Babies' engagements with everyday things

An ethnographic study of materiality,
movement and participation

Alex Orrmalm

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Linköping, a December day, 2020

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LIST OF ARTICLES INCLUDED

- I. Ormalm A. (2020) Doing ethnographic method with babies – Participation and perspective approached from the floor, *Children & Society*, 34(6): 461–474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12380>.
- II. Ormalm, A. (2020) Culture by babies: Imagining everyday material culture through babies' engagements with socks, *Childhood*, 27(1): 93–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568219881676>.
- III. Ormalm, A. The flows of things – exploring babies' everyday space-making, *Children's Geographies*, (accepted 2020).

INTRODUCTION

It is a chilly October morning when I set out to visit the first family for my study. I meet baby Alva and her family at their home where we first sit down at the kitchen table and talk over a cup of coffee. The rest of the time I spend with Alva on the floor, filming her while she engages with toys and other things lying on the floor with the small hand-held video camera I brought with me. After a while, Alva finds a wet wipe and spends quite some time waving it through the air, and I think to myself “how do you analyse something like that?” I push the thought away and decide that whatever the babies are doing I will continue filming regardless of whether I find it meaningful in the moment or not. And this is what I kept doing during the time I spent with the seven babies and their families who participated in this study.

Carrying the small hand-held video camera, I followed the families to a range of different places in their everyday lives. While I was in the babies’ homes, I spent much of the time following them while they moved around on the floors, during nappy changes, when being lifted up and down to their high-chairs, while being fed, having other babies over for a visit, moving around in a walking chair¹, or going on nap-walks in a pushchair or sling. Some of the babies did not seem to take much notice of me, especially at the beginning, while others were quick to interact with me. Sometimes the parents joined me on the floor, chatting with me while I was filming the baby, and at other times they left me alone and instead talked to visiting friends, did household chores, or worked on their laptops. Spending time with families in their everyday lives inevitably means that you also become part of what is happening in the families while you are there, regardless of whether this is the focus of your research or not – sleep deprivation, spousal irritation, errand running, sibling fights, phone calls to sick family members, furniture purchases, attempts to sell the apartment, and so much more. You also become part of at least some of their everyday routines as

¹ That is, a chair with wheels that babies sit in and can move in by “walking” with the chair.

you eat, drink coffee, take nap-walks, and travel between places together with the families.

By means of an ethnographic approach, this study aims to gain insight into what babies are doing in their everyday lives and what it means to do an ethnography with children who are not yet speaking. By taking a social and cultural approach to babies and babyhood, the study focuses on how babies' practices can be understood beyond a focus on development and their interactions with their caregivers. The purpose is to explore what babies' practices can tell us about what it means to be a baby and the range of relations in which babies are involved, including their relations with the material world.

This distancing from developmental and caregiver issues is important because developmental psychology, according to James and James (2012), has played a central role in our understanding of children and childhood since the early 20th century. Much social and cultural research on children has, however, been carried out over the last few decades with the aim of moving away from developmental understandings of children and towards a reconceptualisation of children as social actors (e.g. James & Prout 1997). While several scholars have argued that, in many ways, developmental understandings of children and childhood are still commonplace and taken for granted (Burman 1994, Woodhead 2013), the understanding of children as social actors has also gained widespread societal recognition (Prout 2005). However, as Tebet and Abramowicz (2019) point out, there has been relatively little research from social or cultural perspectives about babies compared to older children and, according to Holt (2017), developmental understandings of babies are rarely approached critically in social or cultural research. Exploring other ways of understanding and approaching babies' practices than those focusing on development or babies' interactions with their caregivers is therefore vital because these traditional perspectives play such a dominant role in how babies and babyhood are understood.

Achieving this through a focus on the everyday, a common strategy of traditional ethnography (e.g. Atkinson et al. 2008), is important because babies' development is not only a concern within research but also part of families' everyday lives. For example, within the Swedish healthcare system babies are intensively weighed and measured to monitor their growth and health. Their abilities are assessed and compared with what is expected at specific ages.

Developmental understandings of babies and babyhood also influence the everyday lives of families through other media, such as literature for parents, popular scientific TV shows, parental magazines, toys, and other products for babies. Nowadays, parents can even get apps for keeping track of their babies' (expected) development.

One example is the app *The Wonder Weeks* (The Wonder Weeks 2020), which at least one of the mothers in my study was using and showed me during one of my visits. In this app, you register the due date of your baby and the app then shows on a chart the different leaps in mental development that your baby is expected to go through. This mother told me that the baby's grandma had also downloaded the app and that the expected leaps became a way for them to talk about the baby. Apps like *The Wonder Weeks* make it possible for parents to assess their own baby's behaviour in relation to psychological ideas concerning expected or normal mental development without having to involve either psychologists or medical professionals. In the app babies' practices of, for example, crying are framed within a developmental discourse, reassuring parents that these practices, while challenging to deal with, are good for the baby's future because they signal learning and development.

The market for toys for babies, according to Nadesan (2002), is another arena where developmental and educational research is shaping ideas around babies and their everyday lives. Through their exploration of toys and other material things, Chase (1992) argues, babies can be understood as acquiring different capabilities. Chase also notes that babies spend a considerable amount of time exploring material things and that these explorations unfold in predictable patterns throughout the first year of life. This understanding of babies' engagement with material things is one example of how material aspects of children's everyday lives become of interest within a developmental approach because of what they can tell us about something else (cf. Rautio 2014).

These engagements could, however, tell us something about how material things *in themselves* become of interest to babies by shifting the perspective from the future to the present lives of babies. Through approaching babies and their engagements with things using a social and cultural approach, I am inspired to explore what can be learnt about babies by expanding on Rautio's (2014) argument that we need to approach children's relations to the material world

beyond a focus on the future in order to appreciate what kind of beings they are in the present moment.

A focus on material things can also provide insights into practices that babies spend a lot of time engaging in because material things were a central feature of what the babies were doing when I visited them, especially at home. Attending to these engagements with things therefore seemed vital for understanding what babies themselves chose to do in their everyday lives. By using the word *engagement*, and its various forms, I open up the possibility of understanding what babies do with things beyond the idea of play. Moreover, engagement is used as a way of including a range of different embodied and material practices.

Focusing on babies' engagements with material things, or what I call *everyday* material things, using a social and cultural approach has involved a focus on two strands of issues. Firstly, how babies' engagements with things can be understood when directing the attention towards things that the babies themselves choose to engage with, regardless of whether they are toys or intended for them. Secondly, how babies' engagements with things can be understood as having effects on the everyday lives of their families and social environment.

The aim of this study is to explore what can be learnt about babies' everyday lives and engagements with material things by allowing babies' orientations and interests to guide the research focus rather than starting from pre-conceived ideas about which things are important for understanding babies and babyhood. This means expanding the focus from toys and things intended *for* babies towards things engaged with *by* babies. As developmental perspectives have been dominant for how babies and babyhood have been understood in western societies, this study seeks to explore what else, or what more, can be learnt about babies' everyday lives by taking a social and cultural approach. The study aims to provide empirically and theoretically grounded insights into how babies' everyday lives can be understood when focusing on their own practices.

More specifically, the following questions are addressed:

- How do babies engage with material things in their everyday lives?
- How can ethnographic method contribute to social and cultural approaches to babies' practices?
- How can explorations into babies' practices contribute theoretically to the field of child and childhood studies?

Outline of the study

In sum, in this introduction the focus of the study has been outlined, together with the overall aim and research questions. In Chapter One, I situate baby research by first discussing psychological research, with a focus on the critique of its orientations towards development, and then move on to social and cultural research, with a focus on the relative lack of attention to babies within these fields. After this, I will discuss research from both psychological and social and cultural perspectives that are helpful in addressing the aim of this study. In Chapter Two, the overall theoretical framework and concepts are presented. This combines a baby-focused research approach with a theory of lines and an approach to material things as unfinished. In Chapter Three, the methodological framework, including ethnographic methodologies and the method of analysis, is discussed. And finally, Chapter Four draws together the study in a concluding discussion, followed by summaries of the included articles and the articles themselves.

SITUATING BABY RESEARCH

This study aims to contribute to the discussions on how babies and babyhood can be understood when we study babies from social and cultural perspectives rather than developmental ones. Therefore, in this chapter I will first present what I have identified as two concerns that this study is addressing: Firstly, that much of the baby research has been carried out with a focus on development and the future rather than the present lives of babies. Secondly, that when child and childhood research did shift its focus from development towards children and their present lives, it rarely focused on babies or very young children. To address these problems, I will first discuss psychological research on babies, with a focus on the critique of the orientation towards development, and then move on to discuss research about babies from social and cultural perspectives, addressing the lack of research on babies' everyday practices. I will do this in the section *Babies in the intersection of developmental research and social and cultural research*.

After this, I will describe research from both psychological perspectives and social and cultural perspectives, which is useful for exploring the question of babies' practices in the here and now. I will do this under three headings: *Babies' participation*, *Babies' social effects*, and *Babies' everyday materialities*.

Babies in the intersection of developmental research and social and cultural research

The idea that children's development can be categorised into stages dependent on age becomes especially relevant within psychology for understanding young children. Woodhead (1999, 2013) argues that major developmental theories tend to focus more on the early years of childhood because development during this time of life is understood as being more rapid than in later childhood. This suggests that such theories have an even greater impact on the understanding of babies than on older children. This can be seen in the influence of developmental perspectives on the care of children through the healthcare services monitoring children's health and growth, especially during the early years (Woodhead

2013). Indeed, as pointed out by Murray and Cortés-Morales (2019), children's bodily practices and movements become meaningful even before birth as foetuses' movements are monitored and assessed during pregnancy.

The criticism of psychological understandings of children launched by child and childhood studies becomes relevant for shifting the perspective to the present lives of babies because, according to Prout (2005), this critique was centred around the notion of development. However, the critique can be understood as primarily focused on later childhood because, according to Holt (2017), psychological understandings of babies and babyhood are rarely problematised within social and cultural research. This has led to early childhood remaining primarily a research subject for developmental psychology, psychoanalysis, and theories concerned with attachment.

Understanding childhood through the idea of development has also found its way into the everyday lives of families and it has been argued that this idea has become both commonplace and taken for granted (Walkerdine 2008, Woodhead 2013, Burman 1994). One example is the rapid growth of infant developmental and educational toys. These toys, according to Nadesan (2002), are closely connected with a developmental discourse through the implicit promise that these toys will help parents to ensure optimal development at a time in their baby's growth that is framed as critical. Moreover, Nadesan (2002) argues that the relation between developmental ideas about babies and the kinds of toys that are created for them is reciprocal and that the toys marketed for babies also shape the way in which we understand babies and babyhood at a given time or place.

The reciprocal relation between developmental perspectives, or sociological perspectives for that matter, and societal understandings of children and childhood was noted by Prout and James already 30 years ago (1997). This idea that psychological views dominate the understanding of children and childhood not only in academia, but also in society at large, can be understood as the backdrop to the critique of developmental psychology during the first wave of child and childhood studies. This critique, according to Prout (2005), was centred around the notion of development, and developmental views were problematised for approaching childhood as a largely biological and universal phenomenon. The idea that children develop according to age-linked stages was,

moreover, problematised for not recognising childhood as a social and historical institution (Prout 2005). As Gottlieb (2004) argues, these universal claims and norms about children's development have also been criticised within anthropology, which has shown how social and cultural factors influence children's development in different contexts across the world.

