Play and Folklore

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Play and Folklore – On the Web

This issue of Play & Folklore is the second to enter the 'virtual reality' of the Web. Museum Victoria, the home of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection since 1999, is now publishing Play & Folklore on its web page. As before, it will appear twice a year; as before, it is edited by June Factor and Gwenda Beed Davey and will continue to publish childlore and play research, memoirs, debate and reflection – lively and thought-provoking material from across the globe.

Freed from the costs of printing and postage (although Play & Folklore will still be available in hard copy if required), we can now welcome a much wider readership, and, we hope, new contributors. The old, true notion of knowledge as a public good, freely available to all who wish to partake, is not a reality – at least for Play & Folklore readers. In the future, we hope to publish an Index covering all issues of Play & Folklore, and to reprint key articles, building up an archive of valuable material. Send us your email address, and we will send you each issue. We look forward to your comments complimentary and critical – and your contributions.

PRINS JORIS WAS A GENTLEMAN

Multicultural folklore for children in sound recordings at the National Library of Australia

Gwenda Beed Davey

Children playing games under supervision at the Child-Minding Centre at Graylands Migrant Hostel, Perth, Western Australia (detail). National Library of Australia Pictures Collection.

Prins Joris was a gentleman
A gentleman was he;
He had a coat with currants on
And pants of rice pudding. (TRC 2632)

In 2002 I completed a project for the National Library of Australia which I had begun some years before (Davey, 2002). This was a survey of children's folklore recordings held in the Oral History and Folklore Section, and I was delighted to find that many of the Library's leading field collectors had included some children's folklore among their recordings.

Children's folklore is one of the most ancient of continuous traditions. Stories for children such as *The Emperor's New Clothes* were written down in the fourteenth century, and the famous painting *Children's Games,* produced by Pieter Brueghel in 1560, shows more than eighty games still played by children today. Children's lore is, however, not significant only for its antiquity, but because of the important role which it plays in children's social and intellectual development.

It is of particular interest that the National Library of Australia's collection of sound recordings of children's folklore contains a strong multicultural component. The Dutch rhyme about Prins Joris printed above is one of many in more than twenty languages, held in the Library's Oral History and Folklore section. It's also one of the many nonsense rhymes of a similar type, in different languages, where reality is turned upside down. The cow who jumped over the moon in the English rhyme, *Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle* has many companions such as a mouse in a monastery (Greek), sardines in the mountains (Spanish) and a house with no roof (Italian). This Serbian rhyme is called *The Fisherman:*

The fisherman put a net in the sea
And next day found seven pheasants in it.
The next time he put out a line
He hooked a rabbit!
When he fished out in the deep sea
He found sausages and a bottle of wine!

And nobody in the town could work it all out! (TRC 2632)

There is no doubt that the main reason why adults use nonsense rhymes with young children is for entertainment, but both parents and early childhood specialists are well aware that nursery rhymes serve other functions as well. Nonsense rhymes help children's ability to classify concepts (what's real and what's not), and children's first lessons in counting may be through rhymes such as

One two three four five,
Once I caught a fish alive.
Why did I let him go?
Because he bit my finger so.

Physical and emotional bonding are enhanced by body games such as 'This little pig went to market', 'This is the way the ladies ride', and by charming rhymes such as the Italian *Signorina Patatina:*

Signorina Patatina,	*Little Miss Potato,*
Con le gambe di gallina,	*With your chicken legs*
Con la vesta di veluto,	*And your velvet dress;*
Signorina, ti saluto!	*Little Miss, hello!* *(TRC 2632)*

In an era when cultural differences between people of different ethnic background may be a source of bitter dissension, it is a cause for joy to discover that there are many cultural similarities too, including similarities in the songs, rhymes and games which adults use with very young children. One aspect of multicultural similarities in folklore for children which has interested me for some time involves the enigmatic sayings which adults use, usually humorously, to put curious children in their place. A child's query 'How old are you, grandma?' may be answered in English with 'As old as my tongue and as young as my teeth' and in Italian as 'Thirty years per leg'. The perennial question 'What's for dinner?' may be answered by a Greek mother with 'My liver and kidneys', or by an English-speaker with 'Bread and scrape', or 'Bread and pullet. Most families have their favorites, such as the mysterious response to the question 'What are you making, Dad?' – 'a wigwam for a goose's bridle'.

Although the earliest sound recordings held by the National Library were made in the 1950s by pioneers such as Hazel de Berg and John Meredith, there are only a few recordings of any kind in languages other than English made before the 1970s. This was the decade in which the word 'multicultural' was first used extensively in public discourse, and the decade when real interest began in the cultural treasures brought to Australia by immigrants of many different ethnic origins. Peter Parkhill was one of the first to make field recordings of immigrant musicians, beginning in the 1970s, and his collection held in the National Library includes items for children and performances by children. Parkhill's recordings include musicians from Anatolia (Turkey), Cambodia, Crete, Czechoslovakia, East Timor and Macedonia, all playing for child singers and dancers.

Some of the traditional Turkish songs recorded by Peter Parkhill such as 'The Red Handkerchief' are also included in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection. It is interesting that love songs in many languages, such as the English 'Lavender Blue', are frequently sung by adults to children, and I have found that the old song 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do' has passed through oral tradition into the nursery rhyme repertoire. The following translation of the Turkish folk song 'Mendil' ('The Red Handkerchief'), one of Peter Parkhill's recordings, is from the Australian Children's Folklore Collection (TRC 2632):

Go to the mountains and get some snow;
The wood smells wet, bring it in a golden bowl.
Break a golden nut in the golden bowl
And bring me the red handkerchief.
I should have not broken the nut,
I should not have broken my lover's heart.

There are two exceptions to my contention that most multicultural recordings in the National Library date from the 1970s. One is from the important O'Connor Collection, recorded in the 1950s and 1960s, mainly in Victoria. This collection includes a number of items of children's folklore, including songs and lullabies from Africa, Israel, the United States and Yemen. The other exception is Catherine Ellis's 1962 recording of Aboriginal women at Ooldea (South Australia) singing songs including a lullaby. There are of course many recordings made with Aboriginal people in the National Library's collections, but recordings of traditional lore for children are rarities.

