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Editors' introduction

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Questioning childhood, media and culture

In many parts of the world, and for many decades, children have been early and avid adopters of new media. Indeed, they often challenge normative socio-cultural practices through the ways in which they use media. Yet at the same time, many parents, educationalists and marketers consider that media permeate, even control, children's lives to a degree that was unknown just a generation ago. Is it, then, the case that children's media practices differ in both scale and scope from what today's adults knew from their own childhoods? It seems undeniable that the global reach of many recent media technologies such as satellite television, the internet and mobile devices have been instrumental in recontextualising children's media practices, not merely for the prolific young blogger or texting enthusiast, but equally for children for whom these activities are beyond practical reach – nearly all youngsters around the world know of transnational television series, of mobile conversations and internet chats, of the top music stars and, of course, the global brands of Nike, Coca Cola, McDonalds and many more. More profoundly, it also seems that few are unaffected by the shifting priorities in education, identity, politics and commercial marketing strategies that the changing media and information environment ushers in for today's youth.

The combined developments of globalised communication networks and new media technologies have catapulted children's media culture to the centre of public attention. In many parts of the world, debates are rife over the regulation of children's media fare, for this is often more personalised, more globalised and certainly more volatile and versatile than is, for example, the more familiar print media. When poor children in India with little or no schooling get the opportunity to take up computing, access the internet and enter game worlds, questions begin to be asked about these children's position in public life, the material and symbolic resources which grant them a voice and a new visibility, and the institutional consequences of such 'digital inclusion'. When highly profitable transborder flows of marketing and media products push the boundaries between local and global forms of representation, questions arise regarding children's identity development and sense of belonging to a community. Arguably, globalising media processes favour new forms of cosmopolitanism by providing opportunities for children to encounter and engage with greater cultural and social diversity. On the other hand, possibly the commercial basis of these media downplays such diversities in order to cater to audiences across spatial boundaries? Questions such as these are asked with varying inflections around the world, but the

local answers offered rarely embrace the global phenomenon of having to answer in the first place.

While debates over children's media uses have repeatedly resurfaced since the advent of modern mass media in the 19th century, their ramifications and implications are, in many ways, different today. This is partly because of transformations in childhood, as formally expressed in both Article 12 of the UN Convention of Human Rights which stresses the need to respect and listen to children, to act in the child's best interests and not to discriminate against children, as well as by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is also because debates over children media are shaped by the pervasive global discourses on "the information society", "the knowledge society" and "the network society". Irrespective of the chosen terminology, these discourses focus on how information and communication technologies both enable and enforce "new economies" characterised by increased global competition and by a rise in immaterial forms of production known, for example, as "experience economies" (such as tourism, film, design and life styles) and "service economies" (such as online call centres, banking, health care). Since the mid-1990s, interest in information and communication technologies has been magnified by the technological potential to digitize all text, images and sound and hence to facilitate convergence across hitherto distinct media platforms and services. While this in no way makes all media output look the same, or makes all media appropriations resemble each other, it does mean increasing overlap among the often hotly contested public debates on young people, media and information technologies.

A pressing question arising from these changes in the global economy is how to ensure people are qualified in terms of the resources and competencies required to handle these transformations. In this context, children's literacies assume a new urgency – should they be media literate, computer literate, multimedia literate, information literate or something completely different? Perhaps, simply, it is critical literacy that is ever more urgent in a complex media environment? If 'the ability to access, adapt, and create new knowledge using new information and communication technology is critical to social inclusion in today's era' (Warschauer, 2003: 9), then young people's uses of new communication technologies has far greater significance than their traditional relation to audiovisual technologies, generally (though arguably inappropriately) relegated to the domains of entertainment and leisure. Indeed, this concern echoes the importance long accorded to print media, though this latter is now neglected as a field of study (except within the field of education), despite its crucial and continued importance for policies of social inclusion both within nations and cross-nationally. Analysis of young people's emerging literacies in this fast changing information and communication environment is only now moving from speculative hype to grounded empirical investigation, with a plethora of concepts being advanced, with too little agreement on their substance or use, and with many still wedded to a highly optimistic view of the transformative potential of media technologies for children's life chances.

This optimism contrasts strongly with another equally long-standing and persistent debate regarding children and media, namely that concerned with the perceived threats or risk of harm to children of particular forms of media representations or appropriations. As with literacy debates more recently, the moral or media panics associated with these latter risks have also been catalysts in bringing children's media

uses into the public eye, thus providing the major motivation for conducting and, certainly, funding research on children and media over decades. As has long been the case (Drotner, 1992), questions of media harm become drawn into urgent debates over the regulation and governance of both media and childhood, with the laudable desire to protect children from harm uneasily balanced against both adult freedom of expression and, less noticed but equally important, children's own rights to expression, exploration and, even, risk-taking (Millwood Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006). It is the pessimism inherent in these moral panics, uneasily combined with society's idealistic optimism regarding the new, which has informed the dominant – and highly ambivalent - frameworks for researching children's media. However, both the moral panics over potentially harmful media and the excitement over potentially empowering media are not really, or not simply, debates over media but rather more profoundly debates over the cultural values that society should promulgate to its children. They concern, in short, the potential and actual meaning-making processes of communication and social interaction, and these are precisely the defining features of the cultural dimension of life.