However, as Mayall (2002) points out, even though child and childhood studies emerged as a critique of how children and childhood were understood within, for example, psychology, during the 1980s there were many similarities between the child and childhood studies' approach to children and approaches within developmental psychology. A shift in focus around the same time made developmental psychology less universalistic as it started paying more attention to the importance of contextualisation and started to recognise children as active in their own learning. Moreover, as Burman (1994) argues, psychologists also became interested in understanding the social capabilities of children even as young as newborn babies as early as the 1970s. One significant difference between the fields, however, was that psychology, in contrast to the sociologically and historically inspired child and childhood studies, was still primarily focused on the future and children as becomings (Mayall 2002).

The critique against future-oriented perspectives on children was thus a central tenet of the emergence of child and childhood studies during the 1980s (Prout 2005). Moving away from developmental views on children led to a shift of focus away from children as becomings, i.e. future adults, towards children as beings, i.e. as children in their own right (James & Prout 1997, Lee 2001). This shift in perspective has contributed with decades of research into the *present* lives of children and their own perspectives on the world. However, according to Oswell (2013), this research has for the most part focused on children in the mid to late age range, rather than on babies. This lack of interest in babies from social and cultural perspectives has been noted within child and childhood studies (e.g. Gottlieb 2004, Thorne 2008, McNamee and Seymore 2012), children's geographies (e.g. Tebet & Abramowicz 2019, Holt 2017), children's mobilities (e.g. Murray & Cortés-Morales 2019), material and consumption studies (e.g. Lupton 2013b, Martens 2018), anthropology (e.g. Gottlieb 2004, Montgomery 2000, DeLoache & Gottlieb 2000), and early education (e.g. Johansson 2011, Blaise 2005).

Within many of these fields, the interest in babies and very young children seems to be increasing, and several scholars have critically addressed the possible reasons for the lack of attention to babies in research from social and cultural perspectives. For instance, common explanations have pointed to babies' lack of language (e.g. Gottlieb 2004, Thorne 2008), their heavy reliance on their bodies rather than their voices (e.g. Brownlie & Leith 2011, Gottlieb 2004, Holt 2017), and their perceived immobility and dependence on others (e.g. Murray & Cortés-Morales 2019, Holt 2017). This indicates that babies' embodiment is a central question for grappling with how they can be understood from social and cultural perspectives.

While, according to Lupton (2013a), there is a limited number of studies concerning babies' embodiment from social and cultural perspectives, there are some studies that address babies' embodiment; for example, by examining representations of babies' embodiment (Lupton 2012, 2013a, 2014), babies' bodies and the production of personhood (Conklin & Morgan 1996), and parents' understandings of their babies' bodies (Brownlie & Leith 2011, Lauritzen 1997). While these studies are relevant because they discuss how babies' bodies can be understood beyond a developmental scope, they are often more theoretically oriented rather than focused on what babies themselves are doing with their bodies.

The same can be argued of research concerned with babies and everyday materialities, which, for example, demonstrates how parents and babies become part of commodity culture, even before the babies are born (e.g. Burningham et al. 2014, Martens 2010, 2014, 2018, Clarke 2004, Taylor 2000, Miller 1997, Lustig 2004, Sjöberg 2013, Landzelius 2001, Layne 2000). Within research into young children's mobilities, material things like prams and slings have also gained attention (e.g. Cortés-Morales & Christensen 2014, Cortés-Morales 2020, Jensen 2018, Whittle 2019, Clement & Waitt 2018). While these studies are relevant for this study, because they highlight how central material things are in babyhood (and parenthood!) in western societies, they rarely focus in more detail on the practices of the babies themselves.

While research about babies from social and cultural perspectives contributes to the increased visibility of a group of children who have not previously gained much attention, it is crucial to be mindful about *how* this research has

been carried out. Several scholars have pointed out the perceived methodological difficulties of doing research with babies, suggesting that these are connected to babies' lack of language and the underestimation of their abilities and social competence (Gottlieb 2004, Montgomery 2000, Gallacher 2005). The younger the child is, Thorne (2008) argues, the more researchers seem to rely methodologically on adults close to the child. Moreover, she suggests that the focus on children's perspectives could be a reason for the lack of attention to young children who are not yet speaking. This suggests that it is vital not only to attend to babies' embodiment for understanding them as research subjects, but also to critically explore how babies are involved, if at all, in research about them.

The three themes in the next section therefore address research concerning babies that is useful for elaborating upon what babies' practices can tell us about how babies participate, and have effects, on the social world in which they live through their embodied practices and their engagements with everyday materialities.

Babies' participation

The studies about participation presented in this section are relevant primarily for three reasons. Firstly, they highlight the importance of critically examining how participation has been understood from psychological as well as from social and cultural perspectives. Secondly, they suggest that a relational approach is important when we approach participation and perspective with babies in mind. This relational approach is not limited to babies' relations with their caregivers or even humans. It also includes material things and spaces. Thirdly, they also reveal the importance of attending to embodiment and sensoriality in research with babies, not only the babies', but also the researchers'.

When discussing the limited attention that has been paid to babies within anthropology, Montgomery (2000) suggests that it could be connected to the difficulties of interviewing and participating in babies' lives. However, when conducting research concerning baby care practices or parents' views on babyhood, for example, one does not need to involve the babies themselves. It is therefore both a question of how much research has been conducted about babies and babyhood and from what perspective. Babies have, according to

Alderson et al. (2005b), been understood as active, and as participants, in their relation to their caregivers in psychological research for quite some time. However, it can be argued that they have been studied to a much lesser extent through what is called within, for example, child and childhood studies participatory methods (cf. Horgan et al. 2017).

If we turn to educational and care settings, there are several examples of discussions concerning babies' participation and babies' perspectives (e.g. Elwick & Sumsion 2013, Elwick et al. 2014a, 2014b, Hultgren & Johansson 2019, Salamon 2015, Eriksson & Sand 2017, Bradley et al. 2012). However, as Elwick et al. (2014b) argue, research into babies' perspectives is still often based on the same methodological approaches, assumptions, and language as participatory research with older children, even though the focus is on non-verbal expressions and behaviour. It has further been argued that there is a lack of critical discussion on the concept of babies' perspectives or what the concept of children's perspectives could mean in baby research (Elwick et al. 2014b, Johansson & Emilson 2010). The idea that babies have the right to be 'heard' is also, according to Elwick & Sumsion (2013), connected to an understanding of babies' participation as a method or tool for accomplishing certain goals, such as representing babies' own views. While guided by good intentions, this approach might obscure issues connected to how participatory research is done *with* babies in practice, they argue (Elwick & Sumsion 2013).

This can be understood in relation to Johansson's (2011) argument that the limited attention to babies and toddlers within early years education has led to a lack of knowledge about their everyday lives in educational settings and that little work has been done to develop methods or theoretical approaches for doing research with this age group. While much work has been done to develop methods and theoretical approaches concerning *children's* participation and *children's* perspectives, as many have addressed (e.g. Horgan et al. 2017, Gallacher & Gallagher 2008, James 2007), the discussions about babies above reveal the difficulties of using similar approaches when doing research with babies as with older children without critically engaging with the approaches and concepts as such.

One interesting approach that can be helpful for understanding babies' participation concerns participation as a relational process. For example, Elwick

et al. (2014a:875) suggest that, rather than focusing on babies' experiences or perspectives, we direct our attention to "the encounter *between* researcher and infant as it unfolds and develops in practice". Participatory research with babies following this line of thinking requires self-reflexivity from the researcher rather than methods for more accurately capturing babies' experiences or perspectives. This approach also suggests that researchers reflect upon their own embodiment in the encounters with babies and the possibilities that researchers create for babies to evoke embodied responses in themselves (Elwick et al. 2014a). Similarly, in their discussion of babies' and toddlers' participation in libraries, Hultgren and Johansson (2019) argue for an approach to participation as processual, relational, and something that emerges in the encounters between children, researchers, places, and things. Participation is then ongoing and unfinished in the sense that it is being reshaped between and during certain moments in the research process (Hultgren & Johansson 2019). As well as focusing on how participation is done in practice, and thus creating space for critical explorations of the concept, these discussions also approach participation as something that is done in babies' relations with both humans and non-humans.

Similar arguments have also been made about the concept of voice. In their study of vocal actions, Eriksson and Sand (2017) argue for an understanding of voice, not as done *by* humans (vocal cords), but as done in and through relations between humans, spaces, and cultural contexts. They argue that attending to how voice is produced physically and spatially is one way of approaching the concept of voice in research with pre-verbal children. Moreover, Juhl's (2019) research on pre-verbal children as co-researchers, shows how attending to how babies participate through embodied practices can also help us to understand how very young children take part in shaping the social situations in which they are engaged. Here, the body becomes important for exploring young children's participation in both research and in their everyday lives. This brings us to the social effects babies' participation can have.

Babies' social effects

The idea that babies have social effects in their relations with caregivers has been discussed within psychological research at least since the 1960s (see Bell

1968 for a review of early research in the subject). According to Burman (1994), technological developments during this time became important because they meant that babies' interactions with others could be studied by using, for example, video recordings. This new technology provided new opportunities for more detailed analyses. One example is Trevarthen's (1974) study of mother-baby interactions where he argues that babies only a few weeks old can show intentions to speak and are able to participate and shape the conversations with their caregivers. The activity of communication, Trevarthen (1974:230) argues, "is much more complex than any other form of activity of infants at this age". Thus, while babies' ability to influence the world is acknowledged, it is primarily connected to early verbal practices within the sphere of their relations with their caregivers.

However, this focus on social interaction has been highlighted as one way of moving away from ideas about babies as passive by for example Lewis and Rosenblum (1974) in their discussion on the effects that babies have on their caregivers. This idea that babies and mothers participate in social interactions that affect each other has been addressed by, among others, Kaye (1984) in the context of neonatal feeding. Kaye (1984:40) argues that babies' pauses while feeding do not seem to have any functional explanation except "to bring the mother into the feeding as an active taker of turns with the baby". While Kaye (1984) frames the practices of the baby and the mother in biological terms, that is, as instinctive, he does highlight the social effects that babies' embodied practices during feeding have on the mother:

Only because that turn-taking is not quite built-in do mothers have the opportunity to achieve it *by adjustment*, and thus to begin organizing the infant's world through sharing his rhythms and regulations. (Kaye 1984:90)

What becomes interesting in relation to this study is not questions regarding whether these interactions can be understood as an instinct or adjustment. Neither am I interested in questions concerning why babies pause or what functional explanations there might be for this. What becomes interesting in this example of babies' interactions with their mothers is rather the idea that, through their embodied practices, babies participate in social interaction and thus shape the actions of their caregiver.

