Culture by babies: Imagining everyday material culture through babies' engagements with socks

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Abstract

This article takes its point of departure in babies' engagements with socks and seeks to explore (1) how material culture matters in babies' everyday lives and (2) how we can understand material culture through attending to babies' own practices, that is, babies' culture. The ongoingness, sensoriality and movement of material culture are highlighted, and the article concludes that re-thinking material culture through babies' engagements with socks means shifting the focus away from objects' established meaning and towards the materials of those objects.

Keywords

Babies, babies' culture, material culture, movement, sensoriality

Introduction

When I began my fieldwork in the homes of babies and their families, I never imagined that I would write an article about socks. What immediately caught my interest while doing fieldwork was not socks, but rather how the babies were engaging with objects like iPads or books. It took many hours of viewing and thinking about the video recordings for me to even notice how often socks showed up in the babies' everyday lives. In this article, I am focusing on babies' engagements with socks as an example of how we can understand babies' culture because it raises questions both about babies' own relations to material culture and about how we understand material culture in relation to babies.

The so-called baby culture is booming in western societies (Molin, 2010) and, at least in larger cities in Sweden, you can take your baby to organised cultural activities like

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rhyming, storytelling, theatre, guided museum walks, finger painting, circus workshops, dancing, rhythmic or even something as specific as baby-salsa-rhythmics.¹ The babies in my study also had access to a variety of toys and books that were especially designed for younger children. In other words, there is no doubt that there is an interest in creating culture *for* babies (i.e. baby culture) in our society. In this article however, I want to shift the focus onto culture *by* babies (i.e. babies' culture) by exploring how the babies themselves engage with material objects, whether or not these objects are understood by adults as baby culture.

A majority of the babies in my study, at some point during the time I spent with them, were engaging with socks, and some of them did so during several different visits. Socks seem to matter *in some ways* and possibly *in multiple ways* to babies. While I am not arguing that the socks per se are going unnoticed by parents and others, I want to show in this article how babies' engagements with socks are going on within, outside of and beyond parents' interest and engagements with them. In this article, I want to explore how we can understand material culture through noticing, acknowledging and account for babies' own, multiple, ways of engaging with socks. More specifically, how does material culture matter in babies' everyday lives and how do babies and socks matter for how we think, and could re-think, material culture?

Babies within the social and cultural study of children and childhood

According to Tobias Hecht (2012), most of the research about infants is carried out by developmental psychologists, paediatricians, nutritionists and educators. While the term 'child' refers to the age span 0–18 years (Thorne, 2008), many have pointed out that very little attention has been given to the youngest of children within the social studies of childhood (Brownlie and Leith, 2011; Gottlieb, 2000, 2004; McNamee and Seymore, 2012; Thorne, 2008). While there are some examples of research concerning babies' participation and babies' rights (e.g. Alderson, 2005, 2008), the focus when discussing questions like agency, power, culture, interpretation, politics and rights has mostly been on children in the mid to late years of this range and rarely on infants (e.g. Oswell, 2013: 37).

While research about child culture usually focuses on children up to 13 years of age (Helander, 2014: 5), there seem to be only a small number of examples of research concerning baby culture. One example of baby culture that has gained some academic interest both in Sweden and internationally is theatre for babies (see Bárány, 2008; Brinch, 2018; Osten, 2009; see also Schneider, 2009). Thus, babies are included when terms like 'child' and 'child culture' are defined, but they are relatively invisible in the research using these terms. In this article, I am arguing that it is therefore not enough to make babies visible within the already-established framework of child culture research, but that we also have to acknowledge that concepts like 'child culture' and 'material culture' have been developed and rethought *without* babies explicitly in mind. This, I argue, calls for critical engagement with the concepts as such.

