

# Fairy Play, Recycling Trash in Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tale and Children's Play

**Herdis Toft**

Department of Culture Study, University of Southern Denmark

Campusvej 55, DK-5230 Odense M, Denmark

Email: [herdistoft@sdu.dk](mailto:herdistoft@sdu.dk)

**Abstract** The article investigates contemporary functions of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, situated as they are in a cross-cultural mix between folklore, booklore and medialore, and therefore useful as "trash" in a play culture where children recycle them into FairyPlay. Folktales belong to *folklore*, Hans Christian Andersen's copyright-fairy tales to *booklore* and the multiple versions in modern media to *medialore*. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales have inspirational background in folklore, are aesthetically adapted to booklore by the author and reconstructed in innumerable ways in medialore. Originally he created culture *for* children by writing literary fairy tales. Pedagogues and teachers use his literary fairy tales in a diverse range of projects *with* children. However, we focus on culture created *by* children — their play culture. Hans Christian Andersen is analysed as a *homo ludens*, a *trash-sculptor* and a *thing-finder*, like *Pippi Longstocking* and like children in play. Examples of Danish children using his fairy tales are provided. Fairy tales are raw materials — trash — for their play-production, and these contemporary children muddle, mingle, remix the formulas with other materials and adjust them to play context through improvisations. So they perform what we name *FairyPlay* — just like Hans Christian Andersen himself did.

**Key words** FairyPlay; fairy tale; play; trash; folklore; Hans Christian Andersen

**Author** **Herdis Toft**, Ph. D, Associate Professor, is Head of Studies and Researcher of the Department of Culture Study, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark. Her research interests are the aesthetic aspects of child and youth culture, especially concerning their play culture. Together with Karin Esmann Knudsen she is the head of a team of researchers engaged in the cross disciplinary study of Play & Literature.

## Introduction

This article investigates contemporary functions of Hans Christian (in the following: H. C.) Andersen's fairy tales, situated as they are in a crosscultural mix between folklore, booklore and medialore, and therefore useful as "trash" in modern children's FairyPlay. There are significant common characteristics between folk tales, H. C. Andersen's fairy tales, and children engaged in play. Basically, the involved partakers in these kinds of storytelling take as their starting point the question: "What if ...," and thereby agree to frame the situation as a fictional world of possibilities you may bring to life by means of narration.<sup>1</sup>

As a producer of fairy tales H.C. Andersen stood divided between the folklore mode of storytelling in an oral tradition, that he knew well from his childhood among the poor, and the demand of an artistic mode of expression and originality in written literature or fine arts, which he learned as a grown-up participant in the sociability practiced by the emergent bourgeoisie. In a previous work, I argued that his iconic status is due to the successful mix of characteristics from both.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I shall go the whole length by arguing that the mix also contains characteristics closely linked to children's play culture. As such his fairy tales build upon the recycling of folklore — "trash" and contemporary children may look for ways to treat his world famous stories as — precious "trash."

This approach is inspired by the realm of understanding in Critical Ethnography,<sup>3</sup> e.g. by placing analytic emphasis on process over product as the critical ethnographer Dwight Conquergood does in his research, resulting in a change in perspective: "... the movement from performance as mimesis to poiesis to kinesis,

1 Herdis Toft, "Hvad gør børn med børnelitteratur?" *Hvad gør vi med børnelitteraturen?* Karin Esmann Knudsen, ed. (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2012) 43-65.

2 Herdis Toft, "Fra folklore til medialore. Fabler, ev entyr, rim og remser." *Dansk børnelitteraturhistorie*. Eds. Kari Sønsthagen og Lena Eilstrup (København: Høst & Søn 1992) 9-33.

3 I refer to Critical Ethnography as described by J. D. Soyini Madison (2011). *Critical Ethnography. Method, Ethics, and Performance*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Los Angeles, SAGE Publications, and earlier by Jim Thomas: "Critical researchers begin from the premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between control and resistance. This tension is reflected in behavior, interaction rituals, normative systems, and social structure, all of which are visible in the rules, communicative systems, and artifacts that comprise a given culture." See Thomas, Jim. "Musings on Critical Ethnography, Meanings, and Symbolic Violence." Ed. Robin Patric Clair. *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003) 48.

performance as imitation, construction, dynamism” (Conquergood 31) Conquergood’s conceptualization helps us to understand the role of fairy tales as (a) mirroring or reflecting mimesis, as (b) the marking of meaning, the enlightenment of poiesis, and last but not least as (c) the intervention of kinesis, in the Aristotelian meaning of motion or change<sup>1</sup>. Or you may name the three roles *transmission*, *transformation*, and *transgression*. Although the transmitting mode often is seen as traditional, and the transgressive mode as avant-garde, we choose to understand these three concepts as equal and co-operating positions in the pyramid of performance:



Figure 1: The pyramid of performance.

The telling of fairy tales is a performance founded on mimesis, poiesis and kinesis. The telling is situated between production and reproduction, between individual and collective performance, in brief: as organic recycling of “trash.”

### **The *Homo Ludens* as Thing-Finder and Trash-Sculptor**

H. C. Andersen could be described as a personification of *homo ludens*<sup>2</sup> throughout his life:

1 It is Aristotle who first presented the concept of kinesis or motion, and he linked his concept to his notions of actuality and potentiality, which I shall present later using Giorgio Agamben’s concept.

2 Referring to the classical work by the anthropologist Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press 1955).

Plays and playthings are an important factor in the rich and motley world of H. C. Andersen. Throughout his life, he kept on playing. He was acquainted with the common kinds of play in folklore. He observed children at play, and as a grown-up he enjoyed playing with children and letting himself be inspired by them. (Stybe title page)<sup>1</sup>

As players do, he mingled old rhymes, songs, sayings, and legends with fairy tales, producing his own, personal versions and interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

The Swedish modernist poet and writer Gunnar Ekelöf (1907-68) also has noticed the similarity between aesthetic performance in play culture and in H. C. Andersen's fairy tales. The world is seen as raw material for modelling, and each thing also has a symbolic value: "H. C. Andersen was an excellent trash-sculptor. He could bring life and voice to simple things, and he did not need to weld or solder" (Ekelöf 267)<sup>3</sup>.

