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Metaphors we experiment with in multimodal ethnography

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Abstract

In this paper, we argue for a view of analysis in multimodal ethnography as an embodied practice in which metaphors play a key role. We illustrate this claim through in-depth analysis of our own multimodal ethnographic experiences on an international study looking at the relationship between childhood and public life with children in middle childhood. Our analysis focuses on the experiences and emergent metaphors that shaped our practice during the first 18 months of fieldwork. During this time children's *play* became central in our understanding of children's communicative practices and their engagement with what moves and matters for them; play was also instructive in our own formation as multimodal ethnographers. We provide examples of the ways in which children recruited us into their play, the ways in which play taught us about what matters to children, and finally, how we took play into our own analytical practices.

Key words: multimodal ethnography, embodiment, metaphors, sense-making, visual, everyday life, childhood.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we argue for a view of analysis in multimodal ethnography as an embodied practice in which metaphors play a key role. Focusing on the first 18 months of fieldwork on a multimodal ethnography with children in middle childhood that was concerned with the relationship between childhood and public life, the paper contributes to our understanding of on the practices involved in doing multimodal research and analysing multimedia data artefacts. We argue that metaphors play a key role in getting to know our research subject (in our case, the relationship between childhood and public life), as well as communicating the embodied and emotional positionalities of researchers within their field, among their participants and amidst their data. Play was a key metaphor that we encountered in our own fieldwork and we argue that this playfulness also insinuated itself into our analytical strategies and the ways in which we subsequently approached our data archive, an approach which we often referred to amongst ourselves as ‘experimental’. While using a number of established research methods, what characterised our practice is the willingness to remix plans, methods and sense-making, and to respond creatively to the field and our data. In this paper, we describe this playful, experimental stance in relation to our fieldwork, its origins and consequences. As such and to paraphrase Gadamer, our real concern in this paper, is not what we do or ought to do when carrying out research, ‘but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing’ (Gadamer, 1975, p. 333).

Our arguments build on our methodological experiences as researchers on the ERC funded Connectors Study, a cross-national and multimodal ethnographic study that explores the relationship between childhood and public life, and if/how an orientation towards social action emerges in childhood. The study follows forty-five children and their families in three cities (Athens, Hyderabad, London) over a three-year period (2014-2017). The *relationship* between

childhood and public life is approached in broadly phenomenological terms and we draw on ethnography and social theory rooted in this philosophical tradition to think about experiences of human agency, relating, belonging and everyday life in childhood (Ahmed, 2006; de Certeau, 1984; de Certeau et al, 1996; Seremetakis, 1994; Stoller, 1997; Jackson, 2005). Such approaches raise questions about interlocutors', and researchers' relationships of care and concern to the world (Sayer, 2010), as well as what *moves* and *matters* (Lutz, 2017) for children as they engage with the world beyond themselves. The study draws on a heterogeneous sample in each city aiming to engage with a plurality of experiences that cut across sociological categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and economic situation, as well as capturing different family arrangements, political orientations, and geographical areas of each city. The children who took part in the study were aged between five and a half and eight in 2014 when fieldwork commenced. Most of the research took place in children's homes or in the areas surrounding their homes, occasionally we met children in other places such as their schools or different parts of the cities.

The paper reviews the multimodal ethnographic literature paying particular attention to advice and/or practices of sense-making and especially the bringing together, *making connections*, between different modes and media. Reference to the role of metaphors in analysis is notably absent in the existing literature yet researchers have used metaphor to make sense of their (multimodal) ethnographies and we provide some examples of this before focusing on our analysis of our own fieldwork experiences. We conclude the paper with a discussion on implications for practices of sense making and knowledge creation in multimodal ethnography.

2. Multimodal ethnographic orientations in the literature

Multimodal ethnography, and the analysis of multimedia data artefacts, made an appearance as a named research practice in the social sciences in the mid 2000s with a publication by Bella Dicks and colleagues (2006), 'Multimodal ethnography'. Possibly on account of the article's subject-matter (children's experiences of a science exhibition) children, young people and education are focal topics in research carried out since this publication that describes itself as 'multimodal ethnography' (Hackett, Pahl, and Pool, 2017; Domingo, 2014; Falchi, Axelrod, and Genishi, 2014; Dicks, 2013a, 2013b; Gallagher, Wessels and Ntelioglou, 2013; Flewitt, 2011; Hurdley and Dicks, 2011; Clark, 2011; Pah, 2009). Multimodal ethnographic practices also emerge in research on space and identity as well as the overlap between the two (Bartos, 2013; Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiler, 2005). As a research practice, multimodal ethnography involves a range of methods from traditional participant observation, to map-making (Powell, 2010), photography (Chaffee, Lynn, Luehmann, and Henderson, 2016) and sound (Morgade, Verdesoto, and Poved, 2016).

