

Spatial perspectives on babies' ways of belonging in infant early childhood education and care

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Abstract: In this article, we endeavour to think spatially about the texture of infants' everyday lives and their ways of 'doing' belonging in the babies' room in an Australian early childhood education and care centre. Drawing on data from a large, multiple case-study project, and on theorisations of space that reject Euclidean notions of space as empty, transparent, relatively inert containers into which people, objects practices and artefacts are inserted, and instead emphasise space as complex, dynamic and relational, we map the navigating movements (Massumi, 2002) of baby Nadia. Through the telling of 'stories-so-far' (Massey, 2005), we convey how Nadia, as part of a constellation or assemblage of human and non-human beings, found ways to intensify space and to mobilise new vantage points, thus expanding the spatial possibilities of what we initially took to be a particularly confined and confining space.

Keywords: early childhood education and care, belonging, infants, babies, space.

Introduction

As I (first author) peered for the first time over the stable-like, half-height door into the babies' room of the Happy Families¹ early childhood education and care (ECEC) centre, I was jolted by what felt like a shock of recognition. At a deeply visceral level, I was reminded of the setting for the first half of Emma Donoghue's novel, *Room*, published in 2010 and shortlisted for the

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Man Booker Prize in that same year. The room of the book's title measured 11 feet by 11 feet. It was in this room that the narrator, five-year-old Jack, had lived, along with his mother, for his entire life. Skilfully, if somewhat disconcertingly, Donoghue portrays Jack's experience of such confined surroundings, not as claustrophobic, but rather one of intimacy and security. Jack "seems happily ensconced in a routine that is deeply secure, in a setting where he can see his mother all day, at any moment. She has created a structured, lively regimen for him...", wrote Bender (2010, n.p.), in her review of the novel. "We have thousands of things to do every morning", says Jack, (Donoghue, 2010, p. 10), referring to the routines and rituals that he and his mother have created for themselves. Looming large in these routines and rituals are their co-inhabitants of the space – a rich cast of non-human, "named beings" (Bender, n.p), amongst them Door, Skylight, Wardrobe, Table and Shelf and, of course, Room, itself. Notably, Jack "does not feel trapped", even though he and his mother "live in Room against his mother's will" (Bender n.p.); a situation of which Jack is unaware for much of the first half of the novel. This incongruity, Bender points out, "creates the major fissures and complexities in the book: Room is both a jail and a haven" (n.p.).

We are not suggesting that the babies' room of the Happy Families centre is a jail, even though the babies² themselves have little, if any, 'say' about how much time they spend in it. Nonetheless, it shares some striking similarities with the fictional room. At approximately four metres by four metres (13 feet), the babies' room, in which the four youngest children attending the centre on any one day spend most of their time, is a little larger, but not by much, than the physical dimensions of the confined space in which Donoghue's protagonist, Jack, lived for the first five years of his life. Like Room, the babies' room is, to practical effect, windowless to the outside world. At least initially, both invoke a sense of disquiet for the reader/researcher. But upon growing familiarity, both spaces begin to exude a sense of cosiness and security – skilfully created in the novel by Jack's mother, and in the babies' room by Ms Connie, the babies' educator. Both spaces convey busyness and, more subtly, purpose. Like the routines and rituals that Jack and his mother have created for themselves, the routines and rituals of the babies' room generate almost constant activity and motion. In both spaces, non-human beings play vital roles in the flows of everyday life. In the babies'

² We use the terms baby/ies and infant/s interchangeably to refer to young children up to the age of approximately 18 months. For coherence, we also refer to Nadia as a baby, although she was 19 months of age at the time of data collection.

room, for instance, the half-height, stable-like door and the centrally-positioned, low table have a similarly prominent non-human presence to Door, Wardrobe and the other non-human participants in the novel.

