Berriman, Liam. "Materializing Time: Toys, Memory and Nostalgia." *Researching Everyday Childhoods: Time, Technology and Documentation in a Digital Age*. By Rachel Thomson, Liam Berriman and Sara Bragg. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 77–94. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350011779.ch-005>>.

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Materializing Time: Toys, Memory and Nostalgia

Liam Berriman

Fourteen-year-old Abi describes how her room used to be 'cluttered' with items from her past. Recently, she has turned to eBay and has sold a lot of the items that were just 'shoved' in her wardrobe to help 'make space'. When researcher Sara asks which items she has decided to keep, Abi describes 'stuff that has memories attached and stuff that my mum wanted me to keep as well'.

Whilst her mum 'wouldn't force me to keep anything', she has encouraged Abi to keep 'baby stuff' that she 'might not ... be that bothered about' right now. For Abi and her mother, the process of sorting through childhood belongings has prompted reflection on the changing value of material objects over time and their significance as sites for creating and curating memories of childhood.

This chapter reflects on the significance of time and memory in children's material worlds. It is inspired by recent iterations of practice theory (Shove et al. 2009) and studies of material culture (Miller 2009) which have provided ways of observing the 'materialization' of time and memory in everyday life. From birth and throughout childhood, material objects act as important markers of change and continuity (Clarke 2004). A soft toy kept from birth can be a source of continuity and comfort, whilst an out-grown childhood toy can herald change and transition. In this chapter, we explore how the children

in our study engaged with toys and material objects, allowing us to think of these as sites of temporal imagination and practice. As museum curators and historians of childhood have long known,¹ toys are objects marked in and by time, and their material design provides insights into the popular imaginings of children's play at different historical moments (Brookshaw 2009). This has become increasingly evident in a fast moving technological culture where toys have become markers of subtle generational divides.² Toys have increasingly become sites of 'retro' nostalgia for past childhoods;³ however, the historical and generational marking of toys is not an exclusively adult pastime. When we invited children and young people to share their favourite things from the present and past, we also encounter objects marked in and by time. Toys from the 1990s and 2000s already provoked nostalgia for many of the young people we interviewed, providing anchors for the navigation of a changing sense of self and values over time.

Drawing on two of the key themes of this book – time and documentary – we explore how children's toys and other personal belongings operate as 'sites of memory' within children's everyday lives (Nora 1989). This chapter draws on interviews conducted during the first phase of the Face 2 Face project, where children were asked to show and tell us about 'favourite things' (see Chapter 2 for more on this method). This approach enabled children of different ages to imagine their biographies as stretching both 'backwards' in time – reflecting the significant memories attached to toys – and 'forwards' in time – reflecting on what toys they might wish to keep for the future. As discussed towards the end of this chapter, decisions about what to keep or to throw away, and whether broken and obsolete toys still had value, are highly significant in shaping the value of toys as objects beyond play. This chapter proposes that children can be nostalgic for their own recent pasts and engage in everyday curatorial practices which assign value and meaning to favourite toys and objects over time. The chapter pays close attention to the practices through which time is materialized in children's toys and objects – first, in terms of the 'storying' of time and memory, and second, through the 'sorting' and curating of material pasts.

Throughout our study, we observed how toys and other material objects were a constant presence in the everyday lives of our research participants, acting as playthings, comforters, gifts, collectables, hand-me-downs,

¹During our research, we encountered an oral history project led by the Brighton Toy and Model museum that recorded adults' accounts of their favourite childhood toys. The interviews from this project offered insights into many of the different temporal markings of toys as historical and generational artefacts that live on in adults' memories of childhood. Its online archive of oral histories can be found at: <http://www.toysinthecommunity.org>.

²For example, the film *Boyhood* directed by Richard Linklater features several toys as generational markers for different moments in time (e.g. Nintendo's Gameboy).

³For example, television programmes such as Channel 4's *100 Greatest Toys* and the BBC's *The Toys That Made Christmas*, which invite adults to recall their favourite childhood possessions.

keepsakes and decorations. Here, we consider the ‘temporal affordances’ of children’s material cultures. Affordances is a concept originating in design studies, where it is used to describe the multiple ways an object might invite action (Gaver 1991). We use it more narrowly to describe how children’s objects may invite temporal purpose, for example, as sites of memory or nostalgia. We begin by considering different ways of approaching the relationships between time and material culture in children’s everyday lives. We then explore how children ‘story’ their pasts and biographical narratives through material objects, and how, through practices of ‘sorting’ and curation, children assess the changing meaning and value of objects in their lives.

