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ABSTRACT

Based on Vygotsky's theory amongst others that play reflects different aspects of children's development and culture, this thesis explores in depth how aesthetic activities can influence children's play and the nature of the connections between play and culture, primarily in the aesthetic forms of drama and literature. The thesis also presents ideas on testing and developing models for an aesthetic pedagogy of play in preschool. Part 1 of the thesis presents the background and theoretical starting points of this didactic study, and includes discussions of the role of play in Swedish Preschools, the Froebel pedagogy, developmental theories of psychology and play pedagogy, as well as the different traditions of research into play and the need for an aesthetic approach. Part 2 discusses interpretations and analysis of different types of pedagogy, ideas in creating a play world for children, and examples of games that can reinforce children's sensitivity to role, dramatization, and aesthetics. Part 3, the conclusion, discusses the meaning of dramatic action in play, the roles of adults, play development in classes, and the linkage between play and children's culture. Results of a survey of child care workers in one Swedish municipality are appended. Contains 250 references. (MOK)

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# Gunilla Lindqvist

## The Aesthetics of Play

A Didactic Study of Play and Culture  
in Preschools

UPPSALA 1995

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Gunilla Lindqvist

# The Aesthetics of Play

*A Didactic Study of Play and Culture in Preschools*



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#### ABSTRACT

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This didactic study of the aesthetics of play examines the connections between play, drama and literature. The aim is to develop a creative pedagogy of play for Swedish preschools.

The study is a reaction against the preschool approach to play as a "free" activity and an expression for children's self-regulation, instead of an approach which regards play as a cultural activity which concerns both adults and children.

On a basis of Vygotsky's cultural historical theory, amongst others, and theories of drama pedagogy, an approach to play is developed, which recognizes a dynamic connection between children's play and the cultural influence of their environment.

A cultural theme is tried in a didactic project: "Alone in the big, wide world". The narrative is the main thread, drama pedagogic methods are used and the structural basis is the form of play. The project was carried out at a day-care centre in Karlstad, and lasted for a period of 12 months.

The results show that a common playworld helps developing play in preschools, and this is created in relation to a cultural context. The multi-layered text prevents the play from becoming one-dimensional and stereotype. The dramatic action is vital as it provides the play with a meaning. The adults' dramatized characters give life to the play through their acting, and establish a dialogue with the children so that they can enter the play fiction. World, action and characters are all interconnected. This gives rise to the variety which develops the play and enables everyone to meet in the common playworld.

*Keywords:* the aesthetics of play, preschool pedagogy, cultural historical theory (Vygotsky), drama, literature, playworld, dramatic action, (dramatized) character.

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## Preface

My interest in play pedagogy was sparked by the preschool teacher education at the University of Karlstad, and the co-operation which has been established between the subject of pedagogy and the aesthetic subjects on this programme, and the interest in play has now become a common denominator. This is the origin of the play pedagogic ideas developed by drama pedagogue Jan Lindqvist and myself. For this reason, I would like to thank all my colleagues and the students who have taken part in this research project.

The play pedagogic ideas have been staged at the day-care centre Hybelejen in Karlstad; a project which has partly been financed by the National Board of Health and Welfare.

The project has in a natural way been linked up to the "F...y project" at the Centre for Child and Youth Studies at the University of Uppsala, where my advisors have been stationed. For several years, I have been able to take part in discussions held with colleagues and students from the Eastern University Region, which has been very stimulating and for which I am grateful.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my advisors Karl-Georg Ahlström and Agneta Lindh-Munther, whose enthusiasm and generous, but nevertheless constructively critical, approach I have grown to appreciate deeply. Likewise, I would like to thank Maud Jonsson for her critical reading of my manuscript.

I have also been in contact with play researchers in other countries, and I wish to thank Brit Paulsen in Norway for her very valuable co-operation, and Torben Hangaard Rasmussen from Denmark for his original ideas on play, which have broadened my own approach.

Last, but not least, without the day-care centre Hybelejen, this project would not have got off the ground. My warm thanks goes to everyone, to Agneta Englund and her staff and the 84 children, who actually made the literary texts come to life. Thank you for your enthusiastic journey into the big, wide world!

Furthermore, I wish to thank Birgitta Sohlman and her team, who gave the project an added dimension by making a series of television programmes about our working method.

Many people have had a hand in reading the manuscript and typing. I wish

to thank Ebon Arnelund, who has spared no pains in typing out the manuscript, and Katharina Lyckow for her sensitive translation of the thesis into English.

My research was made possible through a doctoral studentship offered by Uppsala University, and the University of Karlstad has also contributed generously towards the translation and printing of the final thesis. Finally, I would like to thank the Karlstad University Library and the Public Library in Karlstad for providing invaluable help and assistance.

I dedicate this book to my entire "family".

Karlstad, February 1995

*Gunilla Lindqvist*

Part I  
Background and Theoretical  
Starting-points

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

This thesis is a study of how aesthetic activities can influence children's play and of the nature of the connections between play and culture, primarily in the aesthetic forms of drama and literature. This way, I am trying to find a common denominator of play and aesthetic forms. I have chosen to call this denominator *the aesthetics of play*.

Play and culture are ambiguous concepts. *Play* reflects different aspects of and approaches to children's development and children's culture.<sup>1</sup> When playing, children display the social and cultural forms which are consciously expressed later on. Play can be said to be culture in the making.

The combination "the aesthetics of play" may be reminiscent of theories of the joint origin of play and art. These theories have been around for quite some time: in the late 18th century, Friedrich Schiller presented such ideas in his letters on the aesthetic education of man.<sup>2</sup> Play unites man's sensuous instinct and his instinctive feeling for form, and it is also the origin of art. However, Schiller's theory is an idealistic theory which regards play as an instinct raised above society.<sup>3</sup> Personally, I am more interested in the links between play and culture which exist in a modern, secular society. My approach is one in which play is considered to reflect the cultural development in society.

Like play, *culture* is a concept which is used to mean different things in different contexts. Two definitions of culture predominate.<sup>4</sup> One is related to an anthropological approach, and denotes collective forms of life, ideas and norms existing within one group or one society. This is regarded as a descriptive cultural concept, lacking in normative meaning. The second definition of culture is connected with education and refinement, and also includes aesthetic subjects such as art, music, literature and drama. This is a narrow cultural concept, emotionally charged and based on classical tradition. The forms per-

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Herron & Sutton-Smith 1971; Sutton-Smith 1979; Bruner 1976; 1980; Pepler & Rubin 1982; Elkonin 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller "Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen" from 1795.

<sup>3</sup> Asplund 1988, p. 55-60, where he criticizes Schiller's playing man for existing beyond the social aspects of society.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Sundin 1982.

taining to mass media are often excluded from this definition, which is only considered to apply to superior cultural products.

To me, it is important to look for a view on culture which enables me to understand and explain the dynamic link which exists between play and culture. The definitions on culture which I have presented above, signify an existing dualism between culture as a form of life and culture as art. However, both cultural anthropologists and cultural historians have started to call this contradiction into question. The cultural anthropologist and play researcher Sutton-Smith, for one, has developed a cultural concept in which he emphasizes the active and creative powers of man and takes an interest in children's aesthetic development in connection with e.g. play.<sup>5</sup>

I have taken particular interest in the ideas developed in the 1920's by the Russian psychologist and philosopher Vygotsky, as his cultural historical theory concerns the dynamic links between the human consciousness (reflected in children's play) and the cultural forms. This theory considers the individual as a whole, and sets out from art and literature to describe the cultural development of man. According to Vygotsky, the form of play and the cultural, aesthetic forms correspond. Play is dramatic, and it often has a literary form. Vygotsky's theory is also a pedagogic theory, describing how the individual finds himself in a dialectic relationship to the culture which surrounds him. Play teaches the child cultural methods. It is an all-embracing cultural theory, which combines emotion and thought, aesthetics and rationality.

In this thesis, I will argue against the dualism which manifests itself in preschool pedagogy and which focuses on children's natural development, separated from the culture which surrounds them. Play is regarded as an activity free from adult influence, an activity which expresses the child's natural development.

The dualism becomes apparent in Johnson & Ershler's (1982) critical survey of research and evaluation of various preschool programmes in the USA, which reveals that it is difficult to know how pedagogy has influenced children's play. Johnson & Ershler claim that no conscious pedagogy of play could be discerned, which means that nothing but indirect links can be established between preschool activities and children's play. Activities which are too rigidly governed will inhibit play, whereas conversations with adults and encouragement will increase play activities, as will the material available in preschools. The authors would nevertheless like to see studies of conscious influence of play, an influence intended to stimulate children's imagination.

This indicates that people are beginning to criticize the "natural" view on development. The Dutch preschool researcher Singer (1992), for one, is critical of the dualism behind the idea that childhood is a natural phenomenon simply because it is connected with the maternal ability to interpret the child's natural development, separated from the outside world and from institutional

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<sup>5</sup> Sutton-Smith 1975; 1981.

preschool influence. From her feminist perspective, Singer claims that there is a need for an "in-between-area" to overcome the split between the family and the outer world. To her, the talk about natural development is nothing but a way of making sure that children and women remain inside the four walls of the home.

Eastern Europe has featured an approach to the pedagogy of play which is diametrically opposed to the Western one. Play has been a dominant activity in Soviet preschools, and it has been regarded as a factor which influences children's all-round development. Adults have also played an important role when it comes to influencing children's play. They are supposed to step in when children are playing and set a good example. The pedagogy of play in Eastern Europe has, however, been criticized for being authoritarian and for only considering children's social adaptation.<sup>6</sup> The theory of activity<sup>7</sup>, which has been derived from Vygotsky's cultural historical theory, has followed the ideological development in the former Soviet Union with an emphasis on reproduction and social realism. Despite the fact that this theory considers play to be a primary form of activity in preschools, I am critical of this approach, as it in my opinion diverges from Vygotsky's fundamental ideas on play as a creative activity—not a question of adaptation.

## Didactic projects and interdisciplinary teacher training

The teacher training programmes in Karlstad have included deliberate interdisciplinary attempts at combining theoretic and aesthetic subjects. This merging of aesthetic and theoretic subjects has made the training programme unique. Another added advantage at this relatively small university is that the subjects are "close" to one another, which makes co-operation easier. In Karlstad, all teacher training takes place in the same building.

Working with themes has allowed different subjects to come together and offer one another new approaches. The aesthetic subjects have provided models for creative pedagogy and guided the students in their projects.

As part of these didactic projects, we who run the preschool teacher education have tried working with themes intended to develop children's play. This has mainly been a case of co-operation between the subjects of drama, literature and pedagogy, but also music, movement and art.

The literary themes we have tried have ranged from the lyrical and poetic aspects of "nursery rhymes" to fantastic adventures and fairy-tales via everyday stories such as "Alfie Atkins".

The theme "nursery rhymes" has influenced the children's playing by em-

<sup>6</sup> Heinsohn & Knieper 1978 were among the first people to criticize the Soviet pedagogy of play.

<sup>7</sup> Leontiev 1979; Hydén 1988.



phasizing the tension between imagination and reality. When the children started playing around with words and expressions and discovered the magic of language, they also started twisting and turning things when playing. The activities are now characterized by a sense of humour and playfulness, and the adults have become more "play-minded".

When the adults dramatized the characters and the action in "Alfie Atkins", the story inspired the children to play simple role games.

"Adventurous journeys" made both children and adults play together, using their imagination and setting out in search of adventures. The literary narrative seems to correspond to the form of play. In their own way, the children played the stories which the adults had dramatized.

In a similar way, the fairy-tale theme made the children aware of their fears and their feelings of inferiority. Also on this point, the adults played an important role by trying to influence the children directly by means of theatre, glove puppets and letting fairy-tale characters enter the children's world, or less directly by performing the story as a play or a puppet show. As a result, the children seemed to feel at liberty to play different fairy-tales and challenge their fear by dramatizing certain actions, based on the fairy-tale.

One of the important conclusions that can be drawn from these didactic experiments is that art, music, literature and drama *influence, enrich and are connected to* children's play. I have described my experiences of these projects in my book "From Facts to Fantasy" (1989), both how they were conducted from a pedagogic point of view, and how play developed in the different groups of children. My interest in studying the connections between play and culture stems primarily from the observations I made at this time.

However, we have felt that our didactic attempts to apply play themes have been reduced to limited parts of the normal preschool activities. To enable us to gain information on the nature of the connections between play and culture, it is important that the entire preschool programme is given a cultural base. Furthermore, it is important to observe the activities for a considerable period of time in order to decide the nature of the influence. For this reason, this study includes an extensive didactic project, in which I test and investigate in what way drama and literature influence and enrich children's play. The applied research method complies with Vygotsky's ideas on "double stimulation", which is used to acquire a knowledge of the potential of children's play.

The project is being carried out by myself and Jan Lindqvist, a drama pedagogue, at a municipal day-care centre in Karlstad. Together, we try out a cultural theme at the day-care centre, Hybelejen. Jan Lindqvist has developed the drama pedagogic ideas applied.

The project, which constitutes part of this study, can also be said to form part of the attempts at developing the co-operation between theory and practice in the teacher training programmes in the sense that it also enables teachers of aesthetic subjects to guide students who are working as trainee teachers in

preschools. It should also be possible to use the documentation of the theme as a "case", a basis for reflection, and perhaps also as a model for similar projects in other teacher training programmes.<sup>8</sup>

## Aim

The aim with this thesis is to study in what way the aesthetic subjects, mainly in the forms of drama and literature, can influence and enrich children's play. The basis is a critical analysis of the role of play in Swedish preschools.

In what way does literature and drama influence the form and contents of play? What is the nature of the connections between play and the cultural, aesthetic forms? How do playworlds develop, that are common to both children and adults in preschools? How does the children's ability to play improve? What does the working method look like, and what role do the adults play in their capacity as pedagogues?

Consequently, this thesis has a *double* aim, viz.:

- *investigating the connections between play and cultural, aesthetic forms, and*
- *testing and developing models for an aesthetic pedagogy of play in preschools.*

## The outline and terminology of the thesis

### *Part I*

In this I present the background and the theoretic basis of my study.

Chapter 1 is this introduction, and chapter 2 contains a critical examination of the pedagogy used in preschools, which proves that play has an ambivalent role in Swedish preschools, which means, for example, that the pedagogues are unsure of whether they should influence the children's play or not. In my opinion, this is a result of the dualistic approach (as opposed to a dialectic one) held by current psychological theories. This means that there is no dynamic link between children's play and the culture which surrounds them. If anything, these theories reflect a biological approach to knowledge, with an emphasis on nature instead of culture. The aesthetic subjects, e.g. drama, has not had enough impact in the preschool pedagogy of play.

In chapter 3, I describe the theoretic bases which relate to Vygotsky's cultural historical theory of play. The analysis of the theory of play is based on Vygotsky's theory of art and on the importance of the imaginary process to our consciousness. I use Vygotsky's fundamental ideas on children's cultural development and the relationship between play and art as a starting point. In

<sup>8</sup> Ahlström 1993 and Lindh-Munther 1993.

connection with the analysis of play, I make a critical comparison with the Soviet pedagogy of play, primarily Leontiev's and Elkonin's ideas.

Chapter 4 includes a critical analysis of the preschool as an institution. Basing my arguments on Ziehe's critical theory and analysis of modern society, I illustrate the need for an aesthetic approach in preschools.

### *Part II*

This is the empirical part of the study. It deals with the project carried out at the day-care centre Hybelejen in Karlstad, where we tried to find out in what way the aesthetic subjects, mainly drama and literature, have influenced and enriched children's play. The theme "Alone in the big, wide world" has been tested in three classes over a period of approximately 12 months. My descriptions and analyses of both dramatizations for and with the children (including spontaneous playing) are extensive in order to provide sufficient information on what has happened. I describe how children and adults create culture together, and how meanings take shape from the basis of three central concepts: *world, actions and characters*.

Chapter 5 introduces the project by providing information on the research method as well as the methods used for documentation and analysis of the project.

Chapter 6 deals with the overall fictions or playworlds which take shape in the three different classes.

The chapters 7, 8 and 9 are based on the textual aspect of children's play, and start off by presenting a research outline of connections between play and different cultural, aesthetic forms (chapter 7). I then move on to the actions in play (chapter 8), and describe how "adventurous journeys" influence children's play. In chapter 9, I provide examples of dramatizations and games focusing on the characters, and how these influence children's play.

### *Part III*

In chapter 10, I summarize and discuss the conclusions I have drawn from the project. Amongst other things, I debate the literary themes and the part dramatic action has played in developing play, as well as the way in which the adults' roles and characters have influenced the play. Furthermore, I describe how play has developed in the different classes and its aesthetic pattern. Finally, in chapter 11, I link my research and results to my initial questions in chapter 1, and discuss what role play may come to have in preschools in the future.

### *Terminology*

The term *preschool* refers to both day-care centres and part-time groups. *Adults* and *pedagogues* are the terms I use for those working in preschools. *Pedagogues* is used to represent both the child-minders and the preschool teachers in a class. More often, I have simply written *adults*. When I have

called the staff by name, as I have frequently done, I have used italics to indicate this.

In the current debate on preschools, *teacher* and *education* are not the only concepts used. In Sweden, the terms *pedagogue* and *pedagogy* are in fact more common, and they also apply to the fields of play and drama, when literature in English is likely to use teacher and education.<sup>9</sup> I have chosen to keep the terms *pedagogue* and *pedagogy*, since these serve a better purpose when it comes to explaining the pedagogic principles of education.

The translation of the concept of *play* has entailed a slight problem. In Swedish, the word *lek* is used to denote both children's play in a general context and particular games. An attempt has been made at using *play* and *playing* in a general context, and *game* in a more particular context, like e.g. a particular play sequence. The fact that the English word "play" can refer both to children's play and a theatre play may also lead to certain interpretation problems for the reader.

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<sup>9</sup> Simon 1981, explains why there is no pedagogy in England.

## The Role of Play in Swedish Preschools

Preschool pedagogy emphasizes children's right to development. As opposed to the formal school curriculum, the preschool curriculum with its integrated subjects is "spontaneous" and regards play as a high-status activity to distinguish it from the learning approach found in schools.<sup>1</sup> Ever since the time of the first Kindergartens at the beginning of this century, play and creative subjects have had a dominating role in preschool programmes, and the general opinion has been that when children play, this indicates that the pedagogy used is stimulating and conducive to development.

One of the most important pedagogic issues have concerned the attitude to free and controlled activities.<sup>2</sup> Play has become a guarantee for freedom. Ever since Fröbel, the epithet "free play" has strongly emphasized children's self-activity. At the same time, however, play is the preschool pedagogy dilemma. The role of play is not clear. Play has been representing freedom without adult interference, but this has meant that the adults have failed to get actively involved in and share children's realities. Instead, pedagogy have been a matter of knowledge and proficiency based on an instrumental understanding, lacking in adult participation in the children's adventures. When Ramberg (1989) investigated aesthetic activities in preschools, her study showed that adults are mainly interested in techniques, not in experiences, and that their conversations with the children usually concern the finished decorative product. Adults only participate in a small proportion (2-3 per cent) of the children's creative activities.

In connection with the "Proposal for a New Pedagogic Programme for Preschools" (1983), we, the staff at the University of Karlstad, started working with a content (a theme) aimed at developing children's play.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this was that we found current pedagogy to be too traditional, subordinating play and serving more as a supplier of facts for children. A lot of time was spent on organizing circle time activities. Structure and order were key concepts. Creative subjects played a peripheral role. They were turned into attrac-

<sup>1</sup> Kärrby 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Johansson 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Lindqvist 1989.

tive gift boxes, hiding a perception of nature and society. Rather than the opposite, the adults seemed to be preventing the children from playing as much as they wanted to. Dencik (1988) pointed this out, when saying that "free play" is a euphemism, where "free" means a freedom from direct control, but where play is nevertheless under the influence of the preschool structure and its indirect way of offering children possibilities to play.

"Why don't children play in preschools?", Birgitta Olofsson (1991) asked in her report on a play project. Why is play not stimulated? Why are adults more interested in the chores than the play? Olofsson describes the adults' lack of interest in children's play at one preschool, which ran counter to their expressed interest in play. How can this ambivalent relationship between attitude to play and to pedagogy be explained?

According to a report by the Norwegian preschool researcher Bae, there is an emotional distance between adults and children. The adults have a supervising approach: they regard regulations and norms as crucial, and do not play with the children. Bae writes that there is no "dialectic relation" between adults and children, i.e. the adults are not aware of themselves in their relation to the children.<sup>4</sup>

When Jorup (1979) made in-depth researches into children's play in preschools, she discovered that it was not particularly advanced. Only 15 per cent of the activities contained a long chain of events—five minutes or longer. All other play acts were considerably shorter. Another discovery was that no adults took part in the play. Jorup's intention was to relate play to Piaget's theory of play in order to assert whether dialogue pedagogy took advantage of children's spontaneous activities, i.e. play.

The Commission on Nursery Provision has hardly considered play, the child's most important activity. Piaget emphasizes the importance of pedagogic protection of the child's spontaneous activities, where play constitutes the predominant spontaneous activity.<sup>5</sup>

The criticism Jorup launched in 1979 is just as valid today. When Kärrby (1986) makes researches into the activities on offer to 5 and 6-year olds in day-care centres and part-time groups, the result is a widely varying degree of play. Play was more common in preschools where the adults were engaged both in conversation and activities with the children. Preschools which featured creative activities were more play-oriented.

Why is play not clearly defined in preschools? How can it be regarded as an essential activity in preschools at the same time as it is not given priority in practice?

To be able to answer this question, we have to investigate the attitudes which have prevailed behind the preschool pedagogy, the theories which describe child development and play.

<sup>4</sup> Bae 1985, p.63 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Jorup 1979, p.181.

Play is a concept with multiple meanings, and many researchers have developed theories on children's play. It is my conviction that to be able to illuminate its role in Swedish preschools, it is vital to base it on the assumption that play has multiple meanings. The very multiplicity of play, and the many attitudes to it, can be one of the explanations to the relationship between play and pedagogy. This is why I wish to trace the path of development of play pedagogy in Swedish preschools, from Fröbel's pedagogy to the preschool programme of today.

## From the Fröbel pedagogy to the preschool-programme of today

### The Fröbel pedagogy and attitude to play

The expression "free play" is associated with the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel. In 1840, Fröbel opened a "play and occupational institution", upon which the first Swedish Kindergartens, and, much later, preschools, were based. The fact that Swedish preschools have been strongly influenced by the Fröbel pedagogy is no secret.<sup>6</sup> Johansson's (1992) description of the strong influence which Fröbel's pedagogy still exerts on Swedish preschools, provides yet another reason to look for explanations to the current attitudes to play in this early tradition.

Children's play is one of the principal points of the Fröbel<sup>7</sup> pedagogy. According to Fröbel, play is the natural outlet for the child's expression of self-activity, and the most pure and divine product of preschool children. Through play, the child develops physically, spiritually and morally. Play gives feelings of happiness, freedom, satisfaction and being at peace with the world.<sup>8</sup>

Spiel is die höchste Stufe der Kindesentwicklung ...  
die Darstellung des Inneren im Äusseren.<sup>9</sup>

Children's independent activities in play naturally belong to the preschool, and unless the child is held back by the adult, play will thrive.<sup>10</sup> Fröbel has a metaphysical view of life, and his ideas are based on romantic and idealistic ideals. There is an eternal unity of all things which stems from God, and which finds equal expression in the laws of both physical nature and human spirit. The aim of education is to develop the indwelling divine unity within the child. The child is regarded as unique, natural, true and innocent. The inner nature must mature, or, as Fröbel put it: "The child is the plant, which needs the care

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Simmons-Christenson 1977; 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Fröbel 1973 (published in 1826).

<sup>8</sup> Fröbel 1973, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Fröbel 1973; see also Bollnow's analysis 1977, p. 156.

<sup>10</sup> Brubacher 1947.



of the Kindergarten".<sup>11</sup> In accordance with his romantic view of life, Fröbel develops 20 play gifts, where the "sphere" denotes the all-inclusive unity and divine perfection. For this reason the sphere, or the ball, is the first gift, and it symbolizes the universe.<sup>12</sup>

This is how the Fröbel pedagogy came to emphasize both free activities, i.e. children's unhampered expression, and activities based on the gifts, which the adult and the child were to examine together. However, the gifts represented a totally formalized and closed world of symbols, with its roots in mathematics, geometry and crystallography.<sup>13</sup> Bearing in mind the rigorous discipline and numerous rules attached even to singing games, the pedagogy came to be characterized by an obvious opposition between freedom and formal activities.

The first Kindergarten in Sweden was based on the Fröbel tradition, but it was Henriette Schrader-Breyman who was the main source of influence over the development in Sweden. Schrader-Breyman was Fröbel's niece, and she had also worked for him for a short period. Her work at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel Haus followed a pragmatic model, and it is this model which still characterizes the preschool of today. Circle time, outdoor activities, general activities and "free play" are all part of an organizational model, which everyone recognizes from preschool pedagogy. Schrader-Breyman made a distinction between play and domestic work, the two most important factors in children's lives. She emphasized that play must be free of prototypes, otherwise it would only be another form of work for the children.<sup>14</sup> To Schrader-Breyman, the "Monatsgegenstand"<sup>15</sup> became the primary pedagogic way of integrating the activities as a contrast to the lack of entirety encountered in schools. In preschools, the "Monatsgegenstand" is based on the healthy rural family life.

The Fröbel institute in Norrköping, run by two sisters, Ellen and Maria Moberg, played an important role in spreading the Fröbel tradition in Sweden. To them, the cogency of Ellen Keys' ideas on the ideals of motherliness was on a par with Schrader-Breyman's emphasis on the motherly aspect of the Kindergarten. The bourgeoisie was dissatisfied with the lack of upbringing in working class children. The public Kindergartens offered "bourgeois happiness for working class children", according to Hatje (1990). This included good behaviour, customs, cleanliness, honesty and a love of God, mother nature and one's country—a gentle authoritarian spirit, where obedience played an important role from a liberal, philanthropic perspective. This was also where the basis of psychological insight into child development was built.

The opposition between "free play" and a fostering ideology was obvious. "Free play" was more of an organisational concept, which reduced the child's

<sup>11</sup> Simmons-Christenson 1981, p. 147, which is an excerpt from Fröbel's "Kommt, lasst uns unsern Kindern leben!" from 1840.

<sup>12</sup> Öhman 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Brubacher 1947; Bollnow 1977; Johansson 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Johansson 1992; Rubinstein Reich 1993.

<sup>15</sup> The Swedish translation of this German term is "arbetsmedelpunkt", and the term corresponds roughly to "monthly object".



self-activity to a free choice between a few different activities. The pedagogy was centred around the "Monatsgegenstand", where controlled activities predominated and creative activities became illustrations of natural themes. The children sang songs about nature and drew spring flowers. The songs sung at the turn of the century were primarily of a lyrical nature.<sup>16</sup>

Uncontrolled play was restricted, characterized by activities such as handicraft, and to a great extent captured in the trap of morality.

### The influence of child psychology over preschool pedagogy and the attitude to play

The preschool pioneers took a great interest in child psychology. In the 1930's, Carin Ulin (1886–1971) and Alva Myrdal (1902–1986) challenged the dominating Fröbel pedagogy by starting two new preschool teacher training institutes, based on the latest discoveries in the developmental psychology research carried out in Europe and the USA.<sup>17</sup>

Myrdal (1935) was strongly critical of Fröbel's romantic pedagogy, its morals and its idealization of the family, and with her idea of the communal nursery (Storbarnkammaren) she brought forth her theory of the need for an anti-authoritarian upbringing. Her faith in science and social planning forms a sharp contrast to Fröbel's religious faith.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, she is critical of the handicraft ideal which surrounded the Fröbel pedagogy.<sup>19</sup> Myrdal's pedagogic ideas were mainly concerned with adult attitude, creativity and taking an interest in society. Play was primarily stimulated by carefully chosen toys.<sup>20</sup>

Ulin (1952) carried out her own research into child psychology, and she also developed toys based on studies of e.g. the motorics of children's hands. To her, pedagogy was characterized by these behavioural studies and functional methods. It was a matter of "complete psychological knowledge and its practical application".<sup>21</sup>

However, through their contacts with Elsa Köhler's ideas, the Fröbelians were also influenced by these activity pedagogic currents. Hultqvist (1990) writes that Elsa Köhler proved able to combine Fröbel's morals with a normative developmental process. Her starting point was Fröbel's theory that all human development and education take place because man is driven by an intrinsic creative instinct.<sup>22</sup> Fröbel's philosophy of nature could be replaced by biology and studied by applying scientific methods. Her criticism of the Fröbel

<sup>16</sup> Zetterholm 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Schill 1973, lists some important researchers: Charlotte Bühler, Dewey, Gesell and Piaget.

<sup>18</sup> Hultqvist 1990, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup> Schill 1973.

<sup>20</sup> Myrdal 1935, p. 114 ff., a description of toys as material for activity—large, strong and versatile.

<sup>21</sup> Schill 1973, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Johansson 1992, p. 64.

tradition concerned the soulless handicraft which was passed on through the "Kindergarten method".

Hence, the Fröbelians altered their pedagogy in accordance with new discoveries made in the field of child psychology. Set activities and models were removed at the beginning of the 1930's, and there was more time for free play. The question of control or freedom was a burning one. The emphasis was placed on being able to interpret what the children were interested in, and the "Monatsgeschehen" developed into "centres of interest".<sup>23</sup> How could the children be stimulated to be creative and play on their own? Participating in children's play was out of the question, and Sandels (1945) describes the Kindergarten teacher's role in free play as follows:

Surreptitiously, she should inspire free creativity when the inspiration threatens to wane; not through words, but by conjuring up some additional material at the right moment, which will rekindle the imagination ... Direct intervention in play activities should only be necessary if e.g. one child always returns to the same materials, ... if two children always play together and one is always the leader ... But the main duty of the Kindergarten teacher is to observe the children during free play time.<sup>24</sup>

According to Johansson (1992), it is not likely that Köhler's ideas of focusing on children's interests were ever realized. In practice, a functional pedagogy governed by adults dominated the scene. Paradoxically, the theories of functional pedagogy was supported by theories of developmental psychology, because the latter often look upon different aspects of development as separate parts rather than a whole. One symptom of this is that many American textbooks of child psychology did not mention children's play at all.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, "theories of maturation" such as Gessel's, started emphasizing the normative aspect of development, pointing the pedagogic interest in the direction of different behavioural categories and stages of development (intellectual, linguistic, motoric, etc.). With this approach, play is of little importance. Moreover, psychoanalytical theories, such as those presented by Erikson and Charlotte Bühler<sup>26</sup>, focusing on the concept of play, also contributed to the ambivalent attitude towards children's play by advocating a therapeutic approach and at the same time describing different stages of play (functional play, fictional play, etc.). To the pedagogue, the most important thing became diagnosing children's play and their behaviour.

The therapeutic and the functional approaches to children's play were united by letting child observations assume an important role in preschool pedagogy. The theoretic approach to children's "readiness" tended to provide pedagogy with an "input" role. The reason for this is that there are no theories dealing with the link between internal and external processes, with the individual in

<sup>23</sup> Köhler 1936; Johansson 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Sandels & Moberg 1945, p. 79-80.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Elkonin 1988, a comparison between theories in Eastern Europe with Western theories.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Erikson 1969 and Harding 1965, who describe Charlotte Bühler's theory of play.

relation to his or her surroundings. Theories of maturation provide answers and direct the attention to different stages of development. Activities, occupations and material come to provide the setting for children's play, which becomes almost functional.

### Dialogue pedagogy and approach to play

According to the Commission on Nursery Provision<sup>27</sup>, dialogue pedagogy would become the model which maintained the relation between children and adults as well as children and their surroundings, as opposed to the theories of maturation and behaviourism. Internal aspects were to be related to external ones. Dialogue pedagogy was an approach to children, and children's self-activities were important to it. Then why was play not a central activity in this model?

I have already mentioned that Jorup (1979) asks why preschool teachers do not heed children's play, as play is the dominating spontaneous activity amongst children.

Dialogue pedagogy originates from the radical movements of the 1960's and 1970's which emphasized children's consciousness. This was a clear break with all romantic notions as well as criticism aimed at pedagogy as a banking method<sup>28</sup> and its behaviouristic nature. By opting for dialogue pedagogy, Piaget's theory was made a third model, taking a stand both against idealism (Fröbel) and behaviourism. The influence exercised by Piaget's theory of the development of intelligence resulted in an emphasis on rational cultural transmission in preschools.<sup>29</sup> Even play will be rationalized, but at the same time, Piaget's approach means that play as child assimilation, or a way for children to confirm an already acquired behaviour, becomes a low-status method. Play is children's self-activity.

Dialogue pedagogy was subjected to ideological criticism both from the political Left and the Right. From the Left, it was criticized for being liberal and under the influence of an idealistic, psychological approach to child development.<sup>30</sup> Children were not described in a social context<sup>31</sup>; if anything they were described as an "abstract construction".<sup>32</sup> Right-wing criticism of dialogue pedagogy bore down on the absence of conduct and a working method which centred too much around the individual. The pedagogy was even accused of being chaotic and haphazard.

However, with its organizational changes, such as introducing "sibling groups" and working teams, dialogue pedagogy resulted in a democratization

<sup>27</sup> SOU 1972:26 and 27. Statements from the Commission on Nursery Provision from 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Freire 1971.

<sup>29</sup> Dahlberg 1982; 1986.

<sup>30</sup> Amongst other things, the criticism concerned the fact that dialogue pedagogical ideas were not in agreement with Freire's (1972) radical dialogue pedagogy.

<sup>31</sup> Kallos 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Hultqvist 1990.

of preschools. In the whole Nordic area, the pedagogic debate of the 1970's was inspired by dialogue pedagogy. The didactic discussion concerning the contents of the preschool curriculum, on the other hand, was not considered very important. It mainly involved the adult approach, an issue which had already been brought up for discussion by Alva Myrdal. Play was not part of the curriculum, but it seems likely that the discussion about a more flexible approach paved the way for the current interest in play.

### The 1980's emphasis on the structure of and the approach to play

In the last preschool programme (1987), the criticism voiced by the conservatives seems to have gained support. The programme recommends structures and organization, and it has reintroduced the concept of theme work. The individual approach which formed the basis of dialogue pedagogy is replaced by a group focus. Referring to preschool tradition, Ulla-Brita Bruun<sup>33</sup> for one regrets the lack of handicraft traditions.

In my opinion, there is a danger that the programme will result in preschool activities which are too easily influenced by traditional forms. Traditional pedagogy and circle times have been returned to favour.<sup>34</sup> Play has become subordinated. If anything, the rationalistic model from the Commission on Nursery Provision of 1968 has been revived, and according to Kärrby (1989), the programme expresses a constructivist approach to play:

Play is children's tangible way of reflecting; of using their knowledge and proficiency; of depicting and reshaping reality in such a way that it becomes understandable to them; of trying their competence and gaining an insight into the processes of society.<sup>35</sup>

As opposed to Piaget's description of play as a means of assimilation, this is a description of play as a problem solving activity. Kärrby (1989) states that this approach is well in line with Bruner's theory<sup>36</sup> of play.

Play is often generated when children are in the process of learning something, or when they are trying to work something out, or when they feel a need to confirm something they have just learnt.<sup>37</sup>

The preschool programme presents an unmistakable cognitive trend as it links play with learning.

<sup>33</sup> Fredricson 1985; Engdahl 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Lindqvist 1989; Rubinstein Reich 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Pedagogic preschool programme, 1987, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> Bruner 1980.

<sup>37</sup> Pedagogic preschool programme, 1987, p. 42.

## Conclusion

My aim so far has been to show that despite the fact that play has been an important ideological concept for preschool pedagogy to maintain its importance in relation to school pedagogy<sup>38</sup>, the role of play as an activity has been unclear. It has neither been developed nor brought up as a problem in the pedagogic debate of preschools. During this century, the predominating tendency has been to make theme work ("Monatsgegenstand", centres of interest) into a central concept. This has not shed any light on the role of play. Either play has been idealized, as in the Fröbel tradition, in which case the actual activities have been characterized by morals and upbringing with an emphasis on work and activities, or it has had an obscure role as part of the developmental psychological ideas which form the basis of preschool pedagogy. Play has become but one aspect amongst many others of child development. Moreover, play signifies children's own world, which has made it difficult for adults to use it as a pedagogic method. Attempts have been made at solving this problem by applying a dualistic approach, in which child development is regarded as a phenomenon separated from direct adult interference. It is no surprise that preschool teachers have an ambiguous approach to play. In a study of preschool teachers' ideas of play as opposed to their actual behaviour, Henckel (1990) proves this contradictory state. The two predominant attitudes were either to regard play as a learning process or as therapy. In practice, most of the teachers treated play as therapy, but this approach was in no way unequivocal.

To a large extent, the preschool teachers' behaviour in relation to the group of children is characterized by not getting involved in the children's play. They do not enter the play to take part in it. However, they do provide the children with "services" and support: they fetch play material, help them dress up, take care of anyone who has been hurt and comfort those who are in need of consolation and a plaster ... This is nevertheless a therapeutic approach only in the sense that by not entering the play, the teacher runs no risk of disturbing it, but there are often other reasons why the play is interrupted, which means that the "therapeutic idea" is not likely to be realized.<sup>39</sup>

A straightforward survey which I carried out in the spring of 1991 shows that preschool teachers are aware of this ambivalent approach. A questionnaire was distributed to all those employed in the child-care sector in a small municipality (some 400 people altogether), and most of them replied that they wished to influence and develop children's play without disturbing them too much. All the statements were to be answered with "yes" or "no" ("play is free, the adults mind their own business", "play is free and the children should be able to express strong emotions", "the adults should set an example in play", "the adults should tell stories, play-act, and organize dramatizations etc"), but they were all highly controversial and impossible to answer categorically. There

<sup>38</sup> Kärby 1989.

<sup>39</sup> Henckel 1990, p. 54.

was only one statement which everyone agreed with: "play should be stimulated by an inviting play environment, props, etc.". This was also considered the most important criterion of all. It was however obvious that the question of adult participation in children's play was considered very important; an issue which required considerable consideration and motives for the action (see appendix).

A closer examination of adult approaches to play could perhaps shed some light on the issue of fundamental values and the connections which exist between theory and practice—questions which the Centre for Child and Youth Studies at the University of Uppsala intends to bring up in its extensive study of adult approach to play.<sup>40</sup>

### A comparison of two approaches to play pedagogy: that of a play researcher and that of a drama pedagogue<sup>41</sup>

Drama is a subject which is closely related to play, as well as a subject which has been part of the preschool curriculum for a relatively long period of time. Nevertheless, drama pedagogic ideas do not seem to have had much influence on either the pedagogy of play or the approach to children's play.

A comparison of the prevailing psychological theories of play, which have formed the basis of preschool pedagogy, and the drama pedagogic approach to play results in some interesting differences which explain why adults rarely participate in children's play. It also illustrates the existing approaches to the role of play in children's development and lives.

Øksendal (1984) has tried to demonstrate why adults rarely intervene in children's play in preschools. She explains that the main reason is that the pedagogy of play rests on the pillars of developmental psychology, whereas drama pedagogy has developed from other traditions, such as the art of theatre, reform pedagogy and the philosophy of art. The discrepancies between the approaches of a play researcher and a drama pedagogue are manifested in something as basic as their denominations of the different forms of play. Drama pedagogues would also call role-play by the name of fantasy play and dramatic play, whereas a play researcher would rather refer to the same kind of play as symbol play, make-believe (pretend) play, social play and, of course, role-play.

By way of Øksendal's line of argument, I would like to make a comparison between the different theories of play and their approaches to the pedagogy of play—approaches which are often implicit in psychological theories and explicit in drama pedagogy.

<sup>40</sup> Lindh-Munther 1991.

<sup>41</sup> This section is an elaboration of a former article (Lindqvist 1990).

## Developmental theories of psychology and play pedagogy

### A psychoanalytical theory of play

According to the theory of psychoanalysis<sup>42</sup>, play is the most important way in which children deal with unconscious emotions. It could be a matter of scary feelings of inferiority and a fear of threats. Play enables the child to try out its options—both fear and triumphing over evil. Play is a way for children to assert themselves in relation to the adult world, and it needs to be free of adult intervention. Children cope with anxiety by means of their imagination.

The psychoanalytical approach assumes that play is free from adult interference, nevertheless enabling the adult to diagnose the source of any frustrations and anxiety displayed by the child.

### A cognitive theory of play

The main supporters of this school of thought are Piaget and Bruner. According to Piaget, play is a way for the child to strengthen the structures it has already learnt (assimilation). Play is developed from the simple act of sensory-motoric playing through imitation, which means that the role of the adult is not necessarily to teach the child how to play, but primarily to create an environment conducive to development for the child. The pedagogue remains outside the play, using props as stimulation. It is important that the toys used can provide the children with inspiration.

In her thesis, Jorup (1979) showed that only two per cent of play activities in Swedish preschools involves no accessories. According to my questionnaire (see appendix), this attitude towards play was the one most commonly found amongst preschool teachers.

Bruner (1980) places the emphasis on play as a way of solving problems.<sup>43</sup> This is a constructivist approach to play, in which play has an important role in the learning process. Consequently, pedagogic approach varies depending on how we perceive children's ability to play, and how this can be stimulated. Kärrby's studies of "Play and learning" (1989; 1990) is based on Bruner's theory. Researchers involved in the British research "Under five" project advocate sensitive participation in play activities, avoiding adult domination. Intervention may be allowed when the child is unable to play or has a problem playing with other children.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Freud 1974.

<sup>43</sup> To Bruner (1980), who has summarized the project "Under five", the most important thing is to be able to offer structured activities as well as structured material for developing the play. The best way of developing play is when children are playing in pairs. To older children, however, playing with an adult may serve the purpose even better (p. 60–61). See also Sylva, Roy & Painter 1980, p. 48–76.

<sup>44</sup> Wood, Mc Mahon & Cranstoun 1980.



### Theories of play which emphasize child socialization

This school of thought includes Soviet theories. The principal followers are Vygotsky, Leontiev and Elkonin.<sup>45</sup> When playing, children learn the meaning of social life. Play combines emotions, will and thought, and it is the most important source of development.

According to Leontiev, play is a reproduction of general characteristics of adult roles. When playing, children lay the foundations of abstract thinking, and Elkonin describes the child's ability of gradually liberating itself from the dependence on the objects used in play.

The Soviet pedagogy of play has been criticized for its strong ideological emphasis. It states that adults should set good examples and surround the children with an environment which teaches them about working life and production. In other words, the adult is expected to intervene in play.

In my opinion, Leontiev and Elkonin have given Vygotsky's basic hypotheses of play too narrow-minded an interpretation, focusing on the social psychological aspect and ignoring the aesthetic, cultural aspects. There is a need for a new interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas, one which recognizes children's creative abilities in play instead of focusing only on reproduction. The interesting basis is that of psychology as cultural science and not as a biological theory, and this is the kind of analysis I would like to return to.

The Soviet tradition has given rise to numerous different interpretations: cognitive, social and aesthetic.<sup>46</sup>

### Cultural and social anthropological theories on play

Over the past years, supporters of the above theories have influenced the pedagogic preschool debate.<sup>47</sup> These theories regard play as a cultural form. Followers of this tradition are e.g. the cultural philosophers Huizinga and Buytendijk and the social anthropologists Bateson, Schwartzman and Sutton-Smith.<sup>48</sup>

Play is a fundamental social phenomenon, characterized by being voluntarily undertaken and having a cultural form. Children learn to play within the framework of a certain culture or subculture. This means that the pedagogic approach to play will vary in accordance with different researcher's views on the learning process, or hand-over.

Those who regard play as a form of children's culture, handed over from child to child, consider adult intervention in and influence over play to be a

<sup>45</sup> Elkonin 1988, a summary of the Soviet tradition in play psychology and research into the pedagogy of play.

<sup>46</sup> Lindqvist 1989.

<sup>47</sup> This is an influence on pedagogic research in broad outline, both research methodology and theory.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. Huizinga 1955; Åm 1989, based on Buytendijk's theories of approach to play in preschools; Bateson 1971; Schwartzman 1978; Sutton-Smith 1971.



hindrance rather than anything else.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, those who view play as a way of learning social rules and place the emphasis on the playful "being-able-to-pretend"-aspect, believe that adults will have to teach children to play. When she asks why children do not play in preschools, Birgitta Olofsson indicates that she would like to see the adults take active part in play and inspire the children.

Olofsson (1987; 1992) has based her theory of play partly on Bateson's theory of communication. When playing, children learn to understand the meta-communicative signal "this is play", and with its mutual understanding and turn-taking, play can teach children the rules of social intercourse. The degree of adult playfulness and the adults' ability to communicate with the children is a crucial factor. Play is an instrument for developing social roles.

The Norwegian preschool pedagogue Eli Åm (1989), who also has practical experience of working as a preschool teacher, regards adult participation in children's play as a natural reaction. Setting out from Buytendijk's theories of the nature of play (order-chaos), Åm seeks to gain knowledge about play from a child's perspective. A knowledge of "the laws of play" will make the pedagogue sensitive to and aware of further dimensions of the structure of play. Åm is also interested in the differences between boys' play and girls' play, i.e. the issue of power structures.

The Danish preschool pedagogue Torben H. Rasmussen tries to describe the nature of play along similar lines, both "the great play" and "the wild play".<sup>50</sup> He is interested in developing the phenomenology of play. His book "The Great Play" (1985) contains the embryo of an aesthetic theory, which compares play with the narrative form.

Social and cultural anthropological theories regard play as a phenomenon which features its own individual characteristics, and maintain the importance of recognizing this phenomenon at the same time as play is allowed to receive fresh inspiration from the surrounding culture. This means that the empathy and attitude to play takes on importance. The advantage of such an approach is that play is given a special status in preschool contexts, which is often expressed using the term "child perspective", and a playful approach is appreciated.

The role of the adults, on the other hand, is not very distinct. It can serve both as a threat to and a necessary condition for the child's development in play. There is also a risk that play is idealized and described in harmonious terms only, isolated from modern society, something which both Sutton-Smith (1989) and Schwartzman (1978; 1991) have pointed out by emphasizing the creative and critical dimensions of play—imagination and satire. Moreover, there is a risk that the "artistic and fictitious" aspects of play are left out of the anthropological theories.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Enerstvedt 1971; Rönneberg 1987.

<sup>50</sup> Rasmussen has written a book entitled "The Wild Play" 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Aspelin 1975, p. 99.

## Drama pedagogic views on the pedagogy of play

Many drama pedagogues are of the opinion that play and drama are strongly related—for one thing, both are fictitious actions. Furthermore, play is reminiscent of theatre, and theatre as a form of art has its roots in play.<sup>52</sup> Play comprises an author, a director, an actor and an audience, all in one. The aesthetic contents, or fundamental elements, are the same in both play and drama, according to Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad: role/character, action/fable and world/time and space.<sup>53</sup> The dramatic instruments (tension, contrast, symbols, rituals and rhythm) are important both to role-play and drama, and the narrative exists within play and drama, either as a whole or as individual episodes. Similarities can also be found between children's play and the course of events in classical drama (introduction, escalation, climax, descent and crisis).<sup>54</sup>

In compliance with Øksendal's analysis, I would like to review four different drama pedagogic theories and traditions:

1. Creative dramatics originated in the USA in the 1920's. Winifred Ward (1960) and her disciple Geraldine B. Siks are the two most prominent supporters of this tradition.

Ward's method of working is based partly on the theories of reform pedagogy which was developed in the USA (by Dewey and others), and partly on children's theatre. The method originated from her attempts at vitalising the current teaching of children's literature by dramatizing it instead of merely reading and analysing it. Both Ward and Siks also took an interest in very young children and called role-play "dramatic play". Play is based on actions and dialogue, and does not often include a plot. For this reason, the pedagogue needs to inspire the child to play, in order to develop the dramatic nature of play. This requires an experienced pedagogue or artist, who can draw on history and the wealth of stories which are part of our cultural inheritance. This working method is based on dramatizations or improvisations inspired by stories, nursery rhymes and poems, and attaches particular importance to the form of pantomime along with rhythmic exercises for the youngest children. Ward and Siks maintained that children's senses and narrative ability should be stimulated both in and outside play.

In Sweden, Elsa Olenius (1957) pursued the tradition of "creative dramatics". Olenius, who was working as a librarian at the Stockholm Civic Hall, became a legendary story-teller. Her story-times turned into dramatizations carried out together with the children, and this led on to theatre performances at "Our theatre" (1942). These performances were playful improvisations in every respect: chain of events, roles and lines. Olenius believed that literature could be accessed through theatre. The idea of popular education was of vital

<sup>52</sup> Eriksson 1990; Hagnell 1983.

<sup>53</sup> Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad 1992, p. 102. Here the term "environment" has been used where I have chosen to use "world".

<sup>54</sup> Eriksson 1990; Rasmussen 1985.

importance for Olenius' work, Lindvåg (1988) writes in her thesis, which partly polemized against the criticism voiced against Olenius in the 1970's, which called her a representative of a bourgeois tradition of "fairy plays about princes and princesses".<sup>55</sup> Birgit Öhrn (1978) is one of the Swedish drama pedagogues who was trained in the spirit of Olenius.

In creative dramatics, free dramatization and restricted theatre exist side by side, as two legitimate sides of the same coin. However, the conflict between drama and theatre came to leave its mark on drama pedagogy, particularly in the UK after the second world-war.<sup>56</sup>

2. Peter Slade and Brian Way are the two chief representatives of a new tradition which strives to separate drama education from the theatre. These theories were initially developed in the 1930's, but only became popular in the Nordic countries in the 1960's and 1970's.

Peter Slade became the ideologist for pedagogues, and he has presented his ideas in "Child drama" (1954). According to Slade, there is a special form of art for children which he calls child drama, and in a conducive environment this can be developed. Even an infant presents dramatic ability in the interaction between child and mother, and this ability is later developed through play. Slade distinguished between two kinds of play: projected play and personal play. Projected play often involves objects, and the focus has been removed from the child's own body. Personal play, on the other hand, emphasizes the child's own actions which engage its entire body; large movements and rhythmical gestures like e.g. running, jumping and dancing. To Slade, role-play and dramatic play are identical, and Braanaas (1985) claims that the most original aspect of Slade's approach is that it gives these kinds of play a dramatic and aesthetic perspective. How play relates to the space around it is of particular importance; not only how it relates to the stage, but to the room itself and to other people inside this room.

The pedagogue should stimulate play with sounds, music and stories by means of improvisation. The child's own story should form the basis. Strictly speaking, Slade's relationship to theatre is ambivalent. He has a background in acting, but what he keeps looking for in the child are the genuine dramatic forms.

In the same way as his mentor Slade, Brian Way (1971) has a background in children's theatre, but instead of focusing dramatic education on theatre, he focuses on the development of the child's personality. Way's approach to dramatic education is pragmatic, and he develops numerous exercises for "practising living". Improvisations should be based on the participants' own ideas, and the atmosphere in the group is very important.

In the 1960's and 1970's, drama teaching in Sweden took on the nature of different exercises. Pedagogic drama became a working method, and it reflects the influence from Slade and Way.

<sup>55</sup> Ursing's paper "Drama and Society" 1979; Szatkowski 1977.

<sup>56</sup> Braanaas 1985.

3. In the 1970's, theories of drama were developed with an aim to raise the level of consciousness in children and teenagers by means of theatre and role-play. Drama pedagogues such as the Brazilian Augusto Boal (1980) followed in the footsteps of Freire. For a short period of time, Boal worked in Brazil with the "Theatre of the Oppressed". When this came to an abrupt end he was captured and tortured, escaped to Argentina and later to Europe, where he became known for his "liberating theatre" and his "Forum theatre", where the spectators are enticed to participate and influence the chain of events, i.e. where they are made aware of their situation and the situation of their society. One of those who has used drama as a way of raising the level of consciousness in children and teenagers in Sweden is Magnér (1976). The pedagogues use ideas from daily life, which are dramatized as role-play. Similar ideas have been described in preschool pedagogy, e.g. in a German preschool programme which emphasized social and problematic aspects.<sup>57</sup>

4. From the end of the 1970's, drama pedagogy has been under the influence of the "Newcastle school". Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote developed theories and methods for using drama in education, both as a method and an aesthetic experience. Heathcote has been influenced by Bruner amongst others; both by his theory of instruction and his way of describing the line of development from action to symbols via pictures, Braanaas (1985) writes. Both Heathcote and Bolton are linked to theories of psychology and pedagogy. Drama should be a central subject on the school curriculum, used in all kinds of teaching through the teacher-in-role method, which means that the teacher assumes a role and interacts with the pupils. In this way, a literary and/or historic content could be turned into interactive play.

Bolton (1979; 1984) takes a greater theoretic interest in drama than Heathcote, and his dramatic base comprises theories of children's play. He refers in particular to Vygotsky's theory on play, in which the latter emphasizes the role play has for creating meaning. Drama is about creating an understanding of the world, about obtaining a living knowledge of reality. According to Bolton (1979), the difference between role-play and drama is mainly a matter of the degree of participation in the common fiction (the meaning). In role-play, everyone is free to make their own interpretations, whereas in drama, everyone has to be part of the common fiction. Dramatic play must be organized by an adult. Together, Heathcote and Bolton have reduced the discord between theatre and drama by a deliberate introduction of theatrical structures into drama.

### The different traditions of research into play and drama

Most drama pedagogues have known about theories of play, Øksendal writes, and they have also been influenced by the same. When it comes to play researchers, the situation is reversed. Play researchers have been influenced by

<sup>57</sup> Lindqvist 1989, p. 35 ff.

theories of psychology, pedagogy and sociology, but no one refers to theories of drama pedagogy.

The break between play researchers and drama pedagogues also manifests itself in their respective terminologies. Play researchers use concepts such as id, ego, super ego, cognition, socio-cultural, socialization, instinct, urge and abstract. Drama pedagogic concepts stem from theories of theatre and relate to environment, idea, plot, dialogue, climate, tension, action and characterization.

According to Øksendal, there are three concepts common to the theories of both play and drama, viz. imitation, identification and the ability to imagine things. Drama pedagogues, however, call these phenomena by other names: characterization, ability to live a part, and imagination. The emphasis is placed on sensitivity to the role and the power of living a part. From this comparison of the different traditions of play research and drama pedagogy we can draw the conclusion that there is a need for an integrated theory of the role of creative subjects in child development, and for a nuanced approach to play; a theory which studies the relationship between imagination and children's abstract thinking. Moreover, play researchers need to look to the theories of drama pedagogy to be able to develop a pedagogy which stimulates children's play.

## Summarising the conclusions

The idea of "free play" has meant that the pedagogic debate has limited itself to matters relating to freedom or control. Based on his interviews with experienced and veteran preschool teachers, Johansson states that their work mainly resulted in providing the children with an ability to relate their experiences spontaneously, without prior instructions from the teacher. The focus seemed to be placed on a strong "real experience", but the question of how all this was brought about was wrapped in mystery.<sup>58</sup>

Not until the Reggio Emilia pedagogy appeared, had it been possible to prove how a dialectic relationship is created between a child and its environment by use of an artistic working method.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, the theories of drama pedagogy show how children and adults can share aesthetic experiences within the framework of play. The artistic subjects serve to develop a dynamic relationship to reality, and such a working method can provide new angles of approach to preschool pedagogy.

The Swedish preschool tradition has not developed a cultural, aesthetic approach to pedagogy. Instead its fundamental theories have rested on theories of psychology, in which art and culture have not been represented, and this has meant that the artistic subjects have become an issue of secondary importance. To me, this explains why play has not become a central concept of pedagogy.

Preschool pedagogy is related to psychological theories of child develop-

<sup>58</sup> Johansson 1992, p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> Barsotti 1986; Wallin 1986; Lindqvist 1989.

ment, and can in broad outline be viewed as applied psychology. Ever since the time of Fröbel, play is part of all pedagogic programmes, where it denotes children's self-activity, a principle of self-regulation, and becomes the symbol of the abstract and psychologizing view on children adherent to preschools, the view Hultqvist pinpoints so well as a psychology free from any social and cultural context. Behind the choice of theories lies:

a kind of meta-criterion for the demarcation of criteria. This meta-criterion says: exclude theories where the environment is perceived as a historic context which takes active part in the child's psychological development. This principle of demarcation announces its presence when, without explaining the motives for their action, people define pedagogy as a kind of applied psychology. The result is that large groups of psychological theories are placed beyond competition. One of the theories which has been particularly unfairly treated in the order of things is the psychological theory inspired by cultural history. This is quite natural. If an abstract, non-historical child is produced, theories of this kind will of necessity have to be excommunicated.<sup>60</sup>

Our attempts at introducing a theme based on play and artistic subjects has made me look for an all-embracing cultural approach to preschool pedagogy, which regards play as the most important form of activity for child development.

Of late, such overall cultural views have been presented by Sundin (1988) and Bjørkvold (1989), amongst others. When describing the muse-like man, Bjørkvold brings out children's play as a creative form of life, in which emotion, thought, movement and rhythm form a unity.