We are mindful that gesturing to unsettling parallels between the Room of Emma Donoghue's evocative novel and the babies' room of the Happy Families ECEC centre might be seen as spurious, sensationalist, or even offensive³. Yet, we are also conscious that affronts to our sensibilities, assumptions and expectations – in our case, concerning the spatial provisions of infant ECEC – can potentially generate new insights. Affronts can afford access to new forms of knowing (Pink, 2015), just as “encounters with the apparently familiar ... where something continues to trouble ... [can open up] unexpected lines of thought” (Massey, 2005, p. 6). It is in the hope of harnessing the possibilities alluded to by Pink (2015) and Massey (2005) that we use these speculative parallels as a springboard for thinking spatially about the texture of infants' everyday lives in the babies' room of the Happy Families centre, and how that texture might contribute to (or constrain) the babies coming to experience a sense of belonging.

Taking Pink, Mackley, and Moroşanu (2015) as a point of departure, by texture, we mean the temporary 'cohesion' arising from the site-specific interweaving, for example, of people, objects, desires, practices, routines, rituals, and rhythms that differentiates everyday life in one room or ECEC centre from that in another room or centre, and one child's experience from that of another child in the same room / centre. As we elaborate upon later, this cohesion is inevitably momentary for the interweaving is ongoing, with interconnections continually forming, un-forming and re-forming in new configurations, constellations and assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). We are acutely conscious, however, that any endeavour to understand infants' experience, especially of such a nebulous phenomenon as belonging, is ambitious and contestable. Our hesitation is not because we consider they have a limited point of view, as book reviewer Bender (2010) ascribed to the five-year-old protagonist, Jack, but because we consider it presumptuous to assume that we can 'know' with any certainty how infants experience their lives in ECEC (Elwick, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). In this article, therefore, rather than focus entirely on the babies, we grapple with the broader question of how the texture of the babies' room 'works' as a space of belonging.

³ Donoghue's novel is also concerned with sexual exploitation. In alluding to the novel, there is absolutely no intent to imply any ill intent or wrongdoing by the early childhood centre.

We contextualise our endeavours by first outlining the *Babies and Belonging* project from which this article derives and then, more specifically, by describing the Happy Families centre, one of the project's four case study sites and the source of the empirical data upon which we have drawn for this article. Next, we elaborate on some of the theoretical influences on how we are conceptualising space and thinking spatially about the texture of infants' everyday life and their ways of 'doing belonging' in the babies' room of the Happy Families centre. We then turn to the "navigating movements" (Masumi, 2002, p. 210) of baby Nadia to tell a 'story-so-far' (Massey, 1994) about how she expanded the spatial possibilities of the babies' room. We also gesture to other possible stories that could be told about her navigating movements and expansion of space. Finally, we reflect on our use of spatial perspectives and, more broadly, on the potential of these perspectives to extend and deepen insights into infants' experiences and lives in early childhood education and care settings, with particular attention to belonging.

The *Babies and Belonging* Project

The genesis of the *Babies and Belonging* project (Sumsion, Harrison, Bradley & Stapleton, 2013-2016) was the emphasis placed on fostering a sense of belonging in Australia's first nation-wide ECEC curriculum, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009); and subsequently, albeit more indirectly, in the National Quality Standard against which ECEC services are assessed as a requirement for receiving government funding (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2017). The study was conducted in the infant-toddler rooms of four Australian ECEC centres in localities of relative socio-economic disadvantage. Each centre was selected as a 'critical' case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) in anticipation of its potential to illuminate the phenomenon of belonging in the presence of one or more risk factors for marginalisation, for example, through poverty, migrant/refugee status, and/or Aboriginality. Approval to undertake the study was obtained from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Within a primarily ethnographic design, the project brought together diverse disciplinary lenses, theories and methodological approaches with the aim of developing situated, multi-layered and critical insights into the phenomenon of belonging, infants' experiences of belonging, and how belonging can be fostered in ECEC settings. Specifically, the study investigated the questions: 'How do babies come to develop a sense of belonging in ECE set-