Childhood, time and materiality

Discussions of the materiality and temporality of childhood have grown in prominence over recent decades. Time has been an ever-present backdrop to the study of childhood as a period of biological and biographical transition (James & Prout 1997; Neale & Flowerdew 2003; Nielsen 2016). In particular, debates in the late 1980s and early 1990s about childhood as a state of being vs. becoming generated a conceptual ‘crisis of time’ that was caught between temporal immediacy and future potentiality. More recent contributions to this debate have taken a more nuanced approach to the temporality of childhood (Uprichard 2008), with researchers critically exploring children’s experiences of time and memory in their everyday lives (Christensen 2002; Hohti 2016b; Moss 2010). This in turn has been supported by theoretical developments that encourage us to understand how the figure of the child is tied into normative biographical tropes connecting historical and biographical notions of progress (Steedman 1995; Stockton 2009). Attempts to queer time and to locate us within queer times move our attention away from universalist developmental temporalities towards the recursive, layered and contested temporalities of lived childhoods (Freeman 2010; Castañeda 2010). This chapter draws on these latter developments by approaching children as agentic in their practices of memory making, acknowledging how memories are created and located in broader sites of shared, communal and hybrid memory, such as family narratives.

Children’s material cultures have become a prominent focus for childhood studies (Buckingham 2011; Gutman & Coninck-Smith 2008). Research in this area ranges across children’s toys and play cultures (Sutton-Smith 1986; Woodyer 2013) to marketing and consumer culture (Cook 2004; Seiter 1993). A shared theme across these studies has been recognition of material culture as a space of agency, play and meaning making for children. Time and memory have not featured prominently in these studies, though many have

featured historical accounts of how particular material cultures of childhood have evolved over time, focussing, for example, on books (Rudd, 2010), clothing (Cook 2004) and toys (Brookshaw 2009). In contrast, youth studies has a strong orientation towards the temporality of young people's material cultures. In particular, research into 'self-documentary' practices examines the materialization of time through diaries, scrapbooks and photo albums (Day-Good 2013; Himmesoete 2011; Tinkler 2008) and, more recently, social media practices of curating 'timelines' and 'news feeds' (Lincoln & Robards 2014). Though diaries have long been a source of historical interest for understanding the construction of childhood and youth at certain moments time (see Ariés 1962), we are only now beginning to consider how these practices contribute to the *materialization of time* in children and young people's everyday lives.

Storying objects

During the 'favourite things' interviews, we invited children to share the objects that were most important in their lives, telling us how they came to own them, what memories they associated with them and how the objects were important to their past, present or future. Across these interviews, the children shared a wide assortment of treasured items with us, along with the stories and memories they evoked. In this section, we explore some of the common ways that children 'storied' their objects, and through this, gain insights into how childhood becomes a focus for the making of memory and nostalgic investment for individuals and for families (in Chapter 6 we discuss more specifically how these objects relate to the work of gender). The following section suggests that objects enable children to tell stories about mundane and momentous times in their lives – anchoring and materializing particular memories. We also consider how absent objects could be highly significant, representing moments of separation and loss in children's symbolic universe.

Across the interviews, favourite toys and objects occupy a space of both mundane and momentous significance in the lives of participants. Some of the objects we were introduced to had very mundane existences, either in common use as everyday playthings, or residing in drawers, on shelves or in boxes where they are displayed or stowed away. As objects for discussion, however, they evoke 'momentous' stories relating to significant people, places and events within the children's lives. These stories are rarely told in a linear fashion (e.g. from earlier to more recent memories), but are reported in a patchwork arrangement involving multiple layers of time. Through their

objects, children weave together different strands of time, focusing our attention on particular relationships and events with meaning for them at the time of the interview. For those children who had been followed since birth, we experienced resonances with conversations that took place in their babyhood where presents bought for them were prized by parents for their connections to particular gift givers (e.g. parents or close friends). Eight years on, we understood ourselves as engaging with an unfolding and materializing symbolic universe of significant relationships, yet one in which the children are increasingly in the driving seat as collectors and narrators.