However, in the 1920's, L.S. Vygotsky (1896–1934) developed his cultural historical theory which regarded man as a "whole" and which he based on art and literature. It is this theoretical approach to play which has been of particular interest to me.

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<sup>60</sup> Hultqvist 1990, p. 255–256.

## CHAPTER 3

# Vygotsky and the Cultural Historical Theory of Play<sup>1</sup>

The following ideas in Vygotsky's cultural historical theory can be considered relevant in an analysis of play.

1. The *dialogue* with other human beings keeps man (the subject) in a dynamic relationship to his environment (the object), and he develops his conceptions of the world through a process which is both reproductive and productive. At the same time as he can remember and repeat patterns of behaviour, he is able to shape and reshape his own conceptions. Man is thus basically creative, since he creates his own conceptions of the world, i.e. he makes his own interpretation. This is a *dialectic theory* of influence in the pedagogic process.

2. The theory displays an *all-embracing cultural approach*, which unites art, culture and social processes. It is an integrated theory of human development, which unites emotion and thought, two aspects which are often separated in theories of developmental psychology. In the theory of cultural history, *consciousness* is the key concept and the principle of individual development, and to children *play* is the activity through which they become conscious of the world. Play does not keep emotion, thought and will separated from one another.

3. There is a *correspondence between man's consciousness (internal) and the external environment*. Artistic, cultural and social structures are reflected in the structure of consciousness. Vygotsky's view of the dynamic structure of consciousness corresponds with the aesthetic form of art. In play, a meeting between the individual's internal and its external environment takes place in a creative interpretation process, the imaginary process, in which children express their imagination in action. Play reflects the aesthetic form of consciousness.

The theory of cultural history did not develop into an unambiguous theory in the sense that there is no agreement between Vygotsky's view of man as being basically creative (something which is manifested early on in children's play), and his followers' views of play. Normally, Soviet theories of play are thought

<sup>1</sup> Biographic data on Vygotsky are available in Hydén 1981; Wertsch 1985a, b; Kozulin 1990.



to share the same standpoints. However, Vygotsky's followers came to conform with the developments in the then Soviet Union, thereby emphasizing reproduction rather than production (creativity), and adult intervention in play rather than a creative approach.

It is therefore my opinion that there is a need for an interpretation of Vygotsky's theories which is based on his original ideas of "the psychology of art" and his studies of children's imagination and creativity. I believe that following Vygotsky's scientific path will shed some light on at what point his approach to play and that of his supporters diverge.

My opinion is that Vygotsky's line of argument will provide ideas on a creative pedagogic attitude as opposed to an instrumental one. Vygotsky shows how children interpret their experiences by creating new meanings, and how emotion and thought are united in the learning process.

My interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas follow two lines: first a description and analysis of the cultural historical theory of consciousness in the light of Vygotsky's theory of art, followed by an analysis of his theory of play. In connection with the play analysis, I will draw parallels between Vygotsky's theory and prevalent Soviet theories of play, mainly represented by Leontiev's and Elkonin's approaches.

## A dialectic approach to knowledge

The dialectic theory of cultural history illustrates the complex and contradictory interaction between man and his environment. It is a theory of processes, in which the relationship between the dialectic concepts and the world are cinematic rather than photographic.<sup>2</sup> This dialectics is characteristic of the entire learning process, which is both reproductive and productive at the same time. The reproductive aspect is attached to the memory and it means that people repeat patterns of behaviour which have been created and shaped at an earlier point, whereas the productive aspect, or creativity, as Vygotsky calls it, means that something new is being produced.<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky is of the opinion that all people are creative and he calls this creativity imagination. Imagination is the basis of every creative action and manifests itself in "all aspects of our cultural life, making artistic, scientific and technical creativity possible".<sup>4</sup> Creativity is not characteristic only of a few people; it is present wherever someone is creating something new, even if this is thought to be "nothing but a speck of dust compared with the creations of geni".<sup>5</sup> Creativity is essential for the existence of man and society, Vygotsky writes.

<sup>2</sup> Løvlie 1992, p. 26. He compares two pedagogic philosophies, with an analytical and a dialectic approach. The British analytical tradition is aiming for conceptual unity, whereas the dialectic tradition is trying to describe processes and courses.

<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky 1972, chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## “The dialogical word”<sup>6</sup>

The child receives knowledge about the world in a dialogue together with other people.

... any function in the child's cultural development appears on stage twice, on two planes, first on the social plane and then on the psychological, first among people as an intermental category and then within the child as an intramental category.<sup>7</sup>

The child learns the cultural methods, the different ways of thinking and behaving. Reading and writing are typical examples of cultural methods.<sup>8</sup> Learning is a social process, which means that the child becomes part of the general culture, which can thereby be said to be social. The dialogue between a child and an adult reflects a meeting between the different experiences of the adult and the child. The adult challenges the child's thinking through language, because the adult's language and words do not have the same meaning as the child's. The relationship between the child's developmental process and learning is dialectic. “What a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow,” Vygotsky writes.<sup>9</sup>

Vygotsky uses a concept which reflects his dynamic approach to knowledge: “zone of proximal development”. It covers the cultural changes in society which influence our way of thinking. Moreover, the word “proximal” indicates that man has a freedom of choice. On the other hand, he must be challenged. “The only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development,” Vygotsky writes.<sup>10</sup> When dealing with the issue of learning and development, Vygotsky is critical of Piaget's view of development as a process separated from external learning—a form of self-regulation.<sup>11</sup>

Consciousness is developed as an internalization of social communication.<sup>12</sup> According to Vygotsky, language and action are intertwined, and any contact with the objects, the environment, always takes the shape of a dialogue with another person.

<sup>6</sup> “The dialogical word” alludes to Bakhtin's dialogic perspective in which the word is regarded as being part of many contexts, and corresponds with Vygotsky's approach. See e.g. Zinchenko, Davydov 1985 viii f. and Kozulin 1990, p. 180 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Vygotsky 1960, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Vygotsky 1981, p. 37 and 1978a, chapter 8.

<sup>9</sup> Vygotsky 1978b, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 89

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hydén 1988, p. 77. He shows that Vygotsky's approach differs from that of Leontiev, who regards active action (practice) as the materialistic base for consciousness. Vygotsky places active action in the mediation process, i.e. using language to form conceptions of the world, and gives the *word meaning* as the analysing unit applied by consciousness. Rubinstein (1946/1973, p. 339) accused Vygotsky of idealism. In his interpretation of Vygotsky, Wertsch (1985a) introduces “tool-mediated action” as a compromise between the supporters of the theory of activity and Vygotsky. See also Zinchenko 1985; Kozulin 1990; Engeström 1987.

The path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person.<sup>13</sup>

Vygotsky also describes consciousness as a dynamic process, in which functions are related to one another. Memory, for example, has different functions at different ages, and will function in different ways in relation to both attention and perception as the child develops. To consciousness, the key functions are thought and language.<sup>14</sup> What unites thought and word is word meaning.<sup>15</sup> Meaning means that something is both language and thought at the same time.<sup>16</sup> It is the unit of the verbal thought. On an external level, the word is communicative, and on an internal level it has meaning. The word is both a communicative and a cultural sign at the same time. Consciousness is in itself dialogical, and man is communicating even when he is on his own.

Consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water. A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

"The dialogical word" means that every word reflects the whole text and the text belongs to the context. This approach opens new doors for pedagogy, since influence can be analyzed as a matter of creating meaning, as opposed to a simple stimulus-response pattern.

## An all-embracing cultural approach

### The importance of art

In my opinion, Vygotsky's ability to develop an all-embracing psychological theory can be explained by the fact that he starts by studying man's relationship to art and literature. What signifies art, and in what way is it related to human consciousness and social life?

"The Psychology of art" discusses how man creates and the way in which he experiences and interprets art. Art is the potential for development, according to Vygotsky, and art is what makes man develop his creative ability and move on from merely being reproductive.

Art is the organization of our future behaviour.  
Without art there can be no new man.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Vygotsky 1978a, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Vygotsky 1986, chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Vygotsky's view of the role of the word has been inspired by Mandelstam's "On the nature of the word" 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Vygotsky 1986, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> Vygotsky 1971, p. 253 and 259.

Vygotsky finds the current theories of art too narrow and inadequate, as they tend only to explain certain aspects of art.<sup>19</sup>

This is why it is important to develop a theory of art which is connected to human consciousness on the whole. For this reason, Vygotsky describes the relationship between emotion and thought as crucial to his theory of art. He claims that people's emotions are influenced by the aesthetic form of the work of art. As opposed to everyday emotions, there is an aesthetic emotion, which results in a delayed action and which inspires people to interpret and express their experiences. The aesthetic form is of decisive importance and requires interpretation. A military march will only result in rhythmic marching, whereas a sonata by Beethoven, with its complicated form, will cause contradictory reactions, creating a more powerful experience and interpretation. This, Vygotsky claims, shows there is a close connection between emotion and thought. The need for interpretation brings the emotion up to a conscious level. This statement was partly a reaction to psychoanalytical theories, which separate the conscious from the unconscious. Man produces his interpretation within the scope of culture. He can in this way become part of a culture, and culture can become available to his personal interpretations. Art provides man with a knowledge of society's cultural symbols, which have various meanings. Both when art is being created and when it is being interpreted, it serves as a meeting place for the personal and the social. Amongst other things, this means that art introduces the most personal and intimate aspects of our way of thinking into the sphere of social life. In a way, Vygotsky writes, art is the antithesis of everyday life, as it releases aspects we would otherwise not experience. Art is crucial to man's creative thinking.

## The correspondence between the internal and the external

The dialectic theory is a materialistic theory: the external, or man's activity, is reflected in his consciousness, the internal. Vygotsky's term for this is correspondence, a description of the nature of the relation. There is a correspondence between the internal and the external, but this is not merely a mechanic mirror image. In "The Psychology of Art", Vygotsky illustrates how the artistic

<sup>19</sup> In "The Psychology of Art" (1925) 1971, Vygotsky tries to develop an unambiguous approach to the creation and reception of art. His aim is to unite all aspects: the intention of the author, time, background, the form, content and symbols of the literary work as well as the reader's experience and interpretations of it. He is critical of the prevailing theories of art of that time, especially the idealistic theory, but also the psychoanalytical and the extremely formalist theories. The introduction to the book contains a comment made by V.V. Ivanov, where he points out that the psychology of art is the beginning of the cultural historical theory with cultural signs as its key concept. Marxist research tradition claims that "The Psychology of Art" remains within the scope of Western European aesthetics, and lacks all relevance to Marxism. See e.g. Hydén 1981, p. 12. This has meant that "The Psychology of Art" has been neglected in the analysis of the cultural historical theory. In Sweden, the issue of aesthetics has been neglected in the social sciences.

forms influence man's thoughts, and the aesthetic forms also play an important role when Vygotsky describes the nature of the process of consciousness in the cultural historical theory. The interpretation process, which Vygotsky calls the imaginary process, is described as artistic creativity, and it is obvious that Vygotsky has been inspired by his literary analyses and his interest in the aesthetic form. The Russian formalist school, with representatives such as Bakhtin, Chukovsky and Propp<sup>20</sup>, has inspired some of Vygotsky's concrete ideas, which will be more noticeable at a later stage in this thesis.

### Imagination and reality

"There is a dynamic system of meaning in the form of a unit between affective and intellectual processes", Vygotsky writes.<sup>21</sup> He deals with these issues in a short book called "Imagination and Creativity in the Childhood" (1930)<sup>22</sup>, which has so far only been translated into Italian, and which is rarely included in analyses of Vygotsky's approach to knowledge. This book describes how Vygotsky regarded the creative process of the human consciousness, the link between emotion and thought, and the role of the imagination. To Vygotsky, this brings to the fore the issue of the link between reality and imagination, which clearly states that reality is not only to be regarded in an external sense, but that also the internal processes are real.

According to Vygotsky, there is no opposition between imagination and reality, but there is a dialectic relationship. Imagination is a form of consciousness—an ability to combine—which is connected with reality in more ways than one. It is based on elements taken from reality, which means that:

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<sup>20</sup> Vygotsky's contact with the Russian formalists was partly responsible for his interest in the aesthetic form of the work of art. The Russian formalists was a movement based on linguistics and literary theory, which was active for a short period of time (1915-1930) in the Soviet Union before it affiliated itself with the structuralist movement within the sciences of linguistics and literature. See Aspelin 1970; 1971; Wertsch 1985a; Ivanov 1971; Kozulin 1990.

"Device" is a key concept to formalists, and it includes the plan of structure of the narrative (the plot). The fairy-tale morphology developed by Vladimir Propp has been very influential in the West. In "The Grammar of the Imagination", G. Rodari 1988, who was one of those who inspired the Reggio Emilia pedagogy, develops several of Propp's ideas in the art of telling a story.

One of the most important formalist devices is "defamiliarization" (well-known through the Brechtian "Verfremdung"). The purpose of art is to alienate, enhance sensitivity and re-establish the perceptibility of life. This includes the interest in nonsense, the absurd and parody. In his book "From Two to Five" from 1975, Chukovsky asserts the role of the imagination in children's literature, describing how "probable improbabilities" break up the established order. See also Hellman's book "Children's books in Soviet Russia" from 1991. Michail Bakhtin has inspired Vygotsky in the latter's analyses of the fable in "The Psychology of Art". In a dialogue "the word" is given the opportunity of creating new meanings through its inexhaustible potential. Bakhtin's theories have been "revived" both in Eastern and Western Europe. Researchers into children's literature in Sweden have, for example, recently started taking an interest in his theories. See Nikolajeva 1992, on intertextual analyses.

<sup>21</sup> Vygotsky 1986, chapt. 1.

<sup>22</sup> In his article "To the History of Ideas of Human Imagination", 1993, Skoglund points at a line from the Age of Enlightenment and Diderot, via Ribot, to current popular ideas of human imagination as the source of creativity which tallies with Vygotsky's approach.

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The creative activity is directly dependent upon the individual's experiences, and the extent and degree of variation of these experiences ... This is why the imagination of the child is poorer than that of an adult, because of their differences in experience.<sup>23</sup>

In order to influence the child's imagination, its reality must first be expanded. Imagination and reality are one another's prerequisites.

Imagination is not the antithesis of memory; it supports itself on memory and is using its contents in forever new combinations.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to using elements from the individual's own experience, imagination also uses elements of other people's experiences (social and historical). These indirect experiences are also based on combinations of imagination and features from reality.

Emotion and imagination are closely related, Vygotsky writes. Emotions result in an imaginary process and vice versa. Emotions are also closely related to reality.

Every emotion takes shape and corresponds to notions ... of certain impressions, thoughts and images which are related to the mental mood of every given moment.<sup>25</sup>

The images of our imagination provide our emotions with an internal language. The reverse is also true: the emotions influence our imagination.

Every imaginary construction influences our emotions ... to such an extent that the emotion which has been kindled by our imagination is an emotion which has really been experienced in such a way that it has affected the entire individual.<sup>26</sup>

Emotions are always real and true. In this way, Vygotsky claims, emotions are linked to reality.

Also completely new products of the imagination, which do not correspond to any existing models, will belong to reality once they take shape and become as real as any other object, and in turn influence their environment. This shows that Vygotsky experiences art (fiction) as real, and this is the conclusive difference between him and his social realistic followers.

Imagination describes a circle. It takes fragments of reality and transforms them, the new fragments take shape and re-enter reality. Imagination is both emotional and intellectual, and that is why it develops creativity.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

## The imaginary process

The imaginary process is a complex of transformations, distinctions, regroupings, concentrations, exaggerations and shrinkings which create new combinations and meanings.

The impressions which originate from reality will alter in nature, grow or shrink in relation to its natural dimensions. The kind of passion which a child has for exaggerations, which can also be encountered in adults, can be traced far, far back ... the influence which our internal emotion exerts ... of viewing it from an exaggerated angle.<sup>28</sup>

Children's interest in the absurd, the topsy-turvy and fabulous is connected with the creative process in the consciousness, its aesthetic form. This imaginary form can be found in children's play, and this is a point I would like to return to in connection with Vygotsky's approach to play. According to Vygotsky, the exaggerations of the imagination are equally important to art and science, since what it amounts to is the ability of recognizing new, unforeseeable links. This is an obvious indication of how Vygotsky's theory of art has influenced his general theory of consciousness. Furthermore, Vygotsky's description of the aesthetic form of the imaginary process has been influenced by the Russian formalist approach.

Calling the imaginary process an internal movement does not imply that the imagination is limited by the external environment—on the contrary, it provides the external basis for the creative process. In Vygotsky's eyes, imagination and reality go together.

Creativity is a continuous, historical process in which every form is dependent on the previous one.<sup>29</sup>

Vygotsky's opinion throughout is that imagination and reality belong together, and that the more experienced man is, the greater are his possibilities of being imaginative and creative. Vygotsky polemizes with the opinion that children have a more vivid imagination than adults, and states that this is too convenient an attitude.

This attitude, which claims that children can create everything from anything, stems from a lack of demand, and this lack of requirements leads to a misconception that children have a more unfettered and vivid imagination.<sup>30</sup>

Instead, Vygotsky writes, we know that a child has had far less experiences than an adult, and that the child's relationship to its environment is in no way as versatile as that of an adult. Children's inability to think rationally, like adults do, is often mistaken for vivid imagination.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

When it comes to imagination, a child's ability to imagine things is less developed than an adult's, but the child believes more in the fruit of its imagination and has less control over it ... not only the working material ... is less extensive than an adult's, but the way in which the child combines this material, as well as the quality and variety of it is inferior to the combinations of an adult.<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, Vygotsky regards creative imagination as an "omnipresent" activity, which will continue to affect our whole lives, as much on a personal and social plane as on a speculative and practical one.

## Vygotsky's approach to play—an aesthetic, cultural theory

The basis of my analysis is the lecture on play which Vygotsky held as late as 1933 in the then Leningrad, a lecture which is later published (1966)<sup>32</sup>, but which retains its hypothetical nature, and is open to a multitude of interpretations. The fact that this lecture is often mentioned and referred to in different contexts shows that many play researchers, also in the West, have considered and do consider it a central text to the research into play. In Soviet psychology, this text was the introduction to research into play on the basis of children's socialization. When Elkonin (1988) summarizes Vygotsky's ideas, he adds that there is more to these theses than research in the Soviet Union has so far been able to look into, and that they should therefore be elucidated further.

Vygotsky's article is permeated with his dialectic approach which makes it somewhat difficult to pick up the main thread<sup>33</sup>, since his arguments overlap. Below I will discuss three main issues, and for each one, I will draw a comparison between Vygotsky's approach to play and that of Leontiev/Elkonin.

### Why do children play?

In his article, Vygotsky claims that children play to satisfy their needs and motives, and not, as many Western play researchers of that time would claim, simply because they enjoy it or to get rid of surplus energy, etc.

To Vygotsky, play is to a large extent a matter of the dialectic relationship between will, emotion and intellect. This in itself means that Vygotsky is seeking an all-embracing theory. Play is "the imaginary, illusory realization of unrealizable desires". It is separate from everyday life and "imagination is a new formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child ... and represents a specifically human form of conscious activity ... child's play

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Vygotsky 1966. See also Hydén 1981; Elkonin 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Heinsohn & Kneiper 1978.



is imagination in action ...".<sup>34</sup> "Play is essentially wish fulfilment, not, however, isolated wishes but generalized affects."<sup>35</sup>

This shows that it is in play the child starts maintaining its will in relation to the adult world, in this way creating a conscious form for its actions. In play, the child's distance to its environment is characterized both by its self-assertion and by the fact that it is liberating itself from the actual situation by creating a fiction.

Chukovsky (1975) presents a vivid example of children's self-assertion and their way of breaking with the established order of things when he tells of the child who stubbornly kept saying that the dog is the animal which says "mi-aow", simply to face "the most important humoristic principle—that which endows something with the very opposite traits of real life".<sup>36</sup> This aptitude for, or rather passion for, improbabilities and inversions is an intrinsic part of children's play, according to Chukovsky. At a later stage, I will describe this in connection with the poetic and musical patterns of play.

Vygotsky writes that play liberates the emotions, and it is mainly these emotions which create a fiction. The child expresses its wishes, which are however not isolated wishes, but a matter of generalized emotions. Because of the emphasis placed on the importance of emotions, Heinsohn & Kneiper (1978) find Vygotsky's theory reminiscent of the theory of psychoanalysis,<sup>37</sup> but there is an obvious difference between Vygotsky and Freud. To Vygotsky, defining play merely as a pleasurable experience is not plausible; firstly because there are other activities which give the child much keener experiences of pleasure than play<sup>38</sup>, and secondly because play is a matter of need in the wide sense of the word, comprising both emotion and thought. Vygotsky's explanation is that it is the interplay between emotions and intellect which gives rise to the development of imagination in play. He emphasizes a link where other theories of play, e.g. Freud's and Piaget's, have emphasized detachment.

Trying to intellectualize play and children's development in general is as one-sided as only emphasizing emotion.

Without a consideration of the child's needs, inclinations, incentives, and motives to act ... there will never be any advance from one stage to the next.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, play is a matter of pleasure, but it is a contradictory pleasure. Play is pleasurable in at least two different respects, one being that the child is following the line of least resistance, doing what it feels like doing, which makes it link play with pleasure. "At the same time, [the children] learn to follow the line of greatest resistance, for by subordinating themselves to rules

<sup>34</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Chukovsky 1975, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> Also Kozulin 1990, p. 216 ff. points out certain similarities between Vygotsky and Freud as concerns the view on primary processes (Freud) and nonmediated processes (Vygotsky).

<sup>38</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



..." and "renunciation of spontaneous impulsive action constitute the path to maximum pleasure in play".<sup>40</sup> Vygotsky calls this one of the paradoxes of play.

The form of play (its rules) and the child's command of this form provide a feeling of pleasure and excitement. This line of thought is the same as when Vygotsky describes the aesthetic feeling which results in delayed action. The child is able to control its actions, and to assert itself in relation to the adults.

### **Comparison between Vygotsky and Leontiev/Elkonin**

Vygotsky's emphasis on dialectics, between the worlds of adults and children, between emotion and thought, and between will and emotion, has not been developed in Leontiev/Elkonin's interpretation of children's play.

Leontiev even criticizes Vygotsky's opinion that play is the child's way of maintaining its will (unrealizable tendencies). He claims that play is rather a result of children's inability to assume the roles of adults. When they fail to carry out adult actions, they create a fictitious situation, and this situation is the most important characteristic of play.<sup>41</sup> It means that there are no elements of hostility or conflict between the worlds of children and adults, and the child gradually familiarizes itself with the adult world. Play faces the future. Adult roles are what children play, and adults are what children model themselves upon.

This interpretation shows that Leontiev thinks of play as a reproduction of the roles featured in the adult world. This has made the Soviet pedagogy of play emphasize the harmonious relationship between adults and children (as opposed to the dualism of Western pedagogies of play), which has encouraged an ideological approach to children's play where adults are supposed to serve as models to the children. Heinsohn & Knieper (1978), amongst others, have criticized this approach for being "play intervention oriented" and preventing the children from acting out their feelings of fear and anxiety, etc. The adults enter the play and correct it. Play is interpreted as a realistic phenomenon, and there is no conflict between the reality and the children's interpretations in play.

Heinsohn & Knieper's have a psychoanalytical approach, but also Vygotsky with his dialectic standpoint regards play as a way for children of expressing feelings and asserting themselves in relation to adults. However, at the same time, he senses a longing on the part of the children to move closer to the adult world. This is neither dualism nor harmony—this is dialectics.

### **What is characteristic of play?**

#### *a) Play creates meaning*

Play develops children's consciousness. In addition to the role of play in the children's emotional development process, it also helps them form their own ideas of the world. Play is the activity where a meeting takes place between internal ideas and external actions. Thus, this is the meeting between the

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 13-14.

<sup>41</sup> Leontiev 1977, p. 530.

child's inner self and the outer world. It is imagination in action. Play provides the child with a general understanding of the world as well as with an ability to think and create its own ideas.

The thinking process is a creative process—an imaginary process—which develops in play because a real situation takes on a new and unfamiliar meaning. Play reflects the process in which the visual field moves away from the field of meaning. The child is able to separate meaning from the concrete object and from the situation. Language constitutes consciousness, the word is always a generalization, and the word meaning is the common denominator to language and thought.

In play activity thought is separated from objects, and action arises from ideas rather than from things.<sup>42</sup>

Play is a matter of meaning<sup>43</sup>, not of symbols. Play is not symbolism.

A symbol is a sign, but the stick is not the sign of a horse. Properties of things are retained but their meaning is inverted, i.e. the idea becomes the central point ... Thus, in play the child creates the structure <sup>meaning/</sup>object, where the semantic aspect—the meaning of the word, the meaning of the thing, dominates and determines [the child's] behaviour.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than being a symbol, the word becomes a property of the thing. This attitude corresponds with Chukovsky's (1975) description of children's interest in playing with language. Language turns into a toy, which the child twists and turns. According to Chukovsky, children have a literal outlook on life, not a metaphorical one.

Piaget (1962), for one, describes play in terms of symbol play. However, Piaget does not view language as a mediating process for the thinking. Instead, he describes thinking as an internalization of logical actions. Consequently, to him the ability to discover significance and meanings in symbols becomes a sudden realization. In contrast to conventional linguistic theories, Piaget claims that children's early, playful symbols are very personal constructions. Contrary to the system of symbols which adults have collectively agreed on, play primarily fulfils individual needs.<sup>45</sup> More than anything, play is a protection against the adult world and a less conscious intellectualizing, a subjective way of thinking (assimilation). Children are pre-logical, and, according to Piaget, play is not of crucial importance in the development of children's thinking, but a way of confirming their egocentric thinking.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> "Smysl" is the Russian word which Vygotsky uses in his discussion of meaning in relation to objects and actions. It roughly corresponds to the range of notions covered by the English words "meaning", "significance", "sense" and "purpose".

<sup>44</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ragnerstam 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Elkonin, 1988. Piaget's theory is criticized for its dualism, and interpreted as a "two-world theory", where the lower world deals with the subjective and egocentric (reflected in play), and the upper one reflects the logic and reality of the social surroundings.

To Vygotsky, language and action are intertwined. Language is the tool (mediator) which interprets the world. In play, the linguistic meaning prevails and forms the focus of the dynamic relationship between idea and action which is so typical of play. Vygotsky (1978a) criticizes Piaget, amongst other things, for his approach to action as a process parallel to and independent of language.

Vygotsky regards play as a creative imaginary process, and he states this early on in his book "Imagination and Creativity in the Childhood": "... it is the most genuine and effective form of creative activity".<sup>47</sup> Play reflects the dialectic relationship between memory (reproduction) and imagination (creativity), but the most characteristic thing of play is that it is never pure reproduction, it is a creative action.<sup>48</sup>

... [Despite imitation] such elements of earlier experiences are never merely repeated in play in exactly the same form as they were experienced in reality. Play is not a simple visual picture of experienced impressions, but a creative reproduction of these, a process in which the child combines elements from these and creates a new reality which corresponds to its needs and curiosity.<sup>49</sup>

*b) The form of play is aesthetic*

In play, a dynamic meeting takes place between rules, which have been decided by meanings and behaviour in the situational action, and the desires which the child gives the form of play, where it is at liberty to try its own ability in accordance with its own will. The action when playing pirates will be decided by what is regarded as typical pirate behaviour, but the child is playing the pirate and carrying out his actions in accordance with its own feelings and capability.

The child's internal wishes are expressed in action. "Internal and external action are inseparable: imagination, interpretation, and will are internal processes in external action."<sup>50</sup> This affects the form of play, so that actions can for example be abbreviated, and when children play, one day may pass in 30 minutes, and 100 miles may be included in five steps. In "The Psychology of Art", Vygotsky provides an example of how the form of play corresponds to the imaginary process, or the aesthetic form of the fairy-tale.

First, there is the early presence of special structure required by art, which points to the fact that for the child there exists a psychological kinship between art and play ... the child very early adopts the correct structure, which is alien to reality but required by the fairy tale, so that he can concentrate on the exploits of the heroes and follow the changing images.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 24.

<sup>48</sup> Initially, play is more of a memory than imagination, Vygotsky writes in his article on play. For this reason, reading his comments about the relationship between reproduction and production in his book "Imagination and Creativity in the Childhood" is elucidating.

<sup>49</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Vygotsky 1971, p. 257.

Play has an aesthetic form, and it is largely the aesthetic emotions which influence its course. The elements of transition, exaggeration and shrinking are the same characteristic traits as in the imaginary process, along with the interest in the absurd, the improbable, pointed out by Chukovsky amongst others.

When it comes to children's creative abilities, the dramatic and the literary abilities are the most common, according to Vygotsky.

A child who sees a train for the first time will dramatize this performance. It will play the role of the engine, it bangs, whistles and tries to imitate what it has seen in a multitude of ways.<sup>52</sup>

In Vygotsky's eyes, drama is related to play. Like when playing, the child wants to visualize things, even if they appear vague and lacking in contours. The vague and obscure gains shape and becomes manageable.

Drama is linked to play more directly and more closely than any other form of art; play which is the origin of every child's creativity and includes elements from the most differing forms of art. This is partly what makes dramatization so valuable to children. It opens doors to and provides material for different sides of their creativity.<sup>53</sup>

Children can compose the text, improvise the roles and prepare the scenic accessories: scenery and costumes, which they can paint, stick on, cut out and join together.

Vygotsky emphasizes that the form of play corresponds with the artistic forms. The drama pedagogue Bolton is one of those who has observed Vygotsky's way of relating drama to play. Play and drama are fictitious actions. Bolton analyses drama in terms of internal and external actions, and it is this dialectic relationship, or inversion, he encounters in Vygotsky's description of play, when meaning prevails over objects and actions, and when, moreover, actions are charged with emotional meaning, i.e. dramatic.<sup>54</sup>

Since play creates meaning, it will not simply reflect reality on a surface level, and can never be confused with a realistic portrayal of an action. In the same way as art, Vygotsky writes, play is like a photographic negative of everyday life. The rules are not moral rules, they are rules for self-determination. This freedom of self-determination is part of the form of play. It is a strong feeling—a passion—of an ambivalent nature. "The child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player."<sup>55</sup> The form of play challenges the child's ability to dramatize as well as its creativity.

Vygotsky points out the dynamic relationship between the contents and the form of play by emphasizing the dialectic relationship between the fiction of play (contents) and the rules (form). In addition to this, play follows a certain

<sup>52</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 104.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> Bolton 1979, p. 20 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 14.

course of development: it moves from play with an overt imaginary situation and covert rules to play with overt rules and a covert imaginary situation. Consequently, there is an inverted relationship between fiction and rules. "All games with imaginary situations are simultaneously games with rules and vice versa."<sup>56</sup>

In the Soviet theory of play, the most frequent concepts are role-play and rule play, but Vygotsky does not use role-play as a concept. His definition is characterized by the dynamic relationship between fiction and rules. In this way, he describes a relationship which is dynamic both with respect to fiction-reality and to contents-form. Calling play "role-play" simply reflects the relationship between the social environment and the fiction. There is a risk that when using the concept of role (in the social sense of the word), the emphasis is placed on the imitation of stereotype adult roles instead of taking the entire fictitious frame as a starting point, investigating how people and actions are being created.<sup>57</sup>

### **Comparison between Vygotsky and Leontiev/Elkonin**

Leontiev and Elkonin set out from the material reality, which is activity related to things and objects. Elkonin's description of the development of children's play contains different stages: it moves from socially oriented actions with objects, where the action is realistic and logical behaviour, to social relationships between people and social activities, and these relationships are realistic. From initially playing with objects, the children are able to move on to play role games with their play-mates.<sup>58</sup> This means that play is a reproduction of social activities. This external reality, the objects and the real relationships, is what constitutes the objects of play, and the child's aim is to be as realistic as possible.

This social-realistic approach is clearly discernible in Leontiev's view on imagination. Imagination develops from external action; it is not a result of the meeting between internal emotions and the child's experiences. "Thus, the play activities are not determined by the imagination, but by the conditions of the immediate play activity which calls upon the imagination and makes it indispensable."<sup>59</sup> According to Leontiev, the action involving the stick is what calls forth the child's imagination, not vice versa. There is a discrepancy between the child's will (personal meaning) to ride a horse and the meaning present in the play act. The stick is still a stick. This is how imagination comes into existence.<sup>60</sup> Play is a reproduction of reality. The child is not dramatizing (as in Vygotsky's theory, in which emotion colours the action) it is simply reproducing what is typical and general.<sup>61</sup> Since consciousness and external

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> See also Rasmussen's criticism of the concept of play in his book "The Great Play" 1985.

<sup>58</sup> Elkonin 1988, p. 374-375.

<sup>59</sup> Leontiev 1982, p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

reality have a common structure, this reproduction is possible, and internal action will develop from the external action.<sup>62</sup>

According to Leontiev, children's internal conceptual world, their imagination, cannot start functioning as the basis for dramatic or imaginary play until they are at the age when they move from preschool to school. This is when play starts resembling the productive activity to which the result is essential. Instead of reproducing role actions, the child starts trying to "make a complete reproduction of the objective contents of a certain role".<sup>63</sup> Dramatic play is the transitional form preceding aesthetic activity.

Leontiev's social-realistic interpretation of play becomes even more apparent in his opinion of imaginary play. To Leontiev, the point of interest is the external action, not the children's imaginary world. Besides, he interprets the situation from the visual picture of the author, and not from the experience the children had at the time:

One example of imaginary play can be the beautiful description of a game children play in an old calash in L.N. Tolstoi: the children climb into an old, deserted calash. They take their seats and "travel" in their imagination. In this play like this, there is no action, no rules and no tasks. Nothing but the external situation—a forgotten calash—bears a witness to this activity which turned into proper play. But this is no longer play; it is a dream, an infatuation. The children are only appreciating the imaginary picture. This picture results in poignant and pleasant feelings, which in turn are intensified by the picture. The play motive has moved towards its product: the play died down and the dream was born.<sup>64</sup>

There is an obvious difference between Vygotsky's dynamic and Leontiev's realistic views on play. To Vygotsky, longing is important, whereas Leontiev if anything regards it as an obstacle for the action. Vygotsky sees no opposition between reality and imagination, but regards play as the creative interpretation process where imagination is both a prerequisite for and a result of the play action. The more experience, the better the imagination. Play is a meeting between the internal and the external, and emotion colours the interpretation to the same extent as the external reality. The internal emotion exists as a reality.

### The role of play in children's development

Vygotsky regards play as the most important source of development of thought, emotion and will.

Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Leontiev 1979, p. 131

<sup>63</sup> Leontiev 1982, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 16.



The child is expansive and challenges its own thinking in play; it "is always above [its] average age, above [its] daily behaviour; in play, it is as though [the child] were a head taller than [itself]".<sup>66</sup>

Since the child is able to create an imaginary or fictitious situation, this should be regarded as a means of developing abstract thinking, Vygotsky writes. Consequently, play is the predominant form, praxis, for preschool children, and in Soviet preschool pedagogy, play has indeed had this predominant role.

In 1933, Vygotsky held a lecture on education and development of preschool children. It contains the starting-points for the work on a preschool programme, and was written during the same period as his article on play.

For children of a preschool age (3-7), education should be "something between" spontaneous and formalized education, according to Vygotsky, who expresses himself as follows: "If the preschool child is able to do what the teacher wants it to do, then the child's situation can be explained in the following way: the child does what it wants, but it wants to do what I want it to do".<sup>67</sup> In short, this means that the child learns things to such an extent as the programme becomes its own.

Preschool children are developing the ability to generalize. Also emotions are generalized. The value of a situation is decided by its significance or meaning, and the child is creative in its actions, since it is able to move from idea to action.

A preschool programme should include general concepts of the subjects which will later be taught at school. The programme should not follow the logic of these subjects, but deal with general conceptions, as the child, according to Vygotsky, creates its own explanations and theories.

When reading the article on preschool activities, Vygotsky's approach comes across as strikingly modern, and his reflections on preschool pedagogy as equally close to the role of play in children's development, viz. that children create their own programme (meaning), that emotions and conceptions are generalized and that the child's actions are creative. Furthermore, the child has the ability to formulate its own interests and make its own choices.

### **Comparison between Vygotsky and Leontiev/Elkonin**

With respect to the importance attached to play as a pedagogic tool, there is no major difference between Vygotsky and his followers. Play has had a dominating position in Soviet preschools. On the other hand, the social-realistic approach, which has permeated the entire Soviet society, also has a firm hold on play, and the national preschool curricula have emphasized adult controlled play and the need for moral themes in play from the very beginning.<sup>68</sup> This development is in contrast to Vygotsky's theses on children's need to assert themselves and their creative imagination. In fact, his books were banned shortly after his death, which is a clear indication that his ideas were controversial.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> Vygotsky 1982, p. 91.

<sup>68</sup> Köhler 1980.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Preschool as an Institution in Modern Society and the Need for an Aesthetic Approach

The psychological theories which have formed the basis of preschool pedagogy do not seem to have regarded the concept of culture as a matter of course.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, nature and culture seem to have been engaged in a struggle. The romantic view of children's development process, i.e. the faith in self-regulation, still has a prominent position in theories of play. The dualism which I have described at the beginning of this thesis is particularly palpable when it comes to the approach preschool teachers have to modern culture and their attempts to avoid mass-medial influence. A cultural battle is being fought in schools and preschools today, Isern (1992) writes, and the teachers feel the pressure of the media and of new forms of culture. According to Drotner (1990) there seems to be a battle between different approaches to culture, but also between different generations.<sup>2</sup> There is no denying that mass-media is part of the sphere of interest of children and teenagers, but schools and preschools nevertheless try to avoid the issue altogether. Most day-care centres will not allow mass-medial toys. The validity of activities such as watching television and playing electronic games is strongly questioned. The rapidly developing media and different cultural forms which characterize our time only serves to reinforce the ambivalent approach to culture which seems to exist in preschools. As a result, the preschool comes across as obsolete and isolated from the rest of the world.

Vygotsky's cultural<sup>1</sup> historical theory describes consciousness in cultural terms, which means that the consciousness of both children and adults reflects the surrounding culture. I find that the cultural analysis developed by Thomas Ziehe (1986; 1989) provides important information on the consciousness of modern children as well as on the institutional conditions of pedagogy in a modern society.

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<sup>1</sup> Frønes 1990; Hultqvist 1990.

<sup>2</sup> See also Cohen 1972, who coined the phrase "moral panic".



## Thomas Ziehe's cultural analysis as part of the critical theory

According to Wertsch (1985a)<sup>3</sup>, Vygotsky's approach and the critical theory show certain similarities. In the same way as Vygotsky is seeking an all-embracing theory, in which the role of the individual is emphasized in relation to the surrounding culture, the critical theory is also seeking a "whole" when it unites an individualist (psychoanalytical) and a social (Marxist) perspective, whilst keeping both under critical observation.

Like many others, the German pedagogue and socialization researcher Thomas Ziehe is trying to map out and establish theories which describe how the human subject is influenced by modern trends in society. In other words, he is analysing the fate subjectivity suffers in society.

Childhood is a different matter today, Ziehe (1986) says. At the same time as an increasing subjectivity has created a growing need for intensity, the ego has become more sensitive and vulnerable. This contradiction stems from two parallel processes in the individual, viz. a "cultural detachment" and a "mental detachment".

The cultural detachment can be explained by the changes in society. The relationship to history has changed. Tradition plays a less important role. The capitalist system has resulted in an exploitation of the bourgeois culture and its traditions, or what in earlier generations used to belong to a private sphere. The result of this is that our subjects change and become "societylized", as Ziehe puts it. This cultural detachment means that the consciousness changes. Since tradition is being watered down, people start experiencing their individuality in a different way, and every one has to make their own interpretation of their current situations, since the subjects are lacking a common interpretation of life and meaning, the one which lies hidden away in tradition.

According to Ziehe, the social and cultural changes also affect the more profound personal structures. Ziehe talks about a narcissistic disturbance, when the ego is characterized by ambivalence and vulnerability. These days, the narcissistic phase has changed. Less importance is attached to family bonds and to the role of the authoritative father. Social institutions, such as preschools, now play a more important role in children's socialization process, which means that the natural liberation from the mother (or the mother figure) has not taken place. It is difficult for the child to establish its own identity. The meaning of childhood has changed radically. Children who are subjected to "secondary experiences" (through television, for example, which provides an insight into most phases of life) are forced to grow up. They are both precocious and immature at the same time. Narcissism signifies self-reflection and insecurity when faced with the ego, but at the same time, it entails a freedom to look for different ways of life in order to find an identity—a "mental detachment".

<sup>3</sup> See also Kozulin 1990, p. 190 ff., where he emphasizes Vygotsky's critical approach to dogmatic Marxist psychology.

Ziehe emphasizes the ambivalence (one of the key concepts in his theory) when he says:

... knowledge is less formalized, not so much a result of training as multifarious, pictorial and as unlimited as it is fragmentary and lacking in context. The child knows about everything before it has the chance to experience things itself.<sup>4</sup>

Ziehe's cultural concept is of cultural anthropological origin, and includes "life forms" and "life worlds"; concepts which Habermas, for one, inspired Ziehe to create. "Life world" is the interpretative background, the underlying context, which "makes sure that the link between objective, social and subjective worlds exists".<sup>5</sup> Habermas describes "life world" in relation to human communicative action. Also Hundeide (1989) uses the concept "life world", to interpret children's thinking and their actions. Hundeide represents a historical-cultural approach to children's development, and he is one of the researchers from the Nordic countries who has been inspired by Vygotsky's ideas, which shows e.g. in his criticism of Piaget's theory. Instead of interpreting children's actions on a basis of logical criteria, Hundeide uses a theatrical approach to study their ways of acting. Children play roles, and the interplay is regulated through different rules and contracts. "An internal theatre constitutes the basis for interpretation, which means that we interpret or construct our experience on the basis of these prototypes," Hundeide writes.<sup>6</sup> Referring to Vygotsky's concepts of dialogue, Hundeide claims that the origin of consciousness lies in the human dialogue.

The need to be able to interpret experiences in a meaningful context appears more and more urgent in the light of the fact that children's knowledge is fragmentary and that the amount of information is growing faster and faster with modern technology. This is, in my opinion, why children's play is particularly important in the society of today, since play can create contexts and meaning. Hundeide's description of children's life world, their actions carried out, bears obvious resemblance to my interpretation of the dramatic actions in play. Children are basically, theatrical, or dramatic, and in play they can create meaning—a conscious world.

## The critical analysis of schools and preschools as institutions

Ziehe is critical of the changes in society, but he is not a traditionalist; on the contrary, he sees in modern society a great potential for development. The cultural modernization which has emerged after the Second World War is char-

<sup>4</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 16 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas 1988, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Hundeide 1989, p. 123.

acterized by secularisation, mobility and consumerism—partly as a result of the development of capitalism—and has meant that old traditions are now less important in relation to the bourgeois culture. These changes have been described by Ziehe (1989), and he also relates them to the school as an institution. When traditions change, this means the school will change; it will lose its “aura”<sup>7</sup> and become an impersonal and administrative system. With the lack of common values and traditions, organization becomes the dominant feature. Cultural life has been rationalized, which has meant de-traditionalized but also rendered meaningless. During the 1960’s and 1970’s, a social-democratic surge of modernization swept across the continent and influenced the school, Ziehe writes, and the result was democratization, but also increased bureaucratization. Culture and economy have walked hand in hand. In the 1980’s, a neo-conservative wave of modernizations speeded up the bureaucratization by calling for rationalizations at the same time as it was trying to trace and reintroduce old traditions. The preschool experienced a “Fröbel wave” which was very probably a result of the nostalgia and the planning rage which signified the increasing bureaucratization. The wave of institutional changes carried out at the beginning of the 1990’s is an even more obvious sign.

At the same time as the institutions have lost their “aura”, they have been faced with a more and more important task in our society—that of shaping individuals. Despite their air of impersonality, they have become responsible for providing continuity and context. It is, above all, the role of the school which interests Ziehe, but in my opinion, his argument is equally applicable to the preschool.

The preschool tradition is considered obsolete by many people. Attempts to revive the Fröbel pedagogy almost come across as pathetic, and when a general attempt was made at introducing themes as a working method at the end of the 1980’s, the void became obvious.<sup>8</sup> The only known model was the one which belonged to the old preschool tradition. There did not seem to be any natural cultural content to focus on, and many people perceived modern culture as threatening. There was a general fear of chaos.

Day-care centres have often been planned without any imagination whatsoever. A typical room in a day-care centre is characterized by straight lines, large open spaces; by regularity. “There is no scope for either surprises or enthusiasm,” Andersen and Kampmann<sup>9</sup> write in their analysis of the preschool. Day-care centres are institutions where time and order prevail. This linear approach to time comes into conflict with the subjective way in which children experience time and space. The tempo is speeded up, and the children feel rushed, Rasmussen writes in his book “Time for Children and Time for Adults” (1990). This strengthens the impression that childhood has no value in itself, and that it is merely a necessary stage for moving on. “Being a child

<sup>7</sup> “Aura” is linked with the tradition created by culture; the cultural inheritance.

<sup>8</sup> Lindqvist 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Andersen & Kampmann 1990, p. 56.

means having to wait," Ziehe writes.<sup>10</sup> Children are totally dependent on the adult understanding of time.

Not only are children dependent on the adult understanding of time, they are also dependent on the adult understanding of order. "Any order which is being established is always an adult understanding of order. Its function is to serve as protection against the world of children, which, in the eyes of an adult, is characterized by a lack of order and purpose, unpredictability, anarchy and chaos," Andersen & Kampmann write.<sup>11</sup>

In his cultural analysis of a day-care centre, Ehn (1983) describes how the fear of chaos and anarchy made the staff seek refuge behind regulations and norms. The institution is a "cool world in between the over-heated family and the frosty public life."<sup>12</sup>

The above criticism can also be viewed in relation to Olofsson's (1991) and Bae's (1985) criticism of the preschool for its lack of experiences and life (cf. chapt. 2). They observed that the adults failed to see the activities from the children's point of view, which resulted in an emotional gap between adults and children. Dencik et al. (1988) present a similar picture of preschools in the book "Children's Two Worlds", where they have found that the contact between adults and children seems to be characterized by "mechanical caring". The preschool seems to be impersonal and lack "aura" to a very high extent.

## The need for an aesthetic approach in schools and preschools

How can the preschool and the school be turned into living institutions? Some critics recommend that a close relationship be created between teachers and pupils in order to counteract the feeling of impersonality. This closeness, Ziehe writes, is often a "false closeness"<sup>13</sup>, which has its basis in everyday life and not in the institutional world. This kind of closeness will not create a living relationship, but a therapeutic one, he continues. Psychologization is not the opposite of objectification; if anything, it is the other side of the same modernization process. Establishing emotional relationships with each and everyone in a preschool class is no way of neutralizing the impersonal. The institution can never turn into a home. Lost as they are when faced with modern society, these critics often base their ideas on the concept of feeling at home and on the commonplaceness which the institution is able to offer. Presumably, Schrader-Breyman's "motherliness" is still the underlying ideal.

"Intensity" is what is needed instead of "closeness", according to Ziehe. Intensity is the opposite of closeness, and can be created when children and

<sup>10</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen & Kampmann 1990, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Ehn 1983, p.52.

<sup>13</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 71 ff.

adults (teachers and pupils) meet one another in a defamiliarized form of punctate concentration. "Defamiliarization", which Vygotsky emphasized as a fundamental part of thinking, is one of the main characteristics of modernism.

Ziehe states that there is a call for an aesthetic approach, or "paradigm". In modern society, there is an expressed interest in aesthetic signs and forms of expression. Aesthetics is particularly valuable as a way for the ego to create a distance between itself and its experiences. Ziehe wishes to see a pedagogic approach, which unites consciousness and playfulness (pleasure) with solidarity. Ziehe warns that "closeness" will contribute to the destruction of everyday life. The sociability of the institutions is dissolved, and the public life becomes private. Institutions such as schools and preschools need to be interpreted as a public space—neither objectified nor made intimate. Teachers and pupils meet on a social "stage", which needs to be made aesthetic. The teacher will make the pupil eager to face the unknown. Instead of setting out from the pupil's everyday life (subjective) or from the environment (objective facts), the meeting takes place in a defamiliarized space, where there is scope for new meaning. Everyday life (and even very small children have had the time to gain a lot of experience) is being deconventionalized, which does not mean a retreat from reality, but creating new approaches and ways of dealing with the new experiences.

Teenagers of today show a keen interest in aesthetics. Music and pictures are part of everyday life, vital ingredients in their lives. Nor does teenager culture make a division between high and popular culture.<sup>14</sup> Also very young children show an interest in aesthetic signs. Dencik (1992) describes how a 5-year old child will feel at ease in the new media reality. She is able to combine television, telephone and video in an inter-linked communicative network, which she monitors in such a way that it serves her purposes of creating new experiences. Dencik writes that children of today are able to handle a chaotic reality in which they can combine curiosity and a quest for knowledge with a critical approach. They need to be able to see their reality from different angles in order to avoid believing in definite truths. They need to be creative.

Ziehe (1989) is strongly convinced that the cultural modernization could lead to "abstraction and contingency gains", which would mean new thematization opportunities, new ways of interpreting the world, new horizons of possibilities. The result would be a cultural mobility open to contexts, with scope for everyone to make their own interpretations.

The aesthetic subjects play a special role when it comes to interpreting the world in a new and different way. Art and rationalization go together, according to Ziehe. The aesthetic form is necessary for making knowledge come alive. We need something radically new and unusual to become aware and start reflecting. The aesthetic subjects are able to provide this unusual and artificial aspect—in the most positive sense of the word.

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<sup>14</sup> Fornäs 1989.

The Norwegian pedagogue Dale (1990; 1992) presents a similar demand for an aesthetic approach in schools. An aesthetic theory is needed within teacher education and pedagogy, Dale writes. Modern identity projects are connected with self-construction. This proves that it is time to dispel the myth of children's self-regulation and free development, where the social and cultural contexts are pushed to the side. According to Dale, it is vital that education provides cultural counterparts, or a kind of "product aesthetics" will take over: a mere consumption of products, which is one-dimensional and uniform. To be able to be creative, children need to be able to reflect and master aesthetic forms and codes. Quality and competence are required. Art and rational thinking go together, Dale claims, and calls for liberating pedagogy with scope for developing personal interpretations. To Dale, the basis of creativity is to be found in children's play, and he supports his theory with Vygotsky's cultural historical theory.

The general point which I wish to emphasize in connection with Vygotsky, is that children learn to act according to their will and based on their own decisions. This means, that play promote the will and creativity of the subject. Yes, they learn to play with social meaning, actions and disguises—and this is a positive feature—also in the adult life, may I add.

On the basis of such considerations, play is a source of development. I claim that play and games show decisive structures for man as a creative subject—children as well as adults. And one of the main perspectives in Vygotsky's theory, which I concur in, is that teaching should be an internal continuation of play—a source of personal development for the pupil.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dale 1992, p. 156.

## Part II The Project

## Research Method and Interpretation

### Vygotsky's method of "double stimulation"

In order to learn more about the potential of developing play towards a conscious cultural thinking, it is necessary to study complex and qualitative changing processes. According to Vygotsky, one way of conducting such a study is using a "functional method with double stimulation".<sup>1</sup> This methodology concentrates on the child's cultural development, and not on its biological maturity process, Kozulin writes.<sup>2</sup> As a contrast to a simple stimulus-response situation, this method is aiming at bringing the internal processes into the light, or "objectifying" them. This means deliberate influence or intervening in a situation in order to study how the people involved will solve different problems with new tools. This gives an indication of their potential development. Vygotsky's method should naturally be regarded as a reaction to the behaviouristic experimental psychological methods of his time (the 1930's), which merely studied simple connections and external behaviour. However, the most interesting aspects with respect to the current situation are his ideas of studying potential development and regarding research as a means of intervening, which makes didactic studies particularly well suited to research into development processes.

The education experiment has become a well-developed method within the cultural historical school of thought—a further development of Vygotsky's methodology.<sup>3</sup> The education experiment can be said to represent a form of action or intervention research, where everyday situations are systematically intervened, and an educational perspective is combined with a research perspective. In short, new methods of education are being tried within the frame of a pedagogic research programme. An example of one such study carried out in one of the Nordic countries is the Danish project "Education in Schools", in which Hedegaard (1988) has studied how pupils' thinking can be developed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vygotsky 1978, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Kozulin 1990, p. 137. In the West, the method is commonly known as "Vygotsky's block-test", a method used to study children's conceptual thinking, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> According to Markova 1982, p. 74 ff., and Davydov 1989, p. 268 ff., this method is called "education experiments".

<sup>4</sup> Hedegaard 1988, p. 89–90.



Also Malmgren & Nilsson (1993) have united education and research perspectives in their didactic research into the teaching of literature to children between the ages of 10 and 12. On a basis of general progressive pedagogic principles, they have tried different methods (contents and forms) as part of the regular teaching. The researcher and teacher have developed the methods and followed the course of the project together.

## Using a didactic project as research method

To a large extent, Vygotsky's approach became my guideline when it came to planning and organizing the play pedagogic project. Letting the project assume the form of a didactic experiment or project made it possible to deliberately try different ideas of studying the connections between children's play and creative subjects or cultural, aesthetic forms. What potential did the play have for developing? To what extent did the adults function as "mediators" in their dialogue with the children? How would it be possible for children and adults to meet in a world of play? What was the nature of the dialectic pedagogic process in the meeting between culture (the context) and the different play forms (texts)?

Being able to try out ideas under normal circumstances, i.e. at a regular day-care centre, was important. How can a creative pedagogy of play be created as part of the regular activity? Moreover, trying out different ideas, both as regards form and content, would be valuable for discovering variations and have a chance at following different pedagogic development possibilities. This is why I chose to work with *three* classes in the same day-care centre, so as to be able to compare my results and form a wider base for making interpretations and drawing conclusions.

## Method of documentation

Being *part* of the process provides a unique opportunity to follow what is happening. At the same time, this requires an ability to reconstruct the course of events and document the process itself in a comprehensive, all-round way. It is a matter of approaching the process from different angles and aspects, and keeping a distance to one's own personal interpretation.

I have chosen the following *methods* of studying the pedagogic process:

1. Videotape the *planned* dramatizations and *organized* play sequences as a basis for pedagogic interpretation and analysis.
2. Follow the general development by:
  - visiting each class regularly, keeping a journal
  - having discussions with children and adults
  - taking part in teacher-parent meetings
  - having regular contact with the head of staff.
3. Reading the project reports from the different classes.

The most important features of the project are the dramatizations and the organized play. These constitute the actual *text*, and for this reason, being able to register the authentic course of events is important. Videotaping the planned dramatizations and organized play will enable me to follow a course of event from start to finish, analyse the dialogue and action, and describe what is actually taking place. Since the data has been recorded, it means that I can keep it, review it, analyse it from different angles and let people who are not involved in the project themselves interpret the play sequences. Corsaro (1982), however, points out that the risk when videotaping is that the adults may feel that they are under observation, which could have a negative effect on the activities. In this project, however, the presence of the video camera is not much of a problem compared with the pressure of dramatizing roles before an audience. Contrariwise, both adults and children are able to watch the tapes afterwards and see what has been recorded and how they acted.

In order to form an opinion on the general activity and atmosphere in the classes, I visit regularly, afterwards making a note of conversations, summarizing my observations in a journal. This should provide me with enough material to be able to reconstruct the course of events in broad outline. In addition to this, I have regular meetings with the head of staff, who is always present at the day-care centre as an initiated, but nevertheless objective, observer of the ongoing activities. Moreover, I compare my own observations with the classes' project reports. I use a form of *triangulating* (a key concept in several handbooks on qualitative research methods) which documents the same phenomenon through different sources which approach the same thing from different angles.<sup>5</sup>

## Interpretation and analysis

Empathy and an ability to describe people and events in a genuine way are important when applying a qualitative research method.

Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the connections between play and aesthetic forms requires a qualitative interpretation of the detail and complexity of the activities. I have to make the *text*—the dramatizations and playing—come alive to be able to authentically describe the course of events to illustrate the emotions and experiences of both children and adults. This requires an "aesthetic" interpretation, which in some way reflects the form of the original text (a dramatic text is reproduced in a dramatic way) as a basis for the rational analysis. This analysis

<sup>5</sup> Holter & Kalleberg 1982; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983; Patton 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Sherman & Webb 1988, p. 7.

is made in the light of the *pedagogic principles* which I described earlier, and which have been inspired by drama pedagogues, Vygotsky's play pedagogic analysis and Ziehe's criticism of the school.

## Model for analysis

The pedagogic interpretation and analysis is based on a dialectical model and reflects the dynamic connections between play and culture:

Culture  $\leftrightarrow$  play. Consequently, in this process the interpretation is based on two different aspects: A) *an adult perspective*, and how the adults and children in the three sections together make a conscious effort to create a *playworld*, or a shared culture (context), and B) *children's play* (the text), and its connections with different cultural, aesthetic patterns.