A focus on babies' ability to interact socially with the people close to them suggests that they have interesting social effects. However, it says less about how babies can be understood as social participants beyond these relations. One example of a discussion about babies' effects on the people in their vicinity, which takes a broader scope than the relation between babies and their caregivers, is Alderson et al.'s (2005a) study on premature babies' participation rights. They argue that babies' needs, efforts, and views should be taken into consideration in their premature care. This means closely observing the babies themselves and the ways in which they participate in their relationships with their caregivers. While premature babies cannot communicate their views through words, they can have an effect on their caregivers and the care they receive through voice in terms of cries and non-verbal responses and practices (Alderson et al. 2005a, Alderson et al. 2005b).

In these studies, premature babies are here recognised as social, agential participants and rights-holders, not only because they are generally included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but also because of the effects that their responses and practices have on their caregivers and the care they receive. Babies' social effects are therefore situated within a wider context of social life, which in this case is the neonatal care unit. This provides insights into how we can approach these effects, and babies' participation, through attending to the different relations and practices going on in babies' lives. This, I argue, resonates with discussions concerning the importance of moving beyond a focus on babies' relations with their caregivers when doing research *with* babies (cf. Brownlie & Leith 2011, Holt 2017).

In Alderson et al.'s (2005a, 2005b) studies, babies' embodiment becomes central for understanding the effects they have on their caregivers and the care they receive. This resonates well with Murray and Cortés-Morales' (2019) argument that the interest shown by developmental research and the healthcare system in children's bodily practices reveals how they may impact upon the world even before birth. However, the contribution of Alderson et al.'s (2005a) study is to show how, through a variety of bodily practices, babies have an impact on the world, without making generalised claims about what these bodily practices can tell us about babies' social capabilities. That is, the focus is on how these social effects emerge through bodily practices *in relation to* other humans

and resonates with approaches to participation as achieved in practice that I discussed in the previous section (e.g. Elwick et al. 2014a, Hultgren & Johansson 2019).

The social and cultural context have also been emphasised in research in majority-world countries where, according to Gottlieb (2004), babies are often understood as more social and agential than in western countries. One example is Gottlieb's (2004) ethnographic study of babies in Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa, where babies are viewed as social even before they are born because they are thought of as emerging from a spiritual social existence at birth. While the social is important for our understanding of babies as agential, it is not limited to the relation between the individual baby and his or her caregivers after birth, is rather described in relation to the wider sphere of a community's social life. Gottlieb addresses social effects more specifically when arguing that:

If even infants actively shape the lives of those around them, contributing to the constitution of their social worlds, surely there is a lesson to aid us analysts in understanding social life in general.
(Gottlieb 2004:60)

Babies' effects on the social world are thus not only a question of understanding babies' worlds or even their community's social life. These effects can be understood here as having wider theoretical implications for how we understand social life.

These ideas about babies' social effects contribute to building an approach to babies that moves beyond a focus on their relations with their caregivers to gain insight into the *different* relations going on in babies' everyday lives. This does not necessarily mean an absence of parents or other caregivers, but it does mean recognising that other types of relations are simultaneously going on in babies' lives, including their relations with the material world.

Focusing on babies as social through the exploration of their social effects is vital in this study because it becomes a way of moving beyond discussions concerning why babies are social, how early they become social, or whether their sociality is innate or acquired after birth. That is, the focus is rather on exploring *how* social effects emerge when attending to babies' embodied practices and relations to both humans and non-humans. This approach therefore says very little about babies' social capabilities or development, which has been

the focus within much psychological research. It rather brings insights into how, through *being* in the world, babies shape and reshape it. That is being in relation to both humans and the non-humans.

Babies' everyday materialities

It is specifically research concerned with material things in babies' everyday lives that becomes relevant in this study when recognising babies' practices and relations beyond their interactions with other humans. The idea that material things matter, in the lives of babies was discussed by the child psychologist Shinn back in the early 1900s:

It is an epoch of tremendous importance when the baby first, with real attention, brings sight and touch and muscle feeling to bear together on an object. (Shinn 1900:143)

Besides addressing babies' engagements with material things, Shinn also recognises as mentioned in the citation, these engagements as being of great importance. However, Shinn's interest in closely observing babies' embodied practices and engagements with things seems to be founded in what these engagements can tell us about early capabilities rather than babies' relations to material things in themselves. Babies' engagements with material things have also been studied with a focus on what they can tell us about their interactions with their caregivers; for example, through examining whether or not babies perceive objects and people differently (e.g. Trevarthen 1974).

The caregiver relation is central in Kaye's (1984) study on neonatal feeding, which is an interesting example of how we can understand babies' relations to material things depending on whether we choose to focus on the baby–mother relation or, as I advocate in this study, the range of practices and relations in which babies themselves engage. In Kaye's (1984) account, neonatal feeding does not necessarily mean breastfeeding, but he describes similar practices when using artificial nipples or dummies. If we approach this discussion by centralising the baby–mother relation, we might understand babies' relations to artificial nipples or dummies as extensions of or a substitute for the mother/breast and, as Kaye (1984) does, only briefly mention the material things that occur in feeding practices during babyhood. However, I argue that, if we instead approach this

discussion by centralising the baby and the range of practices and relations s/he engages in, it becomes possible to explore babies' relations to the artificial nipples and dummies as something that might not *only* matter because it takes place within the baby–mother relationship.

As I mentioned earlier, Shinn (1900) also addresses babies' engagements with material things and, similarly to Kaye (1984), seems not particularly interested in babies' engagements or relations with material things in themselves. However, Shinn (1900) makes some interesting points concerning babies' interest in the multiplicity of things accessible to them, their preferences for certain materials or textures, and how their increased mobility gives them access to things that are not intended for them. Shinn connects babies' engagements with a multiplicity of things with their exploration of the world. Babies' engagements with multiple things have also been noted by other researchers in different parts of the world, who describe how the things with which babies engage are not limited to toys, or even to things created with babies in mind (Morton 1996, Kulick 1992, Heath 1982). While these discussions are very brief, they point to a *broad*er understanding of babies' everyday materialities and are not limited to toys or things intended for babies.

The idea that it is the materials or the textures of objects, rather than their intended function, that seems to matter to babies or children has also been addressed in relation to so-called transitional objects. Winnicott (1953:90), similarly to Shinn (1900), argues that, during the first year of life, babies tend at some point to “weave other-than-me objects into the personal pattern.” However, Winnicott (1953) was more interested in the relation that babies created with a single object rather than multiple objects. He argues that a transitional object, like a blanket or bundle of wool, or a transitional phenomenon, like a word or a tune, becomes important to the baby as a defence against anxiety; for example, when going to sleep. The importance that this object or phenomenon has for the baby leads the parents to start valuing it; for example, by carrying it around for the baby (Winnicott 1953, 2003). According to Winnicott (1953), this will lead to the child later attaching to a soft or a hard toy. The relation between the infant and the transitional object is described as being characterised by the baby's right over the object, the parents agreeing to the baby's right over it, the need for it to only be changed by the baby and no one else, its ability to sustain

love, hate and aggression, and its need to “give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own” (Winnicott 1953:91). Similarly to Shinn (1900), Winnicott (1953, 2003) highlights how material things become interesting to babies, not necessarily because of the functions or intended use of these things, but rather because of their ability to provide warmth, certain movements, or certain textures.

Winnicott (2003) discuss material things as helping babies to transition away from being completely merged with the mother to relate to her as something separated from him/herself. As in Shinn’s (1900) discussion, the babies’ engagements with such objects seem to become of interest for what these engagements can say about early capabilities or attachments.

Winnicott (1953, 2003) also illustrates how transitional objects matters for both the babies their parents as well. This is interesting because it reveals how babies’ relations to material things have effects on how the adults in their surroundings engage with these things. These effects have been discussed, for example, in terms of babies’ choices of transitional objects and, as Lupton (2013b) argues, babies’ selection of a transitional object can be understood as an exercise of agency. While focusing on older children, Lee (2008), in his discussion on transitional objects and sleep, also shows how children’s attachments to transitional objects affect their parents’ actions. He exemplifies this with a parent who immediately, and without asking the child, drives back to retrieve a transitional object that has been left behind. While not necessarily extending the focus beyond the baby–caregiver relation, this example does highlight how babies’ engagements with material things could matter, for themselves as well as the people around them.

Babies and young children’s relations to everyday materialities have also been discussed in relation to the use of media. Johansen (2007), for example, brings attention to young children’s social activities involving engagements with everyday materialities. Johansen shows that these engagements do not necessarily take place in the interaction or even direct attention of others and that these engagements can have effects also on parents’ tastes and preferences.

The effects of babies’ relations to material things have also been addressed in relation to pushchairs and prams. For example, Jensen’s (2018) study of pram mobilities not only shows how sleeping children and babies impact

upon the embodied practices of the people around them, but also reveals how moving with a baby in a pram changes the adult's experiences and relations to their material surroundings. While it is the pram rather than the child or baby itself that is in focus, this discussion is interesting because it does show how babies' and children's relations to material things have effects not only on the people pushing the prams but, as we can imagine, the places through which the prams are passing or where they are parked.

I argue that these discussions on the effects of pushing or handling a pram can also be understood in line with the idea of babies' social effects on the world they live in, because the prams are present because there is a baby to push in it. Clement and Waitt (2018) examine the effects of pram mobilities in their account of what they call "mother-child-pram assemblages" where, in contrast to Jensen (2018), they also more explicitly address children's practices while sitting in the prams. While the study includes babies as young as a few months, it is older children's experiences that provide the focus. However, Clement and Waitt (2018) raise an important argument when highlighting the lack of attention given to the experiences of the children being transported in prams. Babies moving-with prams is another example of how babies' social effects can be understood as entangled with both other people and non-humans. Similar arguments have been made by, among others, Holt (2017) in her discussion on breastfeeding practices as socio-spatially specific. She argues that this idea makes it possible to extend the focus beyond the interembodiment of the baby-caregiver relation and towards how this relation is entangled with other humans, non-humans, and spaces.

These discussions on babies and everyday materialities are relevant because they reveal how babies form relations with a multiplicity of material things in their everyday lives. It also becomes evident that these *things* are not necessarily toys, or even things intended for babies, and that the babies themselves make choices around what to engage with. These choices also have effects on the people around them; for example, by affecting how others engage with them. Attending to these aspects of babies' everyday materialities helps to expand the focus from the babies' relations with their caregivers towards the wider range of relations going on in babies' everyday lives and the effects they have on the social world in which they live.

An interdisciplinary approach to babies and babyhood

At the beginning of this chapter, I presented two problems that I had identified as relevant to address in relation to this study – that much research about babies has been carried out with a focus on development and that research moving beyond these perspectives rarely focuses on babies. To address these problems, in this chapter I have drawn on research from both psychological and social and cultural perspectives in order to formulate an *interdisciplinary* approach to babies and babyhood. Following Walkerdine (2008), this approach can be understood as moving beyond developmental perspectives on babies without dismissing psychology altogether. Establishing a research area that focuses specifically on babies and babyhood in a similar manner as child and childhood studies was established during the 1970s and 1980s offers an opportunity to create some common ground for research that is already being conducted within fields like child and childhood studies, children's geographies and mobilities, anthropology, early education, and psychology (cf. Tebet and Abramowicz 2019).

