time of study Reading FC were in the English Premier League.) His knowledge of teams was not restricted to Reading FC, but extended to his team's competitors, and was particularly seen in relation to popular, high profile teams such as Manchester
United and Chelsea. Stephen was an active participant in a broader football culture. As discussed in chapter 4, Stephen was an avid 'collector' of football themed Shoot Out cards and Merlin Premier League stickers, which carry information and statistics about Premier League teams and players. These were exchanged with school friends who shared a passion for football, along with posters and cuttings from football magazines. These exchanges were not merely concerned with the sharing of material goods, but with information. This was not only a process of extending friendship, but of expanding knowledge. This knowledge was not restricted to statistics, but also involved chants, taken from the terraces and enacted in exchanges of banter. There was a particular vocabulary, attitude and set of conventions that Stephen drew on and in turn reproduced.

Stephen expressed the knowledge gained through his participation in this culture and the practices that sustained it in his gameplay. For instance, he would interject statements such as, "He scored an own goal against Reading" when particular players' names flashed up on the screen as they gained possession of the ball. He also enacted various chants as he played, chants that related to specific players ("He's M U R T Y, he knows he is, he's sure he is, he's M U R T Y"), chants that related to specific teams ("And it's suuuuper Reading, Super Reading FC, they're by far the greatest team the world has ever seen") and generic chants that are usually aimed at the fans of opposing teams ("Stand up if you're one nil up"). The game allowed Stephen to demonstrate his knowledge and to express his status as a football fan. This was just as important as the demonstration of game based skill. He revelled in the ability to correct his brother's inferior knowledge about particular players, scoffing at his mispronunciation of foreign players' names, or mocking his failure to remain up-to-date with changes in team personnel:

Matthew: [referring to Stephen's comments about Sol Campbell being stupid] So you think an England player's stupid?
Stephen: Ooooooo. He doesn't even play for them any more!
Matthew: [in an accusatory tone] Sol Campbell?!
Stephen: No he doesn’t! As soon as Steven Gerrard come in he didn’t put him in the first team
Matthew: [mumbles] He still plays for ‘em

(Video Footage recorded 27th December 2006)

Stephen’s football related knowledge was not only demonstrated during the game, but also in the ‘setting up’ procedures. Before ‘kicking off’ each match he would take the time to make adjustments to the team’s default setting, editing the selection and formation of the starting eleven, along with the positions and roles of specific players, game plans and team strategies. This demonstrates not only knowledge of player ability and team tactics, but also a deeper knowledge of the workings of the videogame, and is a means of feeling in control. This also had the effect of intimidating players new to the game, such as me, who referred to such editing as ‘fancy stuff’. Matthew and I tended to concentrate on the match itself, using the time prior to kick off to psych ourselves up and ‘get in the zone’. These alterations were seen to be above and beyond what was required to play at this level, given that the outcome of the match in terms of the victor was somewhat inevitable. Stephen did not lose a game to either his younger brother or me throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Of course it could be argued that one of the reasons for this was his preparatory manipulations. However, given his competent gameplay once the starting whistle had been blown, these preparations were seen as a form of ‘showing off’.

The intimidating effect of these alterations was compounded during the match when Stephen would pause the play to make a substitution (see figure 7.6). This demonstrated a greater level of control over the direction of the match, marked by the jolting halt in onscreen action for this change to be achieved. As Stephen’s team were often winning at the time he opted to make a substitution, his decision to do so may be understood as an intentional expression of his prowess.

The football related knowledge Stephen demonstrated was not limited to that concerning teams’ reputations, players’ abilities or strategic play, but also encompassed experiential knowledge of particular stadiums. During a virtual
Figure 7.6 Making a Substitution

Source: Still from video footage of Stephen and Matthew’s gameplay
match between Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur Stephen commented on the home ground, Old Trafford:

Stephen: I sat right up there [...] quite high up [...]  
Tara: could you see much?  
Stephen: yeah you can see, cos it's a bit high up, you can hard,  
cos the ground, the height of the ground's quite high up, then you can't see the whole of the pitch cos even the [roofing?] is so long you can't see the whole of the pitch. You can see most of it  

(Video Footage recorded 27th December 2006)

This is yet another expression of his status as a match going fan, but this knowledge also adds an additional layer of meaning to the game's graphical representation of its tangible counterpart. This allowed a greater sense of attachment to the game and a deeper sense of immersion in the game world. Stephen was able to picture himself being part of the crowd. Compared to action adventure games, interaction with the virtual environment in the simulation games favoured by Stephen was typically low because the action centred on the interaction of graphical representations of known footballers and wrestlers. McMahan (2003) discusses the quality of social interaction available in the virtual reality environment as a factor influencing the level of immersion attained. This social interaction is not restricted to virtual characters, but also applies to virtual space. The perceptual or photo realism of the virtual stadium environment – how well the environment looks and sounds like the 'real' world – facilitated this engagement. This realism could be further enhanced by the ability to select the weather and playing conditions for a match, allowing the player to replicate the conditions experienced during stadium visits. This social interaction with the mediated environment permitted social interaction in the non-mediated world as Stephen relayed his experiential knowledge.

Engagement with the game was also facilitated by a second form of realism – social realism – which is the extent to which a media portrayal is plausible in terms of reflecting events that do or could occur in the non-mediated world (McMahan, 2003). Certain features of the game made it reminiscent of live
coverage of actual football matches. These included the display of the score and match duration in the top left-hand corner of the screen, the use of camera angles, close ups of the referee’s actions and replays of goals scored. While these features may stress observation rather than participation, they were coupled with the easy recognition of known players, the change in perspective for set pieces and dead-ball situations and a controllability of onscreen movement. Taken together, these features gave the game a ‘real’ feel (see Figure 7.7 and Track 13).

This was clearly seen when the boys played an earlier version of the FIFA game, first registered in 1993, that existed as a bonus feature on the FIFA 07 disc. In comparison to the latest version, the graphics, sound and controllability were crude:

The sound, which is supposed to represent the cheers of the crowd, cuts through you; a sound reminiscent of one designed either to brainwash or induce insanity by torture. It is relentless in its monotone, a non-sound that only makes some sort of sense when experienced with the imagery of the game. The graphics pay a toll on the eyes, making you squint at the screen. Stephen comments that it is ‘foggy’. The players dive into the air whenever tackled, a move made more spectacular by the flash of the star that follows the footballer in play. It is difficult to follow the play as movement is not fluid. Both boys comment on the restricted movement. The ‘camera’ that follows the play is rooted in, and pivots about one spot. Characters are indistinct from one another, except from the name that flashes at the bottom of the screen. Celebrations are not performed by the players; they are instead represented by the scroll of dot composed graphics across the screen.

(Field Diary Extract, 14th February 2007)

While playing this game the boys did not chant and tease each other like they did when playing the later version. Rather they exchanged talk about the names of unknown players that appeared at the bottom of the screen. The match I witnessed was their first engagement with this version of the game, and given
Figure 7.7  Changing Points of View

Source: Stills from video footage of Stephen and Matthew’s gameplay

Overview of the pitch. Note the time and score display in the top left-hand corner.

Change of angle for dead ball situations

Close up view for players’ interactions with the referee.

View from behind the goal.
their less than positive response to it, they expected it to also be their last. While the crude graphics inhibited immersion in the sense of presence, their lack of knowledge of the players depicted also inhibited a more distanced immersion in the form of engagement.

An understanding of Stephen's mode of engagement in the game requires appreciation of how his gaming practice is positioned in a broader context, situated in relation to wider football related practices. As Wakeford (1999) argues, virtual technologies are not self-contained entities; they have to be seen as socialised. They cannot be considered in isolation from the 'landscapes of translation' in which they are encountered and used. For the combined PlayStation/FIFA technology, these landscapes of translation include the home in which professional football is domesticated, the school playground in which knowledge about professional football is exchanged and the non-mediated football stadium where professional football is experienced first-hand. These landscapes of translation encompass a variety of objects beyond the console and game, including programmes, trading cards, sticker albums and televisions. The PlayStation technology was not merely socialised as a technology, but as a form of football paraphernalia and a source of football related knowledge. The videogame technology was involved in a circuit of football related knowledge, acting as not only a means through which to express knowledge, but also a means of gaining and clarifying information.

It is also a tool for generating a complementary system of knowledge. While the outcomes of past matches are fixed, and the reputations of certain teams are commonly understood, alternatives can be crafted in the game space; expectations can be upset. For one match Stephen chose to play as Sheffield United, while his brother opted for Chelsea. Given the relative successes of these teams in the Premier League at the time of study, it would be expected that Matthew's team would win this match. (Although of course upsets do occur in the non-mediated world of football.) Despite playing as the underdog, Stephen triumphed yet again. While the brother was disappointed to have lost, neither boy seemed particularly surprised at the outcome as it related to mediated space. They were, however, excited about the implications of the outcome in relation to the non-mediated world:
Stephen exclaims excitedly, “I can’t wait to tell Dad that Sheffield United beat Chelsea”... As his father comes through the backdoor [some time later] Stephen shouts to him, desperate to tell him about Sheffield United’s victory. “Guess what, Sheffield United beat Chelsea 3-1!” They exchange chat about Sheffield United’s ability and success, or rather lack of it, against their own team Reading. (Field Diary Extract, 27th December 2006)

News of a team’s success in the mediated world is shared in the same manner as knowledge pertaining to the non-mediated world. Alternatives to the non-mediated world were also crafted through Stephen’s use of the game’s league mode, in which he created his own Reading team that was bringing him success in the virtual league table at the time of study. Able to manipulate his players’ abilities and team tactics, Stephen was able to live out a fantasy where his chosen team won the nation’s most prestigious league.

The respective knowledges pertaining to mediated and non-mediated spaces are not evidence of opposing worlds, but rather supplementary overlapping worlds. To say that one is real or true while the other is artificial is empirically incorrect as both forms of knowledge carry weight. This was reiterated by a comment made by Stephen during a virtual match. As Stephen taunted his brother by saying that his Manchester United team were the worst team in the world, Matthew responded by asserting that they are not “cos in real life Reading [Stephen’s team] lost to ‘em four nil”. Stephen replied, “Yeah but real life don’t matter. It’s the game that’s important.” This relationship between the mediated and non-mediated is also witnessed in the boys’ reactions to the footage of their gameplay recorded by the camcorder. As they sat together watching footage of the match just played they relived particular moments, predicted forthcoming events, offered commentary and repeated chants and cheers enacted as the play had originally unfolded. Footage of the recorded match was experienced like replays of a live match. In the same manner that Stephen could recall knowledge of particular matches that occurred in the non-mediated world, he could recall knowledge of virtual matches:
Stephen: [Watching back footage of a match several months after it was recorded] I won anyway. Matty was Arsenal and I was Reading. Reading won. Oh yeah, here's your second penalty...I saved all your penalties. And he gets a red card as well.

('Interview' with Stephen, 20th August 2007)

While the longevity of this mediated knowledge is yet to be determined, the relationship it shares with its non-mediated counterpart is evidence of interrelated rather than separate spaces of action.

**Engaging skills**

It is not only cognitive knowledge, but also embodied skills that are shared between mediated and non-mediated spaces. By definition, the practice of gaming is a pleasurable repetitive learning process that involves concrete motor skills (Grodal, 2003). Players may be motivated to play a game by a fantasy of leading their favourite team to victory or the ability to pulverise a burly 18 stone wrestler. However, these motivations exist in a nested hierarchy with a series of lower order goals, such as handling processes, which are recruited in the quest for victory (Grodal, 2003). The manuals that accompany videogames often offer a bewildering array of game controls, which proceed in a hierarchical order from basic controls involving the use of just one button to more complex controls that require precise sequences and combinations of buttons. The player is required to learn not only what actions the pressing of different buttons achieve, but how these separate actions can be pieced together efficiently and the precise timings this involves. Despite this, the boys did not read the accompanying manuals before endeavouring to play a new game. They favoured a practical, embodied approach, drawing on a bank of general gaming skill, which was cultivated by the use of different videogames, of both similar and different genres. The boys were able to build on general handling techniques, tailoring these to specific games. As O'Connor (2005) explains in relation to the embodied practice of glass-blowing, even the novice is not experience-less, but rather they are equipped with dispositions and schemata for handling unfamiliar situations. The body 'catches' already known components of the new activity and, with
some adjustments to existing skill, handles the new situation with greater or lesser degrees of success.

This restructuring of experience, which happens at the level of the body rather than being conscious and deliberate, was not limited to the practice of gaming. Stephen's development of gaming skill also rested on his ability to transfer embodied knowledge gained through playing football and enacting wrestling moves in the non-mediated world. This may at first appear a strange statement to make given that these different kinds of activity rely on very different sets of motor skills. The videogame reduces the complex motor skills that engage the whole body required by these sports, to the pressing of buttons by thumbs and fingers. However, the act of mediation provided by the gaming technology functions as a link between these different sets of skills.

