Three Notes on Visual Pedagogies in Childhood Research

Making Images that Move and Endure Time

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Abstract

This article focuses on the process of creating still and video images with children through a practice referred to as 'mashing'. The use of wearable cameras (by both researcher and children) is further explored, putting into question how documentation and visual analysis are conducted in school settings. Three concepts (i.e., gesture, encounter, endurance) are employed in relation to issues of visual representation in childhood research in order to support an understanding of documentation as pedagogically necessary in educational contexts.

Keywords

endurance – encounter – gesture – mashing – movement – wearable cameras

FEATURE Nikki Rotas' article comprises two videos which can be viewed [here](#).

Introduction

Within this article, I explore three concepts: 1) 'gesture' (Agamben, 2000); 2) 'encounter' (Deleuze, 1994); and 3) 'endurance' (Braidotti, 2013). In doing so, I offer three brief notes in order to examine the question of how the camera and image matter – ontologically and epistemologically – in the production of knowledge in childhood research. In the second part of this article, I examine the question of how the turn to 'post' (Manning, 2018; St. Pierre, 2014) theories and practices in relation to childhood visual research has altered practices of documentation and thus the role of researcher in childhood settings. I argue that the use of new technologies supports an orientation toward ethical relations that commit to experimental practices of documentation that make ways of knowing and/or learning visible. In the third part of this article, I draw on my experience with visual research, specifically the use of wearable cameras in urban school settings. I offer two images recorded with the use of wearable cameras. Video 2, for example, was captured by the moving, child-body and brings the researcher-body to the fore of the screen. Flipping what is expected of traditional visual research as it relates to ethnographic methodologies, I see this as a necessary shift in decolonising childhood (as the editors suggest). Echoing Manning (2018), part of this 'post' turn is to "shift the

centrality of the (white) (neurotypical) human as purveyor and guarantor of experience” (p. 3). Lastly, I offer a concluding note on enduring ethical relations in childhood visual research.

1 Notes on Gesture

Within Giorgio Agamben’s chapter, *Notes on Gesture* (2000), movement is dissected into a thousand pieces. Drawing on cinematographers, photographers, artists, experimenters and philosophers across time, Agamben concludes that there are no images and/or representations of artwork, but “only gestures” (2000, p.54). Drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s (1989; 1986) philosophy of cinema, he gives the example of the iconic Mona Lisa, which is housed in the Musee de Louvre in Paris, France. Agamben contends that the image of Mona Lisa is not an immobile object. She is a fragment of a tiny thousand gestures or rather “stills of a lost film wherein only they would regain their true meaning” (Agamben, 2000, pp. 54–55). Belonging to instances and/or ‘encounters’ (Deleuze 1994) of ethics and politics, Agamben reminds us that the gesture is not simply a matter of aesthetics. The gesture is rather an expression of enduring time and space. What might then Agamben’s notes on the gesture tell 21st century childhood researchers about images (video and still) as they relate to movement, learning and pedagogy?

Agamben argues that cinema belongs to the gesture and its mobile force. Similar to Deleuze, he understands the image as a representation in movement. In Deleuze’s (1989, 1986) *Cinema* books, he refers to these images as ‘movement-images’. Images move because they are never void of time and space. Movement does not stop. Even the ‘death-image’ (Deleuze, 1989) moves with and in non-linear time. Prior to Agamben and Deleuze, theorizations of (human and animal) movement and visual modes of representation were made evident through the practice of 19th century experimenters, such as Etienne-Jules Marey, Eadweard Muybridge, and Gilles de la Tourette. All three inventors experimented with visual technologies of their historical time, engaging in provocative practices that positioned human and animal bodies in ethically questionable ways. Marey, for example, attached electric cables to the wings of a bird (Manning, 2009; Rotas, 2018a). Eadweard Muybridge employed multiple cameras at once in his projects. He was interested in capturing humans and animals in motion. He is most noted for his work with horses, offering an analysis of animal locomotion through a zoopraxiscope which enabled him to project images of galloping horses. Gilles de la Tourette also examined the human body and how it moves. He employed a positivist