More specifically, this has involved weaving together a departure point for this study's theoretical framework by acknowledging that there is a significant amount of research that recognises babies as social participants, while also emphasising their embodied practices. This departure point makes it possible to direct the focus towards how babies can be understood as participants in the world in which they live. Moreover, by focusing on babies' *social effects*, it becomes possible to approach them as social participants through their embodied practices and relations with both humans and materialities. It is therefore important, I argue, to engage with the question of *how* babies can be known as social, rather than *if* they can. This study is doing so by starting with the idea that babies have social effects and expanding this idea beyond a focus on development and babies' interactions with caregivers. In this study, I am weaving together the idea that babies have social effects with discussions concerning their participation in everyday materialities. This is a way of recognising that there is more work to do, both in critically engaging with psychological perspectives on babies *and* in situating babies as social participants within research from social and cultural perspectives. In the next chapter, I will present the

theories that I am drawing on to explore babies as social participants using a social and cultural approach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical approach of this study aims to contribute to an understanding of what it means to situate babies within child and childhood studies. This is achieved by taking a point of departure in the idea that babies can be understood as social participants and focusing on the effects that babies' embodied engagements have on the world in which they live. In this chapter, I will discuss what I call the first and second waves of child and childhood studies. These research traditions have emphasised children as social participants in their own right (e.g. James and Prout 1997, Prout 2005). This is a beneficial starting point for formulating a research approach to babies because it makes it possible to help position babies and their practices centre stage. What I am proposing is a baby-focused research approach that perceives babies and babyhood as hybrids. This means seeing babies as bio-social entanglements and recognising their involvement with aspects of the world, be they human or non-human. This is important because it opens up possibilities for exploring how babies' hybridity, for example their intertwinement with material things, can have broader impacts on theoretical notions about children and childhood more broadly. I will begin by presenting how I define the first and second waves of child and childhood studies and how babies can be situated within the field, and after that I discuss what I call a baby-focused research approach. Then I will present and elaborate upon Tim Ingold's (2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2015) theories about lines and material things as a way of thinking along the lines of babies. Finally, the arguments presented in this chapter are drawn together in what I call an unfinished theoretical approach to babies and babyhood.

Situating babies in child and childhood studies

Many names and descriptions have been, and still are, used to discuss what I in this study call child and childhood studies. Names have changed over time, signalling different shifts within the research tradition, and today it is common to say childhood studies or child studies. I have chosen to use both, which then

includes both of what I call the first and second waves of child and childhood studies. While the division between the waves is simplified, it has been important to make it because it signals a shift in focus within the research tradition that helps in addressing how babies can be situated in relation to the central ideas of each of the two waves.

The first wave of child and childhood studies is what has been referred to in terms of ‘the sociology of childhood’ (James & Prout 1997), ‘the new paradigm for the sociology of childhood’ (Prout & James 1997), ‘the new paradigm of childhood studies’ (Lee 2001), or ‘the new social studies of childhood’ (Wyness 2012). One focus within this wave was to create child-focused research by reconceptualising children as social actors and childhood as a social construction. This wave developed in relation to the emergence of social constructionism theories in the social sciences more broadly.

The second wave of child and childhood studies is what, for example, have been referred to as ‘the new wave of childhood studies’ (Ryan 2011) or the ‘ontological’ turn in childhood studies (Spyrou 2019). The second wave of child and childhood studies can be described as trying to move beyond dualism, for example the bio-social, and acknowledge childhood as made up of a range of both human and non-human entities (Prout 2005, Spyrou 2019, Ryan 2011, Sparrman 2020, Kraftl & Horton 2018).

While different authors might mean slightly different things depending on which names they use when referring to either child and childhood studies more generally, or the first or second wave more specifically, I have chosen a terminology that gathers together these different ways of describing the field primarily for two reasons. I do not myself have any stake concerning what names are used because my intention is to discuss child and childhood studies in a broad sense, regardless of how it is named more specifically in different texts or by different authors. It is just a way of simplifying the terminology, especially as the word ‘new’ appears in both waves and in any case loses its meanings over time as nothing can stay new forever. While I might lose some nuances in the process, such as how different disciplinary backgrounds might influence the authors’ approaches to child and childhood studies, I do believe that this will make it easier to follow my argument.

The main argument is that situating the baby-focused research approach I am proposing within child and childhood studies means working with the idea of child-focused research, which was central during the first wave, and with the notion of hybridity, which became central during the second wave, in order to stay with babies as ongoing and multiple.

A baby-focused research approach

The most important idea of child-focused research is that it focuses on conducting research *with* children (James & James 2012). As this was central during the first wave when establishing the field of child and childhood studies, it was also central for the quest to reconceptualise children as social actors. The idea of children as social actors was launched as a critique by sociologists who were interested in children beyond the family and went against dominant theories of developmental psychology and socialisation (e.g. Prout 2005, James & James 2012, James & Prout 1997). The lack of attention to babies within child and childhood studies, and research from social and cultural perspectives overall, suggests that this process lost track of the youngest children (e.g. Oswell 2013, Brownlie & Leith 2011, Tebet & Abramowicz 2019). While psychological research has done much work with conceptualising babies as social participants, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the relatively limited attention to babies within child and childhood studies suggests that more work is needed to explore what it means to approach babies as participants from social and cultural perspectives. The lack of attention to babies,² however, seems to be a question of a gradual decrease in attention when moving down the ages of babies, rather than a question of specific age distinctions (cf. Thorne 2008). Rather than a question of an absolute time span, the lack of attention to babies can be understood as connected to the specific corporeality of the youngest children. That is, their

² What counts as a baby does not have a straightforward answer and, while usually understood as starting at birth, it has been discussed by different authors as spanning the period up to 12 months, 18 months or two years of age (e.g. Gottlieb 2004, Burman 1994, Sumsion and Goodfellow 2012, Løkken 2004).

lack of language, their perceived immobility, and their dependence on others to move or have their needs fulfilled (e.g. Brownlie & Leith 2011, Gottlieb 2004, Howson 2013, Gallacher 2005, Murray & Cortés-Morales 2019, Holt 2017). However, the use of the words baby and babyhood in this study is important for following Tebet and Abramowicz's argument (2019) that it is vital to establish babies and babyhood as theoretical concepts in their own right, just as children and childhood have been. Altogether, concepts like these, rather than referring to an exact or distinct age span, serve as a way of connecting the lives, experiences, understandings, and discourses of the youngest children. This baby-focused research approach that I am proposing expands upon this argument by asking what a focus on babies' practices can contribute to theoretical understandings of babies and babyhood.

In a child-focused approach, children tend to be centralized through participatory methods (e.g. James & James 2012). Participatory methods during the second wave have been criticised by several scholars for relying on discursive forms of participation, such as written or verbal language (e.g. Wyness 2013, Clark & Richards, 2017; Horgan et al. 2017). It therefore becomes crucial for a baby-focused research approach to critically engage with *how* children are focused upon in research in order not to exclude babies that do not speak yet. This argument is part of a broader critique of an over-emphasis on the social (e.g. Prout 2005). To address this critique of child-focused research, and the first wave's strong emphasis on the social and discursive, this study combines a child-focused research approach with the notion of childhood as a hybrid phenomenon (e.g. Prout 2005, Lee & Motzkau 2011). Turning to the notion of hybridity offers an understanding of babies that recognises babies' bodies, and other material aspects of their lives, without turning to ideas about their innate abilities or development. The idea of the hybrid child becomes a tool for formulating a baby-focused research approach that emphasises babies as social participants by primarily focusing on their *embodied practices* rather than their discursive abilities. It also opens up opportunities for attending to the range of human and non-human relations that are involved in babies' everyday lives.

As it is the babies who are in focus, material things become of interest in this study because of babies' embodied engagement with them. That is, babies' engagements with material things have emerged as a focus because the

material world seems to matter to babies themselves in their everyday lives. This means, drawing on Rautio and Jokinen (2016), focusing on how a thing becomes important in the moment, whether or not it is perceived as meaningful for the baby's future. Exploring how things matter therefore signals a shift of focus from what effects babies' practices may have on their development, towards what their engagements with things can tell us about their present lives.

By focusing on what matters to the babies themselves, I want to acknowledge babies' interests and orientations when examining what they are doing in their everyday lives. A baby-focused research approach thus entails following the babies in order to gain insight into how *their* everyday lives are going and what *they* choose to engage with.

Material things along the lines of babies

In order to attend to how babies' everyday lives are going on and how material things seem to matter to them, I have chosen to work with Ingold's (2007, 2015, 2011a, 2011b) theory of *lines* and his approach to material things as *occurring*. These theories provide theoretical notions to work with that keep the focus on the babies and the everyday things they engage with, while avoiding approaching either babies or things as ready-made categories. This makes it possible to also stay with non-closure and complexities (Sparrman 2020) as assets rather than aiming to produce unified understandings of either babies or babyhood. That is, these theories keep babies and everyday things in focus as unfinished and continuously ongoing, rather than aiming to produce generalised or fixed understandings of them.

Wayfaring and clinging

The idea of the theory of lines (Ingold 2007, 2011a, 2015) is that life is lived along lines. These lines, according to Ingold (2007), have the potential to go in a range of directions and therefore challenge the idea that lives are lived along straight lines. This approach to how both human and non-human beings inhabit the world is called *wayfaring*. This means approaching life as "led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere" (Ingold

2011a:148). Wayfaring is another way of expressing the embodied experience of moving through the world.

The inhabitant is rather one who participates from within in the very process of the world's continual coming into being and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture. These lines are typically winding and irregular, yet comprehensively entangled into a close-knit tissue. (Ingold 2007:81)

The theory of lines is to be understood as an approach to the world, while the concept of wayfaring explains how the world becomes what it is through humans and non-humans creating lines. The notion of wayfaring has implications not only for *what* knowledge is produced but also *how* it is produced. Approaching scientific knowledge as wayfaring means recognising that, for researchers, as for any humans, knowledge is carried on through the practices of trail-following rather than in the form of context-independent knowledge (Ingold 2007, 2011a). This means that knowledge is understood as continuously generated rather than as contained or concentrated at a fixed point.

Wayfaring offers an approach to how babies shape the world through their movements. The approach therefore makes it possible to view babies as social participants by moving beyond verbal language and discursive forms of participation. Their wayfaring through the world makes it possible for their lines to entwine with the lines of others. Combining a baby-focused research approach with the theory of lines means directing attention towards how babies' everyday lives emerge when attending to how their lines entwine with both other humans and things, rather than by focusing on what is present or going on in certain contexts or spaces, such as the home. This makes it possible to appreciate how babies' everyday lives can emerge in unique ways and be open to acknowledging how their lines entwine with others' lines, such as those of their parents. By studying babies' wayfaring, it has been possible to direct attention towards how material things emerge along babies' lines and how they then engage with them. Or, in other words, how babies' lines entwine with the lines of things:

Indeed there would be good grounds for supposing that in clinging – or, more prosaically, in holding on to one another – lies the very essence of sociality: a sociality, of course, that is in no wise limited to the human but extends across the entire panoply of clingers and those to whom, or that to which, they cling. But what happens

when people or things cling to one another? There is an entwining of lines. They must bind in some such way that the tension that would tear them apart actually holds them fast. Nothing can hold on unless it puts out a line, and unless that line can tangle with others. (Ingold 2015:3)

Clinging can thus be understood as one of the practices that babies engage in when moving. While the lines of babies and things entwine in different ways, which could also include parents giving things to babies, for example, paying attention to how *babies* cling to things signals that it is the babies' interests and orientations that are in focus. This is important for examining how babies' ways of engaging with the material world can contribute to our understanding of them as social participants.