tings?' and 'In coming to belong, (how) do babies contribute to a broader 'climate of belonging?' Each of the disciplinary lenses (primarily developmental psychology, social psychology and the sociology of childhood) contributed additional questions, as well as key foci, theoretical constructs, analytical lenses and interpretative approaches. Consequently, our conceptualisations of belonging have continued to evolve with the unfolding of the project but encompass children experiencing a 'sense of belonging' and their active participation in the 'politics of belonging'. The former includes attention, for example, to matters of identity, acceptance, security, togetherness, and nurturing relationships; the latter to issues such as diversity, power relations, agency, inclusion and exclusion (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). Belonging can be both an experiential state and a practice, making it possible, therefore, to refer to 'doing belonging' and to how belonging 'works', as well as to the experience of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Across the four case studies, we have endeavoured to draw on these different facets of belonging, but some facets have been more prominent in some case studies than others. In the case study we draw from in this article, we focus primarily on identities, power relations and agency in baby Nadia's belonging as she navigated the spatiality of the babies' room in the Happy Families centre.

Data for the Happy Families case study were generated over a period of 10 months and 22 field visits by a research assistant who was familiar with the centre and well-regarded by centre staff. On five of those visits she was accompanied by Author 1 or Author 2 of this article. Data comprised digital video recordings, Time Use Diary observations accompanied by still photograph (Go-Pro[®]) images, transcripts of conversational interviews with educators and the centre director, and reflective field notes written by the research assistants (for further details, see Sumsion, Harrison & Bradley, 2018).

The Happy Families Centre

The Happy Families centre was located in a culturally and linguistically diverse suburb of South West Sydney. Licensed for 33 places for children aged from 6 weeks to five years, it opened from 7am to 6pm year-round, except for public holidays. Under the national quality assessment scheme, the centre had been rated as 'working towards' the National Quality Standard; a rating consistent with findings that in Australia, ECEC centres in low-SES areas tend to be of a lower average quality than those in more advantaged areas (Cloney, Cleveland, Hattie & Tayler, 2016). The centre had changed ownership immediately prior to the commencement of field visits when the family-operated business, which was well-regarded in the local community,

was sold to a stock market-listed corporation that operates a large national chain of ECEC centres. The corporation undertook to make minimal operational changes and to preserve the centre's warm, family-like atmosphere that was highly valued by the parents, staff and former owners.

The centre had three class/play rooms: the babies' room (for children aged from six weeks up to two years), a toddler room (for two-year-olds) and a preschool room (for three- to five-year-olds). The toddler and preschool rooms flowed directly on to a large, shared, outdoor play area. Access to the babies' outdoor play area was more complicated, and involved walking through the toddler or preschool room, and then through the play area used by the older children. It was out of sight of the older children's play area and bounded by high walls. Sun protection awnings obscured most of the sky. Perhaps because of complicated access, but also because of the rainy weather and playground renovations following the change of ownership, the babies generally spent only minimal time in their outdoor space during the 22 field visits to the centre. This article, therefore, focuses only on the texture of the babies' room.

The Babies' Room and its Occupants: Towards Rich Description

The babies' room opened off one side of the narrow central hallway running from the centre's front door to the toddler and preschool rooms towards the rear of the building. It was centrally located directly opposite the kitchen, diagonally opposite the centre director's office, and only a few metres from the front door, which opened into the car park. When the front door opened, the babies could hear some of the comings and goings in the car park, including the daily ebb and flows of arrivals and departures. Moreover, as the hallway was the centre's only thoroughfare, everyone who entered the centre and proceeded beyond the office necessarily passed by the half-height, stable-like door of the babies' room that, at the time, was the only entrance to the room.