Fourteen-year-old Nathan has been accumulating a collection of teddy bears since he was born, and the bears provide a site through which he is able to talk about his relationships over time and can reflect back on a range of childhood memories. One of his first bears was inherited from his older brother and formed the basis of a collection that has gradually grown over time. Nathan explains:

I used to play with them a lot and [. . .] (they were) the first thing I thought of, like straight to the head because I can't really think of anything else that would be, that will be important from the past.

Nathan's description of where and when he had got the bears enables him to name important relationships and to communicate a sense of continuity and stability over time. Whilst the bear he inherited from his brother is particularly special ('I had it since I was a baby'), each of his other bears is also an important site of memory. The way that the bears are narrated draws attention to what Nathan values, including a special holiday ('I got this one couple of years ago in America') and a theme park trip ('I got this from Chessington'), as well as important relationships with family members whose affection is materialized in the object ('My auntie made this for me') and friends whose agency is affirmed in their ability to contribute to his collection ('my best friend bought it for me'). While each bear is singularly important for its connection to a specific person or event, the bears also existed as an interconnected set of objects collectively representing Nathan's evolving relationships and investments.

At the time of the interview, Nathan's bedroom is being renovated as part of a wider house extension, and so most of his belongings have been displaced from their normal home and packed away in boxes in the family's living room. The bears are amongst those belongings packed away, and Nathan retrieves them especially for the interview. At a later point in the study, after the renovations had been completed, Nathan gives a tour of his bedroom to show some of the items he hadn't been able to find for the favourite things interview. During this, he highlights many of the changes

to his room, which include a new dark grey colour-scheme, self-drawn artwork on the walls, and a new computer desk. Over the course of our study, a number of the children's bedrooms changed or were redecorated. At these moments of transition, it is interesting to note which objects have remained, been moved, or been displaced entirely. For Nathan, the bears maintain a highly visible place in his room – on a bench below his window – remaining a significant point of material continuity. It is unclear whether Nathan's sharing of the bears and their stories during the study is influential in his decision to place them back into the room. Whilst many objects may already act as 'sites of memory' for children, it may also be possible that our request for them to story significant objects in turn generates new value for those possessions.

The invitation to share something from the past could also be interpreted in a much more casual manner. For example, 15-year-old Funmi chose a pink door sign embossed with the word 'Princess', hastily selected in the last minutes before the interview. During the interview, it became clear that the act of selecting the object had prompted Funmi to reflect on why she had kept it, and what memories were attached to it:

I got it for Christmas from my uncle. It's pink because, because it was my favourite colour. It says princess because, I guess that's how he thought of me. So I really cherish it, I think it's really special.

Over the course of the discussion, Funmi describes how she has now grown out of the colour pink – rejecting it as 'too girly' – and has instead started to cultivate a purple colour scheme in her bedroom that the door sign no longer matched. In contrast with Nathan's bears, Funmi's object has been displaced within her room and instead resides inside a drawer. The object's obsolescence is undercut by important family memories and so the sign is 'kept' rather than disposed of, memorializing her relationships with her uncle and a past 'pink' version of self.

Though objects could evoke stories of important relationships and events in children's lives, they also serve as reminders of significant moments of change and transition – such as Funmi's transition from pink to purple. One commonly recurring narrative involved objects marking 'agentic change', where children described a broadening of choice, freedom or responsibility in their lives. These stories share parallels with the notion of 'critical moments' (Thomson 2002) – where a particular moment or event is narratively constructed as a critical biographical turning point. In this instance, objects are described by the children as closely involved in shaping or marking a critical moment of change. Whether these moments will find their way into well-worn stories of self is another matter, and one that only a longitudinal research design can capture.

For David, the occasion of choosing or purchasing a favourite item stood out as a moment of newfound agency. In the following extract, he narrates how he came to possess his soft toy dog 'Bernard':

I was walking in Morrisons (a UK supermarket chain), I was in a trolley, well I wasn't walking, I was in a pram, maybe, I don't know. I was in the trolley and, when you walk in, the first thing on like your left and right was one of these doggies. He's really soft, and I wanted to get it, so I grabbed it out of the shelf and I was like hugging it really tight. And when we got to the checkout I didn't want to let go of him, didn't put it on the conveyor belt, so my mum had to rip the label out and give it to the lady and she scanned it.