Drawing on the theory of lines is important for formulating a baby-focused research approach because it offers help in grappling with two questions – what the social could mean in an approach to babies as hybrids, and how hybridity emerges in everyday life situations. It does not, however, suggest universal or generalised claims about how babies can be understood through a baby-focused research approach. The theory of lines keeps the notion of babies and things unfinished by emphasising how babies' lives are made up of a multiplicity of lines. This idea about the “infinite variety of lines” (Ingold 2007:154) makes it possible to recognise that sociality can be understood through a variety of practices and that babies' engagements with things can come to matter in multiple ways, for both themselves and others (including researchers). To elaborate on the unfinishedness of this, I have also chosen to work with Ingold's approach to material things.

Material things as unfinished

I have just described how lines, wayfaring, and clinging help me to approach things as “instantiated in the world as their paths of movement, not as objects located in space” (Ingold 2011a:162). Now I want to turn to Ingold's (2011a, 2011b) notion of material things as *occurring*. In this way, I want to direct attention towards what babies' engagements with everyday things can tell us about their present lives.

To do this, I am directing attention towards the materials, rather than the meaning, of material things (Ingold 2011a). To do so means moving away from things as existing and solid towards exploring what happens to material things when “they flow, mix and mutate” when, as in this case, babies engage with them (Ingold 2011a:30).

Focusing on the materials means, drawing on Ingold (2011a), to approach material things as occurring along lines, and as practically experienced, rather than existing as ready-made objects. This approach does not rely on understanding or communicating the significance of things:

View it as an object, and the material seems swallowed up in the final form; view it as material and the form recedes in our awareness, while what we see is *potential* – for further acts of making, for growth and transformation. In a world of materials, nothing is ever finished: everything may be something, but being something is always on the way to becoming something else. (Ingold 2011b:3)

By approaching things as occurring, it becomes possible to explore how material things can matter in multiple ways depending on how they are engaged with in practice. While the notion of clinging helps us to attend to what things babies engage with, approaching things as occurring helps us to attend to *how* things become involved with babies along their lines. This approach therefore offers an understanding of material things that makes it possible to recognise babies’ engagements with things as valuable in themselves and to explore what these engagements can tell us about both babies and things. That is, exploring material things along the lines of babies does not mean exploring what they are, but rather what they become when babies move and cling to them in different ways (cf. Ingold 2015).

Approaching things as occurring in movements also has implications for how the home and everyday space is approached by babies. Ingold’s (2011b) understanding of the world as made up of countless of lifelines means that the focus is on how space, just like things, occurs. This resonates with Massey’s (2005) approach to space as unfinished:

Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of

being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far. (Massey 2005:9)

Understanding space in this way recognises the home, along with the everyday, as something that cannot be defined beforehand and makes it possible to acknowledge babies as involved in the making of the home. This understanding also brings attention to the different and multiple ways in which the home can emerge along the lines of babies.

An unfinished theoretical approach to babies and babyhood

What connects the theoretical notions and approaches in this study is the idea of unfinishedness. Approaching movements, material things, everyday life, and space as nonlinear and unfinished directs the attention towards how babies participate in the world through non-discursive practices because this approach does not rely on either verbal language or discursive ways of being in the world.

This means that the theoretical framework cannot in itself be understood as finished or complete, which means that theory is approached as a set of tools to ‘think with’ (Jackson & Mazzei 2012). I will discuss the notion of ‘thinking with’ in more depth when I discuss the method of analysis in the methodology chapter. For now, I just want to point out how this has helped me weave together a baby-focused research approach to theory. The idea of ‘thinking with’ has been important because it simultaneously emphasises the reciprocal relation between theory and the empirical material. This reciprocal relation is vital for formulating a baby-focused research approach that is continuously ongoing as it stays with the complexities and non-closure of the empirical material (cf. Sparrman 2020).

The approach to unfinishedness that I have discussed in this chapter is also vital for approaching babies themselves as unfinished because it recognises babies as emerging along an infinite variety of lines. This is vital for dealing with the relative lack of attention to babies within child and childhood studies. During the first wave of child and childhood studies, Lee (1998) argued that the reconceptualisation of children as social was privileging the complete and mature the immature and incomplete. Considering babies as unfinished offers an

approach that does not dismiss the rapid changes their bodies undergo during the first year(s) of life. Attending to “all their attributed conceptual liabilities and somatic messiness” (Gottlieb 2004:58) rather brings to the fore the question of how a baby-focused research approach can also contribute to social and cultural theories of children and childhood.

An open and ongoing theoretical framework also has consequences for the methodological approach of researching along the lines of the babies. It means keeping an open mind about what the babies engage with, which in this study has meant studying babies’ everyday lives with an ethnographic approach.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study has been conducted by means of ethnographic fieldwork in the everyday lives of seven babies (aged one to 18 months) and their families. Much of my time with the babies and their families was spent in their homes. I filmed and followed the babies around on the floor, except for when I followed them to places like the indoor swimming pool, the grocery store, library, pharmacy, or hairdresser. By using an ethnographic method, including participant observation, photographing, ethnographic interviews with parents, and the use of activity diaries, the purpose has been to gain insight into the babies' everyday lives. Researching babies' everyday lives ethnographically means that they have been studied during activities and in places where the families usually spend time, rather than in a setting constructed by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, Emerson et al. 2011). The focus has been on following the babies across different contexts without deciding beforehand what activities or settings would be of interest for understanding their engagements with material things (Pink 2007, Gottlieb 2004, Atkinson et al. 2008).

Following Highmore (2002), the everyday is here approached as a site for critical exploration rather than merely as the location of research or as holding ready-made meanings. This means that my focus on the everyday lives of babies can be understood as fulfilling two purposes. Firstly, it makes visible a group of children who have gained little attention in social and cultural research by recognizing babies' *own* everyday lives. Secondly, while babies' everyday lives overlap in many ways with their families, they cannot be understood as only prolongations of family life. Critically exploring the everyday therefore entails reflecting on how *babies'* everyday lives emerge during the time I spend with the families.

The ethnographic approach employed in this specific study is a mixture of what anthropologist Gottlieb (2004) discusses as a formal and informal approach. This means pre-planned (formal) ethnographic strategies are mixed with unexpected (informal) strategies that were used to accommodate spending time with the babies. The aim has been to explore what can be learnt about babies'

everyday lives and what it means to use non-verbal methods by conducting ethnographic research. This mixture of strategies was vital for addressing the question of what it means to do specifically *baby* ethnographic research. The mixture of strategies also offers a possible way of not glossing over the differences between babies (cf. Gottlieb 2004), as well as expressing a commitment to staying with the complexities of babies' everyday lives (cf. Atkinson et al. 2008). Before elaborating on the implications of these points for this study, I will discuss the process of recruiting families, present the babies, their families, and the research material, and describe how I entered the field.

Recruiting families

I began searching for families with the criteria that the baby was less than twelve months old, lived in proximity, and that the parents were first-time parents. As it was more difficult than I expected to recruit families for the study, I chose to broaden the criteria to families in all of Sweden with babies under 18 months, with or without older siblings. Even though this was done primarily to extend the group of potential informants, changing the age criterion also led to me being able to make visits to the families that participated for a longer time and collect more research material. As I was interested in doing research with children before they started communicating verbally, extending the age span to 18 months rather than 12 months did not change the focus because the babies older than 12 months only communicated a few words to me during my visits.

As I could not recruit the babies themselves, I needed to gain access to their everyday lives through finding parents who wanted to participate. I started searching for families to enter the study by posting ads online and through open daycare³ where parents were visiting. As these methods only resulted in two

³ Open daycare refers to what in Swedish is called "Öppna förskolor". They are often connected to Child Healthcare Centres (Barnavårdscentraler) and have locales designated only for open daycare. Some churches also arrange open daycare during certain hours in their usual locales. Parents can go to open daycare with their

families for the study, I started to use the snowball method (cf. Bryman 2012) and asked friends, families, and co-workers if they knew anyone who might be interested in participating. This enabled me to recruit the remaining five families.

Gaining access to the babies' everyday lives, however, was not a one-time decision about gaining entry to a research site, it was rather a process of continuously negotiating access during my fieldwork (Reeves 2010). Which parts of babies' everyday lives I got access to, or which kind, was dependent on issues such as where and when the parents were (un)comfortable with me filming (cf. Aarsand & Forsberg 2010). Creating, and maintaining, enough trust in my relations with the babies' parents was therefore important for maintaining my access to the babies (cf. Sixsmith et al. 2003).

The babies and their families

The fieldwork with the families took place between October 2016 and February 2019. The fieldwork was more concentrated at the beginning of the period and became more spread out towards the end, partly because of my own long periods of parental leave. In total, I spent between one and five days with each family and, depending on how long the families wanted me around, a day could range from two to ten hours.

With the first four families, I spent a couple of days during a short period and then went back for another visit a couple of months later when the baby was older. I chose to organise the visits in this way because I wanted to gain a deep understanding of each baby's everyday life with several visits close together, but also to add the element of change that came with returning one more time a few months later. With the next two families, I spent only one or two days each, and with the last family I decided to make several visits with a couple

children when they are between 0–5 years of age for organised activities like singing or to enable their children to spend time with other children and/or engage with the available toys or crafts. Open daycare is usually cost-free and while there are people working at the centres they do not provide childcare, which means that children can only spend time there with their parents present.

of months in between each one because I was interested in what insights I could gain from visiting a family during a longer period of time than with the previous families.

For this study, I was visiting families in three different cities in Sweden and one family who lived outside one of these cities. The cities varied in size from small to one of the biggest cities in Sweden. Overall, the study includes seven families with babies, and three of these babies had older siblings. In three of these families, I also met and filmed the babies of friends of the parents who came to visit during the time I spend with the families. In total, the study includes empirical material from filming 10 babies aged between one and 18 months.

None of the parents were unemployed at the time of the study. The parents were working in a range of areas that included social welfare, medicine, mental health care, real estate, research within the social or natural sciences, study guidance, administration, self-employed restaurant owners, bartending, costume assistance, working with non-profit organisations, and arranging music festivals. Almost all the parents had a university degree and/or were running their own business. A few of them had, or were studying for, a PhD. In all the families except one, the plan seemed to be that both parents would take at least part of the parental leave and that both would continue working in the same or a similar job after they had been on parental leave. In the one exception, the mother of one of the families had decided to take a pause from her freelancing work at her own company while the children were young because it became difficult for the family to combine having young children and being two parents who both had odd working schedules.

Most of the parents were aged 31–36 years, apart from one father who was in his late twenties and two fathers and one mother who were around 40 years of age. Two of the siblings participating in the study were about three years of age and one sibling was around 10 years old.