There have been recent moves within the study of videogames to address the question of interactivity and the importance of gameplay as an embodied experience. A particular strand of this work has looked to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) assertion of the embodied nature of perception (Ryan, 2001; Sommerseth, 2007). From this perspective, consciousness is not seen as separate from embodiment. Perceptions are not solely mental states, but are embodied, being interdependent with physical action (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). This concept prompts an appreciation of how we remain embodied subjects whilst engaged in 'virtual' worlds, challenging discourses of bodily transcendence commonly found in writing on cyberspace (Lahti, 2003). It recasts the disembodied player, which is founded on a Cartesian model of perception, as a fictional subject.

To elucidate this idea of embodied perception as it pertains to digital media, I turn to the work of Munsterburg (2004) and Marks (2000) on the multisensory experience of film. This understanding of the audiovisual medium is based on the concept of synesthesia, which is the process by which a sensation in one part of the body is produced by a stimulus applied to another part. Discussion of visuality is shifted from the optical terms by which it is usually dominated. Vision is understood as exceeding cognition because it is located in the body. Thus, film is not grasped by an intellectual act, but by the perception of the
body. It becomes a visceral event that mobilises bodily sensation. While the two-dimensional nature of the film is known by viewers, it is not the immediate impression they form of the pictures in front of them. Rather, an experience of depth and movement are produced by the spectator's mind and invested in the image before them. To this end, the film viewer is not passive, but is actively engaged in participation, sharing and performing cinematic space dialogically. The cinematic encounter that takes place is not between two bodies, that of the viewer and the film, but is between two sensoria. If we transfer this idea to the act of gaming, we can see that the player invests the two-dimensional onscreen action with depth and movement as it mobilises bodily sensation. This bodily sensation is informed by our physical experiences in non-mediated space. Thus, sliding tackles or body slams may be met with a sharp intake of breath, an "oooo" or an "owww".

While an appreciation of the multisensory experience of film may inform our understanding of gaming, it fails to acknowledge a fundamental aspect of the videogame - its interactivity. This feature distinguishes gameplay from other kinds of textual consumption: "The game signals its dependence on the player as (except during cut scenes) the avatar will not move without some action on the part of the player" (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006: 108). This specific feature of the medium enables us to effect onscreen action by some motor action via the interface. A feedback loop exists between mediated space and non-mediated space, enacted via the handset, which inputs action, and the avatar, which feeds the actions back to us. Via this loop, skills developed in non-mediated space are employed in endeavours to influence mediated action. This process can be represented by means of Grodal's (2003) flow model concerning an embodied brain approach to the story experience. Grodal emphasises the relation of 'unmediated real-life' experiences, and the mental structures that support them, to the activity of gaming. He asserts that media representations (the onscreen action) are a different realisation of basic 'real-life' experience. His flow model begins with perceptions (I see a hulk of a man coming towards me), and progresses to emotions (I feel fear because I know he could hurt me), followed swiftly by cognitions (I think I should hit him), before culminating in action (the motor act of hitting). The videogame allows the 'full experiential flow' of the story experience by linking perceptions, emotions and cognitions with actions.
It is possible to adapt Grodal’s model to account for the role of skills developed in non-mediated space in the process of causal inferences. The initial perception is embodied, provoking bodily sensation. The proceeding thought is imbued with an embodied response as the player ‘thinks’ about the motor skill they would employ in non-mediated space to enable the desired embodied (re)action. In the progression from cognition to action the player translates this motor skill into the differential motor skill that will enable this action to come into effect in mediated space, for instance, the particular combination of buttons that will enact that specific action. I discuss the processing of this information in greater detail in the following section.

This transferral of skill was aptly demonstrated by instances when mediated and non-mediated action where placed side by side. For instance, when practising his shooting skills in the Pro Evolution Soccer game, Stephen got to his feet, took a small jump planting his left foot slightly in front of the right one and swung his right leg from behind, forward across his body. In so doing he was striking an imaginary ball. With this skill in mind he sat back down to practice, visualising the desired onscreen action. This transferral of skills needs to be understood as informative rather than definitive. The subjectivity and corporeality of the mediated and non-mediated body are not mutually exclusive, nor indistinct, rather they are continuous and complementary (Lahti, 2003).

Via these corporeal relations players are able to extend the capabilities of their physical body, as complex motor skills are reduced to the pressing of buttons. This liberating corporeal potential is described as the ‘corporeal pleasure’ of gaming. Somewhat distinctly, Lahti (2003) also draws attention to the ‘corporeal disciplines’ of gaming, in terms of the mechanisation of the body induced by the repetitive movements it entails. Beyond the idea of repetition, this notion of corporeal discipline can be applied to the reverse transferral of skills from mediated to non-mediated practice. This transferral of skill was evidenced in the boys’ non-mediated wrestling bouts. This is a practice that has been developed by the boys replicating moves they have seen on televised or recorded footage of WWE bouts and the graphical representation of wrestling moves within their videogames. While short, sharp bursts of wrestling moves could and did occur at any time in this household, they would certainly occur...
when the boys played one of their wrestling videogames. It was as if the wrestling erupted from the mediated space:

Tools downed, Stephen stands paused while Matthew runs towards him. In a swift action Stephen scoops up his brother in a fireman’s lift, spinning round to set him down on the sofa, to the displeasure of his mother, who instructs them that they should not be climbing on the furniture. With his mother out of the room, Matthew follows this with leaps from the arm of the sofa. Climbing up onto the arm, he balances briefly before taking his leap, landing in a heap on the floor.
(Field Diary Extract, 14th February 2007)

WWE matches can appear to be particularly aggressive and vicious, with the use of such objects as chairs and tables to strike opponents, as this extract from the game commentary illustrates:

'I don’t care how tough you are, a chair shot is a chair shot. You can’t take too many of those and expect to continue... He’ll stop at nothing to get what he wants... Pain is natural selection in action.... He’s certainly not showing his opponent here any mercy tonight... This match is going to continue until someone is completely debilitated'.
(Game Commentary, WWE SmackDown vs RAW 2007)

However, there is a realism to the boys’ replication of wrestling moves. No injuries were sustained during the tussles. While they were produced by, and further generated frantic energy, there was a consideration and precision to the moves that recognised and managed the possibility of injury. As the boys watched the wrestling moves on screen, bodily sensations were mobilised. These were translated in relation to the capabilities and limitations of their own physical bodies. In an effort to avoid the pain they indirectly experienced through their viewing they adapted the moves they enacted, for instance, slowing down action so that they could land in a particular way. They were replicating a particular aesthetic through corporeal discipline. In these explorations of physical sensation the boys were going far beyond the spectator
or player role (McBride and Bird, 2007). They were enacting an alternative mode of interactivity with the game.

The circulatory flow of knowledge and skill I have outlined blurs the boundaries between mediated and non-mediated space. These boundaries can be further confused by attending to the fluidity between body and technology, and extending the notion of embodied gameplay beyond the corporealisation of perception.

Presence: the fluidity of body and technology

From ‘engagement’, I wish to turn attention to ‘presence’ and investments in relation to the diegetic level. As already stated, presence refers to a particular attentive state associated with ‘the feeling of being there’. Dovey and Kennedy (2006) explain that there are two ways of understanding player subjectivity. One is in terms of the embodied player located in space and time, the other is in terms of the ‘re-embodied’ player in relation to the avatar. While it is useful to distinguish these two ways analytically, it should be remembered that they are continuous and complementary. This is because of the cybernetic nature of gameplay, the interdependency of game and player, which prompts a subjectivity that depends on a collapse of the boundary between human and machine. Dovey and Kennedy (2006:109) refer to this as a ‘cyborgian subjectivity – composed of wires, machines, code and flesh’. The interface mediates between these two subjectivities. However, despite this central role played by the interface, the material technologies involved in gameplay have been neglected in discourses around immersion. Attention has focussed on the role of the avatar and the associated viewing position in the development of subjectivity (Burn, 2006a; Lahti, 2003; Rehak, 2003). In this section I attend to each of these matters in turn, examining gameplay as an embodied technologically mediated experience. I begin by emphasising how gameplay is a tactile and kinaesthetic experience, involving relationships with material objects that must be handled skilfully and appropriately. Through this discussion I demonstrate how the experience of gaming is as much a matter of ‘doing things’ as ‘being’ there (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). In directly addressing relations with the handset, I challenge the privileged position that the playing subject
assumes in accounts of interactivity as *the* agent in gameplay. Having addressed one aspect of the cybernetic loop, I then turn attention to the children's relationships with the avatar. Rather than following a tendency to restrict the avatar to the game, I consider how a life beyond mediated space influences embodied relationships with it.

*Embodying the handset*

A number of theorists within the field of game studies have called for attention to be paid to the distinctive interactive features of videogames as an audiovisual medium (Darley, 2000; Poole, 2000; Wolf and Perron, 2003). These have been accompanied and complemented by calls for greater attention to be paid to the kinaesthetic dimension of gaming as it is exhibited in and through player activity (Behrenshausen, 2007; Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). The neglect of these aspects of gaming practice and experience results from the hegemony of occularcentrism in the field, which ‘narrows thinking and theorising about videogames to cognitive, psychological, or quasi-cinematic concerns’ (Behrenshausen, 2007:335). However, player activity is ergodic in nature, not merely occurring on the mental plane, but also involving some physical aspect. This ergodic activity can be subdivided into diegetic activity – what a player's avatar does as a result of player activity – and extradiegetic activity – what a player is physically doing to achieve a certain result (Wolf and Perron, 2003). While an appreciation of the kinaesthetic dimension demands an understanding of the embodied nature of perception, as outlined above, it also requires us to go beyond this so as not to reproduce the metonymical reduction of the player’s body to a set of eyes (Behrenshausen, 2007). I consider such extradiegetic activity through an account of my journey of progression as a gamer, which begins with an examination of the contrasting styles of play exhibited by myself, as a novice gamer, and the boys, as experienced gamers. Differences in styles of play are representative of different levels of fluidity between the gaming technology and the body, which in turn, engender different levels of corporeal immersion.

To date, attempts to examine powerfully corporeal modes of immersion, beyond sight, have addressed games such as Dance Dance Revolution (DDR), which rely
on the use of Bemani machines in arcades or accessories such as dance mats in the home (see Behrenshausen, 2007; Chien, 2006). Such games necessitate a player's body to be in full motion, and turn players into performers by putting the body on display and turning it into a spectacle (see Figure, 7.8). As there is no overarching narrative, the object of the game is to perform and perform well (Behrenshausen, 2007). While studies of Bemani games offer important insights into gaming as a wholly embodied phenomenon, they fail to offer a sustained challenge to a more general neglect of player activity by suggesting that it is only relevant to one particular genre of videogame among many.

This chapter builds on and extends these studies by considering player activity as it relates to players' tactile engagements with the staple handset, which is more modest in character and facilitates engagement with a multitude of game genres. In particular I consider the DUALSHOCK 2 Analog controller, the standard handset for the PlayStation2, which, unlike predecessors to the DUALSHOCK style of controller, is touch sensitive and has a vibration feedback function (see Figure 7.9). By addressing extradiegetic activity it is possible to further challenge notions of bodily transcendence that are taken for granted in relation to gaming and engagements with cyberspace more generally. As Lahti (2003:169) suggests:

> 'If something is left behind when we play, it is not the body. We may be toying with the body when we play but we remain flesh as we become machines'.

The bodily dimension of gaming is recognised in the manufacturer's health warning printed in the PlayStation2 instruction manual. Players are warned by Sony (2006:5) to:

> 'Stop using the console immediately if you begin to feel tired or experience discomfort or pain in your hands and/or arms while operating the controller... The vibration function of the Analog Controller...can aggravate injuries. Do not use the vibration function...if you have any ailment or injury to the bones, joints or
Figure 7.8  Embodied DDR Play, Alison using a PlayStation dance mat

Source: Photograph taken by the author
Figure 7.9  Sony DUALSHOCK 2 Analog Controller

* The R3 button and the L3 button function when the stick is pressed.
muscles of the hands and arms. Avoid prolonged use of the Analog Controller... Take a break at about 30-minute intervals'.