As the Danish researcher Jette Lundbo Levy puts it on a seminar on H. C. Andersen, you may see the modern artist as a creator, but also as a "thingfinder" (Levy 259), who finds things — trash — stuff — and puts the findings together in order either to set off a meaning, which the thing seems loaded with already, or to create a new meaning. Much in the same way a child at play act as a "Thing-Finder," the nickname for *Pippi Longstocking*, the well-known Astrid Lindgren-figure<sup>4</sup>, who in many ways treat the world as raw material for producers of play culture, or as such stuff that dreams are made on.

Levy refers to the playing street boys in *The Darning-Needle*:

One day a couple of street boys were paddling in the gutter, for they sometimes found old nails, farthings, and other treasures. It was dirty work, but they took great pleasure in it. (*The Darning-Needle*)<sup>5</sup>

1 My translation. Also see Stybe, Vibeke (2004). *Børnene kyssede mig kærligt. H.C. Andersen og børnene*. København: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitets Forlag.

2 Vibeke Stybe (1997). "Barnets simple Sange." H. C. Andersen og de gamle børnerim. In Else Marie Kofod & Eske K. Mathiesen: *Traditioner er mange Ting*, pp. 181-86, Foreningen Danmarks Folkeminder.

3 My translation.

4 Astrid Lindgren, Swedish iconic children book's author, wrote "Pippi Långstrump" (Pippi Longstocking) in 1945.

5 [http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen\\_fairy-tales/the\\_darningneedle](http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen_fairy-tales/the_darningneedle), accessed January 15, 2017.

Also, she could have mentioned the street boys in *The Brave Tin Soldier*:

So they made a boat out of a newspaper, and placed the tin soldier in it, and sent him sailing down the gutter, while the two boys ran by the side of it, and clapped their hands. (*The Steadfast Tin Soldier*)<sup>1</sup>

The boys grab a thing — a darning-needle or a tin soldier and put it together with another thing — an eggshell or a newspaper — creating new and complex meaning. So, according to Levy, the street boys are trash-sculptors, collage-makers creating magic moments, and their combinations transgress ordinary meanings of things and of life.

Levy summarizes the characteristics of H. C. Andersen's thing-tales:

At first things catch your eye and then they are taken into hands, by which their fragile nature and their fracture surface and defects are uncovered. Also as a narration their transformation from fragment into part of a new whole depends upon the hand that combines sensitivity for the materials with that vital imagination of the street boys. (Levy 267)<sup>2</sup>

The player, narrator and author H. C. Andersen uses the eyes, hands and imagination of the street boys when he produces his booklore-fairy tales and combines them with the reflexivity of the adult author thereby bringing them from the framing “situational play” to the framing “autonomous literature.”

We shall relate Levy's findings not only to his thing-tales, but to his fairy tales as such. For example, to the description of what happened to the queen-puppet during the performance at a puppet theatre in *The Travelling-Companion*:

the great bull-dog, who should have been held back by his master, made a spring forward, and caught the queen in the teeth by the slender wrist, so that it snapped in two. This was a very dreadful disaster. The poor man, who was exhibiting the dolls, was much annoyed, and quite sad about his queen; she was the prettiest doll he had, and the bull-dog had broken her head and shoulders

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1 [http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen\\_fairy-tales/the\\_brave\\_tin\\_soldier](http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen_fairy-tales/the_brave_tin_soldier) accessed January 15, 2017.

2 My translation.

off. (*The Travelling-Companion*)<sup>1</sup>

The travelling-companion manages to bring the puppet to life — whole and healthy along with the other puppets, so everyone is happy:

The coachman danced with the cook, and the waiters with the chambermaids, and all the strangers joined; even the tongs and the fire-shovel made an attempt, but they fell down after the first jump. (*The Travelling-Companion*)<sup>2</sup>

Puppets are fragile and may have their fracture surface uncovered. But the vital and life-giving capacity linked to the travelling-companion spreads joy — only things that are lacking the vital imagination of the observers' such as tongs and fire-shovels must fail and remain meaningless things.

Another example is *The Tinder-Box*, where H. C. Andersen tells the story of a naughty and uninhibited soldier, who provides an enormous amount of money, luxury, and stolen kisses, but at the height of his power is about to be hanged — and — whoops — calls upon the three dogs, who destroy almost every mighty person in the established order:

And the dogs fell upon the judges and all the councilors; seized one by the legs, and another by the nose, and tossed them many feet high in the air, so that they fell down and were dashed to pieces. "I will not be touched," said the king. But the largest dog seized him, as well as the queen, and threw them after the others. (*The Tinder-Box*)<sup>3</sup>

The soldier in this fairy tale resembles a play-boy, who constructs a tower built of toy bricks. He picks the elements and stacks them higher and higher, more and more complex, curious to investigate the fine line between failure and success. Also — whoops — he enjoys just as much to destroy a tower — whether built by himself or by others.

H. C. Andersen's descriptions of boy's playing with trash-elements are part of another Danish author's remembrance, namely Louis Jensen, nominated for the

1 I owe Holbek (1990: 172) for evoking my memory of the puppet theatre.

2 [http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen\\_fairy-tales/the\\_travelingcompanion](http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen_fairy-tales/the_travelingcompanion) , accessed January 15, 2017.

3 [http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen\\_fairy-tales/the\\_tinderbox](http://www.andersenstories.com/en/andersen_fairy-tales/the_tinderbox) accessed January 15, 2017.

Nordic Council's prize for best children's and youth literature in 2014. He describes boys' play in *Elefanterne holdt hver gang med Tarzan. En bog om drenge*. (The Elephants always Favoured Tarzan. A book about Boys). One of his stories bears the title *Affald* (*Trash*). I translate a piece of it:

Also, at the back in the most distant and small merchant's house there was an open box made of cement filled with iron trash. Spokes, bicycle wheels and iron bars. There were shiny pieces of metal that looked like silver, and metal that looked like gold, (...) There were many places in the town where there was trash left by the grown-ups. There was the rubbish dump, and outburned matches, and cigarette butts in the gutter. One of the boys picked them up and exchanged them for even more. He opened them, straightened the paper and made new cigarettes of the paper from a newspaper and the smolder. New Kings.<sup>1</sup> (Jensen 26-27)

Much inspired by H. C. Andersen's aesthetic mode of storytelling, Louis Jensen treats his predecessor's collected works as a recycling depot.