Children's relationships with soft toys have often been a focus of childhood research – particularly in psychoanalytical theories of attachment. Winnicott's work initially highlighted the significant role of the teddy as a 'transitional object' for young children exploring the world beyond the familiarity of their mother's body. He suggested that soft toys could provide a stable presence during periods of transition – offering a constant comforting presence in the mother's absence. David's narrative of meeting Bernard almost has a fairy tale (or romantic) quality to it as he describes them forming an almost instant attachment. The soft dog is represented as an important 'companion' object (Turtle 2011) and source of comfort for David. Alongside reflecting on the important emotional bond that David describes with the soft toy, it's also important to consider the significant role of the narrative of 'finding' Bernard. For David, the story marks a significant moment when – possibly for the first time – he could exercise physical and emotional agency to obtain a toy of his own choosing. David represents himself as a persuasive figure who can successfully convince his mother to buy Bernard for him by combining affectionate display for the soft toy with a firm refusal to let it go. Looking at the narrative enables us to see how David uses Bernard to tell a story about his growing abilities to 'get' what he wants.

In a similar series of stories, 14-year-old Abi describes how several of her favourite possessions reflected her on-going 'obsessions' with different animals. During the interview, Abi describes how efforts to persuade her mother to let her own different animals had mixed results. During a phase where she was particularly keen on horses, Abi manages to accumulate a full set of horse riding equipment, but had been unsuccessful in persuading her mother to let her take up riding lessons:

Abi: I used to be obsessed with horses and I didn't have a horse, but I had like everything else, the saddle and all the equipment (laughs).

Researcher Sara: Oh really? But you didn't go horse riding?

Abi: (Laughs) No! And then I just like really didn't know what to do with the saddle, so it was just shoved in my wardrobe.

Although Abi was not eventually successful in taking up riding lessons, persuading her mum to get her the riding gear had taken her one step closer to her dream. Abi's greatest success came in persuading her mum to let her have a pet rabbit. She explains:

I wanted a dog for quite a long time. So because my mum wouldn't let me have a dog she felt kind of bad so she easily let me have a rabbit.

In the lead up to buying the rabbit, Abi describes how she spent her 'whole time reading about rabbits' and researching the best cage and equipment. In these stories, Abi illustrates how her persistence eventually paid off as she gradually persuaded her mother to let her adopt a pet rabbit. Her eventual success also marks a moment of increased responsibility. The rabbit is kept in Abi's room and her mother makes it clear that it is Abi's duty to ensure it is fed, cleaned and exercised. Like David's story, Abi's emphasizes her ability to attain something much sought after, however, it also narratively traces her transition to being recognized by her mother as 'responsible' enough to care for an animal. In both cases, the objects play a key role in helping the children 'to grow' by materially scaffolding their transition to new forms of agency and responsibility.

In the case of 14-year-old Aliyah, one relatively mundane object was evocative of an important new period of developing friendships and spending time outside of home and school. Initially, Aliyah shared her mobile phone as a highly significant object in her life, particularly for keeping in touch with her closest group of school friends. However, during the interview, it was a small plastic Starbucks 'anti-dust plug' shaped like a Frappuccino and a plastic phone shell with the Starbucks logo that promoted the most discussion about spending time with her friendship group. Together, the phone accessories were relatively mundane items, however the Starbucks brand associated with the objects became an important emblem for experiences she shared with friends away from home and school:

Researcher Liam: Why do you like Starbucks?

Aliyah: Basically there's a Starbucks that we, my friends, always go to. We always end up going Starbucks, they went there yesterday. Everyone likes Starbucks [...] I like everything in Starbucks, apart from some of their drinks, but I like everything else.

Liam: What kinds of things do you order when you go?

Aliyah: Hot chocolate or Frappuccinos, something like that. Usually Frappuccinos.

Liam: And then you all sit there and –

Aliyah: Yeah and then we come back home, so it's weird but

Liam: No, it sounds good.

