Mobilizing the Imagination in Everyday Play:
The Case of Japanese Media Mixes

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The spread of digital media and communications in the lives of children and youth have raised new questions about the role of media in learning, development and cultural participation. In post-industrial societies, young people are growing up in what Henry Jenkins (2006) has dubbed "convergence culture"—an increasingly interactive and participatory media ecology where Internet communication ties together both old and new media forms. A growing recognition of this role of digital media in everyday life has been accompanied by debate as to the outcomes of participation in convergence culture. Many parents and educators worry about immersion in video gaming worlds or their children's social lives unfolding on the Internet and through mobile communication. More optimistic voices suggest that new media enable young people to more actively participate in interpreting, personalizing, reshaping, and creating media content. Although concerns about representation are persistent, particularly of video game violence, many of the current hopes and fears of new media relate to new forms of social networking and participation. As young people's online activity changes the scope of their social agency and styles of media engagement, they also encounter new challenges in cultural worlds separated from traditional structures of adult oversight and guidance. Issues of representation will continue to be salient in media old and new, but issues of participation are undergoing a fundamental set of shifts that are still only partially understood and recognized. My focus in this chapter is on outlining the contours of these shifts. How do young people mobilize the media and the imagination in everyday life? And how do new media change this dynamic?

A growing body of literature at the intersection of media studies and technology studies examines the ways in which new media provide a reconfigured social and interactive toolkit for young people to mobilize media and a collective imagination. After reviewing this body of work and the debates about new media and the childhood imagination, I will outline a conceptual framework for understanding new genres of children's media and media engagement that are emerging from convergence culture. The body of the paper applies this framework to ethnographic material on two Japanese media mixes, Yugioh and Hamtaro. Both of these cases are examples of post-Pokemon media mixes, convergence culture keyed to the specificities of children's media. I suggest that these contemporary media mixes in children's content exemplify three key characteristics that distinguish them from prior media ecologies: *Convergence* of old and new media forms; authoring through *personalization and remix,* and *hypersociality* as a genre of social participation. My central argument is that these tendencies define a new media ecology keyed to a more activist mobilization of the imagination in the everyday life of young people.

1

The Imagination in Everyday Life

Current issues in new media and childhood are contextualized by longstanding debates over the role of media, particularly visual media, in the imaginative lives of children. At least since television came to dominate children's popular cultures, parents, educators, and scholars have debated the role of commercial media in children's creativity, agency, and imagination. One thread of these debates has been concerned with the content of the imagination, examining issues such as representations of gender or violence. Another strand of the debate, which I will examine here, focuses on the form, structure, and practice of the imagination. What is the nature of childhood imagination when it takes as source material the narratives and characters of commercial culture? What are the modes of social and cultural participation that are enabled or attenuated with the rise of popular children's media? Does engagement with particular media types relate to differences in childhood agency or creativity? Behind these questions is the theoretical problematic of how to understand the relation between the text produced by the media producer and the local contexts of uptake by young people. Framed differently, this is the question of how the imagination as produced by commercial media articulates with the imagination, agency, and creativity of diverse children going about their everyday lives. In this section, I review how this question has been taken up and suggest that theories of participation and collective imagination are ways of resolving some of the conceptual problematics in a way amenable to an analysis of new interactive and networked media.

Our contemporary understandings of media and the childhood imagination are framed by a set of cultural distinctions between an active/creative or a passive/derivative mode of engaging with imagination and fantasy. Generally, practices that involve local "production"—creative writing, drawing, and performance—are considered more creative, agentive, and imaginative than practices that involve "consumption" of professionally or mass produced media—watching television, playing video games, or reading a book. In addition, we also tend to make a distinction between "active" and "passive" media forms. One familiar argument is that visual media, in contrast to oral and print media, stifle creativity, because they don't require imaginative and intellectual work. Until recently, young people almost exclusively "consumed" dynamic visual media (i.e. television and film), unlike in the case of textual or aural media where they are expected to also produce work. This means that visual media, particularly television, has been doubly marked as a consumptive and passive media form. These arguments for the superiority of "original" authorship and textual media track along familiar lines that demarcate high and low culture, learning and amusement. For example, Ellen Seiter (1999) analyzes the differences between a more working class and an upper middle class preschool, and sees the distinctions between "good" and "bad" forms of media engagement as strongly inflected by class identity. The middle class setting works to shut out television-based media and media references, and values working on a computer, reading and writing text, and play that does not mobilize content derived from popular

commercial culture. By contrast, the working class setting embraces a more active and informed attitude towards children's media cultures.