So, in this article, we do not investigate the fairy tales as autonomous "copyright" literature or art. Instead we will treat them as "trash," or raw material for what I name FairyPlay, that is: the making use of fairy tales in Danish children's play culture of today.

Before we frame the fairy tales inside children's culture more detailed, we summarize the cogwheels for FairyPlay using H. C. Andersen as an example:

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1 My translation.

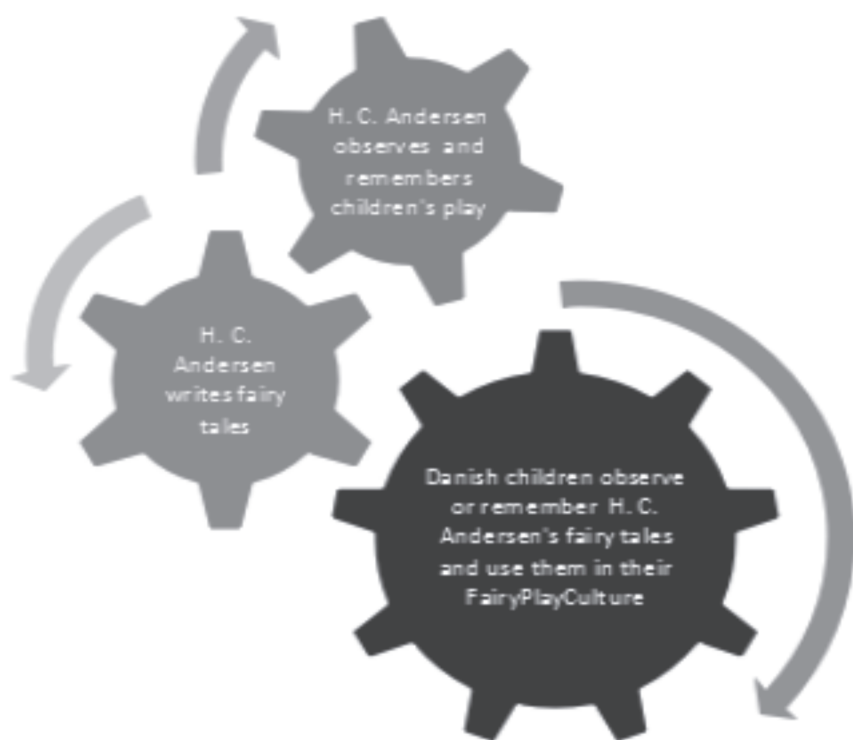


Figure 2: Cogwheels for FairyPlay.

### Folklore, Booklore, Medialore

The constituents of FairyPlay are described also in the following figures, focusing on the conceptual framework for *lore*, that is, at least in this article, the accumulation and mode of performing narrations such as (fairy) tales, nursery rhymes, and sayings. As Hasan El-Shamy, researcher at Indiana University states, the telling of stories “is fundamentally a process, rather than an event” (El-Shamy, “Oral Traditional Tales” 63). During this never-ending process:

No one is lore-free. Thus, an item of lore (e.g., the tale titled “The Taming of the Shrew”) may be born by Shakespeare (or another member of the culture elite), by a Hollywood scriptwriter or popular-song speculator, or by an African hunter, horticulturist, or university professor. (El-Shamy, “A Motif Index” 237)

We shall distinguish between three types of lore: folklore, booklore, and medialore. Seen in a linear perspective, the terms represent a continuum in *time*:



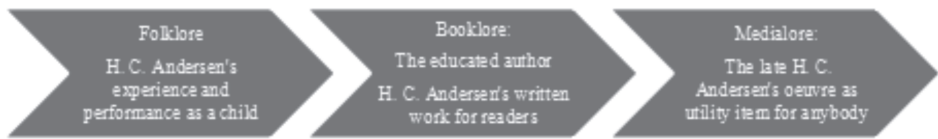


Figure 3: Folklore, booklore, medialore in a linear perspective.

H. C. Andersen met and practised the oral and bodily performed folklore during his childhood; also, his father would read the *Arabian Nights* and other tales to his son (Holbek 167), and as he grew up, he became a reader; subsequently he produced the written and readable booklore as a fiction writer; and finally, after his death, his oeuvre is integrated in all sorts of medialore produced and used by others in present-day society.

Nevertheless, the terms folklore, booklore, and medialore just as well represent a contemporary perspective, because all three types of lore can be found both separate and mixed in our modern times:



Figure 4: Folklore, booklore, medialore in a contemporary perspective.

In the overlappings between these three types we observe a simultaneity that accommodates the potentiality for performing infinite variations of FairyPlay. The telling

emerges out of following a plurality of telling tracks, and therefore appears to be fragmentary, incoherent, esoteric.

In the following figure we have combined the constituents of figure No. 2, 3, and 4 in order to show the complexity of FairyPlay:

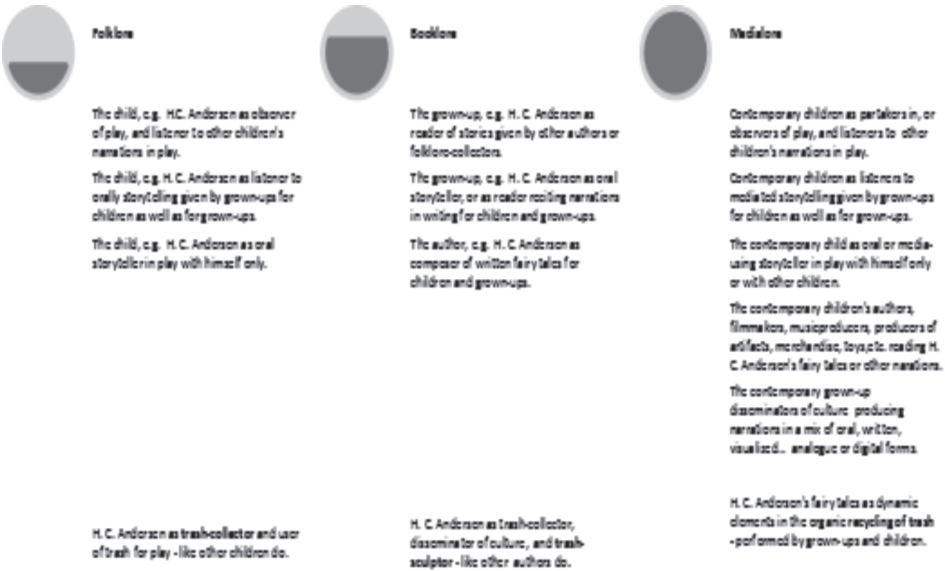


Figure 5: Constituents of FairyPlay.

