



EVERYDAY MEDIA PLAY CHILDREN'S PLAYFUL MEDIA PRACTICES

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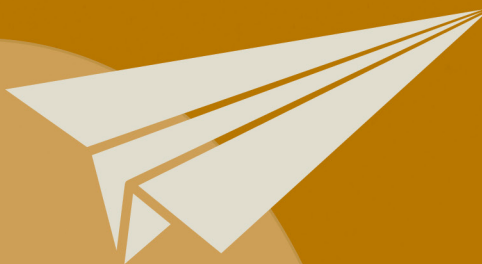
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ABSTRACT

IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, THERE SEEMS TO BE A CONCEPTION THAT CHILDREN'S PLAY HAS DRAMATICALLY CHANGED OR THAT IT HAS BEEN DEPLOYED BY THE MASSIVE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY. YET, WITHIN A FRAMEWORK OF MEDIATIZATION AND PRACTICE THEORY, AND BASED ON EXTENSIVE ETHNOGRAPHIES IN EVERYDAY CONTEXTS OF CHILDREN, DIFFERENT NARRATIVES, GENRES AND COMMUNICATIVE PATTERNS OCCUR. IN THIS ARTICLE, THE AUTHOR DRAWS A BROADER PICTURE OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, POINTING TO RELEVANT DILEMMAS AND NUANCES IN THE FIELD.

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Introduction

In this article, I focus on the role of playful media practices in and in between the different institutional settings of contemporary childhood. Digital media have come to play an important and inevitable role in children's everyday lives. Digital media such as tablets and smartphones form the material infrastructure of children's daily practices of communication, education and play. Prior research tends to focus more on the uses of new and old media in a formal, educational setting (for instance through concepts like "Technology Enhanced Learning" (Goodyear, 2010)) and less on a broader, everyday life perspective.

I aim at investigating the media-related play practices that children perform in their peer relations, their families, and inside and outside school and other kinds of adult-initiated settings. Most research on children's uses of (new) media in an everyday life context focuses on learning and their use of new and old media in a formal, educational setting (Ito et.al (2010), Erstad et.al. (2013)). Only a few studies (Willett et.al, 2013; Marsh & Bishop, 2012) have primary focus on leisure activities such as play or children's as well as adolescents' everyday interactions, negotiations and practices with and around media, particularly in relation to different everyday activities. Also, in pedagogical and educational practices, digital media are often linked to, if not legitimized, through didactic purposes of different kinds. A broader and more nuanced focus on children's everyday life holds potentials for developing pedagogies in more formal settings such as schools through its focus on motivation, peer culture and informal learning.

The core of my research interest is the active meaning making processes of children, which points to ways in which media and technology of different sorts function as the symbolic and practical 'glue' of children's everyday lives. For instance, media and mediated narratives and expressions fill an independent and comprehensive role as a kind of motor that keeps play going, both at a general level across time and space and, quite specifically, in the play practices of a certain group of children in a certain context. As such, play with media can be said to function as a continuous movement back and forth between media narratives, genres and expressions, and the play practice itself with or without different forms of media, computer games, mobile phones, tablets, the Internet or toys.

Theoretical background

When referring to the term 'practice', I especially draw on Reckwitz (2002), who refers to, among others, Schatzki, Cetina, & Savigny (2001) in his definition of practice theory. This theory is separate from other social and cultural theories, as it does *not* focus on mental structures, discourses or forms of interaction, but on what people *do* with each other and with things and artefacts. Practice, according to Reckwitz, "is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002: 249). In this article, the aim is to show how play is expressed in a range of different ways in children's everyday lives and what role the media might play in relation to that. Through empirical examples drawn from ethnographic studies, and based on theories of mediatization, play and practice, I draw a model for characteristics of mediatized play.

Digital media play is commercialized and influenced by media structures. This becomes visible in a range of ways: from how children find inspiration for play and games through the App Store or similar services, through the subtle commercial and algorithmic structures of YouTube, to the ways in which children, in their concrete play practices, combine play, information seeking, learning and communication. As such, my analysis in this article points to the ways in which play as a phenomenon might have changed its appearance and organization, yet it still has the same purpose as it has always had: as a means towards building good social relations through playful practices. I base my analysis on the assumption that children's use of technology should not be considered a practice that takes place beside or as separated from 'real play', but that technology and media are deeply integrated into every aspect of children's social and cultural lives.