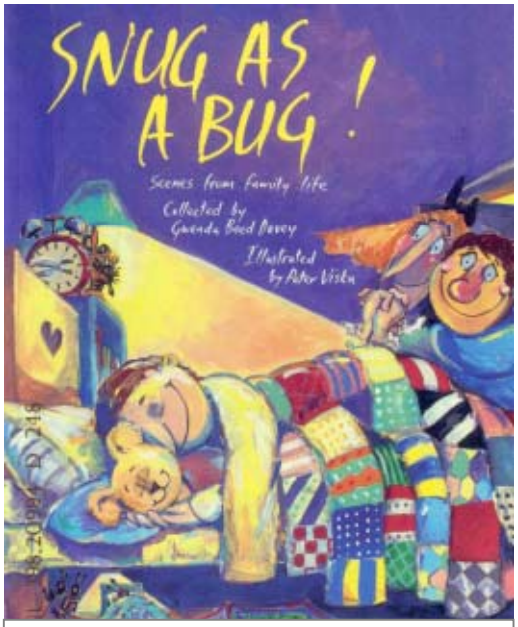
A more recent project, the Greek-Australian Oral History and Folklore Project, was carried out in Melbourne between 1997 and 1999. Interviews were conducted in both Greek and English by Demetra Enzilis, and several different groups of Greek-Australians were interviewed, including Melbourne *Rebetika* musicians and both State and Federal members of Parliament. Groups of women interviewed included women over seventy years of age, professional women, and women under thirty years. The interviews included discussions on folk beliefs and practices, and many interviewees, both men and women, contributed examples of the traditional songs, rhymes and stories which they told to young children, including 'Moon so Bright', which is one of the best-known of all Greek nursery rhymes. It is often said to refer to the illegal Greek schools which were held at night during the Ottoman domination of Greece. However, like English-language nursery rhymes such as 'Little Jack Horner' (sometimes said to refer to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and his allocation of 'plum' real estate to his favorites), the 'political' origins of nursery rhymes are difficult to establish.

Moon so bright
Shine at night.
Light my way
To go to school

To work and play
And learn the rule
And God's good things.

All of the examples given above are folklore used by adults with children. This is folklore FOR children, one of the two main types of children's folklore. The more widely-recognised type is children's own playground lore, folklore OF children, which has become well-known in Australia in recent years through Ian Turner's 1969 publication *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* and through June Factor's compilations such as *Far Out, Brussel Sprout!* and her scholarly book *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia.* Australian children's playground lore is mostly known as English-language lore, and some classic examples are hand-clapping rhymes such as 'Mary Mack dressed in black', 'Teddy bear, teddy bear' or

A sailor went to sea, sea, sea,
To see what he could see, see, see;
But all that he could see, see, see,
Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea.



Snug as a Bug! Scenes from Family Life, collected by Gwenda Beed Davey, ilustrated by Peter Viska (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Some Australian researchers such as Heather Russell and Kathy Marsh have looked at non-English lore in school playgrounds, and particularly at the influences that this introduced children's culture has had on the mainstream play repertoire. Some individual school playgrounds have adopted new games or practices, such as the 'Chinese flick' in marbles, but most Australian children's playground lore remains in the Anglo tradition, as are most of the sound recordings of this lore in the National Library's collections. Even exotic locations like Christmas Island show the dominance of the Anglo pattern! Mr Choo Wai Chee was born on Christmas Island and lived there for a number of years. In 1987 he recorded his experiences for what has become known as the Christmas Island Collection. He spoke about his childhood at South Point:

We were called the 'barbarians' by the other kids and the teachers because we came in from the jungle. South Point and Camp 4/5 kids were always picked on…At 5 o'clock every kid was in the park which was directly opposite our house. There we played all sorts of games like a kind of 'rounders' using rocks for bases, or a game we called 'boompa' which is the sound made by the two sticks we hit together instead of a bat and ball… We played lots of different marble games with real marble marbles. Sometimes if we ran out, we would steal them from the chooks' nests. Mum and Dad used to put dummy marble eggs under the chooks to make them lay more.

The possibilities of cross-cultural research in children's folklore have been greatly enhanced in recent times by the Internet, and particularly through the children's folklore network instigated by Dr Julia Bishop from Sheffield University in the United Kingdom. A recent international discussion (initiated by a folklorist from Norway) concerned the popular playground game of 'elastics", and whether it could be identified before the 1950s. Sometimes called Chinese skippy or skipping, many Australian researchers into childlore believe elastics came to Australia in the 1950s, probably from South-East Asia.

In addition to children's folklore, there are many other multicultural sound recordings in the National Library's collections, such as Barry York's interviews with Maltese-Australians, which hold great interest for scholars. Linguists, for example, are interested in 'migrant English' and in the changes taking place in languages from the home country. The National Library's sound recordings provide a rich body of source material for researchers in linguistics and other disciplines.

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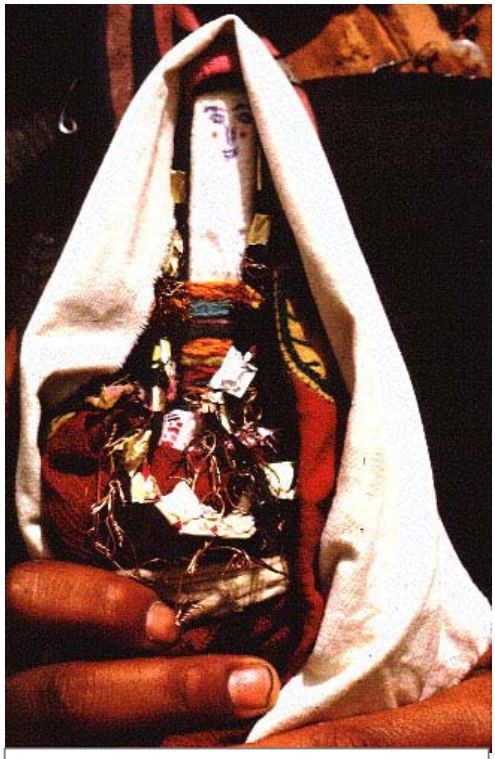
CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY THROUGH TOYS & PLAY IN MOROCCO & THE TUNISIAN SAHARA

Jean-Pierre Rossie

Every toy made by a child and every play activity is a creation, an original act resulting from the child's personality combined with influences from the physical and human environment in which the child lives. However, being creative does not necessarily refer to the unreal or to the imaginary as it very well can be related to everyday life.