While the media harm argument is little supported by commerce, this powerful lobby preferring to align with campaigners for freedom of expression, it does echo more enthusiastically the optimism of public bodies regarding the prospects of the changing media environment to benefit children This construes children today as empowered not only in terms of disposable income but, more significantly, in terms of personal choice and agency. Such discourses challenge established definitions of childhood as vulnerable, instead positioning children as in the vanguard compared to 'their elders and betters'. Thus these commercial discourses support a liberal or rights-based critique of traditional hierarchies of generational power in western societies, recognising that consumerism (and a pioneering approach to new technologies) is now a defining element of youthful leisure practices especially, supporting claims for the further individualisation of society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), with childhood and youth increasingly focused on horizontal, peer networks rather than traditional hierarchies of authority and value. As the historian Gadlin (1978: 253) observes, 'the most important characteristic of contemporary child rearing is the continued diminution of parental authority and responsibility', a claim one might extend to adult authority more generally (including teachers, politicians, community leaders, etc). To many it seems that new forms of interactive and individualised media especially further the emergence of a reverse generation gap by which children are now teaching their parents, transforming normative expectations regarding socialisation. However, critics have countered that these often celebratory discourses of children's generational power serve to downplay and underestimate the persistence of very real divisions in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender and region. These differences of perspective highlight the ways in which debates over children and media throw into relief our basic understandings of childhood and, additionally, of media.

A multidisciplinary field of research
Since the societal position of media has changed, and because the societal position of children is also changing in many societies, children's media cultures have come to assume a central position in many public debates regarding cultural values, social norms and expectations for the future. The same cannot be said for research. This lack of prominence given to research partly reflects the traditionally low level of public

interest in academic research, with only paediatricians and psychologists really capturing the public agenda on matters concerning children – consider the widespread attention devoted to the American Academy of Pediatric's claim that children should not be allowed to watch more than two hours of television per day (American Academy of Pediatrics: Committee on Public Education, 2001). The result is often that little attention is paid to the often more subtle and contextualised insights of educationalists, let alone sociologists, cultural theorists, media scholars and others with expertise in children's lifeworlds. We must also acknowledge the relative paucity of research on children's media cultures in many countries and within many disciplines – a point which occasioned us some difficulties in commissioning chapters for this volume as well as for our contributors from many parts of the world in their attempts to survey the available literature. And last, the lack of prominence accorded to this field also reflects the fact that the empirical complexity of children's media practices is not, in the main, matched by an equally complex or sophisticated body of theory and methodology, though in this respect – as we hope to show within this volume - things are progressing rapidly, resulting in some exciting prospects for the field. One welcome marker of these developments is the recent launch of a new journal, *Journal of Children and Media*, by Routledge.

The present volume grew out of our interest in and a long-term engagement with capturing and conceptualising these complex problematics. Our editorial work has highlighted the considerable mismatch between an acute perception around the world of the importance of children's media cultures in society and the dispersal (or even neglect) of these concerns among the intellectual developments within diverse academic fields. The main aim of putting this Handbook together has been to map out the diversities as well as the commonalities in children's media cultures around the world as they are positioned in relation to particular sites, at particular times and within particular social relations. The potent combination of children, media and culture is, simply, hard to grasp from the scattering of articles published without extensive searching across very different literatures, libraries and sources. A second aim, important to securing future developments in research on children, media and culture across the range of contributing disciplines, has been to bring together contributors expert in a range of fields in order to scope the interdisciplinary domain of research on children, media and culture, and to demonstrate its collective strengths as well as highlighting the current gaps in knowledge. Consequently, rather than nurturing a specific theoretical position, we have sought to identify the major research themes and issues that apply to the diversity of children's media cultures as these are played out under the broader and shifting conditions of globalisation, commercialisation and media convergence.

Thus our purposefully multi- and inter-disciplinary approach brings together a number of discrete analytic discourses in the hope that their multiple voices will help strengthen the depth of contextualisation within studies of media and of childhood both in theoretical and empirical terms. Within this, media studies and childhood studies are the two principal traditions of research on which this volume builds. For those working at the intersection, it often seems that these two traditions take the other as an assumed, but unacknowledged, context of explanation. In media studies, economic structures, textual articulations and historical trajectories take centre stage, and so children are routinely relegated to the contextual margins of interest, a specialist topic of interest only to the few, and not a very high status topic at that. In

childhood studies, children (and youth) as social agents, psychological subjects or cultural producers are positioned as key areas of interest but here the media are accorded only a minimal role, being defined as a narrow and compartmentalised theme, a target for the application of ideas rather an a substantive area in its own right for either theory development or, indeed, a substantial dimension of children's lives (Livingstone, 1998). So, although each approach has much to offer – in terms of lessons from past research, cumulative findings from empirical investigation, and conceptual insights and frameworks, each also tends to be defined by, even restricted by, its object of study (children, media) and by the particular disciplines that support it. In consequence, studies on children and media tend to follow rather than form the trends in their more mainstream parent disciplines.

