



# ‘Got my shoes, got my Pokémon’: Everyday geographies of children’s popular culture

John Horton\*

Centre for Children and Youth, The University of Northampton, Park Campus, Boughton Green Road, Northampton NN2 7AL, United Kingdom

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 7 October 2009

Received in revised form 1 July 2011

Available online 19 September 2011

### Keywords:

Children’s geographies

Popular culture

Pokémon

Play

Cultural phenomena

## ABSTRACT

This paper considers a particular popular-cultural phenomenon: ‘Pokémon’. Specifically, it concerns a social–historical juncture – a so-called ‘Pokémonia’ – wherein Pokémon toys, games, collectables and merchandising were ‘must-have’ items for many children in South-East Asia, Europe, North America, and Australasia. Drawing upon research with Pokémon fans aged 5–8 in the UK, the paper explores some ways in which global cultural phenomena become intimately, complexly and constitutively co-implicated with/in everyday geographies. In so doing, I argue that the quotidian social and spatial import of Pokémon – and other analogous phenomena – should sensitise accounts of children’s everyday spatial practices to the ever-presence of contemporary popular cultural forms, and sensitise accounts of global popular culture to the importance of multifarious, contingent spatial practices.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Preface

An eight-year-old’s daily routine in the English Midlands, July 2003.

Fraser<sup>1</sup>: “I get up, have breakfast... have a wash and get dressed, brush my teeth... Then it’s like: [I’ve] got my shoes, got my Pokémon, and I’m ready”

## 1. Introduction

This paper considers a particular global popular cultural phenomenon: ‘Pokémon’. Specifically, it concerns a social–historical juncture, spanning the last decade, wherein Pokémon toys, games, collectables and merchandising have been ‘must-have’ items for many children in Europe, North America, Australasia and the South-East Asia: a cultural context (or so-called ‘Pokémonia’) in which Pokémon could sometimes – as in the prefatory example – feel as essential to everyday life as shoes, washing, breakfast. Through a focus upon Pokémon, the paper develops a more general point about the importance of popular cultural phenomena in/for children’s geographies, and the importance of a geographical sensibility for understanding (children’s) popular cultures.

This paper explores how the materialities of popular cultural phenomena frequently become intimately, complexly

and constitutively implicated with/in everyday geographies: as per the statement ‘got my shoes, got my Pokémon’. The paper proceeds as follows. First, I introduce Pokémon and Pokémonia,<sup>2</sup> and make two observations about the ways in which these – and other analogous – popular cultural phenomena have been written about (or not) within contemporary accounts of children’s everyday spaces and cultural practices. On one hand, I note that such popular cultural phenomena have rarely been foregrounded within burgeoning geographical research about children and young people’s everyday lives, spaces and cultures. On the other hand, I argue that academic research which *has* directly explored phenomena such as Pokémon – principally within cultural/media studies – has seldom foregrounded the everyday spatialities which characterise and constitute popular cultures in practice. Second, with these critiques in mind, I explore how Pokémon mattered for one group of British schoolchildren. Following a methodological introduction, I note three key characteristics of these children’s talk about/around Pokémon: (i) the taken-for-granted presence of miscellaneous, material Pokémon ‘stuff’ in everyday spaces; (ii) how such stuff constituted and afforded everyday socialities of different tenors; (iii) how this stuff was intimately and constitutively related to daily routines and journeys. In conclusion, I suggest that the everyday social and spatial

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I use the term ‘Pokémon’ to refer to the concept, characters and material manifestations of this popular cultural phenomenon. I use the term ‘Pokémonia’ to refer to the enthusiasm surrounding Pokémon. As I outline in the following sections, Pokémonia has often been figured as a fairly singular, ‘mass’ global event. I use the term ‘everyday Pokémonia’ to denote countless small, everyday moments and acts of enthusiasm relating to Pokémon, such as those outlined in this paper. I intend these multifarious local examples to stand in contrast to the ostensibly singular, coherent concept of Pokémonia.

\* Tel.: +44 (0) 1604 892990; fax: +44 (0) 1604 791114.