As Kohrs (2017) has rightly argued, multimodal ethnography is an emerging field of scholarship and codes and conventions for making sense of various media and modalities are still in the making. Spaces are emerging in which established and emergent methods are already being successfully combined (e.g. biography and walking, O'Neill and Hubbert, 2010; Domingo, 2011). This process of 'making connections' between methods in fieldwork practice is at the heart of multimodal ethnography (O'Neill, 2009; Pink, 2011). The growing literature that problematises multimodal analysis, especially around the inclusion of visual data, also suggests that bringing modes and media together is especially challenging for researchers.

For example, Smith and colleagues in this journal carried out a scoping review to chart the approaches used in the social sciences for analysing visual data in multimodal projects (photographs, video and other audiovisual formats). Their review showed that conversation analysis, content analysis, (critical) discourse analysis, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and thematic analysis, as well as novel techniques and statistics are used in multimodal research for analysing visual components. These categorical approaches to analysis identified in the existing body of research (cf. Smith et al, 2016; Kohrs, 2017) rely on established social science analytical approaches. The scoping review found that just under half of the articles included omitted to mention data analysis or were elusive regarding how the study results came about. The authors surmise ‘some researchers are creating their own unique ‘ad hoc’ solutions for data analysis’ and found limited methodological consistency across articles. Such findings of the practice of multimodal ethnography leads Kohrs to describe this emerging field as being caught betwixt and between excitement for experimentation and criticism of lack of focus and incoherence.

We would argue that while such categorical approaches are hugely valuable (indeed they are ones we are familiar with, cf. Frost, Nolas et al, 2010), they come after more initial, informal, everyday and embodied sense-making practices of analysis have taken place. The approaches currently in use, as identified by Smith and colleagues, are also largely directed towards textual analysis of data that has already gone through several sense-making processes, if we consider that the ethnographer engages in such processes from the moment she enters the field if not before. As such, these categorical approaches are not necessarily helpful for thinking about data in a more embodied and sensory manner, as called for by the combination of words and images (and sound) in multimodal ethnography.

Here we are drawing on a particular understanding of ethnographic practice that is informed by phenomenological and existential traditions of philosophy (Csordas 1990; Ingold 2000; Jackson 2005; Stoller 1997). Ethnography, the study and practice of spending time and sharing space with a peoples or communities of relevance, strives to achieve intimate familiarity with a subject matter achieved through detailed descriptions of everyday life (Herzfeld, 1997). Ethnographic methods are concerned with pluralistic forms of everyday communication that are conscious, reflective and embodied, as well as more tacit and subconscious. Recently, it has been argued that thinking about ethnography in ‘participant observation’ terms alone deprives the approach of depth and restricts the possible phenomena and experiences that can be researched (Feldman, 2011). As such, in the long quest to understand, or make sense as we prefer to say, of our different fields of study, sensory and non-representational concepts such as atmospheres (Stewart, 2007) and minor gestures (Manning, 2016) have come to the fore as a way of appreciating and communicating the spaces between and meeting places of affective, social, cultural, and embodied experiences that are both local and global (e.g. Stephens, Hughes, Schofield and Sumartojo, 2017).

As ethnographers, we record what we see, hear, and feel and recount these multisensory experiences through image, text and sound in an attempt to capture some of the depth and multidimensionality of our interlocutors’ lives. Such processes are necessarily embodied, both at the time in the field and later as we sit at our desks. As Stodulka notes: ‘The exclusion of the field researchers’ bodies, affects and senses for the sake of their radical cognitivization’ is ‘epistemologically suspicious’ (2017, p 43). Using a series of data artefacts, collected for the purposes of the research as well as ones that are stumbled upon, ethnographers deploy their imagination to make connections between their topic of interest, their data, and other social, cultural, economic and political happenings. These (multi)sensory experiences, as Sarah Pink

reminds us, are essential to understanding aspects of society and culture (Pink, 2011, p. 262).