mapping of human movement by using the footprint method. As noted in Agamben's detailed chapter, de la Tourette rolled out a lengthy piece of white paper and nailed it to the ground. His subjects of study were given a rust red color powder to smear on their shoes. Their rusty red footprints became data to analyze, to measure length of step, lateral swerve, and angle of inclination and so on (Agamben, 2000). It is perhaps in the present 21st century where the desire to monitor bodies through media technologies is most evident. Capitalist machines such as Facebook work to surveil and datafy human patterns of movement, granting access to virtual images of worlds that in turn shape future desires. In fact, monitoring bodies with the use of new technologies is happening in many different ways, including an interest in capturing and measuring moments of body-performance. In the world of fitness and health, wristwatches – among many other gadgets – are *passé* technologies that are now re-vamped with extraordinary capacities. Watches are branded as all-in-one gadgets that monitor and measure heart rate, steps taken, floors climbed, kilometers ran, pace, calories burned, and hours slept. These personalized machines have GPS (Global Positioning System) capabilities and keep the body virally connected via text and call notifications. The watch even pokes the body when it is not performing at a preset capacity desired by the wearer. The Apple brand of watch, for instance, transmits a 'digital tap' to other users. The watch even sends the wearer's heartbeat to friends. Detailed summaries of body-performance and/or body-data are synced to smartphones and computers for online viewing.

When technological innovation such as wearable technologies create new ways of seeing/being, what the technology and/or the 'apparatus' (Barad, 2007) is doing is simultaneously shaping the body's "natural" capacities and its "acquired artifice" (Massumi, 2014, p. 18). This simultaneous movement engenders an understanding of the 'artifice' as more than a prosthetic tool of measurement and thus more-than a form of datafication (i.e., an image of representation). 'Post' theorizations of bodies and technologies are evident across disciplines (Alaimo, 2016; Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Colebrook, 2013; de Freitas, 2018, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Hayles, 2012; Manning, 2016; Pink, 2012, 2009; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; TallBear, 2015). Such theories connect to Agamben's notes on the gesture and his provocation to rethink images and their practices as more-than representational objects of knowledge (also see Lorimer, 2010; Vannini, 2015). Agamben provokes a re-claiming of the image through an ethics of encounter that in turn shifts the centrality of the human child as agent of change. What I am suggesting is that the image, and more broadly research 'data,' cannot be severed from its embodied and embedded context; its history of making. However, what

Agamben's provocation considers is a shift from understanding images/data as packets of closed information that represent the child. Rather, 'post' theories and methodologies necessitate a move toward understanding visual data as "images themselves in movement" (Agamben, 2000, p. 54), which potentialize the capacity of the child to 'affect and be affected' (Spinoza, 1985). If children are to *affect and be affected* by more-than the image of self, post-childhood visual researchers must find ways to attend to and endure the temporalities of more-than human living that compose the 'who' and the 'what' that shapes images of childhood.

2 Notes on Encounter

Encounter, Deleuze writes, forces bodies to think. "Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter" (Deleuze, 1994, p.139). Deleuze and Agamben – through their concepts – remind us that the *encounter* and *gesture* are not simply a matter of aesthetic pleasure. To encounter the image is to activate different relations with what was, what is, and what might become. Encountering the image is, therefore, not merely a reflective practice that represents what happened or is used to determine what a child or group of children may need. The encounter is where the language of the image undoes itself. It is where new directions and expressions of learning become felt. The felt quality of learning affirms the capacity of the child to think, to recompose and to thus reclaim experience. What is at stake is this very potential of moving childhood visual research into mobile territories of thought that do not tell the child how to act, but rather facilitate critical and creative thinking. To pedagogically support a process of critical and creative thinking as it relates to the image, researchers might consider engaging children in processes of documentation and visual analysis. For example, in urban school research projects in Toronto, Canada, children have engaged in the documentation and visual analysis of their learning with the use of wearable cameras (see Rotas, 2018a, 2018b, 2016; 2015, 2014). Attached to the head, chest, and wrist of children, the cameras recorded interactions throughout the school day. During the research projects, documentation was understood as a process of composition. The many practices that children engaged in emphasized the importance of process as opposed to product or object. Practices centred a potential process of *affecting and being affected* by more-than human ontologies and epistemologies that shape childhood experiences. For instance, one of the pedagogical practices conducted with children (ages 7–8)