Scholars in media studies have challenged the cultural distinctions between active and passive media, arguing that television and popular media do provide opportunities for creative uptake and agency in local contexts of reception. Writing in the early years of digital media for children, Marsha Kinder (1991) suggested that video games and postmodern television genres provide opportunities for kids to "play with power" by piecing together narrative elements and genres rather than absorbing narratives holistically. Arguing against the view that commercial media stimulates imitation but not originality in children's imaginings, Kinder points out the historical specificity of contemporary notions of creativity and originality. She suggests that children take up popular media in ways that were recognized as creative in other historical eras. "A child's reworking of material from mass media can be seen as a form of parody (in the eighteenth-sense), or as a postmodernist form of pastiche, or as a form of Bakhtinian reenvoicement mediating between imitation and creativity" (1991, 60). In a similar vein, Anne Haas Dyson (1997) examines how elementary school children mobilize mass media characters within creative writing exercises. Like Seiter (1991), Dyson argues that commercial media provide the "common story material" for contemporary childhood, and that educators should acknowledge the mobilization of these materials as a form of literacy. "To fail to do so is to risk reinforcing societal divisions of gender and of socioeconomic class." (1997, 7).

These critiques of culturally dominant views of the "passivity" of children's visual culture are increasingly well established at least in the cultural studies literature (for reviews, see Buckingham 2000; Jenkins 1998; Kinder 1999). Here I build on these critiques and propose frameworks for understanding the relation between media, the imagination, and everyday activity. Engagement with new media formats such as what we now find on the Internet, with post-Pokemon media mixes, and video games suggest alternative ways of understanding the relation between children and media that do not rely on a dichotomization of media production and consumption or between active and passive media forms. These binarisms were already being corroded by reception studies in the TV-centric era, and they are increasingly on shaky ground in the contemporary period. As digital and networked media have entered the mix, the more active and participatory dimensions of media engagement have been foregrounded to the point that longstanding distinctions about children's relations to media are being fundamentally undermined.

In their analysis of Pokemon, David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green (2004) suggest that Pokemon has continuities with early media forms and trends in children's popular culture. But they also suggest some important new dimensions. Their analysis is worth reproducing as it prefigures my arguments in the remainder of this essay.

> We take it for granted that audiences are 'active' (although we would agree that there is room for much more rigorous discussion about what that actually means). The key point for us is that the texts of Pokemon—or the other Pokemon

'phenomenon'—positively *require* 'activity.' Activity of various kinds is not just essential for the production of meaning and pleasure; it is also the primary mechanism through which the phenomenon is sustained, *and* through which commercial profit is generated. It is in this sense that the notion of 'audience' seems quite inadequate.

In other words, new convergent media such as Pokemon require a reconfigured conceptual apparatus that takes productive and creative activity at the "consumer" level as a given rather than as an addendum or an exception. One way of reconfiguring this conceptual terrain is through theories of participation that I derive primarily from two sources. The first is situated learning theory as put forth by Jean Leave and Etienne Wenger (1991). They suggest that learning be considered an act of participation in culture and social life rather than as a process of reception or internalization. My second source of theoretical capital is Jenkins' idea of "participatory media cultures" which he originally used to describe fan communities in the seventies and eighties, and has recently revisited in relation to current trends in convergence culture (1992; 2006). Jenkins traces how fan practices established in the TV dominated era have become increasingly mainstream due to the convergence between traditional and digital media. Fans not only consume professionally produced media, but also produce their own meanings and media products, continuing to disrupt the culturally dominant distinctions between production and consumption. More recently, Natalie Jeremijenko (2002) and Joe Karaganis (Forthcoming) have proposed a concept of "structures of participation" to analyze different modes of relating to digital and interactive technologies. As a nod to cultural context and normative structures of practice, I have suggested a complimentary notion of "genres of participation" to suggests different modes or conventions for engaging with technology and the imagination.

A notion of participation, as an alternative to "consumption," has the advantage in not assuming that the child is passive or a mere "audience" to media content. It is agnostic as to the mode of engagement, and does not invoke one end of a binary between structure and agency, text and audience. It forces attention to the more ethnographic and practice based dimensions of media engagement (genres of participation), as well as the broader social and cultural contexts in which these activities are conducted (structures of participation). Jenkins writes, "Rather than talking about media producers and consumers occupying separate roles, we might now see them as both participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (2006, 4). Putting participation at the core of the conceptual apparatus asserts that *all* media engagement is fundamentally social and active, though the specificities of activity and structure are highly variable. A critically informed notion of participation can also keep in view issues of power and stratification that are central to the classical distinctions between production and consumption. The structure of participation can be one that includes the relation between a large corporation and child, as well as the relation between different children as they mobilize media content within their peer networks. Notice that in this framing, the site of interest is not only the relation between child and text—the production/consumption and encoding/decoding relations (Hall 1993) that have guided much work in reception studies—but also the social relations between different

4

people who are connected laterally, hierarchically, and in other ways. The research question has been recast from the more individualized, "How does a child interpret or localize a text?" to the collective question of "How do people organize around and with media texts?"

