

BOOK REVIEW

Children's Games in the New Media Age: Childlore, Media and the Playground. Edited by Andrew Burn and Chris Richards. (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. Xiii+pp.224, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, contributors, list of figures and tables, index.)

Winner of the 2016 Opie Award from the American Folklore Society's Children's Folklore Section, this fine volume brings the collection of children's games smartly into the 21st century. How fitting that the work itself is dedicated to Iona Opie, as it showcases and builds upon her legacy. Three topics vie for our attention, all reflected in the subtitle. One wonders if the title and subtitle were fighting off camera for the volume's heading. Perhaps this is due to the ambivalence over the word "playground" in our time.

The editors, both professors in the Department of Culture, Communication and Media at the Institute of Education, University of London, have collected a set of essays that merit individual attention. Burn's introduction addresses "Children's Playground Games in the New Media Age," yet another version of the book's title. Pointing to the work of Iona and Peter Opie over 50 years ago, the chapter readdresses one of the ideas that the Opies themselves debunked, that they had started the collection of children's folklore "fifty years too late" (p. 1) Happily, the intent of the book is to show that children's folklore—that irreverent mix of playful genres belonging to children's peer culture—is still alive and well. We read of the history of "children's games, songs, and rhymes" with particular attention to change and children's agency and are introduced to five projects that frame the book.

The British Library Digital Archive, the first of these projects, includes The Opie Collection of Children's Games and Songs, new material collected in the United Kingdom, and the Australian collection of ethnomusicologist Kathryn Marsh. The project exceeded their initial plan and hosts games from Australia, the UK, America and Scandinavia. The second project involved ethnographic studies in two primary schools, one in Sheffield and one on London's edge, from 2009-2011. Methods included surveys, panel interviews of children, and video footage taken by adults and children alike. The third project involved website development: "Playtimes: A Century of Children's Playground Games and Rhymes," an industrious addition intended to display to the public both the Opie material and the ethnographic work collected in these two schools. Additional collaboration with the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford, repository of the Opie archive, and the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, adds the wonderful game photos by Father Damian Webb. Most impressive was the involvement of children in the website development, as "researchers, designers, and curators."

The fourth project associated with the book is an innovative application of "The Game Catcher Prototype," an adaptation of motion sensitive video game

controllers of Nintendo Wii and Microsoft Kinect. The intention was to use the video game system to both record hand games as well as revitalize clapping. This project models the lack of separation in children's culture between "traditional" games and technology. It would be worth watching such applications longitudinally to see how they hold up over time.

The final project frames game collection through the development of a documentary film: *Ipi-dipi-dation, My Generation*. A catchy title, it references the counting out rhyme Ip dip, and ties in to the notion of historical study. Filmmaker Grethe Mitchell thoughtfully pays attention to camera angle and children's commentary, not just game content. It should be noted that the film is tantalizingly difficult to find, almost impossible. It is hoped that the authors will find a way to make it more accessible.

Language of social critique appears throughout, from Bourdieu's "embodied history" to Raymond Williams' notion of "residual culture" to Henry Jenkins' emphasis on "cultural production and circulation." Readers familiar with the anthropology of Levi-Strauss and Caillois will find the term "ludic bricolage" interesting. Burns invites us to think of the chapters as puzzle pieces, and what follows is a brief discussion of each piece.

Chapter 2 "The Opie Recordings: What's Left to be Heard" by Laura Jopson, Andrew Burn, and Jonathan Robinson invites us to listen to the archive, now fully cataloged and available online. There appears to be much in the Opie archive that had never been published, a gold mine of games for the game researcher or childlore scholar. Chapter 3 by folklorist Julia C. Bishop examines online/offline transmission and how "the whole hand-clap thing passes on." This particular chapter is one I will return to with my own classes, as she charts transmission face-to-face, through media culture, and through YouTube. Movement variations are analyzed in a study of variation of one particular game, and there are rich quotes directly from children.

Chapter 4 by Chris Richards offers a mix of memoir and social commentary on "Rough Play, Play Fighting and Surveillance: School Playgrounds as Sites of Dissonance, Controversy and Fun." He writes of "Childhood at Risk, Children as a Threat," and briefly addresses gender differences in terms of playground conflict. In chapter 5, Education professor Jackie Marsh examines "The Relationship between Online and Offline Play: Friendship and Exclusion." Here the chapter mixes fine-grained ethnographic quotes with Internet use surveys. Of particular interest is the innovative contrast between the social webs of one group and their friendship patterns online and offline. In Chapter 6, librarian Rebekah Willet looks at the process of remixing and the study of "media-referenced play in the playground." The chapter wisely points to how "children produce meaning from the variety of texts with which they engage in their remix culture" (p. 149). "Children's Remix Culture" might have been a fourth contender for book title.

Filmmaker Grethe Mitchell's chapter on "The Game Catcher: A Computer Game and Research Tool for Embodied Movement" is perhaps the most innovative project in childlore collection to date. An adaptation of motion sensitive video game controllers of Nintendo Wii and Microsoft Kinect, it translates children's hand games onto the screen for archival purposes and analysis, not to mention the

pleasure of seeing one's motions on screen. Whether the application is affordable enough, portable enough, and easy enough for widespread use remains to be seen. It certainly suggests new ways of thinking about game research, borrowing the tools of media captured choreography and dance notation. John Potter's chapter, focusing on website development and heterotopia, raises the ethical implications of having children as "co-curators."

Part of the challenge rests with the essentially private, yet public, display of children's folklore, and yet when posted, it becomes an exposed performance. The book raises more questions than it has space to answer. I appreciate the ways in which it finds consistency and innovation in children's folklore, and how it suggests that the answer to the rigidity of school curricula can be found outside.

ANNA BERESIN

The University of the Arts