Things that Matter – Tracing Agents in Discussing Photographs of Preschoolers

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Abstract

During the past few decades photographs taken by young children have received growing attention in a range of academic disciplines. Photographs taken by children have been used as visual data in the study of their social relations and wellbeing. However, there is only a little academic research focusing on the photographic practices of children as visual meaning making, as a particular means of being in relation to the surrounding world of things, bodies and spaces. In my presentation I will introduce a qualitative case study which draws on research in the sociology of childhood and art education. The data was produced in a photography workshop carried out in a Finnish daycare center. In the workshop, 14 preschoolers (6-year-olds) discussed their self-taken photographs, inspired by contemporary photographic art. Although visual and verbal elements are closely interlaced in my data, here the photographs are scrutinized according to the discussions of the children. I am interested to know what children pay attention to when presenting their photographs to other people. A special emphasis is put on the role of objects; including the camera, matters and space in the accounts of the preschoolers.

The children's interest in these material entities is examined applying insights of actor-network theory (Latour 2007) and new materialism (Barad 2007). I reflect on the child's relation with the material world as a multimodal event where both the child and the object can perform as agents by inviting, making possible or prohibiting, thus, having an influence on human and non-human entities.

Keywords