Aliyah: Basically it happens if my friend Lisa, she always goes, she's like the Starbucks queen, she knows everything about Starbucks. So sometimes after school she wants to go Starbucks and if anyone wants to go with her then yeah. I didn't go yesterday, but yesterday they went Starbucks and bowling, so we always end up going Starbucks.

For Aliyah, Starbucks epitomized a social space that was independent from school and family. Carrying the branded accessories on her phone provided an ever-present reminder of that experience, but also visually displayed the brand as a shared site of value and meaning within the friendship group. The significance of the Starbucks brand also exceeded the objects – signifying the intensive experience (Lash & Lury 2007) shared by Aliyah and her friends of meeting and hanging out together at the coffee shop. For Aliyah, Starbucks represented a newfound sense of independence that was realized through the 'mature' consumption practice of meeting for coffee. However, later in the interview, Aliyah describes how time meeting with friends outside of school also provides a licence to 'act weird' and to have fun in a way that isn't possible whilst at school. This subversiveness is also made possible by Starbucks as a transitional space between home and school where the group can act and talk in ways not possible under adult scrutiny. In this instance, the immaterial and intensive experience of the brand plays a highly significant role in marking a key period of transition in her life.

So far, we have considered the significant role objects play in materializing and memorializing important memories and relationships in young people's lives; however, objects could also stand in for and mark absences in their narratives about themselves. For 15-year-old Jasmine, everyday life is marked by regular domestic upheaval. On each of our research visits, she is living at a new address, moving between different family members and temporary foster carers. Jasmine chooses a soft unicorn that had been left behind at her mother's house as her favourite thing. Physical and emotional distances converge as Jasmine expresses sadness at not being able to pass on her unicorn to her 2-month-old daughter. She has, however, begun to accumulate a collection of soft toys for her daughter to treasure in the future. In Jasmine's words, 'she's got like loads of rabbits, and she's got like two little cats [. . .] I just want her to have a lot'. Toys are important as comforters and playthings, but they also hold value as a way of materializing love and care and both making and holding onto childhood memories in the future (see also Pugh 2004 and Ponsford 2002).

Curation: Object pasts and futures

By inviting participants to choose and narrate objects, we were also inviting them to act as curators of their lives – something that connected the research to the everyday practices of sorting, valuing, and caring for objects that young people were already engaged in. We can understand curation as taking many forms, including the assembling of collections in digital photo albums, memory boxes and on shelves, as well as single objects stashed, storied or cared for with a future purpose in mind. The etymological root of curation is ‘to care’, and in our research, we were particularly interested to explore how children cared for objects, and the forms of curation this entailed. Discussion of children’s curation practices was most commonly prompted by researchers asking which objects children felt would remain important to them in the future. Though not all objects were deliberately kept or preserved by children with a view to having future value (e.g. as a keepsake), we did find that it was common to value certain objects as having significance beyond its everyday ‘use value’. It is in these instances that we might think of young people as ‘curating’ their own pasts. In the following examples, we consider a variety of different curation practices encountered in the research. We initially explore curation as a ‘site of care’ for the material past, where children begin to reflect on the evolving value of objects and the memories they evoke. These are ideas also explored in Chapter 10, where we use the term ‘votive epistemology’ to capture something of the way in which the materialization of time gains value within the wider culture. Here, we then explore instances where the value of objects becomes explicitly future orientated as children weigh tensions between obsolescence, nostalgia, sentimentality and economic value – shaping choices about what to keep and what to shed.

Curating pasts: Making and editing memories

One of the teenagers most visibly engaged in curating her material past was Aliyah. As one of the older members of the research panel, Aliyah had grown out of most of her childhood toys and had begun to sort through and reassess the value of her childhood possessions. She described passing on her collection of Barbie dolls to her younger sister, but was unable to recall exactly what had happened to the toys:

I don’t know what happened to my old toys. Oh, I think I handed them down to my little sister, and then she probably lost them or something, ‘cos she always loses, she has nothing from her past, so yeah she probably lost it or something, I don’t know.