A) What form does the pedagogic process take, when the adults create a playworld in the respective sections? What content becomes meaningful? How is the *meaning* established, or, in other words, how is a common fiction developed between children and adults? Play is a fictitious world, a fact emphasized by both drama pedagogues and play researchers. When using *playworld* as a concept, I mean the fictitious world (context) which children and adults come to share when they interpret and dramatize the theme in the classes. What does this shared world look like? In this respect, my analysis takes the general interpretation process as its starting-point instead of concentrating on the individual children and their development. Still, each individual child and adult contribute towards the common interpretation and dramatization of the theme. Do the three classes have different approaches to culture? If so, in what way does this influence their different interpretations of the playworld?

What *roles* do the *adults* play in the pedagogic process? To establish this, I examine the adults' ability to create a *dialogue* and share things with the children, their playfulness, etc. In what ways can they give life to the dramatizations and play? What roles do the *literary content* and *dramatic forms* play in the process of developing play?

What is the nature of the actual interpretation process, when the adults dramatize the theme content; in other words, what does the imaginary process or transformation process look like as the playworld and *meaning* emerge? To analyse the interpretation process, I use the same model as I used to analyse Vygotsky's approach to play earlier. How important is the *aesthetic emotion* when it comes to developing imagination in play; in what way do the *aesthetic forms* (literary, dramatic, musical, etc.) influence the play development, and in what way does *language* (the narrative) provide new possibilities for interpretation?

B) When taking *children's play* as the starting-point for my analysis, I use the drama pedagogic concepts of *world*, *action* and *character*.<sup>7</sup> I seek a link

<sup>7</sup> Lindqvist 1993.

between the pattern of play and cultural, aesthetic forms. Through interpreting and analysing both play based on typical *play actions* (such as *adventurous journeys*) and play based on different *characters*, I have found out how play develops and how important the aesthetic forms and context are to the different classes, and also how play can turn into conscious dramatizations.

## A play pedagogic project

One day at the end of January 1991, Jan Lindqvist and I arrived at the day-care centre Hybelejen in the centre of Karlstad to inform the staff about the *theme work* which would form the basis for our play pedagogic project. The main reason why we chose Hybelejen was because the head of staff, Agneta Englund, had become interested in our play pedagogic ideas when taking part in some further education courses at the University of Karlstad. Besides, there were already a couple of preschool teachers at Hybelejen who had tried working with literature and drama in minor theme projects during their training period. *Hans* had dramatized "Alfie Atkins" for very small children, and *Kristina* had had "ghosts" as a theme in one group for several weeks. Despite the fact that the earlier attempts made during training programmes had given ample proof that a deliberate pedagogy of play could influence children's play ("Alfie", for example, had inspired the children to try out the roles together with the adults, and made them take an interest in books) we were convinced that to be able to develop children's play, the cultural aspect would need to permeate the entire section. Otherwise, the theme would still not be linked with nor able to influence the rest of the activities.

For this reason, our *aim* was to suggest that we introduce an all-embracing theme, of an open nature, so that the pedagogues at the day-care centre would feel free to make their own interpretations and dramatizations of the contents, and yet have the support of the substantial theme running all through the activities.

We received a warm welcome at Freja, Valhall and Oden as we entered the day-care centre's new premises. Both the head of staff and the staff members were people who really gave life to their surroundings, but the actual premises were impersonal and could easily be confused with any other day-care centre in Sweden, and it was impossible to tell whether you were at Freja, Valhall or Oden. This made the criticism of day-nurseries as anonymous (cf. chapt. 4) seem justifiable. These premises could contain more or less any kind of activity. The kitchen and the main play room were situated next to one another, and there was a large glass pane in the partition wall. This gave the feeling that the adults could be in the kitchen and still watch over the children playing in the main room. The fact that this very "window" later came to play an important role for creating an atmosphere goes to show that it is always possible to change and give life to the surroundings.

Hybelejen is a large day-care centre. There are six classes with a total of 84 children and 35 adults. There is also a cook for each class.<sup>a</sup> The history of the day-care centre is worth mentioning. It was built at the end of the 1970's as a large "residential day-care centre" in an area called Balder.<sup>b</sup> The classes Freja, Valhall, Oden and Loke<sup>c</sup> got their names at this time. The residential day-care centre was to be run on democratic principles—small units without age segregation and set duties for staff members. Different tasks would be carried out by rotation.

Ten years later, when the premises had become too small and the organization was unwieldy, the day-care centre moved to another area called Hybelejen. It now occupies the ground floors in three tower blocks. Each class occupies a flat with a kitchen, a main play room and three smaller rooms (a paint room, a mattress room and a dolls' room). The activities are based on a model used by many other day-care centres in Sweden: theme work for a couple of days a week, and in connection with this, different activities in cross-section groups. Outings and singing songs have their own allotted times. The original four classes are extended "siblings groups" (0–6 years), whereas the two new groups will only accept babies and toddlers (0–3 years). The main reason for this is simply that most of the new arrivals are babies and toddlers.

<sup>a</sup> January 1991.

<sup>b</sup> In Scandinavian mythology, Balder was the god of light.

<sup>c</sup> Similarly, Freja was the goddess of love, Oden was the supreme god and creator, god of victory and of the dead, Loke was a mean giant who had been admitted into Valhalla, the hall in which those who had died in battle feast with Oden for eternity.

Our intention was to challenge the institution, at the same time as we made use of the opportunities provided through its alien and anonymous character. Artificial surroundings are actually very suitable for creative activities. It enables the participants to meet in the aesthetic dimension, or something defamiliarized, as Ziehe calls it. Singing songs together, reading nursery rhymes and play-acting is often easier to do in a collective, public environment than in the family. Through the theme work, we wanted to give life to the institution, to let children and adults meet in a common playworld by creating the setting and dramatizing the action together. Charging the environment with emotions would fuel and inspire the imagination of both children and adults

The theme would be based on the *form of play* (its aesthetics) and the correspondence between drama, literature and play—something which had been emphasized by both Vygotsky and drama pedagogues. Literature would provide the basic structure, and through a dialogue with the children, the adults were to bring the literature to life by assuming different roles and make use of the intrinsic dynamism between world, action and character in drama and play.

## The theme

We had sat down around the kitchen table, and Jan started explaining the theme, "Alone in the big, wide world":

“Loneliness is one of the most important existential questions, especially for small children who have to leave their parents to go to the day-care centre for hours and hours every day. Moreover, winter is the season when it always seems dark and you feel more lonely. Many people claim that providing a feeling of *security* is one of the most important preschool *aims*, but the question of how fear can be made tangible is far more challenging. Being able to feel secure means that you must be aware of the various shapes fear assumes, i.e. the ‘reverse’ of security. We want Fear to take shape and become so tangible that the children can actually meet her in one of her favourite hiding places—under the bed. One of the adults will play Fear and portray her typical traits, as she is both scared and frightening.

Fear has a brother whom no one can contact unless they whistle. This is the man in Samuel Beckett’s play ‘Act without words’. To this man, life is absurd—he is at the mercy of a world without meaning, and his steps are directed by a whistle. He is never able to reach the decanter which is lowered from the ceiling before his very eyes. We are wondering whether the children will recognize this situation? We are convinced that culture is something which concerns all ages, and that an absurd play (from an adult point of view) should be close to children’s thoughts on and experience of the inexplicable things around us. We would like to try this idea out by letting one of the preschool teachers perform ‘Act without words’ before all the children.” At this point, Jan turns to look at *Hans*, who brightens up.

“The man in ‘Act without words’ is totally alone and the world is incomprehensible. Being small and alone can also mean that you are invisible to the world around you. In Tove Jansson’s story ‘The Invisible Child’, we come to realize how important solidarity and togetherness can actually be. The Moomin family, with the kind Moominmamma and the self-absorbed Moominpappa, and Moomintroll and Little My, take care of the invisible Ninny and make her reappear. Ninny has not been treated well by the lady she was staying with. The lady has been ironical.

We thought that ‘The Invisible Child’ could be performed as a puppet show, since this is a form of theatre which enables us to quickly transport ourselves to the Moomin Valley and also technically show Ninny’s transformations. The puppets will make it possible for the children to keep a distance to the problems presented. At the same time, the adults will gain experience in playing with puppets, and the children will be able to play with the different puppets themselves. This will enlarge the existing family of dolls in the dolls’ room. Play-acting for children is a way of letting them be part of art and culture, but the adults will be the mediators. Hence, the next step is to take a joint step into the Moomin world, both children and adults together. Spring is drawing near, and moving out into the big, wide world to seek adventure and togetherness is a natural step.

‘Who will comfort Toffle?’ is another story by Tove Jansson, with a plot which is parallel to our theme’s introductory stage: Toffle is lying at home in



his bed, feeling very scared and lonely. To escape his fear, he leaves his house at dawn. But despite the fact that he feels slightly less scared, he is still unhappy and lonely. Not until he has saved Miffle from the horrible Groke does he feel strong and secure—strong, through the togetherness with Miffle.

The idea is that we try a technique in which the illustrations from the book (copied onto over-head film) are projected onto the wall with an over-head projector. In this way, children and adults will be able to dramatize scenes, try out different characters, experience the illustrations, paint, draw, dance, act and play together. The poetic story, with its illustrations and its language, will offer a vast scope for interpretation, and together, children and adults will be able to examine the different worlds. Each illustration is a world of its own.

The atmosphere in the Moomin Valley is Nordic, and when spring comes, the doors to nature open wide. This means that the day-care centre can locate a lot of its activities outdoors. Adventure awaits, with adventurous journeys of various kind. This does not have to be imaginary travelling, it could just as well be a real boat trip to one of the islets in Lake Vänern, or a train journey to Arvika.

Tove Jansson's 'The Dangerous Journey' features the perspective in reverse. To the main character Susanna, the journey becomes a way of escaping a catastrophe. A balloon comes and takes her back to safety—to Moomin Valley. The different classes will be able to build their own means of transport: a balloon, a train or a boat.

Since the day-care centre is called Hybelejen, and the area it is situated in has the same name, could this not be a reason to find out who Hybelejen really was? According to folk-tales, Hybelejen was a creative man with an unusual genius, and he is said to have been the brain behind several of the inventions and constructions in Karlstad from this time. Also the writer Selma Lagerlöf was intrigued by his fate, and she wrote about him in her book 'The Story of Gösta Berling'. There, he goes under the name of Kevenhüller and sets light to a building, amongst other things.

This mixture of fairy-tale and reality should characterize the theme work, and we want to show that imagination and reality are not opposites, but dependent on one another for their existence. The theme 'Alone in the big, wide world' should be like a weave, where the different parts are intertwined. The complexity of the literary text—*the story*—should signify the theme. This means that the aspect of loneliness should always be present in the adventurous journeys, at the same time as the individual child is naturally sociable and in search of togetherness. The theme should be characterized by the contradictions, or dialectics, in life. The different parts of the theme only succeed one another on the surface. Really, they represent different views of the same reality. The theme is a cultural world, in which children and adults can experience new things and develop their awareness of the world, which can then be expressed in play."

I am not exaggerating, when I say that the atmosphere was growing more

and more expectant as Jan proceeded with his presentation of the theme. The pedagogues at Freja wanted to start straight away, visualizing journeys in a balloon. The pedagogues at Oden wanted to dramatize Fear to see how the children would react, whereas the pedagogues working at Valhall were overwhelmed and wanted to have some time to think it all over. You could say that these spontaneous reactions to a certain extent reflected the spirit in the different classes: Freja was quite bohemian with a lot of ideas, but a lack of unity in the actual activities; at Valhall, all activities were always carefully planned and the staff had different areas of responsibility (music, painting, etc.) and the focus was placed on the formal aspect of the aesthetic subjects; and then there was Oden, where the activities were based on the children's spontaneously expressed interests and where a lot of improvisations took place, which however meant that sometimes this free form clashed with the formal structure. Furthermore, a couple of times a week, the 6-year olds from all the classes met up at Oden, which could at times disturb the normal activities.

After a long discussion, our first meeting ended by Jan and myself presenting a plan for our future participation in the theme work. Jan would supervise the staff by participating in planning meetings, whereas I would follow the activities at the day-care centre a couple of times a week. I explained that I was planning to videotape dramatizations and the organized play sequences, and that I would be happy to take part in planning meetings and teacher-parent meetings.

My first analysis of the theme work was published in 1992. It was also forwarded as a report to the National Board from Health and Welfare, which had partly financed the project.<sup>8</sup> The report "Alone in the big, wide world" was meant to serve as a basis for my discussions with the staff at Hybelejen.

Birgitta Sohlman from the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR) also took an interest in my project. She recorded the activities and produced seven 15-minute long programmes about our play pedagogic working method for Child-care TV.<sup>9</sup> This provided a unique opportunity of evaluating the project. Moreover, the films could be used in pedagogic activities. The second meeting with Moomin Valley captivated both children and adults.

The idea was to run the project for a period of 12 months. We chose to start with the classes Freja, Valhall and Oden, as they had already thematized some folk-tales ("The Wishing Pot" and "Little Red Riding-Hood") the previous autumn under the theme "The Magic World of Fairy-Tales". Consequently, for them the next step towards an all-embracing cultural theme was not such a big one.

These were the three classes which took part in the project and which I spent a couple of days a week at for the next 12 months.

In practice, what happened was that after the first six months, all six classes

<sup>8</sup> Hybelejen financed part of the project with funds allotted from the item "further education" in its normal budget.

<sup>9</sup> This was shown in spring 1993 for the first time.



were more or less engaged in the project, and after the end of the 12-month period, our play pedagogic method had become practice at Hybelejen, which has meant that our co-operation continued. We have proposed new themes, and Jan has continued to supervise dramatizations in the classes. The result is that I have been able to follow the development for quite a long time, some four years now, even if my presence at Hybelejen has not been as intensive as during that first year.

## CHAPTER 6

# Creating a Playworld

This chapter describes how the three classes Freja, Valhall and Oden develop their own *playworlds*. To a large extent, their interpretations and dramatizations of the themes depend on their attitude to culture and the working method they develop. I follow each section to show how the adults, through a constant dialogue with the children, attempt to create a mutual world of meaning—a cultural context.

In this and the following chapters, the transcription of the video-filmed dramatizations and plays have been printed in small type.

### Freja—a feeling peoples the world

At Freja, there are 14 children between the ages of 2 and 6; seven boys and seven girls. The two oldest girls are 6 years old, six children are 4–5 years old (four boys, two girls), and six children are 2–3 years old (four girls, two boys). At the beginning of the term, there were also three boys due to turn seven and about to start school in the autumn. When they left the day-care centre, the three youngest were admitted at Freja.

There are four adults, or pedagogues: *Monica, Kristina, Ingela* and, for the first month, *Karin*, who is later replaced by *Lena*. There is also *Ulla*, who works in the kitchen.

The activities at Freja are not completely co-ordinated. They include dramatization, and the section has worked with the story of “Little Red Ridinghood”, using unconventional methods. At the same time, finding a link between the activities is not always possible, and everyone seems to be doing their own thing. There are two active childminders at Freja, and they both find it difficult asserting their competence on account of the unclear structure of activities and an equally unclear distribution of tasks.

## Fear comes to Freja

One dark and chilly morning in February, Fear is lying under the bed. *Karin* has put on her pyjamas and a night-cap. She is now *Rasmus*, a boy about to go to bed.

"What if there's someone under my bed? I'm scared. Why is it so dark," *Rasmus* asks. The dramatic overture to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony can be heard in the background.

The children huddle closer together. They are sitting in a semi-circle around the bed. *Malin*, who is almost three years old, climbs into *Ulla's* lap. She does not want to look—she dares not.

"Is there anyone under my bed?" *Rasmus* whispers, and lights a torch to be able to see. He starts back and hides under his blanket, but after a while he boldly makes another attempt.

"Who are you? What are you doing under my bed?"

"I am Fear and I am frightened," says a thin voice, barely audible.

She spots the children. Some laugh uncertainly, others bite their fingers nervously.

"I'm frightened of everything"

"Who are you all?" Fear asks next. "I daren't come out, because children are quite dangerous."

This breaks the ice, and some children laugh out loud. Fear has taken the torch and shines it in her own face from underneath. Her whole face is full of spots in different colours. She is wearing a small black hat, and all her other clothes are red.

"When I get frightened, my whole face comes out in spots; red, yellow, and blue," she says.

"But you are wearing red," says *Stina*, one of the oldest girls.

"Well, I have to get used to it," says Fear. "Do you want to meet my friends? They are just as frightened as me."

She pushes forth a purple hatbox, to show the children that she has brought something with her. The children get up and cautiously move closer to Fear. The youngest children are hesitant and keep their distance. Slowly, Fear opens the box and takes out one of her friends: a small, spotted ghost—a *Frighting*. The whole box proves to be full of *Frightings*, made out of clay, and painted with spots in different colours. The children start investigating the box, and take one *Frighting* each. Fear, who has ventured out from under the bed, climbs onto it and lies down beside *Rasmus*.

"When *Jonas*, my brother, was ill with spots, I thought he was under my bed," says *Mikael*, who is three years old.

"But that was only chicken pox," says his big brother *Jonas*.

"I became a Monster and was able to frighten him," says *Mikael*, inspired by his meeting with Fear.

"Tell me what things you're frightened of." Fear gets the children talking.

"I'm not afraid of anything," *Jonas* says. "Apart from lions."

"I've got a ghost in my wardrobe," *Stina* boasts.

After a while they all sing the Fear Song. They start with *Rasmus*.

"Here comes *Rasmus*, he is frightened, ho, ho, ho. He is frightened of the darkness, ho, ho, ho ..."

Then follow songs about Ghosts, Monsters and Poisonous Snakes.

Fear leaves the day-care centre after the children have promised to look after all the *Frightings* for her until she comes back.

When Fear says good-bye, there is a major outburst of emotions. The children invade the bed, climbing both onto it and in under it, and get all the *Frightings* out. The children start playing. The atmosphere is intense, but there is no lack of purpose. *Mikael* gets into bed, sits up, looks under the bed, starts back and puts his hands over his eyes—he pretends to have been frightened. Over and over again, he tries what it

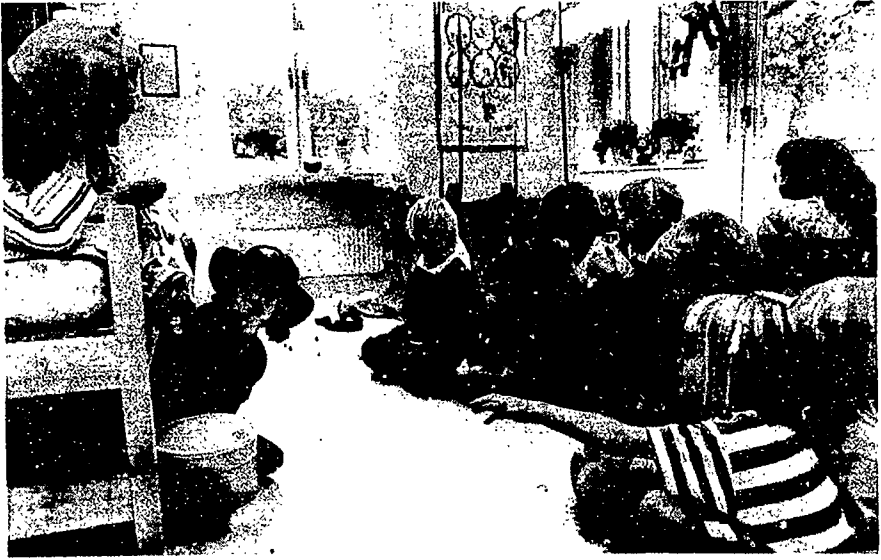


Fig. 1. Fear comes to Freja.

is like to be frightened. Some of the children have crawled in under the bed, and are shouting "Booo". Erik is trying to frighten Rasmus. Charlotte and Rebecca line the Frightings up on the table next to the bed. "Come, come, my chicks! The wolf is coming!" shouts one of the boys, while the Frightings become tenants in the playhouse where some other children are playing. Therèse and Stina are lining up an entire family behind the flower pots, before getting into the bed themselves. "Anyone without socks can play!" Kristoffer gets his slippers off quickly and becomes the baby in the family game. These activities continue until lunch time. That is almost two hours.

It is obvious that Fear brought new life to the class. Everything was a matter of fear and security. Suddenly there was intense contact between children and adults, who had all shared the same experience. When *Monica*, who had acted Fear, had changed back to her own clothes, she played with the Frightings with several children. She was very interested in seeing what the children would do with her "friends". The following day, the children made their own clay Frightings; individual creations of different shape and colour. They were allowed to live with the other Frightings in the purple hatbox. Some Frightings were used when playing with lego, others in games with cars, and some were placed on *Ulla's* extractor fan, so that she would not get lonely. Every morning, all the children were in a hurry to get to the centre to find out how the Frightings were doing.

The Frightings—the spotty ghosts—soon made new friends as the children made their own fabric ghosts. Father Ghost was hung up in the bathroom, after the children had heard the story of Little Spook. Gradually, the bathroom turned into a home for ghosts.

The children also drew things they were frightened of. These drawings were put up above Fear's bed. Secretly, the adults purchased some of the monsters the children had drawn.

One week later, Fear visited Freja again.

"I wonder if Fear's under my bed," says Rasmus, who has got into bed. It is bedtime. "Yes," Fear answers, and sounds more courageous than last time. "I recognise you all. But I will not come out (it sounds like a threat) unless you have spotty faces."

"Well, we can always make ourselves spotty," says Stina cockily. All the children fall in with the idea, and the water colours and brushes appear in no time. Rasmus and Ingela paint different coloured spots in the children's faces. Only the youngest children refuse to be painted. Fear keeps herself hidden under the bed. Suddenly, there is a wail.

"Now I've got white spots! I'm scared!"

"That's only snow," says Rasmus comfortingly. "That's not dangerous. It is winter outside, and then it sometimes snows."

"She's got a spider on her hat!" Stina has caught sight of Fear, who has come out from under the bed, but at the mention of the spider, she gets really scared and throws the hat away from her. Apart from the spider, the hat is full of flies. Erik catches the hat and puts it on. Quickly he runs to the mirror to see what he looks like. Stina runs after him and wants to try it on as well.

"Do you know why you had to have spots?" says Fear. "It's because you have to be as frightened as me." She has a threatening tone to her voice.

"Now I'll show you something," she continues and produces a new hatbox—which looks just like the one she brought last time. She opens the lid and takes out a poisonous snake. Richard, Erik and Jonas, all of them six years old, gather around the snake. Fear grows wilder. She throws skeletons around her, laughing, and now she is throwing frogs, spiders and rats all around. Finally, she picks up two dinosaurs.

"This is wonderful," she says emphatically.

"Wonderful," the children shout, and everybody gorge themselves on scary things. All the children with the exception of the two youngest ones are delighted. And when the two youngest ones are able to investigate the animals at their own initiative, they too are satisfied.

Erik tries to scare Rasmus with the green poisonous snake. Rasmus remains sitting in his bed.

"Next time I want to know what your parents are scared of," says Fear threateningly.

"But I'll stay with you for a while yet, before I have to leave."

This time, the play focuses on Fear and her monster animals. Fear tells about the dinosaurs, what they are called and what they eat. The children are very interested. They hang the skeleton from the ceiling, and sing a song about the spider. Therèse and Rebecka have made the rat a nest in a hat, and are sitting on two chairs turned upside down, singing a well-known song about a rat. They keep playing until lunch time. Fear stays for lunch and eats with the children.

### Dramatization—play

The first time Fear appears, the event is staged as a dramatization in order to establish a fiction. Fear, who is really frightened, does not dare to play with the children, and leaves after the play. The second time, the staged play turns into

spontaneous play with the monster animals Fear has brought. The third time, another day, Fear and the children meet in a common playworld, as the children invite Rasmus and Fear to a party, where they eat horribly green snakes and snakes' eggs, which the children have made from sweet bread dough. Afterwards, they build a house for the monster animals, after first having studied books on how the animals live. This is followed by a solemn ceremony during which the monster animals are baptised with water using a cloth and a bowl. Their names are Skeletor, Asta, Oscar Flyleg (with the children Buzz and Duzz), Karin and Linus Quack, Maria and Viktor Swanson (the rats), Monica and Margareta Hughes (the dinosaurs), and finally the snakes Janson and Karl.

Soon, the snakes and the other monster animals have become the children's favourites when taking a nap—virtual cuddly toys. Every day, each child selects his or her cuddly friend for the day.

### Reality and imagination

Personifying feelings is a form of theatre originating from the allegorical morality of the late Middle Ages, a kind of psychological drama, where different emotional manifestations and manifestations of the will, such as virtue, indolence, sagacity, etc., were formed.<sup>1</sup> In these plays, however, the emotions were clear-cut and had an individual set of attributes.

In the play about Fear, the emotional relationship is dynamic. What is taking shape is Rasmus' inner feeling, and there are two sides to this feeling—the personal emotion: being scared, as well as fear's external objects, i.e. all that frightens her. The play takes place on two levels: the dialogue with Rasmus, where Rasmus wants to control his fear, and the dialogue between Fear and the children, where the children play an essential part, since they are the ones who have to make her come out. The adults are the actors, but the children are encouraged to take on the role of being helpful, which enables them to share in what is happening, and to create an imaginary—or fictitious—world together with the adults. The emotional atmosphere is what gives meaning to the situation, and even the bed, which used to be a sofa and has only been turned upside-down, has been emotionally charged by Fear. For weeks afterwards, the children play in and under this emotionally charged bed.

After the first meeting with Fear, the children take care of her Frightings and protect them. Mostly, they play families with them. By identifying with Fear, and by having been assigned to look after the Frightings, the children become the Frightings' friends and "parents".

During the second meeting with Fear, when she sounds threatening, the children and Fear are able to face the monster animals together and challenge their fear. It also turns out that what the children are scared of are social notions of various threats which they all share. Most of them are scared of mon-

<sup>1</sup> Pettersson 1983.

sters, ghosts, spiders and snakes, for cultural reasons rather than individual, rational reasons. Soon we will find that the children in the other classes also follow the same cultural pattern.

By creating a playworld around the monster animals, the children are likely to realize that their fears are determined by cultural tradition. They read about the animals, take care of them and befriend them. They "humanize" both their real world and their playworld.

"Fear" could be regarded as a metaphor for the dynamic relationship which exists between imagination and reality. Inner emotion gains shape, and its individual and social sides are united in one character. At Freja, a relationship is established between the inner emotion and the outer, real world, in order to enable the imagination to develop in the same way as Vygotsky describes the imaginary process. The play about Fear speaks directly to the children's emotions, since it presents a real emotion assuming a personality. This touches the children's emotions, and it is their interpretation and imagination which carries the story forwards. Moreover, their interpretation is necessary for the play to develop. "Art is the social technique of emotion," Vygotsky writes<sup>2</sup>, and this is obvious in the play about Fear, which actually deals with emotions in more senses than one, as an emotion is being personalized. Art, or culture, is the basis for social unity at Freja. Everything plays a part in the fiction they share. The result is a creative and playful atmosphere. By shaping a fictitious world together, this world can also be populated through a joint effort. In this common imaginary world, the children are free to make individual interpretations and to play what they want. The culture is both personal and social. The very first meeting with Fear inspired the children to play intensively.

After the play about Fear, the feeling that the activities lacked co-ordination has disappeared, and a common playworld is being established.

The first time the children encountered Fear, two of the youngest children were afraid of her. They were uncertain of what the adults would do. When they were able to take part in *Monica's* transformation into Fear, and paint her face with spots, they also felt part of what was going on.

The play about Fear struck up a note at Freja, which continued to characterize everything that happened after that.

### The adults want to be part of the playworld

Fear has become a natural part of the children's playworld. It seems important to develop the fiction and let the rest of the adults play roles as well. At this point in time (the beginning of March) there is a trainee teacher at Freja. She suggests that the world of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* is introduced into the playworld; an idea which the other adults welcome. To the trainee teacher, *Pippi Longstocking* is the playful and imaginative model on whom she

<sup>2</sup> Vygotsky 1971. p. 249.



would like to base her own effort as a teacher. When she was little, Pippi was her idol.

Pippi, played by the trainee teacher, visits the class where she tells the children about herself and reads to them from the books. She also shows a film about the "turnupstuffing" so that everybody can experience Pippi's creativity both on a linguistic and a physical level.<sup>3</sup> The entire class goes out and plays turnupstuffers.

One morning they build up Pippi's home. Everybody helps out. In the middle of the room they place a table, a chair is hanging down from the ceiling and Fear's bed turns into Pippi's. It is moved to a different place and made with real sheets, a duvet and a pillow. In one corner of the room, they put a Christmas tree. The children start wondering what is going to happen. Then they are invited to the play:

#### "Pippi doesn't want to grow up"<sup>4</sup>

*Monica* has the role of narrator and opens the play by saying:

"When Pippi, Tommy and Annika were on the Canny Canny Island, we were celebrating Christmas here at home. This means they didn't get to celebrate Christmas. Now the play will start:"

Tommy (*Kristina*) and Annika (*Ingela*) are lying on two mattresses on the right.

Pippi's bed is in the middle, and her feet can be seen on her pillow. The light beam catches Tommy's and Annika's bedroom.

"It's a shame that we didn't get to celebrate Christmas," says Tommy.

"I also think it's a shame that we weren't able to celebrate Christmas, and thinking of

Pippi lying all alone in Vilekulla Cottage makes me really sad," says Annika.

"When we wake up tomorrow morning, we will hurry over to her house as soon as we can," Annika continues.

Pippi speaks:

"When they come to my place, they will have a proper Pippi Christmas with sausage and gingerbread men."

There is a knock on the door. Drowsily, Pippi sits up in her bed as Tommy and Annika enter the room. They look around and point at the Christmas tree.

"Oh Pippi," Annika says, "how lovely! But it is not Christmas any more."

"My calendar is a bit slow, you know," Pippi explains. "I will have to hand it in so that it catches up again. I have hidden your Christmas presents. You will have to find them yourselves."

Tommy and Annika get wild with joy, and run around searching for their presents.

The children in the audience are grinning, following the search closely.

Annika finds her present first, under the table. She tears off the paper.

"A necklace! How beautiful, thanks ever so much, Pippi!"

"Look! A car!" Tommy has also found his present, in the firewood box. All three dance around madly, laughing.

Three young children in the audience, who have just started at Freja, move closer to the teachers from their old class as if they wonder how the teachers at Freja can be so wild.

"Oh, if only we had some snow," Pippi sighs. "Then I could teach my horse to ski. But I can't work out whether he'd need four skis or only two."

<sup>3</sup> Edström 1992.

<sup>4</sup> From "Pippi in the South Seas" by Astrid Lindgren.



"Four, of course," Annika says knowingly. "Because he's got four legs."

Pippi gets up onto the table.

"Should we really be sitting on the table," asks Tommy as he and Annika climb up.

"We shall always have a lovely time," Annika says after a little while. "Here in Villekulla Cottage and on the Canny Canny Island and everywhere."

"Yes," Pippi agrees.

"But I don't want to grow up," says Tommy suddenly.

"Nor do I," says Annika.

"No, that's nothing to wish for," Pippi says. "Grown-ups never have any fun. All they have are boring jobs and silly clothes and nincum tax."

"It's called income tax, actually" Annika corrects her.

"Well, it's the same old rubbish anyway," Pippi answers.

"And they can't play either," says Annika. "Why do we have to grow up? I don't want to."

"I have pills which are good for those who don't want to grow up," says Pippi, and gets down off the table.

She searches for a while, and produces what looks just like normal dried yellow peas.

"But those are ordinary peas," Tommy says with surprise.

"That's what you think. These are not peas, they are squigglypills. I had them a long time ago in Rio from an old Red Indian Chief when I told him I didn't want to grow up. You have to take them in the dark and say 'I do not wish to grow up'."

"You mean grow, don't you?" Tommy says.

"If I say 'grew' I mean 'grew'. Most people say 'grow' and that is the worst thing you can do. Because then you start growing like mad."

"I daren't take any pills," says Annika in a small voice. "What if I say the wrong thing?"

"You won't say the wrong thing," says Pippi sternly.

Pippi puts out the light and borrows a match box from *Monica*. She lights a candle, and then she sits down by it with Tommy and Annika.

"Little squiggly, you are clever,

I don't want to grew up ever," they chorus.

"Now we don't have to grow up," Pippi says and switches the light on again.

"Pippi, we have to go home now," Tommy says.

"Bye, bye, Pippi," Tommy and Annika say in chorus.

They cross over to their part of the scene.

"If Pippi hadn't said that those were squigglypills, I would have thought they were ordinary dried yellow peas," Tommy says.

"Look!" Annika exclaims. "I can see Pippi at her table. She looks so lonely," Annika says with a tremor in her voice. "I wish she would look this way, so that we could wave at her."

*Monica* ends the play with the words:

"And there Pippi was, sitting all alone in Villekulla Cottage. And who is to know what she was thinking when she put the light out and went to bed with her feet on the pillow."

Meanwhile, Pippi has gone to bed.

"Are there any of you who don't want to grow up?" Tommy asks and turns to the children, offering them green peas.

"I don't!"

"Nor me!" Michael and Jonas run forwards.

"These are nice, they taste just like ordinary peas."

All the children want to taste the squigglypills.

Quickly, Richard gets into Pippi's bed, placing his feet on the pillow. He lies there for quite a while. Michael waits for his turn. Charlotte and Rebecca keep close to Pippi.

Everyone is in high spirits. After a while, several children have climbed into bed, encouraged by Therèse.  
It takes a long time before the youngest children dare try out Pippi's bed.

### The children's play

The two weeks in March, when the trainee teacher was in charge of the play theme, turned into an intensive "Pippi period". Together with the adults, the children made Pippi wigs from wool, and used these extensively when playing families. After several visits to day-care centres, Rönnerberg (1987) states that in girls' play, Pippi is the most popular fictitious character. She fits well into the family pattern, but the family structure can vary from the usual hierarchical family pattern with a mummy, a daddy and children. There can be more than one Pippi at the same time. At Freja, playing Pippi was easy because of the many wigs which reduced competition.

Pippi has many roles. She is creative and expansive, and one of her roles is that of the pirate. "Like all sailors, she longs to get back to the freedom of the big, wide world."<sup>5</sup>

The oldest boys at Freja play pirates, clearly inspired by Pippi. Richard paints a moustache, and Jonas and Erik dress up in pirates' clothes. At the end of March, they will be leaving Freja (they are moving to the after-school centre in accordance with municipal legislation) and enter the "big, wide world". To them, the events which have taken place at Freja during the spring have put things into a completely new perspective. Earlier, they were rather bored with the day-care centre, but when introduced to Fear's world, they became enthusiastic once more. Pirating fits nicely into their own world of ghosts and monsters.

### Transformations of play

Transformation, or inversion, is a key characteristic of play when new meaning is being created.

At Freja, a new world has been established with a dynamic relationship between reality and imagination, between the everyday environment and the play fiction. Vygotsky describes transformation or inversion as the special quality of play, which occurs when meaning predominates over objects and action. This is the interpretation process which characterizes the imaginary process when emotions play an important part in the creative interpretation with its characteristic exaggerations, absurdities and topsy-turvyness as a way of clarifying and giving life to reality. The meeting with Fear also produced this aesthetic emotion, which gave rise to so many different games amongst the children.

<sup>5</sup> Edström 1992, p. 91.

Schwartzman (1978) has claimed that transformation is the most significant characteristic of play for the latter to be able to assert its multiple and changeable nature, owing to its dynamic relationship with its surroundings. Context, text and transformation are the central concepts in her analysis. She criticises many theories of play for their prejudiced and static approach to play. Psychological theories rarely describe play itself; instead, they tend to describe more or less limited effects of play.

At Freja, some of Fear's traits are turned into their opposites—in Pippi's world. The bed changes places, and in it, Pippi breaks with tradition by placing her feet on the pillow. Fear's spots have become nosy little freckles, and the black hat with flies on it has been changed for two wild, orange, pointy plaits. Pippi denotes freedom and independence, someone who dares break with norms and regulations.

Pippi's world is open, generous and untidy, Edström writes (1992), and this is a world well suited to Freja's open and imaginative approach to play. With Pippi, the scenes change like in a farce or at a Theatre of the Absurd. She is particularly theatrical. At Freja, the adults deliberately use different media to develop this fiction. They read books, show films and act to inspire the children to play.

With Astrid Lindgren, the contrast between the fantastic and reality is less obvious, Edström says. She is less mystical. "Colliding with regulations and bans is what gives Pippi's imagination and *joie de vivre* its force."<sup>6</sup> She rebels against a world of regulations.

When the trainee teacher was leaving at the end of her trainee period, she invited all the children in the class to a party, where she served a cake—a large cream cake, just like in the chapter about the coffee morning in the book about Pippi. The cake is served under the table, and everybody is asked to take their seats on the floor. The youngest member of the class goes straight to the cake and digs a deep hole. The other children look horrified, and the room goes all quiet. Normally at the day-care centre, the children are used to certain table manners, and applying Pippi's rules causes a dilemma. The children are simply unable to tell what is fiction and what is reality. The presence of the character Pippi is not enough to create a fiction under the table. The children need a story-line to frame the fiction. After a short while, Pippi fetches Fear—who hardly dares to enter the kitchen—and when there is a dialogue between Pippi and Fear, the children can share in the play as well.

### Showing solidarity with the children

Through Pippi and her not wanting "to grew up" the adults have shown that they side with the children—the same feeling of solidarity as with Fear. Pippi is concerned with children as opposed to adults, and according to Edström, she

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<sup>6</sup> Edström 1992, p. 96.

symbolises the joyful, independent side of humankind on the whole.<sup>7</sup> Lars Bäckström (1991) calls her an aesthete. She represents unfettered imagination and she has a productive personality.

In Astrid Lindgren's books there is an element of opposition between the world of children and that of adults, Rönnberg (1987) writes, but it is not antagonistic as Lindgren communicates across generation borders. Pippi is searching for freedom to conquer loneliness, which is a fate worse than death, and this freedom entails freedom to speak one's mind and freedom from the tyranny of traditional male/female roles. Bäckström also thinks that Pippi would make a good role model for the liberation of children and women. She makes them discover the world, she is generous, and what is more, she is not terribly fussy about what she is wearing, which is an even more important aspect today than forty years ago, when the book was published. Pippi is a counterweight to the "consumerism" of today.

The pedagogic debate around Pippi is probably best known for John Landqvist's nowadays notorious review (1946), where he described Pippi as "something nasty pawing on one's soul".<sup>8</sup>

At Freja, it is clear that the adults have Pippi as a role model, and children and adults meet in Pippi's world, which portrays the world of play as the wishful dream in which children are able to defy adult authority, use their sense of humour to create an existence and, just like Pippi, also rule over time, space and relations, with imagination focused on the future.<sup>9</sup>

## Valhall—the world is a stage

The class called Valhall is situated in the same building as Freja. This has meant that the two classes have had the same theme during the autumn term: The Enchanted World of Fairy-Tales.

There are 15 children at Valhall: a fairly well-balanced group considering age and sex. Six children are 6 years old (three boys, three girls), and one of the girls will soon turn 7 and start school; five children are 4–5 years old (three boys, two girls); and four children 2–3 years old (two boys, two girls).

There are 5 pedagogues at Valhall: *Majlis*, *Ann-Charlotte*, *Kristina*, and finally *Annelie* and *Carina*, who are sharing one position. Moreover, there is *Inger*, who is working in the kitchen.

At Valhall, the adults make a conscious effort to use different creative techniques. When the story "The Wishing Pot" was the theme during the autumn, some of the older children performed a play before the rest of the group, while the younger ones made finger puppets out of plaster in the shape of the animals

<sup>7</sup> Edström 1992, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> John Landqvist's review in the evening paper *Aftonbladet* 1946.

<sup>9</sup> Lundqvist 1979.

the children later dressed up as. Everybody helped make a huge "wishing pot", which was painted and adorned with "precious stones". They used a flannel-graph to tell the story, a common narrative method at Hybeiejen. At this moment in time, they read a new poem from a book of children's poetry every day. The children are often divided into cross-section groups to work with a theme.

Preparing the theme "Alone in the big, wide world" made the staff at Valhall spend some time thinking about how loneliness could be portrayed. They were concerned that they might scare the children, and therefore chose to dramatize the book "Lisen Can't Sleep" by Kaj Beckman in order to portray a situation which every child should be able to recognise.

### "Lisen can't sleep"

"Silence, please," one of the children says spontaneously when everyone has sat down in a semi-circle around Lisen's bed. Just like at Freja, the sofa at Valhall has been turned into a bed.

*Carina* speaks up: It is now evening, and Lisen is about to go to bed. She has had a wash, brushed her teeth and gone to the toilet. Her mother has been helping her.

"Lisen!" *Carina* calls, and the children can hear two voices from the corridor. It is Lisen, played by *Kristina*, in a nightie and with her hair in a ponytail, and her mother, played by *Majlis*.

"I'm not tired," Lisen says. "Do I have to go to bed although I'm not tired?"

"You must get to bed now. You need to sleep," her mother replies in a firm voice.

"I want some water, I'm so thirsty," Lisen pleads.

"I need to go to the toilet," she continues.

"You have just been to the toilet, and brushed your teeth. Now I will go into the kitchen and do the washing up, and you will be quiet and try to go to sleep."

"I need to go to the toilet," Lisen complains. She is now lying in her bed.

The children laugh and look at one another. The older girls look both embarrassed and delighted at the same time.

"Mummy! I can't sleep, I want my doll," says Lisen.

"Then you'll have to fetch your doll," her mother answers from the kitchen.

"Shall I go and get it myself?" Lisen asks, surprised. She gets up and walks over to a chair where her doll is lying. Then she places the doll on the pillow.

"Good night," says Lisen to the children. Everyone giggles.

"Mummy! Dolly and I can't sleep without Teddy."

"Then go and fetch Teddy," her mother says calmly.

"Do you know where Teddy is?" Lisen asks the children.

"If you can't find Teddy, you will have to take another toy," her mother says from the kitchen.

Lisen gets out of bed one more time and fetches Teddy.

"Mummy! Dolly and I and Teddy can't sleep without my lamb. Couldn't you fetch that?" Lisen asks imploringly.

"OK, I will give you your lamb, but then you have to go to sleep," her mother says with determination.

"Mummy, I can't sleep without my lion."

"You will have to get you lion yourself."

"You can sleep there," Lisen says. "Good night! Good night!" All the children roar with laughter.

"My bed is so crowded. There's me and my doll and my teddy and none of us can sleep—not without the ball," Lisen continues.

"Well, that will really make it so crowded that you won't be able to sleep at all," her mother replies and comes in from the kitchen.

"But what about my cat?" Lisen goes on and on. "Is it like this when you go to bed?" Lisen turns to one of the children. "No," they all answer, confidently. "Take Pippi," one of the children suggests.

"I can't sleep without Pippi, can I get her as well?" The children have encouraged Lisen. "And can I have her monkey as well? And another doll?"

"Where can I go then?" Lisen mumbles to herself and gets into the bottom of the bed. Everybody laughs at her.

"Mummy! I can't sleep because the monkey and the cat and the lion and the lamb and I can't all fit in. It's too crowded."

Lisen's mother comes into her room and moves the cuddly toys.

"If I close my eyes, I see scary things," Lisen explains. "Then I need all the animals with me."

"But it is too crowded," says Lisen's mother. "Don't you want me to remove some of the animals?"

"Maybe I only want the cat," Lisen says hesitantly.

"Do you want me to remove the other ones?" Lisen's mother asks one more time.

"If you want to, you can have my dog," says Emil and hugs the dog tightly.

"God night," Lisen says and puts her head on her pillow.

"What happens when you can't sleep?" *Carina* asks after the play has ended.

"If I need to go to the toilet, I get up myself," says Emil as if this was something obvious ...

"And if you dream something scary?"

"Then I go in to my mummy," one of the girls says with equal confidence.

"Do you have cuddly toys in your beds?" asks *Kristina* who has just played Lisen.

"Yes," the children answer unanimously. After all, it was their toys who had been starring in the play.

The discussion continues for a while. Being frightened when you are going to bed is not considered a delicate issue at the day-care centre.

"Maybe you'll see a skeleton," says Adam suddenly to create an effect. "That'll make you feel like jelly".

After a while, *Ann-Charlotte* takes out a large roll of paper, and everybody gathers around it to draw one large picture of the things they are frightened of. After the children have been drawing for a while, they start taking an interest in their own drawings, which seems to trigger their imagination. "Crocodiles are dangerous," says Erik. "This witch is not dangerous," Emil answers. "She can't turn people into things, but she can frighten my mum."

Two days later, Fear comes to visit the class. *Majlis* has dressed in green, painted her face green and put on a winter hat with flaps over the ears. She greets the children. This time, the youngest ones look confused. Fear is scared of loud noises. Gustav tries a little squeak, and Fear quickly pulls the flaps over her ears. *Kristina* suggests that Fear can stay under the bed. The children bring her a quilt, a blanket and a telephone. "You must have a phone so you can call if you get too lonely," says Joel. Fear tries her hide-out, and soon all children want to join her under the bed. It gets very crowded, and most of them come out very soon. The whole group goes over to the mattress room, which is full

of mattresses, pillows and cushions, and play wild animals. Most of them are tigers and sharpen their claws.

Fear comes back one week later, and this time the children paint their faces green, like Fear's, and everybody dances the ghost dance.

### Child play and adult playfulness

Fear's visit mainly served to inspire the children to paint themselves and dress up to play different things—ghosts, for example. The bed in which Lisen had tried to go to sleep and under which Fear had her hide-out was not charged with any particular magic, and after a few weeks it turned back into a sofa. The children spent a lot of time drawing and making their own ghosts.

At Valhall the children were introduced to the theme through a dramatization of a literary text, "Lisen Can't Sleep".

When it comes to theatre performances for children, one of the most important issues must be the relationship between the actors and the audience. How is the audience affected by what happens on stage? In what way is it involved in the chain of events? According to Boal and his liberating theatre, the role of spectator is something we should be liberated from. "The audience must be liberated from their roles of spectators; from the main form of oppression within the world of theatre," Boal writes.<sup>10</sup> And in her book "Theatre for children", Hagnell (1983) writes that there are several ways of initiating communication between actors and audience. It can be achieved through anything from direct questions to letting the children take active part in the play, allowing them to influence the chain of events. However, Hagnell points out that as often as not, these methods of communication have no real function, but are only there for effect.

At the day-care centre on the other hand, there is a unique possibility of achieving a genuine dialogue between adults and children. This opinion is also held by Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad, and expressed in their book "Drama in the child-care centre" (1992). They state that "interaction theatre" enables the staff at centres to establish a genuine dialogue, which allows the children to take part as co-producers.<sup>11</sup> My personal experience is also that when staff members at a day-care centre stage a play, they also create a very special atmosphere. It is as if the children wanted to say: "To think that our teachers are acting to entertain us". Moreover, the borders between stage and audience can be physically removed. Different rooms are used and transformed into different stage settings. Just like when playing, the transformation takes place here and now, in the existing surroundings.<sup>12</sup>

What happened in the play about "Lisen"? The adults wanted to create a feeling of what it is like when you are little and have to go to bed, although you

<sup>10</sup> Boal 1979, p. 176.

<sup>11</sup> Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad 1992, p. 245.

<sup>12</sup> Reminiscent of Slade's ideas.



do not want to be alone. However, the play did not provide this experience of feeling lonely and afraid. Instead, the focus was on the humoristic aspect of the play: imagine wanting to have so many cuddly toys in your bed that there is no room for yourself, and imagine behaving like that in front of your mother.

The play does not induce the shared fiction the adults were hoping for, and the course of events is not the same as it was at Freja, where the play about Fear developed from the dialogue between the children and the adults. But what does happen in the play about Lisen is that *Kristina* establishes a personal contact with the children. She has a spontaneous dialogue with them in her role as Lisen, who dares challenge the authority (her mother), and who even invites the children's cuddly toys to take part in the play. Acting a role creates an atmosphere of playfulness and establishes a special contact with the children.

When the play is over, everybody returns to the normal everyday activities, but it is obvious that the children are now aware that the adults have a playful streak, which will soon grow, as everybody visits the Moomin world together.

### The road to Moomin Valley

The first encounter with the Moomin family takes place when the adults perform "The Invisible Child" as a puppet show.<sup>13</sup> "The Invisible Child" is one of the stories in "Tales from Moomin Valley". This is one of Tove Jansson's many books about the Moomin world. "The Invisible Child" will be performed before all classes, and all the adults will have a role to play. They all take part in the preparations by making puppets and side-scenes. Too-ticky and Little My were made at Valhall. Little My was made as a rod puppet, to emphasise her vitality. The Moomin family was made from cheap sports socks, stuffed with cotton wool and shaped. The main character, the invisible Ninny, was produced in five versions, showing different stages of visibility. The first four versions were wire constructions, where the first one was equipped with a small bell, the second with paws and a bell, the third with paws, legs and the hem of a dress, and the fourth one with a dress and a bow for the hair. The last version was a proper rod puppet, showing her real self, a cheeky girl in a red dress.

The rehearsals take a few weeks. They are quite hard work, as everyone has to share the small space which is confined to about two yards between the background and the mattress which has been put up in front. No one has much experience of puppet theatre and the indirect co-operation which is necessary between the actors.

The children at Valhall have been wondering what's up. The adults have been preparing and rehearsing without telling the children what is going to happen. When the children are invited to the puppet show, they go along ex-

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<sup>13</sup> Jan is the one who has adapted the text for the puppet theatre.



pectantly and with curiosity. With tickets in their hands, they sit down in the narrow corridor which faces the stage. A whole world opens up before their very eyes, as the spotlight lights up.

## At theatre Valhall: "The invisible child"

### Scene 1: In the kitchen

Moominmamma comes into the kitchen and starts pottering by the stove. Soon after her comes Moomintroll.

"Good morning, Mamma. Where is Pappa?"

"He is out picking mushrooms with Little My," Moominmamma answers.

"Mamma, you know what? I think today will be a very special day. Last night I dreamt that a large Hemulen came towards me and said in a booming voice: from nothing everything shall come, as long as there is anger."

The children sit all quiet and amazed.

Moominpappa comes in through the door.

"Mushrooms, mushrooms, rotten ones and other ones," he sings.

Some children recognise the watch strap on the arm. It is their own *Ann-Charlotte* who is playing Moominpappa!

"Oh, good, put them on the newspaper on the breakfast table," Moominmamma says.

"This year, Little My has been picking flybane," Moominpappa says.

"Let's hope she goes for chantarelles next year," Moominmamma replies. Little My shows up on the stage.

"Did you know that flybane is fatally poisonous—but fatally beautiful?" She advances threateningly on Moomintroll.

The children laugh.

There is a knock on the door, and Too-ticki enters.

"Come on," she says, but no one can be seen behind her.

"Who have you brought with you?" asks Moomintroll.

"It's Ninny. The child's name is Ninny. Oh well, she can stay out there if she is shy."

"But won't she be cold?" Moominmamma asks.

"I don't know if that matters an awful lot when you are invisible," Too-ticki answers.

"You see, this Ninny was frightened the wrong way by a lady. She pretended that Ninny didn't exist. In the end, you couldn't see her any more. She became invisible."

"Does she talk?" Moominpappa asks.

"No, but the lady hung a bell around her neck so that you can hear where she is."

Ninny comes in through the door, and the bell shows.

"Come on, Ninny, here's your new family. They're a bit silly at times, but rather decent, largely speaking. Now I have a few other things to attend to. Bye for now."

"Let's eat," says Moominmamma. "Tuck in!"

"Exciting," Little My says. "I hope she'll eat something. I'd like to see what it looks like when it goes down into her stomach."

"What shall we do to make her visible again," Moominpappa wonders. "Should we go and see a doctor?"

"I don't think so," Moominmamma says. "Maybe she wants to be invisible for a while."

"Ninny has got paws," Moomintroll exclaims all of a sudden.

"Splendid! And better still when she shows her snout. It makes me feel sad somehow, talking to people who are invisible and who never answer me," says Moominpappa.

"When are you going to show your snout? You must look a fright if you've wanted to be invisible," Little My stands closer to Ninny.

The children laugh at Little My.

"Shut up," Moomintroll whispers to Little My. "She'll be hurt. Never mind My. She's hardboiled. You are really safe here among us. You mustn't think about that horrid lady. She can't come here and take you away."

Ninny's paws disappear.

"Darling, you're an ass," says Moominmamma. "Surely you understand that you shouldn't remind Ninny of all that."

The paws reappear, together with a pair of legs and the hem of a dress.

Each time Ninny changes shape, the transformation is accentuated by the sound of a xylophone.

"I can see her legs," Moomintroll shouts.

"Congratulations! Not bad! Not bad!" says Little My. Moominmamma goes up to Ninny.

"Come here, Ninny, I'll give you a present."

Both Moominmamma and Ninny disappear through the door, but Moominmamma soon returns.

"What have you given the kid?" Moominpappa asks.

"A doll?" Moomintroll guesses.

"A pirate's gun!" Little My exclaims, appearing again on the stage.

The children are delighted.

Ninny reappears, wearing a dress and visible all the way up to her neck.

"Thanks ever so much," she pipes:

"We're happy that we see more of Ninny today. The more we see, the happier we are," Moominpappa chuckles.

"Fine that you're showing and have started talking." Little My dances around. "If you have anything to say! Do you know any good games?"

"No, but I've heard that there are those who play games," Ninny pipes.

"Let's play 'who jumps the highest'!" Little My and Moomintroll both jump.

"Can't you jump?" Little My asks. Ninny jumps dutifully, but then she stands still again, looking sad.

"Are you expecting us to praise you? Is there no life in you? Do you want a biff on the nose?"

"Rather not," Ninny pipes.

The children are over the moon.

"She can't play," Moomintroll says.

"She can't even be angry. Believe me, you will never have a face of your own until you've learnt to fight," says Little My.

"I believe you," Ninny pipes.

"Don't you know any funny stories, Little My?" Moomintroll asks.

"Two tomatoes were out walking along a road with loads of cars. Swish." Little My has gone wild and waves her arms about and knocks Moomintroll over.

The children shout with laughter.

"One of the tomatoes gets run over," Little My continues. "Then the other tomato says: Come on, ketchup, let's go."

The children are very amused by the story. Some of them have heard it before.

"Come on, all, we have to go and pull the boat ashore," Moominpappa says, and they all file out from the stage.

The children rise and point at the puppets. Look! That is Little My!

## Scene 2: At the beach

All the puppets are walking along the beach.

"Little My," the children shout again.

"Talk!" one child cries eagerly.

Ninny lies down in the sand with a wail.

"What's come over Ninny," Moominpappa asks. "Is something frightening her?"

"Perhaps she hasn't seen the sea before," Moominmamma answers and bends down over Ninny. "No, this is the first time. Ninny thinks the sea's too big."

"Of all the silly kids," Little My says.

"Now, don't be a silly kid yourself," says Moominmamma sternly.

Too-ticki shows up.

"Hello, how's the invisible child doing?"

"There is only her snout left. She is a bit excited at the moment, but that'll soon pass.

Could you lend a hand with the boat a moment?" Moominpappa asks.

Too-ticki and Moominpappa pull and tug: Oh-ooop, oh-ooop.

Moominmamma sits down on the jetty and looks down into the water. If only something exciting would happen!

Moominpappa makes a face, and starts sneaking up on Moominmamma from behind.

Ninny flies across the jetty and buries her teeth in Moominpappa's tail. Moominpappa lets out a scream and drops his hat into the water.

"Hurrah! Well done!" Little My cries. "I couldn't have done it better myself!"

"Little My! Look, it's Little My!" the children exclaim with pride.

Ninny—who now has a small, snub-nosed, angry face—shouts:

"Don't you dare push her into that big, horrible sea!"

Moomintroll has seen Ninny.

"I can see her, I can see her! She is sweet!"

"She is the silliest, nastiest, most badly brought up child I've ever seen, with or without a head;" Moominpappa says and lies down on the jetty. He tries to fish his hat out of the water with his stick, but slips and falls head first into the sea. He turns himself around at once, standing with his feet on the bottom and his snout above the water.

Ninny shouts with joy:

"Oh dear, how funny, how great!" She laughs loudly.

"I believe she has never laughed before," Too-ticki says wonderingly. "I think you've changed Ninny. She is even worse than Little My. But the main thing is, of course, that we can see her."

Moomintroll and Too-ticki pull Moominpappa out of the water.

"Just imagine, my dream did come true. This is a very special day—isn't it, Mamma?"

Moomintroll says and sings:

"You can hear what someone sees. You can feel what someone hears. You can reach out your hand to a friend and get closer together."

The other puppets join in the singing, one after another, and after the chorus, the children also join in.

"Now I want to see!" The children rush forwards, eagerly. The mattress, which is in the way, is removed. Moominpappa greets the children. Little My challenges them.

"Can you jump as high as I can?" she asks Carl. He jumps as high as he can. Then Caroline borrows the My-puppet, and lets her jump, jumping herself at the same time. Oskar and Gustav sit by the xylophone and play a duet. They keep playing for a long time. All the children try the puppets on their hands, to see what they feel like. Everyone is very interested.

After a while, two of the oldest girls go into the mattress room and start arranging the mattresses as stages, inspired by what they have just seen. Then they play royalty, and take their dogs for a walk.