In contemporary play, children act with and within different materialities, and use digital as well as analogue toys without qualitative distinctions. In relation to this, it is important to acknowledge that 'new media' are not new to children, and that – although it may sound as a cliché – this point is an important prerequisite for understanding what will be presented in this article as mediatized play, since children do not necessarily understand play with digital tools as different from any other kind of play.

At the center of my analysis is a conception of play as a situated practice. Drawing on Danish play culture researcher Flemming Mouritsen, play should be understood as a culture, which “doesn’t exist in solid forms, ea. as a product, but comes to existence through children’s actions in *situations*” (Mouritsen, 1996: 16-17, my translation, original italics).

Empirical work

The empirical examples in this article are based on ethnographic field studies on children’s use of digital media such as smart-phones and tablets in educational as well as leisure contexts, and they illustrate how different specific media and media technologies move and reorganize play, communication and relation-building between children and how digital media are integrated into different aspects of children’s everyday lives. These field studies have been carried out over a period of almost 15 years; a period in which children’s media use, and most likely also their play culture, has undergone significant changes following the technological development. More specifically, I draw on a study of children’s football-related play practices (which is elaborated in Johansen, 2016a), a study on the iPad as a tool for play (Johansen, 2014 & Johansen 2016b), the Danish part of a cross-European study on young children’s use of digital technology in the home (Johansen, Larsen & Ernst, 2015) and finally an ongoing study on children and young people’s use of YouTube (initially presented in Johansen, 2017).

Mediatization as a perspective on playful practices

Through theories of mediatization, play can be understood as influenced and conditioned by media texts and technologies. In a mediatized society this means that children find their primary inspiration for play in media, just as media in themselves are used as play tools. Children’s play cultures should therefore be understood in relation to the media’s influence on society and specifically on the everyday lives of children (Johansen, 2014; Hjarvard, 2008). In my empirical analysis, I provide substance to the concept of mediatization and clarify its relevance for the study of children, play and childhood.

Media possess specific technological and semiotic affordances, which can be said to offer a sort of “molding force” (Hepp, 2013) on cultures and practices in which media are being used. This does not mean that practices are predefined by media, but that media allow certain opportunities for a practice to unfold and have a tendency to push practices in certain directions. The molding force is not in itself visible; it is only actualized through practices (Hepp, 2013). When speaking of, for instance, the iPad as a tool for play – as I will return to later in this article – it means that the iPad can be used in a range of ways and as a tool for good as well as less constructive play, learning, communication, social interaction and entertainment activities – depending on the content and the context.

According to Schulz (2004), there are four distinct ways in which media influence our communicative practices. First, media expand our possibilities for communication and transgress spatial and temporal distances between individuals. Secondly, media replace other means of communication – in relation to children this also includes traditional toys. On this matter, Schulz refers to Hjarvard (2004), who mentions computer games as a replacement for other kinds of toys. In children’s everyday lives, for instance in their fan cultures, this relationship is more nuanced, though. This makes Schultz’ third aspect of mediatization – amalgamation – relevant, as it points to the ways in which media fuse with the social practices in which they are being used. It suggests that the media’s influence on children’s everyday lives, and on their play culture, must be understood in a wider perspective in which both mediated and non-mediated activities are taken into consideration and seen as related. “As media use becomes an integral part of private and social life, the media’s definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality” (Schultz, 2004: 89). In children’s play practice, this appears to be particularly visible when physical and bodily practices are supported, expanded and inspired by media content, professionally produced television or YouTube content, as well as made and shared by children themselves, as the analysis below will explore further.

Within media research, especially Couldry (2012) has emphasized a practice perspective in order to understand “what are people doing that is related to media” (Couldry, 2012:35). This definition obviously also encompasses media play, or media-inspired play, and seems appropriate for the study of mediatized play. Through a focus on practice instead of on specific media, the empirical analysis is broadened and is able to transcend media and tools. In media-inspired play (Johansen,

2011; Willett et.al., 2013), media and media expressions function as a kind of motor, driving play onwards, both at an overall level, where media narratives and forms of expression function as the raw material extending nationalities and age (Jenkins et.al., 2013). Also, the specific play practice, for instance a computer game, can be seen to drive play forward through its built-in game dynamics. As such, play should be understood as a continuous exchange between media narratives, genres, expressions and the concrete play practice, as it takes place through the handling of different kinds of media, computer games, mobile phones, tablets, web pages (like YouTube) or toys. This is not (only) a matter of direct, mimic transfers from media to the playground, but merely processes of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2014), through which media content or form are used in play practices.