In order to engage critically with the understanding of material culture in babies' everyday lives, in this article I am drawing on the distinction between child culture and children's culture, as formulated by Anna Sparman et al. (2016: 258). This distinction is

important because it raises questions concerning *whose* practices we are focusing on when discussing material culture. Baby culture is culture directed towards babies and the ideas and imaginings that help produce this culture. The different cultural activities I discussed earlier directed towards babies and their families, or cultural objects – like toys or books – are a few examples of what baby culture could be. Ideas about what kind of culture is ‘good’, ‘educational’ or ‘stimulating’ for babies (see, for example, Lupton, 2013b, or Nadesan, 2002) are another example. Babies’ culture is understood as babies’ own practices around – and engagements with – culture. In this article, this means focusing on babies’ own practices, whether or not such practices are happening during organised cultural activities, or in interaction with or under the guidance of adults or older children. Focusing on babies’ engagements with socks, then, is one example of how babies themselves are ‘doing’ material culture *in practice*.

While material culture is well researched within sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, infants’ engagements with material objects have not attracted much attention (Lupton, 2013b). There are some examples of how we can understand babies in relation to material objects (Landzelius, 2001; Layne, 2000; Lupton, 2013b; Nadesan, 2002) or embodiment (see Brownlie and Leith, 2011; Lupton, 2012, 2013a), but for the most part these studies engage with more theoretical understandings of babies and babyhood, rather than explicitly focusing on babies’ own practices.

Daniel Miller (2010: 67) argues that material culture has a central role to play in the process called culture. The babies in my study had access to plenty of objects and their engagements with these objects took up a considerable amount of their everyday lives. Deborah Lupton’s (2013b) article about infants and/as objects is one example in which babies’ own relations to the objects discussed and babies’ own practices are framed in terms of their regular and intimate engagements with things (p. 4). Babies’ own engagements with objects are connected to “intimate, fleshly, affective, intercorporeal lived experiences” (Lupton, 2013b: 14). Objects selected for infants by caregivers are usually chosen due to their connection with ideas concerning naturalness, aesthetics, appropriateness or good parenthood (Ibid). The distinction that Lupton makes in this discussion is similar to the distinction between baby culture and babies’ culture, and while these concepts are not clearly separated – but rather should be understood as characterised by reciprocity (Sparman, 2011: 28) – they do point to the importance of acknowledging differences in how parents and babies engage with material culture.

The regularity of babies’ engagements with objects (Lupton, 2013b: 4) can also be understood through John Horton and Peter Kraftl’s (2006: 274) discussion about what we can learn from paying attention to what is *going on and on and on* in children’s lives. Children’s encounters with the world, according to Pauliina Rautio (2013: 396), are already going on, all the time, whether or not adults are supporting them or taking them seriously. But in order to take seriously the seemingly momentary and unguided, we need to let go of our focus on long-term accountability, evaluation and learning (Rautio, 2013: 402). For the babies in my study, socks seemed to be one of those small things that, while defying logical explanation, seemed to matter to the babies (MacRae et al., 2018: 510). While babies’ access to objects is certainly limited, by their caregivers for example, Lupton (2013b: 4) argues that babies’ investment of affection, loyalty and emotions in the things they themselves choose can be understood as agential. The notion of babies’

culture, then, opens up the opportunity for an exploration of these kinds of practices and allows us to account not only for *which* things babies engage with but also for *how* they engage with them.

One way of approaching how babies themselves engage with things is to turn to Tim Ingold's (2011a) call to direct our attention towards the materials, rather than the materiality of things. The concept of materiality, Ingold argues, tends to reproduce a duality between matter in terms of its physical properties and objects in terms of their significance within the human context. Ingold (2011a) challenges this distinction by arguing that matter and significance are interwoven rather than separate, and that materials and things occur, rather than exist. Understanding a sock, then, as an object means that the material of the sock disappears and what we see is its final form, that is, its established meaning. If we instead approach a sock as material, the boundaries created by the sock's already-established meaning as an object crumble, and what emerges is the potential and the coming-into-being of the sock. The materials of the socks are never finished and what the socks are "is always on the way to becoming something else" (Ingold, 2011b: 3).

Through this approach, in this article, I am shifting the focus away from the sock as an object towards how babies' engagements with the material of the sock make it possible for the sock to occur beyond its already-established meaning. This is important because it makes it possible to account for the ways in which babies engage with material culture, because it does not *require* either understanding or engagement with the object's already-established meaning. Instead of asking what a sock 'is', the approach pushes us to ask what a sock becomes, and has the potential to become, when we focus on babies' own engagements.