Despite this central location, the babies' lines of sight beyond their room were extremely limited. The void above the half-height door provided partial glimpses, for instance of the heads and shoulders of passing adults (e.g., staff, parents, tradespeople and other visitors). An internal and curtained window looked into the separate babies' cot room that, at the time, could only be accessed from the central passageway. Another internal window was

almost entirely obscured by children's artwork and operational documents. The only external window faced a high blank perimeter wall. Like the doorway void, all windows were above the babies' head height and line of vision.

On any one day, the babies' room accommodated four babies and their educator, Ms Connie. Diploma-qualified⁴ and with more than 20 years' experience in the field, Ms Connie was a long-standing and highly-regarded member of staff. The four focus babies from this centre who participated in the *Babies and Belonging* project ranged in age from 14 to 16 months when data generation commenced. Nadia and Joey, who feature in this article, attended the centre three days per week, for approximately eight hours per day. Jemilah and Ali, to whom we refer only tangentially, had attended the centre since they were approximately six weeks of age, for five days per week, and generally for 11 hours per day. In effect, they had lived a considerable proportion of their lives in the babies' room.

Relegation of the babies to this confined space appeared to stem from operational considerations rather than from any perceptions that the babies were not yet able to negotiate the larger spaces of the centre. Conversely, operational considerations also provided some opportunities for the babies to venture beyond their room. For instance, if, on any day, attendance fell below four babies, the room was 'closed' for reasons of economic viability, and those babies who were present would spend the day in the toddler room instead. Similarly, to economise on the costs of meeting mandatory staff-child ratio requirements, babies who attended for long hours also spent some time in one of the larger rooms in the early morning and, less frequently, in the late afternoon, when the early arrival and late departure babies, toddlers and preschoolers were brought together as a mixed-age group. Occasionally, other children accompanied by an educator, would enter the babies' room to make use of the centre's only nappy (diaper) change bench. Other educators also spent time in the babies' room when relieving Ms Connie for meal and other breaks. Sometimes, if the babies seemed especially restless, they were allowed, as a group, to run up and down the central hallway for a few joyously boisterous moments. For the most part, however, the spatial arrangements meant that the babies led a relatively secluded life.

Most of the non-human occupants of the babies' room —such as the nappy change bench, the low 'high-chairs', various forms of soft seating

⁴ In Australia, this is a sub-degree level vocational qualification, generally requiring two years of study.

that could accommodate adults and children, the open shelves containing toys and blocks, and locked storage cupboards —were arranged around the room's perimeter. Notable exceptions were the low, square, centrally positioned table and the geometrically patterned mat upon which it stood. Together with Ms Connie, they functioned as pivot points and centrifugal forces for the flows of a typical day. As the day progressed, toys, blocks, and many of the other more mobile non-human beings joined the babies in flows to, from, across and around the table, mat and MS Connie (Figure 1). The half-height door into the hallway also exerted considerable force on flows throughout the day. It beckoned babies with a range of enticements, including photographs of them displayed within their line of sight on the inner side of the door. As noted previously, the void above the door offered glimpses of the goings-on in the hallway and in the kitchen directly opposite from where appetizing smells regularly wafted. Given its propensity to encourage hallway passers-by to peer over the door and greet the babies, it also provided the babies with opportunities for spontaneous interactions with assorted adults; and, indeed, many of their relatively few opportunities to participate as social actors in the broader life of the centre.



Figure 1: Flows of babies and non-human beings around Ms Connie and the table

Many of the flows of movement and interactions within the babies' room were skillfully but subtly orchestrated by Ms Connie who, like Jack's mother in the novel, ensured the smooth functioning of the relatively cloistered space. Softly-spoken and seemingly always relaxed, Ms Connie sat, for much of the day, on the geometrically-patterned mat or a low chair adjacent to or near the centrally-positioned low table. When she needed to undertake

tasks beyond her immediate reach, she, too, joined the flows of babies and non-humans across and around the small space before returning to her central positioning by the table. Her warm, calm, and gently humorous interactions with the babies, and her melodious, crooning-like, running commentary on whatever was happening contributed to the sense of intimacy within the room.

