Toys, cartoons, technology and everyday material culture

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The recent literatures in childhood studies and its cognate discipline have put particular emphasis on materiality in the shaping of children’s everyday life in juxtaposition with constructionist, linguistic and embodied approaches. Nieuwenhuys (2011) analyse the cultural politics of teddy bear in her editorial on ‘can the teddy bear talk?’ and the role it occupies in varied social practices and discourses across geo-political spectrum. Similarly, Murris (2016) encourage us to think of ’post-humanism’ or ‘relational materialism’ as the possibility to attribute agency to non-humans and understand the intra-action relationship between various forces that construct everyday childhood.

Against this backdrop, by examining the everyday ‘material culture’ of children in one of the south Indian cities in India, this paper aims to expand our understanding on the relationship between children and public life in everyday life. Our analysis reports on findings from ERC funded Connectors Study, a longitudinal, cross-cultural ethnography that employed multi-methods including visual, creative, task based methods, with 45 children aged 6-9 years in three cities: Athens, London and Hyderabad. The analysis draws on our multimodal data that was created over a period of 18-months spent hanging out, playing and doing research activities with the children in Hyderabad, India.

We seek to look at the consumption of toys, cartoons and technology as fruitful arenas for cultural interrogation and analyse how such pervasive cultural practices interact in relation to popular culture as a trope. We mainly explore the meaning making of children of their consumption of material culture but also discuss do children use popular culture as a site of reference or signifier, if so, for what, and how does it relate to their political subjectivity/agency and public life?

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