Here, I will introduce each baby and their family in more detail. The babies have been given pseudonyms to ensure their and their families' anonymity, and visiting babies are referred to as another or the other baby. I have further chosen to only refer to the parents as parents, mothers or fathers, as it is the babies who are the focus of the study.

Alva and her family

I meet Alva for the first time in the family's three-room apartment just a couple of days before she turns one year old. Alva is the only child in the family, lives with her two parents and for the moment her mother is on full-time parental leave with her. At the time of my visits, Alva is sleeping in her parents' bedroom and the things in the apartment that looked as though they belonged to her were concentrated in an area around the kitchen table and another area by the couch in the living room. Her parents told me that Alva's first three months had been rough because she was suffering from stomach problems but that after that she seemed content with life. During the first year of her life, Alva also spent a lot of time at the hospital visiting a family member who was ill, which her mother describes as something that has been a big part of Alva's life during this time. During one of the visits to Alva's family, I also filmed a six-month-old baby who came to visit with her mother.

Ella and her family

I meet Ella for the first time in the family's three-room apartment while she is resting in her mother's arms when her mother opens the door for me. Ella is nine months old and the only child in the family. She is living with her two parents and her mother is currently on full-time parental leave with her. I get the impression when visiting the family that Ella is sleeping in her parents' bedroom and the things that seem to belong to her are mostly located in the living room. While visiting Ella's family, I also filmed a baby of the same age as Ella who came to visit with her mother a couple of times.

Lia and her family

I meet Lia for the first time when she wakes up from a nap in the nearby café where her mother and I are sitting after meeting up. She is nine months old and lives with her two parents in a two-room apartment. Her mother is on full-time parental leave with her. At the time of my first visits, Lia is sleeping in her parents' bedroom and most of the things that seem to belong to her are spread out in the living room. For my last visit, we meet at the library and I do not spend any time with them at home.

Wilma and her family

When I meet Wilma for the first time, she is six months old and is living with her two parents in a four-room house. At this time, her mother is on full-time parental leave with her but when I come back to visit for the last time Wilma is almost a year old and her parents are both on half-time parental leave with her and switch around at lunchtime. Wilma has her own room upstairs that mostly seems to be used for changing her nappies on the changing table that is located there. Wilma is sleeping in her parent's bedroom and the things that belong to her – except the ones in her room upstairs – are mostly concentrated in an area next to the couch in the living room. Her mother tells me that they live an active life and that Wilma tags along in this lifestyle. She also tells me that their surroundings are very child friendly. While visiting Wilma's family, I also filmed a six-month-old baby who came to visit with her mother.

Milo and his family

I meet Milo for the first time at his family's house after he wakes up from a nap. He is one month old at the time and lives with his two parents and his older sibling in a five-room house. His mother is on full-time parental leave with him when I visit, and his sibling is also at home more than usual because she only goes to daycare for 15 hours a week.⁴ He is currently sleeping in his parents' bedroom and when I visit them it does not seem as though he has things belonging to himself located in any specific area of the house. His mother tells me that something that is important in Milo's life is that he has an older sibling and a cousin. She tells me that Milo cannot really participate when they are playing but he gets a lot of cuddles and hugs from them.

Noah and his family

Noah is six months old when I first meet him at the family's four-room house, where he lives with his two parents and his older sibling. His mother is on full-

⁴ In Sweden, children who have legal guardians/parents who take parental leave for another child only have the right to a limited number of hours of daycare.

time parental leave with him and when I visit his older sibling is also at home. At the moment, Noah is sleeping in his parents' bedroom, but he has his own room next to his older sibling's, where a lot of the things that seem to belong to him are located. His mother tells me that during pregnancy they were informed that Noah might be born with a heart defect and while it turned out that nothing was wrong after all, she tells me that she thinks this may have reflected on them as parents at the beginning of Noah's life.

Liam and his family

I meet Liam for the first time when he wakes up after a nap in the four-room house where he lives with his two parents and an older sibling. Liam is four months old at the time and his mother is on full-time parental leave with him. During the times when I visit, his older sibling is sometimes at home. The things that seem to belong to Liam are concentrated in an area in the kitchen and he is currently sleeping in his parents' bedroom. His mother tells me that Liam's father is working from home a lot and that this is helpful because his older sibling is not getting any after-school hours while one of them is on parental leave. Instead, they have arranged for more activities for Liam's sibling, which the father usually takes her to because it turned out to be too difficult for the mother to take both. She tells me that it feels as though they are two adults at home instead of one and that Liam's older sibling is also helping a lot with taking care of him. She also tells me that Liam is sleeping very well.

The research material

The ethnographic material collected for this study consists of 67 hours of video recordings, 108 photographs from the field, three activity diaries filled out by parents, and 60 pages of research diary and field notes.

The video material consists of recordings of the babies – and to some extent the parents, other adults, older siblings, and other babies – that I made while spending time with the families. I used a small video camera that I usually held in my lap when sitting on the floor or placed on objects or furniture present in the room.

Figure 1: Image of video camera used during fieldwork

On a few occasions, I also recorded the babies with a smartphone camera. This happened when the battery of the video camera was running low. Choosing to video record the babies without using additional equipment like a tripod created both possibilities and limitations for the kind of empirical material that could be collected (cf. Sparrman 2005). As I was following the babies around as much as possible, much of the video material was recorded while sitting on the floor; thus, it rarely provided broader images of the homes. Since the video camera was easy to move with, however, it does provide images on the move; for example, when parents moved the babies between rooms or put them into a highchair (cf. Pink 2007). All of this would have been difficult to capture if I had been using a tripod. To complement the visual recordings, I also took photographs with a smartphone.

The photographs document material things and spaces that belonged to the babies or that I found of special interest. The smartphone was also used for documenting things at times and in places where filming with the video camera did not work out.

After every visit to a family, I also wrote a field diary in which I documented practical information and reflections around spending time with the family. Sometimes the diary also includes a more theoretically oriented text which can be described as a short analysis of something I found especially interesting during a visit (Emerson et al. 2011). On some occasions I also took field notes during fieldwork. These were quickly scribbled down notes in public spaces where it was difficult to either ask for verbal consent from others who were present or to film without capturing images of them. The diary and notes have mainly served two purposes. They have provided material for writing ethnographic accounts of events that were not video recorded and have been a way of continuously reflecting upon my own experiences during the research process (Emerson et al. 2011). I also asked the parents to take notes.

The parents' notes were gathered through three activity diaries in which they wrote information about their babies. The type of activity diary used in this study stems from time-geography (Ellegård 1999, Bendixen & Ellegård 2014, Orban et al. 2012). However, instead of using time as the primary focus, I constructed diaries that used activity as the primary focus. When visiting the families, I handed out activity diaries to the parents who had agreed to fill them out while I was not there. In these diaries, the parents noted what the babies were doing, what material things they were engaging with, who participated in the practice and who initiated it. I asked the parents to take notes during one or two days between my visits.

Entering the field

When visiting the families for the first time, I provided them with an information letter about the study and we talked for a while so that they could ask questions about the study. The parent or parents present during the first visit signed a consent form for their own and their baby's participation in the study. When other adults, with or without children, visited the participating families during the study The adults visiting were always aware that I was conducting research in the participating family on their arrivals and we found different strategies to work around this. Some of them filled out a consent form, others gave verbal

consent to occasionally get captured in the images, and others decided to just keep out of the camera frame.

Sometimes, I also went with the families to places like libraries, open daycare, indoor pools, or cafés. When filming in public spaces I informed parents that I was filming for a research study and asked if it was all right for their children and themselves to be caught on film when they were in proximity. At the open daycare, I took a slightly different approach, first talking to the staff who worked there to negotiate how and when I could film during the visit. When spending time at the indoor pool, I chose not to film at all because it would have been difficult to ask for verbal consent every time someone other than the participating family got close. It also seemed probable that people would be more hesitant about being filmed or having their babies filmed in only swimming costumes. On these occasions, I took fieldnotes and at times photographed material things in or beside the pool without any people showing in the images.

When doing research involving a child-focused approach, James and James (2012) argue, it is important that the children themselves give, and are able to withdraw, their informed consent during the research process, rather than only relying on parents and/or other adults consenting on their behalf. This argument can be connected to a larger question, discussed for example by Clark and Richards (2017), of how recognising children's own views becomes important for their participation in research.

Concerns about the babies' consent was something that emerged for me when visiting the first family in the study. After I arrive at Alva's apartment, we are all gathered around the family's small kitchen table. Alva herself is sitting in her highchair. After the parents have signed the consent letter and hand it to me across the table, Alva reaches out and gets hold of it. She puts it in her mouth and leaves a drool mark on it. Her father says something about the study being baby approved and we all laugh about it. In that moment, I laugh because I am thinking that this is going to be a great story to tell in text later as I recognise Alva's action as a kind of participation in the research study. While I still think that this is an interesting story, it has less to do with the possible meaning of Alva's actions and more to do with the tension that I believe was connected to my own thoughts and feelings in that moment.

Alva grabbed something passing near enough to her and put it in her mouth, as babies often do. However, what was on that paper was of no significance to her. While Alva's actions could be understood as showing that she is not a passive informant, they also show that, through her embodied practices, she takes part in shaping the interaction between me and her parents. My laughter and thoughts when Alva grabs the consent form, however, do say something about my own underlying insecurities. These insecurities, I realised, were connected to the unsettling feelings I had about doing research with people who could not consent, either verbally or in writing, to their participation in the study. Instead, the parents had to sign the consent letter *for* the baby.

These unsettling feelings became important, however, not so much in terms of finding ways of 'baby-approving' the study, but as part of continuously reflecting on the larger question of how to approach babies' participation during research. This question became central for reflecting not only upon what *kind* of knowledge is produced, but also *how* it is produced (Guillemin and Gillam 2004).

Baby ethnographic method

The fieldwork was mainly carried out through participant observations with a video camera (e.g. Aarsand & Forsberg 2010, Gottzén 2009, Cardell 2015, Cekaite 2010, Sparrman 2005, Magnusson 2017). While the study also includes other formal strategies, such as photographs, ethnographic interviews, and activity diaries, these did not become as central for understanding the research topic. The reasons for this will be discussed in the section on the analytical framework because it is connected to how I worked with the empirical material during analysis.

Participant observations have made it possible to gain first-hand knowledge about what babies *are doing* in different contexts in their everyday lives (Fangen 2005, Pink 2015). This has been especially important because the method does not rely on spoken or written language but first and foremost the gaze and the body (Pink 2001, 2007, 2015). Still, even though the participant observations were made with a video camera, it was not used in the same way across the families. This flexibility and open approach to the collection of

empirical material is common to ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007) and has been absolutely significant during this fieldwork. This is especially true because it enabled me to appreciate the specificities of doing ethnographic research with babies who are not yet speaking. The mixture of formal and informal strategies allows for a methodological approach that makes it possible to conduct research *with* babies. It made it possible to rely on formal methodological strategies while at the same time keeping these strategies flexible and open to change in the encounters with the babies. In this study, this has more specifically meant turning to Pink's (2001, 2015, 2007) work on ethnographic method and directing attention towards observations of the visual, sensorial, and mobile activities of the babies.