Methodological departure point

This article draws on a larger research study with babies aged 0–18 months, with the aim of exploring how material culture in babies' everyday lives can be understood through attending to the babies' own practices. The study was conducted as a sensory video ethnography, and seven families with babies aged between 1 and 18 months participated in it.

While it can be argued that ethnography already entails a focus on sensory experience, the idea of sensory ethnography is important as a way of focusing *explicitly* on the senses (Pink, 2015: 7). In this article, an explicit focus on the senses means acknowledging and attending to how sensoriality permeates the whole research process rather than only being located in certain parts of it (Pink, 2015: 7). Sensoriality, then, is just as much about doing fieldwork, understanding the research subject, working with the research material and writing the text.

Through the process of analysis, I have moved between different research materials and different ways of working with these materials (Pink, 2015: 158). I was watching the videos, writing, reading and highlighting in the transcripts with coloured pens, remembering moments and sensory experiences from visiting the babies, engaging with a pair of actual baby socks, reading theory, making lists and imagining different ways in which objects could be connected. In other words, it was not a straightforward process (Pink, 2015: 151).

In time, I could see that socks appeared in the videos involving several of the babies and their families. While I could not instantly point to why socks would be more interesting to

focus on than other objects the babies were engaging with, I chose to stay with the feeling of excitement that came from finding yet another instance of babies engaging with socks. The babies' engagements with socks could be described as 'sticky data' (MacRae et al., 2018) in the way in which they got stuck in my mind, astonished me and kept puzzling me.

In order to understand the ongoingness of socks over time, I have traced all the socks in the video material from the moment they are found, or pulled off the baby's feet, until they disappear from the videos. To explore the babies' engagements with the socks during these moments, I have also analysed some of the scenes in more depth.

Introducing the babies

The story involving *Wilma* took place during a visit when she was 11 months old. At that time, she could move around on her own by dragging herself forward on her backside. The story spans a couple of hours and the scenes take place in Wilma's home, at the hairdresser's where her dad got a haircut and in the home of another family Wilma's dad knows whom we visited that day.

The story involving *Alva* took place during a visit when she was around 1 year old. At that time, she could move around by dragging herself on her backside. The story spans a couple of minutes on the floor of the library that we visited that day.

The story involving *Liam* took place during a visit when he was 17 months old. At that time, he could move around by himself by walking. The story spans a couple of minutes during which Liam is lying on the changing table at home while his dad is changing his nappy.

The ongoingness of socks

Here, I will discuss how the socks are *going on* in different ways during a day I spent with Wilma and her family. The socks in these scenes first appear in the video material when Wilma's mum finds one of them on the living room floor under a blanket in the middle of Wilma's toy-space:²

Scene 1: Wilma's mum holds the sock up in the air and says 'See what mum found here, Wilma! Here's your other sock that we were looking for before!' Wilma, who has been sitting with her back to her mum turns around, drops the spatula that is still in her hand and takes the sock from her mum's hand. Her mum says: 'Was it under there? Did it end up under the blanket?' Wilma holds the sock and engages with it with her hands before, for a short moment, lowering her hands and raising one of her feet so that the sock is pressed against her foot. 'Is it on the foot you usually have it?' Wilma continues engaging with the sock with her hand by squeezing it, pulling it and holding it up in front of her before dropping it on the floor. She almost immediately picks it up once more, just to drop it again after a few seconds.

When Wilma's mum finds the sock under the blanket on the floor, she seems surprised by its location. Something has been *going on* with the sock outside of the attention of Wilma's mum and it has ended up in a location that is not intended for socks. In the toy-space, Wilma is surrounded by plenty of other objects that she is engaging with – or could engage with – but, when the sock appears, Wilma instantly starts to engage with that.

Here, the sock occurs in interaction between Wilma and her mum and, through focusing on this particular moment, we could possibly interpret Wilma's interest in the sock as being sparked by the interest her mum shows in it rather than the sock itself. However, when tracing Wilma's engagements with the sock through the hours I spent with her that day, what becomes visible is that, most of the time, her engagements with it *go on* outside moments of interaction with her parents or other adults.

