

**Mediatizing children's cultures: play,  
imagination and supernatural beliefs  
in the digital age**

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# YouTube

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- ▶ “Kid’s segment” – children as video viewers, producers and commenters
- ▶ **Mediatization** of various children’s cultural practices



# Mediatization of children's cultural practices

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- ▶ Children's folklore supernatural practices (summoning, levitation, suffocating games, visiting haunted houses) in new online video format on YouTube
- ▶ **Summoning of spirits** (Dundes 2002; Cherednikova 2002; Tucker 2005; Armitage 2006; Ellis 2004) as a popular You-Tube genre



# Summoning in Traditional Offline Format

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- ▶ Dangerous characters: Bloody Mary (Mary Whales, Queen of Spades), Babaduk, Devil, Penny Wise etc.
- ▶ Gift-givers: Gnome the Wish Fulfiller, the Fairy of Wishes, the Egyptian Cat
- ▶ Objective: to witness certain evidence / signs of a “spirit’s” or character’s presence in the ritual space



# Grounds for Belief in Summoning

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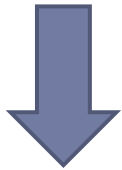
- ▶ Ritual's structure: building on specific mechanisms of a human's psyche and mindset (Ellis 2004: 169)
- ▶ Format of existence in children's communication:  
**oral narratives** vs. actual collective interaction



# Summoning in Online-video Format

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- ▶ Collective face-to-face interaction
- ▶ Oral narratives



- ▶ Staged performance made for You-Tube viewers
  - most videos preset **success** of the ritual (editing, camera work, manipulating objects, acting, and even graphic design)
  - video-producers **claim to have been able to actually summon** a character (documentary, not a feature film)



# Video example

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- ▶ «*Summoning the Gnome. He has appeared!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*»







# Comments to Video-Summoning

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- ▶ *FAKE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*
- ▶ *You are lying!!!!*
- ▶ *Is it for real? How?????*
- ▶ *You've succeeded. I also want to do it*
- ▶ *for real?????*
- ▶ *fraud! doesn't work!!!! boooooooooo!*
- ▶ *I believe you*
- ▶ *I SUMMONED IT BUT IT HADN'T APPEARED*
- ▶ *IT DOESN'T EXIST*
- ▶ *this is lie*
- ▶ *this is true!!*
- ▶ *Should I summon him at day time or during the evening?*
- ▶ *Do I need to be home alone to summon? I simply don't know when my parents will leave*
- ▶ *spirits do exist*



## Rationalization Discourse (employed by the viewers)

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- ▶ *If this was true **the iPad would have been in the box** and with all the supplements inside. You've received it **without a recharger** and without headphones, without anything of it, anything!!!*
- ▶ *This is fake!!!! If this wasn't fake you **would have a happy face** but you don't*
- ▶ ***Egyptian cat writes only in English**, and he never write in such a beautiful way, so we all know that it was you who wrote it*



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- ▶ *The Cat **does exist**, but **this time he did not** fulfill the wish.  
It was you and your friend who did it*



# Comments to Failed Summonings

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- ▶ *Users blame the producer of an “unsuccessful” summoning video pointing out his mistakes during the summoning process*
- ▶ *You should summon it **at twelve o’clock** (not in the morning)*
- ▶ *You should have made a drawing **with a pen, not a pencil***
- ▶ *You should have used **A4 broadsheet***



# Conclusions

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- ▶ The viewers are primarily interested in **maximizing the realistic effect** of a video to enhance the plausibility of supernatural characters. Videos are to create the settings to make the characters more “believable”.
- ▶ “multiple censorship”
- ▶ On the YouTube platform both producers and viewers of summoning videos are involved in a **joint project aimed at constructing plausibility**



# Conclusions

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- ▶ On the one hand, an online video format provides children with the **new tools** to ensure the success of a ritual – they enable children to **construct visualized reality**, where they manage to contact supernatural characters
- ▶ On the other hand, video's finality and unambiguity makes this **visual narrative** much more vulnerable and exposed to challenge. This, in turn, could pose a threat to a child's belief
- ▶ Therefore children have to look for supplementary tools to enhance plausibility of summoning which allow them to believe in it



# Thank you!

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- ▶ Kozlovskaya A.Yu. Children's 'invocation of spirits' on YouTube: constructing the plausibility of supernatural practices in online communication. *Monitoring of Public Opinion : Economic and Social Changes*. 2018. № 1. P. 81—106..