E-mail address: [john.horton@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:john.horton@northampton.ac.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper. Ellipses in empirical material are represented by three dots (...). Bold text indicates substantial spoken **emphasis**.

importance of Pokémon should sensitise accounts of children's geographies to the presence of popular cultural forms, and sensitise accounts of (children's) popular culture to the importance of complex, idiosyncratic, everyday spatial practices.

## 2. Approaching Pokémon and Pokémania

'Pokémon' (a contraction of 'Pocket Monsters') refers to a vast, proliferating, cartoonish cast of "cute monsters that look like birds, insects, or take on more mythical appearances, ... [with] varying personalities, ways of fighting and physical attributes", created by the Japanese inventor Satoshi Tajiri in 1996 (Crow, 2001, p. 1). Over the last decade, Pokémon have existed in multiple forms, most of which were developed and transnationally marketed by the Nintendo corporation: via collectable card-games, computer games, cartoons, movies, comics, cuddly toys, plastic poseable toys, collectable figurines, hamburger wrappers, stationery, confectionery, stickers, toiletries, lunchboxes, clothing, and around a thousand other profitable material cultural items (Nintendo, 2000). During this period, Pokémon has been a major, lucrative cultural phenomenon, principally popular amongst children in South-East Asia, Western Europe, North America and Australasia. As an indicator of the scale of this so-called Pokémania, it is estimated that the Pokémon brand grossed more than US\$30 billion worldwide between 1998 and 2007 (Nintendo, 2007). In the UK, for example, Pokémon reportedly starred in the (then) all-time best-selling video game (Business Wire, 1999), collectable card game (Tobin, 2003), children's magazine and sticker album, and the 'most-visited' child-focused website ever (Crow, 2001).

Certainly, as a geographer who has worked with children and young people in diverse UK contexts over the last decade, I have been struck by the sheer number who have collected, known, played with, and often really *cared* about, Pokémon in diverse ways. More broadly, I have been struck by how, when one is conducting research with groups of children and young people, there is invariably *some* kind of popular cultural phenomenon – be it a pop group, TV programme, book, film, fashion, toy, game, accessory, celebrity, character, collectable, or form of technology – which preoccupies and animates many of them, and which has remarkable ubiquity, currency, urgency and vitality. These observations are illustrated and evidenced in this paper, and I demonstrate that the detailed, material, everyday geographies of such phenomena are revealing when set in the context of some chief contemporary approaches to researching and writing children and young people's spaces and cultures.

As a point of departure, I suggest that more focused and specific attention could be paid to popular cultural phenomena within burgeoning geographical work about children and young people's lives. Over the last three decades, countless social and cultural geographers have turned their attention to diverse aspects of younger people's lives (see Evans, 2008; Skelton, 2009; Jeffrey, 2010). Within this multifarious body of work, one can trace a gathering acknowledgement of the everydayness, spatialities, material cultures, bodily practices and affectivity of children and young people's social and cultural lives (see Horton and Kraftl, 2006a; Woodyer, 2008; Colls and Hörschmann, 2009). As geographers have increasingly explored the qualitative, everyday minutiae of children and young people's lives, they have often highlighted the importance of popular cultural texts, objects, fads and enthusiasms therein. References to specific popular cultural phenomena have thus become increasingly commonplace in this subdisciplinary context. Indeed, many recent research papers by geographers investigating childhood, youth and families include instances where one can glimpse the presence and significance of a particular cultural phenomenon in some local context or space. Some

disparate examples<sup>3</sup> include references to: video games and branded baseball caps in research on Yucatán youth cultures (Massey, 1998); Ninja Turtles<sup>4</sup> and Spice Girls<sup>5</sup> in research on out-of-school play spaces (Smith and Barker, 1999); Grunge<sup>6</sup> music and merchandising in research on 'alternative' femininities (Morris-Roberts, 2004); Eminem,<sup>7</sup> The Simpsons,<sup>8</sup> Audrey Hepburn,<sup>9</sup> and die Ärzte<sup>10</sup> in research on youth identities in post-socialist states (Hörschmann and Schäfer, 2005); Duplo<sup>11</sup> and 'Spiderman balls'<sup>12</sup> in research on preschool nursery spaces (Gallacher, 2005; Horton et al., 2011); punk<sup>13</sup> music and kung fu movies in research on racial tensions in LA playgrounds (Thomas, 2009); breakfast cereal toys<sup>14</sup> in research on the transnational lives of young Filipino Canadians (Pratt, 2010).