The connection between the sock and her feet is for the most part lost in Wilma's own engagements with it, and one way of interpreting her engagements could be in line with how Christina MacRae et al. (2018) and Pauliina Rautio (2013) discuss children's autotelic practices, that is, a practice that is the goal in itself rather than a means to another end. We can also ask what are the socks inviting the babies to do with them. Wrapped around her feet, the sock's possibilities for movement are very limited. When she pulls it off, a myriad of new possibilities for movement with the sock open up and also different sensations for her feet, which are now naked.

After a while, Wilma leaves the sock on the floor in the living room. About an hour later, she picks up a pair of rolled-together socks that are lying on the hallway floor. She drops them and picks them up a couple of times before leaving them on the floor again. Half an hour later, she again finds the socks on the hallway floor and carries them around in her hands while moving around in the hallway and kitchen. She continues dropping them and picking them up before leaving one sock in the kitchen and one in the living room. Later that day, Wilma pulls one of the socks off her feet while sitting on the floor at the hairdresser's while her dad is getting a haircut. She is holding the sock in one hand and a baby spoon she found in the bag under her pushchair in the other. At the end of the day, when I turn on the camera at the house of a friend of the family, Wilma is sitting on the kitchen floor with one sock on her foot and the other in her hand. She moves around with them, drops them and picks them up again, and the sock appears for the last time when the mum in the family they are visiting finds it on the floor. She holds it up and the sock changes hands between the mum, the older child and Wilma a couple of times, before Wilma moves away from them without either of the socks.

Wilma's movements and the movements of the socks are not linear here, but can rather be described as a coming to and going from the socks, or a circling around them. The socks are *going on* not just outside the interactions and attention of Wilma's parents, they are also at times *going on* outside the scope of the camera (and my attention). Babies' engagements with socks are in this sense not only 'sticky data' (MacRae et al., 2018) but, I argue, also *slippery* data.

The socks cannot be understood as located anywhere in particular in space, or even on a particular part of Wilma's body. Rather, what is important here is that the socks do not only *occur* in babies' engagements, they also *re-occur*, and they do so through movement. Focusing on the interaction between Wilma and her mum in the first scene tells us something about how the sock *occurs* within the interaction, but very little about the way in which it continuously *re-occurs* in Wilma's engagements throughout the day.

Beyond or between these moments when the socks appear in the scenes above, they are put on the baby's feet several times by – I assume – Wilma's parents. They do so because Wilma keeps taking the socks off and it seems to be important for her parents that they are on her feet when they leave the house. In Sweden, where the climate is

relatively cold, socks are usually already present in the home when a baby is born. As in this example with Wilma's parents, socks are something that parents often engage with every day, or even several times a day. They are easy to take off compared to other types of clothing and we can imagine (or know from experience!) that they therefore tend to keep parents more busy than other types of clothes since socks will be taken off more often by the baby. The parents in my material, for the most part, engage with – or comment on – the socks in ways that frame them as a type of clothing, for example, by repeatedly putting the socks on or commenting when the baby makes the 'right' connection between sock and body, as in the scene above when Wilma presses the sock against the top of her foot for a few seconds. The parents' engagement with the socks as clothing, through putting them on the baby's feet, is, however, shaped by the way in which the baby engages with the material of the sock by pulling it off and involving it in a variety of other practices. Hence, the significance and the materials of the socks can here be understood as interwoven (Ingold, 2011a) in the ways in which the baby's and the parents' engagements with them overlap with and shape each other.

The sensorial movements of socks

In this section, I will discuss how the babies' engagements with socks can be understood in relation to movement and sensoriality. I will share a scene from visiting the library with Alva and her mum and a couple more descriptions from the visit to Wilma and her family, whom I discussed above. In the scene below, Alva is sitting on the floor of the library with her mum, who is talking and pointing to the pictures in a book. Right before this scene starts, Alva has moved away from her mum and sat down a bit further away from her:

Scene 2: Alva pulls off her socks one at a time. Her mum says 'are you going to take your sock off now? (laughs) Your small, small socks'. Alva in the meantime is waving the socks around and then she holds both of them against each other in front of her belly before reaching both her arms out on the sides and dropping one of the socks. She turns in the direction of the dropped sock while still holding the other one in her hand. Her mum picks up the dropped sock and looks at it while she makes the comment about the sock being very small and both she and I laugh. Then Alva's mum puts the sock down on the pillow in front of her and Alva picks it up, only to immediately move her arm in an arc backwards so that the sock flies away and lands behind and to the left of her. She turns around and puts the other sock close to the one already on the floor while still holding it in her hand. She moves the socks around on the floor so that they move in different directions and then she picks one of them up again. Alva moves behind a big pillow and when she comes out from behind it again, both socks are gone.