Let me return this to creativity and the imagination. A notion of participation leads to a conceptualization of the imagination as collectively rather than individually experienced and produced. Following Arjun Appadurai, I treat the imagination as a "collective social fact," built on the spread of certain media technologies at particular historical junctures (Appadurai 1996, 5). In an earlier era, Benedict Anderson (1991) argues that the printing press and standardized vernaculars were instrumental to the "imagined community" of the nation state. With the circulation of mass electronic media, Appadurai suggests that people have an even broader range of access to different shared imageries and narratives, whether in the form of popular music, television dramas, or cinema. Media images are now pervasive in our everyday lives, and form much of the material through with we imagine our world, relate to others, and engage in collective action, often in ways that depart from the relations and identities produced locally. More specifically, in children's toys, Gary Cross (1997) has traced a shift in the past century from toys that mimicked real-world adult activities such as cooking, childcare, and construction, to the current dominance of toys that are based in fantasy environments such as outer space, magical lands, and cities visited by the supernatural. The current move towards convergent and digital media is one step along a much longer trajectory in the development of technologies and media that support a collective imaginative apparatus. At the same time, Appadurai posits that people are increasingly engaging with these imaginings in more agentive, mobilized, and selective ways as part of the creation of "communities of sentiment" (1996, 6-8). The rise of global communication and media networks is tied to an imagination that is more commercially driven, fantasy-based, widely shared, and central to our everyday lives *at the same time* as it is now becoming more amenable to local refashioning and mobilization in highly differentiated ways.

Taking this longer view enables us to specify much of the current debate on children and media as defined by historically specific structures of participation in media culture. Until recently these structures of participation were clearly polarized between commercial production and everyday consumption. Yochai Benkler (2006) argues that computer and the Internet are enabling a change in modes of cultural production and distribution that disrupts the dynamics of commercial media production. He lays out a wide range of cases such as Wikipedia, open source software development, and citizen science to argue that cultural production is becoming more widely distributed and coordinated in Internet enabled societies. While people have always produced local folks and amateur cultures, with the advent of low cost PCs and peer-to-peer global distribution over the Internet, high-end tools for producing and sharing knowledge and culture are more widely accessible. My argument about children's culture parallels Benkler's arguments. "Reception" is not only active and negotiated but is a *productive* act of creating a shared imagination and participating in a social world. The important question is not whether the everyday practices of children in media culture are "original" or "derivative," "active" or "passive," but rather the structure of the social world, the patterns of participation, and

5

the content of the imagination that is produced through the active involvement of kids, media producers, and other social actors. This is a conceptual and attentional shift motivated by the emergent change in modes of cultural production.

Understanding New Media

Drawing from theoretical frameworks of participation and collective imagination, I would like to outline in more detail my conceptual toolkit for understanding emergent changes in children's media ecologies, and introduce the Japanese media mixes that are my topic of study. Digital or new media have entered the conversation about childhood culture holding out the enlightened promise of transforming "passive media consumption" into "active media engagement" and learning. Ever since the early eighties, when educators began experimenting with multimedia software for children, digital media have held out the promise of more engaged and child-centered forms of learning (Ito 2003). Although multimedia did not deliver on its promise to shake the foundations of educational practice, it is hard to ignore the steady spread of interactive media forms into children's recreational lives. Electronic gaming has taken its seat as one of the dominant entertainment forms of the 21st century and even television and film have become more user-driven in the era of cable, DVDs, digital download, and Tivo. In addition to interactive media formats where users control characters and narrative, now the Internet supports a layer of social communication to the digital media ecology. Young people can reshape and customize commercial media, as well as exchange and discuss media in peer-to-peer networks through blogs, filesharing, social networking systems, and various messaging services. While there is generally shared recognition that new media of various kinds are resulting in a substantially altered media ecology, there is little consensus as to the broader social ramifications for the everyday lives of young people.

In addressing these issues it is crucial to avoid the pitfalls of both hype and mistrust, or as Valentine and Holloway (2001) have described it, between the "boosters" and the "debunkers." New technologies tend to be accompanied by a set of heightened expectations, followed by a precipitous fall from grace after failing to deliver on an unrealistic billing. In the case of technologies identified with youth subcultures, the fall is often accompanied by what Stanley Cohen (1972) has famously called a "moral panic," the script of fear and crackdown that accompanies youth experimentation with new cultural forms and technologies. While the boosters, debunkers, and the panicked may seem to be operating under completely different frames of reference, what they share is the tendency to fetishize technology as a force with its own internal logic standing outside of history, society and culture. The problem with all of these stances is that they fail to recognize that technologies are in fact embodiments, stabilizations, and concretizations of existing social structure and cultural meanings, growing out of an unfolding history as part of a necessarily altered and contested future. The promises and the pitfalls of certain technological forms are realized only through active and ongoing struggle over their creation, uptake, and revision. I consider this recognition one of the core theoretical axioms of contemporary technology studies, and is foundational to the theoretical approach taken in this chapter. In this I draw from social studies of the technology that see technology as growing out of existing social contexts as much as it is

6

productive of new ones (eg., Edwards 1995; eg., Hine 2000; Lessig 1999; Miller and Slater 2000).