Children's uses of technology and new media in their everyday lives, therefore, should not be seen as a replacement for formerly known or traditional toys, but rather as a supplement that expands and transforms play to new arenas and makes new forms of interaction possible. Previously, knowledge about play rules, routines and rhythm was transmitted from older to younger children. The conditions for such transmission have changed, since children's everyday lives are now highly institutionalized and children today spend most of their time in adult-structured settings with other children who are the same age (Johansen, 2014).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that mediatization is not a causal process in which media change or affect play directly. Rather, the process is reciprocal, since play and players also have an impact on the media, which can be said to be 'playified'. For instance, the iPad has undergone a shift from being a businessman's tool towards being the preferred media technology of families with young children. A wide range of play (and learning) apps aimed at children have become available, making the iPad an even more attractive play tool. On a micro level, media are 'playified' when children through their playful practices seek to transgress the media, for instance the game play.

Play has influenced digital media in a range of ways that are not only relevant for children. Adults play too, and they do it in new ways made possible by the organizations of digital media. When adults check in to Swarm or Facebook, when they fill out the breaks of the day with mobile gaming, or when learning in schools becomes 'game-based', it is (or at least has the potential to be) related to or recognizable as play. Frissen et. al (2015) argue that culture as such is ludified, and digital media offer new ways of playful presence. They proceed to argue that traditional play theory makes new sense in the light of digital media, and play is important for the general identity-building in contemporary society. Further, they point to the fact that we do not only play with – and through – media and media content, but that we also (voluntarily or not) are being played with by the media's commercial structures.

This means that we all engage in and become dependent on media, when we are encouraged to buy more coins, lives or players, or to 'pay' for access to games and communities services by granting the supplier access to our personal data. For instance, mobile playable media seem to impose their own logic on us in a dialectic between freedom and force (ibid.). To a certain extent, the fact that play is dependent on access to specific tools (for instance toys) and specific forms of knowledge is not new. What is new, though, is the systematized relation between user and producer.

According to Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby (2015), mediatization can be considered from three different perspectives: institutional, cultural and material. These three perspectives embody previous research on the field of mediatization and at the same time point to the fact that different perspectives could lead to a different analysis of the consequences of processes of mediatization and the ways they are changing the conditions of our social and communicative relations. Mediatized play is without a doubt contingent on institutional aspects (media institutions, toy industry, school system, family contexts, etc.), on cultural aspects (children's culture, globalization, etc.) and on material aspects (digital, mobile media, the relation between digital and analogue toys, the practical organization of play, etc.). These three perspectives should be taken into consideration in order to conduct a thorough analysis of mediatized play. In this article, I primarily focus on the latter two: the cultural and material aspects of children's everyday encounters with digital media and technology. The two perspectives should be seen as mutually intertwined and interdependent.

Analytical approach

A rather prominent question in trying to understand children's mediatized play cultures seems to be how to define and limit the empirical basis of analysis. The following is merely one suggestion or starting point from which an analysis and additional research questions might emerge. Drawing on Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby (ibid.), the point is to take the cultural practices and materialities into consideration – to describe both the individual artifacts and the related practices and to grasp and understand their interrelations and connections. The point is furthermore that everyday practices and media practices cannot be separated. Individuals and peer groups move in and out of social settings and practices, which, in one or more ways, may or may not be related to media use. As I will return to in the analysis, one such example is described in Johansen's (2015) study on children's fan cultures, more specifically football cultures, which shows how children with an interest in football can nurture this interest through a massive range of football-related products and practices, digital as well as analogue, alone or with friends, online and offline.

All in all, these practices form the basis of identity-building and network-building processes in which children themselves act as both active practitioners and more passive audiences of media content, forming a certain participatory or 'remix' play culture (Jenkins, 2006; Willett et al., 2008). The study points to discussions of fan culture and play as forming and founding practices in children's lives with specific focus on the affordances of digital media as a defining factor in contemporary play. As such, mediatized football play can be described as a range of mutually intertwined everyday life practices that, on the one hand, are specific to a particular group of children and, on the other hand, hold general explanatory power for the understanding of how and why fan cultures are so deeply rooted in the heart and soul of many individuals. Further, it points empirically to specific mediated manifestations, which are ascribed meaning through social practices of interpretive reproduction (Reckwitz, 2002; Frykman & Gilje, 2003; Corsaro 2005), which form the grounds for the understanding of the concept of 'football' as a participatory or 'remix' culture (Jenkins, 2006; Willett et al., 2008) or as a mediatized field within children's play culture.