Insights emerge through these processes of connection, through what Miller (2017) calls ‘holistic contextualisation’ and a careful navigation of similarity and difference between the researcher(s) and their interlocutors (Stoller, 2014). In this sense, sense-making in the field and after is a multi-sensory practice that is at once an intellectual and visceral process. Such sense-making implies various forms of entanglement: of body and mind, field and desk, past and present, to name a few of these enmeshments.

A good deal of the discussion in multimodal ethnography has separated data collection from analysis - approaches like Sarah Pink’s and Maggie O’Neill’s, who align with our own and with the broader project of sensory anthropology and cultural studies, are exceptions here. In separating the field from the desk, the mind from the body, the present from the past, researchers’ analytical methods and importantly, their underlying sense-making practices are obscured by more technical categorical approaches to analysis. Binaries are rarely helpful in making sense of lived experience and everyday life, and empiricism continues to dominate our approach to data collection and analysis resulting in the foregrounding of analysis of content (Pink, 2015) and analyses and interpretations that remain at the ‘observable surface’ (Pink, 2011, p. 269).

Instead, as well as insisting on analysis as an embodied sense-making practice, our own research focuses on the practice of making connections, a process that is aligned with dialogical and gestalt approaches to understanding in the Bhaktinian sense (Domingo, 2011), as well as being a process that requires playful experimentation. Such a practice aims to ‘re-embody’ the disembodied and distanced ‘analyst’, the product of more categorical approaches to data analysis, and would advocate for the different dimensions of analysis to remain entangled. We know from our own experiences, as well as that of colleagues we talk with and the students we teach, that it is these embodied aspects of analysis and of making connections that poses the greatest

challenges, often eluding codification and lacking standardisation for good reason: such processes of sense-making are largely idiosyncratic and personal. Pink (2011; 2015) has gone a long way to articulate possible approaches to the practice of multimodal ethnography. It is in this spirit of opening private practice up for public discussion, that we want to venture a few reflections on the practices of *multimodal* research, and the bringing together of *multimedia* data artefacts into a research narrative.

We locate ourselves within a sensory paradigm (Pink, 2015) which evokes the corporeality of practising ‘analysis’, and of making sense of data. Accordingly, multimodal ‘analysis’ is also grounded in the senses and these senses need to be reflexively engaged with for the purpose of analysis in order to move from the researchers’ reflexes to their conscious awareness and from there, to be employed in the invention of knowledge. Metaphors, we argue, play a key role in this process as carriers of knowledge (de Certeau, 1984).

3. The role of metaphors in analysis

Metaphors, a way of understanding language and experience, are pervasive in everyday life structuring both thought, action and relationships to others (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) helping us to achieve reciprocity between inner and outer worlds (Ricoeur, 1975). Metaphors are also fundamental to research practice, with ‘the systematic language of science [...] steeped in metaphor’ (Jackson, 2012a, p. 124). ‘Good’ metaphors tend to be generative and work towards supporting understanding and knowledge production. Examples of this from within our own substantive area of knowledge include Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) much loved ‘ladder of participation’, popularised in the children’s participation literature by Roger Hart (1992; though see Hart 2008 for the limits of a good metaphor). In particular, metaphors are useful in new areas

of knowledge, such as multimodal ethnography, as they provide a language with which to describe emergent practices.

A selective, close reading of ethnographic texts in the sensory tradition suggests that, while metaphor is not formalised in analysis, it nevertheless plays a role in shaping researchers' understanding of their data. For example, ethnographers O'Dell and William (2011) describe ethnography as 'a compositional practice'. *Composing* is an artistic practice that makes reference to text, image and sound, to rhythm and rhyme, to invention and imagination. Composition also suggests mixing things up, configuring and re-configuring part of a whole, the substance of which is often unknown until the composition is completed. Composing, so described, requires the ability to stay with the uncertainty and openness of such processes, and to engage with the unknown. Other ethnographers describe their sensemaking practices as being more of a case of *meandering*. Ingold (2010) drawing on the writing of Rebecca Solnit (2001) describes ethnography as a meandering across the terrain of the imagination, of 'mind-walking' one's data. This is a process that may well involve periods of 'getting stuck' (Katz, 2004, p.270), moving in fits and starts, taking one's time, changing direction, engaging with playful deviations, and moving on once again. Drawing on her own experience Katz (ibid) suggests that all these moments bring a different perspective to bear on a project and ought to be equally valued. Similarly, Sarah Pink (2015) invokes a metaphor of *time-travel*, referring to analysis as a corporeal activity of 're-inserting' oneself in the field through memory and imagination. In this process, different materials evoke the processes which produced them (cf. Banks, 2000), allowing the researcher 'to imagine and feel [their] way back into the research encounter'. While Pink (2015) stresses that analysis is happening from the moment materials are created, and often co-created, the sort of analysis described here is one that takes place after fieldwork. As such, what Pink is suggesting is a form of time travel to the past, the times and places of fieldwork in order