Until now we have put analytic emphasis on process over product; we have seen H. C. Andersen's fairy tales as a representation of the pyramid of performance; we have presented H. C. Andersen as a homo ludens, a trash-sculptor, and a thing-finder, thereby equating him with children in play; we have outlined the cogwheels for FairyPlay; and we have used the lore-perspective—the accumulation and mode of performing narrations — to summarize our framing of FairyPlay.

In the never-ending process of recycling trash, we find the human need for balancing between freedom and control. You demand the freedom to model trash as you like it, but also you negotiate ways of regulation or control of trash-use, in order to share the action with other participants.

We bear in mind that the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben sees children's play as central to the deactivation of power: "one day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good." (Agamben 64) Children may play with concrete results of the types of lore and overlapping lore-constellations as "disused objects" — as mouldable trash fit for sculpturing. In FairyPlay you have no

absolute rules, you negotiate and renegotiate in the situation. The players may — or may not — actualize the mode of potentiality to transgress canonical use. Agamben's theory of the human as a being endowed with potentiality-to-be-or-do (or (im) potentiality-to-not-be-or-not-do)<sup>1</sup> allows us to see play as a *framing*<sup>2</sup> of potentiality/impotentiality, and you may observe children activating the potentiality-to-practise transgression, but also instead observe them activating the potentiality-to-not-do. As figure No. 1, The pyramid of performance, shows us, actual performance may be the realization (or the not-realization) of mimesis, poesis, and kinesis respectively. The potentiality of play is a potentiality, which may or may not practice actual play in an already defined manner. You are free to play, but also free to not-play. This is the core of play. There is no “canonical use” of H. C. Andersen's fairy tales — or of tales as such.

This means that H. C. Andersen's fairy tales are treated like any fairy tale known today — at least in a Danish context. Seeking the perspective of the child in order to understand how children use and produce culture in their every-day life, we do not find it fruitful to distinguish between fairy tales said to be originated from oral, literary or other mediated forms respectively.<sup>3</sup> As researchers in remixology point out, remix, mash-ups, and trash are basic elements in the folk art of the future.<sup>4</sup>

### Folklore of the Future: Trash, Remix, and Mash-Ups

It has been our claim that the term *trash* may be used as an appropriate metaphor for H. C. Andersen's fairy tales, knowing full well, that such a term may be repulsive for all lovers of H. C. Andersen's oeuvre. However, we wish to stress the ecological and cultural geographical distinctive features of fairy tales. They are — like play culture — “at once completely local and extremely global” (Mouritsen 25); they are actualized and performed in variable situations. You may recycle, reuse versions, fragments, elements, themes as you wish for. There is an old saying or proverb: *One man's trash is another man's treasure*. Or — put the other way around: *One man's*

1 Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

2 Gregory Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy.” *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

3 Herdis Toft, “Hvad gør børn med børnelitteratur?” Ed. Karin Esmann Knudsen. *Hvad gør vi med børnelitteraturen?* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2012) 43-65.

4 David J. Gunkel, *Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics After Remix*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

*treasure is another man's trash*. Meaning: children — as well as grown-ups — treat some narrations, heard, read or filmed, as “treasures,” others as “trash”; sometimes the same narration may be treated as sacrosanct treasure in one situation, as tip-trash in another.

By using the word trash, you could mean something which is in a crumbled or broken condition like the darning-needle or the brave tin soldier mentioned above, but also a narration split up or destroyed into bits and pieces, some of which you can reuse in collage, cut-up, mash-up, assemblage, and so forth, others you may just throw on your dust-heap. Here *compilation* and *blending* are the keywords, recombining them to concepts as *remix* and *mash-up*. *Parody* through mash-up of various well-known figures or formula is a popular mode, and often you will find that the recycling is carried out so heavily that the appropriation, reconfiguration, and re-contextualizing of the elements makes it almost impossible to determine the sources or the question of copyright.

However, this mode of creating new narrations is not only the folklore of the future, but also the folklore of the past — and the mode of creating booklore before copyright became a serious issue. Inger Simonsen, a Danish researcher in the history of children's literature, brings a quotation from Morten Hallager, Danish schoolmaster, printer, and author, who in the year 1798 presents his most recent compilation of narrations designed for children:

I find pieces of Choffin in Sultzer and Gedicke, of Campe in Berquin's and Salzmann's works, just as in Campe I find pieces, I have read before in other works; but now so splendid rewritten according to its own purpose, that you almost forget having read them before. As for the translation, I have not exactly always complied with my authors; but sometimes by some authors I added and deducted; in that I thought it to be consistent with my aim, namely to amuse, benefit, and delight children.<sup>1</sup> (Simonsen 20)

Inger Simonsen concludes in this way: “As for the oldest children's literature, the truth of the matter is that the material is communal property; it is borrowed, imitated, rewritten. The patterns are given ...”<sup>2</sup> (Simonsen 20)

In remixes, you reinterpret a single work of art, e.g. *The Snow Queen*, whereas mash-ups samples multiple works, e.g. *The Snow Queen*, *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp*, *The Bible*, and *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush*. The samplers may use

1 My translation.

2 My translation.

tiny slices or bigger scraps and fragments of already made works in their process.<sup>1</sup> Intertextuality in many, and variable forms is understood as everyman's right to copy. All art can be transformed into folk art, as well as all folk art can be transformed into fine arts.

Wherever recycling of trash is performed, it is hard to uphold the principle of copyright. According to Gunkel recycling is a way of undermining our understanding of concepts as originality, innovation and paternity. Consumers become creators or prosumers — partakers in recycling processes, and performing the folk art of the future.<sup>2</sup> In this perspective, children in FairyPlay practice pre- and postmodern dissemination of culture.