Aliyah's sister is described as lacking sentimentality about past possessions, and as failing to keep safe objects that had been passed on to her. This is held in contrast with Aliyah, who describes herself as treasuring certain special items from the past. One favourite object shared by Aliyah was a Tamagotchi that she has held onto despite it having been broken a number of years. The toy evokes pleasurable memories of primary school for Aliyah and, during the interview, she recalls how she and her friends would all sneak their Tamagotchis into school to surreptitiously play with during lunch and break times. When asked where she keeps the Tamagotchi, Aliyah shares a shoebox (see Figure 5.1) containing a variety of possessions from her past:

Researcher Liam: What other sort of things have you kept in the box?

Aliyah: My old school tie, and badge from the blazer [. . .] And I have this handbag, that was my first handbag. yeah I've got some other stuff.

Aliyah describes how she has retrieved the shoebox especially for the interview, and that it is normally stored in her dad's garden shed and that she doesn't have space to store it in her bedroom. Along with the Tamagotchi, Aliyah's shoebox also contains memorabilia from Disney's *High School Musical* (she was a fan, but has now grown out of it), her first purse and an old school tie and badge. These latter school items hold particular significance for Aliyah, and although she had not originally intended to share them in the interview, she is happy to discuss them. Over the past year, Aliyah's secondary school has undergone a great deal of upheaval – with an 'inadequate' Ofsted inspection result leading to a new head teacher and a high turnover of teaching staff. As part of an overhaul by the new head teacher, the school uniform has been replaced with different logos and colours. This has been a period of difficult change for Aliyah, affecting her schoolwork and grades. Aliyah has positive memories of how the school used to be, and holding on to the tie and badge provide her with a means of preserving that past identity of the school in her memory.

When asked how she chooses what to keep in her shoebox, Aliyah struggles to articulate a logic for her choices:

Liam: How do you choose what to keep in there?

Aliyah: If something really like, if something happened, I don't know (.) it just, I don't know.

Whilst the interview prompts Aliyah to consider what items of value she has kept from her past, the act of curation itself has not been informed by any explicit or previously articulated logic. Nonetheless, Aliyah's decision to curate a shoebox has been a conscious choice. Her original inspiration came from YouTuber 'Jack's Gap', who posted a popular video sharing the contents of his own memory box. As we describe in Chapter 4, YouTubers, were

FIGURE 5.1 *Aliyah's memory box*

often an important inspiration for many practices of self-documentation that we observed. After seeing the video, Aliyah felt inspired to create her own memory box:

I was telling myself to make one for ages and then I watched their video and I was like I should, I should maybe do it now.

For Aliyah, the practice of curation is one simultaneously inspired by popular culture and marks her practice as typical of the times within which she lives. Though Aliyah couldn't articulate an overarching logic for selecting items to keep in her box, the decision to curate a memory box is nonetheless an explicit choice and what she saves and why has unique biographical significance.

Thirteen-year-old Sean is similarly invested in materially curating past memories. Using a tablet and a digital picture frame, Sean captures and stores large numbers of photos depicting important people and events in his life. These photo collections take on heightened value for Sean in recent years. In his final primary school years, Sean was diagnosed with a muscular degenerative disorder that saw him gradually lose movement across nearly his entire body. Adjusting to the rapid pace of his body's deterioration has been both a painful and deeply frustrating experience for Sean, leading to him attending a

school specifically designed for children with complex physical disabilities and health needs. Through support from charities and other organizations, Sean is able to take part in a number of experiences that are held especially for him, including visiting his favourite football team's stadium and riding at high speeds around a race car circuit. These experiences are all documented in Sean's photo album, either recorded by himself or family members. Curated in his digital photo albums, the documented experiences form a treasured collection for Sean that play on constant rotation on a picture frame in his room.

Sean's photo albums are also marked by absences – particularly from his early childhood and prior to his diagnosis. One of Sean's carers at his school explains that he no longer looks at photographs from before his condition, as this has become too distressing. Instead, the digital picture frame in his room has been carefully curated to show images of significant memories during the advanced stages of his condition, with earlier photos filtered out. Through the exclusion of certain photographs, Sean has made an explicit break with part of his past – avoiding the memories evoked by those affectively charged visual traces of his earlier life. For Sean, curation provides the ability to selectively sort and bring to the fore those memories which have provided moments of joy and pleasure during a difficult biographical period of physical and emotional transition.

Curating futures: Value and obsolescence

Researcher Sue: How do you think the things you play with have changed as you have got a bit older?