From 1975 until 1992 my research was funded by the Belgian National Foundation for Scientific Research, Brussels. For this paper, I have drawn on my fieldwork among the Ghrib between 1975 and 1977; ongoing fieldwork in Morocco since 1992; the collection of Saharan and North African toys in the Musee de l'Homme in Paris; and various ethnographic, linguistic and other publications relevant to this field of study.

The results of this play and toy research are partly available on the Internet (www.sitrec.kth.se), in an interpretative book *Toys,*

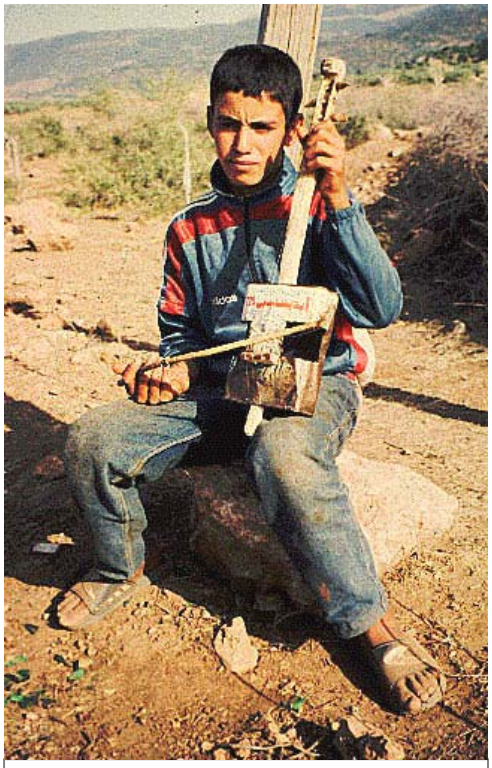


Female doll made by a girl but facial features designed by her brother. Ghrib, Tunisian Sahara, 1975. Photo by the author.

Culture and Society: an Anthropological Approach with reference to North Africa and the Sahara (T), and in the descriptive series *Saharan and North African Ludic Heritages* with a *Commented Bibliography* and a book on *Children's Dolls and Doll Play* (D). Two volumes are forthcoming: *The Animal in Play, Games and Toys* (A) and *The Domestic Life in Play, Games and Toys* (L).Two more volumes are planned *Games of Skill*, and *Traditional and Modern Techniques in Play, Games and Toys*. The capital letters T, D, A and L used before a number refer to the relevant figures in corresponding book. Thus T15 refers to Figure 15 in *Toys, Culture and Society.*

During an observation period in the Tunisian Sahara in 1975 I observed a little boy who showed much creativity while playing.

Three-year-old Bechir plays outside with a stick attached to a rope. He pulls it behind him and calls it 'airplane'. A few minutes later the stick becomes his horse. After a while Bechir takes two halves of an oil barrel, and once his 'car' is constructed by leaning one sheet against the other he sits on top of it; the upper part of the sheet lying over his legs serves as a steering wheel. He imitates a running motor and a car's horn. Later, Bechir starts a pretend play showing much fantasy. This fantasy refers to the real world, not to an imaginary world like the one of Pokemon. Bechir walks to a large basin placed against the hut serving as the kitchen. He climbs on a basin, calling it his donkey. He steps off his donkey, takes a drinking cup and puts it on the basin. Then he goes to take a cushion from the house. Returning he sees that the basin has been removed. He starts crying and his mother puts the basin back against the hut. He puts the cushion and a plastic bag filled with cups on his donkey. He takes a small plank, says that it is his radio, and starts talking about his donkey. His mother and father answer him and accept their integration into the play activity. They tell him to mount his donkey and he says that he will go to the shop. With a stick Bechir beats the donkey, imitating at the same time the movements of the donkey and the cart.



Violin made by the herd boy playing on it. Middle Atlas, Morocco, 1999. Photo by the author.

Children's inventiveness in the use of natural materials of mineral, vegetable, animal and even human origin is omnipresent in North Africa and the Sahara. Ghrib girls from the Tunisian Sahara use wet sand, little branches and reed to make dollhouses (L14-16). They also use different kinds of natural material, such as sticks, reed, goats' or girls' hair when making their dolls (D39-40). Ghrib boys also use sand to make a small house by taking advantage of the different qualities of wet sand and very fine sand (T9-12). The same boys cut out for their herdsman game the shape of a dromedary in dromedary dung (A16). A long cylindrical sandstone represents the herdsman and a smaller one the shepherd's dog.

I have found a clever use of reed-leaves to create the hair of their dolls among the girls of a Central Moroccan village. To give their dolls the much-valued very long hair, these girls look for the upper part of a reed with long green leaves, leaves they split with their fingernails into small strips (T65). Moroccan boys from a High Atlas village use summer squash, pieces of potatoes and sticks to make human and animal figurines (D24). They use clay, mud and gypsum to make human and animal figurines, small houses, toy-utensils, all kinds of vehicles and even a telephone.

Moroccan and Tunisian Sahara children's creative use of material is not limited to natural materials; they also excel in re-utilizing waste material. When making dolls, Ghrib girls use a lot of waste material such as vari-colored rags, threads, yarn, silver paper, pieces of white iron and aluminum, copper wire and buttons (D37-40). At the very beginning of the 1990s, a girl used one of the newly available waste products, namely an empty plastic flask to make a female doll (D41). The girl who made this doll designed an elaborated face on the flask head, something that was not done in the 1970s.

Waste material was also extensively used by Ghrib boys as in the case of making a cart pulled by a mule of stone or when making bicycles (T90-92). For one type of bicycle wheel they used about 20 sardine tins fixed around a tomato tin. When Moroccan girls play household they use whatever kind of waste material they can find (T29-31). Waste material is also used when girls make dolls as in the case of the bride doll riding on a toy-sheep – imitating one of the wedding rituals (D97). The toy-cars and toy-trucks of the Moroccan boys show the great variety of waste material, including old oil filters, used to make them (T100). In 1999, I saw a thirteen-year-old shepherd boy, sitting at the side of a road in the Middle Atlas while playing on a self-made violin. An old tin can serves as resonance chamber and the three metallic strings are made with spirals taken from exercise books (L122).