### The Complex Concept of Culture

The postmodern concept of culture is a complex mixture.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, we may see culture as something to *have*, and if you have enough, you are a cultivated and educated man. For example, you then know the Danish literary canon where H. C. Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* occurs. The Danish Ministry of Culture also has delivered a canon for children's culture, where the first Danish trash-playground (skrammellegeplads)<sup>4</sup> occurs together with *Lego* building blocks, and the comic *Donald Duck & Co.*, but H. C. Andersen's fairy tales do not. Instead all primary and secondary school students will be presented for H. C. Andersen as one of the 15 most important Danish fiction writers in the history of literature. In this context, H. C. Andersen's fairy tales are great works of literature, they are national treasures, and their author is an icon you may be examined on.

On the other hand, we may see culture as something we are born to be part of, and throughout our everyday life *are in*. We share common habits, traditions and

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1 See Gunkel 2006: 17.

2 See Gunkel 2006: X-XVIII.

3 Herdis Toft, "Børnekultur." Flemming B. Olsen, ed.. *Pædagogiske miljøer og aktiviteter. Grundfaglighed på pædagoguddannelsen* (København: Frydenlund, 2016) 201-233.

4 The purpose of a trash-playground is to support children's creative abilities through making hideouts of bricks and boards using saws, hammers, shovels, and nails, and play with provided trash, e.g. old cars, sewers, and cardboard boxes. The first was made in Copenhagen during World War II by landscape architect C. Th. Soerensen. In this article, we see trash-playgrounds as integrating our play-perspective. Also, you may visit contemporary playgrounds made out of trash in order to raise children's awareness about environmental degradation, e.g. Ruganzu Bruno / Eco Art Uganda, an artist using aesthetic artistic expression just like H. C. Andersen did. See <http://www.tedcity2.org/awards> (accessed January 15, 2017).

fairy tales, we choose between different ways of expressing ourselves aesthetically thereby showing with whom in particular we share taste and lifestyle. For example, if you are born as Dane, you meet H. C. Andersen everywhere — you may live at H.C. Andersen-road, enjoy a H. C. Andersen-ice, wear a sweater with the little mermaid-print, and be singing his song of the Danish mother country *In Denmark I am born* .... or you listen to the version sung by a modern Danish band named Outlandish. Or you may fall asleep with your iPad showing the Walt Disney animated film, *Frozen*, with *The Snow Queen* as source material, or you may ... In this context H. C. Andersen's fairy tales are integrated in the commercial consumer culture filled with merchandise.

Others may see the concept of culture as a name for our creation of social relations and aesthetic meaning in a participatory culture. We *do* or *perform* culture, and by doing we learn and gain *competences*, and we reflect upon our skills and craftsmanship. Seen in this pragmatic context, H. C. Andersen's fairy tales are what we practice and perform them to be, and it is the performance, that is the agenda. We reflect — not upon his work, but *how his work works* in e.g. the film industry or in children's play culture as performed in day care institutions.

We *have* culture, we *are in* culture, we *can* culture, and we *do* culture. We all are disseminators of culture. To summarize we use the following figure<sup>1</sup>:



Figure 6: Four contexts for culture.

In the following we focus primarily on culture seen in the 4<sup>th</sup> context of children's performance. We use the distinction between culture performed for, with and by children. H. C. Andersen performed culture *for* children by writing literary fairy tales, Danish artists, pedagogues and teachers perform culture in cooperation *with* children by using his literary fairy tales in a diverse range of projects. Fairy tales are performed *by* children inside their play culture. However, you should remember that in practice for, with, and by are not that distinguishable.

1 See Herdis Toft, "Børnekultur." Flemming B. Olsen ed.. *Pædagogiske miljøer og aktiviteter. Grundfaglighed på pædagoguddannelsen* (København: Frydenlund, 2016) 201-233 for another version of this figure.

## Culture Performed for, with and by Children

*Child Culture* is a concept used in order to grasp those phenomenons of the world that we interpret as belonging to the use of media and play among children. It was the Danish play theorist, Flemming Mouritsen, who divided child culture into three categories: culture performed for, with, and by children. Culture performed by children he also categorizes as children's culture or "*play culture*"<sup>1</sup>.

The category *culture for children* encompasses productions created by grown-ups for children. The child is objectified as a receiver of completed aesthetic expressions, and often the products are adapted according to age, skills and motivation, as we know from the many different versions of H. C. Andersen's fairy tales, e.g. the difference between the original written version, the Walt Disney film version, and the pedagogical adapted LIX-guided textbook-version of *The Little Mermaid*.

Also for children, the Danish playground company, Kompan, builds a H. C. Andersen-playground in Odense combining analogue and digital folklore, booklore, and medialore elements<sup>2</sup>, the Danish Lego Foundation sells a range of H. C. Andersen toy-fairy tales, LEGO Belville products, and Disney-versions as LEGO Little Princess,<sup>3</sup> and The Danish Books & Magic company presents *The Little Mermaid* as Augmented Reality combining physical book and digital app, blending booklore and medialore.<sup>4</sup>

The category *culture with children* is used by Mouritsen in order to describe projects concerning communication of culture and often initiated and publicly funded by e. g. The Ministry of Culture, The Ministry of Education, local authorities,

1 See Toft & Knudsen 2016, Vol. 2: 219-37)

2 See <http://www.kompan.dk> (accessed January 15, 2017) for further information about this "playground for learning."

3 In 2005 they made this range for girls aged 5-10, e.g. *The Little Mermaid*, *The Snow queen*, *The Tinder Box*. See on Belville Hans Christian Andersen at [http://www.hcandersen-homepage.dk/?page\\_id=51850](http://www.hcandersen-homepage.dk/?page_id=51850) (accessed January 15, 2017). In 2017 you could look for the Disney classics-Little Princess range with e.g. Ariel's dolphin-carriage. See on *Ariel's dolphin-carriage* at <https://www.lego.com/da-dk/juniors/products/ariels-dolphin-carriage-10723> (accessed January 15, 2017). The modularity of LEGO® bricks goes well with the modularity of fairy tales within folklore matrix. Today Lego present a culture of interiors, sceneries, sets and set-ups like Lego Friends. They focus upon the "building" of interaction between children – often parts and bricks of a set vanish, but the children just combine with other elements of "trash" from other contexts integrating them into the set by means of narration.