Additionally, both media studies and childhood studies draw more broadly on the social and human sciences. For the study of children's media cultures intersects with the study of family, adolescence, school, literacy, sexuality, civic participation, and much more. Yet the contribution, actual and potential, of other disciplines regarding issues that intersect with childhood, media, technology and culture often remains tangential, with too few really productive connections either linking across the fields of education, anthropology, literature, political science, history and so forth or, indeed, between these fields and the core fields of childhood and media studies. This tendency to work in parallel means that research misses out on the connections between, for example, social science studies on television narrative as a structuring element in children's everyday lives and humanities-based accounts of story-telling in children's literature. Moreover, synchronic and diachronic perspectives rarely inform one another, so that obvious structural commonalities remain unexplored: for example, particular tensions and oppositions mapped out in historical studies on childhood in Europe and North America may be found in sociological studies on contemporary childhood in non-western countries - children's work vs. schooling or conceptions of "proper" public vs. private childhood spaces. Although exploration of the relations between past and present tensions, let alone explanation of these relations, remains fairly thin on the ground, our contributors have worked hard to give recognition to those that they have identified. Further, we hope that the present volume stimulates the development of just such productive connections, occasioning conversations across fields and so enabling new insights, research projects and integrative conclusions to illuminate a multidimensional understanding of children, media and culture.

Everyday culture matters
How shall we identify, analyse and understand children's media cultures around the world? The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz cogently defines culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973: 89). The "symbolic forms" noted by Geertz can be words, images, written text or numbers – that is, a range of semiotic sign repertoires; and this process of sense-making, or signification, is increasingly mediated by global media such as satellite television, the internet and mobile communication. This foregrounding of the cultural dimension is encapsulated by American Roland Robertson who argues that cultural globalization serves to accelerate everybody's notion of living in "a single place" whose properties cannot simply be written off as extraneous to oneself, but whose handling is still informed by different positions and

priorities. Accelerated interdependence goes together with confrontations among different, even clashing world views. So, globalization involves "comparative interaction of different forms of life" (Robertson 1992: 6, 27). It is the increasing mediation, or mediatization (Thompson, 1995), of these interactions that operates as a primary reason for our interest in the cultural dimensions of children's interactions with media. As Roger Silverstone put it, "mediation … describes the fundamentally, but fundamentally uneven, dialectical process in which institutionalised media are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life" (Silverstone, 2006: 109). If we understand these diverse interpretative practices, we will also gain a solid knowledge base for more applied forms of action in this area - for example, in order to advance children's interests in relation to education, health provision, political citizenship or marketing. For these are all areas, along with many others, that are now shaped in part at least, by the rich media and information environment that touches, indeed that mediates, all children's lives in one way or another.

The importance of contextualising children's media culture within a multidimensional account of societal change cannot be overestimated, for only thus can we avoid technological determinism (Smith & Marx, 1994) in evaluating the social, cultural and personal consequences of media and information technologies. We are committed, in short, to contextualising specific research questions within a broad account of the complex and changing cultural environment within which children live. This means analysing children's media culture as it is positioned in relation to the dimensions of space, time and social relations (as John Thompson does in his account of media and modernity, but as is so rarely extended to include children; although see (Meyrowitz, 1984). It also means recognising that these dimensions are themselves culturally and historically contingent. To take a simple example: rather than ask about the impact of television on children, we urge the importance of asking when and why different children use different aspects of television (form, content, technology), and how these practices may be directly and indirectly shaped by the media, family circumstances, educational expectations, broadcasting traditions, economic pressures and cultural values.

However, a contextual approach is no mean feat in practice, even though in principle it is hard to gainsay. Like many, we have been influenced by Raymond Williams' stress on capturing 'the whole way of life' (Williams, 1961), developed in the field of media and communications by the ethnographic turn (Drotner, 1994) and in childhood studies by the new sociology of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The synergies here are stimulating. For example, Janice Radway's (1988: 366) call for 'radical contextualism' in audience studies, namely the analytic displacement of the moment of audience response to media by ethnographic studies of the everyday, in order to capture what she describes as 'the kaleidoscope of daily life' seems especially appropriate for analysing children's activities, for in their everyday lives, children and young people weave together practices involving a wide range of media and cultural forms and technologies, generating a rich symbolic tapestry in a manner which is in some ways deliberate or agentic but in other ways accidental, part of the sheer serendipity of childhood (Corsaro, 1997). Since the links and connections among play, toys and media are also, increasingly, managed and marketed, as part of the regulation and the commercialisation of children's culture, a critical perspective is vital if we are to judge how far children's culture is being transformed into promotional culture as modern marketing directs flows of popular culture, identity is

refashioned through consumption and the citizen (or viewer) is transformed into the consumer (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). Only a critical perspective can judge, further, the question of inequalities - the degree to which some children gain access to certain kinds of meanings and practices, along with certain kinds of opportunities or dangers, while others lack such opportunities, restricted by certain social arrangements of time, space and cultural norms and values, as well as personal preferences and lifestyles.