New media produced for and engaged with by young people is a site of contestation and construction of our technological futures and imaginaries. The cases described in this chapter are examples of practices that grow out existing media cultures and practices of play, but represent a trend toward digital, portable, and networked media forms becoming more accessible and pervasive in young people's lives. I propose three conceptual constructs that define trends in new media *form, production*, and *genres of participation*: *Convergence* of old and new media forms; authoring through *personalization and remix,* and *hypersociality* as a genre of participation. These constructs are efforts to locate the ethnographic present of my cases within a set of unfolding historical trajectories of sociotechnical change. These characteristics have been historically present in engagement with earlier media forms, but now synergy between new media and the energies of young people has made these dimensions a more salient and pervasive dimension of the everyday lives of a rising generation. Let me sketch the outlines of these four constructs in turn before fleshing them out in my ethnographic cases.

Contrary to what is suggested by the moniker of "new media," contemporary media needs to be understood not as an entirely new set of media forms but rather as a **convergence** between more traditional media such as television, books, and film, and digital and networked media and communications. Convergent media involve the ability for consumers to select and engage with content in more mobilized ways, well as create lateral networks of communication and exchange at the consumer level. Jenkins writes that convergence culture is "where old and new media intersect, where grassroots and corporate media collide, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2006, 2). In a related vein, I have used the term in popular currency in Japan, "media mix," to describe how Japanese children's media relies on a synergistic relationship between multiple media formats, particularly animation, comics, video games, and trading card games. The Japanese media mix in children's culture highlights particular elements of convergence culture. Unlike with US origin media, which tends to be dominated by home based media such as the home entertainment center and the PC Internet, Japanese media mixes tend to have a stronger presence in portable media formats such as Game Boys, mobile phones, trading cards and character merchandise that make the imagination manifest in diverse contexts and locations outside of the home. Although the emphases are different, both Euro-American and Japanese children's media are exhibiting the trend towards synergy between different media types and formats.

Digital and networked media provide a mechanism not to wholly supplant the structures of traditional narrative media, but rather to provide alternative ways of engaging with these produced imaginaries. In children's media cultures, the Japanese media mix has been central to a shift towards stronger connections between new interactive and traditional narrative forms. Children engaging with a media format like *Pokemon* can look to the television anime for character and backstory, create their own trajectories through the content through video games and trading card play, and go to the Internet to

7

exchange information in what Sefton-Green has described as a "knowledge industry" (2004, 151). Convergent media also have a transnational dimension, as media can circulate between like-minded groups that cross national borders. The case of Japanese animation and media mixes are a particularly intriguing case in this respect, though the transnational dimension is not something that I will have space to address in this essay.

These changing media forms are tied to the growing trend toward **personalization and remix** as genres of media engagement and production. Gaming, interactive media, digital authoring, Internet distribution, and networked communications enable a more customized relationship to collective imaginings as kids mobilize and remix media content to fit their local contexts of meaning. These kinds of activities certainly predate the digital age, as kids pretend to be superheroes with their friends or doodle pictures of their favorite characters on school notebooks. The difference is not the emergence of a new category of practice but rather the augmentation of these existing practices by media formats more explicitly designed to allow for user-level reshuffling and reenactment. User-level personalization and remix is a precondition, rather than a side-effect of engaging with gaming formats and media mixes like *Pokemon* and *Yugioh*. When gaming formats are tied into the imaginary of narrative media such as television and comics, they become vehicles for manifesting these characters and narratives with greater fidelity and effect in everyday life. While the role of the collective imagination in children's culture probably remains as strongly rooted in commercial culture as ever, the ability to personalize, remix, and mobilize this imaginative material is substantially augmented by the inclusion of digital media into the mix.

At the level of everyday practice and social exchange, the tendency towards remix and personalization of media is also tied to the growth of deep and esoteric knowledge communities around media content. I've described the kind of social exchange that accompanies the traffic in information about new media mixes like *Pokemon* and *Yugioh* as **hypersocial**, social exchange augmented by the social mobilization of elements of the collective imagination. Hypersociality is about peer-to-peer ecologies of cultural production and exchange (of information, objects, and money) pursued among geographically-local peer groups, among dispersed populations mediated by the Internet, and through organized gatherings such as conventions and tournaments. Popular cultural referents become a a shared language for young people's conversations, activity, and social capital. This is a genre of participation in media culture that has historically strong roots in cultures of fandom, or in Japan, the media geekdoms of "otaku"(Greenfeld 1993; Kinsella 1998; Okada 1996; Tobin 2004). While otaku cultures are still considered subcultural among youth and adults, children have been at the forefront of the mainstreaming of these genres of participation It is unremarkable for children to be deeply immersed in intense otaku-like communities of interest surrounding media such as *Pokemon*, *Digimon*, or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, though there is still a social stigma attached to adult fans of science fiction or anime.