4 For further information about this combination of mobile game technology and classic storytelling see at <http://www.booksandmagic.com> (accessed January 15, 2017).



institutions, organizations or corporate sponsorship, involving artists, teachers, pedagogues in steering committees and working groups. The projects focus on co-operation and co-construction, and the children are both subjectified as co-producers and objectified as co-receivers. They may take part in a competition designed and arranged by H. C. Andersen Festivals in Odense, another nationwide drawing and writing competition with crown princess Mary as protector, a local dramatizing of *Numskull Jack* in a class or day care institution....

Later I shall describe some of the findings in my research on projects with children.

The category *culture by children* — *play culture* — point out children as subjects designing, sending and receiving their own aesthetic expressions framed as play. They organize time, place and themes, they choose modes of expressions. They play: singing, telling stories, acting, dancing, jumping, whispering, combining analogue and digital media, filming, drawing, taking photos ... Play is a mental space of *potentiality*,<sup>1</sup> where players are able to give arbitrary signs any number of aesthetically significance as long as the situation is framed “play.” While doing so, players can shift between acting as bearers of rule-based and ritualized tradition or promoters of ungovernable and revolutionary avant-garde.

So, children need to practice play and keep themselves in readiness, i. e. pick up know-how of rituals, patterns of bodily moves, gestures, rhymes, songs, sayings, legends, fairy tales, formula, schemata, scripts and other aesthetic techniques. Mouritsen terms the performance of a player: “*spontaneity rehearsed to the core*”<sup>2</sup> In other words, actual play is grounded on a huge, common cultural storage disposable for the actual users. In this cultural set of shelves, H. C Andersen's fairy tales are muddled, mingled, mixed with a lot of other stuff or trash in a disorderly manner.

The following examples show how children use fairy tales — for FairyPlay.

### **A Mash-up of Two Goats, a Snow Queen, and an Executor**

Often pedagogues, teachers and consultants will design and arrange a project so they can avoid disorderly chaos like that we find in children's cultural set of shelves. In my research, I often observe a conflict between culture for, with and by children, and the following is given as an example retrieved from a project involving Danish

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1 Giorgio Agambe, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. And ed. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999).

2 My translation. See Toft & Knudsen 2016 Vol. 2:226.



state school-pupils from selected Class 5-7.<sup>1</sup>

The government-backed project named *ITMF 464* was designed for improving pupils' subject knowledge and historic awareness by applying information and computing technology in the school Danish and History courses, to be exact a platform named *Hval.dk* containing different databases and toolkits such as *The Scenebuilder*. In order to create their own illustrated books with real-life stories about the local market town in either the Middle Ages or in the year of 1875, the pupils could pick up already finished figures and scenes in *The Scenebuilder*, and transfer them to other software e.g. *The Bookbuilder*. The children had a free choice between professional designed figures such as the priest, the farmer, the executioner, the housemaid, the grocer, and the beggar, and they could place the chosen figures in different sceneries such as the village pond, the church, the schoolyard, and the grocery shop.

Also, the children could transfer figures and scenes to an online chat-programme. Here they might create dialogues between the figures typed in screen bubbles. Figures steered by pupils from one class were able to chat with figures steered by pupils from other classes in the project.

The children had access to the platform in their lessons of Danish and History, but also in their spare time where they could visit the platform in order to do homework — or to play. The teachers instructed them primarily in the use of *The Scenery Builder* and *The Bookbuilder* and then concentrated on their subject knowledge related to this cross-curricular project in order to improve the children's skills as outlined in the school curriculum.

The teachers were taken completely by surprise when they observed how the children quick as lightning looked deeper into the portal *Hval.dk*, examined entry points to other school-projects with other figures, scenes, storyboards etc. For example they opened one of those earmarked H. C. Andersen's fairy tales with figures such as the ugly duckling, the white swan, the brave tin soldier, Numskull Jack and the snow queen. Curious and experimental as they were, one pupil after the other transferred the scenery from the village pond in the market town in the Middle Ages to their chat-programme and there chose not only the executioner or the housemaid, but also e.g. five white swans, a goat from *Numskull Jack*, and yet another swan, and yet another swan— and a snow queen.

You can only imagine the contents of the chat typed in screen bubbles all over,

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1 As researcher associated with the project I have described it for instance in Herdis Toft. "It-integration i lege-og skolekultur. Børns karnevalistiske, digitale kompetence." *Digitale medier og didaktisk design*. Eds. Lars B. Andreasen, Bente Meyer og Pernille Rattleff. (København: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitetsforlag, 2008) 64-85.

and suddenly one goat and one swan typed to each other, that they did not know what was going on in their fairytale project while the other goat typed to the executioner and the housemaid that he had nothing to do with the crazy swan-dialogues.

The teachers would categorize fairy tale-swans, -goats, and -snow queens as confusing trash in the predefined context they wanted the children to concentrate on, but the children quickly categorized the same figures as treasures for making parody in diverse play projects. The figures were designed for remix inside pedagogical pre-defined projects, but the children actually used them for mash-ups in new-defined play projects of their own.

The teachers learned that children spontaneously examines the world around them, and bring all sorts of stuff trash, fragments, bits and pieces together. For them, Hval.dk was an exciting warehouse giving them easy access to act as trash sculptors, playmakers, storytellers, and they had no marked distinction between storyboards for fairy tales and storyboards for realistic representation.

On the one hand, professional people from educational institutions designed and effectuated this project *for* children and *with* children. On the other hand, The Storybuilder, The Bookbuilder and the chatforum imitated performing possibilities known from digital tool boxes, so no wonder the children played with the potentiality of the project both physically, technologically, mentally and aesthetically.

In the assessment of the project, the children required semi-manufactures, and wanted schemes for self-production of new settings and new figures, and room for improvisations and styling. In other words, they demanded what they were able to utilize in play.

### **Tossing a Salade of Fairy Tales**

The grown-up participants might have let themselves be inspired by Gianni Rodari, winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Award 1970, and author of *The Grammar of Fantasy. An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*. In order to describe the values in experimenting with and reflecting on the inertia of combining elements of different fictional worlds, Rodari formulated the questions: "What would happen if?," and "What could happen then?,"<sup>1</sup> which stimulate what he terms as the binomium "fantasy and logic," a mode of realisation. These questions also could be defined as the essential questions asked in children's play culture.