Analysis of these micro-practices of childhood – what de Certeau (1984) called 'the tactics' of everyday life – must, then, be balanced with an analysis of the structures of family, school, community and society that encompass them in multiple circles of influence and constraint (Bronfenbrenner, 1980). Lest the reader becomes anxious at the sheer scale of the task, we would acknowledge the methodological difficulty of knowing where context ends, when analysis may legitimately stop. Indeed, following research questions through multiple layers of context can quickly exhaust a researcher's expertise, for media researchers may lack knowledge of family dynamics, educationalists may not know what children do at home, gender specialists may know little about ethnicity, and so on. Hence it is reassuring to know, as several of chapters included here illustrate, that often it is the detailed case study that offers the most illuminating account of a particular practice in context, thereby revealing the historical and cultural specificities of children's media experiences within a broader sketch of the underlying dimensions that structure and contextualise that experience. We have, therefore, invited our contributors to adopt a double focus, combining a close-up exploration of selected practices of media culture with a long-distance gaze on the shifting contours of the landscape within which these practices are situated. To clarify at least some of these contours from the outset, and in order to situate our own approach to the international study of children, media and culture, we now map out the scientific terrain on which much research draws, namely, childhood studies and media studies, in order to examine their intersection for our field of study.

The view from childhood studies
Since the 1990s, the term childhood studies is closely associated with the so-called 'new sociology of childhood' (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Qvortrup, 1994) which has positioned itself against the social psychological and cognitive developmental studies of childhood that was until then the mainstream approach within the social sciences. But studies of children and childhood have also been conducted in several other disciplines including anthropology, history, education, literary studies and gender studies. Drawing on both the social sciences and humanities, these disciplines also inform studies of the intersection between media and children.

Within the social sciences, Swiss Jean Piaget's developmental psychology has provided the dominant research paradigm for many decades, with the focus on the individual child's cognitive development in "ages and stages" that are defined in universalising terms with little attention being paid to socio-cultural divergences. Although the child is, it is stressed, conceptualised as an active participant in the development process, this role is more cognitive than social, with the child's curiosity driving an engagement with the environment that stimulates learning. Insofar as the family is regarded as central to socialisation, it is interpersonal forms of interaction and play that are seen as formative to children's development, and less attention is paid to social practices, values and norms (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Followers of Piaget studying children and media pay particular attention to the ways in which

media facilitate the child's cognitive development as they advance from one stage of understanding to the next. They have also examined children's developing understanding of the 'reality claims' of television, proposing stages of progression towards a mature adult understanding (Dorr, 1986) and exploring the confusions about modality that, productively, stimulate the move to the next stage (Hodge & Tripp, 1986) and, ultimately, to adulthood. The social and cultural importance of learning was developed by Piaget's contemporary, Vygotsky, who stressed how child development is mediated by social interactions with others, so that the child gains not only cognitive sophistication but also the shared symbolic knowledge of its culture and, thus, of his or herself (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Though this approach would seem more in tune with a contemporary analysis of media and communications in the life of the child, curiously this remains underdeveloped, and instead research has taken two largely incommensurate directions – one, focused on media literacy and media effects on 'the child', follows Piaget, while the other rejects this approach and instead turns to sociology for a more cultural and social account of 'children', plural.

The new sociology of childhood emerged in the 1990s largely as a reaction to the dominance of Piagetian psychological individualism and universalism (Qvortrup et al., 1994; Chisholm et al., 1995; Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). As noted by one of its proponents, Alan Prout, in this volume, the sociological approach defines the modern, Western notion of childhood as a socio-cultural construction which conceives of children as active agents in shaping, sharing and transforming their own lives, rather than as adults-to-be, valued for their future potential rather than their present actuality. Critical of these assumptions, the focus is instead on children in their own right, identifying children's own practices as these are exercised in their everyday lives, be it in self-styled peer networks or in more formal organisational settings such as school. For example, drawing on Goffman's (1961) notion of secondary adjustments, Corsaro shows how, through daily actions often invisible to adult eyes, children contribute to the construction and reconstruction of social structures which have consequences for both children and adults. Applying this to the analysis of childhood, Buchner (1990: 77-8) argues that:

> 'every child is increasingly expected to behave in an "individualised way"... children must somehow orient themselves to an *anticipated* life course. The more childhood in the family is eclipsed by influences and orientation patterns from outside the family (...) the more independent the opportunity (and drive) to making up one's own mind, making one's own choice...described here as the *biographization* of the life course'.