To initiate discussion of my progression as a gamer I direct the reader to Figure 7.10 and Track 14, which offer a comparison of the different styles of play demonstrated by myself and Stephen. You can see from the footage that I tend to look down at the buttons, pull the handset sharply in towards my chest, lean in the direction I want the players to go and move forwards to, and backwards from the screen. In contrast, Stephen remains remarkably still and composed. I asked the boys to compare these different styles. Stephen explained, “You’re slower on the handset.” As first this comment seemed to contradict the action seen onscreen. Compared to his actions my tapping of the buttons was more furious and fast paced. However, his comment was intended as an expression of the lack of fluidity between my mind, comprehending the action on screen, and the relay of information to my hands in response to this action. There were a number of reasons for this lack of fluidity. Firstly, I did not know which buttons to press to exact particular moves:

Immediately at kick off I look down at the handset. “I can’t remember which one’s [button] which.” I look back to the screen just as my onscreen character stumbles while trying to gain possession of the ball. “Oh, that one’s fall over.” We both laugh. “Square’s to shoot, circle’s to whack it, X is to pass” offers Stephen.

“Yeah well I didn’t do that.” My players seem to have minds of their own. “I didn’t do that either. They’re just doing they’re own little thing.”

Stephen laughs, “That’s cos you’re just pressing any button cos you don’t know what to do!”

(Field diary extract, 4th May 2006)

As I did not know which button to press I would repeatedly press any button to play the law of averages, hoping that at least on occasion I would hit the right button at the right time so as to have the desired effect on the avatar. Here I was at a disadvantage because my button pressing then appeared to not be synchronised with the action unfolding on the screen. For example, if I was not
Figure 7.10  Different Styles of Play

Source: Stills from video footage of Stephen’s gameplay
in possession of the ball when I hit a button the game would then exact the
move as soon as I gained possession, meaning that there was no control of the
pass and no direction on the ball, so I would instantly lose it to my opponent.
This habit was recognised in Stephen's advice to me, "Don't press too many
buttons Tara if you wanna win". Stephen's use of the buttons is organised - one
touch for every move - and precise - each touch enacted at a particular
moment. I refer the reader to Figure 7.11 and Track 15, which demonstrate this
more disciplined style of play. From the close up footage you can see how
Stephen taps the buttons and manoeuvres the stick in a gentle, but determined
manner.

Secondly, I had no concept of the need to apply different levels of pressure to
the buttons to control the force of action. The handset is equipped with motion
sensing technology that causes the buttons to be pressure sensitive. This allows
players to adjust the force of a kick, for example. My hammering, rather than
gentle tapping of the buttons was influenced by the frantic nature of my
gameplay, which was further unaided by the third reason for my lack of fluidity.

Success not only relies on learning which buttons enact which moves, but also
where particular buttons are located on the handset. It is one thing to be able to
look at the handset and say what each of the buttons do, the real skill is teaching
the thumb to know this rather than the head, to make the play automatic. While
the boys' gazes were constantly fixed on the screen, I had to repeatedly look
between screen and handset. It was as if I could track the mental process
unfolding in my mind: 'looking at the screen] I am approaching the goal; I am
going to need to shoot; to enact a shooting move I need to press the square
button; [looking at the handset] where is the square button?' In the time it has
taken you to read this sequence, play would have moved on and I would have
lost the opportunity for an attempt on goal. It was this delay that Stephen was
referring to when commenting that I was 'slower on the handset'. Both boys
explained that when playing they were concentrating on the screen. They did
not need to think about which buttons to press as they instinctively knew the
actions they performed and where they were.
Figure 7.11  Disciplined Play

Source: Stills from video footage of Stephen’s gameplay
Through repeated practice the handset had receded from the boys' consciousness and become an extension of the body. To understand this process it is necessary to move away from cognitive theories of movement and practice towards corporeal theories, which adopt a phenomenological approach to spatial behaviour. Phenomenology places the body at the centre of our experience and emphasises its function as an intelligent, active subject (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This is a notion that is foreign to both cognitive and behaviourist theories of spatial behaviour. Both perspectives view the body as passive, 'an inert thing responding to either orders from cognitive consciousness or stimuli from the external environment' (Seamon, 1979: no pagination). For phenomenologists, the intelligibility of the body is witnessed in expressions of bodily intentionality, which is understood as:

"the inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviours of the person intelligently, and this function as a special kind of subject that expresses itself in a pre-conscious way usually described as 'automatic', 'habitual', 'involuntary' and 'mechanical' (Seamon, 1979: no pagination).

To examine the habitual quality of the boys' gameplay I begin with reference to the work of Seamon (1979), who stresses that bodily intentionality is a function of the body's intelligent connections with the world at hand. Movement takes on a habitual quality when it occurs without intervention of conscious attention. Something in the player acts before he can cognitively act. This 'something' is a directed action in the hands. Behrenshausen (2007) and Chien (2006:25) talk about this directed action in relation to DDR, suggesting that before a player is able to reflect on the practice of play the body is already carrying them through it:

'The player carnally translates signs into meanings and realigns his/her body in response, already propelled by the body's movement toward the next step, indistinguishably before or after he/she makes a conscious, reflective reading of those signs'.
The body develops its intelligibility through repetitive action. As movements become familiar they are incorporated into the body's world of pre-reflective understanding (Seamon, 1979). Given that gaming is a repetitive process by definition it is unsurprising that experienced gamers exhibit habitual movement. It is the mechanical, trancelike character of this movement that encourages an understanding of the gamer's transcendence of the organic body.

By referring to O'Connor's (2005) work on the practice of glass-blowing it is possible to extend Seamon's notion of the world at hand to that of a world of things at hand. O'Connor addresses the differential practice of the novice and the master, placing instruments at the centre of this practice. The novice proceeds successively, breaking a technique down into successive moments. In this vein, the novice has two sets of objects of attention. The first is the part as an end in itself. The second is the part as it serves the broader project otherwise known as the whole. In attending to each successive moment, the novice serves the instrument, consciously attending to it. We see this is the case with my gaming practice. O'Connor draws on the work of Polanyi to understand how progression from novice to master entails a changing relationship with the instrument. Polanyi (1958:59) discusses the process through which instruments recede from consciousness and become extensions of the body:

"[T]he tool...can never lie in the field of...operations; they remain necessarily on our side of it, forming part of ourselves, the operating persons. We pour ourselves out into them and assimilate them as parts of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them".

The boys had what Polanyi terms a subsidiary awareness of the handset. The objects of our subsidiary awareness 'are not watched in themselves; we watch something else [here the screen] while keeping intensely aware of them' (Polanyi, 1958:55). The handset is not an object of attention, but rather an instrument of attention. Polanyi (1958:55) discusses the instrumentalisation of the objects of subsidiary awareness in the context of hammering a nail:
‘We watch the effect of our strokes on the nail and try to wield the hammer so as to hit the nail most effectively. When we bring down the hammer we do not feel that its handle has struck our palm but that its head has struck the nail’ (original emphasis).

The boys had a focal awareness of the effects of their tapping and manoeuvring as it appeared on the screen in the avatars’ execution of passes, dribbling, tackles and shots on goal. This focal awareness incorporated their subsidiary awareness of the handset cradled in their hands, negotiated primarily through movements of the thumbs and forefingers. This subsidiary awareness of the feeling in the hand and its digits is merged into a focal awareness of the ‘control’ of an avatar’s actions. By appreciating our awareness of instruments in this manner, we can understand how the child and the handset enact a cybernetic loop that facilitates an experience of fluidity between body and technology. The differentiated relation of the player subject and the handset object is possible because of their grounding in a common element that Merleau-Ponty (1968) calls ‘the flesh’. ‘Player and game are passionately entwined in this fleshy communion, the body of each figuring from a general mode of existence’ (Behrenshausen, 2007:347). This fleshy communion is not transcendental as common understanding would have you believe, but rather is immanent. It is realised only from the always-already imbricated situation of player and game. Behrenshausen (2007:340) states:

‘Real-izing the imperatives of the machine becomes an obsession whose fulfilment can be located not in an ephemeral and transcendental no-where of cyberutopian rhetoric but rather in the sensuous and tactile pleasures of the immanent here and now’.

Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the flesh permits an appreciation of the reversible relations between subjects and objects. Chien (2006:27) invokes this sense of reversibility in relation to gaming, when she explains:

“The experience of playing DDR is not a unidirectional process where symbols on the page or screen are consciously translated into an appropriate bodily response. Rather, playing manifests in the
vacillating, ambivalent, nonhierarchical relationship between information and body'.

The decentring of the subject that is evoked here is reminiscent of recent work on touch and haptics within geography. This emerging body of work has examined how touch offers a tacit form of understanding, a different, proximal form of knowledge. As such, it is a way of knowing that decentres the subject (Hetherington, 2003; Obrador-Pons, 2007).

As awareness of a practice shifts into focal awareness the practice takes on a lived character. Its understanding is 'not an intellectual synthesis of successive acts by a discerning consciousness', but rather is of the body, it is a bodily intentionality (Seamon, 1979: no pagination). As the need to consciously evaluate each successive constitutive movement of the practice subsides, movement takes on the automatic, habitual, voluntary, mechanical qualities Seamon refers to. We are no longer reading the practice, but living it. Sense-making happens otherwise than retrospective meaning-making. Reading a skill can never be an operative mechanism of proficiency because it calls for an interruption of practice. As O'Connor (2005:190) states:

'When the interpretive effort of 'reading' the practice, understanding how the parts fit into the whole, remains salient to that practice, as essentially a semantic understanding of meaning it forms an immense barrier to the lived experience of the craft as meaningful'.

The delay caused by my processing of information meant I was always thinking about just one move at a time, rather than being able to string different moves together into a smooth sequence as the boys did. Their thinking took on a more fluid character, allowing them to anticipate play and think ahead. As I had to look at both the screen and the handset I could not follow the onscreen action as easily and therefore was unable to match the pace of the game. I was less able to orientate myself in relation to areas of the pitch, my team mates and opponents in possession of the ball because I could only ever focus on one particular element at a time. The boys' bodies were always oriented toward the future. This orientation embodied not the 'what happens next' of traditionally unfolding
narrative, but a 'what happens next if I' that placed the player at the centre of experience (Atkins, 2006). In comparison, I felt removed from the action, always acting in a reactive rather than proactive fashion. The following extract from my field diary emphasises the moment to moment approach of my gameplay:

Every now and again I manage to dazzle myself with a spark of inspired skill, and even manage to string together some inspired moves. These events are rare (and often seemingly not from my hands), so when it happens, I wish we could pause for a brief moment just to appreciate them.
(Field Diary Extract, 14th February 2007)

The lack of control I experienced whilst playing meant I experienced lower levels of presence and hence lower levels of rapture. I was not 'in the game' as the boys were. This is seen in the exaggerated movements of my physical body in non-mediated space:

'My movements on the stick seem more extreme. I can hear it click as I move it from side to side. I twist the handset around, in the direction I want the character to go in. This movement stems from my shoulder with my elbow following. I throw my body into the move willing the avatar to go faster. The handset drops lower in my hands with the pressure I apply to the buttons.'
(Field Diary Extract, 17th August 2007)

These movements were noted in Stephen's advice, "Tara, stop moving your jiggly hands round!" My experience of pain while I played also served to disconnect me from the cybernetic loop of technology and body that permitted the experience of fluidity. It acted as a constant reminder of the physicality of my body, distracting my attention from the mediated space. This pain was individual to me as a novice. My high levels of conscious attention and determination created tension in my body. My fingers and thumbs were held in tense positions around the handset. Rather than floating over controls, my digits were held arched and were used to press the buttons and steer the joystick.
with force. This created tension not only in my hand but in my wrist, which then began to ache. This aching was exacerbated by the tightness of my grip on the handset, which increased the more the pain and frustration grew. I would grip harder in an attempt to retain focus.

This account of my experience is supported by Dovey and Kennedy's (2006:110) suggestion that until the point of proficiency, the interface can be experienced as 'alien, as obdurate and unfriendly', because the precise co-ordination of the hands in relation to an unfamiliar object feels awkward. The handset exercised a form of agency that pertains to its presence in events. It asserted what Sansi-Roca (2005) refers to as an 'untranscended materiality'. The embodied player is coerced into adapting to the various physical competencies expected and preferred by the gaming technology:

'The player is required to become habituated with touching and handling unfamiliar bits of plastic and rubber, to cope with the discomfort of sore thumbs and aching wrists after extended gameplay' (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006:110).