By tossing a salade of figures, actions, and dialogues from diverse fictional and historical contexts children are allowed to examine both the potential possibilities

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1 Gianni Rodari, *The Grammar of Fantasy. An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*. (New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1996).

and the logical limitations of the world, e.g. how many goats can communicate in different ways with the same executioner across boundaries without a breakdown?

Flemming Mouritsen summarizes the characteristics of H. C. Andersen's fairy tales: "At the same time they are consistently reflexive and 'naively' playful aesthetically performed" (Toft & Knudsen 2016, 215).<sup>1</sup> This mode of reflexivity integrated in aesthetically performance goes for children's mode of play as well, as we shall see in the next example.

### **Little Mermaids, Hub Caps, Diamonds, and Genius Loci**

2014 I did my research on a project supported by the Danish *Kulturprinsen* (The prince of culture), an experimental development center for culture with children and young people.<sup>2</sup> In this project, pedagogues and artists emptied an ordinary room in two kindergartens, and then took the eldest children on outings to collect trash, e.g. pieces of broken glass from a bus shelter, ornamental hub caps lost by passing cars, a dead starfish with a rotten smell, bottle caps, and a cabel drum.

The artists then built a room for play and storytelling by combining these elements of trash into separate parts of the room. They made an indoor-variation of a trash-playground / a playground made of trash.<sup>3</sup> For instance, you could look at the broken pieces of glass through a tiny port hole in the wall, and see how a spotlight turned this trash into sparkling diamonds; the dented hub caps spun around like UFO's in the ceiling; a vase moulded as a flower-girl became a metaphoric Miss Spring placed at a shrine, and you had to crawl through a tube to visit this *Genius loci*. The children sacrificed bottle caps and flowers to her, and told her their secret wishes and problems.

The strategy used by the artists was the strategy of Pippi Longstocking hiding small trash elements around Tommy and Annika to be found as treasures. In this room, surrounded by discarded, broken, forgotten things, the children would play for hours inventing their own fantasy stories and fairy tales containing a diverse range of formulas, functions and improvisations. In a section the children named "the mermaid room," especially the girls would play Disney-inspired little H. C. Andersen-mermaids decorating their home and sea garden with shells, and the boys ravaged like pirates in another section fashioned like a ship, fighting amongst each other, stealing or hiding an old treasure chest with coins of "gold," and "jewellery."

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1 My translation.

2 See more about the centre at <http://www.kulturprinsen.dk>.

3 Herdis Toft, "Lege-Rum og Fortælle-Tid." *Tidsskrift for børne-og ungdomskultur* No. 58. (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2014) 3-140.

The “mermaids” could quick as lightning turn into “police” or “thieves,” and the “pirates” could act as inoffensive Sea Kings who lovingly nursed the sea princesses, or they could turn into mermaids themselves. Or completely different stories could be performed... No Gianni Rodari or pedagogue was needed for help here. The children made innumerable and often seamless shifts between performance founded on mimesis, poiesis and kinesis as described above in figure No. 1. These shifts were based partly on the allegorical character of the room, partly on the situational mood of the participants and their individual capacity in use of aesthetic codes, magic formulas, and other modes of mimic, gestic, and oral narration. The recycling of e.g. *The Little Mermaid* was carried out so apparently fragmented and incoherent, that it was a conjecture for me as researcher to decide whether a specific line or act belonged to this fairy tale or to another context. But that was my problem — not the playing children's. For each sudden shift, they sensuously understood one another quite well. If not, they rapidly reflected on how the other players re-acted; they *reflected-in-action*, and they sometimes made a stop and *reflected-on-action*.<sup>1</sup>

Pedagogues and parents may be given a huge fright and suspend a play situation, when they hear children whoop: “I’ll cut off your head!” — inspired by the soldier from *The Tinderbox*. Grown-ups may tend to taboo specific elements or entire fairy tales, e.g. *The Little Mermaid* because some children are frightened by the sufferings of the mermaid. But grown-ups and parents had better look for the ways in which children manage to adapt the spectre of horrors and sorrows through playing them out in transformative or transgressive modes of action than give a fright and taboo such elements of horrors and sorrows.

Up till now we have analyzed children's FairyPlay in kindergarten and primary school. The last example relate to an organized leisure activity.

### **Hack Your Heritage: Robot Fairy Tales**

The leisure activities in the Danish organization named Coding Pirates are directed to children with an interest in play, programming, robots, and digital technologies. The chairman, Martin Exner, is the winner of the Danish IT-award 2017. Also, this year, sponsored by the Danish Ministry of Culture, some grown-ups from the

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1 Inspired by Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*. (London: Temple Smith, 1983).

Aarhus-department visited London to join the “Imagine” —festival.<sup>1</sup>

In their workshop, “Hack Your Heritage: Robot Fairy Tales,” British children aged 7-12 would programme robots to enact selected H. C. Andersen fairy tales. The hacker-approach, the playful and experimental use of technology, the mix of digital and analogue materials, and the focus on storytelling in groups appealed to them. The children had a mash-up of raw materials for making remixes at their disposal, combined with expensive technology, especially *Ozobots*, *Quirkbots*, *Lego We Do*, and *Little Bits*. Trash & Technology you may name the constellation. They made paper drawings, they cut out sceneries, castles, caves, and figures using pasteboard or by means of *Geomac*. They modelled the robots to animate the brave tin soldier, Numskull Jack, the ugly duckling, the fearless soldier with his tinder box. The recycling of trash went on both literally and literary. Straws and string, feathers and matches, cardboard cylinders and legobricks, stickers, scissors felt tips, tape, plastic beakers, old soft toys, faded toy figures...

During the intense teamwork, the children along with volunteers from Coding Pirates remixed, de-and reconstructed, the selected fairy tales. On one table, you would see e.g. the tin-soldier-ozobot-with blue-lightning move along sceneries until he reached the red-fire-scenery, where his blue-lightning turned into flashing red. On another you would see robot-Numskull Jack approaching the princess made of a plastic beaker with holes cut out. One of her “hands” is a pressure sensor, and when Numbskull Jack shakes this “hand,” she suddenly brightens, produces a sound – and butterflies circulate around her “head.”