In supporting this identity work, the domestic environment affords access to certain kinds of activities and interconnections among activities, depending on social arrangements of time, space, cultural norms and values and personal preferences and lifestyle. Given these arrangements, children use media both to construct their own local contexts and to transcend their locality, forging wider connections through both mediated communication and through imagination. In accounting for these practices, sociologists of childhood rarely draw on historical studies despite obvious similarities in the questions raised and the kinds of oppositions located in the social positioning of children – for example the changing definition of children from being based on social position to one being based on age; or changing discourses on childhood depending on demographic shifts in children's relative proportion of the population. The

sociological opposition to developmental psychology is apparent in the efforts being expended accounting for the social constructedness of childhood and the diversities in children practicing "childhood" within particular temporally and spatially situated contexts. As an unacknowledged commonality with developmental psychology, the sociological strand of research also focuses on interpersonal practices and forms of communication, and few media studies have been conducted from a sociology of childhood perspective (but see Baacke, 1990).

Anthropologists have a long tradition of studying childhood across cultures, and their contemporary approaches share important theoretical perspectives with sociological accounts, with the premium being placed on interpersonal networks such as family and peers and on the diversities of children's everyday practices, but with the anthropologists adding important dimensions of socio-cultural difference across boundaries of space. In addition, anthropology has been formative in methodological terms – participant observation, case-based or idiographic designs and open, in-depth interviews have influenced many fields including media studies (Schrøder et al., 2003), just as has the anthropological tradition of employing categories that are meaningful to the informants, the so-called emic perspective (Pike, 1954/1967). Perhaps because westernised media differ so visibly from the local cultures often studied by anthropologists, a number of anthropological studies on children include media uses (e.g. Davis & Davis, 1989; Fuglesang, 1994), and arguments have been made that new technology such as the internet is a formative influence not only on children's lives but equally on received definitions of childhood and adolescence (for example, the expectation that development pivots around identity crises; Larson. 2002).

Within the humanities, studies of childhood are mainly found within history, linguistics and studies of play culture, and, as is the case with social-science approaches, interest in media and mediatized cultures remain fairly thin on the ground. The most notable historian of childhood is French Philippe Ariès (1914-84) whose *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) precedes sociological accounts in its focus on childhood as a modern construct borne out of western conceptions of modernity and its gradual increasing differentiation of social spheres over 'la longue durée'. Later studies have focused on the history of youth (Gillis, 1974; Mitterauer, 1986/1992) including accounts on the gendering of this history (Steedman, 1995,Nielsen & Rudberg 2000). However, despite the considerable diversity of research that has taken place in this area since the 1970s, few scholars pay sustained attention to the ways in which books and magazines, film, radio and television play into the cultural articulations of the young. In that sense, historians mirror sociologists in the valorisation of self-styled youth cultures and the downgrading of mediatized practices.

Linguists share the widespread focus on interpersonal rather than mediatized, forms of communication. Naturally, scholars studying language development have focused on children and they often adopt a developmental view drawing on Piagetian psychology. Linguistic investigations of children's media uses are, therefore, often conducted with a view to the ways in which, for example, television viewing influences children's socialization in general and linguistic proficiency in particular (see overview in Close, 2004). While these studies are divided in terms of positive correlations between the acquisition of language skills and media use, their theoretical prioritization of face-to-

face, localized communication easily slides into normative, empirical oppositions between interpersonal and mediatized forms of communication in which the latter is found wanting. Similar oppositions are found in studies of play. These studies need not necessarily focus on children, as the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) has demonstrated in his classic *Homo ludens* (1938), which charts the changing role of play in western culture since the middle ages. But other researchers have picked up on play as a defining feature of modern childhood (Opie & Opie, 1959, 1969; Sutton-Smith, 1997) with a particular interest in the position of play in relation to children's agency and inventiveness within self-styled cultural practices. Play is sometimes defined in relation to games which are rule-based, structured and often collective activities, and these definitions feed into computer games design and research (see Gee, this volume). Other scholars draw on play theories in studying children's toys which are objects appropriated for play but not necessarily manufactured as such. With digitization, toys and media are increasingly interlaced into so-called "smart toys" as described by Dan Fleming in this volume (see also Goldstein et al. 2004).

The view from media studies
Together, the main strands of childhood studies within the human and social sciences illuminate two pervasive discourses on childhood that also inform media studies, namely the discourse of the vulnerable child and the discourse of the competent child. These discourses hark back to the respective western notions of the sinful child in need of adult supervision, guidance and protection and the romantic notion, encapsulated by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and, conversely, of the perfect child endowed with all necessary faculties and in little need of external socializing agents. They continue today to operate through a binary logic that frames academic as well as applied studies on childhood (Cleverley & Phillips, 1976/1986). That these dual discourses retain their potency results less from their apposite insights into childhood than their speaking to deep-seated tensions in adults' relations to both their offspring and to their own childhoods. On both a personal and a societal level, adults are in a position of power *vis a vis* (young) children for obvious reasons of care; but at the same time adults are wholly dependent upon children to secure the continuation of life, whether in an economic, biological, social or cultural sense. This makes children's "proper" conditions of life an issue of continual adult concern, with a persistent focus on the opposition of dependence/independence, as well as that of continuity/change.