So far in this article, we have tried to convey an image of the babies' room as a multisensory space. In the next part of the article, we briefly discuss theoretical resources that are assisting us to move beyond description as we endeavour to think spatially about the texture of babies' everyday lives and their ways of doing belonging in the room.

Theoretical Influences

In keeping with the transdisciplinary intent of the *Babies and Belonging* project, we have been influenced by the work of theorists from a range of disciplines. As foreshadowed in the introduction, they include cultural geographers Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift, anthropologist/ethnographer Sarah Pink and philosophers Gilles Deleuze, his co-author Félix Guattari, and their translator, Brian Massumi. These theorists reject Euclidean notions of space as an empty, transparent, neutral, relatively inert, and therefore easily quantifiable container or enclosure into which people, objects, practices and artefacts, are inserted and in which activities and events take place. Rather, they see space as far more complex and dynamic, as encapsulated in Massey's (2005, p. 9) three propositions: firstly, that space is constituted through, and a product, of interactions and interrelations; secondly that it is heterogenous and plural, with multiple co-existing possibilities, trajectories and stories; and thirdly, that it is "always under construction ... it is never finished; never closed". Elsewhere, Massey (1994) refers to space as "an ever-shifting social geometry of power" (p. 3) and a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (p. 9). Equally evocatively, Thrift (2008) sees space as "the *geography of what happens*" (p. 2, original emphasis) with its "continuous undertow of matterings that cannot be reduced to simple transactions" (p. viii). Our challenge in this article is to portray some of these continually shifting geometries, stories-so-far and 'matterings' in the doing of belonging as part of the texture of everyday life in the babies' room.

To this end, we attend to the materiality and the social and cultural dynamics of doing belonging in the babies' room. We are interested in how belonging "takes shape and gains expression"; for example, through the

material arrangements within the room and through “shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions” (Lorimer, 2005, p. 84). Because these are all entangled and in continual flux, there can be no one set or single starting point to investigating doing belonging (Pink, 2012) nor pre-established coordinates to utilise. Rather, following Pink (2012), it is a matter of attending to the entangled flows of people and things as they move around and through the babies’ room and their “being and doing” (p.12) in this socially and culturally complex, multisensory, material site. These entangled flows mesh together to produce even more complex assemblages of heterogeneous human and non-human parts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

We begin our mapping through the closely connected entry points of ‘affect’ and ‘desire’. From Massumi (2002), we understand affect to be the embodied, inherently dual “capacity for affecting or being affected” (p. 212). In other words, “when you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn ...” (p. 212). In this sense, affects are embodied ways “of connecting to others and to other situations ... of participation in processes larger than ourselves” (p. 212). According to Massumi, and of particular interest to us, intense affects can lead to “a stronger sense of embeddedness ... — a heightened sense of belonging” (p. 214). Although he is referring to broader spheres of life, it seems possible that intense embodied affects might contribute to a heightened sense of belonging in the babies’ room.

Affects can also be thought of as the changes and variations that occur when bodies come into contact with other bodies, situations or things (Colman, 2010). “As we move through life”, Massumi (2002, p. 214) notes, “a swarm of potential ways of affecting or being affected follows along”, from which we select, extract and actualise only some. Our selection, extraction and actualisation is driven by desire — a creative and productive force, flows of energy and experimentation. Desire is “at work everywhere”, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1984, p.1). We all continually produce, and are propelled by, flows of desires. In the assemblage of the babies’ room, bodies were constantly coming into contact with, and affecting and being affected by other bodies, situations and things. Propelled by desire, babies moved around and through the room; to paraphrase Massumi (2002), continually exploring “where ... [they] might be able to go and what ... [they] may be able to do” (p. 212), and continually selecting, extracting and actualising potentials from the entanglements and flows of everyday life in the room. In the

next section, we focus on baby Nadia's 'navigating movements' (Massumi, 2002) as she selected, extracted and actualised some of these potentials.