The organizer of the workshop, researcher at Aarhus University, Rikke Toft Noergaard<sup>2</sup>, also runs this workshop with Danish coding-pirates-children, but over a longer period. The Danish children therefore become better experienced with the use of robots, and also, they are more familiar with H. C. Andersen’s fairy tales than

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1 Presented at the festival like this: “Coding Pirates Denmark is a Danish self-sustained non-profit association which operates a network of clubs which foster and promote ideas generation, technological competencies and design thinking through an open, experimenting and exploratory approach to technologies. Through its activities, it reaches thousands of children, and over 2000 children around Denmark are currently placed on waiting lists to join as regular participants. At the core of Coding Pirates lies the values of imagination, empowerment and co-creation with new technologies for future citizenship” (Hack a Heritage, Southbank Centre).

2 See about the principles for use of open-ended technology as: processual, emergent, modular, reconfigurable, transmutable, and constructible—useful qualities for children’s play culture in Rikke Toft Noergaard and Rikke Berggreen Paaskesen (2016). “Open-ended education: How Open-endedness Might Foster and Promote Technological Imagination, Enterprising and Participation in Education” *Conjunctions*, Vol. 3, No 1, 2016: 1-25.

the British. So, they are more capable of de- and reconstructing a fairy tale as burlesque while balancing between rule-bound and free-form storytelling. For example they let Donald Trump appear in a lot of different roles, e.g. as a young princess or an old woman. Much in the spirit of fairy tales, you might say. One never can be sure, whether a young princess or an old woman is heroines or the opposite, until you have confronted yourself with them. H. C. Andersen himself knew how to strip emperors, kings and frauds to the skin.

### **FairyPlay: Carnavalesque and Neo-Avant-Garde (or Rather Not)**

The three examples given in this article show us FairyPlay brought to life by children in kindergarten, primary school and organized leisure activity. They show us, how H. C. Andersen's fairy tales are recycled by children in a spirit of laughter and a playful aesthetic mode of expression.

We might now point to the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, and define FairyPlay as *carnavalesque*.<sup>1</sup> In his studies Bakhtin underlines the contrast between the hierarchic order of normality and the carnivalesque turning upside down of this order, the breach of taboos, and suspension of rules for everyday life — during a short, well defined break — an interlude.

However, this dichotomous time management or enforcement of rules for “play” and “work” do not provide a contemporary picture of FairyPlay as practiced by Danish children in the institutional settings for their performance. Neither in kindergarten, primary school nor the organized leisure activities do children only “work” while attending “classes,” and “play” only when allowed during playtime or breaks. When participating in projects together with grown-ups, the children tend to carry out that aesthetic and experimental mode of narrative performance, we name play, regardless of what grown-ups have prearranged or wished for.

So, we should see the carnivalesque not as characterizing an *inter-ludic* (Lat. *ludere*: to play) , but rather as one *intra-ludic* out of several other possible modes of performing FairyPlay.

We also might point to the Italian novelist and semiologist Umberto Eco, who in his “diario minimo” (minimal diaries) described the neo-avant-garde project, namely to deconstruct the literary construction, to abolish the marked distinction between everyday language and art language by spinning them around and into each other in new, often comic and grotesque aesthetic modes.<sup>2</sup> Children in FairyPlay

1 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

2 Umberto Eco, *How to Travel with a Salmon & Other Essays*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1995) .

often use exactly this strategy (the transgressive mode, as shown in figure No. 1), because it is useful for their play project: what matters in play is not just learning something by heart, not just transmitting or telling what you were told; you need to adapt the story to the play situation and its participants here and now. You play in order to play well, therefore you must be willing to change from epic to episodic storytelling in a split second. FairyPlay is a notion of performance.

H. C. Andersen could be seen as a neo-avant-garde of his time, when he created his fairy tales by combining trash and treasure, the oral and the literary language, mixing the timbre of voice, intonation and idiomatic speech from a folklore storyteller with a booklore style. He uses a clear child perspective when he addresses the readers of his time. He designs his allegorical sceneries both schematized and detailed: we go under water level with the little mermaid, in the air with the wild swans, at the rich people's castle, in the poor people's shanty, in the frozen land of the snow queen ... you are fascinated by the picture, and you may proceed the drawing, but also you may design new variations and add your own details.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have presented Hans Christian Andersen as a *homo ludens*, a *trash-sculptor* and a *thing-finder*, like *Pippi Longstocking* and like children in play, and we investigated his fairy tales as a crosscultural mix between folklore, booklore and medialore. We illustrated their usefulness as "trash" in a play culture where children recycle them into FairyPlay, and we exemplified how children pick up fairy tales, or fragments of fairy tales, from a context of folklore, booklore and medialore, and how they make them functional as raw materials for play-production by muddling, mingling and (re)mixing their formulas with other fictional materials and adjusting them to the play context through improvisations.

Hans Christian Andersen became a world-famous author due to his talent for transforming his own childhood experiences into art, into booklore. His fairy tales have their narrative background in folklore, and they are aesthetically adapted to booklore by the author and they are reconstructed in innumerable ways in medialore, forming parts of a never-ending trash-and-treasure recycling process. We demonstrated our comprehension through figures showing (1) the pyramid of performance, (2) the cogwheels for FairyPlay, (3) folklore, booklore, medialore in a linear, and (4) a contemporary perspective, (5) the constituents of FairyPlay, and (6) the four contexts of culture. On the whole, these figures illustrate, how contemporary use of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales in play and medialore helps them to live on as fanciful folklore of the future.



The geologist and social scientist Marcos Buser opens his book, *Rubbish Theory: The Heritage of Toxic Waste*, with the following statement:

What we call heritage is the result of what we wish to retain or reperform — whether it be tangible or intangible, and whether it be ideas, memories, things or practices. The act of retaining, in its turn, usually leads to handing down heritage to the next generation. In this way, a cross-generational continuity comes into being (...) This is an example of Heracleitus' *panta rhei* — everything is in flux. (Buser 5)

*Panta rhei* — Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales are in flux, as trash and treasure, as rubbish retained and reperformed. They belong at the same time to three categories, the *transient*, the *durable* and the *rubbish*, as defined in *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Thompson 2017). They are transient: here today, gone tomorrow, they are durable: a joy forever, and they are rubbish: possible raw materials for new creative and aesthetic modes of expression — known as play.

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