One empirically visible change in children's everyday lives, and therefore most likely also their play cultures, relate to the ways in which children recently have had access and disposal rights to several digital devices and platforms, most remarkably tablets and smartphones. Especially the introduction of Apple's iPad in 2010 has had apparent influence on the playing and gaming culture of many children. The iPad's prevalence in Denmark is largely due to the fact that many Danish municipalities have handed out iPads to pupils in elementary schools, which they are allowed to take home and use for homework as well as for all sorts of gaming and entertainment purposes. In combination with major private investments in these types of technologies, this means that 95 percent of Danish children under the age of seven now have access to a tablet in the home (DR 2016).

To grasp mediatized play practice as it occurs in concrete observations, we should distinguish between different relations between the physical and bodily play practice and the media-oriented play practice. I do not want to make a rigid distinction between physical and virtual practices, since it seems obvious that for instance computer gaming is indeed a bodily practice and that media use will always be anchored in the body (Johansen, 2009). Still, it does make sense to examine (Gardner & Davies, 2013) how the dynamic tension between play as a motor and media as a structure is expressed in different ways and constellations.

To examine this, I take a three-part analytical approach. First, mediatized play practice is expressed and performed through practices of *coping and being able to do what it takes to be in play*. This has to do with both knowledge and with concrete action competence. Secondly, play is about *taking part in a community and to develop one's identity*. Access to play equals access to peers to play with and communities to mirror oneself in. And thirdly, the analysis deals with *the physical and material organization of play*, including how play with digital mobile media can be integrated into everyday life, not to mention how mediatized play encompasses both physical/analogue and virtual/digital play tools and play arenas. These themes should be seen in relation to the theoretical framework described above.

Coping and doing

As mentioned above, play is a practice that requires skills and knowledge in order to take place. As such, learning is not just an outcome of play – although it might be a positive side effect – but also a necessity for play. To take part in play, one must

know how to play and how to use the specific play tools, in this case for instance the iPad and the different apps and games. In 2013-2014 I did ethnographic fieldwork in an after-school center at a Danish municipality in which all pupils were given iPads to use for school. In the after-school club (Danish: SFO) I studied how children performed self-organized and informal play practices using the iPad for gaming, drawing, listening to music, etc. Once a week – every Friday – it was ‘iPad time’ in the SFO, and almost all children took part in iPad-related activities, supervised by the pedagogues, but with very little active involvement or guidance from the adults. The study – which is described in further detail in Johansen, 2016b – pointed to some relevant perspectives regarding informal processes of practical performance and building of media literacy. The findings from this study further resonate with findings from Johansen (2016a) regarding the use of iPads and similar technologies for information seeking in fan cultures and football communities.

There are at least three things you need to know to be able to join in on contemporary play with the iPad as a tool. First, you have to know how to use the specific medium, to understand its affordances and to master the necessary skills to use it. What is at stake here is how ‘good’ you are at playing various games, how fast you react or how imaginative you are when building or drawing. Secondly, it is a matter of how much you know: what kind of knowledge of pop stars or football players do you possess, as well as knowledge of their position in the cultural landscape and in the specific setting. Knowledge of tips, tricks and cheats is valuable, as is knowledge of how to perform and what to value in the specific cultural context – be it a sports team or an after-school club. And finally, this coping is a matter of one’s ability to master the social norms and to be able to put one’s knowledge and skills into play. You have to master the role of being a classmate or a friend, and you have to know how to positively benefit from other people’s knowledge and skills (children as well as adults), for example in relation to a specific game.

This knowledge and these skills are achieved through play practices and the social and cultural interplay related to these. Theoretically, this process of acquisition can be grasped through Corsaro’s before-mentioned notion of “interpretive reproduction” (Corsaro 2014), which deals with the ways in which children actively interpret and reproduce play and the material foundations for play in order to make them meaningful to them. Also, the term “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger 1991; Sparrman 2006) makes sense as a theoretical backdrop in this case. Practice is acquired through the practical performances; and an individual learns how to play through his or her active participation in play. Learning is a common and mutual process in which players constantly challenge and learn from each other in order to move play in new directions. It is through their playful interactions that children form the basis of their social relations and thereby also their identity processes. This is visible in tiny everyday- and profane practices – as seen in the SFO – as well as in the above-mentioned more outspoken fan culture practices.