In referring to 'navigating movements', Massumi (2002) emphasises the "openness of situations" (and presumably of spaces) and how it is possible to "live that openness" (p. 214) through exploring their "margin[s] of manoeuvrability" (p. 212). "You move forward", he points out, "by playing with the constraints, not avoiding them" (p. 218) — by being immersed in the experiences and attuned to the opportunities they afford: "It's about ... going with the flow ... [and] surfing the situation" (p. 219). Was this how Nadia responded to the constraints of the babies' room, we wondered?

We now turn to her navigating movements and what did indeed seem to be her playful but also purposeful negotiation of that space. We attend to the embodied movements of Nadia, herself, within the space, as well as to how she negotiated the continual movements, flux and flows of the complex assemblages that constituted the babies' room, and of which she was part. We also consider how her navigating movements might constitute ways of doing belonging and what they might suggest about identities, power relations and agency play out in her navigations and belonging.

Nadia's Navigating Movements

For the purposes of this article, in mapping Nadia's navigating movements we have drawn on fragments from three segments of video footage generated on a field visit during what unexpectedly turned out to be Nadia's final six weeks in the babies' room⁵. At the time, Nadia was 19-months-old and the oldest baby in the room. Her informal status and identity as the 'senior baby'⁶ in conjunction with the spatial and temporal arrangements of the room conferred considerable positional advantage, as we try to convey through the story that follows. The three video segments span from late morning through to early afternoon on a typical day in the babies' room. The camera tracked Nadia, who had woken early from her morning nap, as she moved around the room and interacted with its human and non-human occupants. During the first two segments, the other three babies remained asleep in the cot room next door and Ms Connie took a short lunch break. Her replacement, Ms Maria, arrived about 10 mins prior to Ms Connie's departure for

⁵ Her sudden move to the toddlers' room was necessitated by the new enrolment of a younger infant in the babies' room.

⁶ Our colleague, Ben Bradley, coined this term.

lunch and stayed on for about 10 minutes after her return. For the first two segments, therefore, Nadia had unfettered and privileged access to all the room's occupants, in that her navigating movements and negotiations did not need to accommodate the desires and movements of other children. During the third video segment, 18-month-old Joey returned to the babies' room from his morning nap, providing further opportunities for Nadia's enactment of a 'senior baby' identity.

Although the video footage focused on Nadia, in keeping with the theoretical influences discussed in the previous section, we have endeavoured to see her not primarily as an individual agent or subject, but rather as part of a heterogeneous, entangled and fluid assemblage of people and things, desires and affects, interactions and interrelations, and 'matterings' (Thrift, 2008) and 'stories-so-far' (Massey, 2005). Key to our analytic processes was repeated viewing of the footage at varying speeds. It reinforced our earlier impressions of ongoing flows of energy, objects and embodied movement around and across the babies' room that varied greatly, for instance, in their intensity, duration, components, pathways, continuity and predictability. Some parts of the footage seemed especially compelling, glowing with a kind of mesmerising intensity (MacLure, 2010) and provoking animated conversations amongst our research team. They also reflected moments, it seemed to us, of heightened intensity, embodied desire and affect—for Nadia and, at times, for various other occupants of the babies' room. To paraphrase Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010), they were moments in which we were deeply engaged and affectively moved by that which seemed to enchant and move (affectively and/or physically) Nadia and, at times, other human and non-human participants. Within these mesmerising moments, we then endeavoured to discern how these flows of affect and desire within the assemblage may have been re/producing particular identities, power relations and agencies. Here, we were assisted by provocations from Spyrou (2018) who challenges traditional child-centric analyses of children's lives and contexts and argues eloquently for the turn to relational ontologies that see children as interdependent with other entities.