Alva's engagements with the socks are all connected by movement. These movements – except possibly the movement of pulling the sock off – are not dependent on the socks' meaning as clothing, but are rather made possible because of the materials of the socks. Size, shape, lightness, stretchability and softness all make these different kinds of movement possible.

When tracing the movements of the socks through this scene – rather than focusing on certain already-nameable practices – I realise that I am not able to even name or easily

put into words everything that Alva is doing with the socks. Drawing on Ingold (2011b: 3) here, I wonder if naming a practice – like waving or throwing – creates similar kinds of limitations as viewing something as an object rather than as materials. What, then, happens to the movements without names? What consequences does it have for our understanding of babies' material cultures if we lack words for their practices?

Here, attending to the baby's movements, whether or not they are nameable practices, becomes a way of trying to expand how it is possible to think of and imagine what babies' culture might be. In this approach, the movement when Alva presses the socks against her belly before reaching her arms out becomes as important as any nameable practice going on in this scene. While the material of the socks makes certain kinds of movement possible, these movements are also creating certain kinds of sensorialities. Both Wilma, in the scene in the previous section, and Alva could be described as engaging with the material of the socks in multi-sensorial ways. The movements of the materials in these examples involve senses like touch, sight and at times taste.

Throughout the day, Wilma engages with the material of the socks by carrying them in her hands and mouth, pressing one sock into a ball-like shape, touching it more carefully with her hands, squeezing it, pulling it and holding it up in the air. Alva is moving it up and down – and to the sides – with her hands and she presses it and moves it around with the other sock on the floor. Even when the babies are sitting still, they are engaging with the socks through multiple kinds of movement, which are all entangled with sensoriality. That is, when the babies have the opportunity to choose what to do with the socks, the multiplicity of engagements seems to matter more than any single practice or movement. Or, in other words, I argue that they engage with the socks' *potential* or their *coming-into-being*, rather than their final form (Ingold, 2011b: 3). Through attending to possible sensations, rather than possible meanings, different connections can be made: How are wave-like movements made with culture in babies' everyday lives? What kinds of culture can babies move through the air? What kinds of cultural textures are babies engaging with?

The focus on sensoriality is not absent when it comes to cultural objects made for babies, like toys and books, for example. One example is the number of baby books that provide particular sensorial experiences by incorporating different kinds of fabrics into the book for the baby to touch and feel, or by combining a book with a plastic part for the baby to chew on. The sensorial experiences these provide could be understood as being incorporated into an object that already has an established meaning and, I would argue, a value in terms of culture for babies. Understood as material objects, books and socks can be read as different kinds of material culture through categories such as literature and clothing. When considering the properties of these objects, other connections can be made through observing what movements the properties make possible. Socks and (some kinds of) books share the possibility of being waved through the air, for example.

When attending to this connection between socks and books, it is possible to ask questions not only about the materials of these two objects, but also about the properties of material culture in a broader sense. If objects are not distinct entities but rather *occur through movements*, it becomes possible to imagine that the sensations that make material culture alluring to babies, or possibly to anyone else for that matter, include the possibilities of moving in certain ways. When a sock holds all of these possibilities for

babies to move with them, then it is not only that there is something more to the sock than its established meaning, but that there is *much more* to it.

Opening up

Here I will discuss the imaginative, possible and multiple meanings that socks hold if they are approached as *movements of materials* rather than through their pre-established meaning. I will share a story from the last visit I made to Liam and his family, but first I will discuss how I approach the ideas of imagination and the future. Through attending to the potential, or the coming-into-being, of socks, I am arguing that babies' engagements with socks simultaneously matter as momentary, possibly unguided and autotelic practices *and* as practices that hold the potential to linger on into the future through changing how we might think about or how we can imagine material culture in a broader sense.