to live anew the conversations, interactions, gestures and movements, both one's own and those of others.

Reflecting specifically on the challenge identified in the literature review that faces multimodal ethnographers, of integrating visual data into analysis, we might consider the metaphors that emerge from the work of art and cultural historian and philosopher, Susan Buck-Morss (2008), as she reflects on working with images during the writing of her historical and intellectual biography of Benjamin's *Arcade Project*. She talks about the 140 images, of different visual genres, that appear in her book *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*. In an interview reflecting on her practice, Buck-Morss talks about 'plunder[ing] visual culture for a certain theoretical use,' the purpose of which, she goes on to describe, is the production of 'a cognitive experience in readers, who can see the theoretical point in a certain way', be surprised and illuminated; in this process affect, as much as reason, is mobilized (Smith, 2008, p.50). In this sense, Buck-Morss's metaphor invokes a practice of analysis as theft in the service of creating a sensory experience for the reader.

The metaphors outlined above are not exhaustive and are not intended as a template for future research. They demonstrate instead the inevitability of metaphor in shaping analytical practices, and the embodied aspects of analysis. Furthermore, if not a template, what we suggest instead is that each research project, or set of research encounters, may produce new or different metaphors for understanding fieldwork and analysis that resonate with the research topic and with the interlocutors and artefacts with which we engage. What is important is that role of metaphor is made more transparent in the research process, and we turn to this endeavour next engaging with our fieldnotes and visual data to trace the emergent metaphor for analysis in our own fieldwork and research practice.

4. Metaphorical recruitments into children's play

In our research, play emerged as an orienting metaphor. Play for us did similar work as composing, meandering, time travel and plundering have done for other scholars (see previous section). Play may seem an obvious place to arrive at when carrying out research with children given that children are often essentialised as playing/playful beings in popular and research imagination. But our substantive area of focus was not children's play, nor were we thinking about our methodology in playful ways at the beginning of fieldwork. We also did not enter the field as, what Alison Clarke (2005) calls, 'architects': 'a creator of space and opportunities where multiple listening can take place' or an intermediary relaying different perspectives between different professional groups working with children. We engaged in children's lives as ethnographers making time to hang out with them and to apprentice ourselves to their lives as much as possible in an urban setting with busy child and family schedules. What we had not anticipated was the extent to which our hanging out would be shaped and taken over by children's play and the effect that would have on us methodologically and epistemologically.

The Connectors Study methodology embraces pluralistic forms of everyday communication, both planned and emergent. For example, our practices of data collection have involved time hanging out with children and their families, taking photographs, walking around children's neighbourhoods, drawing maps of significant relationships and places, and talking, as we have discussed elsewhere (Varvantakis, under review; Nolas, Aruldoss and Varvantakis, 2018; Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss, 2017; Varvantakis, Nolas and Aruldoss, under review). Some of the methods used have only recently come to the fore in social science research (e.g. walking, cf. Bates and Rhys-Taylor, 2017; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010), while others are tried and tested (e.g. photography, Ranger, 2001; Mizen, 2005).

Collectively such research practices have resulted in an archive of data that includes extensive fieldnotes, photographs, neighbourhood maps, relational maps and biographical interviews. These modes of data collection, and the data artefacts they produce, cut across texts and images, and are weaved together through an attunement to the embodied sensory experiences of their creators: children and researchers in play and dialogue with one another.

