

“That’s you!” Early childhood goes digital

An invitation into a camera ethnographic laboratory of looking
Press release on the exhibition and exhibits



Exhibition produced by the research project “Early Childhood and Smartphone” (Jutta Wiesemann) within the Collaborative Research Centre “Media of Cooperation” (University of Siegen). Originally shown from 27.09.2018 until 06.01.2019 at the Siegerlandmuseum, Siegen.

Digitalised early childhood

Smartphones and tablets are now well established within everyday family life, and they shape children's learning processes and socialisation. Often, these transformations are hastily denounced as 'digital dangers' by popular media and societal commentators. By contrast, the research project "Early Childhood and Smartphone" (principal investigator: Jutta Wiesemann) takes an observational ethnographic approach to investigate the media practices of 0 – 6-year-old children in a longitudinal study.

Camera ethnography

The video installations in this exhibition are the result of camera ethnographic research undertaken for the research project by Bina E. Mohn, Pip Hare, and Astrid Vogelpohl. We are immensely grateful to the parents and children of our 14 participating families, who have made this project possible by inviting us into their living rooms and their lives, agreeing to the publication of our films, and actively contributing to our research. Camera ethnography is a visual research methodology developed by Mohn that uses filmic techniques to investigate everyday worlds. We use the camera to explore questions such as: How are 0 – 6-year-old children involved in digital media practices? How do they learn to see themselves and to position themselves in relation to others? How do family members overcome physical space to make themselves present and absent? How do children discover and experience things and media? The analytical practices used in camera ethnographic research include not only the careful selection of camera perspectives when filming, but also the cutting, sorting, rearranging, and montage of film fragments to create research films, video installations, exhibitions, and other (audio-)visual productions.

Take part!

As products of our research, the installations in this exhibition show how digital media practices in early childhood shape children's development of self- and family-identity, relations to others, and to the world around them. The audience is invited to become researchers themselves as they explore the exhibition and discover new and nuanced ways of looking and observing as they move about or pause, become absorbed, or allow their gaze to drift among the screens, monitors, and tablet stations. We eagerly await responses from further visitors to this exhibition, which is ready to be installed in other spaces, creating an ideal opportunity to bring research and public debate together.



The exhibits

Paper Smartphone Performance

Video loop on one monitor (6:00 Min.)

Bina E. Mohn (2017)

Three siblings on a sofa, each absorbed by what they are doing in different ways. They appear to be at once more or less there or not there for one another. Fatima and Ali, the two older children, hold smartphones; younger Bisan has a paper envelope. Media and materials, poses and gestures are up for comparison. Watching this miniature puts the viewer in the position of an observing ethnographer: taking the time to let events follow their course; observing with sustained interest while expecting to discover something. As it unfolds, the scene develops a surprisingly compelling momentum of its own: a “Paper Smartphone Performance”.

Face to Face – Face to Screen

Three-channel video installation projected onto three screens (12:54 Min.)

Astrid Vogelpohl, Pip Hare, and Bina E. Mohn (2018)

Three screens exhibit parallel arrangements of audio-visual film fragments: a choreography of dense miniatures in which small children in families with smartphones and digital devices meet ethnographers with cameras. The cameras have encapsulated momentary practices of looking and of relating to someone and something in the everyday world of digitalised childhood. The precisely synchronised juxtaposition in time and space of these camera ethnographic fragments creates an analytically structured perceptual space in which the audience is invited to perceive, distinguish, compare, contrast, and consider potential relationships among the extraordinary diversity of young children’s everyday media practices. As they look, move, and shift their perspectives, viewers research the audio-visual material themselves.

All these Things

Two-channel video installation with asynchronous loops on two monitors (10:03 min. & 6:05 min.)

Pip Hare, Bina E. Mohn, and Astrid Vogelpohl (2018). Films: Pip Hare.