David: Get a bit dusty.

In our discussions with younger children, we often asked them to reflect on how their relationship to particular toys or objects might change as they got older. For some, attachment to early childhood toys had already begun to wane and some unused objects were gradually slipping into obsolescence. As David describes above, these toys and objects are often left collecting 'dust' under beds or in the back of cupboards. Obsolescence has a twin meaning in this context – representing a cultural shift towards products designed with shorter material life cycles that rapidly grow out of date and are consumed by 'dust' (Gabrys 2011; Parikka 2013), but also a revaluing of objects over time as children decide which objects to keep and care for *despite* their breaking or falling out of everyday use.⁴ Seven-year-old Lucien, for example, describes how his

⁴The film *Toy Story 3* captures both of these trends, as Andy grows out of his toys and younger children see the toys as dated and defunct.

interest in motor vehicles changed as he got older. A previously prized Lego camper van⁵ is no longer considered 'fast enough' and, instead, he wants to collect models of motor cars that are similar to those he watches on the television programme *Top Gear*. For Lucien and other children, a challenge of 'growing older' is deciding which toys matter enough to be kept, and which can be given away. In some instances, these decisions become a source of debate between children and parents about the sentimental value of early childhood objects. For 10-year-old Megan and her brothers (a set of triplets), this debate arose when they decided to sell some of their soft toys at a local jumble sale. The children were prompted to sort through old toys after seeing an advert for the jumble sale posted through their letterbox. On learning of their plan to sell one particular set of soft toys from when they were born, Megan's mother felt that they might regret giving them away later. The children were eventually persuaded when their mother explained how the soft toys had been embroidered with their initials when they were born, and placed in their cots to help differentiate them. For Megan and her brothers this vicarious memory adds new sentimental value to toys they had been willing to part with. Decisions about what to keep or discard become political within the context of collective family memory, with parents and children debating the sentimental significance of childhood objects.

Seven-year-old Nkosi similarly found that his parents weren't prepared for him to part with certain childhood objects yet:

Nkosi: One time I put [the toys] in a box and I wanted to tell my mum and dad I am going to sell them tomorrow. I am going to sell them for £2.50.

Researcher Sue: Wow that is very good. Did you get £2.50?

Nkosi: No. Mummy and daddy said no.

Though Nkosi is disappointed that he can't sell his old unused toys, he also acknowledges that certain toys can be too special to give away. He describes his plan to hold onto one prized remote controlled racing car to pass on to his own children in the future:

Sue: So that is like a real favourite. And do you think you will ever get fed up with it?

Nkosi: No. I think I will have it when I am a man.

Sue: Yeah, why not.

Nkosi: I might keep it for my son or daughter-

Sue: Ah that is nice.

⁵This Lego camper van was given to Lucien by his parents because of its similarity to the family's own holiday camper van. During the Making Modern Motherhood study, Lucien's grandmother had described the significance of the camper van for enabling the family to make annual trips to relatives in Germany.

Nkosi: And if I have a daughter I am going to sprayed it pink or purple.

Sue: Well it is rather nice orange. She might like it orange.

Nkosi: And if the son doesn't want it orange I am going to spray it red.

Sue: Right, do you like red?

Nkosi: Red is my favourite and my dad's.

Nkosi's favourite toy car is described as having value and life beyond the present – a souvenir from his childhood to be passed on to a future generation. Nkosi also expresses willingness to customize the colour of the car for his future offspring. For his son, Nkosi suggests he would be prepared to spray the car 'red' – identifying, it as a favourite colour of both himself and his father. Nkosi thus not only proposes to share his much-loved toy with his future son, but also a (male) family preference for the colour red. The toy in this instance becomes a medium through which Nkosi curates his own childhood tastes and values for the future, as we discuss further in the next chapter.

A few exceptional objects have inter-generational histories that stretch back one or more generations. During one of our pilot interviews, 7-year-old Emily shares a collection of dolls that had originally been her mother's childhood possessions, and which she has since inherited ('my mum got me loads from her past'). Emily is fascinated by their worn fabrics and curiously vintage designs:

Emily: It's great because they don't actually break because they've got stuff inside. Not like you know those plastic ones that the arms come off that are not actually huggable. But these are huggable.