Rautio (2013: 402) encourages us to let go of notions like accountability, evaluation and learning outcomes through attending to – and appreciating – the momentary in children's everyday lives and through directing attention towards what is happening in the moment rather than what effects those moment have on the future. Here, however, I want to ask the following: What becomes possible with this suggestion? Is it only that the attention to materiality in children's lives is not diverse enough, or is it that the attention to how the momentary matters for the future is not diverse enough either?

I want to explore this question through attending to how the moment might matter in ways that are not tied up with already-established notions like development, progress and learning, but rather holds a multiplicity of other effects that may – or may not – linger on into the future. The future, then, is understood as having open edges and as craving both new and old connections to be made (Haraway, 2015: 160), and the coming-into-being of the socks happens “where the reach of the imagination meets the friction of materials” (Ingold, 2013: 73). Turning to imagination in this sense is not a way of moving away from materials, but rather a way to explore what it becomes possible to imagine *through* materials.

In the scene below, Liam is lying on the changing table while his dad changes his nappy. There are a few things lying at the side of the changing table that he can reach, and he first picks up a plastic tractor and a moment later he picks up a sock with a leather sole with his other hand:

Scene 3: Liam turns his head to the side and looks at the sock for a few seconds before holding both the tractor and the sock up in front of him and looking at both of them. He moves the objects closer to each other and softly touches the tractors wheel with his index finger. Liam's dad then says: ‘What are you thinking about? Can you maybe put the sock on the tractor? Can you?’ and points first to the sock and then to the tractor before laughing softly. Liam continues looking at the two objects while running his index finger over the surface of the tractor and after a few seconds he says ‘oh’ and laughs a little while turning his head to the side and looking in the direction of me and the camera. Liam's dad says ‘noo . . .’ and laughs softly again. Liam continues touching the tractor, and moving it around, with both his hands, while the sock just lies on his belly until his dad puts it aside.

When Liam holds the plastic tractor and the sock close to each other and lets them softly touch, something beyond the established meaning of the sock becomes possible, that is, the possibility of wrapping the sock around the tractor. In this moment, the meaning the sock already has as a piece of fabric you wrap around your feet is re-established while simultaneously new ways of using a sock open up. Here, it becomes possible to ask is it rather the parent in this scene who is engaging with the sock's potential or possible ways of coming-into-being. The possibilities that the sock could be understood as a piece of clothing for a tractor or as a container for a toy emerge. The materials of the sock – like stretchability, softness, size and floppiness – make it possible to wrap it around something other than a baby's foot, or to approach it as a toy rather than clothing.

As I have already discussed, attending to the *materials* of material culture is important because it makes it possible to account for babies' own engagements. Here, it also makes it possible to account for how babies' engagements with materials can shape and re-shape adults' engagements. The scene above, with Liam and his dad, suggests that parents engage with socks not only *as clothing* but also *as materials*. In this scene, more specifically, by attending to the potential or the coming-into-being of the sock, in that moment Liam's dad is imagining it differently than as a piece of clothing and, I argue, this becomes possible through the connection that Liam makes between the sock and the tractor. In Liam's engagement, there is no distinction made between socks as clothing and tractors as toys, just as the socks in the stories about Wilma and Alva seem to be flitting between these categories and possibly even beyond. Babies' engagements with the *materials* of material culture, or what I discuss in terms of babies' culture, are thus not clearly distinct from the ways in which adults engage with material culture. This reciprocity emerges in these examples because babies choose to engage with socks in certain ways, refuse to keep the socks on their feet or suddenly create connections between things in ways that open up the possibility for thinking material culture in ways that we could not before that moment.

Final discussion

Drawing on Rautio (2013), babies engaging with socks can be understood as one example of how babies are already and ongoingly doing culture, in often subtle ways, that do not need to resist or ignore adult-oriented cultural ideas or expressions in order to 'go on'. The babies in the scenes I have been discussing in this article are stretching culture out, pressing it against something else, pulling it off their feet, making it fly through the air, waving it up and down, pressing it into a ball-like shape in their hands and carrying it around while engaging with other things. In other words, the babies make socks move and they move with socks in multiple ways. Their engagements can also be described as multi-sensorial when imagining what possible sensations these engagements with socks are creating.