The argument I have set forth regarding the fluidity between body and technology may be grounded by an account of how my gaming practice has developed with experience. With practice, and increasing levels of proficiency, my style of play has changed. I direct readers to Figure 7.12 and Track 16. Here we can see that my negotiation of the handset is much more calm and collected. My gaze remains fixed on the screen, which is now possible because, thanks to repeated practice, I instinctively know the layout of buttons on the handset and which of these to press to exact particular moves. As I am concentrating on the screen, rather than looking at the handset, I can follow the play, which makes the experience less frantic. This progression to a calmer practice represents an increased fluidity between subject and object. Having experienced this fluidity firsthand I am able to appreciate how subsidiary awareness of the tactile generates pleasure. To explain this I return to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) concept of flow. In his elaboration of a new theoretical approach to human motivation Csikszentmihalyi discusses how any activity in which a sense of flow is experienced (work-based, play-based or a blend of the two) can be understood
Figure 7.12  Improved Play

Source: Stills from video footage of researcher’s gameplay
as a pleasurable activity. The pleasure inherent within or potentially gained from an activity is determined by the timely and embodied practice of skills in the negotiation of the various challenges that a given activity offers to an individual. Subsidiary awareness realises a match between challenge and competency. This is expressed in terms of the experience of control over the direction of onscreen action, which is possible due to the successful handling of one's avatar(s). As my proficiency increased accounts of being in control became more prevalent in my field diary:

I win my first game! It felt so different. There was a sense of control. I knew which buttons to press, even if I did not dominate play as much as I would have liked. Defence is still a little shaky. But so much more in control, not haphazard hit and hope. Hands still ache, mainly due to the intensity of my grip. Gripping with excitement. More control means it's more enjoyable. More skill, more pride. (Field Diary Extract, 12th June 2007)

This matter of control and its relation to interactivity has been debated within videogame theory. It has been argued that while players may engage in activity as they play, the extent to which they possess agency — the power to control and determine the meanings and pleasures they experience — is questionable. 'True' interactivity entails an iterative ongoing process that leads to jointly produced meaning. In relation to the videogame, it is acknowledged that meaning is not jointly produced since available choices are to a greater or lesser degree already circumscribed (Schott, 2006). It is not my intention here to intervene directly in these debates. Rather I am concerned with the player's experience of control, a subjective experience of agency. As Rehak (2003:111) suggests, part of what players seek is continual response to their own actions, 'a reflection of personal agency made available onscreen for reclamation as surplus pleasure'.

Embodying the avatar

In discussing presence in relation to a player's experience of control of an avatar it should not be presumed that the subjectivity produced by the game transparently corresponds to or substitutes for the player's own. Players exist in
an unstable dialectic with avatars, which is exhibited in a heterogeneity of player-avatar relations (Rehak, 2003). I explore this heterogeneity by addressing how agency was alternatively attributed to individual players, to particular onscreen characters and to a hybrid in which the two were enfolded.

The players recognised their own agency in relation to the outcome of play. In many cases the outcome of the game was taken as a given even before the onscreen opponents had been chosen. This implied that the outcome was determined by the respective skill of the two opposing players. During gameplay player agency was attributed through expressions of another player's relative incompetence. This manifested in both the content and direction of chants and banter. In relation to content it was seen when Stephen scored a goal against his brother's team and chanted "Easy, easy, easy, you won't play me anymore, you won't play me anymore". Many interdictions would be directly aimed at the opposing player, with the protagonist turning to face them so as to make eye contact while engaging in banter or chants that may otherwise have addressed an ambiguous audience. Examples of this included "How wide do you want the goal?!" Player agency was also attributed through celebrations of one's own achievement, such as Stephen's shouts of "I saved a penalty!" Such expressions of player agency position the avatar as 'a digital dummy, whom we manipulate at will - albeit within limits that are defined by the possibilities of the game engine' (Burn, 2006b:81).

However, extensive pronoun slippage in the boys' celebratory chants revealed how agency was also attributed to onscreen characters. It was common for Stephen to shout the player's name as they made a promising attack on goal, "Go on Rooney, go on Rooney!" These celebrations became more elaborate if a goal was scored, with the boys singing songs and performing chants from the terraces, "Number one's Kevin Doyle, number two's Kevin Doyle, number three's Kevin Doyle, number four's Kevin Doyle". This encouragement and praise attributes the avatar, as it functions as a representation of an idol, with agency. This behaviour was an expression of admiration for 'famous' football players. This was realised in the manner in which Cristiano Ronaldo in particular was idolised:
"This is cool! Look, get it on Cristiano. Cristiano Ronaldo on camera. Ronaldo! Ronaldo! Cristiano Ronaldo!! Keep filming. He's quality, he's quality, he's quality".  
(Video Footage recorded 27th December 2006)

The players were not seeking to become the avatars, to become the real life players they represented. Playing the game was less about extending one's bodily capabilities in relation to football prowess, than being able to relate, in a particularly intimate manner, to famous real life players. The level of celebration was always greater when Stephen played as Reading FC, the team he supports, or as a high-profile team such as Manchester United. The importance of this relationship to football players was expressed through the sheer prevalence of the celebratory tone. I was the only player to attribute blame for failure to avatars, which I used as a way of offsetting blame from myself. In a similar way to the trading cards discussed in chapter 4, the avatars function as the distributed personhood of sporting celebrities. This alternating attribution of agency correlates with Burn's (2006b) account of agency in game play. While Burn is concerned with role playing games (RPGs) and interactions with narrative, his discussion of the game as two interlinking types of system may inform understanding of the player's experience of agency(s) in relation to simulation games. This is particularly pertinent for games that embody representations of 'real life' idols and game generated characters that have achieved the status of idol in their own right, such as Lara Croft. Burn explains that while the 'hero' (Cristiano Ronaldo) is read by the player, the 'digital dummy' (avatar) is played by the player. Pronoun slippage directly represents this ambiguous relation. The pronoun used represents which element of the game – the representational system or the game system – is most emphasised in that instance. The representational system concerns how the game represents the world and includes the visible and audible game world, the narrative and the characters. The game system encompasses the rule based system of the game produced by the procedural work of the game engine.

The argument for ambiguous player-avatar relations is further supported by the way the boys talked about themselves and the avatars as a hybrid, as one team. This was represented by use of the pronoun 'we': "We're just too good for you".
"That’s why we’re taking you down", “That’s why we’re top of the league”. This replicates the way football supporters refer to themselves in relation to their team. It is an expression of solidarity. However, the direct participation of the player in the match sees it differ from the terraces. The player forms part of a twelve man, as opposed to an eleven man team. This is seen in Stephen’s references to his team mates: “Ohh I should’ve passed to Doyle [...] whacked it in the net and then one nil to us and then one nil down to you”. The player temporarily places himself as the avatar with possession. Avatars around him remain a representation of their real life counterparts until the ball is passed to them. Once in possession they are then displaced by the player. It is a twelve man team in the sense that the avatar is not replaced, as is seen in the way players shout encouragement at the represented footballer when they are under their control.

However, the twelve man team is ultimately reduced to a one man team when the player has to take responsibility for defeat. Then they are alone, no team mates to commiserate with. Alternating attributions of agency demonstrate a ‘simultaneous splitting and suturing’ (Rehak, 2003:112) of the player and the avatar. The avatar doubles as self and other, as symbol and index. As the self, the avatar’s behaviour is tied to the player through an interface. At the same time avatars are 'other', freed from the player (Rehak, 2003). Discussions of player-avatar relations within videogame theory have restricted the avatar to the game, arguing that it is both the player’s embodiment within the game and a protagonist in narrative. By attending to simulation games it is possible to extend the life of the avatar beyond the space-time of the game. This insight may also be applied to other game genres that include game characters who have achieved cult status. This discussion serves to complicate accounts of the avatar as the in-game embodiment of our gameplay experience. Such accounts talk about the avatar as the means through the game ‘codes’ the player into the game world (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). Here it is shown that avatars may exercise agency in their own right through their representational qualities. In such instances, the avatar is not only an embodiment of the player, but also of the known figure they re-present in digital form.
This discussion of the interlacing forms of embodiment and player subjectivity that relate to the handset and the avatar, further blurs the boundaries between mediated and non-mediated space. I wish to extend the notion of embodied gameplay further still by attending to embodied performances in non-mediated space.

**Performing in Non-Mediated Space**

Recently, within game studies, a textual (often narratological) emphasis has begun to be complemented with growing interest in gaming as a social activity and practice (Crawford and Rutter, 2007; Schott and Kambouri, 2006). As Jenkins (1993:69) states, game research should be:

‘more attentive to the experience of playing games rather than simply interpreting their surface features. We need to situate them more precisely within their social and educational contexts, to understand them more fully within their place in children’s lives’.

An almost absolute emphasis on the individual player is being supplemented with a consideration of collaborative play. This work stresses that interaction forms a significant part of the pleasure of gaming. To date, considerations of this social interaction have been restricted to the sharing of cheats, tips and instructions, the performance of alternating roles of participant and spectator, and the performance of social identities and wider interests that are in part informed by, but extend beyond games (Crawford and Rutter, 2007; Rehak, 2003). This work has been keen to emphasis the wider social and educational significance of gaming beyond gaming encounters (Crawford and Rutter, 2007; Schott and Kambouri, 2006). In this respect, it has sought parallels with the sociological literature on audiences and fans. In line with this work I argue that to appreciate the social pleasures of gaming it is necessary to look beyond in-game performances, however, I wish to emphasis the role of *embodied* interaction that occurs in non-mediated space during gameplay. Here I seek a different set of parallels, engaging with work on affect. Throughout the chapter I have referred to how players engage in chants and gesticulations and how, as expressions of knowledge, skill and agency, these fold wider spatialities into the
virtual space of the game. Here, I consider how these actions are productive of an affective spatiality, as they energise the domestic rooms in which gaming takes place.

I refer the reader to Figure 7.13 and Track 17, which together with the extract below, begin to provide an account of the affective force of the non-mediated space in which gameplay emerged.

The more he cheers, the more resentful I feel. Sigh after sigh. Shoulders drop further with each exhale of breath. Resentment, frustration and disappointment combined. It builds in my stomach, filling me, overwhelming me. I grit my teeth, purse my lips, roll my eyes. Deep breaths. Trying to stay calm, relaxed. But they can't take the edge of that feeling, *that tension*. Then there's a miscalculated move on his part. The tension spills over in a chant, a sudden, brief release through outstretched arms, an instinctive movement of its own determination. A momentary distraction. Just enough to encourage you to go on...

...The deep, long sigh. The disappointment overwhelming. My head drops, can't look. My arms, hands, fingers tense, need something to grip, take hold of my head. Sinking feeling. Down, down. Need to pick myself up, but can't. Demotivation has set in. I'm dragging myself along. Resigned to my fate. I just don't care as the last goal rolls in. There's no energy left to care, to feel anything. A shrug of the shoulders is all I can muster.

(Field Diary Extract, 27th December 2006)

The non-mediated space of gaming was experienced materially as one of intensity, giving rise to extreme sensations and actions. A translocal tension in excess of the individual players inhabited the passage between them (Anderson, 2006). This tension was not only transmitted between players, but radiated into the wider space around them, becoming contagious to spectators, effectively animating this space-time of experience. The space of the lounge became energised as levels of noise increased and bodily gestures became more
Figure 7.13 Performances in Non-Mediated Space

Source: Stills from video footage of Stephen and Matthew’s gameplay
vigorous. Durkheim's concept of 'effervescence' may be usefully applied to describe the particular way in which this space-time was animated (Gamble, in press). Effervescence connotes a bubbling energy, with the potential to build in intensity causing a burst or eruption. Such eruptions were witnessed on the scoring of a goal through celebratory actions, and in relation to miscalculated moves, which prompted chants from the opposition. The notion of effervescence also allows for a sense of dissipation, which was felt following the release of tension through eruptions.

The event of gaming was bifurcated into multiple registers, which came together in the construction of this particular space-time of experience (Anderson, 2006). The affective intensity was registered corporeally in 'proprioceptive and visceral shifts in the background habits, and postures' – or feelings - of the body (Anderson, 2006: 736). It was felt in the heat of my angry body, resentful of Stephen's success; the blush of my shamed body, humiliated by the level of defeat; the coiled visceral tension of my frustrated body, disappointed with its performance. Similarly, it was felt in the restless tension of my excited body, hopeful that fortunes would change. This affective intensity can also be traced in my tight grip of the handset, my heavy-handed pummelling of the buttons, the contraction of my body tensed and its expansion on this tension's release. It can be seen in my changing facial expressions: gritted teeth and beaming smile. Affective intensity was also experienced through emotions, which are personal qualifications of this affective intensity, such as elation, frustration and anger. The material context of the space-time of play, in which affect, feelings and emotions were interwoven, provided a physical, embodied context for the body engaged in the cybernetic circuit with machine (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006).

This material context shaped how gameplay was experienced. The virtual battle was not just occurring on the virtual pitch, but was taking place in the site of gameplay, in the lounge or the bedroom. When engaging in solitary play, playing against the computer, one experiences winces of disappointment, but when playing against other people these winces become transformed. Feelings and expressions of emotion become more pronounced, which is both a matter of increased intensity and performance. The player is no longer performing their technological skill – or technicity – to just the self, but to an audience. They thus
engage in acts, however pre-determinedly, that overtly celebrate or defend one's pride.