Some children from these regions have also shown to play creatively with imported material produced by the toy industry or other industries. A striking example of this was shown to me in 1992 by a young woman from a poor quarter of Marrakech, who as a girl of about nine years and at a time when most girls still played with traditional self-made dolls, already played with a cheap plastic doll imported from Hong Kong that she transformed into a splendid Marrakech bride (T32-33). Other girls also use new or second hand imported dolls to adapt them to local ways by sewing clothes for their dolls (T 34). Two eight-year-old village girls living in Central Morocco in 1999 had an original way to play at the wedding of their bride doll using a cardboard box as dollhouse (L32). The bride doll was a Barbie-like imported plastic doll wearing a self-made dress. As one of the dolls lacked arms, the girl replaced these by a piece of reed, returning to the way in which traditional dolls are made (L33). Boys as well show creativity in relation to imported or possibly locally made new material such as plasticine. So, an eight-year-old boy created a few years ago

Dollhouse with Barbie-like doll, the missing arms being replaced by a reed. Central Morocco, 1999. Photo by the author.

his own dinosaur with plasticine one can buy in grocery shops (T107).

I want to stress that these children's creativity was expressed in different ways:

- by using new material for elaborating traditional concepts, as when imported plastic dolls were transformed into traditional brides;
- by using traditional material for elaborating new concepts, as when Ghrib boys made a telephone line with sand and little branches at a time when no Ghrib family had a telephone (T103-104);
- by transferring new meanings to generations-old toys when using them in a totally new context, as when toy-animals of palm-leaves were made to be sold to tourists (T13-16).

Why were these Moroccan children from the 1990s and Tunisian Sahara children from the 1970s, living in non-industrial communities and playing and making toys that more or less often reflect tradition, were so creative? Creativity is defined here as to performance or creation of something personally and independently from adult interference. I want to stress the possible role of the personal initiative and responsibility of children in non-Western non-industrial communities in learning about their physical and sociocultural environment through observation, imitation and play.

Children's play activities in these regions are especially, but not exclusively, collective and outdoor activities. Playgroups are children’s basic social organizations. Playmates are chosen mostly on ties of kinship, gender and neighborhood. Because of the primordial importance of such playgroups, I want to put forward the hypothesis that these children's creativity in playing and making toys might more often be expressed in the children's interactions within their playgroups rather than in the case of isolated players.

I think it is no exaggeration to say that Moroccan and Tunisian Sahara children are regularly shown to be creative players and toy makers. One can find examples of creativity in all types of these children's playful behavior such as motor, visual, verbal, non-verbal and musical expressions, alone or in combination as in pretend play, games of skill, singing and dancing.

Following the importation of toys produced by Asian and European toy industries that already existed in 1915, a re-interpretation of the children's self-made toys is needed. As the personal creation of a toy is replaced by an external input this not only creates a dependency on a purchased toy but also from the one who offers it, namely an adult. At the same time this provokes a devalorization of the self-made toy. It will also provoke a change in the children's attitude towards the material they normally use, dethroning the material of animal, mineral, vegetable and domestic origin. Another fundamental influence on self-made toys and on the play activities in which they are used comes from the mass media, especially television, and from the Western school system. Such powerful agents of change certainly are introducing new models of play and toys.

The usefulness of the Saharan and North African ludic heritage is not limited to North Africa and the Sahara as it is quite possible to integrate it in what is called intercultural pedagogy, peace education or mundial education, for example in Europe where immigrants from these regions settled down decades

ago. As a volunteer of the Ghent Committee for UNICEF in Belgium, I worked out a small project described in the chapter 'Perspectives' in my book on children's dolls and doll play. What I found very stimulating and useful in these ludic approaches to intercultural education is, next to the stimulation of the creativity and personal effort of the children, the promotion of a more positive image of Third World children.

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Dr Jean-Pierre Rossie is a sociocultural anthropologist researching North African and Saharan children's play and toys, and a member of the Stockholm International Toy Research Centre. Other detailed information, maps and photographs can be found in his publications on the website of the Stockholm International Toy Research Centre: www.sitrec.kth.se. Email: jprossie@hotmail.com

Book Review

Colin Heywood (2001). *A History of Childhood.* Cambridge: Polity Press

Reviewed by Gwenda Beed Davey

One of the best things about Colin Heywood's *History of Childhood* is that he makes it very clear what he intends to do. The sub-title of the book is *Children and Childhood in the West from Mediaeval to Modern Times,* and his section headings are straightforward; Part I *Changing Conceptions of Childhood,* Part II *Growing Up: Relations with Parents and Peers,* and Part III *Children in a Wider World.*

Colin Heywood is a Senior Lecturer in Economic and Social History at the University of Nottingham, and his book is a wide-ranging survey that presents a great diversity of evidence about children and childhood. He also presents a diversity of interpretations of this evidence. In this sense his book is a great relief in comparison to some previous histories of childhood, with their tunnel vision about their dominant themes, such as those of Philippe Aries ('the idea of childhood did not exist in mediaeval society'), Lloyd de Mause's litany of child abuse ('the history of childhood is a nightmare…') and Neil Postman's notions of 'the disappearance of childhood' in contemporary society. All of these three have written, essentially, about things which are *done* to children by adults, and they have paid little attention to children's active involvement in their own lives.

Heywood not only rejects the visions of Aries, de Mause and Postman, but argues firmly for historical continuities in (for example) parent-child relations, rather than simple improvements over time. 'There were of course considerable variations created by the familiar influences of class, gender and ethnicity', he writes, but he does not see contemporary childhood as an 'escape from a nightmarish past' (p 116). In this respect Heywood is in accord with the writers of some current American publications, such as Nicholas Orme's *Mediaeval Children* (2001) and David Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli's *History of the European Family Vol.1* (2001). Both also favour continuity in family treatment of children.