in the above research projects centred collective visual analysis performed with and by children. Children referred to the practice as ‘mashing’ (Rotas, 2018b). The practice involved critical and creative analysis through the editing of images that children recorded with the wearable cameras. Children used editing software to cut and paste images together, creating a micro-film of their experiences. The micro-films (seconds in length) became a cutting and pasting of images, rather than a polished piece of cinema. Emphasis, again, was not placed on the final product. The process attended to the series of cuts that were made and stitched together, proliferating experiences of lived thought.

The practice of *mashing* did not necessarily offer tangible outcomes, nor immediately modify the conditions of childhood environments that include, but are not limited to constraints of race, culture, class, and ability. What the practice does is activate a process that veers from habit toward encounters where children have to identify what is important to them, and what makes that knowledge important (Manning, 2016; Stengers, 2018). In turn, children must also think about what knowledges are neglected, or what is often not seen in popular images of representation (Stengers, 2018). Upon analyzing the images, children were provoked to think about and to question what materialized in another time and space. Children questioned what they did not initially see and how such (hind)sight affected them. The value of this practice, its composites and re-compositions is within the provocation to grapple with the gestures that materialize meaning. How children relate and/or this very understanding of ‘the real’ (as Deleuze articulates), reorients thinking toward understandings of childhood subjectivities as emerging from more-than human processes of feeling that endure the constraints of school(time) and technologies of knowing. Deleuze (2011) believes “that we do not know how to go beyond experience toward the conditions of experience, toward the articulations of the real, and rediscover what differs in kind in the composites that are given to us and on which we live” (p. 26). Deleuze’s interest in visual forms of representation (or the image) and what it can do is timely and relevant for rethinking childhood visual research. Taking my cue from Deleuze (and Agamben and Manning), childhood visual researchers might begin with the process of imaging. When the researcher begins with the gestures of a process, she potentializes the power to produce alternative images of thought. She also makes visible modes of learning that are collectively composed and thus negotiated. To encounter an image is to attend to the very process of composition and re-composition, and with the uneasiness of not knowing the end result of a pedagogical process such as *mashing*. When the visual researcher begins with a process what she is doing

is facilitating ‘modes of attention’ (Manning, 2018) that ontologically operate and run epistemologically askew. Modes of attention horizontally move systems of power in schools and in research projects involving children. Attention – however it might become felt – therefore, optimizes access to research practices that are often hidden from the children we (researchers) work with.

FIGURE 1 Mashing: Children engage in a creative and critical analysis of images, producing micro-films of their experience. Toronto, Canada 2016

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FIGURE 2 Mashing, Toronto, Canada 2016
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VIDEO 1 Micro-Films: The films children produced became a composition of at least two encounters during the research process. This particular micro-film mashes an outdoor encounter referred to as “seedballing” and an indoor encounter referred to as “photobombing”. Toronto, Canada 2016. (See [here](#).)

CHILD PARTICIPANT

3 Notes on Endurance

In Braidotti’s (2013) book on the posthuman, she writes about the potential of ethics and politics of a (zoe-centered) intensive live, and how such life might activate enduring relationships that produce variations in the imaging technologies that humans co-compose. With Spinoza and Deleuze, she begins from the mobile position that we cannot know what a body can do. An ethics of encounter that endures (i.e., sustains itself through its relations) begins from this provocation of potential and affirmation of life, and of the body that is in and of collective constraint. The collective practice of mashing, for instance, cannot be managed in advance. For a practice to be encountered, it must be negotiated and thus endured through intensive modes of more-than human relating/composing. Enduring time is an ethical space to consider relationships with schools, communities, and environments. A time of endurance is an ethical space to affirm the capacity to *affect and be affected* in

processes of learning that are conditioned and constrained by capitalist power and privilege. Braidotti's thinking helps childhood visual researchers think about the possibility of relationships the human cannot quite figure out in language. Her theorizations of a monistic life might help us transform our own 'perceptual coordinates' (Braidotti, 2013) and reclaim one's connections to territorial space, including school, community, and beyond. However, where does this leave childhood visual research and its practices? Is documentation necessary and do linear practices make sense anymore in childhood settings where an ontological and epistemological leap of coordinates is to be encountered?