Media and identity

Peer groups, sports teams, school classes and family form the primary reference points in a child’s everyday life. Through their relations to these (or similar) groups, children build and live their identities as boys, girls, nationalities, gamers or jocks – structured and intertwined by media, as described by for instance Ito et. al., (2010) and boyd (2014). The primary argument in these studies suggests that identity processes are performed through children’s and adolescents’ connections to – or distancing from – specific cultural, interest-based and organizational spheres. Media are used in a range of ways to perform, inform and organize these connections. In the following, I describe three distinct practices, which represent ways of performing identity and a sense of belonging in more or less fragmented communities. The three practices can be described as nurturing of personal interests, social engagements in physical contexts, and practices of media as anchoring other practices. These three aspects should not be seen as covering all possible mediatized play practices, but as prevalent in the empirical data, this article covers.

First, everyday media play has to do with engagements in media practices related to personal interests. In an ongoing study, I interview children aged 8-14 about their uses of YouTube. The video-sharing platform has rapidly become Danish children’s preferred platform for audiovisual content, and so-called ‘youtubers’ (i.e. video bloggers) have become some of the most admired and debated celebrities in the current cultural landscape. Preliminary findings from this study include interesting accounts of how children and young teenagers use YouTube to nurture specific interests and to engage themselves in specific fan communities, which seem to resonate with the interests and everyday lives of the children I have interviewed so far. Whether they are into horses, DIY, gaming or more specific interests such as drag make-up, all interviews suggest that the children find

content related to these interests that is fascinating, interesting and useful to them. At the time of writing, November 2017, I have interviewed eight children. For all of the participants in the study, watching YouTube is an activity they mostly perform on their own, most often in the private space of their bedroom.

This is only one specific way of using digital media, though; other practices are much more social. When mobile media, such as smartphones or tablets, become every child's individual property, one might think that play will also be individualized, perhaps even isolated, too. It does not seem to be that simple, though. Findings from the SFO – the after-school club mentioned above, where every child was given their own iPad – show that the iPad functions as a mediator, a play medium, in children's social engagement with each other. In face-to-face or, perhaps more precisely, chin-to-chin interactions, the iPad functions as a shared point of reference through which the children invite each other into play.

The child's physical movements in these instances are small and insignificant. As described in further detail in Johansen (2014), a child often sits with his or her head bent over the screen, which is either placed in the lap or on a table in front of the child. The child's physical positioning of the body and the iPad suggests whether the child is ready to engage with other children, or whether the child would rather be left alone. For instance, the child may point the iPad towards other children in the room, or keep it close to the body to remain disconnected from the social context. The child may also be faced towards another child sitting next to him or her, while rejecting other children that are also present in the room. Thus, children confirm or decline relations to other children through their bodily and material arrangements. Most often, though, iPad play is a shared activity, involving more than one or two children. For instance, a sense of shared experience can be obtained through music played from one child's iPad, while other children sing along with or move their bodies rhythmically in accordance with the music. Often – at least in the SFO setting – this activity is accompanied by a range of other activities, such as drawing, watching movies or playing games.

And finally, media are being used by children to anchor physical practices and playful communities. In children's fan cultures, media products in the broadest sense also function as reference points. Through negotiations about merchandise, clothing, computer games (such as FIFA) and other kinds of equipment related to, in this particular case, football culture, children use media and media-related artifacts to perform and negotiate their on-going identity project. Clothes and other kinds of merchandise should be understood as part of – or manifestations of – porous media texts that are ascribed meaning through their relations to traditional media texts (film, television etc.), not to mention through children's play and meaning-making practices (Johansen, 2014). For instance, football jerseys are both a specific way of expressing a fan culture reference point as well as a practical tool used in the concrete practice of actually playing football.

The physical and material organization of play

As described above, mediatized play must be understood in a broad, holistically-oriented perspective, encompassing a range of relational and communicative aspects of children's everyday lives. Play happens in and across a range of spheres in children's lives and is expressed in a range of different genres. Generally, mediatized play is simultaneously open to the surroundings while also focused towards specific communities of interest; a 'virtual school yard', where play unfolds with relation to certain topics or genres.

Children's play has always been framed by adults; either by caretakers (parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, etc.) who surround them in their everyday lives, or adults who produce and distribute toys and children's media products. Obviously, this is still very much the case. Children nowadays spend a lot of their time at home, which is one way in which play has been domesticated as well as institutionalized. More and more children's leisure activities take place in the home or in adult-initiated and structured settings, which means that children nowadays have less time on their own, away from adult supervision and surveillance (Karsten, 2005).