The fieldwork in the Connectors Study was organised over two time periods. An initial period of 18 months was spent making regular visits to children. During this time we made between five and seven visits to each participating child/family. These visits lasted between 2 hours to a whole day, and in London we also accompanied children to school for the day. During these visits, we introduced and tried to engage children in the aforementioned research methods. The initial 18-month period of fieldwork ended with a biographical interview. A final biographical interview was carried out after a nine month 'break' from fieldwork. All visits were documented in ethnographic fieldnotes, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, and digital versions of newspaper front pages were appended to fieldnotes to locate the writing in time and place. Over the three-year period, the team collectively undertook more than 400 documented 'encounters', as one London mother described our meetings, with children and their parents.

The accountancy discourse of the previous paragraph leaves out the quality of what 'hanging out' and carrying out multimodal ethnography with five to eight-year-olds was actually like. During the initial 18-months a lot of time was spent, almost an entire 18 months, playing with children as part of our 'participant observation'. Our fieldnotes are pepper with invitations, incantations, threats and promises related to play: 'can we play now?', 'okay, but can we play afterwards?', 'let's do this first, and then we'll play'. Playing was not part of any original research plan. It is rarely spoken about in formal accounts of data collection with children, and

yet is widely practised. It was not until much later in the fieldwork that we realised that play was an *epistemology* that our young interlocutors brought to the study (see Nolas and Varvantakis, under review). Being attentive to play sensitised us to the ways in which children manipulated our methodologies and in so doing both disrupted and created new orders in their everyday lives and ours. To substantiate these claims we engage with one emblematic research encounter with Manos in Athens. The example draws on fieldnotes, discussions and a video made by Manos. The incident that we describe was partly prompted and fully documented by the research camera that we gave Manos as part of our visual methodology.

Children's agency, guerrilla videos and family dynamics

Manos is a 7-year-old boy attending the second grade of primary school. He lives in a predominantly working class area of Athens at the time of the research, with his brother, four years old, his mother, Vaso, an educator, and his father Nikos, a clerk in the private sector. Both parents often work long hours and as family finances are tight rely on Stavroula, Niko's mother and the boys' paternal grandmother, to take care of the children; Stavroula spends a considerable amount of time in the family home and it was on one such occasion that the episode that follows takes place.

Stavroula was at Manos' home one afternoon after school, playing with the children until their mother got back from work. When Vaso returned, she took the opportunity to take a shower while Stavroula was still there and could keep an eye on the children. On an earlier visit, Vaso told Christos that she has a complicated relationship with her mother-in-law in particular with regards to matters pertaining to parenting and bringing up the boys. Stavroula considers Vaso's parenting practices to be (too) relaxed resulting in what she considers a spoiling of the two boys. Vaso finds these regular criticisms infuriating especially given that as educator she has additional

insight on children's development that Stavroula does not. At the same time, aware of her mother-in-law's deeply conservative views, she remains respectful of Stavroula at all times, addressing her in the formal plural (*eseis*) while trying to forge a family life that is in tune with her own values and desires, beyond Stavroula's 'radar', as she puts it.

So, while Vaso was showering, Manos decided to film a wild action film of his brother being a monster, roaming wildly around the living room. And, roam wildly they did! His brother jumps around sofas while Manos follows him and provokes him with the camera, in a guerrilla-style filming style (not an uncommon photographic/filming practice in our sample). All along Manos knows that his grandmother could do little to stop them, while his mother, would definitely not be running out of the bathroom to intervene.

In the eight-minute-long video, Vaso who is aware of the havoc that is going on in the living room, can be heard shouting at the children repeatedly 'Find something to play!' By that, of course, Vaso meant something more peaceful, something less disruptive, something less embarrassing for her. At the same time, as Vaso recounted later, she was painfully aware that the boys had, of course, already found something to play, her disapproval of their wild game prompted instead by Stavroula's presence. Later while reviewing the video, Christos asked Manos about his mother, and Manos commented that since she was having a shower, she couldn't do much, but yell at them.

[insert images Manos 1, Manos 2, Manos 3 here]

Manos' and his brother's running around, and its documentation, really plays into these family dynamics leaving the mother literally and metaphorically exposed, or potentially exposed to her mother-in-law; metaphorically because of the judgement Stavroula will have about her

parenting as Manos runs wild with the camera and literally because she can't get out of the shower naked/wrapped in a towel and present herself like that in front of her mother-in-law given their relationship. Manos knew however that as soon as his mother was dressed, she would come into the living room and the game would be over. This is why he was trying to do as much as he could in the 'free' time, beyond his mother's gaze.

