

BINs and Nordic Councils Conference 2007: Children and Culture – The meaning of aesthetics?

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1: Theme: The meaning of aesthetics in media, art and culture for children and youth?

2: Title: *I'm not perfect ... Cyber aesthetic as the extensions of the ego*

3: Presentation language and form: Danish and Power Point

I'm not perfect is the words from fifteen year old K*** in the caption of her homepage in Arto.dk. Like most of the other young people K*** shows those good points of her personality that she for the time being feels describes her the best.

Homepages or blogs in these days are some of the most widespread ways to 'present ones ego' to the surrounding world. (Goffmann, 1967, Rogers 1980; Amichai-Hamburger, 2005), and especially to the 'vital peers' (Harris, 1998, Holm Sørensen, 2001). The Web is a relatively new way to extend ones self-representation. The homepage, in which you invite all users into the most private spheres of your life, immediately sends signals to everybody about who you are. For personal 'problems' which are characteristic of youth life and it's strive for identity (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1966), the Web is an '*identity lab*' (Amichai-Hamburger: 2005: 39) of inestimable importance, in which you can compare yourself to others (Rygaard, 2007) and use the self representation as a '*talking cure*' (Freud & Breuer, 1980) to clarify things about you and your life.

A 'confession' demands an 'empathic listener', who in the youth often is the best friend, but once in a while strangers are able to act as a catalyst for self knowledge, also known as '*strangers on a train*' phenomenonⁱ. Apparently the Web seems to be the answer to this need for an audience as it is both familiar and strange at the same time. The figures from Arto.dk with just under 600.000 users/profilesⁱⁱ or the American variant MySpace.com with about 100 millions users/profiles (www.kommunikationsforum.dk) speak for themselves about a success, which means something important for the young people.

In an earlier article I analyzed young peoples self presentation, Web socialization and search for identity in Cyberspace (Rygaard, 2007). In this article I intend to go further and focus on the importance of the aesthetics of self representation – and it is not insignificant.

One aspect of the evaluation of ones homepage at Arto.dk is that one must meet several requirements such as to write an account of personal data, interest, good quotes and links to favorite sites on the Web – telling: *Who am I?*, *What is my interests* – meaning: *I am what I like*.

At Arto Website you are not in doubt about the progress: You will be measured statistically of the completeness of your profile, and the result will be listed both in percentage and in graphic form. One part of the site is visual. On most homepages you will find photos, on some you will find video clips and often the site is crafted *secundum artem* with iconographic references, cultural signs and meaningful colours, figures and fount. The creativity is prevailing – and also the visual and aesthetic designs are being evaluated ... by the peers and future friends!

Photo theoretical considerations concerning the purpose of photography and psychological theories about healthy creativity will be the foundation for an analysis of about 20 homepages with ethnic (Greenlandic-Danish) and gendered difference.

From the theory of '*the grey mythology*' of the photography (Kaspersen, 2000), placed between the transparency of the impression and the opacity of the digital pixels, the status of traditional photography is a closed chapter, and a post photographic, deconstructive approach is necessary now. The traditional question: *What is the photography? What does the photography show?* Should be changed to: *What does the photography do?*

What the photography does for the profile on the homepage at Arto.dk can be measured in numbers and percentages, but the question is also directed towards the psychological, visual and aesthetic dimension of life in Cyberspace.

To link up to the psychological needs that the Web gratify, I intend to analyze the young peoples creative and aesthetic poses on their homepages based on some few hypotheses of Carl Rogers 1: On the subject as it's own centre in a '*continually changing world of experience*' (Rogers, 1980) and 2: On susceptibility to new experiences, liberty of choice and creativity that the young people '*adapt to their own circumstances without feeling a need to conform*' (Rogers, 1980). These characteristics are looked upon as an expression of 'the good life' of an adequately functioned person – and not the least this characteristics constitutes most of the profiles of Arto.dk.

Unproved Web panic (Drotner, 1999; www.Arto.dk; www.kommunikationsforum.dk) are not to be found in this article, on the contrary I will focus on the strenuously, creative, socializing and fun play with aesthetic forms in Cyberspace.

ⁱ In which people on a train feel sufficient secure tell intimate secret to a fellow traveller (Rubin, 1975)

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