Annie, who has just turned two, is spell-bound by the spotlight. She lights a lamp, points it at herself, and sings "Baa, baa black sheep" with enthusiasm in the dolls' room.

Later, at lunch time, there is one plate too many at one of the tables. Adam quickly welcomes the invisible child, gives her a chair of her own and feeds her solemnly with a banana. Ninny has been given her own place amongst the children.

## Little My—the children's favourite

In "The Invisible Child", loneliness and fear are the obstacles preventing joint adventures. Fear paralyzes Ninny—she cries out when she sees the sea. Feeling that someone cares about you is vital to be able to feel that you exist. When Ninny comes to the Moomin family, her fear gradually changes, and she becomes more and more visible as a result of their friendliness, which enables her to show her real self.

In the puppet show, the adults have assumed the roles of the Moomins, hereby showing solidarity with the invisible child. They show that they care about those who are small and scared. But it is obvious that the one who fascinates the children the most is Little My. She is the one who dares challenge authorities, and she wants others to be like her. First you must be able to be angry, before you can move on to being happy. This is the case with Ninny, who becomes visible when she bites Moominpappa in the tail. My has shown Ninny the way, and she is the children's favourite, just as Bäckström writes in an article on "The Super Children", where he, amongst other things, compares Pippi Longstocking and Little My. Pippi and Little My are model characters, who are really working on abolishing their own idolised status. Contrary to Pippi, Little My is spiritually super-strong. She is angry and happy and in control of the situation. Tove Jansson is supposed to have said that she likes My the best of all the characters she has created. She is a creative person, with the soul of an artist, and her art is to say the right thing to anyone who needs it.<sup>14</sup> Once again, *Kristina*, who acted My at Valhall, becomes a symbol of rebellion and playfulness, just as she did when she played "Lisen", and it is clear that this is what the children like.

## Puppet theatre and children's play

At Valhall, stick puppets are often used when playing theatre. The children sit behind armchairs and play. The girls immediately found use for the mattress, which was used in the play about "The Invisible Child", in their games.

Puppet theatre is closely linked with children's play with dolls, and their ability to give the dolls life. Puppet theatre creates both an intimate closeness to the role, as well as distance. Theatre puppets are not very common in pre-schools, according to the Norwegian play researcher Brit Paulsen (1984). When puppets are used, their main function is to attract the children's attention and to enhance concentration at circle time. The puppet takes on the role as a moral watch dog. When the children use puppets themselves, they rarely get past the "Good morning" stage or the fights, which usually results in the adults taking the puppets away. A selection of character puppets is a rare thing.

At Valhall, everyone is interested in puppet theatre, but at this stage, after the first meeting with the Moomin family, the children are mainly interested in the

<sup>14</sup> Bäckström 1991, p. 43-45



Fig. 2. Playing with Moomin-puppets.

My-puppet, the rod puppet who can box someone on the snout and wave her arms about. It took some time before the children started using puppets when playing, but when it happened, there was a veritable explosion of puppet play. This is, however, another story, which I have reason to come back to at a later stage.

### Tove Jansson's Moomin world

The Moomin world is Tove Jansson's creation. We are able to follow the life and the changes in the Moomin Valley from the first book, "The Small Trolls and the Large Flooding" (1945)<sup>15</sup> to the ninth book, "Moomin Valley in November" (1971). Tove Jansson's production also includes the picture books: "Moomin, Mymble and Little My?" (1953), "Who will comfort Toffle?" (1960) and "The Dangerous Journey" (1978).

The main theme in her writing is the irresistible urge to travel and seek adventures, but also the fear of catastrophes and the longing for security—a contrast between adventure and security; the same basic theme which is so common in children's play.<sup>16</sup>

Fear is something which cannot be avoided. Tove Jansson herself has said: "I think there is an element of fear in every honest book for children".<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This book is not translated into English.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Garvey 1977.

<sup>17</sup> These were Tove Jansson's words, as she accepted the H.C. Andersson medal in 1966.

The Moomin world can be viewed as an allegory of the adventures of life, with imaginary characters as actors. It is a comprehensive and complex world, populated by a number of characters which stick to their own life philosophies at the same time as they reflect us ordinary people right in the middle of our lives. Most are kind, and more or less meddling and self-centred, but there is one threat personified in Groke, who in the end proves to be the most lonesome character of them all.

Tove Jansson is both a visual artist and an author, and there is a very intimate relationship between the text and the illustrations in her books. In "Who will comfort Toffle?", there is a tension between the text and the illustrations, which invites people to make dramatizations. The illustrations look like scenes, mainly because they create tension instead of depicting the action, and the action is to be found in the poetic text, with its melodious verses and refrains which follow folklore traditions.<sup>18</sup>

### Who will comfort Toffle?

There is more than one reason for introducing the children at the day-care centre to the Moomin world. The theme "Alone in the big, wide world" is also the fundamental theme in "Who will comfort Toffle?": the contrast between safety and adventure, which develops as the characters and scenes change. When we meet Toffle, he is related to Fear. Toffle is lying alone in his bed, huddling under his quilt because he is afraid. He can hear Groke howling. The next morning, he runs off into the mist and starts wandering. He meets whistling Fillyjonks and several Whompses, but he is lonely. He knows no one. In the evening, he is sitting on his suitcase, tired and sad, when he can hear music: "Snufkin played his silver flute down in a sleepy bay". He continues walking further to the west, and finds a happy Hemulen with his guests. This is how the story about Toffle begins.

One day, Lisen comes back with a book under her arm. It is "Who will comfort Toffle?". But Lisen can't read, so she wants Fear to help her. She calls for Fear, but then the children start protesting, saying: "You can't call someone who is afraid of loud noises". Instead, some of the children go and fetch Fear, and a cosy reading corner with a real lit candle is created in the mattress room. The mattress room becomes Toffle's room, and the following day, everyone enters the world of the book. Some of the pictures from the book have been copied onto overhead film and are projected onto the walls. Every picture is one scene, and the children enter each and everyone. What does it feel like, being Toffle, lying in the bed? What does it feel like being Snufkins, playing in a sleepy bay, or simply resting in the grass. The children try it out, and lie down to the tones of Grieg's "Morning Mood". What does it feel like being a Fillyjonk? The children get closer and closer to the characters in the book.

<sup>18</sup> Kruskopf 1992, p. 204.

Peter Lundblad has composed music to "Who will comfort Toffle?", and the children like listening to his music. It is highly atmospheric, and inspires the children to venture forth into the pictorial world. One day, they create their own overhead pictures, and record sounds to go with each picture. The overhead projector also invites the children to make shadow-pictures on the wall.

When Toffle has reached the Hemulen's happy party, then they are ready to invite him to Valhall.

To see Hemulen sitting lighting fireworks on the floor!  
With flowers in their tails and to the music of the band,  
A crowd of laughing Moomins danced so gaily hand-in-hand,  
And thirteen chubby Whompsees, who were holding red balloons,  
Sat riding on a roundabout and chewing macaroons.  
Hemulen had a large iced-cake (from which he'd had a bite)  
But no one noticed Toffle standing outside in the night.

### Enter, Toffle, and join Valhall's fun-fair party

One day, visitors to the class are met by a colour explosion, with coloured paper lamps, yellow, blue and green balloons, and colourful garlands. Expectant children are running around excitedly. The older girls are wearing full dresses and have been made up with grease paint. They have ribbons in their hair, and earrings in different colours. Everybody, both the children and the adults, are dressed up in embroidered waistcoats, wide-brimmed hats and caps, and there is a Harlequin. The Harlequin is *Kristina*, all dressed up.

In an instant, the room fills up with dancing and fun-fair music.

"If you're happy and green,  
if you're King or a Queen,  
if you are old and grey  
you need fun, now today  
...  
fly away on the swings, fly away!"

The Valhall variety scene is standing in a corner.

"Welcome to the show!" Harlequin attracts the bystanders' attention.

"Come and behold Ivor Ironarm and his companion!"

Adam and Joel are wearing shorts and vests, and both have painted moustaches. Elegantly, they lift the weights high in the air, first using two hands, then only one. There are also real weights, which they manage to lift a couple of inches.

The audience is invited to try their strength. Finally, *Majlis* goes up and makes a much-applauded appearance. Since the play about "The Invisible Child", *Majlis* has been everybody's Moominmamma.

Popcorn are being served at one of the tables, next to a lottery stand. A large basket has been made into a cart, which Harlequin is pulling. Adam and Joel have the first go. To everyone's amusement, the cart topples over. When Gustav has been riding for a while, he is still reluctant to leave the cart, and remains sitting in it for a long time with a dreamy look on his face. There is an air of festivity in the section.

Suddenly, the children seem distracted. A figure has been sighted outside the window. It is someone wearing a light overcoat and a black hat.



"It is probably Toffle," *Caroline* says. In the end, *Majlis* goes up and opens the balcony door, and now everyone can see Toffle.

"I say, come on in, come on in", says *Majlis*.

But Toffle is shy, and looks around uneasily. There are so many children! Then he sees that the children are holding bags of popcorn and says:

"You have so much popcorn, are you really allowed to eat popcorn?"

The children have gathered around Toffle.

"Do you want popcorn? Do you want a lottery ticket? Look, we've got great prizes!"

They are all as eager to show Toffle all there is to see at their fun-fair. Adam is standing behind Toffle.

"Hey, you," he says loudly, "we have a book about you. Do you want to read it?"

"Yes, I'd love to," Toffle replies, and book in hand, they all sit down on the floor to have a look. They find the fun-fair scene.

"Have you got balloons as well?" Toffle asks. "Do you have any roundabouts?" He compares the illustration with the day-care centre.

"I'd love to have a go in a cart," Toffle says. Gustav has to leave his seat in the cart, and now both Harlequin and Ivor Ironarm are needed to pull it. Joel pushes from behind. It is hard work, but they manage to pull the cart a whole lap around the room.

"This is the most fun I've ever had," Toffle says. "It's great being at the fun-fair!"

"This is where you can throw balls into a bucket!" *Ann-Charlotte* calls out, and the young children gather around the bucket. Everyone is in high spirits. *Majlis* starts serving iced cake.

"We are serving iced cake at Toffle's fun-fair," she cries in a loud voice. "Lovely, white iced cake."

Adam, Joel, Annie and Emil run over and form a queue.

Toffle tries the roundabout.

"Who wants a go," he asks, and tries to spin the umbrella. Carl wants a go. Together, they set the coloured ribbons, which have been tied to the umbrella, swirling merrily. Nicole is responsible for the lottery, and she is uncompromisingly scrupulous. She is the eldest of all the children, and keeps a check on money and prizes.

Fun-fair pop is now being served by *Majlis*, the Moominmamma.

"Toffle hasn't seen the dance. You will have to do your dance to show Toffle!"

The older girls prepare for the dance. Two and two they dance to the fun-fair music, twisting and twirling. Soon, everybody is dancing. Toffle is holding Carl's hand.

*Carina* takes Annie in her arms. The roundabout spins faster and faster to the beat of the music. Laughter is mixed with shouts of joy.

"Fun-fair children! Time for a lucky dip!"

The dancing stops and is replaced by brimming excitement. The children are jumping eagerly up and down in front of the lucky dip front. *Carina* assists with the "fishing rod", and Nicole is first in line. She pulls out a doll.

"But that doll belongs to the day-care centre", someone objects.

Everybody laughs. Another try leaves her with a goody bag. Another burst of laughter.

*Caroline* has pulled out a nappy. The atmosphere is very cheerful. The older children keep pulling out things that belong to the centre—and it is equally funny every time.

What a strange lucky dip!

"I have to get back to the forest now," Toffle says.

"Then I want to come with you," says Adam. Harlequin keeps him back, and turns to Toffle.

"You know that you can find all your friends here. Bye, bye now!"

"Bye, bye," the children say in chorus. Adam follows Toffle to the balcony, and gazes after him through the window for a long time.

The children are running around, showing one another their goody-bags. They have had stickers and small toys. Some are still eating popcorn. The girls in the lottery

stand have started taking tickets themselves, and are sharing out the prizes. Soon, the party will be over. Lunch is being served. All afternoon, the children spend playing shops in the lottery stand.

### Play and art

The party scene in "Who will comfort Toffle?" is a "triumph over the fear and anxiety caused by loneliness"<sup>19</sup>, according to an analysis of Tove Jansson by Westin. It shows in the colours. The grey and black have been changed for rich colours.

When the party scene is recreated at Valhall, and turns the entire section into a fun-fair, everybody can enter and share the fiction. The fun-fair scene provides a setting which involves everyone, and where the children regard inviting Toffle a natural thing to do. Those who are lonely and scared are naturally allotted a place in the community. This is not a competitive situation; instead everyone is taking part in the fiction created by the fun-fair scene. This is both a fiction and a social community at the same time, since art is a social phenomenon, as Vygotsky puts it.

Vygotsky writes that just like art, play is like a photographic negative of everyday life.<sup>20</sup> By turning Valhall into a fun-fair, a festive atmosphere is created as a contrast to everyday life. The adults have abandoned their "teacher roles", and invited the children to come and play with them. The final step has been taken, in the sense that whereas authorities were formerly challenged through Lisen and Little My, now the entire everyday setting has been turned upside-down. According to Vygotsky, play features the reversed perspective. Interpretation and meaning prevail, and play reflects reality on a deeper level. In an article on "Reversible Childhood" (1989), Sutton-Smith states that new metaphors for play are called for—metaphors which emphasise dynamics and a reversed perspective. Play can be compared to a carnival, he continues, with a reference to Bakhtin's (amongst others) ideas of the role of festivities in the popular tradition of laughter. Bakhtin compares the carnival to life itself, which has been modelled on the principles of play, related to theatre and acting, but without a clear division between actors and audience.<sup>21</sup> Sutton-Smith is of the opinion that the two metaphors for play—carnival and a world upside down—are closely related. They both represent a dynamic world, where everything can happen at the same time.

Children's play shares with the carnival this existing in a conglomerate multifocussed space, in which the members pass fluidly in and out of kinds of experiencing much as does the subjective mind.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Westin 1988, p. 185.

<sup>20</sup> cf. chapt. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin 1991b, p. 16–17.

<sup>22</sup> Sutton-Smith 1989, p. 61.

It transpires that Sutton-Smith's opinion of play tallies with Vygotsky's description of the correspondence between play and the dynamic form of human consciousness, i.e. its aesthetic form.

Toffle's fun-fair is brimming with life. There is an air of happiness and excitement, and this is what creates the various adventures and games. There is weight-lifting, riding in a cart which topples over at high speed, ball throwing competitions, a lottery and a lucky dip—games with different degrees of excitement. Moreover, there is a roundabout, dancing and party food—popcorn, iced cake and pop—and last, but not least, the feeling of togetherness when Toffle is invited to the party; Toffle, the lonely and frightened one. The rich variety of experiences makes this fun-fair party feel genuine. The fun-fair at Valhall is a world—a scene—where everyone shares the same fiction, but where they are at the same time free to make their own interpretations while playing.

### The message in the bottle

Spring has come, it is April and the sun is shining, although there is still a certain chill in the air. The older children have exchanged their winter overalls for jackets and their woolly hats for head bands. Running around, playing and jumping seems easy again. After Toffle's visit to the fun-fair party, everyone wants to go out and search for Toffle and the Moomin Valley.

One sunny afternoon, all children at Valhall are on their way to Lake Lamberg, a small lake close to the day-care centre. They have brought some old bread to feed the birds, and they stop on the bridge to throw the crumbs to the gulls, which are waiting eagerly. There is a deafening racket! But:

"As Toffle gazed far out to sea, quite suddenly he saw  
A bottle bobbing up and down and floating to the shore  
He paddled out and rescued it and much to his surprise  
A letter lay inside it—he could scarce believe his eyes.  
And sitting down upon the sand he opened it with care  
And with the moon to help him tried to read the message there.  
It wasn't very long, and many words were washed away,  
And what was left was very sad and seemed to want to say:"

Erica has found the message in the bottle in the water. A message in a bottle! All the children run down from the bridge onto the small jetty by the edge of the water. There is a letter in the bottle, and together *Kristina* and Nicole start undoing the string around it.

"What does it say?" The children are skipping around, eagerly and happily, and some run out on the jetty.

"Isn't the water warm? Look! Fish!"

"Let's read this message," says *Majlis*, and everybody gather around her.

"... The Groke's fierce howl fills me with fear, I haven't any friend ...  
Because I feel forlorn and sad, this letter now I send ...  
If you are someone strong and kind, please try to comfort me ...  
... I'm just a tiny Miffle who's as frightened as can be!"

"We must try to get hold of Toffle," says *Majlis*.

"We must try to find out where Miffle lives," says Emil.

"Let's see if we can find Miffle somewhere in Lamberg Forest."

"Head for Lamberg Forest!"

In the small forest, there is quite a large rock formation—very inviting. Immediately, the children start climbing the rocks.

"Come, let's read this message one more time." *Majlis* gathers the children around her once again.

"I think that's where Miffle lives," Emil says and points towards a door on the side of the rock—a door to an air-raid shelter. Some of the children run over to it.

"Let's call her! I'm sure Groke lives over there," Emil says and points to three "wild" rocks. "I think that is the Black Mountain Chain."

"Miffle is probably so scared to come out," someone says. All the children are now very excited, and really want to save Miffle.

After the visit to Lamberg Forest, where the children were so eager to save Miffle, the adults decide to dramatize the rescuing of Miffle and the hunt for Groke. There is certainly a lot of similarity between Lamberg Forest and the Black Mountain Chain. The children made the adults aware of this fact.

### Toffle saves Miffle from Groke

A few days later, a picnic basket is packed with squash and newly-made sticky buns. It is a warm day, and as soon as they reach the forest, Angelica and Madeleine want to take their jackets off.

"Let's play 'Wolf'," says Angelica, and the children divide themselves into two teams, which stand facing one another—they are wolves and chickens.

"Come, come, come, all my little chickens," Erica calls, and starts the game. Suddenly, someone spots the door, and everyone runs over to it. It is shut! And it remains shut, despite several attempts to open it. There is a hole next to the door—which seems very deep.

"I think Toffle lives in there," says Gustav. One after another, the children lie flat on their stomachs and peer into the hole. The youngest ones stay for a long, long time.

Toffle advances up the hill with a letter in his hand. The children run towards him.

"It is the message from Miffle!" Toffle looks around closely, and points up towards the rock, where the children can suddenly see Miffle. She is sitting on the very top of the cliff, looking very scared. A fierce howl fills the air

"oOoooooo!" Toffle runs in the direction of the howl. There is a rustle in the bushes, and the children catch a glimpse of Groke, who is dressed completely in grey, and has a blackened face, sun glasses and a black hat on her head. Toffle starts running up the rock, closely followed by the oldest children. Toffle shouts out, and Groke retreats. She seems to disappear.

"Come down, Miffle!" Toffle cries. "The danger is gone now."

Miffle gets up, but then Groke howls again.

"Go away!" *Kristina* shouts.

"Go for her! Scare her away!" Toffle is now incredibly angry, and charges towards Groke.

"But warming to the fight he danced a wild and warlike reel  
Then made a lightning dash at Groke and bit her in the heel."



Fig. 3. The hunt for Groke.

Groke screams as Toffle bites her in the heel. Toffle runs back down from the rock to save Miffle. Joel has stayed on the rock, and approaches Groke. Now, she seems mainly afraid and shy.

Below the rock, Toffle and Miffle stand reading the letter which Miffle wrote.

"Do you want us to have a party for you?" *Kristina* asks. "We have brought squash and sticky buns, which we made this morning."

"But what shall we do with Groke?" *Carina* wonders.

"Do you want some sticky buns?" some of the children call in Groke's direction.

"Why don't we all shout at the same time?" *Carina* suggests. "One, two, three ..."

"Do you want sticky buns, Groke?" everybody shouts at the same time.

There is laughter and giggles. Groke ventures closer to the children.

"What do you do with sticky buns?" she says. "I only eat what I can find in the forest.

Can I join you?"

"Yes, if you're sure you aren't dangerous," *Emil* says.

"Not dangerous," *Annie* seconds.

"But Groke, why do you howl so?" *Erik* asks. "I'm scared of you."

"I have to howl, 'cause I don't know your names," Groke answers.

"I'm Joel."

"And I'm Angelica."

The children gather in front of Groke, and would really like her to join the party.

"Come on, Groke, I won't bite your heel," Toffle says.

"I'm so lonely, and I don't have any friends," Groke sighs.

"You will have lots of friends here," *Kristina* says, and starts serving squash and sticky buns. It's a great engagement party for Miffle and Toffle.

Adam has sat down next to Toffle, and asks if he wouldn't like to come back with them to the day-care centre.

"I don't think I can," Toffle says.

"Can I come?" Groke asks. She has overheard the conversation. "I'd love to come and eat with you."

"I suppose you can," Adam says.

"Where do we go?" Groke asks.

"Home," Adam replies. "To the centre."

"What sort of thing is a centre?"

"A place for children to be," Adam answers her as calmly and matter-of-factly as earlier.

"Do you have a Groke to cook your food?"

The children burst out laughing.

"No, we have *Inger*. She's not a Groke."

Groke becomes bolder and bolder.

"I've been in another forest as well," she says. "Would you like to hear me howl?"

"No," Erik says, and sounds alarmed.

"Well, I don't think I could, what with so many children around me."

Erik sighs with relief.

Most of the children have finished their buns, and get up to continue playing.

Groke also gets up. There is a sudden threat in the air.

"I hope you're not going to frighten us. I can make a sound like a wolf," Emil says.

"We have seen this door once before," Angelica says, turning to Toffle and Miffle.

"I don't like the one who's living there," Erik says.

"Are you the one living in there?" *Kristina* asks Groke. But Groke doesn't reply. "I have my secrets," she says.

"Why don't we have a big party here—a barbecue party!" *Kristina* says.

"Of course, if we barbecue pine cones," Groke replies. The children laugh.

"We would love to join you," Toffle says, "but first we have to set out on an adventurous trip—our honeymoon trip. When we come back, we can come and visit you."

Toffle and Miffle say farewell to the children.

"Bye, bye, friends!"

"Bye, bye!"

Everyone waves.

"In Fillyjonk's red boat they sailed away that very night,  
And all the Whompsees waved their arms and shouted with delight,  
And Toffle said to Miffle: 'Look! the fairy lights appear!  
We'll comfort one another for we've nothing more to fear!'"

There is a considerable interest in Groke. The children circle around her. The eldest girls, Nicole and Caroline, want to reveal her identity. They pull at her clothes.

"It's *Majlis*," they say. But then Groke howls a little. The children hesitate for a second and become uncertain.

"Groke, there are ants here!" Joel shouts.

The next minute all the children are crawling around on the ground, lifting up the stones to inspect ants and other creepy-crawlies.

"Eat them!" Adam orders her.

"Well, no ..." Groke hesitates. "You gave me those sticky buns—they were much nicer."

On the way home, the children talk non-stop about Groke. She has promised to visit them at the day-care centre, but she is going to find her own way there. The children keep picking up bits of paper from the pavement. It could be a message from the Moomin valley. Gustav keeps a firm hold of *Kristina's* hand. He howls like Groke. All the way back to the centre. He is Groke.

Someone is standing by the play house in the yard outside the centre, waving at them.

They run over, and find Groke already sitting in there.

"Come, Groke! Come with us in to the centre," the children say.

### A literary and dramatic world of play

The Moomin Valley has become a fiction common to all at Valhall. It is so strong, that it even reaches outside the walls of the day-care centre. The children were the ones who saw the similarity between Lamberg Forest and the Black Mountain Chain. Unlike the play about "Lisen", the Moomin Valley is an open, dynamic fiction, and the dramatizations of "Who will comfort Toffle?" is a direct invitation to establish a dialogue between the adults and the children. The play has the character of a dramatic game.

The Moomin Valley is multifarious and dynamic, Westin writes in her dissertation on the Moomin Valley and Tove Jansson's works.

The Moomin Valley is a "fantastic reflection of our own, a literary world to step into and get to know through its own rules".<sup>23</sup> Tove Jansson purposely lets the different books reflect different outlooks on life. Her characters and her approach is an interpretation of our experience of life. On one level, her characters are models, which fit our reality. A model is a character which is almost a personification of a certain trait. Little My represents rebellion and Snufkins represents freedom and artistry, to mention only two characters from Tove Jansson's rich gallery. Tove Jansson herself said it the following way:

These characters are not people, and they are not animals, and absolutely not traditional mythological characters—maybe they are simply a camouflage for normal, human behavioural patterns, who at the same time have a more extensive margin for action. I mean, a Mrs. Philips cannot be placed in completely unthinkable environments and situations, whereas if you are working with a Mrs. Fillyjonk, who does not even look like anything anyone has ever seen before, you can experiment quite freely.<sup>24</sup>

Westin says that Tove Jansson's imaginary world is like a huge theatre, where different characters take turn to star.<sup>25</sup>

The formula on which "Who will comfort Toffle?" is based is a well-known one within children's literature. The different stages are all present: home, breaking up, adventure and return.<sup>26</sup> The formula is reminiscent of the fairy-tale pattern, and Propp, amongst others, has described this in his structural analysis of the different functions of a fairy-tale. The same formula can also be found in children's games,<sup>27</sup> and Rasmussen (1985) describes the link between story and play. "Once upon a time ..." fits well in with the fabulous stage of

<sup>23</sup> Westin 1988, p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Westin 1985b.

<sup>27</sup> e.g. Garvey 1977; Corsaro 1985.



play. Just like a fairy-tale, play is often concerned with travelling through the unknown, and to reach one's goal, one has to overcome dangers and trials. The link between play and story-telling is a clear example of how cultural forms correspond with the games children play.

When the adults at Valhall dramatize "The hunt for Groke", they invite the children to an adventure, where the roles, or characters, represent different human feelings. These are models which even question traditional male/female roles. The drama pictures the battle between Toffle and Groke. Groke represents an external threat, and Miffle represents the internal fear, which Toffle overcomes in his victory over Groke—by biting her heel. From a psychological perspective, this battle is about being angry, which is better than being scared.<sup>28</sup> Also, the battle is not one between good and evil, as Groke is a complex and contradictory character. Behind the threatening exterior, she is lonely and longs for companionship.

"The hunt for Groke" arouses strong feelings in the children. It is an "aesthetic adventure",<sup>29</sup> which inspires imaginative games and interpretations of what is happening. It is a dramatic scene, which arouses aesthetic emotions, in Vygotsky's words. The natural setting enhances the excitement. The scene is charged with meaning. Groke could emerge from a nearby bush, and when you are small, running away over stones and on winding pathways is not easy.

How does this affect the children's play? First and foremost, the children's experiences and interpretations are based on the general feeling in the setting. Especially the youngest children are prone to interpret the situation on the basis of their own fear. When someone wants to play "Wolf", this is a reflection of the tension in the air, but the game is soon forgotten when the even more dangerous Groke comes into the picture. The youngest children even experience the ants as a threat. Gustav sounds like Groke, and is Groke, for a long time after the hunt is over. The young children are mainly responsible for creating the basic atmosphere, and keeping it alive for a long time, whereas the older children make a series of interpretations. They are sharing the fiction at the same time as they are playing other games. It is obvious that a group consisting of children of varying ages gives the events a particular, dramatic proportion. Another interesting aspect, noticed when "The hunt for Groke" was recorded by the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company one year later, was that the younger children had "assumed" many of the roles and lines of the older ones, who had left the day-care centre and started school. This is proof that there is a certain influence between children of different ages.

The adults at Valhall have become far more playful, which is a result of the dynamic Moomin world. The fear and carefulness with which feelings were first portrayed has been transformed into full emotional expression and a creative atmosphere. In her role as Groke, *Majlis* has made Valhall vibrate and

<sup>28</sup> Westin 1991, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Bäckström's (1991) expression.

charged it with meaning. There is a park close to where *Majlis* lives, and sometimes the children at the day-care centre are allowed to go there and play. Ever since "The hunt for Groke", this park has been known as Groke's park, both by the children at the centre and by other children in the area.

A few days after "The hunt for Groke", a postcard arrives from Toffle and Miffle. They are spending their honeymoon in Arvika. The adults and children in the centre are planning to go on a trip to Arvika, and several children play trains in view of this trip.

The oldest boys often play hunting games. They follow trails and try to capture Biffy Bolt. The girls of the same age like dressing up, and since the fun-fair party, they have been keen on playing music and dancing. The small children are fascinated by Groke, and want *Majlis* to read "Who will comfort Toffle?" over and over again. On the whole, the section is full of children playing in every nook and cranny. Most of the children want to listen to "The Dangerous Journey", and then fight about who is to be Toffle, or, in this case Too-ticki, as Toffle does not appear in this book.

## Oden—the world is in the forest

There are 14 children at Oden. Three of the children are 6 years old, and will soon leave for school (two boys, one girl); seven children are 4–5 years old (four boys, three girls), and four children are 2–3 years old (two boys, two girls). Consequently, most of the children are 4–5 years old, and there are eight boys and six girls in total.

Five pedagogues are working in the class: *Ingalill*, *Lena*, *Hans*, and *Maria*, who is in charge of the 6-year-olds in all the classes (a total of nine children), and then there is *Gertrud*, who works half-time. *Maj-Britt* works in the kitchen.

The pedagogues at Oden are united in their playful approach. They focus the activities on the interests and needs of the children. The fact that this approach is however manifested in different ways will become evident during the progress of the project. Improvisations and spontaneous play are common features at Oden. *Hans* often plays the guitar, and on Mondays and Fridays, there is a special "singing time" when everybody sings along together. The activities for the 6-year-olds at Oden are based on "traditional" conceptual exercises and rule games. Because of this, the improvisational atmosphere at Oden clashes with the school-like activities, and *Maria*, who is in charge, will reconsider the structure quite radically during the course of the term. Each pedagogue has very much his or her own line of approach, and concentrates mainly on a few children. This results in cross-section groups. The activities are, however, mainly characterized by their dynamic nature and the lack of "must-nots" and obstacles.

## Fear comes to Oden

One cold morning at the end of January, Fear is lying under *Lena's* bed. Just like before, at Freja and Valhall, the bed used to be a sofa. *Lena* is dressed in a long nightie, and she can't sleep—what if there is something under her bed? Fear has black, tousled hair, a green stocking as a mask over her face, and she is wearing red. She seems to be some sort of forest creature. She is lonely and scared, and she wants to come in from the cold. The children wonder where she has come from. She seems mysterious. Most of them find it exciting, but two of the big children protest, and refuse to join in the fiction. After a while, when the play is over, most of the children want to try out the bed. They play Fear and *Lena* over and over again. *Fanny* and *Madeleine* remain playing in the bed for a long time. Their play has turned into "Mother and Big Sister". When mother is about to get up in the morning, she is too tired, and she has a headache which proves to be the start of chicken pox. *Madeleine* is allowed to remain in bed, with *Fanny* to care for her.

*Ingalill* has talked a lot about fear with the children, and they have all painted things they are afraid of on black paper: ghosts, witches and poisonous spiders.

Fear visits Oden several times. Maybe she is trying to be a wood-nymph, just like in Gustav Fröding's poem; a wood-nymph who "behind a pine tree stood, peeking and peering through the wood", and who exercises "witchcraft".<sup>30</sup> She keeps appearing when no one expects to see her. Suddenly, she is sitting in the dolls' corner, telling her mythical stories from the deep forests. Ghost stories of stairs which creak, and invisible beings wandering with heavy footsteps on the floor boards in the attic.<sup>31</sup>

The focus of the theme has shifted to ghosts in particular, and for this reason, the pedagogues plan on having a ghost game. This takes place two weeks after Fear's first visit.

## Ghost game

The children sit down in a circle on the floor together with *Lena* and *Hans*, who have taken the initiative to this gathering, and to the ghost game which is to follow. *Lena* has a sack next to her.

"How can you dress up, when you want to look dangerous?" she asks. No one answers.

They all wait for what is about to happen.

"Well, you can dress up as a ghost," she continues, and now *Madeleine* sticks her hands in her sack. "Ghost sheets!" she cries.

*Lena* opens the sack, and takes out a sheet and a torch. She demonstrates how easy it is to become a ghost.

The children gather around *Lena*, who has taken out grease paints and started paint-

<sup>30</sup> The Swedish poet Gustav Fröding's poem "The Wood Sprite" is included in the collection "Guitar and Concertina" from 1891.

<sup>31</sup> Arhem 1980.

ing Madeleine's nails. Madeleine shows the others her scary blue nails, and when she has had a few lines of green and red on her face, she wants to try the torch effect by placing it under her chin and illuminating her face. It really does look horrific, and now the other children also want to be painted. Felix has blue nails and tries to frighten *Hans*, who has already been painted black under the eyes by Madeleine.

"I'll frighten you with these silver hands," Felix threatens him. *Andreas* has got hold of the torch and is running around the room.

The small children are keeping to one side. Sam tries to push Felix, who turns around helpfully. *Emilia* and *Therèse* are seriously interested, but still too shy to try anything. *Lena* inspects her face in the mirror.

"Now I want streaks of blood on my hands," Felix says.

"Why don't we try it and see what it looks like?" *Hans* suggests, and Felix hides behind an armchair. Only his bloody hands can be seen. Madeleine also tries it. She has both green and red streaks. "You don't look dangerous, Madde," Felix says.

Now *Joakim* is painting himself, and *Andreas* and *Joakim* both hide behind the armchair. They also use the torch, and manage to look quite scary.

*Jacob* wants to wear a sheet and become a ghost. *Lena* helps him cut out holes for the eyes. As soon as he has put the sheet on, he attacks *Lena* and tries to frighten her. The wrestling that follows is both wild and mild. *Jacob* is only three years old. *Hans* and Felix continue painting their faces. *Therèse* also ventures forth and has her face painted, and now she is also a ghost. More and more children turn into ghosts, and pull faces in front of the camera to show how scary they are.

*Hans* has brought out side-scenes, false tree-fronts, which were painted and used for a theme project over one year ago.

"One, two, three ..." Felix is counting the number of tree trunks in the forest. He is prepared to go in among them.

"Listen! Ghost music!" someone shouts. *Lena* has put on an audio tape: "The Water Spirit", a nature symphony by *Ralph Lundsten*. The tempo is rather slow.

"Aren't they going to say something on this tape?" Felix asks with disappointment. "I want them to say something, what it means." He walks up to the tape recorder and turns it off.

*Hans* puts on a green sheet and starts chasing the small ghosts around to the music, which has been turned back on. They are running around the cardboard trees, and *Andreas* is still carrying the torch.

Felix wants to be a ghost with one eye, and *Lena* helps him make a new sheet. The hunt continues.

"Why aren't there any more ghosts?" someone asks. There is an expectation for something more to happen. *Hans* continues to chase the children. Madeleine manages to pull his sheet off, and he freezes for a while until he has got the sheet back on again and the hunt continues. Most of the children are taking part in the tag game, apart from *Jacob* and *Emilia*, who are standing at the table painting each other's faces. Sam is playing in a corner with the wooden railway.

The hunt continues for a few minutes, but the play does not really take off and develop. The sheets fall off, and some of the children stop running around.

"Let's go and scare *Maj-Britt*," *Hans* suggests. "Ghosts!" someone calls out, and everybody quickly puts a sheet over their heads. Only Sam, the youngest one, stays in the room. Everybody else sets off to try and find *Maj-Britt*, the cook at *Oden*.

In the afternoon, the children go out "haunting" the yard outside the centre, and when *Jacob's* mother comes to pick him up, he tells her with a certain amount of pride how many people he has frightened.

## The need for meaning

There were elements of joy and playfulness in the ghost game, but at the same time it was obvious that there was no common fiction, or no meaning, which could carry the story forwards. The play began and ended with the most characteristic thing about being a ghost, which is frightening people and being frightened by other ghosts—a simple game of tag. What really fascinated the children was their own transformation from living people to ghostly images of death. Most children and youngsters are interested in ghosts, and most usually remain interested throughout life because of the human terror-tinted fascination with death, which is beyond time, as Klintberg points out when stating that most myths about supernatural beings like troll, witches and wood-nymphs have now lost their importance.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, the ghost stories, which no longer find support in our rational outlook on the world, now merely serve to amuse.

When Felix advocates an element of significance in the play, and says that he wants someone to say something on the tape which is being played, about what it means, I see this as a key line. Both *Lena* and *Hans* have tried to improvise using first sheets, then side-scenes and atmospheric music, and *Hans* also initiates the ghost tag game, but this is not enough to carry the play forwards.

Play pedagogy harbours a common opinion, based on developmental psychological theories, that props will be enough to give children impulses to play.<sup>33</sup> This is probably correct when it comes to toys and props with well-known connotations (e.g. everyday utensils used for playing families), but this opinion single-mindedly attaches too much importance to the material aspect, and dismisses the meaning which is created in play because it is a dynamic meeting between the internal and the external, as Vygotsky puts it. The dialectics this gives rise to depends largely on to what extent the entire situation has been charged with meaning, so that the child's imagination can be triggered and give rise to many different interpretations. The ghost game at Oden requires a "text", a story, which could inspire the children to play. At this point in time, the ghost stories which Fear was telling earlier would have fitted in well, but Fear has not even been made part of this game.

Another time, when *Hans* brings out the cardboard forest, the children play intensively for over an hour while *Hans* plays well-known songs on his guitar at the same time as he directs the children, who are playing Michael Mouse and his friends in a number of dramatic situations. The underlying story-line provides the inspiration. In the same way, *Lena* finds new possibilities of inspiring the children to play and dramatize, when she bases the play on characters from Peter Pan. The whole situation is charged with a meaning which is known to the children.

<sup>32</sup> cf Klintberg 1982, p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> C.f. earlier lines of argument on Piaget's theory.

At Oden, the adults often concentrate on a small group of children, and there is a close contact between children and adults. The children often ask the adults to play with them. However, these groups change all the time, depending on what the children feel like playing at the moment, and some adults find sharing the current fiction difficult, which also makes it difficult for them to provide inspiration and develop the ongoing play. The play runs a risk of only being surface deep. It was mainly Fear, who had inspired the children to play ghosts, but she was not involved in the play which I have just described. To make everyone part of what is happening, the class needs to share a fiction.

### The house in the forest

The children continue to play ghosts at Oden. A large ghost is placed in the bathroom. Since Father Ghost is already living at Freja, this becomes Mother Ghost. The children make several baby ghosts for her, and they all live in a cardboard box which has been painted purple. The ghosts inspire the children to play families. Usually, the 6-year olds are the ones who introduce new ideas, as their regular meetings with the other 6-year olds at Oden enable them to convey what is happening in the rest of the day-care centre. Most of all, they would like to be let off the exercises which are supposed to prepare them for school, because these clash with the other activities at the centre, which seem so exciting. They tip-toe around to look for Fear. Is Rasmus also present at Oden? What does Fear really look like? What is imagination and what is reality?

Gradually, the character of the meetings for the 6-year olds changes. This is partly because *Maria* is trying to make sure that the meetings do not clash with the dramatizations in the different classes, and partly because the children are allowed more freedom when choosing what activities to do. Their favourite preoccupation is playing chess, something which has become quite an in-thing at Oden after a popular series of television programmes.

One day, they start reading "Who will comfort Toffle?". They only read half the book at first. They then decide to build a hut for Toffle. They really want the lonely and frightened Toffle to have his own hut in the forest, where he can feel secure. They hang up multi-coloured strips of material in one corner of the room—a basic construction. Securing the strips on the ceiling is simple. They furnish the hut with a table and two chairs, and above the table they hang an old lamp. It's a very cosy hut, and soon the children use it when playing. The chess players also move into it. It is a place where you can be left undisturbed. Also the 4-year olds and 5-year olds play chess.

The children make their own Toffle trolls. They gather stones and create their own characters, and they make little figures and boats out of "troll paste", a kind of home-made play-dough made of water, flour and salt. The children have seen the puppet show "The Invisible Child", for which *Hans* made the cardboard scenes, both for the kitchen and the beach. Also the boat and the



jetty had been manufactured at Oden. Moreover, the children paint scenes from the Moomin Valley. Mainly Fillyjocks, Snufkins and Groke. They hang the paintings in Toffle's hut.

Toffle's hut inspires the children to play, but *Ingalill* says that scenes from Moomin Valley are not a dominant factor. The space next to the hut becomes a new exciting play area—a free zone, where the children play with lego and the new farm and the animals. Here, they can be close to the adults at the same time as they exist in their own playworld.

### Toffle chases Groke, saves Miffle and moves into the house

*Lena* is reading "Who will comfort Toffle?" in the mattress room. The curtains have been drawn, and the only source of light is a candle. In the room, there is a slide, which is also a bed and a hut at the same time. *Maria* is Snufkins, and she is playing the recorder.

Toffle has just found the message in the bottle, when a knock is heard at the door. Felix and *Lena* run over to the door, closely followed by the rest of the children.

"Come on," they urge *Lena*, who follows them and opens the balcony door.

"I don't know what she looks like," Toffle (played by *Hans*) says and seems restless.

Scary music can be heard from the mattress room—Ralph Lundsten's "Nature Symphony". When Toffle and the children return to the room they come back to a dark and spooky forest. Black trees and bats have been projected on the walls.

"Look for Miffle," Toffle urges the children. "Look around!"

"Hush! Silent ... I bet that's Groke!"

The atmosphere is scary.

"Miffle, where are you?"

The group starts looking all over for Miffle. They go into all the rooms, and all the way over to another section, Loke.

"Have you seen Miffle?"

Everyone shakes their heads.

Toffle opens the door of the airing cupboard, which is slightly ajar. Sam and Emilia are hiding in there. They have been inspired by the hide-and-seek game. The group turns back to the mattress room, and now they can see the Black Mountain Chain in front of them. Groke (*Maria*) is standing like a grey mountain herself in the barren landscape, and on top of the mountain (the bed) Miffle (*Ingalill*) is sitting, crouching and frightened to death.

"Then all was hushed and still, the rocks themselves seemed full of fright,  
Behind the clouds the moon herself seemed scared to show her light,  
For there was Groke—an awful sight, enormous and alone ..."

Toffle dances his wild and warlike reel, and attacks Groke and bites her heel. She screams and disappears from the room.

"She went to the bathroom! Look in the bathroom!" someone cries. The children have gone wild. Then the scenery changes, as a meadow full of flowers is projected on the wall—blue, yellow and red flowers, under a clear, blue sky.

"And there they stood, quite speechless too, both feeling very shy,  
Just looking at each other, with the moon high in the sky."



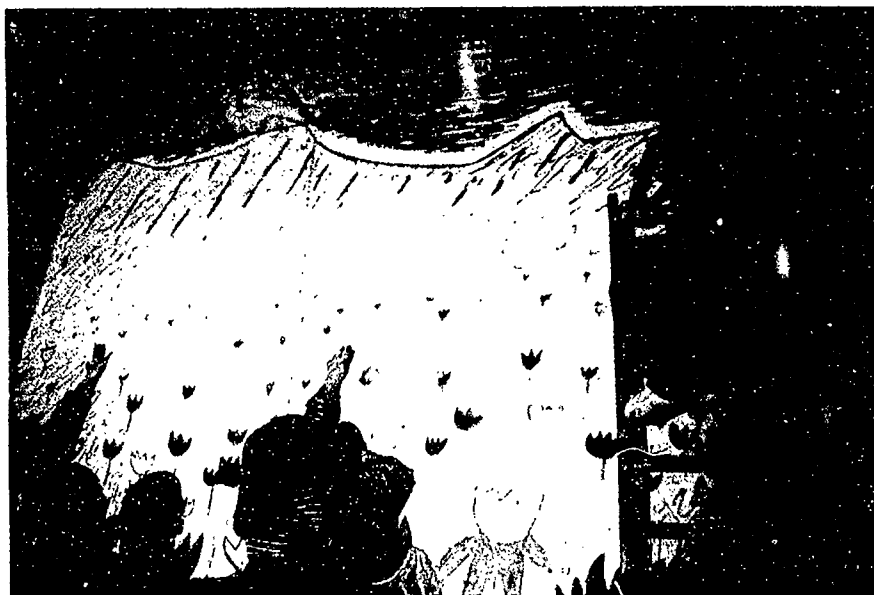


Fig. 4. Moominvalley projected onto the wall.

The children are running back and forth, trying to pick the flowers. Sam and Emilia are also running back and forth.

"Are you just as lonely as me?" says Toffle to Miffle, and they sit down on the meadow.

"They all helped me chase Groke away," Toffle says. "She's gone now."

"It was so kind of you to help save me from Groke," Miffle whispers, and turns to Emilia: "Look, what beautiful flowers. Do you want to smell them?"

They catch a glimpse of Groke through the door.

"Groke can't join us," someone shouts. "Go on, bite her in the heel!" The children dance around her.

"Can I join you?" she asks. "I want to be with you too."

Groke is completely dressed in grey—in an overall with a hood.

"Take the hood off! It's an old woman's hood—a witch's hood."

The older boys are trying to challenge Groke.

"I know who they are," Anders says. "It's *Maria, Ingalill ...*"

Groke has fetched ice cream for everyone, and they all sit down on green blankets.

"Look, my ice cream is red!" The children quickly realize that they can make their ice cream different colours by placing it in the projector light.

"Shouldn't they get married?" Fanny asks.

"Yes, I think they should get married. They go so well together," *Lena* says.

"Let's find my mother," Jacob says, and points at Miffle. He thinks she looks like his mother in her red dress.

"We should go somewhere," Toffle says suddenly. "To the sea. I would like to go to the sea."

"Do you have any pictures of the sea?" Sebastian asks. He has gone over to the projector. Now he is turning the picture up-side-down. Look, it's raining flowers.

"Now we're by the sea!"

Very true—the sky has become a large sea. Felix and Anders have joined Sebastian by the projector. They also want to try it out.

“Let’s go to the dark forest,” Toffle says.

Toffle’s house shows up on the wall.

“This is where I used to live,” Toffle says and gets up and points.

“There you are,” says Madeleine, who has spotted the picture of Toffle.

“I’m scared,” Miffle says.

Now the room is full of black trees and bats.

“It’s not dangerous. I’m here,” Toffle comforts her.

The Black Mountain Chain is being projected onto the wall, and the oldest boys go up to Groke.

“Bite her on the heel!”

“We ought to have a house,” Miffle says. “Just imagine, if they had a house which we could move into.”

“But we have a house,” the children cry.

“Well, not because we have to live there,” Toffle says politely, “but it would be nice to see what it looks like.”

“Let’s go and look at it.”

Toffle and Miffle get up, and most of the children go into the room where the hut is.

“This will be fine!” Toffle cries. “There is both a lamp and flowers.”

Everyone squeezes into the hut.

“Let’s all be Toffle’s children,” Fanny cries. “Look at all children Toffle has!”

“I want to play! I want to play!” Madeleine is eager. Immediately, she and Fanny start calling Toffle and Miffle “Mummy” and “Daddy”. They quickly fetch a drawing which they show Toffle.

“Look, that’s Snufkins! It’s a long time since I saw him last,” Toffle says with a grin.

“And that’s me,” Fanny points proudly to the wall with the photographs of everyone in the class.

“Can I borrow your clothes?” Felix says. He has come into the house.

“This coat is old and worn, and I never really wanted it,” Toffle says and takes off his coat and wig.

Josefin, Sebastian and Anders are in the mattress room. Josefin has dressed up as Groke. Sebastian instructs her.

“You should say ‘Ouch’ when I bite you.”

But Josefin refuses. She wants to make her own rules. Toffle—or Felix—comes into the room and bites Groke on the heel.

They try the different projected pictures—first one after the other, then all at the same time. The dark forest becomes extra scary with music by Grieg: “In the Hall of the Mountain King”.

“Cinema!” Emilia cries, and sits down on top of a pile of cushions. She is Miffle. Anders dances a wild dance in the forest.

In Toffle’s house, Fanny and Madeleine are checking out two baskets with different contents.

“Look!” Fanny says happily. “This is the shell! Isn’t it perfect?”

Toffle puts it to his ear and whistles softly.

“That is Snufkins playing.”

Fanny borrows the shell first, and then Madeleine.

Jacob wants to borrow Miffle’s clothes. Dressed in a red dress and with a red ribbon in his hair, he quickly runs over to Toffle and sits on his lap.

“I’m on the phone,” Toffle says, and presses the shell to his ear. “I’m speaking to Moominpappa. I’ve saved Miffle. I was very angry, and bit her on the heel. We live here now. Yes ... we can visit you later. Yes, we have plenty of food here, we’re doing well. Bye, bye!”

He gives the shell to Madeleine, who wants a word as well.

"Can we go and invite the Moomins' to a party tonight?" Fanny asks.

She is very eager, jumping up and down and waving her arms about.

"Yes, of course," Toffle says.

"Let's prepare for the party, daddy!"

"These are plums which we can eat, and these are strawberries." Madeleine produces the large baskets.

"Do we have enough chairs?" Toffle asks.

The girls have started laying the table next to the house. They place cars and animals in tidy piles.

"Bite her on the heel!" Josefin and Sebastian are still playing in the mattress room.

They are trying out the different pictures—the scenes. At the moment, they have got the dark forest, and Sebastian is climbing up the trees.

"Let's bash the trees down!"

Josefin agrees, and turns the picture around as Sebastian hits the walls with a cushion.

"Pow! Let's attack the bats! Pow!"

They continue playing for a long time.

### The aesthetic forms provide meaning and generate play

The dramatization of "Who will comfort Toffle?" generates play among all children. This is because of the aesthetic form of the book, and the dramatization, which brings the story to life and enables the children to step into the Moomin world and influence it through their dialogue with the main characters. This is a kind of interaction theatre<sup>34</sup> which tallies with dramatic play—it is adventurous play.

The tension between the threat and the togetherness in the story makes it dynamic, and causes the imagination and play to thrive. Just like the children at Valhall, the youngest children interpret the fundamental feeling of hunt and excitement. They start playing hide-and-seek. The big children make the hunt for Groke into an advanced game. In the mattress room, the children use the projector and overheads to create the background scenes for this hunt. The pictures from the book symbolise the contrasting feelings of threat (the dark forest, the Black Mountain Chain) and togetherness, and when they are being projected onto the walls, they create a very suggestive atmosphere. The mattress room becomes the dark forest, and just like in the playworld, the children can change the scenes in whichever way they wish. They dress up as both Groke and Toffle, to be able to portray both the attacker and the victim. At Oden, Toffle has the main role. This is the character which has influenced the children the most, the character which their teacher *Hans* played. The children try out numerous different actions: climbing, throwing cushions at the trees, bashing the trees down, and biting Groke's heel in several different ways. They have either been acting the roles, or directed those who are acting. Josefin, who has dressed up as Groke, is struggling to gain control over her own actions, as Toffle is the main character.

<sup>34</sup> Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad 1992, p. 245.

The feeling of togetherness makes the eldest girls develop the game into playing families. They pretend to be Toffle's children in his house. The fact that the adults want to play with them makes them spontaneously happy, and *Hans* takes part in the play in a natural way, helping the action along. A new story is invented, in which the shell plays an important role, e.g. as a telephone, and in which they invite the Moomins to a party.

Apart from hide-and-seek, the youngest children are playing Miffle. Jacob borrows Miffle's dress, and sits on Toffle's lap where he feels secure. For him, the basic feelings of fear and security are real. He was the one who tested his own feelings of fear when he played ghosts and dared scare other people outside the day-care centre.

Unlike when they were playing ghosts, the children meet a world full of meaning when they play "Who will comfort Toffle?". There is a chase in this world as well, but not just a simple game of tag. It is a battle for freedom and the right to exist whether you are a toffle or a miffle, in a world where danger is part of life, and where the decency of the characters creates a basis for togetherness and tolerance. Tove Jansson's world is "on an island of freedom in a sea of restraint", Bäckström writes, where creative play and adventurous curiosity is everything. He compares the Moomin Valley with the freedom pedagogue A.S. Neill's "Summerhill".<sup>35</sup> Bäckström identifies himself strongly with this sense of freedom, but is at the same time afraid of the isolation it entails. Tove Jansson also became bored with Moomintroll's idyllic, never-ending summer, ended it and introduced winter in the valley. She says to Ørjasæter that this move was unavoidable, that the season winter had to exist as well.<sup>36</sup> Westin's (1988) analysis of the Moomin Valley points at the author's deliberate change of perspectives, which prevents feelings of confinement and limits, and which provides the Moomin Valley with its rich aesthetics.

However, it is not the Moomin Valley, which becomes the common fiction at Oden. Some of the adults do not really feel at home in Tove Jansson's world. (The children do, however.) At the same time, a certain interest has been aroused, and when the theme is re-introduced some 12 months later, the whole day-care centre shows a genuine interest.

### The story of Hybelejen develops

Fear is back in action at Oden, and has hidden a treasure chest in the sand pit—a large treasure chest, which the children catch a glimpse of through the window. With macs flapping, they dash out into the rain to rescue it. The contents prove to be most exciting—chocolate money wrapped in gold foil, brass candlesticks, bottles, paintings and old books. There is a signed message in one of the bottles.

<sup>35</sup> Bäckström 1991, p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Ørjasæter 1986, p. 112 ff.

"Hybelejen" *Hans* reads. "What if he is one of those people on the paintings?"

"Who is Hybelejen? That's the name of our centre." The children are wondering at all the things which are happening at their day-care centre.

"If we send a message in a bottle back to Hybelejen, maybe we'll be able to find out what has happened to him," *Hans* suggests, and they all go down to the River Klarälven, right in the middle of Karlstad town.

"Let's drop a stick in to see in which direction the bottle will float," someone suggests, and they soon find that the river is flowing towards Lake Vänern. It is Lake Vänern they have to visit if you want to get in touch with Hybelejen. That means they have to get hold of a boat. Wild plans are taking shape, but before they sally forth, they need to find out who Hybelejen is and why the day-care centre has been named after him.

The world at Oden is populated with different forest creatures: Fear or the wood-nymph, the Troll of Lamberg Forest, whom the children visit every now and then in the forest close to the day-care centre, the family of ghosts and the toffles and miffles of Moomin Valley. Now this world is extended to include a treasure chest and pirates. And amidst all this, Hybelejen, whoever he is.

Hybelejen is a well-known character, who had his roots in 18th century Karlstad.<sup>37</sup> His real name was Hüblein, and his father was a tobacconist from Germany. Hybelejen is supposed to have been a remarkable man, a genius of his time, and there are many stories about him. The first one concerns his birth. It is claimed that his mother was apparently dead, but that she was brought back to life when the grave-digger tried to steal one of her valuable rings, and consequently, she was able to give birth to Hybelejen three years after her death. Hybelejen proved to be a marvellous constructor: not only did he build a 13 metre tall mill, he also built a bridge right across the River Klarälven in the middle of Karlstad town, and he constructed the first automatic mowing machine, an automobile and wings for flying. He jumped off the top of the mill in an attempt to fly, but landed rather ingloriously in the nearby river. The rest of the inhabitants of Karlstad found this inventor suspicious. Almost certainly, their jealousy is one of the reasons why he is such a legendary character.<sup>38</sup> The reason why the day-care centre has been named after him is that the block it is situated in is called Hybelejen.

Folklore has it that the wood-nymph is the ruler of the forest, and that if you are kind to her, she will bestow wonderful qualities upon you. In the county of Värmland, the wood-nymph has a tail, and she lacks the hollow back which other counties have furnished her with. "She holds a dominant position in Värmland folklore," af Klintberg writes, and continues: "and the folklore archives are full of tales of men who have met her and been bewitched by her".<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ronge 1958.

<sup>38</sup> From a lecture by Britt-Marie Insulander (Karlstad Museum) 18th April 1991. (Staff meeting at the daycare centre Hybelejen.)

<sup>39</sup> af Klintberg 1986, p. 21.

The same popular belief tells how Hybelejen's talent was a gift from the wood-nymph. The wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest gave him the ability to invent new things—but only one specimen of each kind.

Kevenhüller, a character who figures in the 19th century writer Selma Lagerlöf's classic novel "The Story of Gösta Berling", is based on the character of Hybelejen, and Lagerlöf has built the story itself on a folklore tale about the wood-nymph.<sup>40</sup>

In a comment on Selma Lagerlöf's role as a writer, Edström writes: "The fundamental patterns in Lagerlöf's stories are those that allow for both a clear structure and psychological complications at the same time: folklore tales, popular beliefs, ghost stories and legends."<sup>41</sup> She represents something which is specific of Värmland at the same time as she is generally popular. According to Edström, "The Story of Gösta Berling" is a "popular novel", in which Lagerlöf's ambition is to "provide the simplest of lives with a glimmering beauty".

The story about Kevenhüller, or Hybelejen, is really a tale with a despondent streak, as opposed to the optimistic fairy-tales, Edström says. A tale tells the story of people who succumb to greater powers. At Oden, popular tales of varying kinds are told; stories of pirates and ghosts, spiced with myths from Värmland. For this reason, Selma Lagerlöf's story about Hybelejen is the one which enables to unite the adults in their world of folklore, in which tales from Värmland play an important part. *Hans* is the one who illustrates and tells the story of Hybelejen, using a technique which makes the pictures move, just like in the pictures. He draws the pictures on overhead film, and the story develops as he places several pictures on top of one another. In broad outline, his story follows that of Selma Lagerlöf's.