Of course, from our side as researchers, it was not our intention that the cameras would be used in this way. The incident demonstrates the ways in which children (and Manos was not the only one in our sample to do this) manipulated our methodologies and in so doing disrupted and created new orders in their everyday lives. Manos' play, and impromptu use of the research method, created a space and performance of play that isn't the 'peaceful and constructive' play that adults think of (and generally prefer) - or indeed what researchers think of when they think of play as a developmental, educational, or research process and tool. Furthermore, multimodality is important here in creating and documenting the incident. Manos' and his brother's play is prompted by the camera both as inspiration for the play and a record of it. Yet, thinking about this and other similar incidents in which our multimodal methodology was upended, enabled us to think of children's play as something other than developmental and educational, as both a methodology and an epistemology for thinking about around our research topic.

Play as methodology and epistemology

As an epistemology, play taught us how we might trace the dynamics and practices of the relationship between childhood and public life, what moved and mattered to children, and how we, as embodied researchers, might further access such dynamics and come to understand them. For instance, and sticking with Manos, the endless Stratego (strategic board game) rounds that Christos played with him, sensitised us to his strategic thinking, how he estimates his parents'

reactions to things he wanted to do but knew he was not allowed to, and accordingly how he decided whether the pleasure he'll derive from these activities outweighed the punishment he might receive (Varvantakis, 2017).

A more extended example from London serves to illustrate the point further. For the most part of the fieldwork, Melissa was in chronic pain. She had a slipped disc which saw her intimately acquainted with sciatic pain for almost three years. She experienced sciatic pain as a horrible, nauseating sensation that made her sensitive to any abrupt movement or jolt, unable to sit for too long, sensitive to the impact of running, jumping, and dancing and all those movements that able-bodied children probably don't think twice about. Her fieldnotes are sprinkled with explanations about why she couldn't chase anyone around the playground, join on the trampoline, throw the Frisbee, help someone off the monkey bars, or sit for too long.

[insert picture of Andrew on trampoline here]

Her own impaired mobility made her very conscious of just how mobile smaller bodies can be and how much movement is involved in the doing of childhood. It also made her aware of children's practices of expressing care and concern for others and the world around them. On more than one occasion children, boys and girls, asked her how her leg was (she had explained sciatica as a pain in her leg, which largely it was). She was surprised when questions about her well-being arose from the children. It wasn't something she ever imagined anyone would remember or care about, chronic pain being a difficult thing to communicate and an even harder thing to empathise with, often leading to invisibility (Wasson, 2018).

Most memorably during one of her visits to a school, during the morning break, Eleanor (one of the study participants) and her friends were in the playground organising themselves for a

game which Melissa was invited to join. The proposal was that they play ‘pac-man’ and the ‘splat game’. The first game involved running along the court lines (for tennis, basketball and football) and chasing each other. Melissa couldn’t play, because running was too painful. Eleanor and her friends asked her why she wasn’t playing and Melissa explained. Without any hesitation or negotiation, it was unanimously decided by the girls that they would change their game to enable Melissa to join in. The game turned to ‘splat’ which is more static and only requires crouching when the leader shouts ‘splat’ at you. The girls, including the researcher, continued to play this until the end of the break.

Play as epistemology was further instructive in revealing children’s practices of care and concern towards the non-human world, an aspect of children’s everyday lives which other methodologies on our study revealed to be a strong point of connection between childhood and public life (Nolas, Varvantakis, Aruldoss and Prater, 2017). For example, Fotini, another 7-year-old girl living in Athens with her mother, loves animals. She talks about animals a lot, and she thinks that, when she grows up, she will be a combination of a vet, an animal-researcher and an activist for animals. In fact, on more than one occasion she has repeated to Christos how she thinks animals are more important than humans - including her parents. A particular game she played on several occasions when Christos was ‘visiting was the vet’.

