This is the accepted version of a paper presented at 25th Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft (DGfE): „Spaces for Education. Spaces of Education“, Kassel, 13-16 March, 2016.

Citation for the original published paper:

On the Field of Tension of Media-Related Visual Cultures and the Demands of School: Empowering Teenage Pupils (in Sweden), and the Seeing Glasses as a Development of Camera Ethnography.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

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On the Field of Tension of Media-Related Visual Cultures and the Demands of School—Empowering Teenage Pupils (in Sweden), and the Seeing Glasses as a Development of Camera Ethnography

Digital media and adolescents is an emotive issue of pedagogy and Youth Studies. However, there is a lack of empirical studies on the impacts of imaginaries of pupils respectively the way how they visualize being in a technology enhanced classroom and research on the ethical dilemma connected to it (cp. Livingstone 2009). We investigate such impacts in terms of the effects of gazes, creating pedagogically desirable or undesirable relations.

The ideal of a childhood and youth free from the influences of digital media is still alive, though it is deeply thwarted by reality, as adolescents are surrounded by media right from the birth and they extensively use it in many different ways. (Cp. http://www.soi2014.se/) As a rather short-circuited consequence they are widely regarded as “competent” users of, and even as pioneers in using digital media. (Cp. Carlsson 2010, Livingstone & Bovill 2001, et al.) This “competence” is extensively used in school by using PCs as a source of information and for ICT-enhanced learning (evaluation of the Swedish campaign “one PC per pupil” see: Fleischer 2013).

At the same time, the fast technological development of new digital means and applications leads to a successively reduced control of the contacts of the kids with digital media. There is thus a rather fragile pedagogical frame of the indication of emancipative potentials of digital media. (Cp. Ofcom 2012) This is a problem as there is some evidence that the inventiveness and creativity of the use of digital media by young people is rather restricted; we meet a strong merchandised way of consuming media applications (Livingstone 2009). Furthermore, adolescents easily expose or unmask a person or themselves e.g. in terms of cyberbullying. Beside the competent, routinized and creative use of digital media, there is thus a certain amount of misuse or uncontrolled use of it.

In cooperation with the project “Global Perspectives on Learning and Development with Digital Video Editing Media” (see: digitmed.wordpress.com), our qualitative empirical analyses focus the course and interchange of the gazes of pupils in school creating “visual cultures”, in which social in- and exclusions take place and narratives and learning unfold. These “visual cultures” get a digital dimension by being edited as a film. Theoretically, we stick to the growing interest for the “gaze” in digital contexts (Vlieghe 2011, Friesen et al. 2009 et al.) translating the consciously as well as unconsciously experienced field of tension real “gazes” generate (cp. Sartre 2003, Lacan 1981, Foucault 1999) to virtual contexts.

In her “camera-ethnographic” approach Mohn (2006) examines possible interactional patterns, interdependencies and entanglements etc. of the gazes within video-graphical social research.

Methods and Aims

The Seeing Glasses are spectacles with an inbuilt digital, video and audio recording camera. It is a new way of collecting data within Youth Studies about the contexts on which the wearers of the glasses set their gazes, as well as about reciprocating gazes. During one week pupils of a 9th grade wear the Seeing Glasses during the school lessons (in Sweden). Then, the pupils
edit the film material in order to create films about `our life at school`. A stationary camera and participating observations document the classroom context.

In our studies we will analyze the course of attention of the youngsters, captured by the Seeing Glasses and investigate their visualizations of eye contacts in editing the film material, recorded by the stationery camera and by participating observation in terms of the mis-én-scenes, and on the educational work connected to it. By doing this, the analytical tools of Camera Ethnography will be used, put at stake and further developed.