Like otaku culture, the Japanese media mix is both culturally distinctive and increasingly global in its reach. A certain amount of convergence between different media types such as television, books, games, and film has been a relatively longstanding dimension of modern children's media cultures in Japan as elsewhere. Japan-origin manga (comics), anime (animation), and game content are heterogeneous, spanning multiple media types and genres, yet still recognized as a cluster of linked cultural forms. Manga are generally (but not always) the primary texts of these media forms. They were the first component of the contemporary mix to emerge from in the postwar period in the sixties and seventies, eventually providing the characters and narratives that go on to populate games, anime, and merchandise. While electronic gaming was in a somewhat separate domain through the eighties, by the nineties it was well integrated in to the overall media mix of manga and anime characters, aided by the popularity of game-origin characters such as Mario and Pikachu. These media mixes are not limited to children's media, and includes a wide range of adult-oriented material, but children's media does dominate.

Pokemon pushed the media mix equation into new directions. Rather than being pursued serially, as in the case of manga being converted into anime, the media mix of *Pokemon* involved a more integrated and synergistic strategy where the same set of characters and narratives was manifest concurrently in multiple media types. *Pokemon* also set the precedent of locating the portable media formats of trading cards and handheld networked game play at the center rather than at the periphery of the media ecology. This had the effect of channeling media engagement into collective social settings both within and outside the home as they looked for opportunities to link up their game devices and play with and trade their *Pokemon* cards. Trading cards, Game Boys, and character merchandise create what Anne Allison has called "pocket fantasies," "digitized icons … that children carry with them wherever they go," and "that straddle the border between phantasm and everyday life" (Allison 2004, 42). This formula was groundbreaking and a global success; *Pokemon* became a cultural ambassador for Japanese popular culture and related genres of participation in media culture. Many other media mixes followed in the wake of *Pokemon*, reproducing and refining the formulas that Nintendo had established.

My research was conducted in the wake of the *Pokemon* phenomenon. From 1998-2002, I conducted fieldwork in the greater Tokyo area among children, parents, and media industrialists, at the height of *Yugioh*'s popularity. My research focused on *Yugioh* as a case study, as it was the most popular series in currency at the time. My description is drawn from interviews with these various parties implicated in *Yugioh,* my own engagements with the various media forms, and participant observation at sites of player activity, including weekly tournaments at card shops, trade-shows, homes, and an afterschool center for elementary-aged children. Among girls, *Hamtaro* was the most popular children's series at the time, so it became a secondary focus for my research. I also conducted research that was not content-specific, interviewing parents, participant observing a wide range of activities at the afterschool center, and reviewing diverse children's media. I turn now to descriptions of *Yugioh* and *Hamtaro* at the levels of media

form, authorship, and genres of participation to illustrate how these media mixes were mobilized in the everyday lives of children in Japan.

Yugioh

Like other media mixes, *Yugioh* relies on cross referencing between serialized manga, a TV anime series, a card game, video games, occasional move releases, and a plethora of character merchandise. The manga ran for 343 installments between 1996 and 2004 in the weekly magazine *Shonen Jump* and is still continuing as an animated series. In 2001 the anime and card game was released in the US, and soon after in the UK and other parts of the world. The series centers on a boy, Mutoh Yugi, who is a game master, and gets involved in various adventures with a small cohort of friends and rivals. The narrative focuses on long sequences of card game duels, stitched together by an adventure narrative. Yugi and his friends engage in a card game derivative of the US-origin game Magic the Gathering, and the series is devoted to fantastic duels that function to explicate the detailed esoterica of the games, such as strategies and rules of game play, properties of the cards, and the fine points of card collecting and trading. The height of *Yugioh'*s popularity in Japan was between 1999 and 2001. A 2000 survey of three hundred students in a Kyoto elementary school indicated that by the third grade, *every* student owned some *Yugioh* cards (Asahi Shinbun 2001).