### *Hans* story about Hybelejen

Once upon a time, there was a man whose name was Hüblein, but he was generally known as Hybelejen. He was the inventor of the town, and he lived in a mill which he had built himself next to the River Klarälven, right in the middle of the town.

At Lake Lamberg, on the outskirts of the town, there lived a troll-witch called the wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest. She was much talked of amongst the townsfolk, who were all frightened of her, and sometimes she could cause those who crossed her path a lot of trouble.

On this day, the wood-nymph had decided to extend her walk as far as the town, maybe as far as the town square. To avoid recognition, she hung a black cloak over her shoulders. Then she started walking towards town. Hybelejen, who was taking a midday walk after a strenuous morning in his workshop, was striding towards the town square to buy a couple of eggs, when he noticed a great commotion. Men and women were running away from the square in an attempt to get out of the witch's way. Hybelejen saw the wood-nymph come sauntering towards where he was standing. She had long, fair hair, which reached almost all the way down to the ground. Light-green fern leaves and sea-weed had been plaited into it. Apart from the black cloak

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Edström 1986. p. 194.



she wore a dress of green silk, and beautiful as a wild animal she approached Hybelejen. When she came closer, he could see that she had a black adder wrapped around her neck, and between her pale, delicate lips he saw two small pointed teeth. He was completely taken with the captivating beauty now standing in front of him.

"Pardon me, fair lady," Hybelejen said. "Your tail shows behind."

You see, the wood-nymph had forgotten to hide her tail when she set out for town, and now she felt very grateful towards Hybelejen for pointing this detail out to her in such a polite manner.

In return, the wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest gave Hybelejen a gift. He was given the gift of being able to invent things, but only one specimen of each kind. Hybelejen bowed to the wood-nymph with a song in his heart. They parted company, and Hybelejen hurried home to his mill to see if what the wood-nymph had said was really true.

The following day was an important day in Karlstad. Hybelejen had invented a vehicle, and no one had ever seen anything like it before. It could be wound up with a key, and you could sit in it and steer it with a wheel.

The King himself sent for the fantastic invention, and was totally taken with it. He offered Hybelejen large sums of money for the car. But Hybelejen immediately realized that he would suffer a terrible loss if he were to part with his best invention ever and not be able to make another one.

He couldn't refuse the King's request to buy the vehicle, so he started it up and drove it straight into a wall.

After this event, Hybelejen decided not to invent anything ever again, but stick to normal work instead.

However, one September evening he had an idea about flying. Being able to fly would be just the thing for an inventor such as himself.

He worked day and night upon his invention. He planned, he drew and he racked his brains, and finally, one Saturday afternoon, he had finished making his wings. Hybelejen lightly touched the creation with his fingertips. The shiny leather gleamed in the light, and Hybelejen took a deep breath before he climbed up on top of the mill in order to jump off it and sail through the air.

A lot of people were gathering below the mill. They started shouting to him not to jump. A man in a top hat exclaimed that the man must be out of his mind to try to fly. "He will kill himself, please stop him," one girl cried desperately. Hybelejen enjoyed the cool, fresh air where he was standing on the green, glistening copper roof. The sun was going down, and Hybelejen thought that this was a perfect afternoon for a little flight. He stretched up on his toes. The people below him were making a racket. More people were arriving, and even the vicar had joined them, calling "In the name of God, come to your senses and give up the idea of ju ..."

Silence fell in the area below the mill, and nothing but a surprised "Oohhh" was heard from the people. The vicar clasped his hands, and the children hesitantly started clapping theirs, because up there in the sky, Hybelejen was flying.

"What a fantastic invention!" Thoughts were tumbling across his mind. As he was sailing high above the beautiful countryside, he felt extremely grateful towards the wood-nymph.

He suddenly caught a glimpse of a very large bird behind him. He felt his heart jump as the wood-nymph sailed past him—just as beautiful as she had been when they met in the square.

"Oh, what a woman," Hybelejen thought to himself. "She has incredible powers—I love her!" At the same time, a feeling of strong hatred bubbled up inside him. Once again, he had been tricked into inventing something of which there could only be one—what good would that be to other people? Hybelejen felt his anger rising, and he wanted to hit her. He dived down towards her. Before he had the time to do



anything, the wood-nymph gave him a blow with one of her own strong wings. Like an injured bird, Hybelejen hurtled towards the ground. He landed in a large tree next to the Cathedral. Beaten and in despair, Hybelejen never invented another thing as long as he lived in Karlstad, and the wings—well, they were never found again, but it is said that if they still exist, the best place to look for them is near the Cathedral in Karlstad.

## The hunt for Hybelejen

After having heard the story about Hybelejen, the children are eager to go into town to look for the wings. Head for the Cathedral! They all look carefully, but no one can find any wings. Nor can they find anything by the mill, or rather, where the mill used to be. But their happiness is all the greater when Josefin finds a beautiful piece of cloth and a tail a few days later. At least, they've found traces of the wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest!

In Karlstad there is a boat called Solabåten, which makes regular tours on River Klarälven and Lake Vänern.

"Imagine making a real boat trip to a desert island!" The invitation could not have arrived at a more suitable time. At last, the children are able to get out on Lake Vänern to investigate what has happened to Hybelejen. The hunt continues.

Oden is not the only class in the day-care centre which is making a boat trip. Freja, Valhall and Loke are also going.

There is a group of small islands, the Sättersholms, in the north of Lake Vänern, and the journey to get there takes about one hour.

## The trip to the Sättersholms

The atmosphere is excellent and the children are very eager, as the large group of some 60 people is leaving the day-care centre one morning. The walk down to the harbour takes about ten minutes, which is not so long that the back-packs (which include blankets to sit on and life-jackets) get annoyingly heavy. Everyone is in high spirits, and sings along with unusual cheerfulness:

"When others are fishing  
they sit on a stool,  
and look at the float  
as they try to keep cool,  
but I,  
I sit on the float  
and I look at my stool,  
'cause I go my own way,  
I'm nobody's fool!"

There is an extra dimension to the song "Nobody's Fool" now that the children are venturing out into the wide world. The big children are standing at the prow, next to the captain. The waves are sloshing against the boat, the sun is shining and Lake Vänern seems as big as the ocean.

The children swarm across the island. Jumping, skipping and climbing up into the low trees, their freedom seems complete. Soon, the food parcels are brought out, and the appetite for food seems almost as large as that for play.

"What are you doing on our island?" says a gruff and threatening voice, and in an instant, five pirates have appeared, holding a large, black flag between them. The leader is Captain Hook, *Majlis*, who has a black patch with a skull and cross-bones over one eye, and a terrifying hook where her left hand should have been. The other pirates are *Ingalill* from Oden, *Eva* from Loke, *Kristina* from Freja and *Agneta*, the head of staff. Headed by Sebastian, the children attack the pirates and challenge them to a duel.

"Are there any pirates from Oden amongst you?" *Ingalill* calls. "I have a message here for you, in a bottle."

Black patches are now distributed to all the children, and the four classes gather around their own bottles and messages.

"Go down to the lake and along the water, and you shall find a treasure." That is the message in the bottle which the children from Loke had. The pirates from Oden are requested to "Walk towards the group of trees close to the little cottage". "Go straight to the large boulders in the south" is the message in the letter to Freja, and Valhall's reads: "Go through the little forest down to the west beach".

The groups set out, each in their own direction. Now there is nothing stopping them. Not even the small children hesitate when faced with cliffs and the uneven ground. Finding the treasures do not take very long, and within a quarter of an hour, all the children are back at the camp.

"We have found a skeleton of a man," says the group from Oden. Proudly, John shows the other groups what they have found.

"That is my father's skeleton," Captain Hook exclaims. "It's Captain Hookleg!"

"We have found a piece of cloth from a green dress. It must be the dress which the wood-nymph was wearing," says Joel from Valhall, and shows the large piece of material and the piece of tail. The children from Oden recognise the material and the tail-end from Lamberg Forest.

"We have found a treasure chest," says *Eva* from Loke. "Look!"

All the children come close to take a look, because the chest is full of golden chocolate coins. Wow!

Last of all is the group from Freja.

"We have found a lot of strange things," says *Kristina*.

"Look here!" says Charlotte, holding up a larkem, "And look here—a lace dress."

"Listen now, everyone, because we have found a box with an old, crumpled letter, with writing which is almost invisible." It is *Kristina* speaking, and when everyone is quiet, she reads out the following:

"Hope someone has found the treasure chest which I hid in the field ..."

"Yes, we've found that one!" Felix cries. "The coins look the same."

*Kristina* continues to read:

"... the treasure chest which I buried in the field before coming here to this island on my raft, so that I could end my poor, wretched life in this beautiful spot and dream of the wood-nymph from Lamberg Forest.

Greetings,  
Hybelejen"

Who is this Hybelejen? This mystery must be solved!

The crowd returning to the day-care centre in the afternoon is a tired, but immensely pleased, one.

## The story about Hybelejen creates several different meanings

The adults have made the Sättersholm an adventure island, inhabited by pirates. Apart from being an island with connections to Hybelejen's story, it has also been attributed certain features from Peter Pan's "Neverland". The Sättersholm is an island which represents the children's world, with imagination and play. Also the adults find themselves in the middle of the playworld. They have established a secret link between the day-care centre and this island. Their joyfulness and enthusiastic story-telling, has made Hybelejen a magical and multiple concept. As in the world of play, Hybelejen takes on several shapes, and the transformation is a natural thing. Hybelejen is both a day-care centre and a person, a pirate and an inventor, a character with a historic and a literary background as well as someone with a mythical background who joins forces with the wood-nymph. By twisting and turning the story, the children have seen Hybelejen in a series of new contexts, and attached new meanings to his name. This means that all the children can join in the adventure, irrespective of what they knew or believed before. No one needs to feel left out.

The story about Hybelejen, as told by *Hans* to the children, is largely based on Selma Lagerlöf's story, and inspires the children to play together. Its aesthetic structure creates an exciting hunt for Hybelejen, following different clues and traces of his inventions, like his skeleton and the wings, but also for the magical wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest and her witchcraft. This story has the power of blowing life into the entire section.

The most prominent characteristic of Selma Lagerlöf's writing is the way in which she merges imagination with her penetrating observations of society, Edström writes.<sup>42</sup> The reason for this, Edström continues, is that Lagerlöf is part of a realistic and a romantic tradition, or perhaps symbolistic. In her stories, objects and nature itself become symbols and carriers of human problems, and she "opens the doors to our inner selves" and makes us aware of "matters of the soul".<sup>43</sup> In her narrative, our inner selves become visible in the same way as in children's play, and this is probably one of the reasons why the story of Hybelejen so successfully inspires the children to go on an adventure together.

## Back to Freja

*"Who will comfort Toffle?"*

This is mid-April. Fear, played by *Monica*, is reading the book "Who will comfort Toffle?" as Toffle walks into the room. Toffle is played by *Kristina*. A scene has been created in the main playroom; a beach with beautiful stones and some shells. Toffle's hat is lying on the floor, just as it does on the picture in the book. He left the hat behind after his first visit. On the wall, you can make out the horizon, far, far away, and the light comes from the large moon

<sup>42</sup> Edström 1986.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

on the wall. The whole thing has been painted on overhead film and is projected onto the wall. A blue carpet is the sea, where Toffle finds the message in the bottle. The children are playing by the beach, gathering stones. One of the girls is "reading" the story about Toffle to the others. She knows large parts by heart. The surroundings are very atmospheric.

So on he went until he saw a lonely sandy beach  
Where shells and stones lay everywhere, and all within his reach,  
And one shell was so big and white, he looked at it with joy  
And thought: "Well, now I must admit I am a lucky boy!  
I'm very glad I came so far, I think I'll use my hat  
To gather up these lovely stones, all kinds—both round and flat.

A few days later, they find Groke at the beach. She hides quickly behind the door when they spot her. Toffle goes down to the beach and finds the bottle and the message, and then starts looking feverishly for Miffle. It is a very exciting hunt around the whole section, and when Toffle has bitten Groke on the heel, she runs out into the yard. Miffle and Toffle sit happily in their meadow. The different overhead pictures are used to create the scenes, just like in the other classes. The children want Groke to come back in, and run out to fetch her. Groke is being played by *Monica*, who was earlier playing Fear. Everybody wants to comfort Groke, and Charlotte climbs into her lap. "Where is Moomin Valley?" she asks. The children are full of questions, and there is a longing for an adventure in the air.

### The children's play

After the dramatization, the children are playing by the beach. The girls are gathering stones, and the boys are chasing the "teachers", tying up their hands and feet and placing them in the dolls' room. This game is the result of the tension between threat and togetherness in the story. When the adults dramatize the story, the children are part of the play. *Ingela* says that the first time the adults read this book, it did not inspire the children to play.

The everyday environment is gradually transformed as the theme develops and the fiction changes. New scenes and environments, the last one being the beach in Moomin Valley, become charged with meaning and invite the children to play. The main playroom has become Moomin Valley, and the children play a lot with the stones which have turned into small toffles and miffles. They talk a lot about Moomin Valley.

### The dangerous journey

When the children at Freja play by the beach, they are expressing a longing to travel. So the next book to be read aloud is "The Dangerous Journey" by Tove Jansson.

Susanna, the main character in this book, is angry and bored, and wants to get away from her tedious life. This is how the story begins. She puts on a pair of enchanted glasses, and steps right into an imaginary world which is threatening, distorted, different and upside-down. There is no grass, there are no trees and no flowers. "The blackberries are yellow" and "the birds fly upside-down". The difference is also clearly visible in the colours: the bright and sober colours become greyish-green, dirty yellow and purple.<sup>44</sup> Susanna is both scared and delighted—she has wished for this transformation herself. The scary aspect in the book is cleverly balanced with the comical aspect, like when Susanna meets a curious crowd consisting of Hemulen, Thingummy, Bob and Hemulen's dog, and their comments break the spell:

Allsly wrongsly, nothing is the same,  
I thinkslly nastsly badsly powers playsly dirstly game.

The threats remain, however: an erupting volcano and a snow storm, during which Groke's awful shape slides past them, and lastly, a hideous monster, which comes panting after them. But then they are rescued by Too-ticki, who comes flying past in a red and gold balloon. The sky changes, black clouds sweep past, and there they see the Moomin Valley, "full of sunlight and kindness and colour". Susanna's journey ends happily as she lands in the valley.

The book features a clever transformation; from Susanna's reality, i.e. the fiction, via the worlds of imagination and nightmares to the final meeting between the two fictitious worlds, that of Susanna and that of Moomin Valley. When Little My spots Susanna, she cries:

She's just like something potty from a stupid picture book!

The question of what is imagination and what is real has really been brought to an extreme, and Tove Jansson is probably the only one who really knows the answer:

But she never really knew  
Just what had made her travel;  
Real or not, untrue or true—  
Why bother to unravel?

"The Dangerous Journey" provides an insight into the art of transformation and the mechanisms of imagination; the very basis for developing an ability to play. Besides, the book is a brilliant example of the most common type of fantasy of all<sup>45</sup>—that of averting a threat. It is a book, which ought to have the ability to inspire children to play.

The children at Freja want to make a balloon. They are eager, but to the adults' relief, one of the children suggests that everyone should first make a

<sup>44</sup> Westin 1985a, p. 239 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Garvey 1977; Corsaro 1985.

model balloon. And away they go: with Susanna's balloon as a model, they each make a balloon and a basket using newspaper and paste. Some of the members of the Moomin family are placed in the basket. Both the Moomins and the basket are made of paper. But how can they build a large balloon, for everyone to have an adventure?

## Hybelejen comes to Freja

What an abundance of colours! In the paint room at Freja, 14 colourful balloons are jostling one another. Some of them are still waiting to have their baskets fixed, but in a couple of days, all the models ought to be ready. Then they will be ready to build a big balloon.

"This is a story about Hybelejen," *Ingela* says a few days later at circle-time. The children laugh hesitantly.

"But that is our centre!" someone objects.

*Ingela* reads the introduction to the story about Kevenhüller in "The Story of Gösta Berling". Suddenly, the wood-nymph is with them in the room. Her picture has been projected onto the wall. At the point when she meets Hybelejen in the town square, the door to the room opens. A man with a slightly bent back steps inside. He is wearing a dark jacket and a hat. He is also wearing glasses, and his nose is unusually pointy.

"Is there really a building here? When I came here last, there was nothing but grass," he mumbles, and acts as if he was unconscious of the other people in the room.

"What a long nose you have!" one of the children says, in an attempt to establish contact, but the man only continues to walk around the room, scratching the back of his head.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asks suddenly, as if he has just woken up from his dreams.

"What are you doing? Are you going to make a balloon?"

The children are curious and inquisitive.

"I have to think," he says, as he lifts out the large table and turns it on its side.

"No, I can't, it's all too much. I'll have to come back," he says, and suddenly he is gone.

"Won't we go in a balloon now?" one of the children says disappointedly.

"Why did he leave that paper behind?" Charlotte asks, and runs up to it.

"A balloon! Let's build a balloon! We can look at the drawing!"

Everybody is eager. A table turned upside-down—what a brilliant idea!

Hey presto, the table has been turned upside-down, and within seconds, eight children have sat down, close together, on the round, reversed table. Stina takes command, and starts the balloon. She shakes one of the legs back and forth and makes a humming sound.

"To Africa! Let's go to Africa!"

"We need cushions!" Stina and Therèse rush off and get two large cushions to make the trip a little more comfortable.

"Hybelejen came," Michael tells *Monica*, who has come into the room. "He left his balloon drawing behind," he continues.

"Now I'm going to jump ashore," Stina cries.

"Do you want to see Hybelejen?" Charlotte asks, and points to a picture of a man in the "Elephant Song Book".

"Look! The wood-nymph has gone into the wardrobe!" Stina cries all of a sudden, and runs over to it. Someone has opened up the door onto which the picture had been projected.

"Who wants to ride in the balloon?" Michael asks, and takes command after Stina has jumped ashore.

Some children have gone outside to play, and in the end, Michael is the only one left in the "balloon". He continues to play for a long time.

A few days later, Hybelejen comes back to Freja and the children can start building their big balloon. They paint some bed sheets, which are then tightened across chicken-wire which has been bent and twisted into the shape of a balloon. The reversed table becomes the "basket". The children are very ingenious when it comes to building their balloon. This is something they have all looked forward to and longed for. The children play a lot in their balloon—they travel. Sometimes the "basket" is a cosy hut. The balloon has a central position in the main playroom as part of the scene which represents Moomin Valley.

### The balloon journey

"Let's go!" Stina, Tehrèse, Charlotte and Rebecca are all ready and sitting in the balloon, and several teachers and children are sitting on the flying carpet, which has been tied to the balloon by one of the toy snakes.

"The sacks!" Mattias cries.

"Yes, throw the sacks out," says *Kristina*. "What a good idea! Throw them out quickly."

"She takes fire in it," Viktor says and points at Stina.

"She is lighting it, so that the hot air rises into the balloon," *Kristina* explains.

"Let's blow hot air!" Stina, who has taken charge, lifts her arms rhythmically.

"Let's blow!"

Everybody blows energetically.

"Help! We're so high up!"

"Nice," someone says, and while the balloon rises, everybody swings rhythmically back and forth.

"Can you see how small people are?" says Charlotte and points downwards.

"Yes, really small!"

"I can see Charlotte's house. Look!" *Kristina* says.

"Look how far away the ground is, and see how small the cars are," *Monica* exclaims.

"Look! Therèse's house!"

Stina points. She is getting more and more excited, and laughs delightedly.

"Oh dear, what a lot of houses!" Mattias cries anxiously.

"You must steer it so that we don't hit the block of flats," *Kristina* warns. "Blow! We have to blow! Oh, I was really scared!"

"Now I'm turning towards another hill," says Stina proudly. "We're going to fly over it."

"We have to fly higher to pass over it," *Kristina* says urgently. "More hot air in the balloon!"

"Look! Water!" Mattias cries. "Lake Lamberg!"

"Let's land then," Therèse says. "Let's land in the lake."

"Watch it, so we don't take in water," *Kristina* warns.





Fig. 5. The balloon journey.

"I'm going to do some magic," Stina says. "I have turned the balloon into a boat."

"We have a balloon and a flying carpet which have become boats. That's good," *Kristina* says.

"It's a sailing boat, no, a houseboat," Stina explains.

"Look! An island!" Charlotte cries. "Let's go ashore! In through the tunnel!"

Close to the flying carpet there is a tunnel, made from cushions and mattresses.

"We will have to go very carefully. Maybe we'll meet someone on the desert island," *Monica* says. The children crawl through the tunnel, one at a time. The big children reach the island first.

"Great fun!" several children cry. "Great fun! What fun!" They are all very eager.

"Sharks!" someone calls out.

"Here are some large stones, which we'll have to pass over." Three chairs have been placed out in the hallway.

"Look! Three stones! We'll have to climb over the stones."

Some of the children have entered the mattress room. *Kristina* is right at the front, while *Monica* is helping the small children across the large stones.

"Look!" someone cries. "A devil! Help!"

"We'll have to escape! Let's jump in the water and swim away!"

Stina runs away to the balloon, closely followed by David, one of the youngest children in the class.

"Come on, someone's come," *Monica* says, and Stina jumps out of the balloon.

"We'll have to swim across!" David makes swimming motions.

"Swim, swim, swim," he says on his way out into the hall.

In the hall they see the wood-nymph, or *Ingela*. She is wearing a long, white lace dress, and green leaves have been plaited into her hair. She has protruding teeth with gaps in between. She is invited into the section, and the children follow her closely.

"Do you know who has built our balloon?" *Kristina* turns to the wood-nymph.

"Hybelejen!" the children cry with one voice.

"Yes, Hybelejen helped us build this nice balloon, and this is the first time we have a ride in it together," *Kristina* says.

"And you saw us coming in our balloon?" *Monica* interjects.

"Hybelejen, he is a man who can invent things," the wood-nymph answers. "He can make one specimen of each thing he invents, and now he has invented a balloon."

"But we're wondering how he can be so good at inventing things," *Kristina* says, and wants the wood-nymph to tell the children about her meeting with Hybelejen.

"I have given him that power," the wood-nymph says proudly, "he was kind to me and told me to hide my tail."

"So you have met him?" *Kristina* seems surprised.

"Yes, in the town square in Karlstad," the wood-nymph answers. "I am the wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest."

Now the children want to show the wood-nymph the different things in the room.

"Look at our tunnel!" *Michael* says.

"Look at our drawings—balloons!"

*Michael* presents one of the snakes.

"But that's my adder!" the wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest cries happily.

"No that's not it," *Stina* objects. "I know where that is." She runs over to the bookshelf and fetches the green snake *Jansson* out of his nest. The wood-nymph hangs him around her neck.

"You see, my adder has run away."

"You can borrow this one," *Stina* says and looks pleased.

"But—you've lost a tooth," *Therèse* exclaims. "Look, I've also lost one!"

"How old are you, wood-nymph?" *Kristina* asks.

"I'm 150 years old."

"How strange," *Monica* says, "people can't get that old. I think you must be something in between a troll and a human being."

"Some people can get as old as 500 years," says *Viktor*, turning to *Monica*. "My father said so."

"Could I travel back home with you?" the wood-nymph asks. She seems to want to get going.

Everyone prepares to leave. This time, those who travelled in the balloon sit on the flying carpet and vice versa.

"Let's go to the forest. Towards Lamberg Forest! More hot air in the balloon!" *Kristina* encourages the children.

"Keep hold of the snake, so we don't lose track of one another," *Monica* says.

*Mikael* is in charge, and he is pumping for all he is worth.

"Wow! This is high! I've got butterflies in my stomach!"

"A house!" someone cries.

"No," *Kristina* objects, "that's not right. We're on our way to the forest. Turn!"

"That's my cottage!" the wood-nymph cries.

"And that's a water tower," someone else cries.

"Let's land on the water tower," *Kristina* suggests.

"I want to go for a swim!"

Everyone is in a playing mood.

"Plonk! We've landed. Now we'll have to crawl on all fours through the water tower to get down to the ground," *Kristina* says. "Be careful!"

The tunnel has become a water tower, and all the children crawl through it.

"Yuk! That was disgusting!" one of the youngest boys says.

"Have we reached the ground yet?" *Stina*, *Therèse* and *Rebecca* are jumping up and down.

"Wait for us," *Monica* begs, "so that we don't lose track of one another."

"I have to get home," says the wood-nymph, who is back in her forest.

"Bye, bye!"

All the children wave, and *Ingela* disappears out of the room.

"Homewards! We have to go home now! But first we'll have to climb up the water tower again," *Kristina* says. The children are eager, and the cushions come tumbling down.

"The water tower's fallen down, we'll have to send *Hybelejen* here so he can build it up again," *Kristina* says with a hint of satisfaction in her voice.

"A leaf!"

Suddenly someone has found a leaf, which the wood-nymph left behind.

"Let's keep that. We can use that as proof that we have really met her," *Kristina* says.

"Sit down! Hold on to the carpet! We're off!"

*Viktor* and *Mikael* are balancing at the very rim of the carpet. They are really living the part.

"We're landing in a chimney!" *Stina* cries. "It's the chimney on *Freja's* roof."

"I can smell food!"

"Nice to be back!"

There is a party feeling in the air. Everybody is happy and vivacious, but no one is giggly and silly. The happiness is genuine.

## Play analysis

Sensitively and deliberately, the adults have guided the children along on their adventurous journey.

*Kristina* led the party, talking to the older children who are quick to make comments and act, *Monica* went at the back, calm and encouraging, helping the younger ones crawl along the tunnel and climb across the stones. Everyone participated at a pace which suited them. The adventure surged forwards, with the big children taking the initiative, and the small ones living every part, experiencing all the action. The play became an adventure—a dangerous journey—brimming with ideas, threats, unexpected meetings, transformations, gestures and body language, just as *Rasmussen* (1985) describes "the great play".

*Rasmussen* claims that there are three stages of play: the imaginative stage, the problem solving stage and the execution stage. As the adults smoothly carry the action forwards, they avoid getting stuck in a situation where the adventure is interrupted, where conflicts have to be solved or where someone wants to stop playing. The theme has become a source of inspiration, both to the children and the adults, and any problems they have encountered have been genuine problems within the frame of fiction.

The adventurous play—the balloon journey—can also be viewed as a parallel to the type of drama called “teacher-in-role-play”, in the spirit of Heathcote and Bolton.<sup>46</sup> In this dramatic play, the teachers figure both as leaders (*Monica* and *Kristina*) and as characters (*Ingela* as the wood-nymph), which means that there is a common fiction which the two pedagogues can stick to as leaders of the play. The contact between the adults within the play makes the play dynamic, and includes all the children into it. Heathcote<sup>47</sup> has described different leader approaches in “teacher-in-role-plays”, from “those-who-know-and-are-in-charge-of-the-developments” to those who say “there’s no point in asking me”. Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad show how it is possible to develop the play by assuming different roles, both as a leader and as a character.<sup>48</sup>

“We had a plan, but sometimes we digressed a fair bit from it,” the staff at Freja writes in their project report. This strengthens the picture of the children’s and the adults’ mutual presence in play.

Only a few days later, they travel in the balloon to Denmark and Tivoli in Copenhagen. First they make a little detour to the Amusement Park in Fårup, where they all crawl through a tunnel and walk across a suspension bridge. One of the boys in the group has been to Fårup, and he wants to share this experience. After Fårup, they carry on to Tivoli in Copenhagen. The section is decorated with Danish red-and-white flags, and the bathroom becomes “the Haunted House”. Everyone rides on the “Ghost Train” through the bathroom. This is where Father Ghost used to hang when Fear came to visit. Now *Lena* is dressed up as a ghost, and the skeletons are dangling from the ceiling, illuminated by a lamp. After the ghost train, the children spot the roller coaster, which is really a newly acquired slide. *Ulla* sells ice cream from an ice cream stand. It is her birthday, and she is being celebrated at the same time. This is an adventurous trip, and a promise of the summer yet to come.

“They kept playing with the cart all summer,” *Kristina* says. Every morning someone says: “Who wants to play ghost train?”

## Conclusion

What do the playworlds look like in the different classes? It could be summarised as follows:

At *Freja*, the children and adults have developed a dynamic playworld, by unleashing their emotions and imagination and establishing a bond between their fiction and the day-care centre reality. The world has been created by children and adults together, and Frightings, monsters and stones, which the children have adopted as proper toys—toys full of meaning and magic—have

<sup>46</sup> Wagner 1979; Bolton 1979.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. the periodical “Drama”, 2nd issue 1980.

<sup>48</sup> Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad 1992, p. 206 ff.

been an important link between fiction and reality. The balloon enables both children and adults to transfer themselves to the playworld in a most realistic way. The adventurous journey is the form of play through which children and adults explore the world. The world has developed through transformations, and at the end of spring, there are numerous play environments: the world of the Frightings, houses for monsters and ghosts, Pippi's world and, of course, Moomin Valley. The children play intensively, and children of all ages play together. According to the adults, the group is now "structured", and dividing the entire group into cross-sections is no longer necessary as the children spontaneously divide themselves into the wanted groups.

The adults now share the same basic outlook: they like acting together and they develop the fiction through dialogues with the children. Everyone shares the same experience. The theme has been a source of inspiration as well as a challenge both to the children and to the adults' "zone of proximal development", and the adults have not been afraid of venturing into the unknown. They have shown a rare ability of vitalising the activities.

At **Valhall**, activities have been guided by the main interest in drama, literature, pictures and music. The adults' initially hesitant approach changed when the story "Who will comfort Toffle?" took shape. The dramatic pedagogical method made the adults enter the fiction, merging with the characters and turn the entire section into Moomin Valley. Tove Jansson's literary world allowed children and adults to meet within the fiction, and because of its wealth of aesthetics, a dynamic playworld could be created. The main characteristic of Valhall is its unity: the entire class is transformed, and the fiction is extended out into the Lamberg Forest. The adults' distancing "teacher roles" disappeared when they assumed the roles of the different characters and a fiction was created. Everyone is involved in the creative process.

At **Oden**, the folklore framework unites everyone. Amongst other things, this includes an approach which emphasises the children's perspectives, which the adults should interpret as a sign to improvise and be guided by the children's ideas and take part in the play on the children's conditions. This approach is more of an anthropological one, according to which the aesthetic approach can be said to represent an adult perspective, where the adults consciously introduce new ideas and act these out. Improvising does, however, require a creative aptitude as well as knowledge of the different aesthetic forms. These prerequisites do exist at Oden, but things often come to an end because not everyone is involved in what is happening. This gives rise to an underlying feeling of competitiveness. But focusing on a common popular fiction—the story of Hybelejen—allows everyone to be spontaneous. Through the detailed, colourful story, a world full of meaning develops; a world where everyone can play a part, and where different activities are united in the hunt for Hybelejen.

## How the common playworld was developed

I have tried to describe how the different classes developed a playworld of their own, i.e. how shared fiction developed and took shape amongst both children and adults. This development did to a large extent depend on the adults' abilities to interpret and dramatize the contents of the theme. It was a matter of being able to bring the theme to life, and the most effective way proved to be when all the adults in a class entered into the fiction through dramatization, acting different parts.

The establishing of a playworld was, however, dependent of the adults' attitude to the theme and to what children's literature they liked—largely, in other words, their whole attitude to children's culture. If one of the adults was not interested, this fact would influence the course of events. At Oden, some adults did not like the Moomin world and they were not keen on entering the fiction, motivating their reluctance by saying that the children were not interested. This observation was hardly correct, given the children's positive reaction to the play based on "Who will comfort Toffle?". Some adults in the other classes also hesitated to approach Tove Jansson's books, but their attitude changed when they entered the fiction, and saw the children's reactions. It makes me think that despite everything, the basic problem was the fact that the adults' lack of interest was projected onto the children. The general feeling at Oden was that it was difficult to get into the method of working with a theme. At times, it felt as if they had to start all over again, especially when they were entering the Moomin world. There was no common denominator, which was partly a result of the fact that the adults all had their own individual starting points, and that their work was mainly based on improvisations. I have already pointed out that the hunt for Hybelejen eventually became the common denominator.

## Our participation in the spring term

My task was to follow and analyse the pedagogic process. I chose to use a video camera to tape the staged dramatizations and play at the three sections for further observations. This meant that I visited Hybelejen two mornings a week on a regular basis. Apart from that, I also visited the day-care centre at other times, in the afternoons and evenings, and I also spent an entire week there. In addition to my video taping, I kept a *journal* where I recorded every visit and conversations with children and adults; a journal which contained all that I had heard and seen, as well as my own interpretation of my experiences and suggestions for what could be done in the classes. It provided a basis for the discussions with the staff at the day-care centre. This contact was mainly informal, but I also participated in a couple of meetings when the staff was planning future activities. Moreover, I had running *meetings with the head of*

staff, who was also present at all the staff meetings, and the one who organised the activities whenever a member of staff fell ill. This went very smoothly, and without this assistance, the project would have been more difficult to carry through. The fact that the sections were adequately staffed also made preparations possible. Finally, together the pedagogues in all the classes wrote *project reports*, which they let me read.

Video taping proved easier than I had expected. There was a natural course of events, and after a couple of hours, the playing subsided and the children went off to play outside or to have lunch. Nor did the video camera seem to have a negative effect on the actors; not even the adults were bothered by it apart from the very first time. Instead, the presence of the video camera made the actors more acutely aware of the situation and more concentrated. I regarded this as positive. Watching the tapes made me aware of what changes had actually taken place. I also showed them to the adults and children at the centre on a regular basis as pedagogic feedback, and to give the children another possibility of experiencing the fiction again by seeing themselves play.

I also made a conscious effort to observe what the children were playing and what part of the theme appealed the most to them. I was able to spend time with the children; talk, read and play, and I could then pass my observations on to the adults, thus influencing the developments in different directions.

The parents had known about the project right from the beginning, and after one term, in the middle of autumn, I attended the parent-teacher meetings. This made discussing the different themes easier, as the parents were already aware of most of what had happened, and proved to be very interested.

Jan, the drama pedagogue, has created the fiction—the theme. At our first meeting in January, he introduced the theme of the story, and painted a scenario where Fear and her character could be dramatized under the bed; a possible dialogue, etc. He described “Who will comfort Toffle?” in the terms of dramatizing different characters from the book; project them onto the wall, etc. The way he intended the developments to take place was to start with improvising Fear, and then move on to do a puppet theatre version of “The Invisible Child”, and finally combine improvisations of different characters from Moomin Valley, made possible by the Moomin world’s versatile structure and characters. At the first stage, meetings between the children and fictitious characters would be staged, which would bring everyday events to life in the same way as playing does. After this, fiction would deliberately be merged with reality. Just as children are used to playing, the adults would be able to develop a situation where they switched between acting roles and being themselves, and between different stages of fiction. One minute, someone is acting Fear, the next Fear may be real and read fiction like “Who will comfort Toffle?”. And next, Toffle may step out of his fiction and become authentic. The rhythm flows, and the adults take turns being actors and audience. To Jan, one very important factor had been describing the theme in terms of play, with its dynamic relation between world, character and story.



To keep the fiction alive, or rather to develop and enrich it, Jan gathered the staff on three different occasions during the spring. I was also present at these meetings, where the pedagogues shared their experience of what had happened and how the theme had developed. This enabled Jan to point out in what ways the children's and adults' interpretations had together carried the story forwards and developed the theme. Jan also presented different ideas about how the theme could be developed further, and how different dramatizations could be staged. Furthermore, he often solved the problems of how to create scenery, and in what way the existing premises could be utilised and turned into play-worlds.

Also the trainee teacher at Freja, who chose to work with "Pippi Longstocking", received assistance with the organisation and focus of "Loreliness".

Jan assisted the adults in the production whenever they asked for help, but when it came to the puppet theatre, he directed all the adults in all the classes. Using puppets is an indirect way of acting, and it was so demanding that Jan thought everyone would benefit from being directed.

The result of this was that many of the adults later found dramatizing and acting different roles quite easy, especially when they were able to use their entire body.

This proves that there was a plan for how the theme was supposed to progress, which also served to develop the ability to dramatize and understand the pattern of play. In the autumn, when the other classes were introduced to the project, getting into that way of working did not prove an easy task. People needed a path of progress, and help with dramatizations and understanding this way of working. For this reason, the adults in every class received guidance (direction) through at least one of their productions (dramatizations).

For the continuation of the story, Jan prepared a scenario in view of the joint outing at the end of May. At this time, the different characters would be released from their contexts, free to meet in a new fiction. Ninny turned up together with Moomintroll and Little My behind a stone in the forest, and Little My challenged them to play. Further away was the man from "Act without words", and his sister Fear was sitting in a tree playing the saxophone. Fear saved the man from his predicament, and they were able to meet in the world of music. Even further into the forest was Toffle's house, and the children found a letter from Toffle saying that he and Miffle were hiding, as Groke was looking for them.<sup>49</sup>

This joint outing was the prelude to all six classes at Hybelejen venturing forth on adventurous journeys when the autumn term started; first to the Jungle with Turetroll.

At Freja, Valhall and Oden, the children were taking over more and more in the play they all share. The question is: what was the result?

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<sup>49</sup> Lindqvist 1992.

## CHAPTER 7

# Playing and Dramatizing

In the last chapter, I have tried to describe how the classes Freja, Oden and Valhall developed their own playworlds, where children and adults have been able to meet and share a common fiction. The theme "Alone in the big, wide world" had its roots in anxiety on an individual level; the small child's fear of the unknown. Together with Fear, the children were introduced to different kinds of dangers and threats (personified in Groke amongst others) in order to become aware of their own fears and their own possibilities. At the end of spring, the three classes had reached the point where they shared their adventures and travelled around the world together. The children at Freja travelled by air, and the moment the round table was turned upside-down it was transformed into a balloon, and everyone was prepared to go on a journey.

This chapter will focus on the *texts of play*. I have selected a few different forms of play to study how they relate to cultural, aesthetic forms such as drama and literature. Which aesthetic forms are able to improve children's play and promote a rich variety? However, the question is not only how we can influence play, but also how play can turn into conscious dramatization. What sort of influence does this require, and what shape does the potential development take when play turns into conscious dramatization?

### Relation between play and cultural, aesthetic forms

Having an aesthetic approach to play means trying to establish in what way cultural, aesthetic forms are connected with children's play and how they influence one another. Vygotsky has pointed to a link between play, literature and drama. The theory of cultural-history emphasizes the correspondence between the form of consciousness and the cultural forms of society. In children's play, the form of consciousness is manifested and reflected as a meeting between the internal and the external worlds, Vygotsky writes. Garvey (1977) has shown that "averting a threat" is the most common plan in children's play, as well as being fundamental to stories and tales. It was present in Tove Jansson's "Who

will comfort Toffle?”, and it originates from the fairy-tale: home, breaking up, adventure and return.

Researchers into children’s culture—whether in the field of cultural anthropology, folklore, literature and art or psychologists—have described different cultural and aesthetic forms within this culture, where children’s play is one of the central forms. There seem to be fundamental similarities between children’s games, stories and the literature written for children—different forms of children’s culture,—even if certain researchers aim at pointing out the unique features of a certain cultural form and come to regard this as a sub-culture with individual rules and social patterns where hand-over also takes place. My own intention is to provide examples of a few general patterns from the research into children’s culture to show the correspondence to different cultural, aesthetic forms. This description will provide the background to the empirical attempts made at Hybelejen to find out how some aesthetic forms (primarily literary and dramatic) can influence and inspire children’s play on the basis of convergence.

## The lyrical and musical patterns of play—a theme with variations

Two main patterns can be distinguished in children’s play and children’s culture as a whole. The first one is dynamic and versatile and goes with music, poetry and movement. It is based on the young child’s poetic, rhythmic approach to the objects around it and to language. This pattern includes the child’s play with movements, objects and language (words, nursery rhymes, nonsense verse, etc.)—forms of play which are typical of the very young child.<sup>1</sup> From an aesthetic point of view, these forms should be regarded as part of a lyrical and musical pattern. Sutton-Smith (1989) goes as far as to prove how the form of play largely corresponds to that of music. He compares children who are playing together to a jazz improvisation, where everyone is playing their own instrument and follows their own part, rather than to a regular conversation. Play “is a radical heteroglossia of interwoven possibilities ...” much like an individual person’s consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Bjørkvold (1989) describes children’s play and its connection to lyrics, music and movement in a similar way. Basic elements such as sound, movement and rhythm will affect a person all through his life. These are all present in play. Free play is an improvisation based on a fixed blues blueprint—a theme with variations. Song is present in play as a linguistic symbol, but it can also serve as a particular base or framework in the playing.

Chukovsky (1975) claims that children have a poetic approach to language.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Garvey 1977, an opinion shared by most researchers.

<sup>2</sup> Sutton-Smith 1989, p. 61, which resembles Vygotsky’s theory of play.

He shows how children's play with language relates to all the other games they play. The ability to grasp the structure and grammar of their language and the joy of discovering new words and sounds are noticeable in very young children (who have not even reached two years of age). This child will make poems and familiarize itself with new words. According to Chukovsky, children are born poets, and learn to speak in prose as they go by. The basis for versification is inherent in the baby's crowing. Children have an built-in feeling for rhythm and movement. When a child plays around with language, it is turning its notions into playthings.

In an extensive report written by Sutton-Smith<sup>3</sup>, which includes children between the ages of 2 and 10 and their way of telling stories, he confirms the picture of the young child as a "poet". When very young children relate a series of events, they use a kind of metric form, where events are linked together in associated series, in the same way as in play. Sutton-Smith compares this with e.g. Piaget's (1963) description of the circular motions of sensory-motor games. A versified story has a theme with variations by analogy with the music. The intonation of the language gives rhythm to the story.

Children are also very interested in nursery rhymes. Based on the "probable improbability" aspect of the nursery rhyme, Chukovsky demonstrates the child's interest in the absurd and topsy-turvy, which can disrupt the established order. Children use their imagination to interpret their realities. Every deviation from reality's conventions and norms in the nursery rhymes strengthen their understanding of reality. The deliberate violation of reality which "probable improbabilities" constitute is paralleled in play with its ability to break the connection between objects and their normal functions, instead providing them with new meanings or significance—which is what we normally call imagination. According to Vygotsky, the imaginative process is characterized by exaggeration, reductions and inversions, which makes the child discover new, unpredictable connections in its interpretation of reality.

When a writer such as Lennart Hellsing writes his verse and rhymed stories, he bases his work on theories similar to those of Chukovsky.<sup>4</sup> In his book "Thoughts on children's literature",<sup>5</sup> Hellsing likens words to a play-box, which the children can use along with the verse or nursery rhyme. His experiments with form, where lyrics, music and movements all work together, are based on his knowledge that when playing, the children themselves choose which different forms of art to combine.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he sought to break with the idyllizing norm which had come into existence at the beginning of the century. Instead, he wanted to "shatter the forms that were far too neat, far too polished and well trimmed, and write with a more boldly realistic flare and

<sup>3</sup> Sutton-Smith 1981, where he investigates children's narrative competence as part of an investigation into children's aesthetic development.

<sup>4</sup> Edström 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Hellsing 1963, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Edström 1987; Sundin 1982.

more spontaneous imagination for a generation of children who have grown up without the same faith in authorities".<sup>7</sup> A better example of how connections are established between children's play and culture and the artist's aesthetic forms is difficult to find.

## The dramatic and literary patterns of play—based on the folk-tale

The second main pattern is a pattern of action, which originates primarily from the original folk-tale. This pattern can be found in children's games and stories from the age of three, as well as in children's literature. The lyrical and musical forms do not, however, disappear altogether when this pattern comes to the forefront, but they are dominated by the action.

Consequently, children's play changes character and become dramatic, or thematic, to use Garvey's (1977) terminology. This means that the play is characterized by a theme, action and roles—a complete plan of action. This way of describing play tallies with Vygotsky's description of imaginative play and with our way of putting the emphasis on the world, characters and actions.<sup>8</sup> According to Garvey, role and action often go together, but they can also appear separately. She calls the roles that are combined with necessary actions "functional roles". These are often family roles. A mother, for example, feeds and takes care of her baby, etc. The actions of character roles, such as the stereotyped professional roles, are also limited and predictable, but these can also be roles which lack actual action, and where the children spend most of the time talking about the different characters.<sup>9</sup> Many of the plans of action in play are ones the children have personal experience of, e.g. packing, travelling, shopping and eating, and these are often linked with functional roles. The most common plan of action in children's play has proved to be "averting a threat"—a formula with connections to the folk-tale and its approach to the fundamental problem of the threats of reality. In her study of 48 pairs of children and their games (48 different play situations), Garvey found no less than 51 episodes of this kind. These games included an attacker, a threat and a defender.<sup>10</sup>

Sutton-Smith writes that the formula of the folk-tale also can be found in the stories children tell.<sup>11</sup> From the age of 4, children's stories borrow many of the traits of the folk-tale, but at the same time, the form is less restricted. Sutton-Smith has called his book "The Folkstories of Children", by which he is trying to point out that this is a matter of folkstories, and not folk-tales. These stories

<sup>7</sup> Edström 1987, p. 17 citing Arvidsson 1949, p. 544 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Lindqvist 1993.

<sup>9</sup> True of certain fictitious roles in films and stories.

<sup>10</sup> C.f. Corsaro 1985, who confirms Garvey's results.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton-Smith 1981.

are currently being incorporated in a popular tradition, but they are still at a personal, embryonic level.

90 per cent of the stories (of 4–10 year-old children) dealt with a struggle against different fates. The older the child, the more complicated the struggle, with various obstacles and ways of defeating them. There is hardly any difference between boys' and girls' ways of telling a story, apart from the fact that boys fight longer, while girls tend to go for help to conquer the threat.

According to Sutton-Smith<sup>12</sup>, there is a pattern of action in the story, which deals with a struggle between two forces. This pattern is established very early on in children's play, in fact as early as in the stages of turn-taking which Garvey has described. This pattern then develops and when the children are 5–6 years old, it adopts its mutual form, i.e. where the hero is affected but the crook is also neutralized. At this time, the patterns turn into prototypes of the opposition between two forces (opposites), such as attack-defence, hunt-escape, capture-release, and these feature both in children's stories and in their games. In her interpretation of Sutton-Smith's analysis, Rönnerberg (1987) writes that the stories and play structures reflect basic conflicts in the socialization process, e.g. weakness/strength, dependence/independence and helplessness/power.

In games, the plans of action have settled into a fixed structure (based on rules). The roles are static, and there is a mechanism, or rule, which demands a change of roles and makes the game exciting, Berit Østberg (1979) writes. When Iona and Peter Opie (1969), American ethno-folklorists and pioneers in the field of research into children's culture, investigate children's games in streets and playgrounds, they discover patterns similar to those described by Sutton-Smith. The games include chasing, catching, running competitions, duels, guessing games, daring games, etc.

Folklorists<sup>13</sup> often point out the fixed structure of games as a characteristic of children's own tradition, as opposed to spontaneous imaginary play, which has a free and dream-like structure. However, the most likely thing is that a connection exists between different cultural forms of children's play, as Vygotsky has described it in his comparison between fictitious play (imaginary play) and games based on rules. In fictitious play, the fiction is overt with covert forms (rules), whereas games based on rules feature overt forms and rules with an underlying or covert fiction. Thus, the basic patterns of conflict are reflected both in children's stories, in imaginary play and in games.

In an analysis of stories told by 4–7 year-olds at certain Norwegian day-care centres, Rolf Romøren (1989) shows that these stories feature a basic conflict motive. Many stories deal with the contrasts of feeling at home and feeling left outside, of feeling secure or insecure. Very young children often fear the threat of being eaten by a monster or falling victim of some disease or accident. At Hybelejen, it was clear that the children's play centred around fear and security

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Opie 1969; Enerstvedt 1971; Østberg 1979.

in connection with ghosts and monster animals—inspired by Fear's arrival at the centre. Death also features regularly in children's stories, both as a physical reality and as an existing threat. Conflicts with parents, brothers and sisters are also of frequent occurrence.

The ties between story and play are so strong that they are on many occasions inseparable. When Koltsova (1977) describes the chronology of children's stories, she points at the fact that the starting point is often to be found in play, when children pretend to read aloud from a book. At the age of 3, although the stories are still short, they are nevertheless complete, Koltsova says. The main characters are objects, animals and people. The "Once upon a time" aspect of their stories shows how such young children can make use of the fairy-tale formula, and in their stories they often also include phrases from well-known situations.

Similarly, Sutton-Smith (1981) shows that children's stories often originate from their dramatic play. They simply borrow part of situations they have already played.

The Danish literary historian Mouritsen (1987) maintains that play is a way for children of telling a story at the same time as they are dramatizing it. The final argument why play should be interpreted as a story is the use of the preterite tense: "Once upon a time, there was ...". The dramatic structure of the play is often blatant as they tend to deal with subjects such as death, accidents, catastrophes, policemen, etc. According to Mouritsen, the story-line in play resembles a detective story as related by the mass media, with a concluding moral. In play, the child exists on several narrative levels at the same time: as initiator, actor and narrator. Play has one dissociative point, from which the narrator rules over the fiction from reality to imagination. According to Mouritsen role-play is far too often analysed from a psychological aspect. Instead, he would like to see more cultural, aesthetic analyses. Role-play, with its well-defined fictitious worlds, opens the door to the fictitious dimension of the story. When children play families, the roles are well-defined. The mother is the initiator and the administrator, the one who is in control and who gives the dressing-downs. This is an essential role in this game, in the same way as baby is the other one who puts spanners in the spokes in various ways. Interpretations of play often claim that the children are imitating the roles adults have, but Mouritsen says that the roles they play are not realistic imitations, but fictitious roles, epic elements. The mother speaks with a soft voice, in the language of power, and this represents the principal theme, i.e. the confrontation between adult and child. The types of roles are the formulas of role-play; chains of events in play are similar to popular tales, *commedia dell'arte* or *Dario Fo*. This means that the aesthetics of role-play has a simple basic pattern, which corresponds to popular drama, simple action patterns which the child can use for improvisations. This mixture of formula and improvisation is a typical feature of children's aesthetic forms of expression, Mouritsen (1984) writes.



Edström (1982) says that no form has exerted so strong an influence on children's literature as the fairy-tale. Based on a certain formula, the plot in a fairy-tale creates excitement and "consents to exhilarating adventures and transformations at the same time as the borderline has been determined," Edström writes.<sup>14</sup> The fairy-tale features the central patterns of action: the hike, the journey, the search, the escape, the adventure. The home-adventure-return formula is common to them all. Rönnberg (1987) describes how the films based on Astrid Lindgren's books inspire the children to play, and how the literary themes: outing, running away, adventure, pirating, treasure hunt, etc., become the forms of their play.

When Rasmussen (1985) says that the journey is one of the children's favourite themes when playing, the pattern is the same as in the fairy-tale or the adventure story: someone is setting out on a trip into the unknown, and to reach their destination, they have to cope with the dangers and strains they encounter. The circle is complete. The cultural, aesthetic forms are there, as a combined pattern.

Storytelling is a crucial structure of thought, in Sutton-Smith's opinion:

... storytelling is as old as human history in every group about which there is knowledge, narrative is a fair candidate for being such a basic model ... of the human mind.<sup>15</sup>

Sutton-Smith's way of explaining the kind of correspondence which exists between the cultural, aesthetic forms and the consciousness bears apparent resemblance to Vygotsky's opinion.

Emphasizing the basic cultural forms, or structures, enables cultural anthropologists and historians of art and literature to meet in their analyses. However, it also means that they partly disregard certain aspects of contents with links to the aesthetic quality of the text, both as regards play and stories, and these are the aspects I believe could become crucial when it comes to developing a pedagogy of play that will enrich children's play. What, then, is the nature of these aesthetic forms which create a multi-layered meaning?

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<sup>14</sup> Edström 1982, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Sutton-Smith 1981, p. 37.

## CHAPTER 8

# Focusing on the Action

### Play as adventurous journeys

After the spring term, which had been full of seriousness and emotional meetings, the time has come to “set play free”. When autumn comes, all the six classes at Hybelejen want to join in the theme work and go on adventurous journeys. They have been inspired by the book “The Children in the Jungle” (1959) by Leif Kranz and Ulf Löfgren.

This time, Jan, Agneta (the head of staff at Hybelejen) and I meet to draw up the plans for the continued theme work. Jan comes up with tangible ideas about how we could dramatize the theme: how jungle surroundings could be created in each section, how the troll Ture, who will be unravelling the fiction, could be invisible to the rest of the adults in collusion with the children, and how he could take the initiative in making different adventurous journeys to the jungle by some means of transport. On the first day of term, which is a planning day for the pedagogues, Agneta presents the plans for the term ahead. There is also time to discuss the actual contents and plan of action, both in respect of the individual classes and for the day-care centre as a whole. Everybody seems full of expectation in view of what is to come, and take particular pleasure in working with a common theme.

### The Children in the Jungle

“The Children in the Jungle” is part of a trilogy. The other books are called “The Children in the Air” and “The Children in the Water”. All three books tell tales of adventures and wonderful journeys, and their form originates from children’s play. Like play, the journeys depart from the monotony of everyday life, and all three books begin when it is raining outside. “One rainy day, Olle was lying on the nursery floor, finding life unusually boring ...”—this is how “The Children in the Jungle” starts. The journeys start in the nursery, and the initiator is the nursery troll Ture, who paints scenes with his paint brush. He is the one who takes the step from the “real” world in the fiction to its “imaginary” world, and this is also visible in the book. In “The Children in the Jungle”, the nursery

scenes have been drawn in black and white, whereas the jungle scenes have been drawn using “deep, rich colours”.<sup>1</sup> Westin<sup>2</sup> points out that the artistic idea of letting the fictitious character rule their own fiction and function as narrators stems partly from comic-strip drawing. Rhedin<sup>3</sup> states that this is a relatively rare approach in picture books—of “defamiliarizing” by drawing the story as it goes along. This unusual narrative technique adds to the feeling that this is a form of play, and the fact that the plot can be easily influenced and altered should make it easier for the children to transform the day-care centre into whatever they want in their own play. The troll Ture is a character who can be both a help and a hindrance when it comes to developing the story. He is the modern answer to the folk-tale magic helper (hindrance). For example, he paints a bridge across the river, so that the tiger which is chasing the children can get dangerously close to them. Ture represents excitement and adventure, but at the same time, he is the children’s link with the “real” world in the book. The children refuse to let themselves be passively manipulated by Ture. They take charge and influence the line of action themselves, and Ture can be interpreted as a concretion of the children’s joint imaginative efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Anna wants to be an Indian princess with a crown on her head, but the crown has been stolen by the calamangs—wild cannibals who live way into the jungle. Olle promises her that the others will fetch the crown back for her, and this is the start of an adventure including rescuing the crown and avoiding being caught by the wild calamangs. This is an adventurous journey with the same formula that is so common in children’s play, i.e. “averting a threat”.

## Adventurous journeys at Oden

Oden makes its first contacts with Ture one day when the entire day-care centre is making a trip to the Sättersholms—a trip similar to the one made at the end of the spring term as part of the hunt for Hybelejen. This time, the island is transformed into a jungle, and Ture makes an appearance. Ture is played by *Gunilla*, from one of the classes, Loke. The children find Ture in a tree, where he is sitting popping balloons to catch their attention. He is invisible to the adults, and with his paintbrush he conjures up four threatening calamangs: *Hans*, *Anneli*, *Åsa* and *Ingela*. They work in different classes, and now they have dressed up and taken Anna’s crown. Ture and the children start tracking them down. The adults still have not “noticed” anything, and the children pretend to go off to pick mushrooms. Only when all the calamangs have been caught, everyone is able to join in the dance at the end, accompanied by rhythmic drums.

<sup>1</sup> Westin 1985b, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Rhedin 1992, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> Westin 1985b, p. 69.



Fig. 6. The jungle party with Ture.

After this, the children talk a lot about ghosts and calamangs. Jakob wants Fear to return to the section. He is probably afraid. The mattress room is transformed into a jungle. Green military masking paper covers the walls, and the children make a large hut out of cardboard from the sawmill in Skoghall close to Karlstad. From this moment, this type of cardboard becomes a favourite at Hybelejen. One leftover piece of cardboard is made into a circle, and this is used both as a lake and a car in the children's games. It is perfect for sitting in.

A few days later, they encounter Ture in Lamberg forest, where he is picking mushrooms. To the children's horror, he is just about to eat a poisonous fly agaric. Oden's Ture is played by *Hans*, and also he is invisible to the adults. He jokes around and makes fun of most things. Since the adults cannot see him, he is at liberty to play tricks and practical jokes, and not even the children are safe from him. Ture comes along to the day-care centre and helps them paint animals and plants in their jungle.

After Ture's visit, the adults and children start making animal masks and costumes. They produce a lion's mane out of cardboard, crocodile jaws out of egg boxes, tiger and lion costumes, etc. The large treasure chest is filled with

costumes and props representing different animals. They make yet another hut under the bed, and cover it with a blanket with leopard spots on.

Both children and adults play animal games. They dress up and copy the animals' sounds and their movements. The adults also read the book "The Children in the Jungle", and the children never grow tired of hearing it.

The big jungle party at the end of October is going to be the "grand finale" of the jungle theme.<sup>5</sup> Ture is the host, and as usual, he is invisible to the adults.