It seems to me to be a weakness that so many histories of childhood are written without much, or any, acknowledgement of the importance of children's unfolding physical and intellectual development. Heywood's 2001 book purports to study both '*children* and childhood', but neither of the great psychologists Jean Piaget nor Eric Erikson are mentioned, and Heywood cannot be said to pay much more than lip service to features of

children's autonomous lives, even though he writes on page 4 that 'children must be seen as active in determining their own lives and the lives of those around them', an assertion which he attributes to James, Jenks and Prout's 1998 book *Theorizing Childhood.*

Chapter 7 in Heywood's *History* seems to offer more promise, in his section on 'Mixing with the peer group', which includes a discussion on youthful gangs, and their influence on the behaviour of their members. It also includes a sub-section on 'Games and entertainment'. Heywood has used Bruegel's 1560 painting of *Children's Games* on the cover of his book, but although he acknowledges the antiquity of the games depicted, Heywood is clearly uncomfortable about what he calls 'the pleasing notion of a particular "culture of childhood"' and cautions that

There is a danger here of pushing the young into a ghetto, ignoring the fact that from the very beginning they acquire their language and patterns of thought from adults (p 112).

Folklorists would dispute that children's folk culture represents a 'ghetto', and I would contend that children's folk culture simply represents one of the overlapping cultural milieus in which children take part. Children also belong to the family, the school, the peer group, and the social class, region and nation to which they belong; their often-undervalued folk culture can have a key role in children's overall socialisation.

Heywood has written (p 112) that a study of children's 'tribal' play culture requires the historian to behave like an anthropologist, and he is right. Anyone wanting to write a book about 'children and childhood' needs to recognise that more than the traditional skills of the historian are needed, and although researchers cannot conduct field work among children of past eras, they would be well advised to spend more time with children of the present day, in particular, in the school playground.

One of Heywood's conclusions I most appreciate is that debates on the nature of children and childhood have taken place throughout history, at least from mediaeval times, and do not belong only to the mediaeval era. In Chapter 3, he outlines centuries-old concerns and debates: depravity versus innocence, nature versus nurture, independence versus dependence. He makes clear that issues concerning gender and age, and the dilemmas they pose, are not yet over. Readers of the book will appreciate Heywood's last line: 'one should never underestimate the power of a child'.

PLAY AS DISCOVERY

June Factor

While Director of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, June Factor was asked by Museum Victoria in 1995 to write a consultancy report on the Children's Museum to be created in its new building. June had been previously involved in the development of the Children's Museum in the 1980s, including one of its most successful exhibitions, 'You're It!', a hands-on exploration of children's traditional games.

The following is an extract from that report.

You're It! Exhibition, Children's Museum, 1988. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria

PLAY AS DISCOVERY

The central utility of play as a means of entering and integrating experience is an

assumption that dominates the theory and practice of children's museums. An activity of enormous complexity and variety, play suffers from an excess of (sometimes competing) definitions. Most theorists agree that play has certain distinctive characteristics. It is generally a voluntary activity, an experience entered into for its own sake, not for adult-styled 'useful' ends. It operates outside the boundaries of the 'realism' of everyday life, according to its own, agreed-upon rules. All things that can be imagined may be undertaken in play: 'In play, behaviour, while functioning normally, is uncoupled [and buffered] from its normal consequences... Therein lies both the flexibility of play and its frivolity.'[1] Play offers the young, the small and the powerless an authority and freedom unthinkable in non-play life. It is 'an arena of choice in many contexts where life options are limited'.[2]

Piaget's interest in play as a crucial form of adaptation of behaviour, and the essential mode of learning in early childhood, together with the work of many other psychologists in this field, have undoubtedly influenced children's museum practice.[3] The old aphorism that play is children's work has been adapted to the notion that learning through play will make that process pleasurable.

Sometimes play seems to be viewed as a sugar-coating for the less tasty pill of knowledge. The Louisiana Children's Museum's brochure 'invites anyone who is or was a child to play, to explore, and to investigate. The museum gives free rein to inquiring hands and minds, and it cultivates curiosity. The Louisiana Children's Museum is a dynamic environment where children and their families learn together by having fun together.'[4] The Santa Fe Children's Museum's publicises its exhibits: 'beckoning children to discover, to play, to question, and to find things out.'[5] In Venezuela, the Children's Museum of Caracas sees itself as 'the laboratory lacking in the schools, the place where children learn while having fun.'[6] One of the most prestigious of all children's museums, the Children's Museum in Boston, explains:

> *our environment is informal, but our purpose is serious. Central to our philosophy is the belief that real objects, direct experiences and enjoyment support learning. To involve all kinds of learners we use a variety of strategies and programs... At the Children's Museum, children have fun, and children who are having fun are open to learning.*[7]

According to the enthusiastic author of *Doing Children's Museums*: 'Essentially, children's museums are learning playgrounds, full of choices that encourage visitors to pursue their own interests as far as they want.'[8]

By no means all children's museums support this last, rather simplified view. Despite their rhetoric,[9] most in practice appear to know the kinds and range of learning they wish to impart, and utilise experiential and playful methods to achieve goals that would certainly be acceptable to more formal institutions such as schools and traditional museums. The Boston museum has a comprehensive 'mission statement' and includes among its treasures cultural and natural history collections. In San Francisco, the internationally renowned Exploratorium, established in 1969 by a professor of physics, allows visitors to undertake what its founder called 'a library of experiments' to discover for themselves - or with the help of 'explainers' - fundamental laws of science.[10]

NEGLECT OF CHILDLORE

Perhaps because of its concentration on learning through discovery, the children's museum has not generally been a site for the exhibition or exploration of childlore. The intellectual grounding of these museums may be various, but it rarely extends to the inclusion of research and theory in the field of children's own traditions of play, language and ritual. In this neglect the children's museums have merely reflected a wider institutional silence.

The study of childhood has been relegated in the 20th century to the spheres of paediatrics, psychology and pedagogy. Consequently, the lives of children have not featured in culturally and socially important centres such as museums, other than as part of anthropological exhibits and in more recent times as a significant component of the museum clientele. The children's museum, although revolutionary in its re-characterisation of the role and function of museums, has continued to view children more as learners of adult-devised information than initiators and creators of their own.

As a result, there are very few children's museums that concern themselves with the lore and language of children, those 'accumulated traditions...inherited products and practices'[11] which mark out the young in all cultures as participants, conservers, adapters and inventors of linguistic and kinetic play.