These basic concerns go a long way towards explaining why most theories of childhood, including those from media studies, assume a normative dimension even when their parent disciplines typically critique and seek to deconstruct normative assumptions in other domains. Indeed, in both childhood studies and media studies of children, the normative assumptions are too often left unacknowledged, for when adults investigate children and childhood they are offered an opportunity to revisit their own past with a view to framing the future; and this trajectory seems to undermine the distance required to position oneself as researcher in relation to the object of research. This tacit normativity equally offers an explanatory framework for another set of key oppositions that may be identified in studies on childhood, namely the opposition between interpersonal and mediatized practices. The first are often more tangible to adults since they may partake in conversations and face-to-face interactions with children, while children's interactions with media seem more dispersed and less transparent to the adult eye. And what one does not know or

understand tends to be neglected or forgotten. Herein lies a challenge to both social sciences and humanities as they seek to understand the importance of media in childhood, a challenge that many contributors to the present volume seek to meet.

Studies on children's relation to media are almost as old as media themselves and normative approaches dominate from the outset. When children and young people in Europe and North America become avid readers of so-called 'penny dreadfuls' or dime novels in the late 1800s, studies warn against their perceived ill-effects (Salmon 1888, Drotner 1985/1988, Denning 1887), and later investigations on comics continue this approach (Barker 1989, Barker & Petley 2001). The advent of film equally spurs pioneer research on children's and young people's film going such as the thirteen reports from the USA known as the Payne Fund Studies (1929-32) and an earlier German study performed by Emilie Altenloh (Altenloh 1914).

The professionalisation of many academic fields during the 20th century includes literary studies, film studies and media studies, all of which conduct research focused on children. Still, these traditions rarely interact and so, for example, the fairly comprehensive research on children's books follows an "arts" tradition in literary studies that is at odds with the formative tradition within media studies "proper". Throughout the twentieth century, particularly the second half, the interdisciplinary field of media studies, or communication, has developed diverse strands of theory, method and focus. Yet when we turn to the work on children in particular, it seems that most has followed one main approach, namely an investigation into the effects – mainly harmful, though also some positive - of the media, mainly television. In consequence, the particular intersection of media and children has become ensnared in the hotly contested debates not only over the effects of the media but also over this very emphasis on media influences on individuals and its often tacit dependence on particular agendas of public concern, research funding and regulatory policy. Perhaps in consequence, for many in media studies, a focus on children seems narrow, uncritical, empiricist or conservative. It also seems to address an irresolvable problem; as UK researcher Denis McQuail observes, 'the entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that there are effects from the media, yet it seems to be the issue on which there is least certainty and least agreement' (1987: 251). Partly, the problem lies outside the field, with the kinds of questions that are asked of it. Parents, school and peers are all readily acknowledged as major influences on children's development, though the theories and methods designed to investigate them are complex, diverse and contested. Yet in relation to media influence, these complexities seem to frustrate, for it seems that straightforward answers are expected and yet, not forthcoming (Barker & Petley, 2001; Kline, 2003). Indeed, more recent research argues that instead of asking, what is the effect of the media on a particular and usually problematic aspect of childhood, research should instead identify the range of factors that directly, and indirectly, through interactions with each other, combine to explain particular social phenomena – for any particular social problem (e.g. aggression, prejudice, obesity, bullying, etc) is associated with a distinct and complex array of putative causes of which one may be media content or use (Millwood Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006). In other words, instead of asking whether the media harm children one should ask instead, of the many causes of particular social ills, what role do the media play? This invites a recognition of the wider context within which media are located, thus avoiding a media-centric approach.

Additionally, there are many other ways that media studies does and can research the relation between media and children, though these undoubtedly receive less attention from the research community, policy-makers and the public. Audience studies, particularly approaches stressing an active and interpretative audience, have been productively applied to children – in the context of television in the family and home (Buckingham, 1993; Hodge & Tripp, 1986; e.g. Palmer, 1986), later computers and the internet at home and also at school, in the community, among peers, and so on (e.g. Buckingham & Willett, 2006). While media theory has always been committed in principle to the integrated analysis of production, texts, and audiences, empirical research on audiences was somehow marginalised by comparison with texts especially. Reception studies rectified this tendency by foregrounding the cultural contexts within which meanings are both encoded and decoded and acknowledging the importance of the socially shared (or diversified) aspects of those contexts. Hence, empirical reception studies have variously explored the relationships between media texts – film, soap opera, news, etc - and their audiences. Audience interpretations or decodings have been found to diverge depending on viewers' socio-economic position, gender, ethnicity, and so forth, while the possibilities for critical or oppositional readings are anticipated, enabled or restricted by the degree of closure semiotically encoded into the text and by audiences' variable access to symbolic resources. The point is not that audiences are 'wrong' but that they construct their interpretations according to diverse discursive contexts which are themselves socially determined.