Importantly, it should be realised that the affect and feelings emerging in and from the relations of this gameplay served to not only animate the space-time of experience, but to also dampen it (Anderson, 2004; 2006). Let me reiterate this aspect, by briefly repeating my earlier field diary extract:

Need to pick myself up, but can't. Demotivation has set in. I'm dragging myself along. Resigned to my fate. I just don't care as the last goal rolls in. There's no energy left to care, to feel anything. A shrug of the shoulders is all I can muster.

Here, expressions and qualifications of affect can be seen to diminish, rather than enliven. At this moment all hope had evaporated. I had realised the hazard and defeat integral to hope (Anderson, 2006). This disappointment of hope depleted the space-time of experience. Tension dissipated, displaced by lethargy and boredom. The quality of the experience was diminished through the production of meaninglessness and indifference (Anderson, 2004). This dissipation was not only felt by me, but by my opponent, whose gestures become less vigorous in the absence of a response. There was nothing left to prove. Space-time 'stilled' and 'slowed' as I waited for the final whistle. The body's capacity to affect and be affected had been suspended (Anderson, 2004); its earlier vitality had been drained. These negative connotations of the affective provide an important response to the tendency for vitalistic accounts of affect (Anderson, 2006). However, rather than ending on a sombre note, it should be noted that the depletion prompted by defeat provided an imperative to action, hope re-emerged (Anderson, 2004; 2006). I would practice, practice, and practice some more. Triumph would one day be mine. This account reiterates Anderson's (2004; 2006) assertion that affects are always entangled in the circulation and displacement of other affects and other space-times of experience.

This account of embodied play emphasises how the player's body is always located in space and time. As such it is necessary to consider the particular
spaces-times of play for each gaming situation, as they may have a profound effect on the experience of gameplay and the experience of traversing 'virtual' space (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). Here it is clearly seen that my bodily experience was anything but one of liberating potential, as suggested by writing on virtuality (see Dovey and Kennedy, 2006; Lahti, 2003).

In Summary

In this chapter I have further reduced the conceptual distance between 'reality' and 'play' and the worlds they inhabit by presenting three ways in which the boundaries between mediated and non-mediated space are blurred. Firstly, I attended to the circulatory flow of knowledge and skill between these different spaces. I then discussed the cybernetic nature of gameplay, attending to embodied relations with the handset and onscreen avatars. Finally I have emphasised how gameplay involves embodied performances in non-mediated space. In blurring the boundaries between mediated and non-mediated space I have subjected the 'virtual' to empirical scrutiny, questioning the conceptual distance that is commonly invoked between it and the 'real'. In line with recent geographical and anthropological work, it has been demonstrated that the virtual is encountered from, and within particular spaces and times, and is embedded within wider social practices and relations.

In examining the co-configuration of virtual spaces of play by children and gaming technology, I have addressed object agency in terms of ergonomics. Through consideration of flow and fluidity I demonstrated how the handset may assert its 'untranscended materiality'. Mastery of this instrument, as it is fed back to the player via the actions of the avatar, is a central motivation of gaming. Gaming technology invites play by offering a challenge. My examination of the embodied relations shared with the handset usefully contributes to the study of videogames, which to date has excluded consideration of the material technologies involved in gameplay (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006). It also usefully contributes to an emerging concern for haptics within geography, and offers the consideration of ergonomics to the study of material culture. To date, concern with the social significance of material form has limited physicalist attention within material culture studies, causing questions of ergonomics to be effaced.
As this case study demonstrates, such matters may be of primary importance for understanding our practices with things and their significance in our everyday lives.

In attending to the physical engagement of players and the embodied experience of gameplay, this case study challenges the common association of gaming with passivity. A further challenge to this association is issued by situating the practice of gaming within wider practices and relations. In attending to the flow of knowledge and skill between these various practices, gaming is recast in active and participatory terms. This work also strengthens the notion that children are able to work flexibly and creatively across different media platforms, which was first introduced in chapter 5 in relation to branded goods. A challenge to the notion of passivity is further reinforced by the exploration of gaming as a social activity involving embodied interaction between players in non-mediated space. This examination of the relational configurations of children and gaming technology serves to animate the practice of gaming and the specific role of the material interface within it.
Affirmation through Animation?
Playing and Consuming in Co-Fabricated Worlds
At the outset of this thesis I identified three key areas of debate within human geographical enquiry that were usefully advanced by the study presented here: children's geographies, material geographies and current methodological concerns relating to the investigation of sensate life. Engagement with these areas of debate formed the focus of chapters 1 and 2. Rather than coming full circle and simply reiterating these contributions in the final chapter, I twist this perspective to draw out four cross-cutting themes that have run through the thesis: the co-fabricated nature of our everyday worlds; consumption and consumer cultures; and non-representational geographies and play.

Co-Fabricated Worlds

This thesis represents an engagement with ontological politics as it challenges the singularity, anteriority, independence, definiteness and externality of the world (Law, 2004a). It draws on, and critically advances, understanding of the co-fabricated character of our everyday social worlds. An appreciation of this character has been emphasised within geographical enquiry by engagements with science and technology studies (STS), as seen in more-than-human or hybrid geographies (Whatmore, 1999; 2002). It has also been stressed in non-representational geographies, which draw inspiration from a variety of philosophical resources including, but not limited to STS and actor network theory. A common currency of these strands of geographical enquiry is a radical decentring of the human subject. Common understandings of it as a bounded entity are rendered as a mythical unity. In this sense, the human, like its non-human counterpart, is a socio-material assemblage. Rather than being a given, it is a product of the relationships in which it is located. This understanding renders both subject and object provisional, enacted and relational. As the relationships in which these entities are located are shifting, their status is understood as performed rather than fixed. The body does not operate upon a world comprised of the indifferent stuff 'out there'. Rather it is involved in a relation with the world that is always ongoing and joint with others. This appreciation of joint action draws attention to embodiment – the reversible and reflexive fold between subject and object; to technologies of being – the hybrid assemblages with which the body moves; and to affect – intensity felt in corporeal, dialogical practices.
It should be noted that in taking up this concern with co-fabrication, it has not been my aim to reconcile the dichotomous perception of object and subject by attempting to establish symmetry between human and non-human. Rather, I have sought to explore how objects (as well as subjects) participate in action by examining the different kinds of forces they may exercise. This has been achieved by tracing the various effects of their agency. I began by tracing an effect produced by the particular material and sensual qualities of toys - the provocation of anthropomorphic thinking - and effects produced by a toy's location within a particular socio-relational matrix - provocations of sentiment, anticipation, anxiety and enchantment. In addition I traced effects produced by the representational qualities of toys in terms of the provocation of mutating value systems. I then considered how the particular materialities of different branded goods afford them transitory agential power in relation to other branded entities. Finally, I extended my discussion of object agency by examining toys as technologies of play, exploring how they are productive in relation to the co-configuration of imaginative spaces. Here attention was drawn to a range of different object properties: representational qualities, materials, size and scale, and ergonomics. A contribution of this work is the development of an appreciation of multifarious object agencies. This goes beyond Law's (2004a) suggestion that agency need not necessarily be predicated on the cognitive but may also be imagined as emotive and embodied, by illustrating the specific forms it can take. This adds texture to understandings of relational agency, which have previously been charged with ontological monism. Rather than presenting a flattened, even toned picture of co-fabricated worlds, this thesis crafts a series of animated geographies, punctuated with an array of productive provocations to feeling and action.

This focus on object agencies does not equate to a fetishism of the material. Material culture was once avoided as the primary focus of attention for fear of such accusation. It was thought that a focus on the material would prevent the study of cultural life (Miller, 1998b). However, studies that quickly shift the focus of attention from object to society will only ever see a Bratz doll as merely a material symbol of femininity and heterosexuality, a text to be analysed for its ideological content. By attending to objects and the various agencies they may
exert we can unpick the more subtle connections between material things and cultural lives, and hence enhance understanding of the latter. As an additional response to the issue of fetishism, this thesis does not assume the *a priori* importance of materiality. During the fieldwork I encountered a plethora of children's material culture, ranging from felt-tip pens to porcelain dolls, golf balls to microscopes. A relatively small percentage of these objects stood out from this crowd, mattering more significantly in the children's everyday practices during the research period. It is these objects that form the basis of the case studies presented here; it is their materiality that is addressed as a matter of importance.

In chapter 1 I illustrated the important role materiality plays in ideal constructions of childhood and children. There is still little sense of how constructions of childhood are practised in more-than-discursive ways and how children's experiences of childhood are defined by materiality. This thesis offers the beginnings of such understanding. For instance, I illustrate how children negotiate understandings of appropriate toys for different ages. This was seen in relation to the cuddly toy, which was deemed 'babyish' and thus effaced 'in public'. It was also forcefully demonstrated by Emily's discussion of her changing favour for Bratz dolls rather than Barbie dolls, where the latter provoked a sense of haunting. This accords with Cook's (2003) understanding of how children come to realise childhood through the commodity form; how the child consumer is developed through age emulation and a longing to be older. Things are seen to be fundamental to children's everyday geographies, mattering to children in significant ways. This significance allowed toys to become embroiled in intra-household conflict, playing an important role in familial power relations. On several occasions during the fieldwork the removal of toys from the child's possession was used as a tool for discipline. Toys also played a more complex, often tacit role in household politics, beyond instances of direct confrontation, for instance, in marking the child's presence in the household. This may be enacted by children moving toys between rooms or by parents who actively make space for children's belongings, such as displaying crafted pieces in cabinets or including children's DVDs in family collections of media. This demonstrates the important role of things in personal relationships central to the experience of childhood. This role was also seen in more agreeable
relations, for example in the centrality of model aeroplanes to the relationship Sam shared with his step-father and by extension his hospitable mother, discussed in chapter 4. Materiality plays an important role in complex relationships characterised by both conflict and affection.

This thesis demonstrates how children negotiate the 'commercial panorama of consumer goods' (Cook, 2004a:1) targeted at the children's market by providing an in-depth examination of how they actively construct meaningful worlds, negotiating and reconfiguring the networks of meaning surrounding various toys. The particular materialities of toys are seen to be central to such engagements. This advances understanding of children as 'heterogeneous engineers'; how they enrol and orchestrate all kinds of human and non-human entities as they emerge through relational processes. It is not my aim to detract from the agency demonstrated by children as social actors by stressing the important role played by object agencies in these relational processes. Rather, this focus allows for a greater depth of understanding of these relations. Children actively form alliances of different kinds with their toys, ranging from mere possession (as with duplicate trading cards available for 'swapsies') to passionate, committed engagement (as seen in the development and expression of expertise in relation to magic and Harry Potter, and PlayStation games). Above all, this thesis forcefully asserts the need to look beyond the purely symbolic, representational nature of children's spaces and artefacts.

Through its concern with object agencies, this thesis points to avenues that could be more fully exploited within studies of material culture. Dominant strands of material culture studies have paid surprisingly little attention to ergonomics and tactility (Miller, 1998c; 2001a). Through its concern with tactility and affect this thesis also contributes to a growing concern with sensuous geographies that does not see itself as material (Rodaway, 1994). In particular, it contributes to an emerging concern with haptic geographies (Hetherington, 2003; Obrador-Pons, 2007; Paterson, 2006). This thesis points to useful ways in which material geographies and sensuous geographies can be brought together, and inform each other. Through its engagement with questions of ergonomics and object agency this work also contributes to
videogame studies, which have neglected the role of material technologies as an agent in the cybernetic loop of gameplay (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006).

Appreciation of embodied, corporeal relations between objects and subjects requires both a bodily and a materialised sensibility. Taken together, these sensibilities can cultivate an attuning to affect. Through the development of an innovative methodology, this thesis contributes a way to foster such sensibilities. This was explored in detail in chapter 3. This fostering of sensibilities has wider implications in terms of critical thinking (Bennett, 2001). This is discussed at the end of the chapter.

Finally, through its engagement with co-fabricated geographies, this thesis advances a new ecumenical framework for the study of childhood and children. Traditionally, childhood studies have zigzagged between oppositional engagements with the biological and the social, because they have operated within a modernist field of thought that posited nature and culture as dichotomous entities (Prout, 2005). This has meant that important features about the ways in which contemporary childhoods are constructed and experienced by children have been occluded. To date, there has been at best an uneasy evasiveness about materiality, whether in terms of bodies, technologies, artefacts or architectures, within childhood studies. By emphasising how children and the spaces and things surrounding them are socio-material assemblages, this thesis approaches childhood as a complex phenomenon that is not readily reducible to one end or other of a polar separation between nature and culture (Woodyer, 2008).