The animals have met up in the jungle. Ture is inside the hut, and the children know this. *Ingalill* and *Lena* enter the jungle.

"Shall we play 'dog and bone'," *Ingalill* asks.

There is no reaction from the children. They are all waiting to see what Ture is going to do.

"Yes, let's play," says *Lena*.

All the children are wearing animal masks and costumes apart from Madeleine. She is a princess with a crown on her head.

Ture's arm can be seen in the entrance of the hut. He is carrying a large serving tray, full of newly grilled drumsticks.

"Wait a moment! Let's have some manners even if we're in the jungle," Ture says, as some of the children try to grab a drumstick straight away.

"Let's put it here," Madeleine suggests and points to the middle of the floor.

"Yes, let's put it in the middle," Ture answers.

"Go on, eat with your hands," he says, as he seems to have frightened some children with his initial admonition.

The adults understand nothing. They talk to one another, and look a bit puzzled. They still can't see Ture.

"Shall I pour them some of my magic potion so that they will be able to see me for a while?" Ture asks the children.

They nod, and Ture pours some potion into the adult's glasses. They are very surprised to see him. Finally, the splendid feast can start.

Afterwards, they all need to wash their hands and faces. In the shower, Ture plays Niagara Falls with some of the older children. The atmosphere is cheerful.

### A pedagogic analysis of Oden's "journeys into the big, wide world"<sup>6</sup>

The trip to the Sättersholms is the start of the theme and the hunt for the calamangs coincide with the events in the book. However, the pedagogy applied in this class is not really about adventurous journeys. "The Children in the Jungle" serves as a general source of inspiration, e.g. inspiring Ture (or *Hans*) to create a jungle and play animals with masks and costumes. They relate freely to the fiction, and do not dramatize the literary and dramatic contents of the book. Ture also improvises, and shows how to do magic and paint things into existence; he shows the children the art of transformation and he jokes with them.

The forest is one of Oden's favourite themes. This is where they find their

<sup>5</sup> This was filmed by the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company in the autumn of 1991.

<sup>6</sup> The section's own choice of name for the theme during the autumn term.

playworld.<sup>7</sup> This is one reason why the jungle is such a suitable environment at Oden, as it covers both forest and wilderness.<sup>8</sup> The children find Ture in Lamberg forest, and he is the one who helps them conjure up (paint) the jungle indoors in the section. He is the link between outdoors and indoors. Consequently, a jungle is created. It is inhabited by animals and masks are made from cardboard with rubber bands to hold them in place. The adults play animal games—movement games—with all the children. Costumes and masks are placed in the large chest, which dates back to when they were looking for Hybelejen, where they are easily obtainable.

The children's own play is to a large extent centred around animals. The games are calm and focus on the family, and they lack the mobility and activity which animals have. According to the adults, the children are very fond of dressing up, especially as tigers and crocodiles, and use both the costumes and the masks. Consequently, the environment and the accessories inspire the children to play family games, and the huts turn into homes. The fact that family games dominate the scene can probably be referred to the fact that the adults' dramatizations have not been based on the adventurous action in the book, and so the play environment and materials have made the children associate them with everyday actions and events. Children often play animal games<sup>9</sup>, and they are often a variation on the family theme. They differ from the family game by being more physical, including more movement, and they also have a less restricted form.<sup>10</sup> This is to say, that the animal game is more active than the family game, and according to Corsaro (1985), animal games are not often played indoors. This may be the case in America, where parents seem to set stricter rules than here in Sweden. At Oden the children are allowed to play without being burdened by "must-nots" and restrictions, and animal games are popular in the class. They once had "Michael Mouse"<sup>11</sup> as a theme, which was very popular.

### A psychological—not a drama pedagogic—approach

I have already stated that the pedagogues at Oden put the emphasis on the children's spontaneous play and needs (they have what is called a child perspective), and try to interpret their interests so as to inspire the children to play. The adults like dressing up, and different characters often visit the class or meet the children in the forest. Like Ture, these characters relate freely to the basic fiction (they are often literary characters). The plots and actions in the books are not dramatized. Instead a character is loosely connected with the contents and form of its story. The most important thing is the dialogue be-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. chapter 6, "Creating a playworld".

<sup>8</sup> According to the definition in the dictionary (the National Encyclopaedia).

<sup>9</sup> Garvey 1977; Corsaro 1985; Nilsen 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Corsaro 1985, p. 109-110.

<sup>11</sup> "Michael Mouse and his friends in Whistelton Forest", a story for children in words, song and illustrations by the Norwegian writer of children's books Thorbjörn Egner.

tween the children and the character. Different parts of the story are split up and separated. This is what happens in "The Children in the Jungle", where there is no predetermined dramatic action tying Ture, the animals and the jungle to one another. In this play pedagogic approach, which is often linked with a psychological approach (c.f. chapt. 2), play environments and accessories are often accentuated, as opposed to the drama pedagogic approach in which focuses on the action in the fiction. When children play adventure games, the most important thing is not the material, according to Corsaro (1985), but the fiction. This is what governs the action in the play. The children at Oden do not form associations with adventures, nor do they play adventure games at this stage of the theme. To them, the family setting is more natural.

The theme is wound up by a big party for the whole class, where the children dress up as animals. This is a party brimming with sensuality. Ture invites the adults, who are able to join the party once Ture has transformed them with his magic potion so that they too can see him.

The question is, however, if the "child perspective" is not simply the adults' way of looking at children's play—in their capacity as spectators. The children, who are dressed up as animals, can hardly find it easy to determine whether they are representing animals, or if they are children at a jungle party. What does this fiction look like? Are the children animals in the jungle? If so, their movements are restricted by the masks they are wearing. You are not likely to be able to enjoy a drumstick that much if your face is hidden by an egg box. Or is this a game concerned with dressing up and masquerading? Trying to adopt a child's perspective as an adult could mean reducing the children's need to play and placing it on a surface level, with the result that the adult refrains from using the contents and form of literature to develop an all-round fiction. Instead, everyday activities are the centre of attention, albeit in a more exotic environment.

The adults at Oden have not made use of the story in "The Children in the Jungle"—the adventure, where threats are averted. The play was not about an adventurous journey. An exotic environment has been created, but in a familiar setting. They still have not entered the big, wide world.

## Adventurous journeys at Valhall

The Moomin world stays at Valhall throughout summer. At the beginning of autumn, the adults present another puppet show: "Trouble in Moomin Valley", because the composition of the group has changed somewhat. There are now five 6-year old children, an unusually large proportion, and the adults at Valhall are concerned that this may give rise to disagreements and trouble. The puppet show is a way of introducing discussions about friendship and bullying.

At the prospect of more adventurous journeys, the pedagogues spent £50 on



an oriental carpet—a carpet which has to be facing Mecca. The door of the mattress room has been turned into a “transformation door”, and the doorway facing the main playroom has been closed off with parcel paper. *Kristina* is playing Ture, and she has dressed in a black outfit with patches on the short trousers and frizzled her hair—the same look as Freja’s Ture troll.

### The first trip to the jungle

One day at the beginning of September, *Ann-Charlotte* gathers all the children around her and starts reading “The Children in the Jungle”. When she gets to the place where the calamangs turn up, she puts the book to one side.

“I wish we could conjure ourselves away to the jungle,” she sighs.

“It’s so boring here,” *Majlis* says.

There is a loud bang—as if someone had fired a shotgun. Ture charges in through the paper with his rolled-up carpet tucked in under his arm.

“Help!” *Ann-Charlotte* cries.

“Hi!” Ture says. “What’s up? Anything fun?”

“Hello. Who is that?” *Ann-Charlotte* asks with surprise. All the children laugh.

“Are you bored?” Ture asks the children. “Are you?”

“Well, yes ...” the children reply, somewhat hesitantly.

“If that’s the case, you can come with me. Exciting things always happen when I’m around. Always!” Ture says.

“Do you know what this is?”

The children get up and go over to Ture.

“A flying carpet,” Adam says.

“And do you know what we can do with that? Travel ... anywhere we want,” Ture continues.

The children look pleased and expectant.

“What’s that book you have been reading? What was it about? Go on, tell me!” Ture asks eagerly.

“‘The Children in the Jungle’,” Adam answers awkwardly.

The children laugh. They are a little embarrassed.

“Do you want to come with me to the jungle?” Ture asks.

All the children nod.

“Really? OK! Let’s get rid of all these things! This will be really great!” Ture says.

The children are now looking expectantly at one another.

“Have you seen this, isn’t it nice ...? I’ve just bought it, so I haven’t even removed the price tag,” Ture tells them. “I had it from someone who lives in the Orient. His name was Abdullah, and he sold it to me for a fiver. Dirt cheap!”

“Well, are you coming?” Ture asks.

“Yes!” The children shout all at once. Some are giggling.

“OK! Everybody must take a seat on the carpet and turn their faces that way.” Ture points to show.

“That’s where Mecca is.”

The children sit down quickly, and turn obediently to face the direction Ture has pointed out.

“I want to sit with you,” Carl says to *Ann-Charlotte*.

She takes his hand.

"Do you want to sit next to Ture?" she asks.

"Ouch, you're sitting on my tail," Ture says, and continues: "Did you know that my name was Ture? How could you know that?"

"It was that book we were reading, there was someone called Ture in that, and he was a troll," Joel explains.

"But surely, he didn't look like me? Like this?"

"He did!" the children cry.

"But there is no one else who looks like this. There is only me," Ture objects.

The children protest.

"What does the jungle look like, then," Ture asks.

"There are tigers and snakes," Joel explains.

"And palm trees," Adam adds.

"What about strawberries?" Ture asks.

"Nooo!" the children cry laughingly.

"Do you know what we must do to get this carpet to start?" Ture asks the children.

"Apala mesala mesinka meso," he scans. "You know that one, don't you?"

"Apala mesala mesinka meso," the children "count out" at the same time.

"Hold on!" Ture says.

Everybody starts swaying back and forth.

"This is fast. Really fast!" Ture says. "Look over there! I can see Lamberg Hill. I know what it looks like. And I can see the tower. Can you?"

"Yes," all the children answer.

Erik points in Ture's direction.

"That means you can see that door which is a bit scary," *Ann-Charlotte* says in a low voice.

"I'll count and you'll all close your eyes," Ture tells the children. "All eyes closed? One ... two ... three ... can you see anything?"

"Over there," the children answer breathlessly and point towards the transformation door.

It is a fairy-tale door full of glittering sequins, colourful flowers, moons, suns and stars against the deep blue fabric.

"What do we have to say to make the carpet land?" Ture asks.

"Stop carpet land!" they all say simultaneously.

"I can jump," Emil says, and jumps over the edge of the carpet. The other children also get up and follow him. There are eight pots of paint on the floor, and the walls of the mattress room are covered with paper. Apart from that, the room is completely empty.

"It's light in this jungle," *Ann-Charlotte* says and lights the fluorescent lamp—the sun.

"I want to paint!" Anna cries. She is one of the youngest children.

Oskar is dancing around, laughing.

"What kinds of animals do you get in a jungle?" Ture asks.

"Tigers and snakes," someone says.

"There are lions as well," Joel says.

"Aren't you afraid that the lions will come and eat you?" Ture asks, and threatens Joel with his fist.

"No," Joel says.

"I would be if I were you," Ture says. "What if a snake comes along and picks your nose?" Ture says, and points his tail at Emil's nose.

The children roar with laughter.

Then they start removing their clothes, and soon they are all standing in their underwear with a paint brush each in their hands.

"You can put your clothes in the swamp over there," Ture suggests.

"Now imagine what the jungle looks like!" Ture says, turning to speak to everyone.

"You can share one paint-pot between two," *Ann-Charlotte* suggests.

Soon Joel has started painting a black tree trunk.

"Have you met any cannibals or calamangs?" Ture asks the children. "What do they look like?"

"They are black and yellow," Emil says.

"Are there palm trees in the jungle?" Ture asks. "I think I'll paint a palm tree."

"Let's put a head on top," Ture says, and Joel's trunk turns into a calamang.

Adam paints a yellow calamang with a large spear.

"Has anyone seen any giraffes?" Ture asks. He has started painting a yellow body.

Erika and Sara are painting a dark blue tree trunk with enormous leaves. Erik is painting a brown monkey next to Joel's calamang. Caroline and Madeleine are painting a brown tree trunk. It is the beginning of a palm tree. Erik is using black, painting something which looks like a zebra.

"Have you painted any wriggling snakes?" *Ann-Charlotte* asks.

"I want to paint a green snake," Caroline says.

"Can I paint some flowers," someone asks.

Ture's giraffe is taking shape up on the wall.

"Wow, what a red tiger!" someone cries.

"Well, how are you going to get back home?" Ture asks the children. "I don't want a lot of messy kids with dirty paint all over them. No children with paint allowed on the carpet!"

Madeleine and Caroline look down on their feet, and on the stains on their chests.

"We'll have to shower later," they say and sound pleased.

"I don't want to paint any more," one of the children says.

"We have to get back to the centre," Ture says.

The group which now takes place on the carpet is a happy one.

"Can you remember what to say?" Ture asks.

"Apala mesala mesinka meso."

"Hold on! Help!" Ture cries.

Everybody shakes.

"Oops, Annie is falling off." Suddenly Annie is standing on the side of the carpet.

"Can you see the day-care centre?" Ture asks.

"What was it we were supposed to say to make it land?" *Ann-Charlotte* says.

"Land, land carpet!" Joel says.

"Stop, carpet, land!" the other children cry.

"Phew! What a thud!" Ture says. "Well, I'll take my carpet and be off! Bye bye!"

"Bye bye!" Everybody waves him off.

After their washing and showering, Gustav and Annie are the first ones to return to the jungle.

### Play analysis

Here, the children are creating the setting for the play together with the adults. Instead of dramatizing the dramatic contents of the book which is typical of children's play, the excitement is generated by the unexpected meeting with Ture and the trip on the flying carpet. *Christina* is the one who is playing Ture, and she is a teacher-in-role with a fictitious role, which can keep the fiction alive. The children know that Ture is transformation personified, and that anything could happen together with him. He is an exciting character, and the

children are looking forward to his visit. In order to keep the fiction alive, Ture has to establish a dialogue with the children, which will make them remember the events in the book—especially as he has chosen not to dramatize these. The dialogue almost takes the shape of an interrogation, albeit on a very playful note, and Ture needs to be very expressive. *Ann-Charlotte* has read the book, and it is obvious that the children are interested in the story. Her role as a pedagogue is mainly supportive; she makes sure that all the children have a place on the carpet, and that they all have access to the paints and a brush when they are going to paint. She is mainly there to help the youngest children.

It is obvious that the pedagogues at Valhall are interested in making the children express themselves in artistic or creative ways. This time, they use poetry and painting. The line “Apala mesala mesinka meso”, which is used to start the carpet, is the opening line of what was one of the most common counting-out rhymes in Sweden during the 19th century, according to af Klintberg.

Apala mesala mesinka meso,  
sebedej, sebedo ...<sup>12</sup>

Every day at Valhall, the children read from a book called “The Children’s Book of Poetry”, and learn several nursery rhymes by heart. Folklore is often passed on horizontally, af Klintberg writes.<sup>13</sup> This agrees with the general opinion amongst folklorists.<sup>14</sup> They have come about through a collective creative process, which has taken place in the streets, in playgrounds and in school yards. In the Sweden of today, day-care centres have probably more or less taken over the role formerly played by playgrounds in the handing over of nursery rhymes. The adults at Valhall want to pass this poetic tradition on.

The main purpose of the journey to the jungle was to inspire the children to paint a jungle together. Everyone starts working methodically. The older boys are painting calamangs and animals, and the older girls are painting palm trees. The young children express an instantaneous joy at the prospect of painting (by dancing and laughing). The atmosphere is collective, and no one gets irritated when their motives are painted over. The trip to the jungle has resulted in creative joy. In this game, the children function as “stage hands”, and it has inspired them to re-create the story and to express themselves in picture form.

### The second trip to the jungle

The children paint more animals to be put up in the jungle on the walls. After this, the whole class goes to the Sättersholms and meets the Ture from Loke

<sup>12</sup> af Klintberg 1987, p. 214.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Opie 1959; 1969; Enerstvedt 1971.

and the four wild calamangs. For their own jungle, they make a calamang hut from a large cardboard box, which the oldest children go outside to help paint. The painting is taking place on the stone slabs in front of the entrance door, and wearing their macs, the children paint away, splashing both the stones and themselves. The climax is when the painting session turns into playing firemen, and use the big hose to wash the place down after they have finished. Coloured strips of material and beautiful batiks are also put up in the jungle, and the children are making binoculars and "bone necklaces" from beads and polystyrene. *Ann-Charlotte* makes plaster casts of the faces of the children who want to try. The others paint a mask each. They cook jungle soup out in the open air on a spirit heater—in short, the jungle atmosphere is manifesting itself in the section. One day in the middle of September, all the children are sitting in a ring around *Carina*, who is telling them about safari animals, lions and zebras, when someone turns up on the balcony.

"Look! Ture!" cries Gustav.

Adam quickly runs up to the balcony door, closely followed by Emil.

Ture comes in through the door, dragging his heavy carpet along.

"Hello Ture," says *Carina*, looking surprised.

"Oh dear, there is something wrong with this carpet," Ture says. "I couldn't remember what to say, so I had to run all the way here. I'm so tired! Dear me, dear me. I'm lucky I found my way here, because I had to run a long way through the bushes, I didn't know which way to go."

The children are standing around him.

"Do you want to come for a ride?" he asks.

They nod.

"If so you'll have to help me remember what to say, because I have plain forgotten."

"Have you?" *Carina* asks the children. "Why don't we try to start it, and maybe we'll remember what to say."

"We'll have to roll it out," Ture says.

"Oh! It's really dirty!" Joel says.

"Everybody find you places on the carpet," Ture cries.

Oskar is laughing out loud, and within seconds, they are all sitting down on the carpet.

"Edvin and I have to get on as well," *Carina* says, and takes Edvin on her arm.

"Has anything happened here?" Ture asks.

"No, not a lot," says Adam.

"Do you want to go there now?" Ture asks the children.

"Yes please," they reply eagerly.

"Well, what do we have to say?" Ture asks them. "I said 'Mesiko mo babeli bo', but it refused to go."

"Mesili mesinka meso," one child suggests.

"Apala mesala mesinka meso," they say all together.

"You'll have to sit down," Ture admonishes them.

"It's taking off!" he cries happily. "Look over there—the centre! And look at the water tower over there on Lamberg Hill!"

They all look in the direction in which Ture is pointing.

"We're flying over Stockholm," says Ture. "Now we're getting somewhere."

"Look! I can see loads of lions. We are heading in the right direction," Ture says.

The children agree.

"Now, what was it we were supposed to say to make the carpet land?"

"Please carpet, stop," Carl says.

"OK, let's say it all at the same time," Ture urges them.

"Please carpet, stop!" They all call out.

"Good! We got here," Ture says contentedly.

They all stand up and go into the jungle.

"Wow! Such a lot has happened in this jungle!" Ture cries.

Erika, Madeleine, Adam and Joël disappear together with *Carina*, quietly, so that Ture won't notice anything. They soon return, wearing black clothes and carrying large palm trunks (cardboard rolls) in their hands. They stop outside the transformation door.

"Have you seen any calamangs?" Ture asks from the depths of the jungle.

The calamangs come into the jungle through the transformation door.

"Watch!" Ture shouts. "Calamangs! Can you see them in your binoculars?"

He starts back.

"Hello!" he says. "What is that you are carrying?" He is not afraid any longer. The calamangs are standing completely still.

Suddenly, they can hear samba music in the jungle.

"Calamang music!" someone exclaims.

Oskar starts to dance.

"Shall we try?" Ture says. "Let's dance the calamang dance!"

The calamangs immediately start dancing with Ture, close to him, using similar movements. Wild drumming in the air, drumming on the ground, then up again, quickly and spin around ... and then all over again, following the music.

"Drums!" Ture cries, as a drum solo comes from the record player. The music turns into chirping birds and animal sounds.

"Help! A lion is coming to get us," Erik shouts and points to the wall. He shrinks back from it.

"Help!" Some other children follow him.

Some children are running away, others are going up to the animals on the wall to pat them. Gingerly, Carl strokes an elephant.

"A snake!" Erik cries and runs off.

Suddenly, the chirping gives way for rhythmic jazz-like music, and Oskar starts jumping and dancing. Everybody is dancing. Ture dances around the calamang hut, and the children form a chain and follow him.

The four calamangs continue their drumming movements. Adam is trying to balance his binoculars on his head and dance at the same time.

"Let's go home," Ture whispers. "Do you want to come?" He turns to the calamangs.

"Just leave your trunks in the jungle!"

"I'll take my binoculars," one child says.

"But those are not yours. They're mine," another child objects.

Everyone is heading out of the jungle into the main playroom, where the carpet is lying.

"Let's go via China!" Ture says.

"Do you remember?"

"Apala mesala mesinka meso," they answer immediately.

"Wow! I daren't go via China," Ture says regretfully. "Have you ever met any Chinese people?"

"No," the children say, surprised.

"Are they dangerous, Chinese people?" Erik asks.

"Let's go via Africa instead," someone says.

"But that's where we've been," Ture reminds them.

"Maybe we can stop in China next time," Ture says, "but this time, I think we'll simply say: Get a move on so we'll get back home today!"

"Can you see the water in Stockholm? Over there," Angelica says, pointing at the large aquarium in Valhall.

"Yes, I can see the big aquarium in Stockholm," Ture says.

"There is a big aquarium there."

"Oh, it's getting windy," someone says.

The children move eagerly back and forth.

"OK! Can you see Lamberg Forest over there?" Ture asks. "That means we'll be home soon."

The passengers are getting wild. Ture takes a hold of some of the children, to make sure they don't fall off.

"Stop, carpet, stop!" Ture orders. "OK! You can all get off."

"Edvin has gone back into the jungle," Erika says.

"I'll go back into the jungle!" Adam says and disappears.

Madeleine accompanies him.

"If I return to the jungle, will there be palm trees there as well?" Ture asks. "But now I'll take my carpet and leave. Bye, bye!"

"Bye, bye," the children say, waving.

Ture disappears. The youngest children follow him to the balcony door. After the visit to the jungle, they all paint their faces with grease paint. The calamangs are war painted. Their faces are very dark. Even the younger children paint themselves. Emil makes whiskers, and Carl frames his face with black lines. They keep doing this for a long time.

## Play analysis

### Lyrical and musical patterns

This is a game in which the oldest children, the 6-year olds, play calamangs. This game is only concerned with the dramatic meeting between the calamangs, Ture and the children. No other part of the story is involved. The calamangs turn up carrying a palm trunk each under their arms, and they are there to surprise the others in the jungle. They are not really feeling menacing, but secretive and curious: they want to find out what will happen, what reactions they will get from the other children, and especially from Ture. However, playing a role without having a plan of action is difficult and quite advanced, and the four calamangs are probably more interested in taking part in the game Ture has initiated. They wait until they hear the music before they start acting together with Ture. They are dancing, and they are very eager to learn the calamang movements and figures. Later, they are also eager to create their own calamang dance, which they practised and learnt in view of the filming which will take place a few weeks later.<sup>15</sup>

The other children are playing, living the part of being subjected to threatening attacks by the lion, for one, while the calamangs keep on dancing and moving. It is as if the rhythm and dancing provides them with a feeling for what is exotic and atmospheric in the jungle, that which can enhance their power of living the parts of the calamang characters. After the visit to the jungle, these children are the ones who return to the jungle the quickest, and

<sup>15</sup> Filmed by the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company.



they paint themselves as menacing warriors. The musical aspect of the play seemed to make them sensitive to the calamang character.

The artistic approach to the story in "The Children in the Jungle", which lets the characters actively create their own fiction, has influenced the adults at Valhall. They observe how the journeys are all based on the same idea: of together creating an exotic and exciting environment. The first time, they paint their jungle, and the second time, they give the jungle a rhythm and an exotic atmosphere, which is both beautiful and scary. One of the tasks of the calamangs is to bring the trunks, which will soon become four luscious palm trees in the jungle. The games can be regarded as creating a scenery in parts.

## Adventurous journeys at Freja

During the summer, play at Freja has primarily been centred around the ghost train in the bathroom, Pippi Longstocking and travelling in the balloon. The class seems well prepared for venturing forth on adventurous journeys. During the spring term, the children were faced with a number of threatening situations together with Fear, they have dared challenge their fear and even followed Toffie through the Dark Forest, drawing strength and courage from Pippi's wig to face the unexpected and exciting. And what's more, the balloon is always ready in the main playroom to take them on new adventurous journeys.

At the beginning of September, when I go back to Hybelejen after the summer break, there is a sun-helmet on the hat rack and a pair of large, green boots are standing on the floor. The children are hard at work in the paint room, making binoculars from empty toilet rolls and kitchen rolls. The room is bustling. Kevin puts on the boots, which are far too large for him, and sets off into the jungle to pick some mushrooms. He goes into the mattress room, which has been turned into a fantastic jungle.

A few days earlier, the adults at Freja have been dramatizing "The Children in the Jungle". In their project report,<sup>16</sup> the staff writes: "A lot of time was spent on preparations, papering the walls in the 'jungle' with white paper, getting hold of other necessary props and rehearsing new roles. But it was worth it. The response from the children was tremendous." The staff are *Monica*, who plays Ture, *Kristina*, who is Olle, *Lena*, who is Anna and *Ingela* who is Fia. The play more or less follows the chain of events in the book. Ture, who has a paint brush in his hand, starts painting the jungle, just like he does in the book, and soon, all the children are helping him.

After the dramatization, all the children paint different animals for the jungle: monkeys, tigers, elephants, crocodiles and snakes, which are all stuck up on the walls. The river has already been painted on one wall, just like in the

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<sup>16</sup> Project report from the autumn of 1991.

story. Soon, the jungle is as colourful and deep as a tropical forest. Coloured plastic ribbons become lianas, and a calamang hut, made out of long coloured ribbons hanging down curtain-style, is standing in one of the corners. A red-dish brown tunnel made of fabric is hanging from the ceiling as a place of refuge which the children can easily get to. By one of the walls, there is a large paint-pot and a brush. This is a very exciting setting. What's more, all the children need a pair of binoculars, so that they can spot dangers in time, and they have to get ready today, because the entire class is going to travel to India in the balloon and on the flying carpet. "In India, anything can happen ..."<sup>17</sup>

### The first trip to the jungle. Focusing on the action.

"I have loads of butterflies in my stomach," *Kristina* says expectantly.

"Me too," Rebecca nods. All the adults and children at Freja are sitting in a large circle, not far from the balloon.

"But, can we really leave just as we are?" *Kristina* wonders.

"Yes!" Camilla and Rebecca cry convincingly, at the same time as a few random answers of "No " can be heard from some other children.

"With our binoculars," Sami says, and Mikael starts waving hello happily.

"Yes, so we can see if a leopard or a lion or something is coming close to us," *Kristina* replies, and continues: "Maybe we'll see a giraffe."

"Or an elephant," says Therèse.

"Yes, it would be good to see that before it gets too close," *Kristina* continues. "Shall we put our pretend boots on? Really high ones, so that the snakes can't ...?"

"Can I have my binoculars?" Kevin interrupts her. He has seen that *Kristina* has brought out the basket of binoculars from behind her back. The other children put their boots on with elaborate movements.

"We will have to look inside them to see whose it is," *Kristina* says in answer to Kevin's question. She holds a pair of binoculars up: "This one says 'Stina', and this one 'Mattias'. Does anyone recognize this pair?" *Kristina* continues and waves another pair of binoculars.

"Those are mine!" Malin cries and runs up to her.

After that, Charlotte fetches her pair.

"Whose are these?"

"Camilla's," the children answer.

"Where are Daniel's binoculars?" Stina asks. She is sitting next to Daniel, who is the youngest child in the class.

"He will have to hold somebody's hand, somebody who has got their binoculars," *Kristina* replies.

"Whose are these?"

"Viktor's! ... Natalie's! ... Rebecka's!"

Everybody is shouting, and they are all eager to get going.

"I made that one," says Mikael calmly, and gets up to fetch his.

"Those sticky ones, the black and yellow one, those are Kevin's," Stina tells *Kristina*, while Kevin runs up to fetch his binoculars, looking happy.

"Well, *Lena* has to have a pair of binoculars too, but now the basket's empty," *Kristina* says. "There must be more pairs in the paint room."

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<sup>17</sup> Quote from "The Children in the Jungle".

"Let's try our binoculars out!" *Kristina* uses her own purple binoculars to demonstrate how the buttons can be turned for looking at things close up and far away.

"Hello *Lena*! Hiya *Viktor*! Hello *Rebecka*! Hello, hello! Hello *Camilla*!"

"Hello *Mikael*."

This continues for a little while, as everybody is trying their binoculars out.

"Hang them around your necks, so that you can use your hands for other things when we get to the jungle," *Kristina* says. "Who wants to go in the balloon?"

*Malin*, *Rebecka*, *Camilla* and *Mikael* show their interest straight away, and the others want to ride on the flying carpet.

They all get up and enter the balloon and get on the flying carpet.

"Here's your safety belt," *Mikael* says and motions to *Kristina*.

"Are there safety belts on flying carpets?" she muses. "Maybe we should have parachutes ... I can see something, I can see something," she says and tries her binoculars out.

"I can see a circus," someone says eagerly from the balloon, and the others join in.

"Well now, we can't just sit here on the floor. Don't we have to go? Are you all ready? So what are we going to do?" *Kristina* asks encouragingly.

"We'll go!" they answer her in one voice.

"We'll have to light a fire to get the hot air for the balloon," *Kristina* points out, and *Mikael* stands up and lights it. They all blow energetically.

"Can you feel us taking off?" *Kristina* asks them. "Now we're flying," she whispers, and then they can all feel the excitement in the air.

"I can see animals!" *Mikael* cries, and stands up in the balloon with the binoculars before his eyes.

"I can see a tiger!" *Stina* exclaims.

"That means we're getting close."

"I can see an elephant," *Camilla* says.

"It's is getting very warm," *Kristina* complains. "I'll have to take my jumper off. We're getting really close. I'll just throw it on the ground." *Mikael* and *Kevin*, who are sitting next to her, start giggling at her mischief. There is a general feeling of mirth amongst the travellers.

"I can see Africa," *Kevin* says.

"It smells of Chinese food in Africa," *Mikael* points out.

"I see a snake!"

"Help! A tiger!" *Malin* cries.

"I can see Africa," *Stina* says.

"Can you see any good places to land in?" *Kristina* asks.

"Yes ... over there," the children cry.

"So what do we do now?" *Kristina* asks.

"We have to let the air out of the balloon." *Mattias* rises quickly and goes out on the edge of the balloon basket, from where he throws the sand bags down. The air goes out of the balloon, and the children illustrate this by letting air out of their lungs: OOOooooouuu ...

"Hold on, *Mattias*, and watch so you don't fall off," *Kristina* warns.

"We're on our way down, slowly."

*Mikael* and *Charlotte* are the first ones to get out of the balloon and into the water. They make swimming strokes, and head for the jungle. *Malin* does the crawl on the floor.

"Help!" *Kristina* calls out. "A tiger! Get your binoculars out!"

By now everyone is on their way into the jungle room.

"Look! There are lianas here!"

"I'm flying! Help!" The liana breaks off.

The children try the lianas out, shouting and laughing. Therèse strokes the tiger, which

seems quite domesticated. The tiger is *Ingela*, dressed in a stripy nightie, a head made of fabric and nylon tights on her arms and legs.

"A rat!" *Kristina* yells.

"But it's dead," someone points out.

Kevin and Stina ride around on two toy elephants. Kevin gets off his, and walks up to *Kristina*.

"I saw a crocodile, and it bit me."

"The tiger has fallen asleep," someone says.

"Maybe it's been up hunting all night," *Kristina* suggests.

"A snake! I'll hang it around my neck," someone says. It is the toy snake.

"Wow, you're a real snake charmer," *Kristina* says admiringly.

"There's a real snake!" someone cries, who has caught sight of the green rubber snake.

The children attack. The fight is intense, but short. Someone groans.

Much later, they leave the jungle and travel all the way back again in the balloon and on the flying carpet. Back home to the day-care centre.

## Play analysis

### **The children's imagination in relation to the fiction of the story**

At Freja, the adults started by dramatizing "The Children in the Jungle", to acquaint the children with the story. In addition to this, the children have drawn and painted animals which have been stuck up on the walls in the jungle. The jungle is a creation which all children and adults have had a hand in making. The snakes which Fear brought with her have found a new home in the jungle. Old things have been mixed with new ones.

It is obvious that the basic fiction—the story and its settings—provides the children with some kind of freedom to improvise. The children know how to travel in a balloon, and what they can expect will happen in a jungle. Moreover, they are familiar with and interested in the play formula "averting a threat", which can be seen in the initial stage, when they have "butterflies" in their stomachs in view of the take-off. The whole group is eager and expectant as they are about to make their adventurous journey.

### **Keeping up the action—a feeling for what is dramatic and humorous**

When it comes to children's play, it is not unusual for the play to be short and abrupt compared with the initial imagination which sparks it off.<sup>18</sup> But what characterizes this journey is the fact that the action is the dominant and dramatized factor, and that all the children have joined in the fictitious action. They are looking through their binoculars, both close up and far away, they ride in the balloon and on the flying carpet, they blow hot air for the balloon to take off up and sway as it moves, they keep a look-out for things and check the direction, and they land in the water and have to swim to get to the jungle. With their binoculars in front of their eyes, they are all ready for the dangerous animals which they have been expecting to meet since they started their journey. Someone said they saw a circus, which is mentioning the animals as a group. The next step is to build up the tension, to draw out the action—the

<sup>18</sup> Rasmussen 1985.

action which Vygotsky describes as the paradox of play, when the child consciously submits to the rules of the game and enjoys being in control of the situation (c.f. chapter 3). When the time has come to face the threats, the children play tricks on one another. Someone sees a rat. And someone else says that it is dead. One of the snakes also proves to be harmless, and even the tiger is tame and OK to stroke. In the end, the real threat is the snake, which has to be killed. And that seems logic, as all the children have put their boots on to go snake hunting. In the book "The Children in the Jungle", Olle is wearing a sun-hat to be able to hunt tigers, binoculars to be able to spot dangers in time, and boots "so that the snakes won't be able to bite his toes."

When the balloon is descending, Mattias dares to balance on the edge of the basket, and this is especially exciting since he is really at floor level. Crawling across the floor like Malin does is another way of enhancing the feeling of moving. The actions become dynamic and dramatic in the inverted situation which is the result of their concrete reality taking on a new, and unknown, meaning. Furthermore, the whole situation brings out a feeling of wanting to twist and turn things, to pull one another's legs in the dangerous hunt in order to increase the excitement. This "reversibility", as Sutton-Smith (1989) calls it, or this interest in the absurd and exaggerations, as Vygotsky and Chukovsky describe it, where humour is an important ingredient, is what gives the action its aesthetic quality. This shows that the children are very aware of the rules of the game.

#### **Teacher-in-role challenges the children's zone of proximal development**

Very deliberately, *Kristina* has guided the course of the game. She is "a teacher" in the role-play, not a fictitious character. Moreover, the play is centred around the action, not around the characters in the book. Apart from the conscious preparations (the dramatization, creating the jungle environment, etc.), she makes a lengthy ritual out of equipping every child with their own binoculars. This is to make them aware of the binoculars' existence, so that they can use them to look for dangerous animals and to enhance the feeling of being on the move during the journey. *Kristina* also demonstrates the buttons on the binoculars carefully. She dramatizes every bit of the action, and keeps the fiction alive. They all put on their boots, blow air, etc. She takes her jumper off when it gets too warm as they are getting close to Africa. She maintains a dialogue with all the children and takes their comments literally, alters the direction, etc. She asks questions to include everybody in the fiction, from the youngest, who is 1 year old to Stina, who is the oldest at 7. Stina gets to decide when they have reached their destination, and where the balloon and flying carpet should land. *Kristina* has deliberately let the binoculars and boots play significant parts in the game. The binoculars are the most important, and need to be there for the dramatic action, whereas the boots can remain fictitious and invisible. The fact that the children know that they are walking around in the dangerous jungle in their boots is enough.

It is clear that the children are aware of the formula of the play, and since they are familiar with the story, the jungle setting and the balloon, they are at liberty to improvise with this wide register to choose from. This makes the play a challenge to their zone of proximal development.

### The second adventurous journey to the jungle—action meets characters

One week after the first trip to the jungle, Ture suddenly turns up with a wardrobe and an owl. *Monica* is playing Ture. He wants to move into the section and everyone helps look for the best place for him to put his wardrobe.

A few days earlier, the children had met Ture at the Sättersholms, where they had participated in the hunt for the calamangs together with the rest of the day-care centre.

With Freja's Ture moving into the section, the children are very interested. They know that adventure follows him wherever he goes.

A couple of days after Ture has moved in, Olle (played by *Kristina*) comes to visit, and he gathers the children in the dolls' room. He distributes their binoculars, and when there is only one left and he asks whose it is, Stina answers that it is *Kristina's*, but since she is not around, Olle can borrow them. Soon, Fia turns up as well, played by *Ingela*, and then they all hear a voice ...

"Do you know what I've realized? Do you know what I've realized?" Ture sings as he storms into the section carrying a Swedish flag, a globe and an atlas. Olle, Fia and the children all leave the dolls' room and meet Ture in the main playroom. Ture goes up to his wardrobe where the owl is sitting.

"We've made the owl a house," says Charlotte eagerly.

"You're too sweet," Ture says. "My little owl," he greets the owl in a childish tone.

"I made it," Stina explains and points at the cardboard box on which she has painted two large spruces.

"Do you know what I've realized?" Ture says again, and holds the flag up high above his head. "I've realized, ta-ra ta-ram, that I'm Swedish!" he sings and leaps for joy. "I live in Sweden. You, Owl, you live in Sweden! And you live in Sweden!" he says, turning to the children.

"Yes," they all cried in unison.

"I know where Sweden is," someone says.

"Do you know what this is?" Ture interrupts them. "You may think it's a football."

"No!" the children answer him.

Ture holds the globe up. He has put the flag down next to the owl.

"No, no, no," he sings.

"It's a globe," Stina explains.

"We live on this ball. Now you'll have to sit down in a circle, because I'm going to show you where on this ball we live," Ture instructs them.

"I know where," Mattias says.

"Do you know already?" Ture asks them.

"Yes!" they cry.

"Do you know any colours?" Ture continues.

"Yes."



Fig. 7. Freja's children in the jungle.

"Just imagine, we actually live on this ball. Dear me, I find that really hard to understand," Ture says with concern.

"The sun is much larger than that," Mattias points out.

"Yes, and warmer," Ture says.

"Much warmer," Mattias says.

"Burning hot, actually," says Ture. "Look, this little orange blob is where we live," he continues.

"We can't. We wouldn't all fit there," Olle objects.

"You wouldn't fit there," Stina says and looks at Ture.

"But my father told me that, that we live there and that the earth is really this big." Ture measures with his hands.

"But that thing is that small," Stina protests.

"Well, I don't get it," Ture says. "But then my father got an atlas out. Do you know what an atlas is? That's hard to understand as well. I had a look, and I couldn't care less, but I'm going to take the Freja kids to Africa today, to the jungle, because there are so many great animals there. Can you see?" Ture shows them his nature atlas, where each continent has been illustrated with pictures of animals typical for it.

"Lions, too," says Kevin eagerly and gets up.

"Sure," Ture agrees, "and do you know? Wow, do you remember? Elephants, snakes, and help! Crocodiles!"

"We'll have to kill them," someone suggests.

"Let's sneak up on them," Ture says.

"I don't want to come," says Kristoffer. He is starting to feel scared.

"You have to, or you'll be all alone," Kevin says.

"Then I'll hit them," Kristoffer says and throws a few punches in the air.

"You mustn't," Kevin admonishes him.

"Hello!" Ture interrupts them. "You'll have to help me."

"We've seen prints!" Therèse says, and Charlotte nods in agreement.

"No?!" Ture says with surprise.



"Yes, do you want us to show you?" the girls ask him.

"How shall we get to that jungle, then?" Ture asks. He sounds concerned and turns to the children.

"By balloon and flying carpet," someone answers quickly.

"Ture, do you know where I've been? In Denmark! There were swings in Denmark," Malin says suddenly and goes up to stand in front of Ture.

"What if there are swings in the jungle?" Ture replies.

Meanwhile, Camilla, Rebecka, Stina, Kevin, Kristoffer, Mattias, Therèse and little Daniel have climbed into the balloon. It gets so crowded that Therèse and Daniel get out again.

"I'll have to try this balloon of yours," Ture says.

"Have you all got your binoculars?" Olle asks.

"Yes!" the children cry.

"But I don't have one," Ture says. "I'll have to go and get mine from my wardrobe. And I'm not gone out either," he says and exchanges his GONE OUT-sign for an AT HOME-sign, which he hangs on the door.

"But we are off to the jungle," Fia says, "that means you'll be gone."

Ture does not reply.

"I have to get my binoculars. Wait for me!" Ture sings.

"Here's the flying carpet," Olle says and places it next to the balloon.

"Couldn't you find your binoculars?" Olle asks Ture.

"Yes I have now," Ture answers.

"That's lucky," Olle says.

"I have to see my lion," Kevin says.

"Can I really sit on that?" Ture asks and points at the flying carpet. "I daren't."

"But we have speeding belts," Sami says.

"Will you hold on to me then?" Ture asks.

"No, we've got safety belts," Stina tells him.

"But now I won't be at home, I'll be out," Ture dithers and goes back over to his wardrobe. "That means I'll have to change my AT HOME-sign. What if I'll have some mail while I'm gone, that means I'll have to put my letterbox back up. Will you wait for me?" he asks.

"Yes," everybody says determinedly, and follows Ture's actions very closely.

"We'll wait," Olle says.

"My little owl, how I've longed for you! I wish I had another name for you!"

"Ko-Ko," Rebecka cries.

"Ko-Ko, Ko-Ko," several other children join in.

"Have you thought of that while I went to fetch my letterboxes?" Ture asks.

"Yes, Ko-Ko, Ko-Ko," the children cry delightedly.

"That means I can put Ko-Ko's letterbox up. Isn't that great! Maybe he'll receive some mail as well," Ture says. "This is so exciting, I think I'll wet myself."

They all laugh.

Suddenly, Ture spots Olle and Anna. They have been there all the time, waiting for him.

When at last Ture gets on board, Olle takes command.

"Look!" Ture grabs his binoculars. "Look over there, what a huge frog!"

"I wonder if there isn't a lion over there!" says Olle.

"I'm a diver," Kristoffer states and throws himself into the water.

"You're lucky you're wearing a parachute," Olle says and fishes him out again with a firm grip around his braces.

"We'll soon start moving downwards," Ture shouts. "We'll soon be landing."

"OOOooooooooo ..."

"Now we have to sneak up to the jungle," Olle whispers. "Careful, in case there are some lions or tigers around."

When they get to the jungle a pineapple falls to the ground.  
 "We can ride on the elephants," Kevin and Kristoffer say and mount the toy elephants.  
 "Look! Prints!"  
 "And there are more over there," Olle informs them. "Paw prints, they are."  
 "Look, paw prints!" The children follow them through the main playroom all the way to the kitchen.  
 "He has been in the fridge," Fia notes. "Taste them!" There are jam prints on the fridge door.  
 "He has had his paws in the jam," Stina says in an upset tone.  
 "I can see red prints," Ture says as he comes into the kitchen. "Someone has visited the jungle fridge, maybe a jam tiger? Has cook seen anything?"  
 "Something swished through the air," Ulla says. She is the cook at Freja.  
 "We'll have to find out whether he came in through the window," Olle says and goes into the main room.  
 "Look what I found in my pot!" Ulla says, showing them the odd-looking pasta animals.  
 "Strange, there's jungle food in that pot," Ture says.  
 They all return to the jungle, and cut the pineapple into pieces.  
 "I really feel like some pineapple," says Olle.  
 "Has anyone seen a calamang?" Ture whispers all of a sudden.  
 "There!" Rebecka points at the wall.  
 "We are sitting quite close. There they are," Ture explains. "Do you know what I think? I don't think that tiger saw this yummy pineapple!"  
 "It just fell down all of a sudden," Stina says. "I saw it fall. I think the tiger is gone."  
 "Yes," Ture agrees.  
 "The calamangs are over there," Sami cries.  
 "What shall we do?" Olle says. "The calamangs are dangerous. I know, lets turn into animals. They are not dangerous then."  
 "My binoculars are not behaving," Kevin says. He is trying to catch sight of the calamangs on the wall.  
 "What sort of animal shall we turn into?" Olle asks.  
 "A dangerous cat," Stina suggests.  
 "And I'll be a lion," Kevin says.  
 "Does anyone know a good spell which would turn us into animals?" Olle asks.  
 "Well, we could paint ourselves," Stina says.  
 "You can do magic and pretend to be an animal," Olle suggests, "so the calamangs won't come and get us. Couldn't we just say AbracaDabra, we want to become animals!"  
 "Now I'm a cat," says Stina.  
 "Me too!"  
 "I'm a lion!"  
 "And I'm a tiger!"  
 "I'm an elephant with a trunk!"  
 The children sharpen their claws and mimic the different animals' actions and movements.  
 Ture goes into the kitchen to fetch the jungle pasta. Everyone has lunch, investigating their pasta animals very carefully.  
 "We'll have to go home now," Ture urges the others after a short while.  
 The children get up quickly and run into the main room.  
 "We ran all the way home," one of the girls says. Therèse, Rebecka and Charlotte are standing next to Ture's wardrobe. Charlotte sits down at the round table. She has brought out drawing paper and crayons.

"Has everyone got their binoculars?" Olle asks.  
 "Come on, everybody! Come on!" Fia urges them.  
 "We're already back," Rebecka answers.  
 "Get ready everyone," Olle calls.  
 "Bye, bye!"  
 Malin blows air into the balloon.  
 "We've already ranned home," the children say one more time. They are very excited, almost tense.  
 "Aha," Olle says, catching on. "Everybody who's not already home, jump on board!"  
 "It's starting to sway," Ture says.  
 "Ha ha, he's had a letter. We won't say anything," Therèse whispers over by Ture's wardrobe, while the balloon and the flying carpet is high up in the air.  
 Therèse and Rebecka are dancing around, expectantly and triumphant.  
 Mikael leaves the flying carpet and runs up to the letterbox, where Charlotte has put the letter to Ture.  
 "Round and round the mulberry bush, the monkey ..." Therèse and Rebecka sing as they are dancing around.  
 Mattias and Sami leave the flying carpet.  
 "You've had a letter!" Mattias and Mikael have run back to Ture on the flying carpet.  
 "No?" Ture is surprised.  
 Malin tries to get the letter out of the letterbox.  
 "But it's for Ture," someone protests. "Ture's supposed to have that. He's supposed to open it."  
 Now Ture has arrived.  
 "How can you know that I've had a letter? Can you see through the letterbox?" he asks.  
 "You've had a letter," Stina says. "It's only for you."  
 Stina, Therèse, Camilla, Rebecka, Charlotte, Mikael, Sami and Mattias have all formed a ring around him.  
 "Get your letter out!" one of them urges him.  
 "Do you know what?" Ture says. "I'm really tired now. Hello Ko-Ko!"  
 "Go into your wardrobe then," Rebecka says.  
 "I'm going to take you in with me," Ture says lovingly to the owl. "I have missed you so much. I, I who live in Sweden. It's nice to be back from Africa again."  
 Someone is trying to get the letter out of the letterbox.  
 "No, that's mine," Ture protests. "I'll get it later, now I have to go in and rest. Can't you see how tired I am?"  
 "Yes," the children say.  
 "Well, I'm off to the jungle, I am," someone says and disappears.  
 "I'm going into my wardrobe," Ture says. "You'll have to promise that you'll also go for a rest."  
 "But we're not tired!"  
 "Bye, bye, all my little puddings! See you later!"  
 Therèse closes the door behind him. She and Stina are trying to peep in through the crack in the door.  
 "He's asleep now," they say.  
 "The letter is for Ture," Therèse reproaches her younger sister Camilla, who is trying to get it out of the letterbox.  
 The AT HOME-sign is up again on Ture's door handle. The girls leave his home and run off into the jungle.  
 A while later, when Ture has crept out of his wardrobe, Sami goes up to the door and opens it. Mikael and Mattias come out of it with the GONE OUT-sign around their necks. Mikael takes the letter out of Ture's letterbox.

"Let's play Ture," Sami says. He enters the wardrobe and closes the door behind him. Mikael and Mattias read the letter. Sami comes out of the wardrobe.

"Ture's at home now," Mattias says and hangs the sign up. Mikael throws the letter into the wardrobe. Sami picks it up and puts it outside the door, and goes back into the wardrobe.

"This is where I'm living," Mikael says. He has put two chairs on the floor, and made a bed with some cushions and blankets.

"This is my bed," Mattias suggests, and goes up to Mikael and his chairs. Sami comes out of the wardrobe with a pair of binoculars around his neck. He goes up to Mikael and Mattias, who are now lying in their chair beds.

"Hello Ture!" he greets them.

## Play analysis

### **The characters give life to the action**

What makes this play rich and dynamic is first and foremost the conscious dramatization, where the adults are teachers-in-roles, but this time as fictitious people with characters. This gives both the characters and the action a dynamic feeling. This game includes everyone in the entire section, even *Ulla* in the kitchen joins in the fiction. They look at contrasts, they turn things upside-down and there are numerous transformations: both pasta and children turn into animals. The whole section has become a setting.

It all starts when Ture storms into the section. He already has a place to live and a friend—the owl—there, and he has established a "home world" in the section. The children have been longing to see him, and they have both thought of a name and a home for his owl. Ture has a complex personality. He is childish and wild and forward at the same time. When he is explaining things to the children, he often refers to "Dad" and acts on the children's own level, but at the same time, he is the one who plays tricks on them, joking and threatening them with calamangs. He is clearly influenced by the actress Birgitta Andersson and her character Hedvig in the children's programme "From A to Z", where she was singing "I'm so happy to be Swedish" and had a partner who was an owl, Helge. Ture wants to be the pedagogue, who teaches the children things about Sweden and other countries and continents. At the same time, the most important thing is having fun and being playful. Obtaining knowledge is a way of expanding the world, making it a more exciting place. Consequently, Ture creates an exciting contrast between being at home and being out in the big, wide world—travelling in the unknown. He emphasizes this by having signs on his door. Apart from his dynamic personality, the play between him and Olle is what carries the action forwards. Olle is like a big brother to the children. He keeps track of everything, teaches them how to travel in the balloon and perform different tasks. He makes sure that the binoculars have been handed out, so that the children can experience the journey itself as well as the many threatening animals. When Ture challenges the children and threatens them with calamangs, Olle is the one who averts the threat

by helping the children turn into animals. This provides an exciting contrast between Olle and Ture, and it makes the adventure in the jungle come alive. The plan of action is not predetermined. Instead the action is carried forward by the dialogue between the characters and the children. Ture, Olle and Fia are able to interact on a fully conscious level instead of having to resort to the somewhat more technical solution Heathcote<sup>19</sup> recommended: choosing different attitudes (being unaware, knowing what will happen, trying to cause problems, etc.) to create a dialogue with the children. Here, the characters give life to the action.

### **Play stimulates the children's imagination as well as problem solving**

This affluent and dynamic play challenges the children's imagination and engages them in problem solving. Rodari has described how "fantastic hypotheses" can be used to stimulate the imagination, i.e. learning to tell a story and "establish an active relationship with reality" in the extension by asking the question: "What would happen if ...?"<sup>20</sup>

The question is implicit in this adventurous game. The adults keep challenging the children's imagination all the time, inviting them to solve the problems: "What if the calamangs were to come and attack us?", "What if the jungle pasta were to turn into real animals?", "What if the pineapple is alive?", "What if the tiger were to come in through the window?", "What if Ture had a letter?". This question, so good for firing the imagination, is a potential inherent in the formula "averting a threat".

The children at Freja also want to challenge the adults who are the leaders of the game. This is why some of them hurry back home to surprise Ture with a letter. This is thrilling and exciting, and they really have to think hard to find good reason for not complying with the adults' requests to travel home with them.

Apart from the interest in the contents of the actual play, the children show a lot of interest in Ture as a character. Malin tells him about her experiences, and after the game, she tells Ture how much Ko-Ko the owl has missed her, because it is Stina, Malin's elder sister, who has painted the house for Ko-Ko. The children do everything in their power to establish a contact with Ture. In the game, the girls write to him, and when he is not visiting the class, most of the children write him letters, which he brings with him when he does come and visit. Viktor has no problems writing both name and address on the envelope to Ture.

Ture's wardrobe becomes an interesting play setting, partly because it provides the boys with a possibility of playing "home games". By identifying with Ture, whose versatile personality represents both adventure and loving care, the boys are able to play typical family games. Sami, Mikael and Mattias try out living in the house, and they make their beds. Another thing is that it

<sup>19</sup> Wagner 1979; Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Rodari 1988, p. 31 and 33.

seems as if they can all be Ture at the same time. Otherwise the two oldest girls at Freja, Therèse and Stina, are often the ones who play mother and boss the other girls and some of the boys around.<sup>21</sup> And if they are not mothers, they are big sisters, often with parallel homes. The character of Ture has opened new possibilities which are not gender related.

### **The formula of the story and the different play settings**

Through the adventurous journeys, the play world at Freja is expanding. Once the action has been brought to life by the adults and children together, it becomes part of the children's play and games. The adventurous journey also provides many different play settings: the home—the journey—the adventure. These settings are all charged with meaning. The home is Ture's wardrobe and his owl. All the children play there. The balloon symbolises the journey, and there are often many keen travellers. I have on several occasions witnessed how the children have sat down in the balloon and studied the nature atlas which Ture brought. The adventure is in the jungle, and this is an excellent setting for play. Both boys and girls go out hunting. They put on their sun-hats and hunt both snakes and tigers. The binoculars are always at hand. They are hanging in a branch in the main playroom, so that everyone can see them. Every morning, the oldest girls (4–6 years old) go into the jungle to dance. Equipped with a radio cassette recorder, the dancing continues for at least one hour every day. They keep doing this as long as the jungle is still there (for a period of over one month). The jungle is an atmospheric, inspiring setting.

Thus, the different playworlds have their own physical space in the section. Ture's wardrobe is standing in a corner in the main playroom, the balloon is in the middle of the same room, and a room next door contains the jungle. This means that the children are free to move between the different worlds, at the same time as they inspire different groups of children to meet and interact. The different "stations" of the adventurous journey inspires the children to play amongst themselves at each "station", as well as go on new adventurous trips with Ture.

### **The third and fourth trips to the jungle**

The next time Ture comes to visit the class, he goes via the balcony and gets stuck with his tail in the rail. The children run out on the balcony to help him. They all want to see Ture to find out what has been happening. He has come straight from the big forest, where he has met both bears, squirrels and a clever fox. He points proudly at pictures in the nature atlas when the children have sat down in a circle around him. "I have brought something tasty too," he says and holds a jar out to them. "Dip your finger in it and taste it!" he urges them, and it is not long before someone realizes that they are eating blueberry jam—

<sup>21</sup> C.f. Mouritsen's argument that playing the role of mother is about having power.

newly made. Ture has picked the berries himself in his forest. Now, however, he wants to leave the forest and travel far, far away. He has found a beautiful flag. It's from the Congo. He gets the globe out to show the children where the Congo is situated, before they go off in the balloon and on the flying carpet. One of the children reminds the others about the binoculars.

When they arrive in the jungle, they are met by the sound of a drum. A calamang is sitting in the hut. This is *Lena*, who has dressed up to look like one of the natives from the book. She beats her drum more vigorously, and rises threateningly. The children turn on their heels and run straight out of the jungle. Ture and the children start making plans out in the main playroom. The question is how they can outwit the calamang. Ture teaches the children a jingle: "Tingelitang—sleep calamang", and they all go back into the jungle. As soon as the calamang attacks, they all shout in unison: "Tingelitang—sleep calamang" and to their immense delight, the calamang starts staggering and falls to the ground. However, the magic of the jingle only lasts a short while. The children just about have enough time to pick the oranges which are dangling from the palm tree.

After the trip to the jungle, the children play calamangs. Therèse and Camilla are sitting in the middle of the room, beating their drums. Mattias has little bells on his hands and races through the room, chasing the others. One after the other, the children play threatening calamangs, and as soon as someone says the jingle, the calamang falls asleep. Camilla, Malin and Charlotte are playing dogs in Ture's wardrobe, and after a while, Sami and Mattias join in the family game. They are two yapping puppies, and each has a furry ball in his mouth. The atmosphere is light and playful, and everyone is moving around as if they were dancing a boisterous dance.

In the end, Therèse and Sami find the crown which the calamangs had run away with. It was in the calamang hut. They proudly show it to Ture, who hangs it up in the large cobweb which is still there from when Fear came to visit. Now Anna will be able to have her crown back the next time she comes to the day-care centre.

Shortly afterwards, Ture returns to the section together with Anna. She is wearing a white dress, like an Indian princess, and she wants her crown back.