What a scholar has called 'the triviality barrier'[12] is another explanation for this neglect. In the pragmatic, educationally hierarchical and often instrumentalist societies which typify what is known as the 'developed' world, it is difficult to take seriously the repetitive, seemingly absurd and non-functional play of the young. Museums, like schools, value order, clear categorisation, learning which has as its goal increasing competence in intellectual, physical or social 'performance'. Children's museums insist that play - carefully stimulated and channelled by knowledgeable adults - will help children achieve these goals. 'Children's museums create numerous participatory exhibits to help children understand the world in which they live through delightful play.'[13]

But even in a setting which reveres play, few (other than preschool educators) recognise the developmental utility for a child of pretending to be a fairy, playing Tag, speaking Pig Latin, or chanting:

Mary had a little lamb
Her father shot it dead
And now it goes to school with her
Between two chunks of bread.

Such behaviour may be considered a little wild; it is not easily controlled, does not defer to adult priorities, and rarely finds a place at the centre of the museum culture.

IMPORTANCE OF CHILDLORE

You're It! Exhibition, Children's Museum, 1988. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria

Lost to the museums by this marginalisation of childlore is the opportunity to study a central feature of child life. As I have written elsewhere, child-initiated play is the medium and the message, the evolutionary mechanism by which the young of our species make sense of a bewildering world without danger to limb or reputation. Safely anchored in what one theorist has defined as the 'third area' between the external world of objects and people, and the inner world of dream and thought,[14] children creatively and imaginatively explore their own experience, and look with a quizzical eye at the universe of adults that surrounds them... Children together, in the collaborative interaction of play, enhance the communicative possibilities of each individual child.[15]

Through traditions of play, children are able to move outside the limitations of the immediate moment, the here and now, the status of smallness, weakness, ignorance and powerlessness. Theirs is no mere imitation of adult life, or practice of skills useful in the distant future. These engagements of mind, heart and imagination are forms of creative invention built on tradition. Everything is possible in play - if the rules allow it.

In its own way, the playlore of childhood functions for children as the arts do for adults: the flux and chaos of life is temporarily ordered, given form and pattern and meaning. Robert Louis Stevenson understood this when he wrote: 'Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child: it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life.[16]

One facet of childlore is play with toys. Although often presented without historical and cultural context, toys are familiar objects in children's museums. Many include toys as playthings, and facsimiles of 'olden times' toys may be used as historical artefacts. Collecting or exhibiting play material is another matter. Determined not to be associated with a parallel institution, sometimes called a Museum of Childhood, where children's playthings and the paraphernalia of well-to-do nurseries are displayed, a number of hands-on museums refuse to engage in a practice they regard as narrow and static.[17] In the words of an Australian children's museum director, 'relatively uninterpreted collections of adult-made "childhood" artefacts drawn overwhelmingly from a narrow spectrum of society may serve only to reinforce inadequate or wrong stereotypes regarding a small aspect of the life of young people.'[18]

A few children's museums, such as the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia - the first American museum to specialise in children under the age of 8 - have moved beyond the toys/no toys polarity. Here

the staff has recognised the intrinsic importance to an understanding of childhood of a scholarly approach to the world of children engaged in their own self-directed play.

In 1985, the Please Touch Museum presented an unusual exhibition: *Children's Play: Past, Present, & Future*. Intended as a project to 'illustrate the history of children's play in the Delaware Valley', the exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue equally surprising: instead of the customary annotated listing of items in the exhibition, this catalogue contained a series of short essays by leading specialists in the history of childhood and children's folklore. The editor of the catalogue, Brian Sutton-Smith (then both Professor of Education and Professor of Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania), used his final comments to point to the dilemma facing those who would harness play for their own - adult - purposes:

> *[T]here is a common romantic assumption that play is functional and is always worthwhile. At the same time, adults are in general so scared of it that, unless it is called 'game simulation', or 'adjustment', or 'cognition', or 'problem solving', they would rather have nothing to do with it. By calling all of a child's intelligent activities 'play', the modern generation of educators and psychologists manages to suppress play on behalf of education and supervision.*
> *Present trends indicate that there will be much more of such usurpation of play's potential to go wherever the players want to take it...*[19]

As their own contribution to documenting and studying the patterns of children's play, the board of the Please Touch Museum established a Childlife Center within the museum in 1987. Determined that the museum would 'increasingly become known as a centre for research and study of American childhood',[20] the Executive Director persuaded the association of toy manufacturers in America to donate the most popular toys each year to the Center, while continuing to add historical material to an existing collection of objects, including home-made and child-made play artefacts, and audio tapes of childhood memories.

As a result, a children's museum which started, like so many others, as a lively, interactive, hands-on learning centre based on Piagetian principles, has begun a deliberate evolution into something more: a significant institution in American cultural and intellectual life, and one of the few to take the experiences of childhood seriously. A by-product of this development - and one which the museum consciously sought - is to 'speak directly to [their] adult audience who constitute some forty percent of...visitors.[21]

The Children's Museum in the Museum of Victoria followed a similar trajectory when it determined that its second exhibition would focus on the play cultures of childhood. The first exhibition, *EveryBody*, opened in 1985 and was acclaimed for its originality and accessibility to the young. It explored concepts of the human body through sculpture, 'touch and feel' exhibits and a variety of imaginative activities for children. *EveryBody* is an example of a first-rate interactive exhibition which fulfilled one of the Children's Museum goals: to present 'high quality and enjoyable activities for children which stimulate them to discover the [natural] world'.[22]

You're It!, which opened in 1988 and benefited from the talents of *EveryBody*'s designers, Mary and Grant Featherston, was developed from a quite different perspective. A rare instance of a children's

museum making the folklore of the young a central project, the museum utilised the resources of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection, the major public archive documenting the play cultures of childhood in Australia.

This exhibition featured the traditional games of generations of children in this country: Marbles, Hopscotch, string games, spinning tops, paper cut-outs, Knucklebones. In order to 'highlight the universality of children's traditional games',[23] the exhibition included old play practices no longer current, such as Diabolo and Cup and Ball, relatively recent innovations such as Elastics, and non-Anglo variants of games: Aboriginal string games, Japanese Knucklebones (O-Tedama), etc.

