CAMmer in the Spotlight

Kirsten Drotner, dr.phil.

Chair of media studies, Dept. for the Study of Culture – Media Studies, University of Southern Denmark
Founding director of DREAM (Danish Research Centre on Education and Advanced Media Materials)
Contact: drotner@sdu.dk / personal website

Getting to know… Kirsten Drotner

What are you currently working on? Top-of-mind right now is co-organizing an international conference in August at the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters on museum communication. The conference is hosted by a national research centre DREAM which I have been directing since 2004. We study creative media and information literacies as they unfold in what we call semi-formal learning sites such as museums, science and experience centres. In these partnerships we adopt a research ecology approach to studying media and information literacies: We co-design learning resources, and we then analyse and evaluate literacy outcomes for users across domains of learning. Facilitating longterm interaction across disciplines, academic and professional fields of interest and teaming up with new generations of young professionals is incredibly rewarding – this work keeps me on my toes intellectually, and it keeps me grounded in engagements of pedagogy and policy beyond the academy, a very useful combination.

In addition, I have recently taken up an old intellectual passion of mine studying peer production, also known as mediated content creation. In the 1980s, I conducted one of the early media ethnographies following a group of Danish teenagers for a year as they made their own videos, and the book I wrote (*At skabe sig – selv [Self Creation]*, 1990) operated as an antidote to national video-scare discourses at the time. I now follow groups of children making film; and while others have focused on the social or financial aspects of these peer practices, I am particularly interested in understanding their processual nature – how users shape and share aesthetic 'building blocks'. Naturally, these practices are undergoing fundamental changes with easy access to distributed open source software; so I currently have a unique chance to revisit former research insights and results and, not least, have my own assumptions challenged by children of various ages, social backgrounds and cultural outlooks.

What has been your most memorable project, and why? Over the years, I have been very fortunate to collaborate with wonderful colleagues at home and abroad on research projects that have stimulated me to study a variety of media and genres from different perspectives and have taught me the pleasures, and pitfalls, of interdisciplinary work. It is difficult to single out particular projects; but I certainly learned a lot from joining a pan-European project in the 1990s on children and their changing media environment, which was directed by Sonia Livingstone and encompassed 15.000 children across 12 countries. My engagement in another comparative project on Disney audiences led by Janet Wasko and colleagues at the University of Oregon (*Dazzled by Disney*, 2001) also sparked my interest to conduct a national project on Disney which encompassed features of production, representation and parent and child audiences (*Disney i Danmark*, 2003).

In personal terms, the most formative studies I have conducted have perhaps been my projects on media history. Since my student years I have been interested in people's engagements with media as part of their everyday lives; and for my dr.phil. dissertation I spent precious years in my twenties at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the British Library (then at the British Museum in London) studying children's magazines and children's autobiographies and memories of childhood from the 18th century on. I published a historical reception study on children's magazine reading (*English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945*, 1985, rev. ed. Yale UP 1988) for which I received the Children's Literature Association Book Award. More recently, I had much fun writing a textbook in Danish on the co-evolution of modernity and media (*Mediehistorier*, 2011) and was fortunate to receive the Danish academic textbook award for the result. I think the many years I have spent researching up-to-the minute media gave an extra thrill to capture *la longue durée* of media discourses and developments.

Which achievement are you most proud of, and why? In overall terms, this is keeping some sort of sanity in balancing my research activities and integrity and my research policy work. I have helped frame research and education within and beyond my field as a fund raiser, as a founder of my university's school of media studies, in serving the research community on national and international research councils and committees and as a public voice on children and media. However, this 'hidden' work has always been fueled by my research projects and practices and by the energy and commitment shared by students and colleagues. It has been

very rewarding to see how research insights can sometimes forestall policy discourses and become relevant to communities outside of the academy in unexpected ways.

What would be your work motto? Always look beyond.

Which of your publications is your favorite, and why? It would be the article 'Modernity and Media Panics' written in 1992 and published in an edited volume *Media Cultures: Reappraising Transnational Media* (London: Routledge, eds. Michael Skovmand & Kim C. Schrøder), and updated and revised in 1999: 'Dangerous Media? Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity'. Here, I coined the term 'media panic' as part of what would now be called the history of mediatization in Western societies. The article has a particular resonance for me because writing it made me rethink reasons for my own normative dismissal of popular media discourses and instead analyse and reflect on the wider implications of their recurrence. Also, I wrote it at a time when I thought I was past doing media history, and then recaptured my intellectual enjoyment in this approach.

If you had unlimited resources, what kind of project would you want to do and why? A comparative international project on children's media creativities would be such a thrill to do.

If you had to give one piece of advice to young CAM scholars, what would it be? Follow your intellectual intuition and develop it through collaboration with colleagues who can challenge it.

Who would you like to put in the spotlight next, and why? I'd like to nominate danah boyd who, to me, is an excellent representative of a younger generation of scholars asking fresh and critical questions to our field about the situatedness of digital technologies and also manages an admirable engagement as a public voice. I would love to learn about how she sees her national insights relate to the complexities of youthful media uses around the world.