"Ture, the crown you put in the cobweb, it's gone," Stina says.

Anna starts crying uncontrollably.

"I want my crown back," she sobs.

Ture tries to comfort her.

"I've seen it," someone says.

"I'll fight the calamangs, I'm super-strong," Mikael says and beats his chest.

"I'm also strong," one of the other children says.

"And I'm He-man," says Kevin and jumps up towards Ture.

"Let's go to the jungle first," someone suggests.

"Is that where the crown is?" Ture asks.

"Yes!" the children answer in unison.

"Are you sure?"



"The calamangs have stolen the crown," someone says.  
 "It's the calamangs who have taken the crown," Sami says emphatically.  
 "How are you going to get to the jungle?" Ture asks.  
 "We'll go by balloon and flying carpet," the children answer. They are all talking at the same time, and they are very excited.  
 "What if the tiger comes?" Ture says.  
 "It won't, not if I make a river, then it won't come," Malin explains.  
 "No, it won't," Ture says matter-of-factly.  
 Ture starts getting the binoculars down.  
 "Mine is the one next to those red ones," Sami tells him.  
 "Whose are these?" Ture says.  
 "Mine," Malin answers at once.  
 "How shall we sit, then," Ture says. He is holding Anna's hand.  
 "We have speeding belts," Sami says.  
 "Anna, you can sit there, so you won't get scared," Ture comforts her, and leads her up to the balloon. "Or there!" he says and points at the carpet.  
 "I can see a crocodile!" Kristoffer cries.  
 They are now flying high in the air.  
 The beat of a drum can be heard from the jungle.  
 "A tiger!"  
 "A calamang!" They are all nervous in view of facing the threatening jungle.  
 A calamang is sitting in the hut, beating a drum for all it is worth. He gets up and attacks. Mikael attacks him and pulls him down on the ground.  
 "Tingelitung—sleep calamang!" they say, all at the same time.  
 The calamang falls to the ground, sleeping.  
 The children catch sight of the crown high up in the palm tree. Therèse stretches her arm out for it. There is fruit hanging from the palm tree as well, bananas this time.  
 There is a crash, and another calamang comes out of the hollow tree trunk. He has a long spear in his hand, and he dances around madly.  
 "Bang, bang, bang," Kevin shoots at him eagerly.  
 "Tingelitung—sleep calamang! Tingelitung—sleep calamang!"  
 Ture makes magic gestures to transform the calamang. The calamang lies down and falls asleep. The muscles in his face are quivering, and the children continue to repeat the jingle.  
 Ture takes Stina on his back and crawls up to the palm tree where the crown is dangling. Stina cuts off the ribbon which holds it.  
 "I've got it!" she cries, beaming with joy.  
 "Tingelitung—sleep calamang!" The children keep scanning.  
 The first calamang is waking up.  
 "Oh, I'm so happy now that I've got my crown back," Anna says.

### Play analysis

The story is the connecting thought in these joint games. The adults bring different parts of the story to life very deliberately. Adults and children all live every part of the action. Ture's wardrobe with Ko-Ko and the letterboxes constitute an exciting world, the journeys in the balloon and on the flying carpet provide powerful experiences of being able to steer a balloon and dare to fly high in the air, as well as being able to imagine the world from high above. The mixture of the concrete action during the journey and the abstract messages

presented by the globe and the atlas seems to result in a particular interest in the world around them.<sup>22</sup>

During the third adventurous journey, the topic is the threat itself, and the ability of averting a threat is what is at stake. Earlier, the children have been faced with threats in a more indirect way: calamangs on the wall and paw prints on the floor after the tiger. This time, there is a threatening calamang in the hut, and the children run off. Ture helps them think of a jingle, which will change and avert the threat. They use language, and are able to affect the situation together. Language gives meaning to, and even power over, the different events. This is an important insight, which the children are made aware of and also try out. Despite the fact that the children are small and unable to control the world around them, the conscious action of speaking provides them with a means of influencing their surroundings.

### **The circle of imagination—a new story takes shape**

“The adventurous journey” started with the adults’ dramatization of the contents of the book. After that, a new story has been allowed to develop, and live its own life, through all the different events. During the fourth journey, another story takes shape—the circle has been closed. But what has developed here is a story of its own. The contents of the play is a mixture of the interpretations and dramatizations made by both children and adults. The story has changed, received added material—meanings—and been rearranged, and, as Vygotsky writes about the imaginary process, the children’s creative ability has developed. This has been made possible through the dialogue between the adults and the children. The adults have kept challenging the children’s imagination, provided a text full of potential, e.g. real characters and actions to be interpreted and dramatized by the children themselves when playing. Emotions have been crucial for charging the situation, and play and games at Freja have been characterized by bubbling life. The children’s commitment has increased as the meanings created in the games has grown deeper. The fourth journey to the jungle was filmed by the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company but as far as the children were concerned, they were keen and interested and playing so spontaneously that they completely forgot the camera.

### **Towards conscious dramatization**

The children at Freja are all sitting in a bath-tub together with King Neptune, played by *Kristina*. The setting at Freja has changed. Instead of a balloon, there is now a bath-tub in the main playroom. Colourful fish are hanging from the ceiling, and the bath-tub is surrounded by screens on which the children have painted seascapes. There is a line of washing above the bath-tub, and next to it there is a long broom-handle with a shower, and a captain doll the size of

<sup>22</sup> There is a paradox in play, Bolton (1979) writes, between the concrete action of play and the abstract aspects, which creates a potential for meaning and significance.

a grown-up person, sea boots and life jackets are lying on the floor. It looks just like the illustrations in "The Children in the Water", in which Ture takes the children on new adventures, even going under water, where they meet King Neptune.

The whole class is on its way in the bath-tub. They are heading towards the sea, singing a song for all they are worth, moving with the rhythm of the waves. On the sea, they meet a rowing boat. It is Mother Gnome (*Ingela*) from the book "Hat-house",<sup>23</sup> on her way to the brownie to buy wool to weave trousers for her children. She is concerned about her children, who are all alone on the island, and asks the children from Freja if they would mind rowing over to the island and play with her children for a while. The children from Freja tell her not to worry, and with King Neptune in the lead, they head towards the island at once.

But something has already happened! The flickering light from a fire can be seen from the island (the mattress room). The children quickly leave the bath-tub and go ashore, and there is the Hat-house, on fire. Stina and Viktor are standing on the sand, dressed in nothing but white underwear. Viktor is managing the projector, and the flames are dancing on the wall. Stina and Viktor are the children in "Hat-house". The next picture shows the stove and the chimney as the only parts remaining of the house, which has now burnt down. Stina and Viktor start crying uncontrollably. Then the brownie comes up to them. It is *Ingela* who has taken on a new guise. "What is all this crying? I hope you'll both receive a good hiding," he says sternly, as in the book. "Please don't give us a hiding, but help us build the house up tidy," Viktor and Stina reply tearfully. They do not need any prompting to say this line which is straight out of the book—it is said with true feeling.

The other children are eager to help rebuild the house. It falls to King Neptune's lot to provide material (cardboard and paint) for building another house.

## Conclusion

### Freja

Freja's dramatizations and joint playing has been based on the action in the adventurous journeys. At the same time, both adults and children have been playing roles and characterized the different personalities (Ture's personality has been extra exciting), and in this way the course of events has been able to develop through the dialogue between adults and children. Also, all the adults have had roles to play in the fiction. There is a natural connection between action and characters, which is probably the reason why the children at Freja want to join in and play roles from "Hat-house". Apart from the tension in the story, created by the adults' contradictory relationship to the children, which

<sup>23</sup> Elsa Beskow 1931.

includes both praise and blame, the children have learnt how to create roles, and how to work on the scenery and settings with a projector.

The adventurous journeys continue to be a feature at Freja throughout the autumn term because of the multi-layered, dynamic playworld they result in, both with respect to characters and action.

## Oden

The jungle setting at Oden has inspired the children to play. They have played animal games, mainly family oriented. Ture, who is played by *Hans*, has contributed towards the playful atmosphere in the class. He has had a special contact with the oldest children. There is a large group of 6-year olds at Oden. They will be part of the activities which *Hans* will be running for 6-year olds together with *Kristina* from Valhall, and this will include a number of adventurous journeys. As for the rest, the activity is centred around boats and a journey made with Captain Hook, based on a simple story-line. The adults and the children build a hut together. The action moves quite freely within the framework of the general fiction. After Freja has finished travelling by water in the bath-tub, Oden borrows it and the adults perform a short play about someone taking a bath in a bath-tub. After this, the bath is used for water games. As soon as the children arrive in the mornings, they get out of their clothes to be able to play. They also use the bath-tub to travel to foreign countries.

## Valhall

The meeting with Ture is a very exciting one at Valhall. The children tell him a lot of things, and he becomes their close friend. The result is a poetic atmosphere in the class, and the jungle inspires the children to dance and play music. The children love dressing up, and above all paint themselves, and dance to the music. However, developing the epic action is more difficult. The children lack an interest in the dramatic action, and Ture is the only character who is dramatized by the adults. In the book "The Children in the Jungle", the characters are somewhat vague and subordinate to the action. But since there is a general interest in creating scenes and play-acting in the class the theme continues, but the focus has been moved to the characters in an attempt to develop the story.

## Focusing on the Characters

### Role, type and character of children's play

The dramatic and literary patterns of play includes a plan of action—both with respect to actions and to roles. In the last chapter, the focus was placed on the *actions* of play. This time, the roles, or characters, will be in the forefront. Throughout the theme, the adults' dramatizations of different characters have been crucial for creating the fiction and giving life to the children's cultural world. Assuming roles is something which is done both when playing, when dramatizing and when play-acting. But how do literary roles relate to children's play?

Role is a central concept in Leontiev's and Elkonin's theories of play, but in a sense of learning social roles, or reproducing social relationships.<sup>1</sup> Role is of major importance also in other theories of psychology. The concept of role-play is a common one in psychological play theories. Garvey (1982, 1984), whose approach is based on the theory of communication, presents role and communication as the key concepts. By communicating with others, the child learns to play and the functions of social roles. A role is not a realistic person, it is an abstraction which includes several different aspects, such as the function of the role, i.e. goal-oriented actions, the relation to other people, and lastly, the characteristic traits and attitudes which belong to the role. Roles can be taxonomized, according to Garvey (1982). First, the child learns functional role activities in interaction with its mother or its father, and then the ability to personify roles develops; both in the company of parents and in the company of friends. In order to be able to personify a role, a person needs to be able to act, perform, display attitudes and carry on a dialogue with changing tones of voice and pitch. Garvey explains that this is to a large extent a matter of vocal range. The first roles to be personified are family roles, followed by professional roles and, finally, imaginary roles. The ability to communicate is cru-

<sup>1</sup> As opposed to Vygotsky's view on play, in which he emphasizes the relation between fiction and reality and between the contents in and form of the play. Play is a child's way of including both role and action in the form of drama.

cial, both for performing the role and for controlling it, i.e. describing the setting and directing. The role is created in relation to another person, and the child develops its role in relation to a supplementary role. An example would be that if the child is playing mother, what is being portrayed is the relationship to a child. Garvey (1982) calls the role relational. The Norwegian play researcher Vedeler (1987) has also studied children's communication in role games, but as opposed to Garvey, who studied children at home and in a laboratory, Vedeler conducted her studies in a day-care centre. She observed the verbal statements the children made, both in the role and about the role. The youngest children were lacking role statements. Family roles were the most common ones, both for boys and girls. After this, the girls went on to professional roles, while the boys were playing wilderness games which included hunting and fighting. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 often played imaginary roles inspired by various stories. Vedeler states that the prerequisite for role-playing was that the role was known, thereby turning against the idea that roles have one given hierarchical order. On the other hand, characterizing a role was difficult. Only 11 per cent of the girls' and 1 per cent of the boys' role statements were concerned with the characteristics of the role. Vedeler thus drew the conclusion that the girls showed the widest range of roles. In their role interpretations, they expressed both concern and generosity and authority and aggressiveness. These characteristics mainly occurred amongst family roles. At this point, I wish to dispute Vedeler's line of argument. Since the family play is to a large extent characterized by a dialogue between mother, father and child, the role will naturally be both mentioned and described in the play. Without the dialogue, the children would not be able to develop the story. But is this really a matter of characterising roles? Is it not more likely to be a set of predetermined attitudes (concern or aggressiveness), reflecting the underlying issue of power between adults and children, as Mouritsen claims? When the boys are playing their wilderness games, their actions are expressive, and there is no reason for them to comment on their roles. However, their actions are nevertheless motivated by the same presence of good guys and bad guys, circling around the hero in the centre: the child itself.

Sutton-Smith (1989) is of the opinion that too many play researchers are too rational in their approach to play. He says that there is not enough of the Dionysus spirit. Far too often, their theories deal with how play can be specified, what is to be considered play and what is not to be considered play, play signals, text or context. This criticism is also aimed at Garvey when she tries to restrict play to being linguistic communication: "play is saying", instead of recognizing that in play, both action and voices are dramatized. In a study of children's play (1989), Sutton-Smith demonstrates that when children themselves are asked to define play, they consider themselves to be playing also when they are onlookers and when they are solving a problem related to the game. He maintains that there is a need for other metaphors for play. Play is dramatic. Sutton-Smith emphasizes the similarity between

play and theatre.<sup>2</sup> If anything the dialogue in play is more of a "quadrologue", he writes (1979), as the children are both actors, script writers/directors, audience and themselves at once. Theatre terminology is closely related to play, but play is more a matter of helping the role along<sup>3</sup> than acting yourself. "The theatre (i.e. children's play) plays the players rather than the players playing the theatre," Sutton-Smith<sup>4</sup> says in Gadamer's words. Play is characterized by dialogue and mobility.

Within their dramas they can switch themes or roles, or can use functional roles or character roles; they can treat their roles stereotypically or with personalization,... they are in line with all the other players of history; the clowns, musicians, actors and storytellers.<sup>5</sup>

Children are theatrical, Hundevide (1989) says. They possess an inner theatre, serving as a basis for interpretation, complete with a stage, roles and dialogues. Sutton-Smith's opinions are well in line with the approach to play displayed by the literary historians I have mentioned earlier (chapter 7). Mouritsen speaks of different "persons" in play: the self, the narrative self and the actor. From an aesthetic point of view, the role would rather be described as epic elements, or types. The mother-child game deals with power, and both roles are essential, and the fighting game deals with violence, and the roles are those of good and evil.

## Role, character, type and personality in the drama or dramatization

Role, dialogue and action are key concepts in drama.<sup>6</sup> Those who act at the theatre strive to transform themselves, to play a role, to be someone else. The dialogue links the role with the action, or as the Swedish writer Stig Dagerman said: "The action folds out of the dialogue".<sup>7</sup>

Role is a general term which covers the various kinds of character personification that exist within the theatre. A character is a role which develops along with the story, and which is influenced by the action and the plot. Type is the opposite of role: a fixed character who will not change as the story moves on. Such types can be found in *commedia dell'arte*—Harlequin is one, with his

<sup>2</sup> In his drama pedagogical dissertation on the understanding of dramatic play within different types of theories, Björn K. Rasmussen writes that Sutton-Smith's theory, as well as other cultural anthropological theories, are relevant to drama pedagogy (1990).

<sup>3</sup> One example of this could be when a child makes a swimming motion and says "swim, swim".

<sup>4</sup> Sutton-Smith 1989, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Holm 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Stig Dagerman's statement is really criticism of the tyranny of drama (1948). Drama demands that the action and intrigue are suitable to the theatre and can be acted without hiding too many secrets. See Holm 1981, p. 71-72.



comic streak. Along with several others featured in the theme, Fear deliberately connects on to popular theatre. Mouritsen also points out the similarity between children's play and *commedia dell'arte*—popular theatre (cf. chapt. 7). When Tove Jansson draws up her literary characters, she isolates a certain behaviour in them and makes them allegorical types. Little My represents rebellion, and Hemulen institutional order. However, these types are also individuals with contradictory traits. So skilfully have they been designed, that they widen the scope for action. It was obvious that the Moomin Valley enriched the play world at Hybelejen. The various characters represented emotions, e.g. threat and fear. In this way, the characters were able to give each scene an emotional atmosphere which the children could soak up. At the same time, the characters were living personalities, e.g. Groke, whom the children wanted to get to know. When *Monica* acted Ture at Freja, and gave him an exciting personality, the children's play actions developed. At Freja, the character developed from the action. But what happens when the characters come to the forefront and the play is based on a given text?

## From Alfie to Mr. B

An Alfie room has been created at Filuren, one of the day-care centre's two classes for younger children. Before you even get into the room, the sign on the door clearly states that this is Alfie's room, and inside it is Alfie's bookshelf, the book about animals and several other toys from the illustrations in "Get a move on, Alfie Atkins".<sup>8</sup>

It is Tuesday morning. The children will soon meet Alfie Atkins, played by their teacher *Ingegerd*. They are sitting in a corner of the room together with some of the adults. The play is about to begin. The audience is quiet and full of expectations. The trainee teacher, who is going to read the story during the play, is sitting on a chair. The lights go out, and Alfie comes in. When the lights are switched on again, he is standing in front of his bed, about to dress.

"This is Alfie Atkins. Soon he will have to go off to his day-care centre," the trainee teacher reads.

"Alfie, are you ready?" Alfie's dad calls from the kitchen. The voice sounds far away. It is in fact coming from the main room next door.

"There's only the sweater left now," Alfie says and takes his sweater off the bed. He tries to put it on. One arm gets stuck, and he can't get his head through the hole. He tugs frantically.

The children laugh.

"What's he doing?" one of the children asks.

"He's putting his sweater on," one of the adults whispers.

"Look! Under his sweater was Lisa's sweater. Lisa is Alfie's doll. Of course, she also has to get dressed," the trainee teacher reads.

"Alfie, are you coming?" Dad calls again. He is sounding a bit cross now.

"Yes, I just have to... dress Lisa as well," Alfie says, and puts Lisa's sweater on.

<sup>8</sup> Gunilla Bergström 1975.

"Is that Emil<sup>9</sup>," one of the children asks.

"No, this is Alfie," one of the adults explains.

"Alfie," someone from the audience repeats.

Alfie puts Lisa on the toy shelf.

"Aah, the wheel for the tractor!" Alfie takes it out, spins it on the floor, looks around and spots the tractor on the very top shelf. He raises himself on tiptoe and takes it down. He fiddles, twists and turns, and suddenly, the wheel is on.

"Alfie! You have to come now, it's late already," Dad calls from the kitchen.

"Yes, I just have to... park the tractor first, so it won't lose its wheel again," Alfie says and places the tractor on the top shelf.

"Look, there's the new book about animals. I wonder if a quick look at the snakes wouldn't be OK," the trainee teacher reads.

Alfie takes the book down and places it on a stool. Then he kneels in front of it.

"Alfie! Are you coming soon? Breakfast is ready!" Dad calls from the kitchen.

"Yes, I just have to... look at the page with the snakes," Alfie says and turns the pages quickly until he comes to the snakes.

"The python is wonderfully scary," the trainee teacher reads.

"Snake! Oh!" The children get very eager. "Look, snake!"

"What a shame that the page has been torn here. Right across the snake. Dad hasn't seen that yet," the trainee teacher continues.

"*Ingegerd*, you'll have to mend it," one of the children says.

Alfie picks up the sellotape and the blunt scissors.

"Alfie!" Dad shouts. "What are you doing? Come on now, your porridge is getting cold."

"I just have to... mend something first," Alfie says. He pulls off a long strip of sellotape. It gets stuck on his sweater. Then he gets completely tangled up in the tape, and his sweater is full of it.

"That's silly," one of the children says.

"But he manages to get out of it, and mends the page so it's all nice and neat again," the trainee teacher reads.

"He was careless!" one of the children says indignantly. "He was careless. Is *Ingegerd* being careless?" The children are upset.

Now Alfie goes up to the large green letterbox on the wall behind him. He gets the news paper.

"There is a large picture of a fire on the outside. He can see a fireman in the smoke. Alfie stops and looks. When he grows up, he is going to be a fireman too," the trainee teacher reads.

The lights go out.

"EEE-eee-EEE-eee..." The sirens from a fire engine. The sound comes closer.

"Ture!" Alfie says. "What are you doing here?"

Ture comes running in with a helmet on his head and a suitcase in his hand.

"Can't you see that there's a fire!" Ture asks. "Help me put it out!"

A large fire is projected on the blind.

"He's a fireman," one of the children says.

Together, Ture and Alfie open the suitcase and pull out the fire hose.

"It's Ture! It's Ture and the snake!" the children cry.

Now both Alfie and Ture are spraying water for all they are worth. Ture is using both the fire hose and his own tail, and Alfie is using the toy snake.

"Fire's out!" Ture shouts, and the overhead projector is turned off.

Alfie and Ture put the water hose back in the suitcase and close it. Alfie is still holding the toy snake in his hand.

<sup>9</sup> Emil is a well-known character in the fictitious world of Astrid Lindgren.

"Well, I'll see you at the day-care centre later, Alfie," Ture says.

"Bye then," says Alfie.

"Bye!" Ture says.

"Bye, bye, Ture. He's a fireman," one of the children says.

"AAAAlfie!" Dad shouts from the kitchen. He is furious.

"For the last time—come and eat your breakfast at once!"

"I just have to... put the fire hose back first," Alfie says and takes the news paper and leaves the room.

"Come on, let's leave as well," says one of the children, and they all get up and follow Alfie into the main playroom (Alfie's kitchen).

"Where is Alfie?" the children ask. "Where is Alfie?" They are curious and look around.

Dad is standing next to the laid breakfast table.

The audience sits down on the floor in front of the table.

"Here Alfie is," the trainee teacher reads. She has followed the rest of the group, and is now sitting on a chair a little way from the kitchen table.

Alfie comes into the kitchen and gives Dad the paper.

"Why, thank you! To think that you remembered the paper today as well. Thank you!"

That was kind of you," Dad says in a friendly voice.

"There you go, there's your porridge," Dad says.

Alfie sits down and starts eating. Dad fills his pipe and opens the paper.

"Alfie pretends that the porridge is land. The milk is the ocean, and the berries in the jam are boats. He wants there to be loads of boats," the trainee teacher reads.

Alfie takes the spoon for the jam and helps himself to more.

"Don't play with your food," Dad says.

"I just have to take some more boats," Alfie says.

"Just have to—just have to... What if you could get a move on instead," Dad sighs from behind the paper.

"And Alfie can get a move on. Look how quick he is, and Dad doesn't even notice it," the trainee teacher reads.

Alfie finishes his breakfast in a jiffy, takes his bowl over to the sink (the bookshelf), wipes his hands and mouth... and brushes his teeth. He spits the water out in the mug and puts it back in the bookshelf. He packs his bag for the day—his backpack—and fetches his jacket from the hall. At that moment, the clock strikes seven.

"Bing-bong, bing-bong, bing-bong, bing," the trainee teacher reads, and sounds like a chiming clock.

Alfie puts his white jacket on, and a blue scarf. He takes his hat in his hand.

"Dad, I'm ready," he shouts.

But there is no sign of Dad.

"Dad, I'm ready. The clock has struck seven!"

But there is still no sign of Dad.

Alfie takes a look. He goes around in the room, looking everywhere. The children follow his slightest movement.

"Where is he? Well, would you believe it, he is still in the kitchen, reading the paper.

Although Alfie is dressed and perfectly ready," the trainee teacher reads.

"I'm coming, I just have to finish reading the pa..."

"There! You said it now!" Alfie exclaims.

"Said what?" Dad asks.

"I think I'll go mad, always this 'just have to'! Come on, Dad, let's go!" Alfie says.

"Yes, we'll go, We just have to..."

"What?" Alfie says.

"We just have to finish laughing first!" Dad says and gets up. He folds the paper and puts his arm around Alfie's shoulders.

Dad and Alfie are both shouting with laughter.  
The audience is laughing as well. Everyone is merry.  
Alfie and Dad leave the kitchen.  
"It's theatre," Anna whispers. "Shall we clap?"  
The audience claps, while Alfie, Dad and Ture all bow.  
Ture takes his helmet off, and his wig and his false ears. Out comes *Ann-Sofi*, who has been playing Ture.  
"Strange," says Caroline. "Do your ears hurt?"  
"Do you want to try it?" *Ann-Sofi* asks.  
Caroline stands up and goes up to her.  
"Oh dear," someone says as *Ann-Sofi* places the helmet on Caroline's head. It is large and heavy, and it starts sliding to one side. Caroline sits down again, and the others look at her wonderingly. The helmet falls off.  
Martin puts the helmet on. He is one of the youngest children in the class.  
Mattias gets up, closely followed by one of the girls. They go up to the table.  
"Ture's ears," Mattias says and picks the ears up from the table.  
Another three children have also come up to the table. One of them is stirring Alfie's porridge with the spoon from the jam jar.  
Caroline puts Ture's large black wig on her head. Kristoffer tries to put the helmet on as well, but she refuse.  
Inside Alfie's room, Mattias and the girl have sat down by the stool, where the book about animals is lying.  
The girl takes the scissors and the sellotape and starts cutting tiny, tiny pieces of tape. Mattias turns the pages in the book, pointing. The girl sticks one small piece of tape on the page. Quickly, Mattias moves it to the other page.  
"Where's Dad?" Mattias asks and looks around. He spots the green letterbox and gets up. "Newspaper! Where's the newspaper?" he asks.  
He sits down again in front of the book.  
"Birds!" He hits the page with his hand several times. "No birds can look!" he says.  
The girl continues to cut pieces of tape which she sticks on the pages of the book.  
"Look, what birdie!" Mattias is leafing rapidly through the book.  
"Tape!" he says and bends across the stool, which falls over.  
*Ingegerd*, who has been playing Alfie, comes into the room. She goes up to the children, puts the stool back up and points at things in the book.  
Mattias has found the paper on the floor, and points at one of the animals in the book. "Not dangerous!" he exclaims and bangs his hand down on the page several times.  
Now the girl has cut off a large piece of sellotape, which she sticks right in the middle of the book.  
They are still on their own in the room.  
More children come into Alfie's room. Three of them go up to the stool with the book and the tape.  
Mattias opens Ture's suitcase and takes out the fire hose.  
The girl continues cutting bits of tape.  
The overhead projector is switched on. Mattias aims the hose at the fire: "Spray, spray, spray..." he says.  
One of the girls is holding the spoon from the jam jar in her hand.  
Caroline comes into the room. She is still wearing Ture's wig.  
Filip bends down and picks up the fire hose which is lying on the floor.  
"No, no," Mattias shouts, "I had it!" He seizes hold of Filip's fringe and retrieves the hose.  
Filip starts crying.  
"Filip," *Anna* says, and gives him the toy snake. "This is another way of spraying water," she says and shows him how.

Mattias aims the hose at the book.

"What's he doing?" Kristoffer asks. He has put the pipe in his mouth and points at Mattias. "He's got the hose."

"It's OK," Anna explains.

Four children are now sitting around the animal book.

The girl is still cutting pieces of sellotape.

"Ture has been putting tape," one of the children says and gives another child a roll of tape.

Mattias rushes around the room with the hose. He sprays in the letterbox.

Filip takes a roll of tape.

One of the youngest girls picks up the hose, which Mattias has put on the floor for a second.

"No," he protests and grabs it as he runs past.

The younger girl takes a step to the side.

"Spray, spray, spray..." Mattias says.

One of the younger boys has spotted the tractor, which is lying on the floor with one wheel off. He sits down on the floor, puts the wheel back on in one single movement.

He tries the tractor. It works. He puts it back on the shelf.

The girl is still playing with the sellotape, but now she is sticking it onto her jumper. Several large pieces.

Mattias has put the hose back in the suitcase.

Anna is playing with Caroline out in the main playroom. Caroline has Ture's wig on her head and his tail in her hand. She aims the tail at Anna.

"No!" Anna cries. "I'm so afraid of snakes! Why do you have to do that, Ture?" she asks and shrinks back.

Kristoffer comes in with the toy snake. He also attacks Anna.

"He's not dangerous, is he?" Anna says. "Oh, I'm so lucky that he's a kind snake," she says and sighs with relief.

Kristoffer has sat down on the floor and is trying to stick the pipe into the mouth of the snake.

Inside Alfie's room, the overhead projector is switched on, and a number of children are spraying water on the fire to put it out. Ingegerd is also spraying water. She is using a long strip of material as a hose.

In the main room, Anna continues to play with Kristoffer.

"I just have to... I'll be there soon, Dad," says Anna to Kristoffer, who has put the pipe in his mouth.

"I just have to... put the sweater on first, Dad," Anna says, and puts on the large knitted jumper Alfie had in the play.

"Kristoffer is Dad now," she explains to Caroline.

"Now you're Alfie," Caroline says to Anna.

"Here!" Kristoffer says and sticks a handful of tangled tape on Alfie's sweater.

"I just have to... finish taping first, and then I'll come," Anna says.

"You should take it off now," Kristoffer admonishes Anna and removes the tape from the sweater.

"Yes, I've noticed that it's very warm," Anna says and turns to Caroline.

Kristoffer has sat down in the sofa with the pipe in his mouth. He is jumping up and down.

"Who was Ingegerd when she was wearing the sweater?" Anna asks.

"Alfie," Caroline replies.

"Are you Dad when you have the pipe?" Anna asks.

Kristoffer is jumping up and down.

"Ingegerd was only playing," he says.

"Put the fire out," Ingegerd calls from inside Alfie's room.

"Spray, spray, spray..." Mattias says.  
The fire has been put out, and the overhead projector is turned off.  
"Spray, spray, spray..." Mattias continues.  
"A fire, Alfie!"  
"A fire, Alfie!"  
The projector is switched back on again.  
This time Caroline in her Ture wig is spraying water with the hose.  
Kristoffer has put the helmet on.  
Some other children are playing with the sellotape  
The play has been going on for almost one hour.

### Alfie Atkins as a play theme

At the beginning of the autumn term, all six classes at Hybelejen joined in the theme work. They had been inspired by "The Children in the Jungle". In the classes for the younger children, including Filuren, Ture was a character whom the children often talked about and wanted to meet in the day-care centre. He came to visit them with his suitcase on several occasions, and then they all went off to the jungle together. The children helped draw plants and animals and stick them up on the walls. They were especially fascinated by the tigers. Every day, they would hunt tigers and pull them off the wall. There was also a toy snake made of fabric in the jungle, which made them think of Ture and his adventure.

In the middle of the term, Jan talked to the staff at Filuren about letting Ture and his adventurous world meet Alfie and his everyday existence. The children were very interested in the books about Alfie Atkins, so Jan helped the staff prepare a play about Alfie. The jungle room became Alfie's room.

Dramatizing the stories about Alfie Atkins does not require much effort. The method is one where you alternate reading and play-acting, in the following way: one adult reads the story at the same time as the other adults act the roles (the dialogue). This form of dramatization was one of the very first tried in the preschool teacher education in the middle of the 1980's.<sup>10</sup> Hans, who is now working at Oden, was one of the teachers who dramatized Alfie Atkins during one of his trainee periods at one day-care centre, and he noticed that the children's play was strongly influenced by it. They tried acting different roles and different scenes from the stories, they pretended to read aloud to one another, etc.

The contents of the books about Alfie Atkins are directly linked with everyday situations recognizable to every child: going to bed with all the rituals this involves, getting a move on in the morning to get to the day-care centre, where "I just have to..." is a recurring line. There is an obvious link between home and the day-care centre: being small, being new at the centre and routines in the adult world are all themes which have many points in common. The books contain conflicts between norms and human irrational behaviour. Dad is in-

<sup>10</sup> Lindqvist 1989.



Fig. 8. Caroline in Alfie's room.

consistent, and often helpless. Alfie and Dad have to solve their problems together. Through Alfie, the children are able to personally experience the situation. This enables them to identify with Alfie's feelings and experiences. Alfie is a character, he has motives for what he is doing and it is possible to follow his line of argument and his thoughts when he is faced with different problems. He exists as a person, whatever setting he finds himself in. Alfie is a normal boy, and both boys and girls can identify with him. The books let people share the things that happen through Alfie.

"Dad gives Alfie an entire world", the journalist Åsa Beckman writes in a review of one of the books about Alfie.<sup>11</sup> He gives Alfie exactly the amount of space he needs. Dad has just the right amount of absent-mindedness and introspectiveness to let Alfie exist, but when Alfie really needs him, he is always there. Children recognize fears and power conditions which are not visible to us, Beckman writes.

Establishing a world proved very easy when the trainee teachers dramatized Alfie. Despite the fact that their trainee periods only lasted a couple of weeks, they were able to dramatize different Alfie stories several times over, so that the children were able to take active part in the play. *Anna*, who is now working at Filuren, also has experience of dramatizing Alfie from her time as a trainee teacher. She was practising in a part-time group, with children who were about to start school. The dramatization awoke their interest in playing

<sup>11</sup> In the Swedish national daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* June 20, 1993.



the roles of Alfie and Dad themselves. They learnt lines and acted different stories over and over again. Amongst other things, this enabled the boys to pretend that they were girls under the cover of the play world.

### Analysis—a theme of freedom and restrictions

In her book "Children's Theatre", Hagnell has described several surveys on how children experience and mentally process a theatre play they have seen. In her experience, once the children are back in their day-care centres, no obvious processing activities can be observed. On one occasion, ten days after some children had seen a play called "Bursting Balloon", their teachers were asked if they had been playing, drawing or speaking of their experience. The reply was negative without exception. The teachers had noticed nothing at all.<sup>12</sup> In another survey the teachers had been alerted, and after the play the children had access to material for making puppets, so that they could relive the characters from the play. (They had been to see a puppet show.) This time the children were active after the performance, and made puppets, but the puppets predominantly represented themselves. It took a long time before the children were able to assume other roles. Hagnell reported on a number of different methods tried for following up a visit to the theatre: drawing, conversations, improvisations etc. Her conclusion is that the best results will be achieved through a combination of different methods. At the same time, she is aware of the fact that children's external reactions are only a very limited aspect of their experiences.<sup>13</sup> However, the surveys illustrate an important issue on children's experiences and understanding, viz. that teachers in pre-schools find it difficult to translate what they have just seen at the theatre into activities in the day-care centres.

The conditions change when the theatre is played in the day-care centre and different parts and situations are acted by the children's own teachers, who give life to a world which everyone is able to share. After the play "Get a move on, Alfie Atkins", the children are able to step right into Alfie's world. The play is so realistic that the audience has even had to move from Alfie's room out into the kitchen. During the play, they have been worrying about Alfie and his protests against his fathers urging "get a move on...". How dares he? He is careless. He has torn the page in the animal book. He sticks a lot of sellotape on his sweater. The children sympathize with Alfie, and they are able to follow his innermost thoughts. It is their own *Ingegerd* who dares subject herself to all this, and they show that they sympathize with her. "Is *Ingegerd* being careless?" someone says. When Ture turns up, adventure and action is in the forefront. Ture is brave. He is a fireman, and this is something the children comment on. A wish come true! He dares everything, and he also turns into Alfie's friend, just as he became the children's friend. This creates a link between

<sup>12</sup> Hagnell 1983, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170 ff.

Ture's and Alfie's worlds. Alfie, whose person and action are characterized by moral afterthought, meets someone whose action is expressive and adventurous. This brings more external action into Alfie's world and enriches it.

When the play has finished, the children remain on the floor, experiencing the contradictory atmosphere of freedom and restrictions which the play has created. Once the ice has been broken, and the brave Ture lends someone his helmet, wig and false ears, the children are free to enter Alfie's world. The thing that first attracts the most attention is the picture book with the torn page. This enables the children to relive the situation where Alfie mends the page, at the same time as he gets all tangled up in the sellotape. Imagine daring to use so much tape, and imagine cutting it with a real pair of scissors! Mattias is the first one to try it. He examines the animals to see how dangerous they are, he sticks tape on the pages and carries out all the actions in the scene with the animal book. He goes through every action, and there is a beginning and an end. The girl by his side spends the whole time cutting and sticking tape on things. She is very systematic. Starting with tiny pieces, she gradually gets bold enough to cut a piece large enough to stick on the page of the book, and at the end, she even dares stick pieces of tape on her jumper. When Mattias has tried all the actions in the scene relating to the animal book, he starts looking for the newspaper and asking where Dad is. He is now playing Alfie. After this, he tries the fire hose, very systematically and in numerous different ways. There is no sign of isolated actions; he acts coherently throughout, and sprays water in every place he can think of which was part of the story, and God help anyone who tries to interfere in his playing. Another interesting thing is his movement pattern: he circles rhythmically around the room. Not once does he collide with other children, unless he is deliberately interrupted, although the small room is full of people, both children and adults. This suggests that there is a rhythmical or musical element to his play.

Another small boy spots the tractor and puts the tractor wheel back on it. His action is very goal-directed, and his single movement is very accurate. It is unlikely that he would have managed to do this under normal circumstances, and above all, under normal circumstances it is unlikely that he would have bothered about a broken tractor at all.

Caroline, who at three is the oldest child in this class, usually plays in the Alfie room. She takes the Alfie doll out of bed and feeds him. One day when I was visiting, she told me that Alfie was ill, but that she was going to try to give him breakfast anyway. When she had borrowed Ture's wig after the play, it seemed as if she was not quite free to do certain actions. She is Ture now, but she is used to trying different roles. Kristoffer, who is playing with Anna, is not entirely sure that he wants to enter into any role. "She was only playing" he says about *Ingegerd* who has been playing Alfie. He does not want to have to be Dad when he puts the pipe into his mouth. He wants to make his own choice.

On the whole, the distinction between the children's roles and their actions

seems hazy. They alternate between being themselves and being Alfie, Dad or Ture. It all merges. Alfie represents a *whole world*. Alfie's personality inspires the children to try different actions which are connected either with freedom or with restrictions. They are affected by this contrast, which in combination with their own feelings about what they dare and dare not do, is what makes the situation so dynamic. Naturally, they can also experience the same thing when someone reads them the story, but seeing it acted out, and meeting their own teachers in this new world, enables them to enter the world and experience the feeling of challenging authorities together with adults. This is something they would never have dared to do without the protection of their playworld.

Seen from outside, the play sequence could be perceived as extremely sporadic, even somewhat chaotic. But when the emphasis is placed on each individual child, their actions are coherent. In a study conducted in Denmark in the mid 1980's, Andersen & Kampmann (1990) show how difficult it is for adults to see and comprehend the underlying motives for children's actions. The adults were often stationary, while the children were very mobile.

The dramatization of "Get a move on, Alfie Atkins" has illustrated how deliberate attempts can be made at creating a mutual playworld with a special significance also amongst very young children in preschools.

#### "Peter No-tail"<sup>14</sup> at the Valhall Theatre

In the books about Peter No-tail we meet cats, who are characters with very set personalities—regular types. The law of the jungle<sup>15</sup>, from a child's perspective, is what counts in Gösta Knutsson's world of cats. In other words, these books are about bullying and being bullied.

At Valhall, there is a marked interest in artistic forms. When Ture has said good-bye to the children, but left his flying carpet in the mattress room, there are two ways of playing that interest the children most of all. One is sitting on the carpet playing with meccano or lego, and the other one is painting themselves, dressing up and dancing to music. This makes the staff want to continue their efforts to encourage the children to do their own dramatizations.

We planned to play some story from a Peter No-tail book. In this way, we were hoping to inspire the children to dramatize and play-act of their own accord.<sup>16</sup>

This is what the staff wrote in their project report (autumn term, 1991).

There were a number of reasons for choosing Peter No-tail. One was that the group of 6-year olds was unusually large, which meant that there were several children who had considerable experience of the day-care centre and one another. These children needed some fresh challenges. Moreover, during

<sup>14</sup> Gösta Knutsson wrote the first in a series of books for children about the cat Peter No-tail and his friends in 1939.

<sup>15</sup> Stybe 1970, p.169 ff.

<sup>16</sup> This idea had emerged during discussions with Jan and myself.

the autumn the issue of friendship had been discussed with ardour. The children would often pretend to be cats, and at times, they would pick their roles from the world of Peter No-tail. In view of this, the characters in the books about Peter No-tail were thought to be able to inspire the children to do their own dramatizations. One particular aspect was the vividly described conflict between Peter and Martin and the latter's cronies Bill and Bull.

The first thing was, however, creating an inviting setting for dramatizations and play-acting by building a theatre in the main room.

### The clown who had lost his theatre

One day, the children can hear some strange noises from the broom cupboard. They call the adults, and ask them to unlock the door. Inside the cupboard, they find a confused and very sad clown. It is *Majlis*, who has dressed up in a pair of wide pink trousers, a red nose and a small black hat. The clown is crying. He has lost his theatre. It has burnt down. Adam consoles him by pointing at the puppet theatre, saying that they too have a theatre. Full of expectations, Angelica and Erica are skipping around the clown, who brightens up at the information but says that most of all, he would like a proper theatre with a large stage. At this stage, *Majlis* starts telling the children about theatres, what they look like, what a play is and what a dressing room is used for. Oskar thinks of a good name for the clown: Bertil, and Bertil he is. Before leaving, Bertil the Clown says he wishes the children would build a theatre where he could see a play about Peter No-tail. "Would you do that for me?" he asks them, and the response is a unanimous "Yes".

No sooner said than done: the children go shopping for fabric, which is made into a curtain. Screens made of wood and cardboard are brought out and used as side-scenes. They move the sofa and make the available space into a dressing room with a table and a mirror. Clothes, shoes and grease paint are put out to enable the children to turn themselves into different characters.

Mildly surprised, the staff reported that as soon as it had come into existence, the dressing room inspired the children to play. The girls dressed up as ladies, made themselves up with grease paint and acted out different attitudes. Some of the boys painted themselves as threatening monsters, and tried to frighten the others. Playthings from the dolls' room were moved into the dressing room, and the family games became increasingly popular.

The opening play at the Valhall Theatre, "The Mysterious Polisher" is based on a chapter from the book "Well done, Peter No-tail" (1951) called "The Royal Polishing Agency". The pedagogues in the class made the adaptations for the scene. The plot in this chapter is straightforward, as is the story-line: assisted by Bill, Martin tries to trick May into giving him her golden crown, but at the last minute, Triss turns up and reveals Martin's identity. To make the play even more life-like, the pedagogues make the different characters very distinct and deliberately prolong the dialogue. This is to bring out the conflict

between the two sides, Martin and Bill on the one hand, and May and Peter on the other, but also clarify the relationship between Martin and Bill as well as between May and Peter. Furthermore, they leave the solving of the actual conflict to the children in the audience. In the play, no one comes forth to rescue them, so the denouement takes shape gradually, as the chain of events is "rolled out" and dramatized over a period of time. The theme continues as Bill and Martin return one week later with a map of a hidden treasure. They hide the map under a carpet. On January 13<sup>17</sup> there is a fancy dress ball at the day-care centre, and this is also intended as the grand finale of the play. On this day, when May was to wear her golden crown in the play, Bill and Martin turn up and reveal where they have hidden the map, and at last the children find the crown behind the curtain in the main playroom. After this happy ending, the party can begin.

But what happened during the adults' performance, and how were the children influenced in their play and own dramatizations?

### "The Mysterious Polisher"

*Ann-Charlotte* is the compère.

"I would like to inform you that today, the Valhall Theatre will put on a play called 'The Mysterious Polisher'. Please take your seats, the performance is about to begin."

"'The Mysterious Polisher'?" says Madeleine inquiringly.

"Yes, 'The Mysterious Polisher,'" *Ann-Charlotte* repeats.

"What comic book is that?" Adam asks as *Ann-Charlotte* disappears behind the curtain. Martin and Bill appear on the right in the corridor.

"Say that you are from the Polishing Board," Martin says. He is played by *Annelie*, who is wearing black tights and a black "cat-hat" with ears on. Bill is wearing reddish brown tights and a similar cat-hat.

"So, what do we have to do to lay our paws upon May's crown?" Martin whispers.

"Crown's what it was," Bill repeats, "golden."

Martin rubs his paws.

"Crown... is that the sort of crown<sup>18</sup> you buy things with?" Bill asks.

"No, silly, it's the sort of crown princes and princesses wear," Martin says at the same time as he pulls the curtain to one side.

"Such a crown must be worth lots and lots of money, don't you think?" Bill says.

Martin lights the spotlight.

"Look what I found in the bin," he cries. "Let's get you dressed up so that Peter and May won't recognize you."

Once again, Martin rubs his paws gleefully.

"Dress me up? But they'll see that I'm me," Bill says unhappily.

"But look at the rags I've found. Here! Put them on!" Martin says and gives Bill a pair of wide silk trousers with flowers on. "That'll do fine!" he says with satisfaction. "No one will recognize you."

"But they won't do, will they?" Bill says hesitantly.

"Yes, they're great! Hurry up!"

<sup>17</sup> January 13 is when the Swedish Christmas is traditionally over. On this bank holiday, all the decorations are taken down and the tree is ceremoniously thrown out.

<sup>18</sup> N.B. that a "crown" can also refer to the Swedish currency.

Bill gets into the trousers.

"I've found a jar of paint," Martin says. "Let's paint your face a little, so they can't recognize you. Ahh... that's good... and a bit more!" Martin paints Bill's face black.

"Now no one will recognize you. Here! Put these on as well!" Martin gives Bill a pair of old glasses, which he had also found in the bin.

"That's great! Oh, that's excellent!" Martin cries.

"Now, go to Peter and tell him that you are from the Polishing Board," Martin instructs Bill.

"From the Porcelain....," Bill says.

"NO!" Martin shouts. "Polishing!"

"Porcl... polsh... porcelain," Bill tries one more time.

"No! Polishing," Martin says.

"Porcel... plish... pors... polishing bureau," Bill says.

"And ask them if they have any gold," Martin says.

"Gold?" Bill asks.

"Yes," Martin replies.

"Shall I ask if they have any money as well," Bill says.

"Yes, it costs money. Tell them they'll have to pay to have their gold polished," Martin says. "You'll have to tell them that."

"Let's see now... I'll ask for gold... I'll say Polishing bureau... and ask for money," says Bill, who is counting on his front paw.

"That'll be great," Martin says, rubbing his paws. "And then you tell them that you have your polishing stuff-outside."

"OK," Bill says.

"And I'll hide behind here, so they can't see me," Martin says and points at the curtain. Bill tries to say polishing bureau a few more times before he knocks on Peter's and May's door.

"Afternoon," he says as Peter opens the door.

"Good afternoon. Who are you?" says Peter, who is played by *Majlis*. She is all dressed up in grey.

"I'm from the Royal Pork bureau, no, I mean Porcelain Bureau. Have you got anything which needs polishing?" Bill answers.

"May, have we got anything which needs polishing?" Peter calls.

"Something like a crown, or something," Bill interjects.

May puts her head around the door. It is *Ann-Charlotte*, dressed in a cream-coloured outfit.

"Well actually, I do have a crown. You see, I'm a cat queen, so I've got a golden crown," May says and puts her nose in the air. "I imagine that it could need polishing... as long as it's not too expensive?"

"No, Martin... I mean the boss, he didn't say how much it'll cost. But it will cost money," Bill says.

"Don't forget that you'll need it at the fancy dress ball," Peter says.

"Yes, I'm going to the fancy dress ball as a cat queen," May says.

"Fancy dress ball's what it is," Bill repeats.

"But I'd love to have it polished, as long as it won't be too expensive," May says.

"I'll ask Martin, no, the boss, I mean. Martin... what am I saying, talking about Martin this and Martin that... I'm prattling and porcelaining and poshelaining, I don't think I quite know what I'm saying... I mean, give me the crown, and I'm sure everything will be OK," says Bill.

"We will have it back in time for the fancy dress ball, won't we?" Peter asks.

"Yes, I think we can promise that," Bill says.

"Because I have to have it, when I go as a cat queen," May says in a small voice.



"May is so pretty as a queen, and then she has to have her crown," Peter says and puts his paw around May's back.

May puts the crown on.

"Look how pretty she is!" Peter says. "Although she's pretty anyway."

After a lot of coaxing, Bill has managed to persuade the timorous May and the gullible

Peter. He has received the crown and promised to bring it back the following week.

"Yes, we'll bring it back next week," he promises.

Martin waves eagerly:

"Come on, let's go," he says.

"We'll just have to trust him," Peter says.

"Do you think Martin was behind this?" May asks Peter.

"No, I don't think even he could be that mean," Peter says.

"But I think he said Martin once," May says. "Yes, it did sound as if he said Martin."

"I think you're right," Peter answers.

"What if we have been fooled? What if I won't get my crown back when I'm to be a cat queen?" May sobs, and hugs Peter.

"Just imagine if it is Martin who has fooled us. We'll have to try and take the crown back somehow," Peter says.

"Sneak!" one of the children in the audience cries.

"Do any of you have any ideas about how we could get hold of this P. or whatever he is?" May says and turns directly to the children in the audience.

"Is it true that Martin has fooled us?"

"Yes, it's Martin, it's Martin," all the children answer in unison.

"But that means I won't get my crown back. We've been fooled," May says.

"Martin had painted Bill," Angelica says.

"Follow them! Track them down!" someone suggests.

"Couldn't you make a Wanted poster?" Peter asks. "Neither May nor I can write or draw, but maybe you could help us to do that?"

"Can you remember what Martin and Bill looked like?" May asks.

"Yes, we've got a book on Bill and Bull and Martin," Angelica says.

"And can you remember what they looked like when they were in here?"

"Yes, Bill was orange and Martin was all black."

After a slight discussion, it has been decided that the children will make one drawing each—a Wanted poster—and that these will be put up in different places in the neighbourhood.

"What if we follow them?" Joel says. "We're ace at creeping and running. I'm the best runner in the whole of Valhall. I'm faster than everyone else."

"But I think they were in disguise, so that we shouldn't recognize them," Peter says, and the children agree with him.

"First Martin said that they had to dress up," Caroline explains, "and that's when they found those trousers with flowers on in the bin, and then they painted him and put the glasses on."

"We were fooled, weren't we?" May says tearfully.

"Could you help us do those Wanted posters while we go into our house, Peter and I?"

May concludes, and then the curtain is drawn.

"Bye, bye!"

The children get up and hurry out into the kitchen and paint room to draw. Angelica and Madeleine fetch the book on Peter No-tail to see what Bill and Martin look like.

The youngest children have sat down in the paint room together with *Ann-Charlotte*, who has now changed back into her own clothes.

WANTED  
BILL AND MARTIN



Adam comes into the paint room and shows *Ann-Charlotte* his drawing of Martin and Bill where he has also written "wanted". He is going to add a cellar air-hole, since he is convinced that they sneaked in under the floor. At the bottom of the paper he draws a crown, and writes "Valhall". Then he is off to the front door with a piece of sello-tape in one hand and his drawing in the other one. He comes back to the paint room three times to fetch more tape. He is very eager.

When all the children have finished their Wanted posters, they start playing intensely.

### "The lost star"—from theatre to children's play

The children have gathered around the cat outfits—the tights. The oldest girls are really enthusiastic.

"Who do you want to be?"

"I'll be Bull."

"No, I want to be Conrad."

"Bill and Bull..." someone sings.

Caroline draws the curtain and prepares a performance together with Angelica, Erica and Madeleine.

The others, both adults and children, are the audience.

"We are going to play something called 'The Lost Star'," says Caroline. She has come out from behind the curtain, as *Ann-Charlotte* did. Madeleine, who is dressed in Martin's cat-hat comes in from the right, together with Erica, who has put Bill's cat-hat on.

"We can't start yet," Caroline says. She and Angelica have not finished setting up their home. Caroline is going to play May and Angelica will be Peter.

Martin tries to pull the curtain aside.

"We can't see anything," someone shouts from the audience.

*Majlis* gets up and helps them pull the curtain aside.

Martin and Bill are frantically rooting around in the bin.

"What was I supposed to say to Bill?" Martin asks unhappily.

"Tell him to dress up, so they can't recognize him," *Majlis* whispers loudly.

"Come on!" Martin puts the glasses on Bill.

"And what was I supposed to say?" Bill asks. He is trying hard not to laugh.

"Poshl... porcelain... Do you have anything which needs polishing?" Bill giggles.

Martin pushes Bill towards Peter's and May's house.

Bill knocks three times. Both Martin and Bill are giggling.

"Hello!" Bill calls, and opens the door himself. "Do you have anything which needs polishing?" he calls in a loud voice to keep from laughing.

"Yes, the star," May says hesitantly.

"We can't hear, you'll have to talk a little louder. You'll have to come out of the house," the audience protests.

"We've got this," Peter says and holds up a star-shaped reflector disc. "Have this." Peter gives Bill the star.

Bill runs quickly off to Martin, and they both run out into the corridor. Peter and May come out of their house.

"I saw something black out here. Who was that?" May asks.

"Yes, he looked suspicious," *Majlis* replies from the audience.

"Well, I don't know who it was," *Kristina* says.

"Was he black?" May asks.

"Yes, black all over," *Kristina* replies.

"But that means it's Martin, and he has fooled me again," May says.

Peter and May go into their house and close the door.

"But what has he done?" *Kristina* asks them.

"He's taken the star," May says from behind the door.

"Bravo!" the whole audience claps, as the performance seems to be over.

"There will be one more performance," May says. "I just need to go out and talk to Martin."

Before the next performance, *Majlis* helps Angelica put on the nose, cat ears and tail.

She is to play May. Caroline will be Martin, and Madeleine Peter. Erica has the same role as before. She is Bill.

"Now you must wear these," Martin says sternly. "Put them on!" Martin puts the glasses on Bill, who giggles.

"Now you must go and knock on the door and say you're from the P. and ask if anything needs polishing," Martin holds Bill's paws as he instructs him. "They live in this house, so you must knock on their door now."

"Yes, yes," Bill says and knocks five times.

"Hello, do you have anything which needs polishing?" The door opens.

Inside, Peter and May are frantically trying to find the star.

Peter holds the star out, and Bill returns to Martin.

Quickly, Peter and May close the door, and Martin and Bill run off.

The door opens and May and Peter come out. They look around, and walk around the stage, searching.

"Peter No-tail, May!" Martin calls from the corridor.

"But we're supposed to play a bit more," Peter objects.

"Yes, but then we had the crown and you were trying to chase us, and then we were trying to get away," Martin explains.

Peter and May run after Martin and Bill. They chase them around the whole section before Peter and May manage to catch Martin and get him down on the floor. The audience laugh excitedly.

"And then you discovered that the gold crown was lying there," Martin says and points to a chair next to the bin.

Peter takes the star, and he and May go back inside the house and close the door.

Now Caroline assumes Bill's role, without changing her outfit.

"You don't recognise me," Bill says to Martin, and knocks on the door three times.

Nothing happens.

"Oh well, I suppose I'll have to open the door myself," Bill says resolutely.

"Do you have anything which needs polishing?" Bill asks and goes into the house, closing the door behind him.

"Actually, we've polished everything. We've polished our things ourselves," Peter says behind the door.

"Do you have anything which needs polishing?" Bill asks.

"Yes, we do. Wait a little!" Peter says.

"Is this all, this star?" Bill asks.

"I didn't know you had this star here?"

"Here it is," Peter says and pretends to be looking through his papers.

"No," May says, "I'm not sure if I dare."

Bill confers with Martin.

"We'll be back in a week," he says.

"That's fine," Peter says.

"Wasn't there someone black?" Peter says when Martin and Bill have disappeared.

"We did see someone who was black," *Majlis* says.

"Maybe that was Martin. Come on!" May tugs at Peter's clothes and wants them to chase after them straight away.

"We shouldn't chase him," Peter says. "No, let's not chase him."

"Yohoo, the star!" Peter and May start running.  
"Do you think we were fooled?" Peter asks.  
"Yes, actually," someone in the audience answers.  
Then Martin and Bill return to the bin after having run around the section.  
"Well, then you and I should be together," Caroline says turning to Madeleine.  
"Yes, now I'm going to be Bill," Madeleine says and removes her Peter-hat.  
"Let's change now," Caroline cries.

### Analysis—a play theme of equality

"I want to treat all children as equals," Gösta Knutsson (1964) writes, and this equality theme is what he develops in his books about Peter No-tail, so thoroughly that it makes up 11 separate adventures dealing with every imaginable way of tricking others, exercising power and what it feels like being a victim, being different. The cats are full of inconsistencies, which means that the books do not contain any straightforward moral. The sense of humour is often the conciliatory factor.

The fundamental conflict in the play affects all the children. During the play, they remain fully concentrated, and as soon as it is over, many of them want to go hunting for Martin and Bill. There is a problem, and it has to be solved. The oldest boys are in a rush to draw their Wanted posters, so that they can start searching. They are mainly attracted by the expressive action. The oldest girls want to try acting the different roles, step into the conflict and play-act in the same way as the adults did. They do not think twice about acting before an audience, probably because they are acting in pairs, which feels secure.

During the first performance, they make a conscious effort at play-acting. The play is called "The Lost Star", which refers to the story-line in the original play although the children do not have access to the golden crown. Instead, they use Caroline's reflector disc, which also sparkles. Caroline plays the leading role. Like *Ann-Charlotte*, she is the compère, and she chooses to be May in the cream coloured cat-hat; the one who owns the golden crown. The curtain is pulled aside in the same way as at the adult's performance; Bill puts on the flowery trousers and Martin puts the glasses on his nose. The children remember the important actions, but the lines cause problems. They recall the mixed up words, with porcelain and polishing, and reproduce a simplified version. Getting their hands on the star takes no time at all, and then Martin and Bill disappear from the room. What remains is for May and Peter to state how they were fooled.