**Consumption and Consumer Cultures**

This thesis contributes to the study of consumption and consumer culture on two levels (Lury, 1996; Miller, 1987; 1995). Firstly, it takes forward a growing interest in children's consumption practices (see Buckingham, 2000; 2007; Cook, 2004a; 2004b; 2008; Kline, 1989; 1993). Beyond and because of this, it speaks to the study of consumption more generally. Through an in-depth examination of children's relations with, and uses of toys I am able to provide a critical response to less grounded cultural commentaries on the (negative)
character of contemporary childhoods and children’s engagements with consumer culture. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, popular debate about the character of modern toys and contemporary children’s play abounds. This centres on the concept of the ‘commodi-toy’ and the increasing commodification of childhood, which is frequently understood to be antithetical to the notion of ‘natural’, ‘authentic’ play. Potential for spontaneity and creative capacity is thought to be inhibited by ever increasing levels of scripted play (which is a result of integrated, synergistic marketing) and the growing interactive capabilities of toys. Symbolic readings of the ideological content of toys have also expressed concern about the ‘adult’ themes – such as violence and sex – that children are introduced to at progressively younger ages.

This thesis directly addresses types and categories of toy that have been heavily criticised in both popular media and (the albeit sparse) academic literature. These toys were not chosen because of the negative connotations surrounding them, but rather because of the significance they held in particular children’s everyday lives. In chapter 4 I addressed trading cards, which are held to be archetypes of acquisitive activity, positing exchange value as pedagogy in children’s leisure. In this regard, they epitomise the moral tension existing between the sacred sphere of childhood and the profane arena of the market. In chapter 5 I addressed two examples of branded toys. Brands have been condemned as symbols of the intersection between capitalism and consumerism, and accused of preying on consumer anxieties and concocting false desires. A special charge is issued to brands operating within the children’s culture industry because of their relation to fast-paced entertainment product cycles. This casts them as potent symbols and stimulators of the contemporary ‘I want’ culture (Fleming, 1996; Langer, 2004). One of the brands addressed – Bratz – centres on the fashion doll, which has been hotly debated in relation to Barbie for the sexualised and stereotypical images of women it portrays. In chapter 7 I addressed videogames, which have been condemned for their perceived encouragement of violence and aggression, and solitary, passive play. In each of these chapters I have shown how children are active in the creation of their own systems of value and meaning, negotiating and reconfiguring the commercially oriented meanings surrounding these toys. I have also presented behaviour that prompts reconsideration of contemporary discourses about toys.
encouraging violence and sexuality. In stressing children’s role as active consumers I am not suggesting that children are unconstrained in their engagements. Through a focus on material culture, I am able to navigate between the dichotomous approaches to the study of child consumers, which cause work to be divided by oppositional concerns with structure and agency. To date, the study of child consumers is characterised by a division between work that constructs the child consumer as manipulable, exploited by advertising and marketing, and work that perceives the child consumer as empowered, active in their negotiations with the market. These constructs respectively map onto the figures of victim (duped by marketing strategies) and hero (resistant and creative in their consumer sovereignty) prevalent in broader studies of consumption (Jackson, 1995a).

I have been able to explore how children construct their own systems of value and meaning because I conducted empirical work with children. To date, the study of toys has been over-reliant on data generated from pictorial or documentary evidence, or on direct readings of toys for ideological content. In adopting this alternative strategy, I am able to respond critically to a dominant strand within the study of toys where a ‘production of consumption’ approach is felt strongly (see Attfield, 1996; Dietz, 1998; Toffoletti, 2007). Similarly, I am able to respond critically to a dominant strand within the study of child consumers that tends to be critical of capitalism and consumer culture, and is thus characterised by an ‘exploited’ view of children (see Kline, 1993; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997). In contrast to this view, the work presented in this thesis chimes with wider arguments about consumer (re)appropriation. This study is situated in line with a broader commitment to take on detailed empirical work to address the practices of actual consumers within the geographical study of consumption (Gregson, 2007; Jackson, 1995b). Here there is a concern to address the ‘second phase of consumption’, moving beyond reductive accounts that limit consumption to momentary acts of purchase. This concern has witnessed a shift in the site of study away from mega malls and department stores to ‘new’ retail sites and domestic spaces (Gregson and Crewe, 2003). In accordance with this, there has been a shift away from the grand and the spectacular to seemingly more mundane practices that involve commodities in acts of use, and their transformation and disposal beyond the single act of
exchange. This thesis contributes to these concerns expressed within the geographies of consumption, especially in regard to its focus on a seemingly neglected group of consumers and category of commodity.

This thesis also makes a valuable contribution to the study of brands (and the associated practice of character merchandising), which is an emerging interest within Human Geography (Jackson et al, 2007; Pike, 2008). While there is now a growing literature on branding outside of the field of marketing and consumer behaviour, the social, cultural and political effects of brands are yet to be fully assessed (Arvidsson, 2006; Holt, 2006a; Lash and Lury, 2007; Lury, 2004). There has been little consideration of branding in relation to consumption, with a lack of empirical examination of consumer engagement with brands. To this end, the literature has tended to overgeneralise how brands and characters work within society. It is strange that geographies of consumption, which have been so keen to understand the entanglements of commerce and culture, have overlooked these entities and the practices dedicated to their proliferation and cultural and economic success. The area of children's consumption is a useful place for an engagement with branding as the children's culture industry has been at the forefront of important developments in industrial practice, such as integrated marketing. The Disney Corporation was a forerunner of this development.

Through its detailed examination of children's encounters and negotiations with Bratz and Harry Potter, this thesis directly addresses a lack of empirical engagement with how consumers engage with brands in their everyday lives. This work emphasises how brands work in heterogeneous ways in relation to each other, and in relation to different users. In chapter 5, I recounted how I encountered a multitude of brands during the fieldwork, but how only a few were explicitly registered as significant by the children. For instance, Crayola was a brand found in a number of households, yet, despite its success in market terms, it was not attended to in an ostensive manner. The Bratz and Harry Potter brands appeared to matter more, commanding direct and explicit attention. However, while Harry Potter was a brand found in every household visited, the children's engagements with it differed significantly, ranging from passing interest to passionate attachment. These differing levels of engagement
found expression in relation to the different forms of media through which it was encountered. In discussing brands in this manner, I deviate from Lury's (2004) understanding of the significance of brands in terms of proprioception, reframing it in terms of poignancy. This is set in the context of a concern for the children to structure my understanding of which toys matter to them in their everyday lives. This issue was discussed in chapter 3 in relation to my use of ethnography and creative tasks as research methods. They both allow the researcher to gain insight into what factors are significant to the children under study rather than assuming these in advance.

This work asserts that in order to understand the cultural significance (and thus economic success) of a brand it is necessary to look beyond the brand itself. By examining the relationship between brands and other forms of mass culture it is possible to appreciate how and why they resonate so powerfully in society and culture at particular historical moments. This was demonstrated by placing Bratz in relation to Barbie and contemporary television programmes such as Charmed, and by placing Harry Potter in the context of a broader contemporary interest in magic. This stresses that commodity use is embedded in the socio-material contexts and relationships of everyday life. Users are thus selective and creative in their engagements, adapting commodities to their own ends. This was demonstrated by Devan's fan based practices involving the Harry Potter texts and her incorporation of particular elements of J.K. Rowling's work in the creation of her own magical world. This is not to deny out right the social effects of integrated marketing, as outlined by Kline (1989; 1993), including growing gender divides and the exclusion of older siblings and parents from play as toys are increasingly targeted to clear market segments. However, brands such as Harry Potter, which transcend gender and age divisions, prompt reconsideration of these trends and stress the need to engage with the heterogeneous ways brands work.

A final way in which the work presented here contributes to the study of brands is its emphasis on the role of materiality in people's engagements and negotiations with these seemingly immaterial concepts. This was discussed in relation to product quality and 'playability', which are intrinsic to a brand's reputation, and set in the context of the 'thingification of media' (Lash and Lury,
2007). With regard to the case study brands, it was discussed in relation to the concepts of stickiness and authenticity. The notion of stickiness encompasses the transitory power exerted by the Bratz doll over other manifestations of the brand, which is a function of its particular materiality and the affinity between plastic body and human body. Through reference to the idea of authenticity, I also discussed the experiential qualities of the different media manifestations of the Harry Potter brand and how these matter to children's engagements with it.

In chapter 2 I discussed the absence of children and childhood in theories of consumption and consumer culture. Child consumers cannot simply be made to fit in with the already formulated conceptual structure offered by existing theories. This thesis draws attention to ways in which the study of child consumers may speak to and prompt reconsideration of this pre-existing conceptual structure. Commentators offering a critique of general theories of consumption in this regard have emphasised how children draw attention to the issue of co-consumption (Cook, 2008; Martens et al, 2004). Their concern lies with the primary role of parents in the acquisition of children's goods. In chapter 4 I raised a different perspective on this issue in relation to the shared consumption of model kits by Sam and his step-father. This points to the importance of addressing the practices in which commodities are involved. A reorientation of consumption towards practices minimises the analytic importance of individuality (Warde, 2005). This usefully counters the continued fixation with the individual actor within studies of child consumers. This fixation is seen in approaches that construct the child as 'exploited' and approaches that construct the child as 'empowered'. Both focus on what the child does or does not know or do as if they act alone. For Cook (2008), this fixation on individuality permits an ongoing hegemony of the adult male consumer in theories of consumption, to the expense of child consumers.

A preoccupation with individuality limits understanding of the various motivations to consume to personal indulgence and status seeking. There has been a focus on children's adoption of a materialistic philosophy, which is expressed by an 'I want' culture. Here there is a focus on individual desire and the continual postponement of satisfaction (Kline, 1989; Langer, 2004). Status seeking has been posited as a primary motivation for children to consume due
to the prevalence of peer group pressure and the particular vulnerability of children in relation to the need to gain acceptance and belong to social groups (Martens et al, 2004). While not denying the importance of possession, like owning the right brand of trainers, in such matters, it is my contention that belonging does not pertain to possession alone. Demonstrations of knowledge and participation in shared cultures were seen to be a primary concern of the children in this study. We can think of Stephen and Matthew's participation in a football oriented culture and Devan's participation in a culture based on magic. These features of consumption displace display and status seeking as motivations to consume with questions of fan cultures, sub-cultural capital, and affect and vitality.

With a reorientation of consumption toward practice, similarities and differences in the possession and use of commodities within and between groups of people may be seen as a corollary of the way practice is organised, rather than the outcome of personal choice. From this perspective it is practices rather than individual desires that create wants. This approach provides a powerful counterpoint to expressive accounts of consumption. While consumption may often be a form of communication it should not be limited to this. In this thesis I address both a concern with identity formation and the intrinsic value of consuming practices. Specifically, in chapters 6 and 7 I engage with subjective experiences of play and playing which may generate a sense of vitality. This intrinsic motivation should not be reduced to a crude hedonism and personal indulgence, which are offered as primary motivations in some existing theories of consumption (see Campbell, 1987), because it was rewarding for reasons deeper than simply being fun (Malbon, 1999). This vitality is a product of affective relations, of shared experience. These practices of sociality constitute play more as autotelic strength. An emphasis on vitality and sociality acts as a counterpoint to melancholic and alienated understandings of consumer society (see Bauman, 2007). In moving away from the language of individuality and strategy it is possible to recognise a sense of humanity within practices of consumption (Miller, 1998a). Love, affection and passion emerge in the stories I present about children's relations with their toys.
The argument that consumption cannot be reduced to individualistic, expressive acts is asserted in work on practices of household shopping (Miller, 1998a), and domestic practices of appropriation (Miller, 2001a), accommodation and ridding (Gregson, 2007). This thesis demonstrates that the study of child consumers may be usefully aligned with this strand of consumption studies. It also contributes to this approach to consumption by examining the practices of children, which have been effaced to date. Where items of children's material culture have been addressed, it is in reference to adult practices of accommodation and ridding (Gregson, 2007).

This thesis advances a particular geographical concern with the congruence of interests between material culture and consumption: how the use of things relates to the production and consumption of space. Geographical studies have shown how a multitude of things, such as bicycles, family photographs and interactive toys, are used as tools for an active inhabitation of the world, transforming space and our experience of it (see Rose, 2003; Spinney, 2006; Thrift, 2003). In chapters 6 and 7 I examine how relational configurations between children and toys allow active inhabitation of various imaginative spaces of play in and of the everyday. These spaces – magical, miniature and virtual - are synchronously produced and consumed through embodied practice. This is a dynamic process of consuming, whereby imaginative spaces are experienced through continual dialogues and interactions with other human and non-human bodies. Through these embodied relations with toys, domestic spaces and the everyday objects within them are transformed. This embodied approach to imaginative spaces opens fantastic and virtual landscapes of consumption to investigation, moving beyond the representational approaches that have tended to characterise their examination to date (see Balfe, 2004; Kitchin and Kneale, 2005; Stewart, 2003). In addition to these imaginative spaces, this thesis has also addressed the production and consumption of spaces of intimacy (in relation to cuddly toys and model aeroplanes) and spaces of fandom (in relation to Harry Potter media and videogames).