Compared to *Pokemon*, where games are only loosely tied to the narrative media by character identification, with *Yugioh* the gaming comprises the central content of the narrative itself. In media mixes such as *Pokemon* and *Digimon*, the trading cards are a surrogate for "actual" monsters in the fantasy world: *Pokemon* trainers collect monsters, not cards. In *Yugioh,* Yugi and his friends collect and traffic in trading cards, just like the kids in "our world." The activities of children in our world thus closely mimic the activities and materialities of children in Yugi's world. They collect and trade the same cards and engage in play with the same strategies, rules, and material objects. Scenes in the anime depict Yugi frequenting card shops and buying card packs, enjoying the thrill of getting a rare card, dramatizing everyday moments of media consumption in addition to the highly stylized and fantastic dramas of the duels themselves. This is similar to a series like *Beyblade* that followed *Yugioh*, which involves kids collecting and battling with customized battle tops. The objects collected by the fantasy characters are the same as those collected by kids in real life. When I was conducting fieldwork, *Yugioh* cards were a pervasive fact of life, a fantasy world made manifest in the pockets and backpacks of millions of boys across the country.

Personal authorship through collection and remix is at the center of participation with *Yugioh.* While many children, and most girls, orient primarily to the manga or anime series, game play and collection is the focus of both the narrative and the more high status forms of *Yugioh* engagement. Players can buy a "starter pack" or "structure deck" of cards that is ready to play, but none of the children I met in my fieldwork dueled with a preconfigured deck. Players will purchase "booster packs" which are released in different series that roughly correspond to different points in the narrative trajectory of *Yugioh.* The booster packs cost ¥150 (a little over $1US) for 5 randomly packaged cards

from the series, making it a relatively lightweight purchase that is integrated into the everyday routines of kids stopping at local mom and pop shops on their way home from school, or accompanying their parents to a convenience store a bookstore—all locations which stock the most popular trading cards. The purchase of booster packs supports a collection and trading economy between players, because they quickly accumulate duplicate cards or cards that they do not want to keep or use. In duel spaces, players will buy, sell, and trade cards to one another in order to build their collections and design their own playing decks of forty or more cards. Since there are several thousand different cards on the market now, the combinations are endless.

Players I spoke to had a wide range of strategies that guided their collection and deck combinations. Some players orient toward the narrative content, creating decks and collections that mimic particular manga characters or based on themes such as dragon cards, insect cards, or occult cards. Serious players focus on building the most competitive deck, reading up on the deck combinations that won in the national and international tournaments, and pitting their deck against local peers. Others with more of a collector or entrepreneurial bent prioritize cards with a high degree of rarity. All cards have a rarity index that is closely tracked by Internet sites and hobby shops that buy and sell post-market single cards. While most children I played with or spoke to did not have easy access to Internet sites which are the clearinghouses for most esoteric collection knowledge—card lists, price lists, and rarity indexes—they were able to acquire knowledge by visiting hobby shops or through a network of peers which might include older children or young adults. Even young children would proudly show me their collections and discuss which were their favorite cards that reflected their personal taste and style. When I would walk into the afterschool center with a stack of cards I was quickly surrounded by groups of boys who riffled through my deck, asking questions about which cards were my own favorites, and engaging in ongoing commentary about the coolness and desirability of particular cards. While there is a great deal of re-enactment and mimicking of existing narrative content in the practices of card collection and play, the subject positions enabled by the game are highly differentiated and variable. The series sports thousands of cards and dozens of duelist characters that Yugi has encountered in his many years on the air. The relation between the subjectivities of players and the commercially produced narrative apparatus of *Yugioh* is indicative of the mode of authorship of remix and personalization that I have been working to describe in this essay. Players draw from a massive collectively shared imagination as source material for producing local identities and performances.

The practices of card collection and deck construction are closely tied to the modes of participation and sociability of *Yugioh* play. The structure of the media mix is built on the premise that play and exchange will happen in a group social setting rather than as an isolated instance of a child reading, watching, or playing with a game machine. It is nearly impossible to learn how to play the card game rules and strategy with out the coaching of more experienced players. My research assistants and I spend several weeks with the *Yugioh* starter pack, poring through the rule book and the instructional videotape and trying to figure out how to play. It was only after several game sessions with a group of fourth graders, followed by some coaching by some of the more patient adults at the

card shops, that we slowly began to understand the basic game play as well as some of the fine points of collection, how cards are acquired, valued and traded. Among children, this learning process is part of their everyday peer relations, as they congregate after school in homes and parks, showing off their cards, hooking up their game boys to play against one another, trading cards and information. We found that kids generally develop certain conventions of play among their local peer group, negotiating rules locally, often on a duel-by-duel basis. They will collectively monitor the weekly manga release in *Shonen Jump* magazine, often sharing copies between friends. In addition to the weekly manga, the magazine also featured information about upcoming card releases, tournaments, and tournament results. The issues featuring the winning decks of tournament duelists are often the most avidly studied. When kids get together with their collections of *Yugioh* cards, there is a constant buzz of information exchange and deal-cutting, as kids debate the merits of different cards and seek to augment both their play deck and their broader card collection. This buzz of hypersocial exchange is the lifeblood of the *Yugioh* status economy, and what fuels the social jockeying for knowledge, position, and standing within the local peer network of play.