[insert image of big stuffy here]

She would set up her room as the inside of a small veterinary surgery - with a waiting room included, and several of her toy-pets, some of which were clothes and wearing make-up, they would be her patients. She originally invited Christos to join her in her vet clinic in his professional capacity - as a researcher, a scientist as she said, and as future colleague. She talked

him through the issues and problems of each of her patients, while talking with them, asking them to have a bit of patience as we were doing something very important, something scientific. She apologised for one teddy bear that had fallen asleep and she told Christos that that's basically because he has been waiting for ages for his turn. Fotini then got to work, explaining that she would treat the animals, and asking Christos for his assistance with various things she needed. Christos and Fotini have played this game repeatedly during the fieldwork, and it was through this game and the discussions with Fotini and with the toy pets, that Christos started realising how the toy pets had personalities and they had agency, and how Fotini was addressing them in terms which blurred any clear-cut distinctions between animate and inanimate as well as between animals and humans.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to articulate and share with the reader the ways in which fieldwork and research analysis are embodied practices, and to highlight the role of metaphors in shaping those practices, paying particular attention to the metaphor of play which emerged in our own fieldwork with children. In particular, and through reflecting on the practices and meanings of children's play in a study about the relationship between childhood and public life, we have attempted to show the ways in which children's play insinuated itself into our analytical thinking and to highlight what we learnt from their play. As play is stereotypically closely identified with childhood, its analytical potential is often overlooked. In research, play is usually studied in order to assess children's skills, abilities and development and/or to intentionally designing playful research settings in order to engage children (Campo, Baldassarre and Lee, 2018; Clarke 2005; Koller and San Juan 2015). Our experience was the inverse as we found ourselves recruited by

children into their play and through that recruitment more closely attuned and attentive to children's forms of communication, their cultural worlds and their cares and concerns (Nolas et al, 2018, see also Rosen 2015).

As such, in this article, we have argued that children's play enabled us to think more explicitly about the ways in which, in multimodal ethnography, we might start to make connections between our topic of interest and our data, as well as between data. Thinking of children's play epistemologically jolted us out of what might be described as methodological complacency and forced us to use our imaginations, as we too started to jump around, guerilla style across our data archive following the thread of a potential story. As Christos has demonstrated elsewhere in his analysis of children's photographic practices (Varvantakis, under review), it is not sufficient to remain within one category of data (e.g. only interviews or only texts). Instead, in multimodal ethnography, what is termed analysis, emerges through making connections between different modes and media, and of weaving stories out of those synaptic connections.

The argument we make here is not about doing away with systematic analysis, such as is offered by some of the more categorical approaches found in the literature and discussed earlier. Instead, we argue that playfulness and experimentation, which we learnt from the children in our study, constitute an initial step before the 'disciplining of method' (Sassen, 2014). When we started the Connectors Study we started with an open field, an aim to create theory from the bottom-up on children's encounters, experiences and, on occasions engagement with public life. Honouring such 'bottom-up'-ness is difficult and the temptation to impose frameworks is always there (indeed in an early advisory group meeting, a framework analysis was proposed to us). Play was the specific metaphor that emerge from our fieldwork with the children and which ended up guiding our analytical practices.

We want to close by suggesting that in order for metaphors to be recognised in different research contexts and for us to be attentive to our sense-making as being underpinned by metaphor, the ways we think about analytic practice needs to change. All of the metaphors we reviewed (and undoubtedly there are many more metaphors-in-use out there) point to a form of creativity and invention that ‘folds’ together (Marks, 2002) categories that are typically separated: time and place, self and other, past and present, public and private, modes and media. Through a process of making connections, of entangling and enmeshing, new knowledge is created. Such practices are necessarily experimental and playful, and we would argue take place at the margins, beyond the formal and the technical, and a sensitivity to the embodiment of what we call analysis is needed in order for these practices to be recognised. Dicks and colleagues’ (2006) original text on multimodal ethnography already hinted towards a need for phenomenological approaches to understanding data gathered. They wrote about the need to ‘pay attention’, to be ‘alerted’ and to ‘attend’ to the differences that different modes and media afford. Sensory anthropology, as represented largely by the work of Sarah Pink, has provided a rich theoretical tradition to flesh out practices of multimedia creation and analysis. In this paper, we provided a close reading of metaphors some researchers live by, as well as exploring those that we encountered in our own fieldwork. We have argued for metaphor as an entry point into multimodal analysis which can be understood as experimental and inventive arguing that these playful practices provides us with a different language for thinking about our own sense-making in multimodal ethnography.