You're It! Exhibition, Children's Museum, 1988. Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria

Visitors were able to expand their repertoire of play by observing and practicing Aboriginal string games, learning a Calabrian string game rhyme, and playing American, Japanese and Vietnamese versions of Knucklebones. Indirectly but most effectively, children were encouraged, through their games, to recognise their common humanity. Alone, this would not be sufficient to alter ingrained prejudice or antipathy; in an environment which consciously reinforced reflection on the universality - and attractiveness - of the play traditions of children from other cultures, such activities enhance a museum's efforts to foster respect for difference and challenge bigotry.

Furthermore, by focusing on the non-official, outside-the-classroom traditions of child life, the children's museum provided an exceptionally efficacious bridge between generations. To observe a grandfather and grandson kneeling together in the marbles ring at the *You're It!* exhibition, sharing their often differing knowledge of rules and procedures, was to recognise the potential for such an exhibition to evoke congenial and mutually satisfying interaction between children and adults. Both young and old were experts here, both had much to teach and to learn.

Programs built around the traditions and rituals of childhood create a special space, rare in contemporary culture, where children are acknowledged as teachers and leaders, and adults willingly accept tutelage from the young. No other museum project, in my experience, facilitates such reciprocal and egalitarian relationships between generations.

Once again, the Children's Museum produced an attractive and extremely popular hands-on exhibition. This time, however, it was not a feature of the 'real' world important to adults that was reinterpreted for children's delectation and enlightenment. Here was an exhibition which celebrated a central characteristic of childhood: play. In the words of the designers:

Play is at the very heart of childhood. The theme of play provides an opportunity for the Children's Museum to present an exhibition, not only for children, but also ABOUT children - children's own culture... It will be a lively, participatory exhibition to rekindle memories and stimulate shared experiences across generations...

Play is essential to every aspect of children's development - social, physical and cognitive - but it is still regarded by many, including teachers, as peripheral and ephemeral. In presenting this exhibition, the Children's Museum will give new status to play and games.[24]

Here, as in the Please Touch Museum, there was an awareness of the responsibility of a children's museum to enhance the status of activities of special importance to children. As well, the planners and designers of *You're It!* acknowledged the cross-generational bonding which the experiences of play, common across generations, can engender. Adults bring children to the museum, and there is every reason to consider opportunities to encourage their involvement in the museum's projects. Heather Russell, a consultant to the exhibition and later its archivist, commented in a report written in June 1989:

Thousands of people of different ages and cultural backgrounds visited the exhibition, and, in the case of adults, were inspired and delighted to relive childhood memories of playground games. Children were impressed that here was an exhibition in the Museum where they were the experts - they had the knowledge and the expertise which we adults...wanted to know about. This reversal of the flow of information - from child to adult - contributed significantly to many children's appreciation and enjoyment of the exhibition.[25]

For many teachers bringing school groups to the Children's Museum, the *You're It!* exhibition was something of a revelation. Teachers are rarely educated to appreciate the informal learning and artistry that develops amidst the hullabaloo of their school playgrounds. Most regard yard-duty as a necessary but unloved chore. The discovery, through the exhibition and related materials produced by the children's museum, that their students are tradition-bearers of ancient subcultures, and irreverent adapters and innovators as well, surprised - and delighted - many. Some spoke of their own youth, and felt a renewed sense of affiliation with their charges.

The Children's Museum encouraged teachers to observe their students at play and recognise the extraordinary cultural richness and collaborative learning that takes place outside the classroom. Instead of the customary guide-dog/sheep-dog role often forced on teachers by the traditional museum ethos, there was now an opportunity to interact with the children's museum staff as colleagues. Most teachers, after initial hesitation, responded enthusiastically.

Exhibitions of this kind, with their focus on children's interests and capabilities, have the capacity to draw together youngsters who otherwise are separated by culture or convention. When *You're It!* was taken to schools as part of the Children's Museum's Outreach Program, teachers remarked on changes they observed among their students:

You'd think with all those children, with a huge group of them playing Marbles, that you'd have a few blues. Hardly any of that has gone on and it's really good because it's got boys and girls, children of different nationalities, different ages, all playing together. It's something they all enjoy. Marbles is something you don't have to be really sporty to be good at playing. It crosses a lot of ability barriers, age and sex stereotypes barriers. Yes, especially for some of the Asian children, who knew some of the games the Children's Museum brought out, they relate to those very well and teach the other children how to play.
I think it's really helped them socially too.

[The games] generated a lot of interest from kids with different migrant backgrounds...They brought their games along and taught other kids how to make the equipment e.g. for Elastics using rubber bands threaded together...Before [the Children's Museum] came none of the kids from Asia had volunteered any stories to me about what it was like in the camps in Thailand, etc. All of a sudden it was 'This is what we used to play in the camps in Thailand.'...'So that's the way I played this game and I had to sit there and play while mum was selling food in the market to try and get us some money.'

They felt good because they were actually in a position to show somebody something else that they were better at. There weren't just the differences in these games. There were a lot of similarities discovered. That kids play the same games like Marbles in many parts of the world. They began to swap a lot of ideas e.g. How we played Marbles in Asia, etc. The kids were really receptive to each other.[26]

Such developments in a children's museum are of great importance. They provide the opportunity for youngsters to demonstrate and reflect, in a secure and comparatively non-judgmental environment, on the lore and language of their many cultures. They permit a more holistic approach to the lives and interests of children than that which has emerged historically: on the one side, hands-on, activity-based children's museums endeavouring to make the world of science and the arts (adult-constructed categories) accessible and attractive to the young; on the other side, museums collecting childhood-related materials and artefacts for an audience of adults and children to look at and read about rather than handle or use.

Without representation of the world from children's perspectives and reflecting their priorities, a children's museum is still, in essence, a conduit for adult perceptions, adult criteria of importance (and usually a narrow range of adults at that). More-or-less voluntary, engaging, pleasant for the eye, ear and hand, the children's museum remains as it began: a progressive educational outpost. Lacking a commitment to reflect, analyse and celebrate childhood as children experience it, such a museum cannot be regarded as comprehensive, or, in an intellectual and cultural sense, truly innovative.

