

The Video Camera in Play and Narrative

Note about the projects in Play Culture – Playing Media 1991-2002

VIDEO DOCUMENTATION of children's play may unfold as a narrative in which a child grabs a microphone as a matter of course. This can be seen e.g. in the video *Gertrud the Ant and Other Narratives and Plays*: Nine-year-old Nina and her friends scamper all over the playground equipped with camera and microphone, and a voice says: –Welcome to the TV sportscast. Come on, we're going this way. We're going to film some boys doing some sports.

In a direct and humorous way the girls draw in experiences and experience, e.g. from TV genres. Like many other children they are familiar with the scenes enacted around a camera and the stagings that appear when a microphone is proffered.

Seen from the perspective of play culture, media narratives and genres are nicely suited as »raw materials« for play; often children are eager to transform or cultivate the large quantity of programme offerings flowing from loudspeakers and TV screens. In this undergrowth of play and narratives children harbour a latent, but at the same time very lively and massive interest in drawing e.g. video equipment into investigative processes spanning the genres of fiction and documentary. The relation between fiction, reality and storytelling is fundamental to children's play – a relation or double vision which is diligently rehearsed, tested and evolved by children, and in this context a concrete or imaginary camera can make a unique contribution.¹

These reflections are the basis for *Gertrud the Ant and Other Narratives and Plays* and for *Play Culture – Playing Media* as a whole. The projects have been developed in cooperation with children, and they have taken up roles as co-creative documentarists in their play environments.

DOCUMENTATION may take on many forms: from ironic storytelling to more direct processual accounts. From drawings over written records to video, photo and sound recordings. Everybody does not necessarily understand everything the same way. But everybody gets a chance to

see and hear the records and results. Tapes, photos, files and plans are accessible. The documentation process may supply the raw material for new narratives and media play. Elusive situations and events frequently offer basic potential for these narratives. At the same time intense processes with electronic equipment will require special types of supportive control and structure on the part of the adults.

THE SITUATION around the camera takes on a *spatial dimension*; a *photographic space* is created around the camera. The recording is not just created in front of the camera, in fact the presence of the photographer and the camera offers significant contributions to the nature of the recording. The participants collaborate around the camera.

The adult documentarist takes it upon himself to discover the uniqueness of this space, he challenges habits, conventions and the apparent facts and observes his own role as challenger and observer. The mark he makes on the situation may contribute to a change of life in this space.

The documentarist in the play cultures may be an outsider who is invited in, a familiar adult who plays a special role for a while – or it may be a child who picks up the camera and is supported in his filming efforts. The adult documentarist faces the paradox that he is part of creating a divergence, but he does not know what this divergence consists in before it occurs, if it ever does.

The camera is visible and often handheld. At the same time the camera is handled with determination: a will and desire to see is felt behind the handling of the camera.

In consequence, documenting does not include a technique or a procedure which can be transferred unequivocally from one situation to another. Combinations of equipment, roles etc. are continuously being examined, tested and changed, and there is a constant creation of special relations and spaces, of reflexivity and storytelling.

When we document by means of a camera, we inscribe ourselves very clearly into the life and the time of which we are part, and the video recordings become important reminders of human vulnerability and transience.

THE ADULT meets the children's aesthetic expressions through his own adult aesthetic interest. In a concrete way. That is to say that the adult must be able to film, photograph, narrate, draw or play an instrument immediately or at fairly short notice. Not just any aesthetic skill, but one that is also valid to the adult himself. The adult can provide an attitude that says: – We are not just dealing with a story about us here. Some

people spend an entire life becoming good at expressing themselves the way we are trying to do now.

IN CONSEQUENCE, documentations are textual elements in changeable and productive processes. Preferably processes and products prove useful to the participants, both immediately and later. Together children and adults can create videos, gain common experience, and a new visibility and audibility will emerge. Stories about the life found where people are and where life and stories are found.

So video documentation leaves productive traces. The play culture and the life of which it is part have undergone small but perhaps decisive influences and changes when a documentation process draws to a provisional close.

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Note

- Mouritsen, Flemming (1998): *Child culture – play culture*, Center for Kulturstudier, Medier og Formidling, Syddansk Universitet, Odense
Mouritsen, Flemming (1999): *Children's literature*, Center for Kulturstudier, Medier og Formidling, Syddansk Universitet, Odense