

Thinking-Doing Childhood Urbannatures in Neurodiverse Ways: Possibilities, Limits and Contradictions of a Visual Art-Based Research

Rachel Fendler¹, Laura Trafi-Prats², Aurelio Castro Varela³

¹Florida State University,

²Manchester Metropolitan University ³University of Barcelona

Abstract

A research project with a group of fifty 5th graders unfolded over the course of one academic year through a series of art propositions seeking to enact encounters and emplacements with patches of urban nature surrounding the school block. The project troubled the deeply familiar associations between children and nature, children and the city, nature and urban (Duhn, Malone & Tesar, 2017) by using art as a way to enact messy multiplicities of urban-natures childhoods. In this presentation, I examine one of the propositions of the project, which consisted of making a video-essay of a tree, in terms of radical becoming, and variability. Inspired by Manning (2016) and Simondon (2017), I discuss the techniques of relation (thing-thoughts) that emerged as a group of children with special needs and I worked with iMovie™ to edit visual footage of a small bush, selected sounds from sound libraries, images of their bodies, and sounds of their own human voices. Techniques of relation live in processes where thought is an emergent coming-to-form that is transindividual and hap-

pens in an ecology of practices that are more than the sum of its parts. The activity of putting together a video essay brought to the fore the processes of attunement to move between understandings of facilitation as ways to meet a neurotypical economy of video-expression, and facilitation as a relational force that valued and dwelled on the singularities of worlds in-information that constitute autistic perception (Manning, 2016). The video-essay as a thinking that emerged from working together with our bodies, images, sounds, technologies permitted a retrospective conceptualization of art and learning as a more-than its alignments with school curricula and institutionalized art pedagogies that opened towards other bodies and worlds-to-come.

Keywords

Participatory visual art-based methods, Speculative pragmatism, Autism, Erin Manning, Gilbert Simondon