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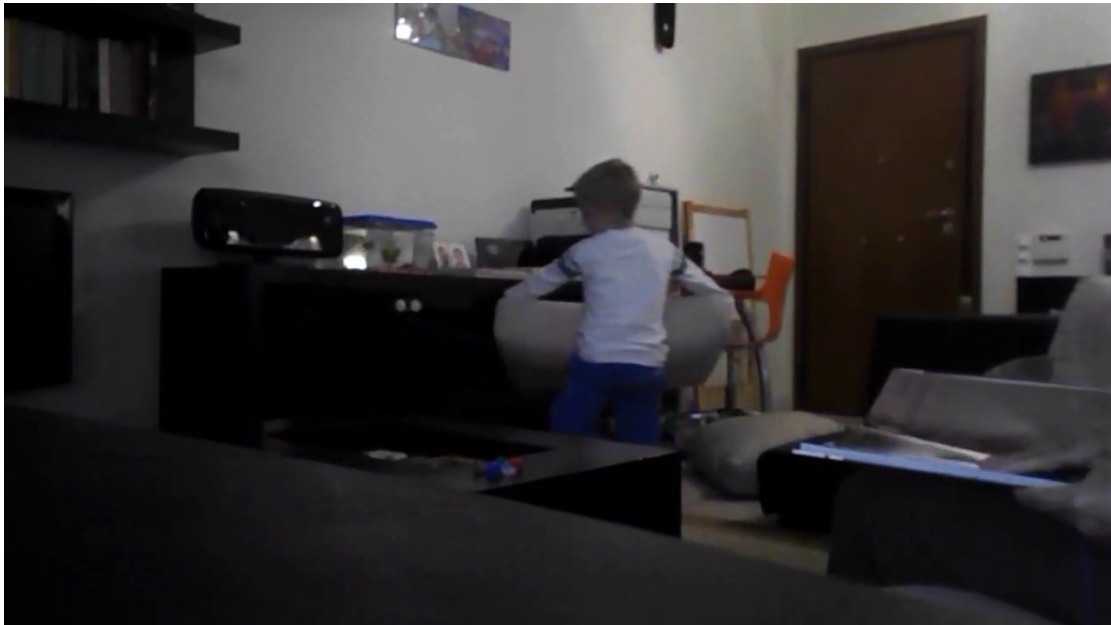
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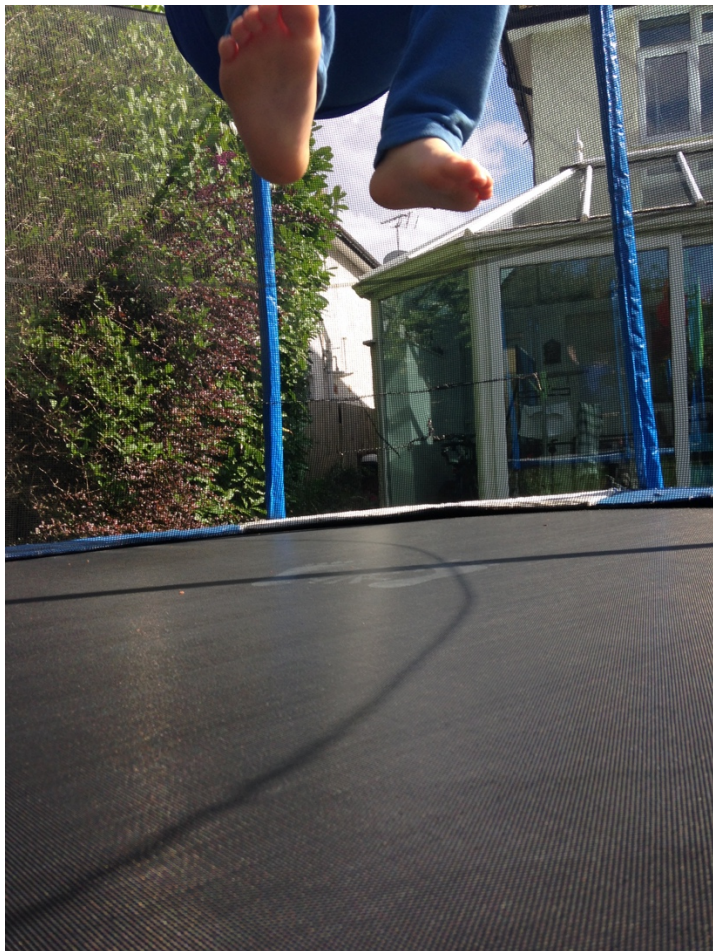
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[images from page 15, Manos 1, Manos 2, Manos 3]





[Images from page 17 of Andrew on trampoline]



[Images from page 18 of Fotini's vet game]

