Sonic Materialism: Children’s physical performance of CupSongs on YouTube

Herdis Toft
University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

Children’s performance as shown on YouTube reveals how their play agency is an aesthetic modelling of the corporeal and bodied being when they are handling and handled by various materials. The embodied interaction involves non-human participants, e.g., toys, trash and junk. Their self-presentational strategies (e.g., trial-and-error-exercises, striving for artistic perfection and invention of new variations, and coping shown in tutorials) help children collaborating in the actualisation, the variation and renewal of classic play culture.

An example of performance shown on YouTube is the so-called CupSong which comes in numerous traditional, transformative and transgressive variations and settings. This paper analyzes a selected corpus of children and young people’s CupSong-performances in order to stress their sonic and corporeal materiality. We explore what the artistic-acoustic part of the performance actually does, how it operates, how it works (Cox 2011).

We compare the performances with dancing practices, where the relation between embodied awareness of movements and the sense of one’s body-space is modified and changed (Ravn 2016). We point out the children’s craftsmanlike skills, the relation between ‘Toys and Tools’, ‘Spiel- und Werkzeug’, ‘Lege- og værktøj’. We focus on the measured sound (Leeuwen 1999), the musical regularity, the periodic vibrations, the ever more delicate rhythmic choices (McDonald 2014) through melodic singing, timing and synchronic tapping and moving the cups. Children ‘let their fingers do the walking, but also the cups do the talking’, thereby demonstrating the vibrancy and inner connectedness between player and plaything. The cup becomes a living partner of the play, when childhood and thinghood come together (Bennett 2010).

References:

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