The use of a video camera when making participant observations became a central strategy because it recorded what the babies were doing in much more detail than the field notes that I occasionally jotted down during fieldwork. The use of a video camera also afforded other possibilities to capture babies' engagement. It made it possible to film at the height of the babies when they spent time on the floor as the perspective of the video camera when it lay in my lap was at the babies' height. This lowered the perspective of the images captured by the video camera as well as that of my own gaze because when sitting on the floor I was often observing the babies through the small screen of the video camera rather than from the height of my own gaze. Using a video camera also provided certain opportunities for interaction with the babies and their parents because I was not busy taking notes while spending time with the families. My interactions with the babies was one way that spending time on the floor together with them gave insights into how the researcher becomes entangled with the knowledge production (e.g. Pink 2001, 2015, Coffey 1999, Aarsand & Forsberg 2010, Sparrman 2005). The empirical material is therefore approached as a product of the relations and negotiations going on in the field, rather than as an intact result that can be collected and brought home from the field (Pink 2001). Therefore, the continuous reflection upon *how* knowledge is produced (Guillemin & Gillam 2004) does not only concern the babies' participation in the research but also the researcher's participation in the everyday lives of the babies while conducting research. The video recordings can thus be understood

as producing specific ways of understanding the research subject, rather than being a neutral device capturing a fixed reality (Pink 2001, Sparrman 2005).

The use of the video camera drew attention to two informal strategies that became central for reflecting upon and conducting a baby ethnography – attending to sensoriality and movement. The babies’ engagements and negotiations around the video camera brought my attention to the effects that these embodied and sensorial encounters had on the ethnographic method and how they could provide insight into the research topic as such (cf. Sparrman 2014). Drawing on Pink (2015), this has meant attending to sensoriality at different stages during the research process and to how sensoriality emerges in the relations between bodies, minds, and environment. Focusing on both the visual and the sensory has offered an approach to babies’ everyday engagements with both humans and non-humans. For example, as the video camera became involved in the embodied and sensorial encounters with the babies during fieldwork. This methodological combination opens up space for exploring babies’ everyday lives in close-up beyond the discursive.

The focus on the senses also draws attention once more to how the researcher’s embodied and sensory experiences become entangled with the knowledge production, what Pink (2015) calls sensory participation. Sensory participation offers an approach that situates the researcher in the midst of the embodied and sensorial relations, rather than as someone who approaches the babies’ embodied sensory practices from a distance. Situating myself and the video camera as part of these relations entailed following babies at the heights and in the spaces where they were spending their everyday lives. It includes attending to babies’ ways of relating to the researcher and research technology and following babies’ movements as a way of ‘walking with’ them while using a video camera in ethnographic fieldwork (Pink 2007). This approach emphasises the moving bodies of both participants and researchers as a way of exploring their experiences and engagements in the research context by following their interests and orientations (Pink 2007). When conducting research using the baby ethnographic method, it is important to shift the focus from ‘walking with’ video to ‘moving with’ video to appreciate how babies engage in their environment through a variety of often very small movements that do not necessarily entail moving across distances.

What I have discussed here as a baby ethnographic method is not so much *a* method as a methodological approach to doing ethnographic research in babies' everyday lives. A baby ethnographic method that primarily emphasises the attention to babies' engagements is also valuable for exploring what it means to do ethnographic research *with* babies. By mixing formal ethnographic strategies, such as participant observation, and informal ones, such as filming at the height of the babies (cf. Gottlieb 2004), attention has been directed towards sensoriality and movement as two methodological tools for attending to babies' embodied practices. This focus on sensoriality and movement has also been central to how the analyses of the empirical material have been approached.

Analysing along the lines of babies

To explain the analytical method of the empirical material, I want to turn back to the theories. In the theoretical chapter, I launched the concept of thinking along the lines of babies with the help of Ingold's (2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2015) theory of lines. Approaching everyday things as emerging along babies' lines has made it possible for me to question the things that quickly caught my interest or that I found exciting and important at first sight. For example, how babies were moved between different places was one such aspect. I was especially excited when I got the chance to spend time with one of the babies and her parents at a bar because at the time it seemed to expand my ideas about where babies spend their everyday lives. While these movements do say something about where babies spend time, it is to a large extent based on where parents decide to take their babies.

However, thinking along the lines made me re-focus. It made me turn away from my burst of interest in new places to the moments "when nothing in particular seems to be happening"⁵ (Ehn and Löfgren 2007:11, my translation). It turned out that what quickly caught my interest often seemed to reveal much about my own preconceived ideas and interests. Focusing on moments when nothing in particular seemed to happen therefore became a way of working with

⁵ In Swedish: "när ingenting särskilt tycks ske"

examples that required me to slow down the analyses (cf. Horton & Kraftl 2006) as they were more difficult to pin-point, categorize and put into words.

Through this focus, I came to explore the things that are going on in the background and that “often unnoticed, often unsaid, often unsayable, often unacknowledged and often underestimated” (Horton & Kraftl 2006:259). This is how the articles came to focus on the babies’ engagements with things in their homes.

In their homes, the babies’ movements were also less restricted than when spending time outside the home which meant that they could to a larger extent choose for themselves what things to engage with. This methodological and theoretical approach helps making the babies’ interests and choices central to the analyses. In order to gain insight into the babies’ activities, I have chosen to focus mainly on the video recordings. The rationale behind this decision is that, when filming, I always kept the babies in focus regardless of whether their engagements seemed relevant to the research topic or not. The analyses of the video recordings have been combined with the activity diaries because they provide accounts of what the babies were engaging with when I was not present in their homes. This means that I have excluded the material, such as photographs and the informal interviews with the parents, which did not focus on the babies themselves.

My approach has been to analyse the material through *thinking with* which means using theory to think with empirics, and empirics to think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei 2012). The practice of thinking with offers an approach to analysis that does not aim to provide generalised representations of the empirical material but rather to open up and attend to its complexities. In this approach, knowledge production is therefore understood as neither final nor complete, but rather as ongoing and unfinished. In other words, it means keeping “meaning on the move” (Jackson & Mazzei 2012:7) by spending time moving both between and within the empirical material exploring different ways of approaching it analytically.

This resonates with Ingold’s (2007, 2011a) discussion about scientific knowledge as wayfaring, in which he argues that knowledge is passed on through the practices of trail-following. Thinking with wayfaring means approaching movement and trail-following as central to the analytical process,

which means that knowledge is understood as continuously generated in movement rather than contained or concentrated at a final destination. This means that the analytical process has meant moving back and forth between collecting empirical material and analysing it. This is partly because the fieldwork and the more focused process of analysis overlapped in time, but also because being in the field generated theoretical insights that were written down in the fieldnotes or kept in mind and integrated into the more focused process of analysis (Pink 2015, Emerson et al. 2011).

Analysing with the notion of wayfaring becomes a way of attending to the multiplicities of babies' practices because trails have the potential to go in a variety of directions (cf. Ingold 2007). However, attending to multiplicities does not mean to dismiss connections but rather to move away from an approach to connections that relies on systematising or categorising the empirical material. Instead, it has meant exploring the different kinds of connections and multiplicities that emerged when working with the empirical material in a variety of ways.

Approaching the empirical material analytically has entailed moving between different ways of working with, and analysing, the same material (e.g. Pink 2015). When watching and transcribing the video material, I have focused on transcribing the material things that the babies were engaging with, how they were doing so and how they moved, or were moved by adults, within the home environment. During the transcription process, I also made different analytical connections to highlight material things and activities that recurred in the videos. This made it possible to return to the material and look through it again for more examples. The process of transcribing – and making connections through the material – also entailed making different kinds of lists, such as lists of material things that could be found in the babies' toy-spaces, and material things found by while not intended for the babies. The video-recordings were also used for making maps of the homes (cf. Tebet & Abramowicz 2019, Sumsion et al. 2014) of the babies to achieve a broader – and different type of – visual representation of their homes. While analysing, I have moved back and forth between the video material itself and the different transcriptions. This has helped me to stay connected with the sensory experiences evoked by the video material and to analyse embodied practices that were difficult to convey by transcribing (cf. Pink 2015).

Because the focus on sensoriality emerged as an important part of spending time with the babies, and therefore also for conducting the ethnography, I also explored how working with sensoriality can provide ways of analysing embodied practices. This has meant attending to sensorialities that I interpreted as relevant for understanding babies' embodied practices and the effects these practices had on the research process (cf. Pink 2015). The focus on sensoriality has included attending to senses like touch, taste, or gaze. As touch has been central for analysing the babies' embodied practices, I will elaborate on this specifically. To stay with touch, I first watched the video material with the sound turned off because this facilitates a focus on the babies' embodied practices. Later in the process, I turned on the sound because at times it became relevant to analyse the parents' talk in order to gain insights into the effects that babies' engagements with things have in their everyday lives. The process of turning the sound off and on during the analytical process has been a way of staying with the babies because I did experience the process of analysing the babies' embodied practices as challenging. This was especially true when I could hear the parents talking in the recordings.

The aim of the analyses is to provide insight into what babies' engagements with things can tell us about their present lives and the relationships within them. The empirical examples that are analysed and discussed in the study have therefore been chosen based on the babies' engagements with material things and how they provide insight into *the moment*. This has more specifically meant focusing on examples of babies' engagements that challenges neat or smooth analyses by emphasizing the at first glance seemingly uninterested, slippery or even troubling. This has meant attending to connections across the materials. For example, by following certain things or practices that several babies engaged with or babies engaged with in several contexts. It has also entailed moving between different interpretations of the same or similar examples. Focusing on empirical examples that became interesting over time, rather than right away, have made it possible to expand and stay with the commitment to understanding the complexities of babies' everyday lives, rather than providing generalised claims about what it means to be a baby. As this study aims at centring babies' interests and orientations, I have chosen to focus to a lesser extent

on examples involving parents bringing babies to settings outside the home or examples of parents initiating engagement with material things.

By methodologically combining ethnographic research approaches with a focus on visibility, sensoriality and movement I have formulated a baby ethnographic method that relies on both formal and informal strategies. Combining this with analytical tools for analysing along the lines of babies, I argue, that it has become possible to keep the babies in centre throughout the research process.

SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

I: Doing ethnographic method with babies: Participation and perspective approached from the floor

Orrmalm A. (2020) Doing ethnographic method with babies – Participation and perspective approached from the floor, *Children & Society*, 34(6):461–474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12380>.

In this article, the unplanned, troubling, and messy encounters with babies during ethnographic fieldwork are presented as a departure point for discussing how participation and perspective can be understood as emerging from the embodied and material engagements between babies, researchers, and research technology. Relocating the researcher and the research technology to the floor, where the babies spend much of their time, is discussed as an important decision for opening up possibilities for the babies to participate in the research through embodied, rather than verbal, practices. This decision further highlights the importance of height when discussing participation and perspective in baby research. How the control of the video camera is negotiated between the babies and the researcher is also discussed as being important for how participation and perspective are done in these encounters. The researcher's choice around letting go of control of the video camera is further discussed as a moment when questions are raised concerning how babies' embodied practices can shape and reshape the research material that is captured with the video camera. The article proposes an approach to the discussion about how we can understand the notion of children's participation and children's perspectives when doing research with babies based on a *cautious curiosity*. This means attending to both similarities and differences that emerge when working with these concepts in baby research, and to be mindful about not simply trying to add babies' ways of participating or ways of creating perspectives into a broader understanding of the concepts. Rather, as well as yielding new insights into how participation and

perspective could be understood as being done with and by babies, baby research can also help us to critically engage with and rethink the concept of participation and perspective as such.