Through its concern with the sensory, tactile body and embodied practice, this thesis also advances a corporeal geography of consumption. This approach to consumption combats a previous tendency within geographies of consumption
to focus on the visual. This tendency is seen in work on spectacle, retail space and advertising (Chaney, 1990; Goss, 1993; Gottdiener, 1986; Jackson, 1994). The corporeal geography of consumption advanced here complements the emphasis on corporeal disciplines seen in Valentine’s (1999) work, developed in relation to food consumption. In contemporary Western societies dominant discourses around food and eating are associated with practices of discipline and self-control. This explains her emphasis on corporeal disciplines at the expense of corporeal pleasures. This thesis addresses both. Where corporeal disciplines are discussed (in relation to practices of videogaming and the creation of magical force fields), they are seen to be actively developed in the pursuit of pleasurable experiences of vitality. This feature of corporeal disciplines is also seen in Malbon’s (1999) study of clubbing. Discussion of pleasurable corporeal sensations combats an overemphasis on the control of children’s bodies within children’s geographies, seen in a focus on parenting cultures, schooling and the production of civilised subjects. This emphasis on enforced discipline constructs an associated concern with resistant bodies, rather than ‘vitalistic’ bodies. The issue of resistance is addressed in the following section.

Play and the Non-Representational

Non-representational theory has been central to how the project of this thesis has been formulated. An interest in a non-representational style of thinking was first inspired by a previous research project exploring children’s geographies of outdoor play. During this research, which involved the use of creative tasks and interviews, I was confronted with the problem of how to examine just what play entailed and the significance it held in children’s lives. I struggled to get beyond explanations of “we just played” and “it’s fun” in relation to children’s everyday practices of play. The children’s practices seemingly exceeded representation. I pondered on this problem as I walked along a street familiar to me from my childhood, and found myself dragging my hand along wire fencing, plucking a leaf from a bush to run between my fingers and hopping up and down the kerb. These banal features that just ‘go on’ in the background of the street, stuff that is often unnoticed and unacknowledged appeared to matter, and yet I was not quite sure how to give voice to this, or who would want to listen in any case.
(Horton and Kraftl, 2006b). From this point I was drawn to non-representational theory, in particular its concern with mundane everyday practices, the momentary way in which the world unfolds, and practical, non-cognitive, pre-reflective ways of knowing, being and doing.

In attending to the non-representational it is not my intention to dismiss the continuing importance of the representational. I have not dismissed the discursive in favour of the practical. My concern with the non-representational is its suggestion that there is 'something more'; a different way of looking and acting, a different way of knowing, a different way of presenting that may complement and supplement as well as reformulate that which has gone before. My primary commitment to NRT is not in terms of contributing to, or advancing philosophical debate, but rather its deployment in the study of children's material culture. To this end, I do not advance NRT to the expense of other theories. As discussed in chapter 2 and in the preceding section of this chapter, I am equally committed to theories of consumption, material culture and children's geographies. While NRT steers us towards the 'rough ground' of the practical aspects of everyday life, dominant strands within it appear to also retreat from it, inserting 'a layer of philosophical complexity, a maze of aporias, essaying the impossibility of researchers ever being more than hopelessly behind, after the event' (Laurier and Philo, 2006b: 354). In contrast, the approach adopted here works through key elements of NRT without staying locked into the advancement of its philosophy. NRT is the means, rather than the end, enabling the development of concerns beyond itself. This is not to say that through the application of NRT, philosophical debate cannot be developed. This thesis contributes to NRT on two fronts: by displacing a preoccupation with the impossibility of representation with the possibility of shared knowledge; and by taking play seriously in and of itself.

This thesis contributes to NRT in relation to the notion of impossible geographies. In outlining this contribution I revisit McCormack's work on ethics and affect, first introduced in chapter 3. Two critical lines of thought may be identified within non-representational geographies: a resistance to the prioritising of representation within Human Geography and an assertion of the impossibility of representation (Laurier and Philo, 2006b). McCormack
(2003: 489) writes of ‘processes that are excessive of the representational thresholds of geographical thinking’. In an attempt to attend to such processes he stresses the need to maintain a fidelity to the event, which will inevitably remain excessive. This fidelity is achieved by forestalling attempts to expose the meaning of the event by going beyond and behind its surface. He actively resists attempts to illustrate how research participants make reflective, after-the-fact sense of events. The approach to the non-representational adopted by this thesis offers a different ‘mood’ to this one of resistance and impossibility (Laurier and Philo, 2006b). As discussed in chapter 3, in line with a commitment to NRT as a means rather than an end, I actively drew children into the process of reflecting upon practice and encounters to develop a sense of how and why some things matter. In line with NRT, this forges a new political and ethical space which incorporates ‘encounters and interactions that are partially invisible in the dominant regime and excluded from the definition of what counts as knowledge’ (Thrift, 2004a: 84). Bodily ways of knowing are central to this process, knowledge of bodies that share commonalities through their capacity to ‘go on’ rather than ‘grow up’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2006b). Rather than being consumed with a notion of impossibility, this thesis reframes events and encounters according to a possibility of shared knowledge.

This thesis also contributes to non-representational geographies by taking play seriously. The theme of play and playing has run throughout the thesis. In this concluding chapter I turn attention to this theme more directly, pushing for a conceptualisation of play in terms of its autotelic qualities. Here I address a series of themes raised in chapter 2: play’s temporality and spatiality, its relation to the everyday, and its connection to resistance.

The way in which Bauman describes play’s temporality and spatiality as being well marked is suggestive of intentionality, of a time and space being deliberately set aside for play. It suggests play is constituted by boundaries, which circumscribe action (Stevens, 2007). In many instances the children of this study enacted play in this intentional manner, undertaking various ‘setting up’ procedures. For instance, Katie would deliberately ‘set up’ her Nintendo GameCube for play: choosing a particular videogame, untangling cables that had been stowed away, distributing appropriate handsets to different players.
and opting for specific game modes, levels, characters and worlds. This was replicated by Stephen and Matthew in their play with their PlayStation2 consoles. Additional stages to this procedure were added when the lounge was chosen as the site of play. In this instance the console had to be connected to the television and the appropriate AV setting found, which would often take some time. Setting up was not specific to play involving technologies, or even objects. It was witnessed in the imaginative play enacted by Devan and her friends, where the assigning of different roles and basic scenarios would be discussed at the outset. These procedures were not definitive. Play would often evolve in unforeseen and unpredictable ways. This was witnessed in the development of the narrative enacted in Devan’s miniature play. Practices would also be interrupted so roles and scenarios could be re-evaluated and game options could be altered.

However, play cannot be reduced to the pre-planned and the set aside. In contrast to the static games consoles, Nintendo DS and GameBoy handheld consoles were picked up and turned on without any forethought as children came across them in the course of other practices. On many occasions play was of the moment, spontaneously unfolding, as demonstrated by examples of Sam hiding in a cardboard box and Matthew’s mission to save Mousee recounted in chapter 3. In such instances play could be prompted by a shared look or the touch of a surface, an opportunity or a momentary distraction.

An affinity to the event allows space for these actions which speak of the moment. Play, then, may be thought of as exploiting the openness and potential of the event. It is contingent, the opportunist product of circumstance (Jones, 2000a; Stevens, 2007). In this way it conjures the ‘what-if’, the ‘as-if’, and allows for ‘something more’ (Bauman, 1993; Radley, 1995; Thrift, 1997). Play is performative experiment (Thrift, 1997): ‘the ongoing, underlying process of off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring, and transforming the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood below, behind and to the side of focused attention’ (Schechner, 1993:42). Such creative, spontaneous playful events or happenings may be singular or strung together in a continually unfolding playful practice.
A momentary appreciation of play’s temporality questions the location and locating of play offered by Bauman. In its spontaneity, play can occur in any space or place, or the journey between them: in the home, in the classroom (Harker, 2005), in the car or the outdoors (Jones, 2000a). Within the home it is not confined to the bedroom or the lounge, but can unfold by the kitchen bin, on the banister or under the dining room table. It can begin in one place and spill over into another, as was the case with Devan’s play with the dollhouse that began in her bedroom and progressively took over the hallway and the kitchen. As we have seen in chapters 6 and 7, play can also be productive or transformative of space and therefore (re)locating rather than located.

This emphasis on the momentary - the unfolding present - contrasts with the concern for a future oriented, linear trajectory that consumes accounts of play from the developmental psychology perspective. In such accounts, play is interpreted in terms of aiding cognitive development and socialisation. This alternative concern with play in the present permits it value and worth in and of itself, rather than in the pursuit of an external goal.

However, this is not to say that nothing accrues from play. As we have seen across the chapters, skills and knowledges, both practical and cognitive, can accrue through repeated play. The point here is that repetition is not equivalent to reproduction. The capacity for potential and for surprise remains. This is the draw or motivation to play – the possibility of configuring alternative ways of being-in-the-world. At once, play also extends a challenge - the pursuit of mastery or competence, be that in relation to modelling or gaming, spell casting or story writing. As Callois (1961) suggests, play exists along a continuum between paidia and ludus (Stevens, 2007). Paidia is improvisory action, which explores the possibilities of social existence and develops new social forms. While Ludus is play institutionalised as a game, following rules and purposefully contrived to be tedious. It thus requires patience and skill, with its pleasure lying in the development and mastery of technique. In highlighting the continuity between work and play, this continuum liberates play from its common understanding as the preserve of the child, questioning its opposition to rationality and instrumentality.
But if play is at once momentary and cumulative, can we say nothing definitive of its character? In seeking to pinpoint its essence, Stevens (2007) draws on the work of Callois to speak of play as intensity. This is intensity in terms of a play of risk, focusing on the testing and transgression of the limits of one's social experience and personal capabilities. This thesis has explored play as intensity through its concern with affect, which by its very definition is intensity (Massumi, 2002). This element of play was also explored in chapters 6 and 7 through the concept of 'flow'. Exposure to intense experience, however framed, adds strength and depth to people's experience of the world (Stevens, 2007). This is an autotelic quality of play.

In advancing a conceptualisation of play along this vein, I want to push further at this notion of 'flow'. To this end, I want to turn to the collective experience of play, relating it to Malbon's (1999) discussion of clubbing as a shared experience, which he examines as a source of playful vitality. Sensations provoked by the proximity and the tactility of shared experience are central to his account. Shared experience may be usefully conceived as a coming together, a moment of becoming. In its extremity, this becoming can result in sensations of exstasis, where an individual's sense of self as a separate entity is temporally displaced by a sense of becoming part of, or strongly identifying with something outside or beyond, yet also including the self. This becoming results from a growing sense of flow – the matching of challenges (be they physical or emotional, technical or imaginative) with personal competencies.

This sense of becoming has been traced on a range of levels within this thesis, from intimate identification with the cuddly toy to techno-human assemblages generated through videogaming. Thus it can be variously conceived as a becoming-with the moment ('going with the flow'), a becoming-with technology, and/or a becoming-with other players. These moments of displacing the self as a separate entity constitute a temporary inhabitation and thus configuration of alternate worlds and alternate orderings. As Malbon suggests, these alternate configurations generate a sense of vitality through their capacity for affirmation and self-validation. This is extended as these sensations of becoming expand beyond the moment of their constitution into 'non-playing' times and spaces (Jackson, 2004; Malbon, 1999), as seen in chapter 6. This
helps account for the meaningful significance of objects that are involved in moments of becoming within people's lives. In this way, play is able to contribute to an individual's sense of self identity.

This emphasis on vitality as the autotelic quality of play positions this phenomenon as inwardly oriented (Malbon, 1999). It therefore provides a critique to work that frames play in relation to resistance. As Malbon (1999:148) explains:

'Play is...about an engagement with and an expression of a different facet of power altogether. This power comes not from above – it is not ascribed – but from within – it is achieved. Rather than being a mode of power that is evaded through play, it is instead a form of micro-power or 'vitality' that can be inhabited through play'.

This conceptualisation of play offers a differing inflection of politics for play by shifting focus away from a dualistic construction of 'power' and 'resistance'. This orientation of politics is similar to that of NRT, which Thrift (2004a:92) defines as 'a politics of the creation of the open dimension of being'.