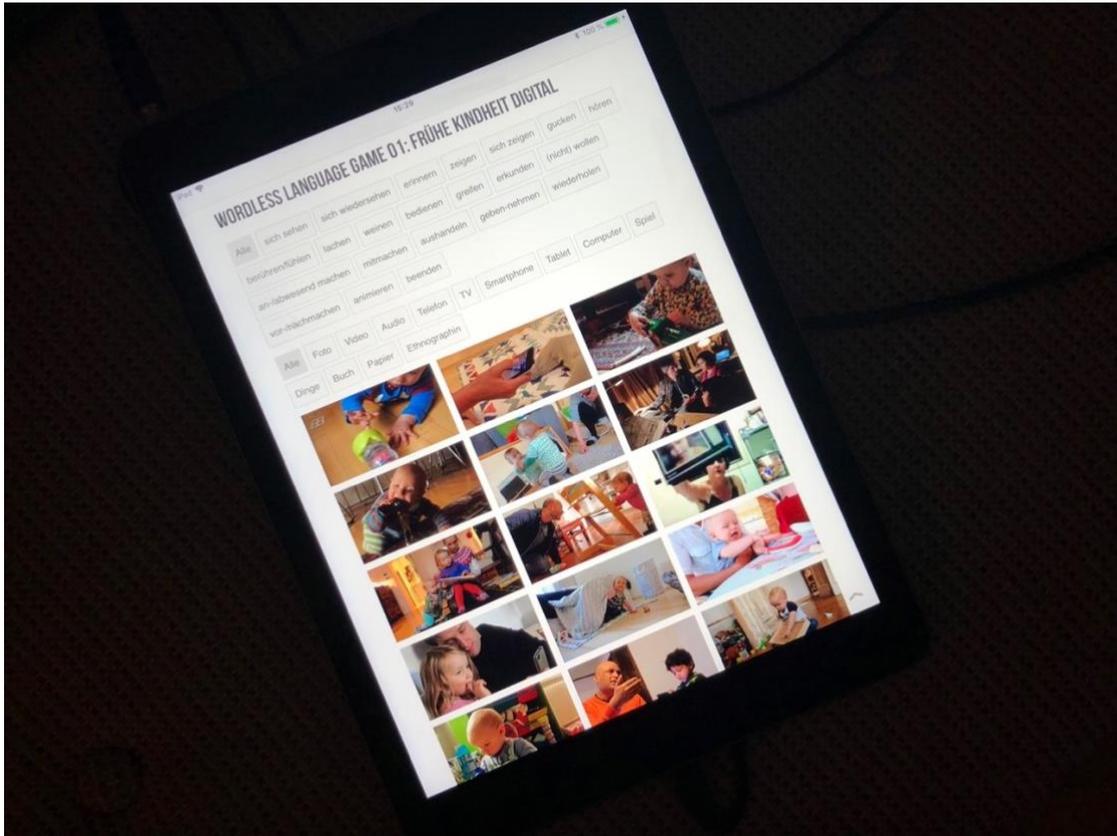
Two parallel monitors, two children, multiple worlds. The films in this installation run in asymmetrical loops, creating ever changing juxtapositions. The children navigate physical and digital spaces, moving and probing, touching and tasting, interacting and operating. Each child is the centre of the camera’s attention in its own film. Viewers are invited to immerse themselves in each child’s worlds, yet constantly drawn out again by what is happening alongside. Both films were made by Pip Hare, who shot them in Northeast India in 2017.

Wordless Language Game 01: Early Childhood goes Digital

Interactive video installation on tablets

Bina E. Mohn, Pip Hare, and Astrid Vogelpohl (2018)

The tablets offer exhibition visitors an array of 178 film fragments, 22 verbs (practices), and 13 nouns (media) to choose from in order to create individual ensembles of films for further investigation. Viewers are thus invited to sort and observe; compare, contrast, and interrelate; identify, describe, and discuss. Many of the observational fragments reveal wordless activities, which make it particularly challenging to find words to define and describe them. Our title “Wordless Language Game” references Wittgenstein’s “Language Games”. The aim of the game is to discover what differentiates the filmed practices from one another, as well as what they have in common. The “Wordless Language Game” is a research tool for a researching audience that is invited to explore the media practices of early childhood and the challenge of perceiving and describing them.



Photos from the exhibition by Pip Hare (2018)

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Further information on camera ethnography: <http://www.cameraethnography.com>