The Materiality of the Family Home. Methodological Approaches to Family Practices and Generational Differences in the Context of Home-based Work

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Scholarly discussions and concepts in family research have shifted since the so-called ”practice turn” (Schatzki et al. 2001) to the everyday life and the understanding of families as a quality or practice (see e.g. Daly 2003, Morgan 2011). Although this approach makes the involvement of all family members – including children – visible scholars have not adequately interrelated family to childhood studies (see e.g. Mayall 2002, Thelen & Haukenes 2010, Honig 2017). My project aims to tackle this issue and examines family practices from the perspective of generational difference (Honig 2018).

Specifically in my ongoing dissertation I look at family life in the context of home-based work in Austria and examine the temporal, spatial and material aspects of everyday family and homing practices, when the family home becomes the location of both family life and gainful work. In this paper, I am going to give insight to the methodological implications of my approaches.

In order to examine the family practices and their material, situational and contextual conditions I apply a variety of qualitative methods for data gathering: interviews, auto-photography, socio-spatial network game and shadowing.

This multimethod design meets on the one hand the different perspectives and needs of the involved age groups (e.g. Clark-Ibanez 2004; Pain 2012: 308)– i.e. children and adults – and allows on the other hand to focus on the context and materiality of the practices.

The paper gives an insight on how and what materiality can be captured with the various qualitative methods as well as on the role of the ”research materiality ”during data collections (e.g. the camera) and the materiality of the empirical data itself.

In conclusion, the focus on materiality offers an alienation effect on the family home and generational orders but also opens novel perspectives to the questions of how the perception of something as child-specific is tied to a child-shaped world of things as well as of how a specific materiality has the potential to blur generational differentiations.

Keywords: Materiality, qualitative multimethod, generational difference, home, family practice