From fragments of some of the mesmerising footage, we now tell a story-so-far (Massey, 1994). In part, the story is about how moments of heightened intensity, embodied desire and affect contributed to the babies' room working as a space of belonging. The protagonists⁷ are Nadia and a lolly-

⁷ In the sense that they constitute the part of the assemblage that we particularly focus on.

pink, delicately-ruffled carnation flower that clearly fascinated her. Apparently freshly-picked, but minus its stem, the carnation had mysteriously appeared in the babies' room on the morning of the field visit, just prior to the commencement of videoing.

Nadia and the Pink Carnation

"Flower, flower!", Nadia greeted the research assistant, holding the carnation aloft. She then backed into Ms Connie's lap, where she sat for a minute or two. The carnation, pressed against her nose, caused her to sneeze. When Ms Connie rose to get Nadia a tissue, the carnation slipped from Nadia's grasp and fell under a highchair. Nadia quickly retrieved it. Propelled by her excitement, Nadia and the carnation (the latter alternately pressed to Nadia's nose and brandished in front of her) set out on a circuitous route around the small room. As Nadia-and-carnation plopped into the soft cushions piled against the wall, the flower again slipped from her grasp, coming to rest this time under the central low table. Again, Nadia quickly retrieved it. Reclining briefly against the cushions, carnation pressed against her nose, Nadia inhaled deeply (Figure 2a). Nadia-and-carnation then rolled off the cushions and slid on to the adjacent low central table, coming to rest almost on top of the cut-out shapes jigsaw puzzle that had been lying unfinished on the table, awaiting the return of its two missing pieces: a circle and a heptagon.

"Block, where are you?" called Nadia, echoing Ms Connie's playful way of engaging the babies in searches for missing objects and in doing so reproducing Ms Connie's endeavours to impose order through routines. "Block, block", she called again, tapping her fingers in the empty space for the miss-



Figure 2a: Nadia-and-carnation on the soft cushions

ing circle in the jigsaw puzzle, the carnation twirling in her other hand. Nadia stopped tapping, transferred it to her other hand, peered at it intently, possibly registering its circular shape, plucked a couple of petals and smelled it again (Figure 2b). Then holding the flower face down, she repeatedly pressed it in to the space in the jigsaw puzzle for the missing circle. In a scrubbing-like motion, she moved the increasingly bedraggled carnation across the jigsaw puzzle, and then pushed it into the space for the other missing, heptagon-shaped, piece.

At this point, the video camera suddenly started beeping, attracting Nadia-and-carnation back to the research assistant. Soon afterwards, Ms Maria entered the room. As Nadia ran to greet her, the flower again slipped from view, its whereabouts uncertain.



Figure 2b: Nadia-and-carnation with the shapes jigsaw puzzle

.... 20 minutes later

In anticipation of Joey waking from his nap, Ms Maria had enlisted Nadia's help in searching for his shoes, a frequently enacted script in their co-performances involving Nadia as senior baby assisting educators in ensuring the smooth flow of the day. Suddenly, Nadia deviated from that script. Mid-search, she stopped abruptly next to the low table, her eyes to the floor. "Flower! Flower!", she suddenly cried, "Where's the flower? Oh, where's the flower?"

She ran quickly to the low slung, fabric-covered, rocker chair, no more than a metre away, and which was squeezed between the edge of the mat and the nappy change bench. She circled it twice clockwise at consider-

able speed, bumping into it roughly a couple of times as she negotiated the tight turns. 'What are you doing?', called Ms Maria, apparently bemused by Nadia's frenzied movements. Nadia paused and gazed intently at Ms Maria. "Flower, where go?", she responded, looking under the rocker. Then, several times in quick succession, she lifted the rocker's cushioned head rest flap, as if suspecting it of hiding the carnation. "Not there! Not there!", she called each time she lifted the flap, "Where it go?" (Figure 2c). She ran around the rocker again, circling it twice, this time anti-clockwise. Again, the rocker gently fended her off as she bumped roughly into it on the tight turns in the confined space. "Careful, Nadia. Slow down, Nadia", cautioned Ms Maria, to little effect. On her third circumnavigation of the rocker, Nadia suddenly paused. "Look!", she exclaimed, as something under the low table caught her attention. It was the carnation. "Oh, the flower", commented Ms Maria, belatedly making sense of the script.



