

Abstract

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The "frivolous" play – an examination of the aesthetics of play culture

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Kant's very brief, however, extremely influential description of the aesthetics as "beauty without interest" has had great impact on the understanding of play not least through Schiller, Huizinga and Gadamer et al. But it may be a difficult task to merge Kant's understanding of aesthetics, art and taste with children's play as performed in practice. When playing, children use what the play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith in his work *7 Rhetorics of Play* from 1997 call "the rhetoric of play as frivolous", i.e. the frivolity and superficiality that are also found in folk culture.

The frivolity, which both Kant and Schiller wished to raise the play level above plays an important role in children's own cultural way of expressions and in their consumption of culture e.g. in the form of media products and toys. The aesthetical quality in play that, intently or not, takes off in the understanding of the aesthetics, of which Kant lay the foundation, fails against children's play culture and can neither provide a relevant scope of understanding nor some useful evaluation criteria. We are not better helped by the post-modernists' Nietzsche-inspired critics of the issue of aesthetics.

This paper will try to advocate the argument that the "frivolous" play is a fruitful starting point of a discussion about play and aesthetics, in which the relationship between the two are not predetermined by the hierarchy defined for instance by Kant's and Schiller's theories. This paper will discuss, among other things, whether play is a special aesthetical way of expression, whether play has a special aesthetical form of experience or whether the relationship is something quite different to the effect that aesthetics is a special history-bound form of play. In continuation hereof, this paper will discuss the issue of "taste" with take-off in Kant's as well as Bourdieu's theories. In the Scandinavian play-culture research "frivolity" and folk culture have played a significant role for several decades, and this paper will discuss key texts written by Flemming Mouritsen, Beth Juncker, Ivar Selmer Olsen and Ulf Palmenfelt et al.

The aim of these discussions is not just theoretical, it is rather a wish to create a practically applicable basis for evaluating play qualities in culture products such as media, toys, games and playground tools. Such a basis is strongly required since commercial as well as non-commercial culture products play an ever increasing role in children's play culture.

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Temaramme: Det æstetiskes betydning i børns kultur?

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Den "frivole" leg - en undersøgelse af legekulturens æstetik

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Kants meget kortfattede, men ekstremt indflydelsesrige beskrivelse af det æstetiske som "interesseløs skønhed" har haft stor betydning for forståelsen af leg via bl.a. Schiller, Huizinga og Gadamer. Men det kan være vanskeligt at forene Kants begreber om æstetik, kunst og smag med børns leg som den udformer sig i praksis. I deres legekultur dyrker børn det, som legeforskeren Brian Sutton-Smith i sit værk om legens syv retorikker fra 1997 kalder "the rethoric of the frivolous", dvs. det useriøse, fjollede, pjankede, pjattede og overfladiske, som også genfindes i folkekulturen.

Det "frivole", som både Kant og Schiller ønskede at hæve legen over, spiller en hovedrolle både i børns egne kulturelle udtryksformer og i børns forbrug af kultur fx medieprodukter og legetøj. Et begreb om æstetisk kvalitet i leg, der bevidst eller ubevidst tager afsæt i den forståelse af æstetik, Kant lagde grunden til, kommer til kort overfor børns legekultur og kan hverken levere en relevant forståelsesramme eller brugbare vurderingskriterier. Vi er ikke meget bedre hjulpet af postmodernisterne Nietzsche-inspirerede kritik af æstetikbegrebet.

Dette paper vil forsøge at argumentere for, at den "frivole" leg er frugtbart udgangspunkt for en diskussion om leg og æstetik, hvor forholdet mellem dem ikke på forhånd er fastlagt inden for det hierarki, som bl.a. Kant's og Schiller's teorier definerer. Paperet vil bl.a. diskutere, om leg er særlig æstetisk udtryksform, om leg har sin egen æstetik, om leg er en særlig æstetisk oplevelsesform, eller om forholdet måske er det omvendte, så æstetik er en særskilt, historisk bundet form for leg. I forlængelse heraf vil paperet diskutere begrebet "smag" med afsæt i såvel Kant som i Bourdieu's teori om habitus. I den skandinaviske børnekulturforskning har det "frivole" og folkekulturen gennem flere årtier spillet en væsentlig rolle, og paperet vil diskutere centrale tekster af bl.a. Flemming Mouritsen, Beth Juncker, Ivar Selmer Olsen og Ulf Palmenfelt m.fl.

Formålet med disse diskussioner er ikke alene teoretisk, men rettet mod at skabe et praktisk anvendeligt grundlag for vurdering af legekvaliteter i kulturprodukter, herunder medier, legetøj, spil og legeredskaber. Et sådant grundlag er stærkt påkrævet, fordi kulturprodukter af såvel kommerciel som ikke-kommerciel art spiller en stadig stigende rolle i børns legekultur.