As already discussed, the idea that babies engage sensorially with material culture is not new, considering the number of toys directed towards babies that are designed to create different kinds of sensorial experiences. What I am arguing, though, is that babies' sensorial engagements with material culture are not dependent upon them having access to these kinds of toys or being taken to organised cultural activities that offer different

kinds of sensorial experiences. Babies' engagements with material culture in their everyday lives are *already* and *ongoingly* sensorial, and they find ways of sensorially engaging with the world whether or not the adults around them initiate, guide or offer them the materials for doing so. Socks are just one example of this.

In order to tie this article together, I want to discuss some of the insights we can gain from attending to and accounting for babies' engagements with socks.

First, in this article, I have discussed how the babies' various engagements with socks can be understood as connected by different kinds of movement, and here I want to suggest that it is possible to read movement not only *as connected to* existing sensory categories but also *as a sensory category* in itself (Edvardsson and Street, 2007: 26; Pink, 2015: 150). This is a push for expanding how sensoriality and the senses are thought of when babies (or anyone else, for that matter!) engage with material culture. Instead of focusing on the meaning of material culture, this opens up opportunities for an exploration of *the sensations of material culture*, with movement being one of these sensations.

Second, through focusing on the *movement of materials*, it becomes possible to explore babies' own engagements with material culture as these engagements transgress the boundaries of the meaning of objects and nameable practices. Attending to the movements of materials makes it possible to reflect upon the limitations of how materiality is understood and to expand our own thinking when having to grapple with the task of describing and analysing phenomena that are difficult to pin-point, define or name. Following Rautio (2013: 402), through moving beyond the focus of accountability, evaluation and learning, babies' engagements with the materials of socks might seem momentary, but my argument is that these engagements might leave traces that extend into the future as well. Thus, much of babies' engagements with material culture can be understood as *slippery* because it escapes already-possible ways of describing or thinking materiality and pushes us to re-think and re-phrase how we understand material culture.

Third, when attending to and accounting for babies' engagements with socks as an example of material culture, it is possible to argue that babies are already part of shaping the ways in which material culture is created and understood. After all, socks figure not only in the lives of babies but also in the lives of their parents and society in general. This does not mean that babies' engagements with material culture do not matter in itself, but rather that being valuable in itself does not mean that babies' culture is isolated or separate from the cultural world of older children or adults. Babies' culture should rather be understood as interwoven with – and something that both shapes and is shaped by – material culture as such.

Fourth, my argument is that material culture does not matter for the babies because of the objects' already-established meanings. What seems to matter instead is whether objects are small enough to be carried, stretchable enough to wrap around something else, light enough to fly through the air or how they feel against the skin or in the mouth. Attending to babies' engagements with materials – rather than with specific objects – makes it possible to expand the argument that babies create intimate relations with objects (cf. Lupton, 2013b: 4). It becomes possible to suggest that babies might also create intimate relations with certain materials and the sensorialities they create.

Re-thinking material culture through babies' engagements with it means that it is necessary to move away from the boundaries established by the intended meaning and functions of objects. It opens up opportunities for approaching material culture as the materials of the socks – soft, stretchable and able to fly through the air. It means that we can approach intimate relations to material culture through how material culture *feels* and how it makes people *feel*. It matters, then, not because we can understand it or put it into words, but because of the sensorialities it evokes.

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Notes

1. <https://biblioteket.stockholm.se/kalender/malgrupper/Sm%C3%A5%20barn> (accessed 20 March 2019), <https://www.stadsbiblioteket.nu/kalendarium/> (accessed 21 March 2019), <https://www.minabibliotek.se/calendar?ftag=Bebisar&fAudience=581a820af09f4a0c10a4ff3d&page=1&no-cache-lang=sv&fContentCatalogId=e1c7e747-c978-4529-a915-6f3b4f93fd2a> (accessed 21 March 2019), <https://malmo.se/Kultur-fritid/Biblioteken/Vara-bibliotek/Stadsbiblioteket/Programme-pa-Stadsbiblioteket/Programme-for-barn-unga.html> (accessed 21 March 2019) and <https://www.barnistan.se/> (accessed 21 March 2019).
2. A toy-space is what I call a space in the babies' homes – which is not in their own rooms if the babies have one – where most of the things intended for the baby are gathered.

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