Hamtaro

In contrast to boys, whose status economy often revolves on skill in competitive play, with girls, this is less central to their social lives. They tend to engage in a wide range of media and play that differs depending on their particular playmate. The girls I spoke to preferred the more subtly competitive exchange of stickers to develop their connoisseurship and cement their friendship circles and did not participate as avidly in the hypersocial buzz of card trading. When *Yugioh* tournaments were held at the afterschool center I observed at, a handful of girls might participate, but they tended to watch in the sidelines even though they likely had their own stash of cards. None of this is news to people that have looked at the gendered dimensions of play. Although *Pokemon* crosses gender lines because of its cute characters, the same is not true for most Japanese media mixes. Overall, boys' content is culturally dominant. It sets the trends in media mixing that girls' content follows. But girls' content *is* following. The trend is slower but as of the late nineties most popular girls content will find its way to Game Boy, though not to platforms like Nintendo consoles or Playstation. Otaku-like forms of character development and multi-year and multiply threaded narrative arcs are also becoming more common in series oriented towards girls. There is yet to be a popular trading card game based on girls content, but there are many collectible cards with content oriented to girls. The gender dynamics of the media mix is a complex topic that deserves more careful treatment than I can provide here. To give one example of how the dynamics of new media mixes is making its way girls content, I will describe the case of *Tottoko Hamutarou* (or Hamtaro, as it is known in English), the series that was most popular among girls during the period of my fieldwork.

Hamtaro is an intrepid hamster owned by a little girl. The story originated in picture book form in the late nineties and became an animated series in 2000. This year, the anime series will pass the 300 episode mark. After being released as a television anime, Hamtaro attracted a wide following, quickly becoming the most popular licensed

character for girls. It was released in the US, UK and other part of the world in 2002. Hamtaro is an interesting case because it is clearly coded as girls content, and the human protaganist is a girl. But the central character, Hamtaro is a boy. It has attracted a fairly wide following among boys as well as girls, though it was dwarfed by *Yugioh* in the boys' market during the time that I was conducting my fieldwork. The story makes use of a formula that was developed by *Pokemon*, which is of a proliferating set of characters that create esoteric knowledge and domains of expertise. While not nearly as extensive as the *Pokemon* pantheon or *Yugioh* cards, Hamtaro is part of a group of about twenty hamster friends, each of which has a distinct personality and life situation. To date the series has introduced over 50 different quirky hamster characters, and complex narratives of different relationships, compatibilities, antagonisms, and rivalries. The formula is quite different from the classic one for girls' manga or anime that has tended to have shorter runs and is tightly focused on a small band of characters including the heroine, friend, love interest, and rival. Instead, Hamtaro is a curious blend of multi-year soap opera and media mix esoterica, blending the girly focus on friendship and romance with otaku-like attention to details and a character-based knowledge industry.

In addition to the narrative and character development that follows some of the formulas established by *Pokemon*, the series also exhibits the convergent characteristics of the contemporary media mix. *Hamtaro'*s commercial success hinges on an incredibly wide array of licensed products that make him an intimate presence in girls' lives even when he is not on the screen. These products include board games, clothing, curry packages and corn soup, in addition to the usual battery of pencils, stationary, stickers, toys, and stuffed animals. Another element important element of the *Hamtaro* media mix is game boy games. Five have been released so far. The first (never released overseas), *Tomodachi Daisakusen Dechu (The Great Friendship Plan),* was heavily promoted on television. Unlike most game commercials that focus on the content of the game, the spot featured two girls sitting on their bed with their Game Boys, discussing the game. The content of the game blends the traditionally girly content of relationships and fortune telling with certain formulas around collection and exchange developed in the boys media mix. Girls collect data on their friends and input their birthdays. The game then generates a match with a particular hamster character, and then predicts certain personality traits from that. The game also allows players to predict whether different people will get along as friends or as couples. Girls can also exchange data between game boy cartridges. The game builds on a model of collection and exchange that was established in the industry since *Pokemon*, but applied to a less overtly competitive girl-oriented exchange system. In Japan, *Hamtaro* even has a trading card game associated with it, though it pales in scope and complexity compared to those of *Yugioh* and *Pokemon*.