As a result of this now considerable body of work, audiences are no longer thought of according to the popular image which always threatens to recur, as homogenous, passive and uncritical or vulnerable to the direct influence of meanings transmitted, and perhaps manipulated by, the mass media. Extending this approach to children and young people, one early example of this approach was Patricia Palmer's study of 'the lively audience', which showed how the symbolic and identity relations between children and television change as children develop intellectually: "with the development of an understanding of narratives, of story and character, older children make more complex demands on their favourite TV shows" (1986: 121). Another was David Buckingham's exploration of how teenagers interpreted the popular British soap opera, EastEnders, following an encoding/decoding approach to show how different groups of young people draw on distinct cultural resources to interpret the programmes divergently, as guided by the deliberate openness structured into the genre (Buckingham, 1987). Possibly the most creative study in this tradition was Bob Hodge and David Tripp's re-examination of children's responses to cartoons, explicitly critiquing the media effects tradition in its assumption that children are uncritical and, indeed, vulnerable to persuasion when faced with violent cartoon imagery, by combining a semiotic and Piagetian approach to reveal the subtleties with which children negotiate the reality claims of cartoons, responding to the invitation to engage creatively with the fantasies portrayed (Hodge & Tripp, 1986).

More recently, these interpretative approaches to children's television have been extended to other screen-based media, especially computers, games and the internet. Possibly because computer-based media incorporate print as well as audiovisual forms, the emphasis on interpretation has been reframed in terms of literacy, so that the interpretative resources and capabilities that children evince in response to these screen media are revealed to draw partly on the long tradition of print literacy as well

as on more recent challenges posed by alternative, multimedia literacies – whether termed computer literacy, visual literacy, internet literacy, etc (Kress, 2003; Snyder & Beavis, 2004). As noted earlier, children's skills in using, interpreting and critiquing such media becomes more urgent as these are valuable not only for entertainment purposes but transfer across, in ways still little understood, to the realms of education, work and participation. The continuities with reception studies remain important, even in this fast-changing media and information environment, with key questions including the ways in which children diversely interpret media contents, the cultural and social resources they draw upon in so doing, and the value of the skills and literacies they develop in consequence (Livingstone, 2004, Drotner 2005).

These approaches are, however, more focused on media content and its interpretation than on media as material goods, part of the cycles of consumption in everyday life. An alternative strand of research, now known as domestication research, examines how the practices and routines of daily life serve to incorporate new media goods – the television set, the computer, the personal radio, the mobile phone, and so forth, rendering them meaningful within particular local contexts in ways not necessarily anticipated by their manufacturers and marketers. In this literature, children play a fairly central role because, as diffusion statistics repeatedly show, it is often families with children who lead in the adoption of new media goods and, when interviewed, parents point to children's demands or parental perceptions of children's needs as a major driver of new purchases. Hence there is a growing body of research examining how children and families appropriate computers, games, the internet, the mobile phone (e.g. Lohr & Meyer, 1999; Facer, Furlong, Furlong, & Sutherland, 2003; Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Ling, 2004).

As in the interpretative approach outlined above, the stress in domestication research is also on people as agents, co-constructing the meaning of goods rather than passively receiving the meanings as given by powerful media producers. This seems particularly apt for children, for their creative appropriations of media goods can be not only significant for them (as in their colourful arrangements of media goods, images and paraphernalia in their bedrooms, for example) but also significant for the market as a whole – consider young people's active role in the 'discovery' of text messaging, or the music and fashion industries' repackaging of street style and habits. As this last point highlights, the political economic dimensions of children and young people's everyday activities in relation to media are far from negligible. One emerging tradition, still too little practiced because, perhaps, of its considerable methodological demands, combines the analysis of political economy and cultural appropriations. Examples of research in this tradition include Janet Wasko and colleagues' (2001) analysis of the global phenomenon of Disney, the work of David Buckingham (2000)on the 'edutainment' market for children and recent work by Sara Grimes and Leslie Shade on Neopets (2005)Often triangulating an account of production, text and audience or user response, these studies portray children's relation to media in the round, tracing the consequences of particular forms of engagement in economic and cultural terms but also, more critically, revealing how children's opportunities and practices are subtly shaped and constrained by the wider political economy of the child and youth markets.