The play has been reduced to a few central actions—which represent the very theme of the original play. It is obvious that the narrative form—play-acting before an audience—makes them feel slightly inhibited. Bill and Martin giggle and feel embarrassed and restricted by their lines, which they fail to remember. They strive to copy the original performance. The secure atmosphere and the adult's interest in the play explains why they actually complete the performance. Besides, the adults' dramatizations and dialogues have cre-



Fig. 9. Martin tricks with Peter No-tail and May.

ated a whole chain of actions which inspires the girls to assume different roles and dramatize the action despite the problems they have remembering the lines. Without this, the play could easily have been reduced to a simple game of tag. Now, the focus is on the issue of being fooled.

The second performance is to be regarded more as children's play than play-acting. Now the girls have become their own audience, and they no longer bother to turn to the audience in the room. The play takes place inside the house, which makes it impossible to hear what they are saying. Caroline is the leader. This time she wants to play Martin, as he is the main character, the one who decides what is going to happen. Caroline really tries to play the character Martin. She sounds stern and torments Bill. She is in charge of both the actions and the lines, and she functions as both narrator and director. "But then we had the crown and you were trying to chase us..." she says, using the pluperfect tense. She is the one who initiates the chase after the actual play was finished. More and more, the play turns into the children's own game, and the dramatic action comes to the forefront.

The third time, Caroline is playing more or less on her own. At this stage, she and Madeline are the only ones interested in playing the roles. To Caroline, only playing Martin is not enough—his role has been unexpectedly passive. She also wants to play Bill, who is the one who carries out the actions. As a result, she is both Bill and Martin at the same time. She plays Bills part in

Martin's outfit. She is interested in the roles as epic units, not as realistic characters.<sup>19</sup> What's more, she is also getting bored with the predetermined plan of action and starts looking for some excitement. She wants the others to break out of it as well, and think of new things to do. "Not that star again", she says with humour, showing distance to the role.

Caroline, who is normally rather shy and retiring, has played the leading part in these plays or games. But it does not end here. When I visit Valhall one week later, Madeleine and Erica are playing away at the Valhall Theatre. "We're doing what *Ann-Charlotte* did," they tell me.

### Children's play and theatre

The play about "Peter No-tail" inspires the children to play, both because of its form and contents. The exciting plot (the fight for the crown), which stems from the conflict between the characters in the play, affects all the children, and the issues of power and equality are important to the oldest girls. The Valhall Theatre gives them a possibility of playing relations. There are obvious links between theatre and their play. Caroline illustrates the "quadrologue" of children's play, as Sutton-Smith would have said: she is dramatist and director, actor, audience and her own self rolled into one. Using the theatre as a setting for play has proven to fuel role play before.

Drama pedagogues find it natural to assume that there is a link between theatre and children's play, but this connection has also been adopted by psychologists and anthropologists alike. When the psychologist Smilansky (1968) is teaching children to play, she works with drama pedagogic models, emphasising the similarities between play and dramatic performances. They both feature phenomena such as direction, a cast, a theme or fiction, decor and props, she writes. However, the Norwegian drama pedagogue Guss (1993) questions Smilansky's interest in the aesthetic dimension of play, stating that Smilansky is mainly interested in the social and cognitive aspects of play. Psychologists and anthropologists on the whole display a noticeable lack of interest in the aesthetic dimension of play, according to Guss. Her own intention is to describe children's dramatic forms of expression in play, by analogy with the art of theatre.<sup>20</sup>

The pedagogues at Valhall like applying the diverse techniques of different forms of art. The theatre stage is the playworld. The ideas developed by "creative dramatics" suit Valhall's purposes. "The scene should be a living picture book", Olenius (1957) writes in her book "Children's Theatre", and this is the feeling you get when you walk into the main playroom at Valhall, half of which has been turned into a setting from the book about Peter No-tail.

Creative dramatics<sup>21</sup> maintain that the theatrical form provides the children

<sup>19</sup> Cf. chapt. 7, where I discuss the issue of the role as an epic unit on the basis of Mouritsen's ideas.

<sup>20</sup> Guss 1991; 1992; 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Øksendals analysis of Ward's and Sik's view on the important concepts of role play, 1984, p. 75 ff.

with a well developed dramatic ability to play, where the *characterization*, *dialogue* and *action* are the most important components. Particularly important is the ability to characterize a part in a play.

Learning to characterize... learning to 'be' other people... we have to think like him and feel like him.<sup>22</sup>

It is thus a question of being able to live the part and the situation, and of avoiding merely copying external action, Ward says. This is why creative dramatics ask themselves whether children should act before an audience. Ward warns of the risks involved in rehearsing theatre plays with small children.

Plays in creative dramatics should not be 'rehearsed'; children are to be guided in developing them. The play must go on developing; it should grow with every playing.<sup>23</sup>

The pedagogue must make sure that the doors between children's play and art are kept open. Olenius reasons in a similar way:

Children's play-acting should consist of nothing but improvisations, preferably without an audience, but why reject literature. For anyone who is not a supremely gifted improviser, a play could provide a nice experience for the imagination.<sup>24</sup>

It was clear that in the play "The Mysterious Polisher", Caroline, the oldest girl, was the only one who was trying to play her role. The others seemed to feel rather inhibited by the theatrical form and performing before an audience. On the other hand, the roles of the play really inspired them to play on their own and use their imagination.

The question whether children should perform before an audience or not keeps recurring in drama pedagogic contexts. In a series of debating articles for the publication "Drama", Hagnell (1984, 1985) writes that it falls to the adults lot to provide the children with a dramatic form of expression, but that this form must never be forced upon them. The creative process is the most important thing. In order to be able to play a role, the children need to be very familiar with their own identities, Hagnell writes. She points out that play and games where children and adults improvise together seem to be methods suitable for preschool children.

The drama pedagogues Bolton and Heathcote find developing the dramatic action the most important aspect. They do not place the emphasis on the role play. Instead, their opinion is that the adult, who is playing the role and who should be following the play as it develops, who should make the children take part in the dramatic action. To Bolton<sup>25</sup>, the emotional aspect of the play is the

<sup>22</sup> Ward 1957, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Ward 1960, p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Olenius 1957, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> According to Bolton, the main concepts of children's play are: *action*, *plot* and *setting*. Bolton 1979 and Øksendal 1984, p. 75 ff.



most important. I have already illustrated how the pedagogues at Freja developed adventurous play by use of the "teacher-in-role" technique, in which the adults' characterizations played a vital part in making the game active. It is clear that role and action are closely connected and influence one another, and also that adult role characterizations are important for the development of the game.

At Valhall, the play theme is approached on two levels. On the one hand, the theme turns into adventurous play where the whole class takes part in the hunt for the golden crown—a form of interaction theatre—where the roles of Martin, Bill, Peter and May are played by the adults. On the other, the theatre performances "The Mysterious Polisher" and "The Lost Star" exist as plays within the play. The children find the characters in the books about Peter Nottail engaging, and their personalities have added dramatic action to the children's games.

### Mr. B and the 6-year olds

The third and final example of games where the characters are in the forefront, but which are not based on a given text, are about Mr. B. He is a character created by the children and adults involved in the activities for the 6-year olds, within the framework of the theme "Alone in the big, wide world".

### The activities for 6-year olds—a brief background

The play pedagogic approach has been characterized by activities for integrated age groups. At Freja, Valhall and Oden, the children are between the ages of 1 and 7. For this reason, it was important to make sure that although the activities for the 6-year olds were more advanced, they remained within the framework of the general theme at Hybelejen, and did not become a separate set of activities. "Travelling in time and space" was the special theme for the 6-year olds, clearly linked to the general theme of "adventurous journeys".<sup>26</sup> *Kristina* from Valhall and *Hans* from Oden were assigned to lead the pedagogic activities. Altogether, there were 14 children around 6 years old, eight girls and six boys, and most of them came from Valhall and Oden. It was decided that the activities would take place in a small theatre situated in what used to be a foundry, opposite the day-care centre. The group would meet three times a week, between 12.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.—a time of day which did not encroach upon the regular activities at the day-care centre, as most of the younger children were taking a nap or resting.

The group left the centre with a large suitcase to go looking for adventures. During the first meeting, they made a time machine out of a large cardboard box, to enable them to travel to different times and worlds. "The old suitcase,

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<sup>26</sup> The original ideas for the activities for the 6-year olds came from Jan and me.



which was full of props, gave birth to the characters Doris and Bobby. They were a recurring feature, and the children loved them," *Kristina* and *Hans* write in their project report. *Kristina* as Doris and *Hans* as Bobby invited the children to take part in well-known, everyday situations, such as conflicts in front of the telly: sports or nature programs?, birthday celebrations and going shopping in large hyper markets. The play was based on improvisations, and the effect was instantaneous: at the very first meeting, the children wanted to play Doris and Bobby in pairs of boy/girl.

### The hunt for Mr. B

Even before the activities were to start, the 6-year olds received a message from a certain Mr. B from A-land. He invited the children to a mysterious place, and to get there, they had to take the No. 14 bus from town. The place proved to be the University of Karlstad, a building which reminded the children of an enormous maze. They were on the lookout for Mr. B, but they could not find him anywhere. All they did find was a blue glass decanter from Oden's treasure chest. But how on earth had that got from Oden all the way to the university? In the decanter, they found another message from Mr. B.

This fuelled their imagination, and set the rumours about Mr. B going. What did he look like? Who was he? Where did he live? It seemed clear that he liked letters, which meant that it ought to be possible to entice him out of his hiding place and then catch him. They had wild discussions about *how* and *where*. Maybe Mr. B could be found amongst the books in the children's section at the back of the library where there are billions of letters? Someone suggested that they should make lots of colourful letters which Mr. B simply would not be able to resist.

Holding one colourful letter each, both children and adults head for the library. It takes about a quarter of an hour to walk along River Klarälven to the library building.

"We'll have to hide!" one of the children says when they have reached the children's section.

"First we have to make a letter trail in the corridor." The children place their letters in a long line, through the corridor leading all the way to the back of the library.

"How will we recognize him?" *Kristina* asks.

"We need a password," Felix says.

"Let's say 'pip, pip, pip', and that means that we should all follow." They all try saying 'pip, pip, pip'.

"*Hasse*, I'll hide here," someone says and points at a sofa.

"Hello, can I say something?" Fanny says. "If I see Mr. B, then we should all see him, and then we'll all have to hide close together so that we can all see," she explains eagerly.

Some of the children hide behind the seats in the corridor, and the others go into a nearby room with glass walls together with *Hans* and *Kristina*. No one but a bewildered librarian is watching them.

At the far end of the corridor, a man dressed in dark clothes—a black floppy hat, sun glasses and a long coat—comes walking with a black sack over his shoulder. He tip-

toes up and starts collecting all the letters. He puts them into his sack, which has the letter "Z" on the outside.

"Pip, pip..." someone says quietly, and Madeleine looks out from behind her seat.

Mr. B continues into the children's section and looks around the children's books, and then tries to get out through a fire exit. It is locked.

The children have now stood up, pressing closely against *Hans* and *Kristina*. Some of them are quivering with excitement. They are hiding behind some screens.

Mr. B is on his way out, and he quickens his pace.

*Hans* takes the first step and starts following him. No one else dares to. They all tip-toe past the counter, down the stairs to the foyer. And Mr. B is down there.

"I collect letters," Mr. B volunteers. "It's what I like best. I can't read."

"Who are you, Mr. B?" one of the children asks.

"Do you know where I live?" Mr. B says. "Do you want to know?"

"Who are you? Are you a thief?" one of the children from Oden asks.

"Come on," Mr. B says and motions the children into a cinema room. It is quite dark in there.

"Have you ever seen any films in here?" he asks the children.

"Yes, loads of times," they reply.

"Well, this is where I live," Mr. B says. "I live on the top floor, in a dressing room. Do you want to see it?"

Some children say "yes", and others "No".

"You see, I do want to learn how to read," Mr. B says, "so I have a pal, a friend, who is going to come to my place tonight. He visits me every week. He's called Alfie, and he's gigantic, 6 foot tall, and he is teaching me how to read."

"Is he the tallest man in the world?" someone asks.

"No, but he's really tall. Anyway, that's why I collect letters," Mr. B says.

"Do you know anyone called Biffy Bolt?"

"No, I don't. Who's Biffy Bolt?" Mr. B asks.

"He's a thief," one of the children from Oden explains.

"I don't know any thieves," Mr. B says.

"We were going to use them as a trap, because you looked so mysterious," one of the children explains.

"How come you aren't able to read?" *Hans* asks Mr. B.

"Because I never went to school," Mr. B says. "I wasn't allowed to."

"Why don't you come with us to the day-care centre? You can learn how to read there," one of the children says.

"What's a day-care centre?" Mr. B asks.

"That's where you go to when your mum and dad are working," another child explains.

"Fanny, can you teach him to read? You know how," Madeleine says.

"Mr. B! Mr. B!" Fanny says.

"What does that mean?" Mr. B asks and points at his letter 'Z'. "What can you do with that?"

"You write with it," Fanny explains. "Those things you are collecting, that's what you use for writing. That's 'B' as in Mr. B."

"Couldn't we come upstairs with you?" Madeleine asks. Mr. B goes up to his room, closely followed by a group of children and *Kristina*. The others stay downstairs together with *Hans*.

"Do you smoke?" one of the children asks Mr. B.

"No, but Alfie does," says Mr. B.

"Smoking permitted." Some of the children read a sign on the wall.

"How do you get out from here?" someone asks.

"Way out," Fanny reads.

"I'm so pleased we got to meet you," *Kristina* says. "Now we don't need to be afraid of you anymore, Mr. B. Do you think you could come and visit us at the centre?"  
"As long as the other teachers don't see you. They'd be really scared," one of the children says.  
"Do you know what? Maybe he could come and visit us at the old Foundry!"  
"We could write you an invitation," *Kristina* says.  
"Do you have coffee there?" Mr. B asks.  
"Yes, there's coffee at the Foundry."  
"What should we do with our letters?"  
"Oh, let Mr. B keep them," the children reply.

### Analysis—play as a detective story in a world of letters

With the personification of the letter B, the children get to meet a human alphabet. The children know that letters exist, and they start making letters of their own to entice Mr. B out of his hiding place. This creates an aesthetic approach to the alphabet, with an emphasis on the burlesque and the humorous, which is part of the lyrical and musical patterns in play. The story about Mr. B is a jocular one, on a par with the burlesque spelling-book which Edström (1991) analyses in her article "The Magic of Letters", in which Sven Nordqvist's character Agaton Zedman and his alphabet bear a resemblance to Mr. B. The action is taking place with the letters, not around them, Edström writes about Nordqvist's book.

The activities for the 6-year olds are characterized by a playful and humorous atmosphere, enhanced by the comedians Doris and Bobby. Pulling one another's legs in witty and clever ways becomes a way of socializing. Mr. B is the sort of character you never know what he might be up to. He makes the children go all the way to the University, but only to give them new clues and a new message. He is a grown man, but he can't read! His friend Alfie is 6 foot tall and lives in a dressing room behind the cinema room. The imaginary process is brimming with exaggerations and probable improbabilities, as mentioned by Chukovsky and Vygotsky. There is no doubt about the fact that the children love what is going on.

The playful relationship to letters also extends to the language in general. The children make rhymes and plays on words, they make up funny stories and have a password of the day, which has to be whispered into a large ear which has been put up on the theatre door, such as "Smelly Nellie" or "adder bladder". They use their bodies to shape letters and words, one verb and one noun together: "farting fiddles", "sobbing socks" and "toppling chimneys". Words and music are mixed and blended. *Hans* plays everything from jazz to children's songs on his guitar.

Both *Kristina* and *Hans* like improvising. This is true of *Hans* in particular. He has developed a repertoire of stories which he tells to inspire the children to play. This way is similar to Rodaris' (1988) ways of telling a story. *Hans* and *Kristina*'s interaction inspires the children to do their own dramatizations, and it is interesting to see how they act together in couples of boy/girl.

The framework for the activities for the 6-year olds is the exciting hunt for Mr. B. The children at Hybelejen are used to adventurous journeys and exciting hunts as a form of playing. All children have joined in the hunt for Hybelejen, and the children from Oden have been especially active. They have also spent considerable time trying to catch Biffy Bolt, a thief they have never managed to get hold of, despite *Hans'* attempts to trap him in a net put up in one of the trees outside the day-care centre. Likewise, all the children have joined in the exciting adventures and journeys together with the troll Ture, and they have captured calamangs. Mr. B is not a dangerous character, but he is perceived as mystical, and the children suspect that he might scare the other teachers. This mixture of something threatening and something playful makes him an exciting character. The hunt for Mr. B is similar to a basic detective story, a form of play described by Mouritsen (1987), amongst others.

The fact that Mr. B has influenced the children's play with his character, which is resting on the foundations of the alphabet, is quite obvious. Together, *Kristina, Hans* and the children decide the contents and the actions of the games. The adults pay attention to the children's ideas of what Mr. B would look like, and conveys these to *Kristina's* friend so that he knows how he should dress and act. Furthermore, the idea of making colourful letters to entice Mr. B to the library also comes from the children. There is a close link between character, action and world, which the story about Mr. B also indicates.

Part III  
Conclusions

## CHAPTER 10

# The Aesthetics of Play—What Does It Look Like?

What *conclusions* can then be drawn from the *project* at Hybelejen? In what ways has play developed? Both the common playworlds and the children's ability to play? What part have the adults played? In what way have the aesthetic subjects enriched the play? What is the nature of the connections between play and the cultural, aesthetic forms?

Contrary to the dualism which in my opinion dominates play pedagogy in Swedish preschools, the working method at Hybelejen is characterized by togetherness and sharing. This approach is dialectic, which means that the relationship between the individual and his environment is dynamic in the same way as the relationships between play and culture, and children and the adult world.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from the project at Hybelejen is that to be able to develop children's play, the adults need to create a common fiction—a playworld—through dramatizations, i.e. bringing the action and characters in literary texts to life. This enables a cultural context to take shape; a context which is shared by children and adults alike, and which inspires them to dramatize and play. This drama pedagogy is partly based on Vygotskij's ideas on the aesthetic form of play and its potential ability to provide our existence with a meaning.

## Creating a shared fiction and a common play world

I have tried to give a detailed description of how the children's play developed in the three classes Freja, Valhall and Oden over a period of approximately 12 months. The playworlds have grown larger and more comprehensive, which is also confirmed by the ensuing activities. At Hybelejen, the

cultural context is detailed and colourful, and it is expanding like rings on the water.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of writing, in the autumn of 1994, Aunt Green, Aunt Brown and Aunt Lavender have moved into the yellow buildings where Hybelejen is situated. The children of the 1990's are introduced to the world of Elsa Beskow<sup>2</sup> which dates back to the early parts of this century, and which to them seems strange and exotic. A street has been created and the house where the Aunts live has been furnished and decorated. The adults have dramatized the adventure of the first book, when the three Aunts meet the orphans Peter and Lottie. The sections are impregnated with new colours and smells, and the aunts all have things to teach the children: Aunt Lavender at Oden, for example, is particularly good at embroidering and making jam. Uncle Blue lives in the same block—or to be more precise, he lives in the Herrhagen School. This is where the 6- and 7-year olds from Hybelejen have started school. *Hans*, who is playing Uncle Blue, has now started teaching the 6-year olds. The co-operation between the day-care centre and the school is based on the fiction and play-world they share. Elsa Beskow's world creates a link between the two institutes. Uncle Blue is like a strict school master from days gone by, who turns up in the school every now and then, and Peter and Lottie, who both go to the day-care centre have also joined his class. They go to school together with a few other children from the day-care centre. When Uncle Blue wants to visit the Aunts, however, he goes to Hybelejen.

This year, an unusually large group of children is leaving Hybelejen for school, containing both 6 and 7-year olds. This means that just as many new children will be starting at the day-care centre. A general opinion, shared by both pedagogues and parents, is that a lot of time at Hybelejen is spent playing. Playing has become a very important part of the daily activities, and the contact between children and adults is very good.<sup>3</sup> As a result, new children find life at Hybelejen relatively easy to get into.

The adults now dramatize and improvise roles and plays for and with the children with an air of naturalness and authority.<sup>4</sup> Their ability to dramatize has improved. Settings and side-scenes are built by adults and children to-

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1992/93, the theme "Alone in the big, wide world" was replaced by another theme, "Dreams", and the new emphasis was placed on the surrealistic and dream-like nature of the texts "Alice in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll and "The Wild Baby" by Barbro Lindgren and Eva Eriksson. In connection with the recordings made by the Swedish Educational Broadcasting company, they also returned for a visit to the Moomin world through the book "Finn Family Moomintroll" by Tove Jansson. As a result of this, the children developed an interest in the puppets (from the dramatization of "The Invisible Child"), which they included in their play (cf. chapt. 6). In the year 1993/94, the universal theme at Hybelejen has been "Winnie the Pooh" and his world, created by A.A. Milne, which has been recreated by live characters and puppets.

<sup>2</sup> Elsa Beskow was one of the most prominent writers and illustrators of children's literature in Sweden during the first half of this century, and her stories, poems and songs continue to fascinate and entertain today.

<sup>3</sup> In a comparative study of the activities in one of the classes at Hybelejen and those of another class in a day-care centre of equal standard, Gustafson (1994) has found that the play pedagogic method employed at Hybelejen results in a closer contact between children and adults.



gether, and are often left in the sections for a long time. At the beginning of the project, props and settings were removed shortly after they had been used, upon which the sections regained their impersonal touch. Nowadays, the settings are left throughout the duration of the theme, which means 12 months at the least.

## The literary themes and what dramatic action means to play

Developing the play has meant finding a theme, a content, which the children can relate to and take an interest in. The fact that there are traces of basic conflict situations in the stories children tell and in their playing suggests that children often relate to their surroundings in a dramatic way. This theme is apparent in the fairy-tale, in which the hero leaves home in search of adventures which involve averting various threats. The theme "Alone in the big, wide world" includes such fundamental conflicts as fear/security, freedom/restrictions and power/equality, which the children can all relate to and which make the theme dynamic. However, these fundamental conflicts need to be brought to life within the framework of a dramatic text. This is to avoid a situation where the play is reduced to a simple game of tag, like the ghost game at Oden, which lacked a proper plan of action. What finally determines whether the play can be developed is the literary text and its *dramatic qualities*. Dramatic action cannot exist without a plot, which is, so to say, the action within the action.

At Hybelejen, there have been three different approaches to the literary texts, or *the contents* of the theme, and this has affected the play. At *Freja*, the pedagogues have maintained a dramatic approach to the texts. The dynamic contents of the theme has led the way, from Fear and loneliness to travelling and journeys into the big, wide world. The adults have had a flexible relationship to ideas and texts, and drawn inspiration from these to make their own interpretations and dramatizations. When *Monica* played Fear, the result was dramatic interaction between herself, Rasmus and the children, which in turn inspires the children to play intensively. The bed became a magic bed, and the things in and around it were charged with emotions. A fiction was created, and within its framework, everything could be interpreted in terms of fear and security. The aesthetic feeling triggered the imaginary process, and the inversions, or transformations, played an active part in developing the common playworld. Fear was turned into her very opposite, Pippi Longstocking, and the balloon in "The Dangerous Journey" is what Ture and the children chose to use for their trips to the jungle. In the same way as in play, a relationship was

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<sup>4</sup> Organized dramatizations and playing within the frame of the theme take place once or a couple of times a week. The rest of the time, the children play with one another or with the adults in spontaneously formed groups.

established between reality, the normal day-care centre setting and the fiction, and different objects and new settings which had been charged with meaning functioned as direct links. These links were anything from Frightings, monster animals, boots, binoculars, and the balloon to the jungle setting. "The Children in the Jungle" suited the particular working method at Freja. The story is based on the same concept as play, and features an adventurous journey characterized by inversions and exaggerations. This inspires the pedagogues at Freja to present their own interpretations and dramatizations of the contents. They undertake numerous journeys together with the children. The formula of the story—home-journey-adventure—is developed into dramatic action within the play as well as into different play settings. As teachers-in-role, the adults govern the progress of the play in the spirit of Bolton and Heathcote. They do however not play the part of neutral teachers, but keep producing new fictitious characters which interact directly with the children. Ture is one of those exciting characters. In line with Bolton's ideas, the pedagogues at Freja emphasize the dramatic action, plot and play setting. The result is a multifaceted play-world, and it is clear that the children's ability to dramatize action and roles has gradually developed.

The pedagogues at *Valhall* stick more closely to the literary texts, and only when a text has a dramatic quality does it result in play. "Lisen can't sleep" is a story which amuses the children, but because of its lack of plot, it does not really inspire them to play. As a comparison, the multi-dimensional "Who will comfort Toffle?" results in a very detailed playworld, because of its elaborate aesthetic content which offers such a generous scope for interpretations. Every illustration is a setting which can be recreated and which invites the reader to take active part in the story. At Valhall, both the fun fair scene and the scene from the black mountain chain were recreated, and the latter, with its inherent tension between the threatening dangers and the togetherness, inspires the children to play a lot. The characters illustrated in the book fascinate the children, and Groke causes vibrations in the whole class. Everybody takes part in creating a playworld. In Westin's words, the book could be called a "handbook of creativity. The actors change roles and start staging their own adventures, both on an external and an internal level. This is an ability to play which communicates directly with the reader's own creativity and which makes establishing new connections into an art."<sup>5</sup>

"Who will comfort Toffle?" has really inspired both adults and children to dramatize and play.

The text in "The Children in the Jungle" also provides the basis for a dramatization of a trip to the jungle, but the emphasis is not placed on the dramatic content of the book with its transformation potential. Instead, what is being recreated are the story's picturesque and atmospheric qualities. Ture's knack of painting sceneries guides the way. The dramatic action which exists as part of

<sup>5</sup> Westin 1991, p. 51.

the story's formula, the adventurous journey, is not used to influence the children's play actions. Throughout the theme, however, the pedagogues keep developing the children's aesthetic experiences of rhythm and music in combination with pictorial art by dancing and painting scenes together. This gives rise to the idea of building a "proper" theatre, as the children love dressing up and painting themselves, and this setting inspires the children to play. The adults perform "Peter No-tail", and this dramatic play prompts the girls to try to reproduce the play, an activity which gradually turns into play. It is obvious that these artistic forms are connected with children's play, but also that dramatic action is required to bring about dramatizations and develop this play.

The pedagogues at *Oden* were even less influenced by the literary texts when playing their roles, e.g. Fear, Toffle, Captain Hook and Ture. They have improvised, built settings and played together with the children, but their characters have not been linked to the literary fiction. For this reason, the different play settings have assumed a kind of general cultural significance: jungles, huts and boats have inspired the children to play animals, family games and pirates. The bathtub from "The Children in the Water" was often used for genuine water games.

The connecting thought in the class's jumble of stories and settings is the hunt for Hybelejen. It assumes the form of a basic detective story, which the children readily include in their playing. The relationship with the underlying text remains relaxed, and everyone mainly does whatever seems fun and exciting. The children could just as well be hunting for Biffy Bolt as for Hybelejen. The most important thing is that they feel that they are in collusion with the adults against the threatening outside world, and this is a feeling which causes the play to progress. The older children have no problems following the fiction about Hybelejen. They have seen and heard the story which *Hans* told using the projector, and they would love to solve the mystery of Hybelejen's lost wings and find out what the Wood-nymph of Lamberg Forest really looks like. It is not as easy for the younger children to follow the fiction. They do not have the same ability to picture the story without the support of dramatized action. This creates a natural division in the group, where the older children are the ones who experience adventures with *Hans*. These are the children who will later on join the activities for 6-year olds, for example going hunting for Mr.B.

The literary text with its aesthetic qualities is not used to develop the dramatic action in the children's play. This would probably be regarded as an undesirably rigid approach to the texts, governed from an adult perspective. As I see it, this would complicate a deliberate attempt at creating progression in the play. Instead, the adults like thinking up tales and stories to inspire the children to play, and there is a playful atmosphere in the class which makes the children feel free to play with one another and invite the adults to play along with them. This takes place spontaneously. At *Oden*, the common playworld has probably been helped along by the adults' choice of literary themes rather than literary texts.

However, it is plain that the literary texts allow of such a wealth of interpretations because the content lends itself to dramatization. (Cf. the dramatization of the texts carried out at Freja.)

Ambiguity is an important characteristic of art and play. In Swedish research into children's literature, there is an active discussion on "ambivalent texts", or texts of the kind that address readers on different levels.<sup>6</sup> These are texts which have obviously been written with both children and adults in mind, but also texts which can be read from different perspectives at different points in time. Examples of such books are the classics "Winnie the Pooh" and "Alice in Wonderland", but also the Moomin books. These books are all multi-layered: they can be read at a very basic level as well as a very sophisticated one. These authors have deliberately experimented with the forms of their books. This means that children's literature can be regarded as a much wider genre than simply texts for children. Rönnerberg (1989) objects to this approach in her book "Hysterically funny!"<sup>7</sup>, where she accuses "Alice in Wonderland" of mocking children. She wants to separate the children's world from the adult world, and she claims that certain children's books are typical books for adults.

The debate about what a child perspective is, is as animated amongst researchers of children's culture as amongst pedagogues. The project at Hybelejen has made clear that a child's perspective and an adult perspective do not necessarily have to be in opposition. The play theme has inspired both adults and children to dramatize and play games. When "Alice in Wonderland" was dramatized one year later, both children and adults were so fascinated by the performance that they wanted to read the book from cover to cover. Neither children nor adults had read it before. The many interpretations of the performance became clear in the play "Act without words" (Beckett).<sup>8</sup> The youngest members of the audience seemed to find the play realistic. When you are small, there is nothing strange with tripping over and not being able to reach a jug of water. The older children seemed to give it a moral interpretation. They sympathised with the man in the play when he made a fool of himself. They protested loudly and wanted to assist him. The adults were struck by the symbolism in the play, and many were deeply affected by the feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness which were conveyed in the performance. It was evident that the play was greatly appreciated by the entire audience. "Theatre" many children called out after having seen this black performance.

<sup>6</sup> Shavit has written an essay entitled "The ambivalent status of texts. The case of children's literature", 1980. Shavit bases her report on Lotman's theories of literature as signs within changing code systems. Lotman, 1971, takes a particular interest in the multi-layered quality of "ambivalent texts", and his structuralistic theory can be referred to the same school of thought as Vygotsky's, inspired by Russian formalism. Shavit is studying how two different groups, children and adults, function in their roles as addressees of certain classical children's books. See also Edström 1992b, p.17 ff.

<sup>7</sup> The original Swedish title is "Skitkul!".

<sup>8</sup> In "Alone in the big, wide world" 1992, I give a detailed account of what happens during one of the performances. Cf. also chapt. 5.



Fig. 10. Hans in "Act without words".

## The roles the adults played and what they meant to play

Through their physical presence, the adults have brought life to the literary texts and made it possible for the children to enter the playworld. More than anything else, the adults' *characters* have persuaded the children to enter the fiction. The literary characters, dramatized by the adults, step out of their literary texts and invite the children into the world which they represent. The adults become *mediators* between the fictitious world and the day-care centre,

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and establish a *dialogue* with the children. The more colourful the character which is being dramatized, the more scope for action. Consequently, dressing up to play the role is not enough—on the contrary. Giving life to the personality of the character and to the action is crucial to develop a play. Without life, the play would only have been populated by one-dimensional models, and soon died down. Playing Groke, on the other hand, calls for a wide range of actions: she is threatening, aggressive, scared and sad all in one. Also Fear is dualistic with her fear and aggression. When *Monica* played Ture, he was both childish and wild, crafty and a jester. Gösta Knutsson's characters also have both good and bad sides: Peter No-tail is wise and friendly, but also stuck-up and gullible.

The adults' ability to dramatize has improved since the theme was introduced, and we have deliberately guided them in a certain direction. At the beginning, they would improvise within the framework of the theme, and then they moved on to play-act and assume set roles. The next step was to combine improvisation and playing set roles, as in "Who will comfort Toffle?" and "The Children in the Jungle". As time went by, most of the pedagogues seem comfortable with playing roles, and their ability to improvise has increased. The balloon journeys, for example, would have been impossible to carry out at the beginning of the project. After some time, most of the adults have played at least one role, and some have played several different ones. As an example, *Majlis* at Valhall has been Fear, Captain Hook, Groke and Peter No-tail, *Kristina* at Freja has been Rasmus, Tommy, Toffle, pirate and Olle, and *Ingalill* at Oden has been Fear, pirate, Miffle and Moomintroll. Having played a role such as Fear or Groke, remaining neutral is no longer possible. Moreover, dramatizing and playing roles per se involve an aspect of duality. The "actor" is both teacher and character at the same time, which means that the contours of the individual become distinct in relation to the role which is being played. "Imagine, Groke is really *Majlis*!"

During the course of the theme, I have seen the teachers become someone in the eyes of the children. They have turned into interesting and exciting people. I have often had the feeling that staff members at a day-care centre are perceived as rather anonymous grown-ups. Sometimes, the children will not even notice if a teacher is ill and has been replaced.

In a way, assuming roles has liberated the adults—it has enabled them to step out of their "teacher roles" and leave behind the institutional language which is part of the teacher role in preschools and schools.<sup>9</sup> By virtue of the fictitious role, the teachers have dared to try new attitudes and ways of acting. The role-play has been playful, characterized by humour, improvisations and inversions.<sup>10</sup> The children have become very interested, and the meeting between the children and the characters has resulted in dialogue. The resulting

<sup>9</sup> Bac 1985; Hedenquist 1985; Reich Rubinstein 1993.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Liebermann 1977, who makes a functional analysis of the term "playfulness". See also Berggraf Sæbø & Flugstad 1992, who relate the ability to play to the ability to dramatize.



interplay can be compared to the liberating dialogue which Boal<sup>11</sup> describes in his drama pedagogic theory (where the children are co-actors), which is based on Freire's dialogue pedagogy.<sup>12</sup> One of the aspects of the dialogue is concerned with direct communication, but the adults have also become mediators between the fiction and the children. The children are enticed into the dialogue by the characters the adults dramatize, and as a result, both children and adults share a common playworld. This world is gradually established as children and adults interpret their experiences and portray a mutual world of meaning. Dialogue is an essential part of gaining knowledge about the world at large. Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin support this approach, which presents culture as a relational system of meanings and significance. Bakhtin has expressed this in the following way:

A meaning reveals its depths once it has met and coincided with another, foreign, meaning; a dialogue is taken up between them, which conquers the introversion and the one-sidedness of these meanings, in these cultures.<sup>13</sup>

The meeting with Fear made adults and children create a veritable scenario of frightings, monster animals and a ghost train. The children's feelings took shape and populated the entire section. In the company of Toffle, the children at Valhall showed how brave they were in the hunt for Groke. And at Freja, the dialogue with Ture made the children come up with a completely new story, which developed from the many adventurous balloon journeys to the jungle. Together, they have decided what places they want to visit and what knowledge they want to seek.

The children have often been longing to meet the different dramatized characters or personalities. The play settings which have been established have inspired them to play, but the playworld would not have come alive if it had not been for the physical presence of the living, breathing characters. Even though the adults have been playing together with the children every day, this has not been enough. After a few days, the children have been wishing for their playworld to be recharged with meaning.

## Play development in the classes

How has the playing developed? Taking as a starting point the different games the children play, a pattern emerges. It does, of course, relate to the arguments already presented in this thesis on the influence which literary and dramatic forms have on children's play.

The staff and parents at Hybelejen have declared that the children (and the adults) at the day-care centre play much more now than they used to do, and

<sup>11</sup> Boal 1979; 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Freire 1972.

<sup>13</sup> Bakhtin 1991a, p. 13.



that the play has become more harmonious. This means that the children find it much easier to think of what to play and to get along with one another. This is fine, although it is not a direct result of the theme but of the fact that play has been given a higher status in the classes. What is more surprising, though, is that the children are playing everywhere, in every nook and cranny. Apparently they feel that the whole section is being charged with meaning. More and more inspiring settings are being created. The main playroom at Freja is turning into Fear's world, full of Frightings and Monster animals. At Valhall the main room becomes a Moomin Valley fun fair; Alfie gets his own room in which the children play family games; Toffle gets his own house and Ture a cupboard of his own. The bathrooms become an abode for ghosts both at Freja and Oden, and the jungles inspire the children to stage adventures and hunts as well as family games and dances. The balloon takes them on journeys to foreign countries and continents.

The rudiments of the theme—loneliness, threats and togetherness—provide the basis for creating different playworlds. The meeting with Fear makes the children produce their own fear by scaring each other with monster animals, playing ghosts, which involves both haunted houses and family games with Frightings and baby ghosts, and going on hunts. When the adults dramatize "Who will comfort Toffle?", this results in a new playworld. The theme itself, with its inherent contradictions, invites them to play around with the form. The hunt for Groke, which takes place both indoors and outdoors, is one of the games played in all the classes. The excitement in the air and the hunt make it clear to the youngest children that the topic in question is fear. The children at Valhall even call the ants dangerous, and before the hunt for Groke starts, when the children want to play "Wolf", the underlying theme is the same.

At Oden, the tension between threat and togetherness results in both hunts and family games. The youngest children feel the excitement in the air, and start playing hide and seek, while the older children dress up as Toffle and Groke in order to find out what it feels like being both attacker and victim. The children try a number of play actions: they climb, throw cushions at trees, fell trees, hunt bats and bite Groke on the heel in a number of ways. This could be called the aesthetics of hunt. Together with Toffle, some of the children play an advanced family game and invite the Moomin family to a party. The inspiration for this diverse playing came from the Moomin Valley.

Many of the games the children played during the first term centred around "averting threats", and it made us choose "adventurous journeys" as the form of the play project in the autumn. This was a way of trying to extend the actions of play. Inspired by "The Children in the Jungle" and "The Children in the Water", play developed in the three classes, but only as a result of the adult's ability to make the dramatic contents come alive. Together with the "magician" Ture, a jungle setting is created in each section, which means that the jungle is charged with magic. All children play intensively in this setting, mainly animal and hunting games, and they dance. At Oden, the animal games become family

games, and at Valhall, the atmosphere in the jungle causes the children to dance the samba, dress up and paint themselves as menacing calamangs. The children try out different attitudes and actions. At Freja, they learn the formula of adventure—home-travel-adventure—together with the adults, who are dramatizing characters (mainly Ture) and actions. Both boys and girls play family games in Ture's cupboard, and they learn how to travel in a balloon, hunt and recognize different animals and avert various threats. This includes knowledge of different countries (both from the atlas and the globe), of fruits, plants and animals—knowledge which is to a large extent part of the preschool programme. Knowledge plays a special role in the adventurous journeys. Together, the children and the adults provide them with meaning. Dramatizations and play walk hand in hand. There are no sharp borders between these different forms, and the children's awareness of them gradually grows. In the middle of the autumn, some children want to play roles together with the adults, in "Hat-house". Later on, they will also play roles in a puppet show.<sup>14</sup> When the adults take part in the play, the children's play actions are developing into conscious dramatization.

"The adventurous journeys" have shown great potential for developing the children's play, but the influence of other forms have also been necessary. At our initiative, a theatre setting was created at Valhall to cater for the interest the children in that class have shown in dressing up and acting, i.e. bringing the characters to the forefront. According to the staff, the children play intensively in the dressing room (mainly family games). Thanks to a comprehensive model such as "Peter No-tail", the family games become more substantial, and also the hunting games which all children take part in (chasing Martin and Bill and the crown), have a meaning, which makes them something more than simple games of tag; something that can be developed into detective games, such as the 6-year olds' hunt for Mr. B.

In short, the children's play has grown more detailed and elaborate, and it is closely linked with the aesthetic forms and their contents.

## The aesthetic patterns and progression of play

Play is a dynamic meeting between the child's internal activities (emotions and thoughts) and its external ones, Vygotsky writes. It is imagination carried out in action through a creative inversion process, where meaning predominates over objects and action. Rhythm, movement and language give the imaginary process a musical and lyrical nature. At the same time, in play a dramatic and literary pattern of action develops, because of the dynamic, conflictual relationship the child has with the world around it. The child creates meaning, an entire world (life-world) full of characters and action.

At this point, a cultural anthropological approach to play can be brought

<sup>14</sup> The puppet theatre performance takes place in the spring of 1992. It is an adaptation of "The Frog King" by Janosch.

together with a cultural-historical approach, since they both emphasize the dynamic relationship with the world at large. However, according to the cultural-historical approach, it is the dialogue between child and adult that teaches the child the cultural, aesthetic forms. This is a dialectic relationship—a contradictory one, but not a dualistic one which separates the worlds of children and adults, as some cultural and social anthropologists claim. This is a crucial difference in the approach to play pedagogy.

Play psychologists<sup>15</sup> often maintain that children's play develops from playing with objects via symbol play to role play. What we have learnt from our research indicates a totally different path of development.

Even the youngest children at the day-care centre had the ability to interpret the context on the basis of the general atmosphere. Their interpretations did not depend so much on individual objects as on the situation as a whole. Moreover, they have an ability to keep the feeling alive for longer periods of time. The aesthetic feeling, as Vygotsky calls it, generates a world in which characters and action are not separated. Instead, the play will be affected by the meaning provided by the *entire situation*. The children alternate between being characters and performing the actions of these characters. Anything which has been charged with meaning can be an interesting toy. The Frightings are excellent examples of this. In combination with the spoken word, their mere existence made them popular toys.

The world takes on meaning through dialogue with other people, and this is why children are interested in characters and roles from a very early age, provided that these represent what the children regard to be an important world of meaning. Alfie, Pippi and Groke are examples of such characters. This explains why it is possible to make the youngest children play together in the Alfie setting at Hybelejen. The fictitious characters represent a world with a wealth of aesthetics, which affects the children strongly. They alternate between being Alfie and performing the actions he performs. Contrary to what many play researchers claim, the roles children adopt in play do not seem to be hierarchically arranged.<sup>16</sup>

In the dramatic and literary play patterns of children who are slightly older (3–5), we find two primary basic forms: adventure games involving “averting threats”, and different relation games, with the play centring around the characters. Both forms reflect the children's dynamic relationship with the world around them: to adults as well as to an unknown, threatening world. Similarly, both the expressive (“action”) games and the games focusing on characters are centred around the dramatic action. The characters are mainly carriers of epic elements, to use Mouritsen's words. The relation games (different kinds of family games) usually reflect issues on power, but also on aspects of caring for

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Piaget 1962.

<sup>16</sup> Fictitious characters can often be more useful in children's play, as they have more than one dimension. They are concrete figures in a story (text), as well as carriers of general human traits and actions. You can easily “use” Alfie when playing families.

those who are under some kind of threat. In these games, the action is mainly expressed through the dialogue. Much later, the children start differentiating between world, action and character and becoming aware of the cultural, aesthetic forms. The ability to consciously dramatize the characters is probably not acquired until the children are 6–7 years of age. At Hybelejen, the 6-year olds were starting to show an interest in dramatizing roles.

To summarize this chapter, we could say that the ability to play is a process, which starts as a vague whole, and develops into a differentiated approach to form and content. The process takes the child from a one-dimensional reproduction of characters towards an ability to produce nuanced interpretations of different roles. In play, the child creates meaning and an aesthetic form, which gives life an outline at the same time as it provides a certain amount of distance and an awareness of what the thinking process and the cultural, aesthetic forms look like—i.e. something which provides a base both for abstract thinking and artistic, creative ability.

A *multi-layered text* is essential for developing children's play, and the adults also need to be able to dramatize characters and actions in the play. The best way of achieving this is through a dialogue between children and adults. At Hybelejen, it has been interesting to see how children of different ages have interpreted and dramatized the theme together with the adults. Side by side, they have produced multi-dimensional play, each with their own text in a universal context. This is possible because the children have the ability to move from internal to external levels in the fiction. They are part of the universal context at the same time as they are creating their own text. The youngest children are the ones who have been responsible for creating the underlying atmosphere and keeping it alive, while the older children make numerous interpretations and transformations into new worlds. At the same time as they take part in the universal story, they also play their own games, either in the shape of a pattern of action or a story. The experiences are enhanced by the fact that the children are not all from the same age group.

## CHAPTER 11

# What Role Can Play Be Given in Preschools?

In Sweden, the proposal to reduce the school age from 7 to 6 years has fuelled the debate on preschool pedagogy, and the question of how preschool traditions can be joined up with school traditions has once again been brought to life. In this discussion, play has been given a connective role<sup>1</sup>, but there have been no concrete examples of what such a pedagogy of play would look like. If anything, play is being ascribed an ideological role, as Kärby wrote (cf. chapt. 2), and becomes a kind of no man's land in the space between preschool and school.

Today's debate on early childhood education features two obvious trends. The same trends are clearly visible across the whole of the Western World. Both approaches are critical of the education technology. One model wishes to give scientific thinking a prominent position in the curriculum, also for the youngest children, and it emphasizes theoretic training. This is a "*scientific*" model, based partly on a Piagetian view on children's lack of logical thinking and their need to develop the same in order to become aware of this thinking process. The current preschool pedagogy are criticized for not providing enough intellectual challenge, and for lacking models of how to develop children's thinking. Pramling<sup>2</sup>, for one, considers it a matter of "teaching children to learn", and to adopt the individual children's everyday thinking as your starting point by means of "meta-cognitive" talks. Agreeing with Bruner's criticism of preschool activities, Kärby writes that also play needs to be intellectually challenging (cf. chapt. 2).

These ideas of "theoretical learning" can also be found in Soviet pedagogic theories. Partly polemizing against Vygotsky's idea of how scientific concepts are developed, Davydov<sup>3</sup> stated that taking a starting-point in abstract thinking was essential. By this he meant understanding the principles behind scientific concepts in order to be able to establish a link between scientific concepts and personal, concrete ideas. This also concerns preschool children. According to Davydov, there is no natural, obvious development leading from everyday

<sup>1</sup> According to the report "The basis for life-long learning". SOU 1994:45, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Pramling 1983; 1988; 1994.

thinking to scientific thinking. In Denmark, Broström (1989) has tried working according to Davydov's theory. In a development project for 6-year olds, the children have started by working with "abstract models" in order to gain insight into how to walk on a tight-rope (or build models, etc.), before going on to actually experiencing what it feels like being a tight-rope walker.

The other model advocates a "*humanistic approach*" as criticism of the one-sided rationalization within education.<sup>4</sup> In his book "Actual Minds, Possible Worlds", Bruner (1986) motivates his current, modified approach. He criticizes his own earlier work and says that Piaget's structuralism is a back number in today's society.<sup>5</sup> It is a theory which does not touch upon human dilemmas and the role of the subject in the learning process. What is needed is a humanistic approach, which can deal with the world as it changes before the onlooker, and which appreciates what it is like to live in the world. The important thing is to be sensitive to the context, and not insensitive to it as the scientific approach prescribes. Bruner claims that removing the human aspect of pedagogy would be devastating. The pedagogic aim should be to:

... create a new generation that can prevent the world from dissolving into chaos and destroying itself ... create in the young an appreciation of the fact that many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created and not discovered, that negotiation is the art of constructing new meanings by which individuals can regulate their relations with each other.<sup>6</sup>

Bruner is of the opinion that Vygotsky is the one with an important message for us about the future. Cultural historical theory turns the past to face the present, and through language we can generate new meanings for the thought.<sup>7</sup>

Kozulin (1990) reasons in a similar way when, in connection with his analysis of Vygotsky's psychology, criticizing those who use "the scientific inquiry" as a prototype of the logic of human thought and a sign of a higher form of theorizing. This excludes forms of thought which are based on art and literature, where dialogue is the norm rather than an exception. Our intellect, on the other hand, is monological, and does not get into contact with other areas of thinking. For this reason, it is important to make the consciousness—not the

<sup>3</sup> Davydov 1989, where he describes his program for "theoretical learning" in schools and pre-schools (for the oldest children), as part of the attempt to increase the pupils' scientific and technical competence. His ideas mainly apply to language, mathematics and history but also art. Kozulin 1990, p. 254–262, explains why the training program did not catch on in the Soviet education system—it was far too authoritarian and centrally controlled. Davydov was dismissed in the 1980's, but was reinstated with glasnost. His ideas of "theoretical learning" have, however, been shelved as more urgent education problems have surfaced. Instead, his ideas are being tried in the Western World.

<sup>4</sup> This is a hermeneutic approach emphasising the interpretation process.

<sup>5</sup> Bruner compares Freud, Piaget and Vygotsky and their influence on the school of tomorrow. Piaget's ideas have made a definitive mark on pedagogy, but the structural analysis which has followed Piaget's structuralism has disclosed how complex these structures are, which according to Bruner means that in reality, it has abolished itself.

<sup>6</sup> Bruner 1986, p. 149.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 145.



intellect—the central concept of human thinking. Consciousness contains the dialogue between different systems of meaning, and it merges rationality and aesthetics.<sup>8</sup> It can be added that dialogue is expressed in the dynamic interpretation process Vygotsky calls the imaginary process, which is displayed in children's play at a very young age.

There are also examples of activities based on aesthetics. The pedagogy of Reggio Emilia has developed an artistic way of working, where visual art predominates. An investigative working method has been combined with a creative one, and the emphasis is on the "researching child".<sup>9</sup> However, instead of pursuing a logical system for thinking, they pursue experiences of a sensuous nature.<sup>10</sup> With respect to its contents, the modern child's situation is reflected on the basis of a critical approach to society.

Egan's (1988) proposition is a curriculum based on the logic of the story. He rests his ideas on the young child's interest in stories, in which emotions and thoughts can be united and which invite the child to use its imagination. This curriculum takes as its starting point the child's conflicting relationship with reality according to Sutton-Smith's description<sup>11</sup> of young children's story-telling. The introductory stage of the curriculum deals with mythical thinking.<sup>12</sup>

Also Whitehead maintains that literature is of general importance to children's thinking. In a discussion on early childhood education, she says that:

The meaning-making power of narrative and story is not restricted to expanding literary horizon only. The power of story also moves out from literature to other areas of the curriculum. Narrative can be a way of initiating children's early explorations of moral issues, religious experiences, historical, geographical, scientific and mathematical investigations.<sup>13</sup>

The prerequisite is, however, that the literature chosen is of literary quality, Whitehead writes.

Despite these examples, pedagogues often seem to doubt aesthetic subjects, as I have mentioned earlier, but these also harbour an element of doubt vis-à-vis pedagogy. Both literary historians and drama pedagogues fear the instrumentalization of their subjects which often occurs within the educational framework of schools and preschools. Literature should not lend itself to any purposes other than literary ones.<sup>14</sup> In the same way, drama pedagogues wish to affiliate themselves to theatre as a form of art, an attitude which is now

<sup>8</sup> Kozulin 1990, p. 267–272, where he refers to Vladimir Bibler amongst others, and also his analysis of Vygotsky's "inner speech" and its innate paradox and the dialogistics of thinking.

<sup>9</sup> Wallin 1986; 1993; Barsotti 1986; Dahlberg & Lenz-Taguchi 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Lindqvist 1989, p. 26–34.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Sutton-Smith 1975, where he discusses the importance of story-telling in connection with the contents of the curriculum.

<sup>12</sup> The other parts of the curriculum Egan calls the romantic part, the philosophical part and the ironical part.

<sup>13</sup> Whitehead 1988, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Malmgen & Nilsson 1993, p. 246 ff.



spreading.<sup>15</sup> In his latest book, "New Perspectives on Class-room Drama" (1992), Bolton is once again dealing with the opposition between education and aesthetics. He is convinced that drama can be combined with a pedagogic purpose.

In our research, the working method has taken the shape of a meeting between drama, literature and play. We have had as our starting point the *form of play*<sup>16</sup>, and sought the correspondence between the aesthetic forms and play. The literary text (the story) has become the contents of a theme, and the actions and characters in the contents have been brought to life through drama. Adults and children have "stepped into" the text and created a fictitious world—a playworld.

This pedagogy is based on an unbiased approach to art and culture, which allows us to mix different forms of expression and to break a traditional hierarchical view on culture. This approach is reminiscent of the mobile form of play, and includes introducing young children to advanced art, as culture is something which is equally important to all ages.

The point is, that we are of the opinion that the most important condition for developing play is to create an diverse and multi-dimensional text, which can generate new meanings. The scenes and settings can turn the entire day-care centre into a world of its own. It is also obvious that when the text is detailed and colourful, both children and adults are able to take an interest in what is happening. Play at Hybelejen was not childish in a limited sense of the word. On the contrary, the adults acted as mediators, using conscious artistic methods to bring the contents to life.<sup>17</sup>

In the multi-dimensional world of art, each and every one—both children and adults—are at liberty to choose to enter into a common fiction at the same time as they make their own interpretations. Art and literature can create a meaningful reality. This helps us understand Vygotsky's statement: that art is social. Literature provides a knowledge of our existential conditions as human beings, along with an awareness of society in general. In a society which can more and more be characterized in terms of mobility and aestheticism, we will need a "cultural identity"<sup>18</sup> to be able to interpret the world, since the traditional "aura" has lost its significance in preschools and schools. Such an iden-

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<sup>15</sup> In "Drama", a Nordic publication on drama pedagogy, a lively discussion on whether drama should exist in schools as an educational method or an aesthetic subject has been going on for the past few years.

<sup>16</sup> In my experience, play as a form of activity is rarely made the starting point when dealing with aesthetic pedagogy.

<sup>17</sup> Dramatic direction was necessary for the staff to be able to work with artistic methods. Since Hybelejen is a normal day-care centre and the staff has not had any special training, it should be possible to develop similar working methods within the regular existing preschool system. The only requirement is that aesthetic subjects are given a prominent position in preschool teacher education, in order to serve as models of the pedagogy of play.

<sup>18</sup> I use the concept "cultural identity" to place the matter at hand in a wider cultural context, that of education, where knowledge involves consciousness, playfulness and solidarity. See also Ziche 1989; Broady 1992; Liedman 1993, p. 7-15.

tity can only be created starting at a very early age, in a democratic manner. Children's culture in Sweden is full of life, and our literature for children attracts a lot of attention in large parts of the world. This is one important reason why the Swedish preschool curriculum should contain cultural and aesthetic aspects, particularly given the fact that these can be combined with children's play. The links which exist between play and children's culture provide the basis for a working method built on the pedagogy of play.

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*Videofilm:*

Child-care TV's series of educational television programmes on *A playpedagogic working method* from the day-care centre Hybelejen in Karlstad with Gunilla and Jan Lindqvist. Producer: Birgitta Sohlman, UR, 26-9351.-1.



# Appendix

## Approach to play—A survey

A survey carried out in the spring of 1991 among all those employed in the child care system in a small municipality in Sweden. There were a total of 371 responses.

(Replies are given in per cent. The actual number of responses are given in brackets)

	Alternatives		
	Yes	No	Yes+No
1. Play is free. The children choose what they want to do themselves. The adults mind their own business. (Most employees did not consider play to be free, but even if they did, the adults were still present in the background.)	25 (92) Unanswered. 4 (13)	43 (161)	28 (105)
2. Play is free and children should express strong emotions such as fear and aggression.	78 (288) Unanswered. 3 (11)	8 (29)	11 (43)
3. Play should be stimulated by an inviting play environment—different corners, material, props. The adult should help if needs be. (Most employees agreed on this.)	96 (356) Unanswered. 1 (3)	0 (0)	3 (12)
4. The adults should set an example for the children's play. Too boisterous games should be redirected. Stereotype sexual roles should be counteracted. (Most employees would like to set an example, but this should not mean too rigid a control.)	32 (119) Unanswered. 7 (25)	25 (94)	36 (133)
5. The adults should take part in children's play by asking questions and stimulating the dialogue. (On this point, there is a noticeable difference in approach between the staff at a day-care centre and self-employed care-takers. At a day-care centre, staff members show a greater tendency of taking part in the dialogues when children play. None of the other questions have resulted in similar divergence.)	43 (161) Unanswered. 3 (12)	36 (132)	18 (66)

	Alternatives		
	Yes	No	Yes+No
6. The adults should tell stories and read nursery rhymes, play-act and sing both within the frame of children's play and outside it.	78 (287)	9 (34)	12 (46)
	Unanswered. 1 (4)		
7. The adults should stimulate the children's narrative ability, the ability to live the part of other people, of pretending "as-if". (Some employees commented that they would like this to happen at times.)	84 (312)	10 (36)	4 (15)
	Unanswered. 2 (8)		
8. The adults should organize and lead dramatizations, adventures, fairy-tales, conflicts, events etc.	56 (207)	18 (66)	22 (82)
	Unanswered. 4 (16)		

*Which approach is the most important:*

	Number of responses	Replies in %
1. Play should be stimulated by an inviting play environment ... (q3)	240	65
2. Play is free and children should express strong emotions ... (q2)	56	13
3. The adults should tell stories and read nursery rhymes, play-act and sing ... (q6)	27	7

These are followed by questions no. 4, 1, 5, 8 and 7.

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