When I spoke to girls about *Hamtaro* they delighted in telling me about the different characters, which was the cutest or sweetest, and which was their favorite. At the afterschool center, I often asked girls to draw pictures for me of media characters, one of many activities that the girls favored. *Hamtaro* characters were by far the most popular, followed by *Pokemon*. In each case, girls developed special drawing expertises and would proudly tell me how they were particularly good at drawing a particular hamster or

Pokemon. The authorship involved in this creations does not involve the same investments of card players and collectors, yet there are still dimensions of personalization and remix. The large stable of characters and the complex relational dynamics of the series encourages girls to form personalized identifications with particular hamsters, manifest in a sense of taste and connoisseurship of with drawing is just one manifestation. Girls develop investments in certain characters and relational combinations. If they mature into a more otaku-like form of media engagement, these same girls will bring this sensibility to bear on series that feature human characters and more adult narratives of romance, betrayal, and friendship. The *doujinshi* (amateur comic) scene in Japan was popularized by young women depicting alternative relational scenarios and backstories to popular manga. Elsewhere I have discussed in more detail the role of doujinshi in popular youth cultures (Ito Forthcoming). Here I simply note that there *Hamtaro* engagements include an echo of the more hypersocial practices of remix, personalization, and connoisseurship that is more clearly manifest in boys' popular cultures and practices.

Conclusions

The cases of *Yugioh* and *Hamtaro* are examples of how broader trends in children and new media are manifest in Japan-origin media and media cultures that are becoming more and more global in their reach. Part of the international spread of Japanese media mixes is tied to the growth of more participatory forms of children's media cultures around the world. At the same time, different national contexts have certain areas of specialization. For example, where Japan has led in the particular media mix formula I have described, the US media ecology continues to remain dominant in film and Internet based publication and communication. The conceptual categories—convergence in media form, personalization and remix in authorship, and hypersociality as a genre of engagement—were developed based on my ethnographic work with Japanese media mixes, but I believe also apply to the media and practices of young people in other parts of the post-industrial world. For example, Sonia Livingstone (2002, 108-116) describes trends in the UK towards "individualized lifestyled" tied to a diversification of media and forms of lifestyle expression among young people. In the US, Jenkins (2006) describes the highly activist cultures of fandoms expanding on the Internet. While a comparative look at these forms of participation is beyond the scope of this chapter, there are certainly indications of growing transnational linkages and resonances.

If, as I have suggested, young people's media cultures are moving towards more mobilized and differentiated modes of participation with an increasingly global collective imagination, then we need to revisit our frameworks for understanding the role of the imagination in everyday life. Assessed by more well-established standards of creativity, the forms of authorship and performance I have described would be deemed derivative and appropriative rather than truly original. It is also crucial that we keep in view the political economic implications of having young people's personal identities and social lives so attuned and dependent on a commercial apparatus of imaginative production. At the same time, we need to take seriously the fact that cultural forms like *Yugioh* and *Hamtaro* have become the coin of the realm for the childhood imagination, and recognize

14

them as important sources of knowledge, connoisseurship and cultural capital. Even as we look for ways of guiding these activities towards more broadly generative forms of authorship, we need to acknowledge *Yugioh* play as a source of creativity, joy, and self-actualization that often crosses traditional divides of status and class. Further, we need to reevaluate what authorship means in an era increasingly characterized by these remix and recombination as a mode of cultural production. Elsewhere I have written about the activities of older fans who compete in official tournaments and engage in the craftwork of producing amateur comics, costumes, and fiction based on anime narratives (Ito Forthcoming). While I don't have space to discuss these activities here, it is important to note that remix and alternative production extends into higher end production practices well beyond card collection, doodling, and everyday game play.

Now as ever individuals produce new cultural material with shared cultural referents. The difference is the centrality of commercially produced source material and, more recently, the ability to easily recombine and exchange these materials locally and through peer-to-peer networks. For better and for worse popular media mixes have become an integral part of our common culture, and visual media referents are a central part of the language with which young people communicate and express themselves. It may seem ironic to suggest that these practices in convergence culture have resulted in a higher overall "production value" in what young people can say and produce on their own. Our usual lenses would insist that engagements with *Yugioh* or *Hamtaro* not only rely on cheap and debased cultural forms, but that they are highly derivative and unoriginal. What I have suggested in this essay, however, is that we broaden the lens through which we view these activities to one that keeps in view the social and collective outcomes of participation. While I am not suggesting that content is irrelevant to how we assess these emergent practices, I do believe that it is just one of many rubrics through which we can evaluate the role of new media in children's lives.

Acknowledging these participatory media cultures as creative and imaginative does not mean foreclosing critical intervention in these practices or abdicating our role as adult guides and mentors. The dominance of commercial interests in this space means that it is crucial for adults with other kinds of agendas to actively engage rather than write off these practices as trivial and purely consumptive. Many efforts in media literacy and youth media are exemplary in this respect, but I believe there is much more work to be done to make these recognitions take hold more broadly. Unless parents and educators share a basic understanding of the energies and motivations that young people are bringing to their recreational and social lives, these new media forms will produce an unfortunate generational gap. Resisting the temptation to fall into moral panic, technical determinism, and easy distinctions between good and bad media is one step. Gaining an understanding of practice and participation from the point of view of young people is another step. From this foundation of respectful understanding we might be able to produce a collective imagination that ties young people's practices into intergenerational structures and genres of participation in convergence culture.

15

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