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

Ortmalm, A. (2020) Culture *by* babies: Imagining everyday material culture through babies' engagements with socks, *Childhood*, 27 (1): 93-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568219881676>.

This article discusses how material things come to matter in babies' everyday lives through focusing on their engagements with socks. The article further discusses how these engagements can help us to think and re-think how we understand material culture. The ongoingness of socks is discussed as important for understanding how babies' engagements with things goes on in their everyday lives, whether their parents are involved in or even aware of them or not. The article further highlights the importance of movement and sensoriality for understanding how socks come to matter to the babies through approaching objects as materials with particular qualities – like softness, stretchability or size – rather than through their established meaning or function. The article argues that attending to socks as materials makes it possible to discuss a range of different movements and practices which at times might not be nameable or easily categorised. Through focusing on the movement of materials rather than the function of objects, it becomes possible to critically engage with how material culture and material things are understood. These practices are not only important for understanding how babies engage with socks, but it is further argued that babies' engagements also have the potential to shape how their parents engage with them. The article concludes by suggesting that attending to babies' engagements with socks means that we need to shift our focus from the *meaning* of material culture towards the *sensations* of material culture. This further suggests

that babies might not only create intimate relations with objects but rather, or also, with certain materials and the sensoralities they evoke.

III: The flows of things: Exploring babies' everyday space-making

Orrmalm, A. The flows of things – exploring babies' everyday space-making, *Children's Geographies* (accepted 2020).

This article discusses how we can understand babies' space-making practices by focusing on their engagements with, and movements of, material things. A central argument is that we need to approach babies' space-making practices as shaping and reshaping the ways in which everyday space is made in the families in their own ways, rather than approaching them as disrupting adults' ways of making everyday space. More specifically, the article focuses on how babies' practices of spreading things around, engaging with a multiplicity of things, and the height of these practices can be understood in terms of *the flows of things*. The flows of things reveal openness, unfinishedness, and movement as important for understanding how babies participate in shaping the everyday spaces of their families in a broad sense, rather than making spaces for babies more specifically. The article further argues that babies' and parents' space-making practices cannot be understood as separate or distinct from each other, but that babies' and parents' practices are done within relations and through negotiations. The effects of the researcher's own (adult) understandings of the everyday spaces of families during the analytical process is also discussed as a way of highlighting the challenges involved in trying to understand how everyday space is made through mundane, subtle, and analytically slippery practices.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

I started this study by sharing a memory of filming baby Alva as she sat on the floor waving a wet wipe through the air, and the insecurities I felt because I could not make sense of what a practice like this might *mean*. Waving the wet wipe did seem to matter to Alva, however, as did so many other mundane everyday things that the babies engaged with during my fieldwork. To appreciate the kind of beings these babies were in the *moment*, it was not enough to move away from future-oriented, developmental perspectives on babies and babyhood. I also needed to reflect upon what kind of beings we as researchers are in the moment, and what we might miss out on if we approach babies' practices while wondering how these practices are meaningful, rather than staying with the moment.

To explore what can be learned from staying with moments like Alva's, I have wanted to further a baby-focused research approach inspired by child and childhood studies and what I call a baby ethnographic method. The result has become a study *with* babies that meets them as social participants by focusing on their embodied practices and the effects these bodily engagements have for them in their everyday lives. More specifically, I chose to focus on babies' engagements with the material things in their everyday lives. This has implied paying attention to the material things they actually engage *with*, rather than things especially made *for* babies. The most important contribution of this study is that it takes the practices of the babies themselves as its departure point for exploring babies' involvement with everyday materialities.

The emphasis on babies' interests, orientations, and movements has brought insight into babies' practices as well as the everyday contexts where these engagements are taking place. At home, the babies can spend time moving around on their own because it does not seem to cause their parents any worries to let them move out of sight within this environment. Babies in the Western world are born into a place where material things form a central part of families' home environments, and research into families' consumption and material culture has, for example connected babies' use of things that are intended for them

to ideas on good parenting (e.g. Lupton 2013b, Martens 2018, Miller 1997, Sjöberg 2013, Nadesan 2002). However, what is often missing from these discussions are, as Lupton (2013b) notes, examinations into how babies themselves engage with things in the context of the family. The baby-focused research approach in this study contributes to these discussions by showing that babies have their own ways of engaging with the material world. These engagements do not necessarily align with their parents' or families' engagements. However, they do have effects on parents' choices and how they engage with everyday materialities. For example, this study points to how babies' engagements with everyday materialities open up for negotiations with their parents around what things should be accessible to them, how they are allowed to engage with them, and how things are located or moved in everyday space.

By directing attention to babies' engagements with things, this study has shown that, apart from providing their babies with a range of things intended for them, parents also seem to spend a great deal of effort tuning into their babies' own ways of engaging with the larger material world of the home. This study shows that explorations into what babies themselves choose to engage with suggest that parents are not only valuing babies' engagements with things intended for them. They also seem to value many of the babies' sometimes unexpected engagements with things that were not intended for them. This raises questions concerning how babies' own ways of engaging with the material world, and of involving others in these engagements, could potentially shape what it means to be a baby and a parent.

Following the babies has shown that, while parents or other adults are always present in their homes, babies also spend time doing things 'on their own'. And in these instances, it has been possible to closely observe the babies' orientations and focus on what they themselves choose to engage with when they are not relying on what their caregivers initiate or give them. This methodological approach has been a way to grapple with the challenge of doing research with children who do not yet communicate verbally without falling back on the practice of relying on the perspectives of adult caregivers. This ethnographic exploration with the babies has drawn attention to aspects like babies' movements, and to their touch, gaze, pace, silence, and stillness. To understand these bodily performances, the ethnographic method has been important

because it has meant spending much of the time during fieldwork with the babies themselves on the floor in their homes among all the things they get involved with.

The fact that the babies during fieldwork were able to move more freely at home also had implications for the informal strategies that I developed during my fieldwork. It is here that the baby ethnographic method has been especially fruitful because it has helped me to be open and flexible (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson 2007), particularly with regard to aspects that emerged as important for doing research *with* the babies. For example, the baby ethnographic method entails much more than simply rethinking your methodological approach. It also entails finding ways of lowering your own gaze, repositioning your body in the room, learning to move across floors in a sitting position while holding a video camera, and figuring out how to film with a baby in your lap. Moving with babies in their everyday lives with the video camera also contributes to re-thinking the challenges, and possibilities, that arise when doing research more generally with people who move very differently than yourself. To fulfil the task of staying *with* the babies, pre-verbal encounters have challenged me to find an alternative reflexive approach to myself as a researcher and also to become more oriented to various embodied practices. In this study, this has meant staying with the *unfinishedness* and the *unexpected* during the research process; methodologically as well as theoretically.

Inspired by Murray and Cortés-Morales' (2019) idea about micro-movements, I have been able to stay with a range of sometimes very small activities going on within the limits of a home, or even in one and the same spot in a home. This entails for example movements like waving, stretching things out, exploring them with the mouth or hands or carrying them while moving around on the floors. It also involves the movements, and non-movements, involved when lying in things like baby gyms, slings or resting in someone else's arms. My focus on such everyday movements has made it possible to see and analyse aspects of babies' social and cultural lives that are difficult to name or categorise. Staying focused on the babies themselves has been vital for seeing and capturing the multiplicity of movements making up babies' everyday lives.

The ways in which babies move, orient, and engage have also been shown to have implications for how they become involved with and effect their

social and material environment. This is a small but important shift in focus from generalised claims about babies' abilities to engage in social interaction to how their movements and actions set other humans, as well as things, in motion. Moving with things or people, moving to, moving away from, moving around, moving up or down, moving quickly or slowly, moving in the same spot, or being motionless – all of these practices make up babies' lives as well as their families.

What this study contributes to is not a unified or finished social and cultural approach to babies; rather, it calls for multiplying the category of children (Sparrman 2020). This is an intriguing aspect of the study because it means staying with the uncertainty of how babies become social participants. A baby-focused research approach recognises how babies' ways of being in the world can expand the category of children, by including babies on babies' own premises.

This has been done by setting off from psychologically oriented understandings of babies as social participants and weaving these ideas together with the interdisciplinary research area of child and childhood studies. To move forward with this theoretical combination has, for example, provided ways of attending to babies as entanglements of the physical changes their bodies go through, as well as what they themselves are doing with their bodies. Shifting the focus from the capabilities of babies' bodies towards babies' embodied practices has provided an approach to babies' dependency on others that challenges the idea that they simply *are* dependent because of their specific corporality rather than because they are socially dependent beings like all of us.

The adopted interdisciplinary approach opens up the possibility to examine how babies' corporality emerges in multiple ways. Other scholars have already suggested that a focus on babies' involvement with the material world is a promising one for moving beyond a focus on babies' relations to their caregivers (e.g. Holt 2017, Lupton 2013b). This study has shown that this indeed is a fruitful approach for addressing different relations going on in babies' everyday lives as well as other aspects of babies' relations to their caregivers.

In this study I have asked, following Tebet and Abramowicz (2019), how a focus on babies' practices can contribute to an establishment of the notions of baby and babyhood as theoretical notions in themselves. To sum up, I

want to say a few words about how finding ways of doing research *with* babies has been vital for addressing this question.

The multiplicities that emerge when attending to babies' interests, orientations, and movements bring attention to the differences between babies within, in this case, the age span of one to 18 months old. The attention to the common corporalities that babies share is one way of multiplying the category of children, for instance, by bringing attention to what it means to include the pre-verbal and pre-walking child in our understanding of the notions of children and childhood. Scholars addressing the question of why babies in social and cultural research have received less attention, point to the need for critical engagement with how babies' bodies, dependency or mobility are to be perceived (e.g. Lupton 2013b, Brownlie & Leith 2011, Holt 2017, Murray and Cortés-Morales 2019). What researching *with* babies can contribute to the establishment of babies and babyhood as theoretical notions is a way of recognizing that neither babies nor babyhood are coherent notions.

The focus on movement and sensoriality has been central in this study for addressing the specificities of babies' engagements with everyday materialities. It has, moreover, been central for recognizing the multiplicities emerging in these engagements because of the differences *between* babies. This is an important argument in this study as it shows that babies' engagements are not only dependent on what babies can do at a certain point in time. Babies' participation in and engagements with, for example research, material culture, and everyday space, can also be understood as entangled with their own interests and ways of being in the world here and now. Finding a way of doing research *with* babies has been vital for keeping this in mind and for attending to the ongoing unexpectedness of spending time with babies. What I am arguing for, therefore, is not only that we need a greater inclusion of babies within child and childhood studies research but that we need research *with* babies that attends to the multiplicities that emerge when approaching babies as babies while simultaneously recognize that they are unique individuals in their own right.

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