Still, there are aspects of mediatized play that challenge these set frameworks, since media in themselves make new forms of communication, in which children to some extent are more in control. For instance, children can use the iPad to communicate without adult permission or restriction, or they have access to the possibilities of the Internet, where they can immerse themselves in genres and practices that are not necessarily approved of by adults, such as silly or even frivolous content on YouTube or in the App Store. A study on how young children aged 5-6 use technology in the home (Johansen, Larsen & Ernst, 2015) describes

how different children were enabled and restricted in their use of media and technology in different ways, for instance due to their different family situations. The study suggests that children have to take account of these frames and restrictions in their use of media and technology for play. In the study was a 6-year-old boy, whose parents were divorced, which meant that he took turns staying one week with his mother and one week with his father, and so on. At his mother's, he had access to a tablet (which was his mother's work tool) that he played Minecraft on. At his father's, he didn't have a tablet, but used his father's laptop computer to watch YouTube videos with Minecraft content. One week he loaded inspiration for play, and the next he played it out himself.

Also, content produced by children and teenagers is becoming increasingly popular on YouTube and social media such as Instagram and Snapchat. Content, which inspires play and functions as reference points in children's communities. This includes inspiration for physical play, as when football kids use YouTube or similar media to gather inspiration for different games in the schoolyard. Online communities enable new forms of play culture, which in some ways resembles traditional, peer-driven play cultures (Willett et.al. 2013). The schoolyard in itself continues to be an important stage for children's play culture, where physical as well as social structures are ascribed meaning through everyday practices – with media as toys and with media content as the most important source of inspiration (ibid.). At the same time, communities form online as well, making specifically YouTube a sort of online schoolyard, not to mention a space in which the children can practice and perform a certain type of behavior most often considered inappropriate by adults. Social media and video sharing platforms can be described, for better and for worse, as a sort of online 'bicycle shed', a space where play culture can take place outside the reach of the adult gaze.

Conclusion

Children's play – and in this case children's mediatized play – must be understood and described as connected practices made possible by material and symbolic artifacts, social and material structures, ways of playing and ways of being a child in a specific setting, which altogether constitutes play as a social, bodily and aesthetic expression. None of these elements have a privileged status compared to others. On the contrary, all elements are mutually intertwined. Not only is play inspired by media and toys, media and toys are also inscribed with a notion of the user, a notion of a child and a notion of play. Some play genres, for example computer games, are strictly structured and offer quite specific patterns for play. Others are more fluid and based on on-going aesthetic practices performed by groups and individuals. This can be grasped through a practice theoretical perspective, which at the same time encompasses bodily and mental practices. When trying to analyze and understand play, bodily expressions and performances as well as on-going negotiations form the key points. From this perspective, the individual child is viewed as a carrier and a performer of practices in relation to other individuals, textual, social and material structures.

The iPad as a toy has provided children with new possibilities to access playful communities of practice, and it gives even very young children access to a more individualized use of media to a greater extent than previously. The iPad is appealing and attractive in itself, and according to a report from the Danish Broadcasting Cooperation (2015), a majority of children claim that they see their tablet as the most important media platform, which they would be most reluctant to get rid of. This obviously has to do with the tablet's vast versatility as well as the ways in which it can be incorporated into everyday practices.

Identity is formed and performed through communities of practice and fan cultures as social practices and interpretive reproduction (Reckwitz, 2002) (Corsaro 2014). Media function as the basis of social interactions, and mediatization must be seen as a prerequisite for contemporary play culture (Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2008). Children gather around playful communities of practice based on specific interests and especially specific technologies; stabile or casual, digital as well as analogue (and bodily), alone or with peers, online or offline. All in all, these practices function as the basis of social and cultural identity processes and networks. Children act as both active agents and more passive consumers of media content that all together form a specific participatory culture or 'remixed' play culture (Jenkins et.al., 2013; Willett et.al., 2013).

The role of media in children's everyday lives should therefore, as I have done in this article, be regarded as processes through which communication and playful, cultural and aesthetic practices are directly as well as indirectly formed by the media's molding forces, their technologies, commercial structures, symbolic content and communicative potentials. The everyday life of a child is performed through and with these processes of mediatization. Play happens with, through and in media; and the acknowledgment of old and new play genres and expressions is important in discussions about the state of contemporary childhood.

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