1 Peter Reynolds, 'Play and Human Evolution', cited in C.B. Cazden, 'Play and Metalinguistic Awareness: One Dimension of Language Experience', in *Urban Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, January 1974, p.33

[2] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, cited in A. Dargan & Brian Sutton-Smith. Zeitlin, 'City Play', in *1993 Festival of American Folklife*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1993, p.88

[3] A volume which brings together much of the influential writing in this field from the first 75 years of the 20th century is *Play – It's Role in Development and Evolution, eds J.S. Bruner, A. Jolly & K. Sylva*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976

[3] Louisiana Children's Museum, New Orleans

[4] Santa Fe Children's Museum, new Mexico

[5] *Play Rights*, X:3, September 1988

[6] Extract from material produced by the Children's Museum in Boston

[7] Joanne Cleaver, *Doing Children's Museums: A Guide to 265 Hands-On Museums*, Charlotte, Vermont, Williamson Publishing, 1992, p.5

[8] In a conversation between a number of children's museum experts 'about what's next', Claudia Haas from the Kindermuseum in Vienna commented rather tartly: 'I hear so often that American children's museums are learning centers but what do you want them to learn?', *Hand to Hand*, vol. 9, no. 2, Summer 1995, p.3

[9] *ibid*, p.10

[10] R.D. Abrahams, 'Interpreting Folklore Ethnographically and Sociologically', in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. R.M. Dorson, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983, p.345

[11] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Folkgames of Children*, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1972, p.538

[12] J. Haider & T. Azhar, 'Children's Museums: Critical Issues in Architectural Design', *Hand to Hand*, 8:3, Fall 1994, p.2

[13] W.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971

[14] June Factor, Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore in Australia, Melbourne, Penguin, 1988, pp.20-21, 27

[15] R.L. Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', Longman's Magazine, vol. 1, no. 1, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1882, p.51
Not all Museums of Childhood are as limited as this description suggests. In Australia, the Museum of Childhood at Edith Cowan University in Perth has consciously challenged the 'toys and things' approach (see Brian Shepherd, 'Childhood's Pattern: Appropriation by Generation', in Museums and the Appropriation of Culture, ed. Susan Pearce, London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Atholone Press 1994, pp.65-83. The limitations inherent in attempts to convey the experience of childhood through adult-made and chosen playthings is discussed in a critical response to the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood in London by the historian L. Jordonova, 'Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums', in The New Museology, ed. P. Vergo, London, Reaktion, 1990, pp.22-40

[16] Brian Shepherd, *op cit*, p.72

[17] Brian Sutton-Smith, 'Projections: The Future of Play', in *Children's Play: Past, Present & Future*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith, Philadelphia, Please Touch Museum, 1985, p.19

[18] Portia Hamilton Speer, Executive Director, Please Touch Museum, in in *Children's Play: Past, Present & Future*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith, Philadelphia, Please Touch Museum, 1985, p.2

[19] *ibid*

[20] *The Children's Museum, Museum of Victoria*, brochure produced by the Director and the Advisory Board of the Children's Museum in 1986

[21] 'Can You Help? The Children's Museum Needs Exhibits', leaflet produced by the Children's Museum, undated but probably 1988

[22] Mary & Grant Featherston, 'Concept Report', cited in the *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*, no. 11, October 1986, pp.9-10

[23] Heather Russell, 'Collecting Children's Folklore at the Children's Museum of Victoria: December 1988 – June 1989', *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*, no. 16, July 1989, pp.15-16

[24] Teachers at Coomoora Primary School in Springvale, Melbourne, recorded by Cathy Hope and quoted in her article, 'Traditional Games in an Outreach Program', *Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter*, no. 16, July 1989, pp.20, 21

DOROTHY HOWARD MEMORIAL LECTURE CANCELLED

Professor Brian Sutton-Smith has recently suffered a sad bereavement, and was therefore unable to present the Dorothy Howard Memorial Lecture in Melbourne on May 7 as previously announced.

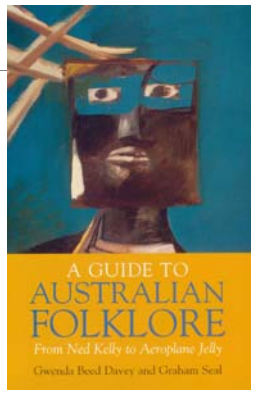
While we much regret this cancellation, we are pleased that Brian's excellent lecture will be included in the publication of Dorothy Howard's monographs on Australian children's playlore, which we hope to publish and launch in 2004 - exactly 50 years since Howard's arrival in Australia as a post-doctoral Fulbright scholar in 1954.

CONFERENCE NOTICE

International Society for Folk Narrative Research, Visby Sweden, 13-17 August 2003.
Topics: Island and Narratives, Cultural heritage, Societies in Transition.
Contacts: email ISFNR@hgo.se. http://ISFNR.hgo.se. ISFNR, Gotland University, SE-621 67 Visby, Sweden.

NEW PUBLICATION

Gwenda Beed Davey and Graham Seal (2003).
A Guide to Australian Folklore: From Ned Kelly to Aeroplane Jelly.
Sydney: Kangaroo Press (Simon and Schuster).
AD$29.95.



PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

• Deutsches SPIELEmuseum, Chemnitz, Germany. Article 'Chemnitz und das Deutsche SPIELEmuseum' in TOP Magazin Chemnitz, Winter 2002.

• Erik Kaas Neilsen. Den der er forkolet skal I faengsel – en bog om borns leg og fortaellinger. Akademisk Forlag, Denmark, 2000.

• Edel Wignell. The Long Sticky Walk, illustrated Dee Huxley. Crawley, Western Australia: Cygnet Young Fiction (University of WA Press), 2003. To be reviewed in next issue.

WEBSITES

• A site that looks at children's games and people's uses of them: **http://www.firebirdtrust.sagenet.co.uk/explorer.htm**

• The site of the English organisation, *London Play*: **http://www.londonplay.org.uk**

• A new online magazine of Australian social history and folklore: **http://simplyaustralia.mountaintracks.com.au**

• *Folklore Australia* – an online resource base for those interested in all aspects of folklore and folklife: **http://members.iinet.au/~cknow/**