Play's vital nature affirms its everyday character. Thus we need to take a step back from an oppositional or dialectical positioning of play, and understand it – as Huizinga suggests - as being not out of the ordinary, but in and of the ordinary. Recognising play's autotelic quality reiterates that play is not a distinct, discrete set of activities, but rather a characteristic that may be present to varying degrees in different types of practices, including those labelled 'work' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Stevens, 2007). This liberates play from the preserve of children, suggesting its significance to children and adults alike. Indeed, under the rubric 'playful practices', this thesis has addressed a range of activities - collecting, crafting, reading, story-writing, television and film viewing and videogaming - which are enjoyed by young and old alike.

To summarise, this thesis has made a series of contributions to the existing literature on play. It takes play seriously in and of itself, rather than approaching it as a lens through which to examine phenomena such as gender
(c.f. Thorne, 1993) or as a way of approaching other bodily practices such as dance (c.f. Thrift, 1997). By appreciating playful practices in and for themselves, this thesis has advanced a conceptualisation of play in terms of its autotelic quality. Through an attention to vitality, the thesis reconfigures the politics of play, shifting concern away from the outwardly oriented power associated with resistance, to the inwardly oriented power bound up with affirmation and self-validation. Taken seriously as a fundamental element of the human condition, play is resituated as being in and of the everyday, rather than oppositional to it. It is shown to have its own value and worth, contradicting previous studies that have stressed its non-instrumental character by placing it in opposition to the productivity of work. Crucially, in drawing attention to the potential for a reconfiguration of the self and of time-space in playful practices, this thesis marks play as a geographical concern.

**Affirmative critique**

By way of ending I would like to return to the beginning. In chapter 1 I presented a tale of disenchantment that was representative of contemporary popular and academic debate about the demoralised and alienated character of modern children and childhood. I proposed to tell an alter-tale by presenting a series of contemporary stories about children’s domestic practices of play that accentuated the meaningfulness of toys in children’s everyday lives. These stories have stressed the love, affection, passion and vitality pervading children’s everyday relations and practices. They have spoken of the capacity of different toys to provoke sentiment, attachment, anticipation and anxiety. They have spoken of the ability of toys to enchant and to inspire the imagination, prompting anthropomorphic thinking and the creation of imaginative worlds. This is my alter-tale; a tale of enchantment, of creativity, of affective attachment.

As a parting gesture I wish to address the parameters of the present study. I do this in the spirit of offering a guide to those who wish to develop alternative lines of enquiry through which to extend understanding of children’s consumption of toys. Three particular parameters are drawn to the reader’s attention: the unit of study, a focus on animation, and a case study approach.
Unit of study

In terms of the unit of study, I adopted Hitchings (2003) approach of focussing on a single link, that between the child and the toy. This has allowed me to attend to the precise contributions of toys to relational agency in terms of the creative capacities they offer. In this context the consumer is individualised, rather than encountered amidst the heterogeneous household unit. This particular focus, while not denying modes of consumption beyond play, limits engagement with practices such as acquisition, storage and disposal. These tend to be practices of co-consumption, often negotiated in relation to parents. Due to this focus on the child rather than the household, the present study addresses the issue of co-consumption in relation to fan cultures, sub-cultural capital and affect.

Focus on animation

In response to disenchanted cultural commentaries on the contemporary nature of childhood, I adopted the particular rhetoric of animation to discuss the agential power of toys. This has led to a particular conception of why things matter. Attention is drawn to those toys that demonstrate a particular poignancy in the child's life. While this is a function of my concern for the children to structure my understanding of the meaningfulness of toys, it leaves questions about the toys that remain static in the background. Their persistence suggests other ways of mattering. Recent work on disposal and divestment (Gregson, 2007; Hetherington, 2004), or Lury's (2004) concept of proprioception may be of relevance here.

Case study approach

So as to remain faithful to the richness of the relations between children and their toys as they had been encountered in the 'field, this thesis is structured around a series of individual case studies. The findings presented in this study are not based upon a representative sample of the population. Following a precedent for a case study approach established in material culture studies, this
thesis seeks to lay the grounds for transferability rather than demonstrating it (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). The presented case studies are used to think about the wider character of contemporary children’s relations with consumer culture and commodities. While the thesis does not purport to offer the only possible theoretical explanation of children’s playful practices with toys, nor to account for the bulk of playful practices that may occur, a series of generalisations regarding children’s creativity, their passionate engagement with socio-material worlds and their active negotiation of the commodified space of childhood may be extended from the case studies presented. Importantly, this approach allows for single toys to be placed in a wider context in which they are related to one another, to other forms of popular culture, and to wider practices of consumption.
Appendices
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Home Ownership</th>
<th>Parental Occupations</th>
<th>Educational Background of Parents</th>
<th>Age of Parents</th>
<th>Alison, Matthew &amp; Stephen</th>
<th>Ben &amp; Emily</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Katie</th>
<th>Devan</th>
<th>Bethany &amp; Joshua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>Owner occupied (Right to Buy Scheme)</td>
<td>Metal worker, housewife</td>
<td>School level</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Late 30s/early 40s</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Early 50s</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
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## Appendix B: Schedule of Research Sessions

### Stephen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/04/2006</td>
<td>Initial Meeting/Participating in Gameplay</td>
<td>1 hour 30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/04/2006</td>
<td>Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/04/2006</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/04/2006</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/04/2006</td>
<td>Talking about Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/05/2006</td>
<td>Filming Gameplay</td>
<td>1 hour 30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/12/2006</td>
<td>Playing with Trading Cards</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/12/2006</td>
<td>Filming Gameplay</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/02/2007</td>
<td>Designing a Toy</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/03/2007</td>
<td>Observing Football Practice</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/05/2007</td>
<td>Attending Football Match</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/08/2007</td>
<td>Attending Football Match</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/08/2007</td>
<td>Filming Wrestling/Review of Video Footage</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Matthew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15/12/2006</td>
<td>Initial Meeting</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/12/2006</td>
<td>Filming Gameplay</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/01/2007</td>
<td>Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/01/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/01/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/02/2007</td>
<td>Designing a Toy</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/02/2007</td>
<td>Sharing in Pancake Day</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/08/2007</td>
<td>Filming Wrestling/Review of Video Footage</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/11/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Harry Potter</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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### Alison

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21/03/2007</td>
<td>Initial Meeting/Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/03/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/05/2007</td>
<td>Participating in Gameplay</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
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### Sam

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/01/2007</td>
<td>Initial Meeting/Talking about Toys</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/01/2007</td>
<td>Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/01/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/01/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/02/2007</td>
<td>Designing Toy/Talking about Making Models</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/02/2007</td>
<td>Playing Board Games</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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### Emily

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/02/2007</td>
<td>Initial Meeting</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/02/2007</td>
<td>Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/09/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/03/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Activity Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/03/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Bratz/Nintendo DS</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/03/2007</td>
<td>Review of General Video Footage (with Ben)</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/11/2007</td>
<td>Review of Bratz Video Footage</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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### Devan

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Initial Meeting/Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/04/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/04/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/05/2007</td>
<td>Visit to Second Home</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2007</td>
<td>Reviewing Video Footage</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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### Katie

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<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05/04/2007</td>
<td>Initial Meeting/Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour 30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/04/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album/Watching TV</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/04/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/04/2007</td>
<td>Reviewing Video Footage/Playing Football</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/05/2007</td>
<td>(Babysitting) Watching TV</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/08/2007</td>
<td>Playing GameCube</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/11/2007</td>
<td>(Babysitting) Watching TV</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
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### Bethany

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05/05/2007</td>
<td>Initial Meeting</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/05/2007</td>
<td>Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/05/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/06/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
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### Joshua

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05/05/2007</td>
<td>Initial Meeting</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/05/2007</td>
<td>Taking Photographs</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/05/2007</td>
<td>Creating Album</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/05/2007</td>
<td>Talking about Diary</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/09/2007</td>
<td>School Run</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/09/2007</td>
<td>School Run</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/09/2007</td>
<td>School Run</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/09/2007</td>
<td>School Run</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Research Ethics Framework

**Freely given informed consent**

'Informed consent refers to the process of voluntarily agreeing to participate in a research project based upon *complete disclosure of all relevant information* and the recipient's understanding of this' (NCB, 2003:2).

Children agreeing to an initial meeting will be informed that does not equate to consent to participate. At the meeting, conducted in the home, both children and parents will be present. The children will be provided with information about participation, which uses appropriate language for the child's capabilities. This information will include:

- The nature and purpose of the research
- Who is carrying it out
- Who is funding it
- Extent and nature of commitment
- How information will be recorded; what will happen to it
- Disclosure and dissemination of results
- Benefits of the research
- Contact details for expression of concern

I will talk through this information, offering both children and guardian(s) the opportunity to ask any questions. While the provision of complete disclosure of all relevant information is complex given the dialogic nature of the research, I will provide as much information as possible. The collaborative and unfolding nature of the research will be emphasised, and it will be explained that they will be consulted on the direction of the research at various stages. It will be explained that either party maintains the **right to withdraw** at any time, without giving a reason, and without any adverse consequences. Here consent is not regarded as a once-and-for-all prior event. I will seek to build rapport with the child, building a relationship based on honesty and trust, which at the same
time acknowledges its complex nature. Consent will also be sought from others, such as siblings and friends, who may become involved indirectly in the research.

**Respect for diversity** in design, undertaking and reporting. However, this will be limited by the sample of children available at the chosen school.

**Privacy**
The concepts and limits of confidentiality and anonymity will be explained to the children. In terms of anonymity, obvious identifying information will be removed from reports and the children will be asked to select pseudonyms, which will be used both for the labelling of data and within reports. The confidential nature of information will be emphasised to the children, guardians and gatekeepers. All data, both in electronic and paper format, will be held securely, with access available to only my supervisor(s) and myself. The children will have the right to withdraw data at any time. Privacy also extends to the avoidance of intrusion, where I will not prompt or follow particular lines of enquiry and will not use particular parts of transcripts where this is deemed appropriate.

**Avoidance of harm** (physical, psychological, social)
Research is an intervention into someone's life, where we become co-constituents of their world, and necessarily have an impact, which may be invisible. This is not restricted to those with whom we have direct contact because our participants are networked actors. I will monitor impact on the child (and those around them). This may be the first time they have been asked to reflect on their own practices. I will avoid disruption to pre-existing relationships between children (and their friends and siblings), parents and gatekeepers. Should it become apparent that the child experiences distress I will desist immediately from the current action. I recognise the limit of my own expertise and will resist giving advice or support. While the research relationship will be characterised by honesty and openness, clear boundaries will be set. At the end of the research there will be a debriefing session where the children will be asked to discuss the experience of the research.
Child protection
In line with legal requirements for working with children, I will obtain a further CRB disclosure, specific to my research. The limits to confidentiality in relation to child protection will be explained to the child. Information will be disclosed to an appropriate third party:

'[w]here a child or young person divulges that they or others are at risk of significant harm, or where the researcher observes or receives evidence of incidents likely to cause serious harm' (NCB, 2003:3).

Before any disclosure of information on my part, I will discuss my actions with the child, gaining their consent where possible. If it becomes evident during the research that the child may divulge such information they will be reminded in advance of the limits to confidentiality. In line with Article 3 of the UNCRC the best interests of the child remain the primary consideration at all times.

Research governance
Research ethics extends to the management and monitoring of the research. I will maintain professional integrity, acting as an independent and impartial researcher. I will aim to maintain the quality of the research by paying attention to rigour and validity. I will endeavour to make the best use of the findings, considering the nature and spaces of dissemination. I will provide feedback to the children, guardians and gatekeepers in appropriate formats.

Continued review
Research ethics need to be addressed in a situated manner as they arise or are shaped contextually at different stages of the research. Ethical responses are personalised in nature, arising from the tension between the multiple roles adopted by a researcher. I will adopt a reflexive approach to the research. While I will remain accountable for my own research, I will discuss any ethical dilemmas arising with my supervisor(s).
Best practice

Central to the theoretical underpinning of the NSSC is the notion that children are individualised social actors. I will work against age and developmentally based assumptions about children's competencies and conceptual understanding. Our ways of seeing children affect our ways of listening to children. In accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC – the right to express views freely – I shall aim to foster an atmosphere of collaboration and communication, where children's perspectives and experiences are listened and responded to. This is reflected in my research methodology. (See Woodyer, 2008). I will seek to communicate clearly with the children; avoiding jargon and not being patronising. I aim to be attentive to children's own practices and strategies, learning and participating in 'local cultures of communication'. I will also pay attention to the power imbalance in the adult-child relationship. These power relations are not reducible to powerful and powerless along essentialised lines of difference, thus I shall monitor and record context specific performances of identity and role. Children are also gatekeepers, differentially located in terms of power. Being attentive to the children's behaviour, I will be flexible in relation to my role as researcher, letting the children decide what role they want the researcher to play. This will be negotiated and adapted to different situations.
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