Our approach in this volume

In the present volume, we adopt a holistic approach to children's media culture by integrating a media and a child perspective and by drawing on both the humanities and social sciences as theoretical and empirical tools of analysis and explanation. We are aware that this approach is fairly inclusive and ambitious, and naturally different contributors introduce different inflections in defining and developing their disciplinary specialisms and cross-overs. Indeed, in selecting contributors, our aim was to encompass a broad range of perspectives and interests, and part of our excitement about the volume derives from the often unexpected as well as the anticipated parallels and interconnections that have emerged and which can be traced across different combinations of chapters. Particularly, and by contrast with many works in this field, this volume does not treat the North American experience as primary, but instead seeks to address the cultural diversity (and, of course, commonalities) of children's mediated culture around the world. For we concur with Curran and Park (2000: 3) that, although 'it has become routine for universalistic observations about the media to be advanced in English-language books on the basis of evidence derived from a tiny handful of countries', the field must now 'de-Westernise', recognising the importance of globalisation as a grand narrative, and prioritising comparative analysis in terms of method.

Thus in this volume, we situate American culture, and the dominance in English language circles of the North American research tradition, within multidisciplinary and multilingual debates about globalisation, for the American experience is as particular and, to many, as 'other', as is that of the rest of the world. It offers, indeed, an interesting point of contrast, too little analysed as such, in relation to the cultures of childhood and media on the other four continents. We explicitly tasked our contributors with representing research conducted in diverse countries, often published in languages other than English, so as to permit a wider lens on existing research and to invite a broader recognition of emerging research trends. For some, this means an exploration of how a North American tradition has been applied to, and perhaps modified for, a particular region of the world, while for others it means introducing a distinct research tradition, grounded in a different locale, within an English-language volume. For the reader, a comparative focus is clearly invited, not only to learn about 'other' cultures but also to question one's own from the perspective of elsewhere (Alasuutari, 1995; Livingstone, 2003).

Not only did we urge upon our contributors the importance of multiple cultural and national standpoints from which to survey the field, we further stretched them by inviting a historical gaze. As John Thompson observes, "if we focus … on symbolic forms and their modes of production and circulation in the social world, then we shall see that, with the advent of modern societies in the later mediaeval and early modern periods, a systematic cultural transformation began to take hold" (1995: 46). Yet there is something about the combustible explosive combination of children, media and social change that makes for a field which too readily falls foul of the twin problems of a heartfelt nostalgia for 'the past' and a fascination with the potential of 'the future'. Beyond encouraging researchers to eschew these pitfalls, both of which mar the quality of much public debate, the intellectual challenge remains to understand the present. This, we contend, requires researchers to balance a recognition of historical continuities where these exist (and so, refusing easy but unsubstantiated claims for 'the new') with the careful identification not only of (the rather rare instances of)

genuine transformation but also of the subtle processes that serve to integrate change within the context of the familiar – processes of social shaping and of remediation or reconfiguration, for instance, by which media innovations are rendered meaningful by the cultural practices within which they are appropriated, these in turn serving to refashion or reposition pre-existing practices (Berker, Hartmann, Punie, & Ward, 2006; Bolter & Grusin, 1999). On a grander canvas, we must recognise the ways in which both childhood and media are caught up with the longer history of modernity and late modernity, for it is the slower but profound processes of globalisation, individualisation, commercialisation and privatisation of culture that sets the conditions for both children's lives and for media practices, albeit inflected in different ways in different times and places, according to path dependencies shaped by the structures and conditions of everyday life.

As will be evident from the contributors' brief biographies, we have invited specialists in children's media culture from the fields of sociology, education, anthropology, history, literature and so forth, as well as media, communications and cultural studies, making for a fertile mix that will surely stimulate productive comparisons of approaches and findings in the mind of the curious reader, comparisons across chapters, topics, methodologies, disciplines and subfields, and countries and regions of the world. In reflecting on the process of selecting contributors, we must acknowledge our own limitations in soliciting contributions especially from certain parts of the world, despite disseminating calls for contributions across diverse networks of contacts. We implemented a rigorous review process, for which we extend profuse thanks to our International Advisory Board for their constructive reviews, as well as to our authors for their willingness to revise and improve chapters as requested. But not all contributions made it through this inevitably culturally-shaped process of review, and not all of those contacted were willing or able to write in English, this being another impediment commonly placed in the way of international collaboration (for, unlike the world of commerce, the academy has little budget for translation costs and so relies, serendipitously, on the variable linguistic skills of its members). Last, we reluctantly reached the view that, to the best of our knowledge, not all of the countries or regions we wished to represent between these covers sustains a critical mass of scholarship in this particular area, this again impeding the range and scope of our international ambitions.

Nonetheless, we hope it is not immodest to observe that we still see no competition for a volume of such breadth and scope on the shelves of bookshops and libraries, for none encompasses so many experiences, cultures and diversity, and so none so explicitly counters universalistic (or even imperialistic) assumptions about 'childhood' or 'media' as homogenous phenomena. Thus we hope that this volume will represent, and act to promote, the international and comparative study of children, media and culture, mapping an agenda for future research that shares insights from one location or perspective to another, so that in future years, other volumes can be (even) more inclusive in their coverage.

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