For Emily there is something uniquely comforting about these dolls that had once been her mother's companions and playthings, and she emphasizes their durability and hug-ability compared to modern 'plastic' dolls. The dolls are also a site of care for Emily and, during the interview, she affectionately buttons their clothes and plaits their hair. Curation in this instance becomes a very literal form of care. By being passed down from mother to daughter, the dolls had become a material point of inter-generational connection interweaving memories and histories across two different childhoods.

Curating childhoods: The materiality and temporality of the research archive

Although our focus in this study was on children's everyday cultures we became aware that the research process itself was playing a role in documenting and memorializing a particular period in the lives of the participants.

FIGURE 5.2 *Megan's changing bedroom*

Our research activities captured brief snapshots of the children's lives that often rapidly become outdated as representations. A year on from the favourite things interviews, we returned to participants to carry out 'recursive interviews' where we looked back with them (and sometimes their parents) at the archive of research records we had collated (see Chapters 2 and 10). These interviews highlighted the rapid pace of change in different aspects of the children's lives over the course of the project.

Of all the data, records of the 'favourite things' tended to signal the most significant changes. In some cases, children described how the objects previously identified as most important to them in the present had changed. Aliyah's Starbucks adorned phone was replaced with a new iPhone brought as a birthday present by her brother, just as Abi's iPad was displaced by a new iPhone. Lucien's interests had expanded to include Minecraft – marking a new foray into social and online gaming with friends and associated commentaries on YouTube. Objects materially embodied continuity and change in the children's lives, with bedrooms – the home of many of the children's material possessions – providing a key indicator of shifting values and interests (Lincoln 2012). When we first met Megan, her bedroom wall was adorned with Moshi Monsters, only to be replaced for a short time by One Direction posters, which were in turn consigned to the bin (see Figure 5.2). David's bedroom had also undergone significant change, with toys cleared away and a hanging basket of soft bears emptied. Potentially, to signal his transition to becoming an 'older boy', David described how Bernard was no longer a bedtime companion. Returning to the favourite things data provided an opportunity for

us to reflect with the children on the evolving value of their material objects over time.

Preparing to archive the research data also brought to the fore how families perceived our research as records of the children's lives. In Sean's case, our favourite things interview became an event photographed and archived in his digital album. In this instance, the research event overlapped with Sean's personal curation practices. The idea of a period of the children's lives being 'immortalized' in an archive and becoming a 'part of history', as one parent described, appealed to many of the families. Megan and her mother described how they liked the idea of revisiting the archive with future generations to show them what Megan's childhood was like. Sean's mother also described how pleased she was for Sean to have a part of his life archived alongside other 'everyday childhoods' – commenting 'Oh fancy them picking you!' For some of the families then, our research record was an important 'archive' that might have value for them over time as a site of memory or 'time capsule' to which they could return. In some instances, however, children and parents voiced uncertainties about how the archived research record might be (mis)read or (mis)interpreted by others at a future point in time (see Chapter 8). In this case, the archive was regarded as 'locked' in time as the world changed around it. Whilst the meaning and value of children's own archives remained under their careful custodianship, the public research archive would be subject to the interpretation of others.

This chapter has explored how children's material worlds are infused with time, nostalgia and memory from an early age. During our 'favourite thing' interviews, we were struck by the significant role material objects played in shaping children's sense of their past, presents and futures. Rather than simply being the 'material backdrop' to children's lives, toys and other treasured objects were central to the practices by which the children explored biographical storytelling and narrative, nostalgia and aging, memory and forgetting, and sentimentality and obsolescence. We also observed through these interviews how children begin the work of 'sorting' and 'curating' their material pasts – selecting which objects to keep as important markers of time and sites of memory for the future. The overall aim of the chapter has been to contribute new child-centred perspectives on the significance of time, memory and nostalgia in material cultures. Moving between childhood studies literatures and the accounts of children in this study enables a sense of childhood as a self-conscious period of becoming, enjoyed by parents, monitored by markets and enacted by children in distributed networks of agency within which time is materialized. Some of the themes introduced in this chapter will be revisited in the final chapter of the book, reflecting on how time, technology and documentation may be coming into a new configuration in digitally saturated time, associated with a heightened sensitivity to the passage of time and new forms of value thereby made available.