Documentation is necessary because it is one of many ways in which children can challenge the conditions and constraints of their environments. It is important for the child's story to be heard and this is, of course, not a new argument (Wien, 2013). Documentation and the images that are produced as a result of a horizontally askew process is a way for children to make visible the learning that is often marginalized in classrooms and schools. As Wien (2013) notes, documentation is necessary in early childhood research because it offers more than a record of what happened and why. Documentation rather offers a process (Wien, 2013). It enables "a process for listening to children, for creating artifacts from that listening, and for studying with others what children reveal about their competent and thoughtful views of the world" (Wien, 2013, p. 1). When the child is in charge of documenting her school-life, she sees through a lens that tells a very different story – her own story of bodied relation. In the use of wearable cameras, the child sees through her moving body and challenges traditional ways of doing and documenting learning. The child is performing documentation and she is actively engaging in a collective process that demands attention to the more-than of the human eye and/or developmental brain. What the above images then tell us is that documentation is a creative process. These images show us the 'how' of a creative process of inquiry (Wien, 2013) that affects bodies that are themselves in movement. The process of creating micro-films is in itself a pedagogical line of inquiry that affects children. Moreover, the films in their material form are objects that can be dissected, reflected upon, and in ways that further serve pedagogical goals that decolonise childhood research. Furthermore, it is rare to see the researcher documented in the form of still and video images during a research project (see Video 2). The use of wearable cameras enables this shift in documentation and distribution of recording power. The cameras put into question modes of storytelling and the role of the researcher as that which extends beyond participant-observer. For Wien, documentation is a step toward ethical relations that widen and deepen a multiplicity of perspectives

and/or knowings (also see Bath, 2012; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2001; Rinaldi, 2006). Braidotti (2013) argues that embracing an ethics of experimentation is necessary in 'post' times. Such experimentation is always invested in a multi-directional process of documentation that is in excess of linguistic signs and yet, makes visible how (past and present) learning is relational.

Conclusion

Thinking with the theories of Braidotti, Spinoza, Deleuze, Agamben, and Manning forces childhood researchers to think about a very important question that asks: "What about the modes of subjectivity that cannot be made sense of through the split between subject and object" (Manning, 2016, p. 42). This very question is a thought about endurance; it is one that resonates with Agamben's *gesture* and Deleuze's *movement-image*. The question vibrates through the concepts addressed in this article because this very question challenges human epistemologies of knowing. It challenges the confines of language and ways of seeing that the childhood researcher has become accustomed to. It is, however, not enough to say that there is a shift in childhood visual research because new technologies and experimental practices enable new ways of thinking and doing documentation. Childhood visual researchers must think deeply about practices with children and the ontological and epistemological relationships that must always account for the past, present, and future contexts of our inheritance. Wearable cameras are just a minor part of the leap that is necessary in teaching us – childhood researchers – what the image, documentation, practices, pedagogy, ways of being and knowing might be in a future time where the child *affects and becomes affected* by the excess of a collective power of thought. Like Manning, I am, however, not sure that experimentation and child-led inquiry – without tangible outcomes – will decolonise childhood knowledges and practices. I am not sure if experimental practices are welcome in classrooms, school districts, and academic institutions. What I do think is significant are *modes of attention* that facilitate access to research practices and data. Practices that are invented and led by children and their communities are valuable processes that add and thus remake livable worlds worth living. I think that there is, at least, minor potential in that. This minor methodological shift in power might create the conditions to endure this necessary leap in childhood visual research.

VIDEO 2 Flipping the Screen: Performed alongside the researcher, one of the children wears the camera on his chest during gardening practice. Toronto, Canada 2016. (See [here](#).)

CHILD PARTICIPANT

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