However, geographers' multiple, fleeting, oblique empirical glimpses of specific popular cultural phenomena do not amount to a focused, thoroughgoing, geographical engagement with, or understanding of, children and young people's popular cultures. To reiterate an argument latterly made by Buckingham (2007), I suggest that more sustained geographical research could be directed towards the popular cultural phenomena which preoccupy contemporary children and young people. In particular, more geographical research could explicitly recognise: the substantial, transnational reach of such phenomena (Kline, 1993; Cross, 1997); their considerable importance to children and young people themselves (Horton, 2010); the contexts of commodification and consumer cultures which structure many children's lives (Zelizer, 2002; Cook, 2004); and, especially, the considerable contribution a geographical sensibility might make to longer-standing scholarly habits of writing and knowing children's popular culture (Cook, 2003).

For there is a substantial, longstanding body of scholarly research about popular cultural phenomena designed for children and young people (see Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002; Cook, 2008). Here, such phenomena have typically been approached via a prism of questions and assumptions initially articulated in

<sup>3</sup> Likewise, it would be possible to compile similar lists from recent work by sociologists, anthropologists and educational researchers working with children and young people.

<sup>4</sup> **Ninja Turtles** Four anthropomorphic, crime-fighting turtle martial arts experts (Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello, Raphael); featured in countless comics, cartoons, toys and merchandising in Americo-centric territories and South-East Asia since c. 1988.

<sup>5</sup> **Spice Girls** English pop group, comprising five members ('Baby', 'Ginger', 'Posh', 'Scary', 'Sporty'). Released a succession of UK-chart-topping songs, c. 1996–2000. Noted for notion of 'GIRL POWER' and members' subsequent celebrity status.

<sup>6</sup> **Grunge** Genre of loud, ostensibly countercultural guitar music. Heyday c. 1990–1995; epicentre Seattle WA. Chief proponents: Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden.

<sup>7</sup> **Eminem** Detroit-based rapper, active since c. 1992. Noted for: controversial lyrics; 'disses' of rivals and family-members; 'po-mo' play with quasi-autobiographical lyrics.

<sup>8</sup> **The Simpsons** Cartoon suburban North American family; stars of eponymous television series since 1989. Noted for: catchphrases ('D'OH', 'aye caramba'); labyrinthine satirical and popular cultural references; comic, though ultimately touching, portraits of family and community life.

<sup>9</sup> **Audrey Hepburn** (1929–1993) Actress, star of many Hollywood box-office smashes during 1950s and 1960s (see Roman Holiday (1953), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *My Fair Lady* (1964)). Noted for 'gamine'/'elfin' looks and chic clothing.

<sup>10</sup> **die Ärzte** Berlin punk band. Released 20+ studio albums since 1982. Noted for controversial, sex- and alcohol-themed lyrics.

<sup>11</sup> **Duplo** Large, colourful plastic construction bricks designed for preschool children. Launched in 1960s as extension of 'Lego' range of construction bricks.

<sup>12</sup> **Spiderman balls** plastic balls featuring logos and images from the *Spiderman* series of movies.

<sup>13</sup> **Punk** Ostensibly countercultural movement, lifestyle or state of mind closely linked to punk rock. Widely theorised and romanticised by cultural commentators. **Punk rock** Genre of loud, ostensibly anarchic guitar music. Heyday c. 1977–1980; epicentres London and New York. Chief proponents: Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Ramones.

<sup>14</sup> **Breakfast cereal toys** Small 'free' gifts often found in breakfast cereals marketed at children and young people.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5074552>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5074552>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)