

Mediatized play

– or: Where is the text in playing soccer?

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Introduction

Children's play must nowadays be understood as a mediatized field in society and culture (Hjarvard, 2008, Johansen, 2011). Media – understood in a very broad sense - holds severe explanatory power in describing and understanding the practice of play, since play happens both with, through and inspired by media of different sorts (Johansen & Karoff, 2010). In this presentation the case of 'playing soccer' will be outlined through its different mediated manifestations, including soccer games and programs on TV, computer games, magazines, books, YouTube videos and soccer trading cards. Mediated manifestations, which are ascribed meaning through social practices of interpretive reproduction (Reckwitz, 2002, Frykman & Gilje, 2003, Corsaro, 2005), and therefore form the grounds for the understanding of the concept of 'soccer' as a participatory or 'remix' culture (Jenkins, 2006, Willett et. al., 2008) or as a mediatized field within children's play culture. The purpose of this presentation is to present an analytical framework for mediatized play, specified through empirical examples, combining the textual, the technological, the cultural and the social artefacts and practices.

Mediatized play

Mediatization should be seen as processes in which play as a cultural practice is directly as well as indirectly influenced by media logics, 'technology, economical structure, symbolic content, and communicative properties' (Hjarvard 2008:, 218, my translation). The point in this case is that the direct *and* the indirect mediatized processes *as well* as the interplay between them must be understood as contributing to the cultural field as a whole. Mediatized play seems to offer different affordances than not mediatized play, since media and technological play tools are often mobile, easily accessible and carrying game play and inspiration in them.

This will be done through empirical studies – fieldwork, observation studies, interviews, and experimental methods – amongst children¹ as well as textual and technological analysis of products, artefacts, things and texts. Still, the emphasis of the analysis will be on children's own constructions and negotiation of meaning through their everyday life practices.

From a cultural studies perspective, du Gay et. al (2003) suggests a model for analyzing cultural artefacts in a circuit involving five stages: production, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity. The point is that meaning is created in articulations combining these processes: *'rather than privileging one single phenomenon – such as the process of production – in explaining the meaning that an artefact comes to possess, it is argued (...) that it is in combination of processes – in their articulation – that the beginnings of*

¹ A gender perspective could be of interest here – how does boys' and girls' play cultures differ and which are their similarities?

an explanation can be found' (du Gay, 2003:3). Obviously, the concept of soccer could be analyzed from any of those angles, not to mention in a combination of both. Yet, in this paper I will limit the framework for analysis to the cultural and social practices carried out by children themselves. Therefore, what is chosen to be included in the analysis is those practices and artefacts which children themselves – through the same practises – point out a meaningful and relevant. Still, the combination of specific practices and the claim for elaborated meaning in the connection of these should be seen as serving an analytical purpose.

Remix

Buckingham describes the study of media audiences as involving targeting; mode of address; circulation; uses; making sense; pleasures and social differences (Buckingham, 2003:60). This kind of multilayered approach suits very well this particular purpose. Also a notion of remix (Markham, 2011, Jenkins, 2006, Willett et.al. 2008) seems to be a fruitful way of understanding and describing a complex field like this. The notion of remix call for consideration on how to grasp and understand complex phenomena of humans engaging with and within social and cultural spheres and with, through and around media, technology and/or artifacts of different sorts. The term remix(ed) has a double meaning, since it on the one hand points to the fact that cultural expressions – for instance in media – are characterized by being mixed and remixed and on the other points to the need for methodological rethinking of analytical inquiries.

Remix is not something we do in addition to our everyday lives. It is the way we make sense of our world, by transforming the bombardment of stimuli into a seamless experience. (...)If we take seriously the idea that everything we take to be 'real' is a constant negotiation of relationships between people and things, and that culture is 'habit writ large', remix as a form of sense making embraces this framework.

(Annette Markham, oral presentation, Feb. 2011)

Empirical outline

The most prominent question in trying to outline the field of soccer as mediatized play is the definition and limiting of the empirical basis of analysis. The following should be seen as one suggestion – or merely as starting points, from which analysis and additional research questions might emerge. Basically, a division between media products and mediatized practices could be applied, keeping in mind that the one should be understood in the light of the other – and vice versa. At an overall level all these different media, artefacts and practices can be seen as part of this specific genre in children's play culture, which is in itself related to global media distributing, advertising and structuring soccer as an enormous entertainment industry. What is of analytical interest is to describe both as individual artefacts and related practices, but also to grasp and understand their interrelations and connections.



Trading cards

Trading cards is a medium which by no means can be called new. Since the mid or late 19th Century, children have collected cards with adverts, movie or sports stars. From the early 1990's, collectible card

games also became very popular. Soccer trading cards, relating to national soccer leagues or international tournaments – as we know them nowadays, are a combination of these two types, providing play opportunities like both collecting and playing matches against ones friends. What should furthermore not be underestimated is the amount of factual knowledge of soccer players and –teams and -leagues, which is possible to retrieve from the cards.



Goal Magazine

The same kinds of knowledge can be achieved from magazines like 'Goal'. Unlike older print media like 'Tipsbladet', a weekly newspaper mainly concerned with national Danish leagues, 'Goal' is directly targeted at a younger audience, providing news, facts and gossip – as well as posters to decorate ones bedroom walls and thereby relevant as yet another artefact suitable in the process of identity formation (Sparrman, 2006).



Clothing – merchandise

Naming clothes and other kinds of merchandise media might be a subject for discussion. Still, I'm emphasizing these kinds of products as parts of – or examples of - porous media texts, since their relation and reference to other kinds of more familiar media texts (films, television programs etc.) are so powerful in children's own handling and meaning making of these (Johansen, 2008). As such, for instance clothing provides an opportunity for the user to express their fandom of a particular product or in this case a team, to signal this to other fans or opponents and also to achieve a bodily experience of being not only a spectator, but also a participant in a soccer game.



Fifa

Also in computer games like Fifa players can themselves take part in the matches, setting up teams, choosing stadiums and discussing pros and cons related to the depicted teams and players. Research shows that children in many cases use computer games as raw material for physical play. How – and if – this is the case in relation to soccer is still an open question. What is furthermore interesting in relation to computer games, is how physical play influences players' meaning making of the game and how new and mobile gaming consoles like the Nintendo DS or iPhone/iPod/iPad might influence the gaming experience and the role of gaming in soccer play culture as such.



Playing soccer (formal, informal)

First and foremost, though, for children soccer is about playing soccer; in school yards, back gardens or in organized practices in local soccer clubs. Approximately one third of Danish children play soccer², which makes it the most popular organized leisure time activity in Denmark. The complexity of practices related to this is huge; ranging from the rules and regulations of the game itself, the bodily experiences of playing or cheering, the peer and/or fan community of the club, or parents' framing of children's soccer practice through direct or indirect involvement (Facebook sites etc), just to name a few. All of them in more or less subtle ways related to mediated and mediatized notions and understandings of the field.

Conclusion: Possible analytical approaches

How then, can complex phenomena like this be grasped from a media and mediatization perspective? Does media and mediatization call for new understandings of literacy – in this case play literacy? How – if – does media add new aspects to play? And what is – in this matter - new about new media? These are all relevant questions to be considered in further inquiry of this subject matter. Intensive field studies of specific cases seem inevitable as core sites of data construction, yet these should be analyzed through more holistic, multi-sited and cross disciplinary lenses. Finally, the possibility for long terms studies should not be underestimated in order to understand the development of play practices over time and across physical, institutional, and media spheres.

² <http://kum.dk/ServiceMenu/Love-og-tal/Kulturstatistik/Kulturvaneundersogelsen/>

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