Figure 2c: Looking for the missing carnation under the head rest flap

As if to secure Ms Maria's participation in the script, with the carnation thrust out in front, Nadia ran to Ms Maria, who was sitting next to the low table, and forcefully pushed it under her nose. Reeling for a fraction of a second from the onslaught of Nadia-and-carnation, Ms Maria then lent towards them and inhaled deeply (Figure 2d). Just then, Ms Connie returned to the room. Seizing this opportune moment, Nadia-and-carnation turned to Ms Connie. Nadia raised the carnation to her own nose and again inhaled deeply, all the while gazing intently at Ms Connie. She then held it out, invitingly, towards Ms Connie who stooped to smell it. "Mmm, lovely", she said, buying into the script.



Figure 2d: Nadia-and-carnation eliciting Ms Maria's participation in the script

... a further 10 minutes later

Joey, still sleepy after his nap, was sitting in Ms Connie's lap. Ms Connie was encouraging him to watch Nadia — now positioned, in her capacity as senior baby as role model or perhaps as guide — who, less than a metre away, was stacking plastic cube-shaped containers on the low table. Once again, as if to disrupt the educator-initiated script and return to her own script, Nadia suddenly turned from her container stack and began to run in tight circles next to the table, her eyes downcast. "Oh, here it is. Here it is", she called, stooping to pick up the carnation which had again caught her eye, this time from under the rocker chair.

She brought the carnation to the table, put it into one of the plastic containers, pulled it out again, and smelled it several times. Then she turned to Joey, still on Ms Connie's lap, and thrust it into his face. Joey recoiled, refusing the invitational advances of Nadia-and-carnation. Ms Connie, in contrast, accepted. Entering into the performance on Nadia's terms, she gently took Nadia's hand, guiding the carnation to Ms Connie's own nose. "Mmm, nice", Ms Connie commented, inhaling deeply, then redirecting Nadia's hand-and-carnation back towards Joey. He did not respond. Twice more, Nadia's hand-and-carnation reached towards Joey's face. "Flower, flower, look, flower", Nadia urged. Yet, despite his less-than-powerful positioning, at least at that particular moment, as junior baby to Nadia's much more powerful positioning as senior baby, he continued to resist her attempts to enlist him in her orchestrated performance of desire. On their third attempt, Nadia's hand-and-carnation connected with Joey's nose. He grimaced, waved his hands in front of his nose, and then grinned at Na-



Figure 2e: Joey resisting Nadia-and-carnation

dia, possibly conspiratorially or perhaps in capitulation (Figure 2e). “Okay, cuddle”, she called, moving in close to hug him in a display of affection that further asserted her relative positional power. Ms Connie embraced both children, then swept Nadia on to her lap alongside Joey, while the carnation faded from view.

For us, this story-so-far (Massey, 1994) both resonates with and illuminates the theoretical influences on our endeavours to think spatially discussed in the previous section. It illustrates, for example, how even very young children, as part of an assemblage, can find opportunities in what may seem uneventful happenings to generate and mobilise intensity, desire and affects in ways that can invigorate their everyday lives and spaces. The unanticipated arrival of the pink carnation that was so alluring to Nadia, afforded her the means, in concert with the flower, to inject excitement, drama, suspense, humour, possibly even joy, into what, for adult observers, might otherwise have seemed a mundane morning in a confined and confining space. With the flower, she criss-crossed the room, reproducing but also improvising on existing rituals (e.g., ‘calling up’ missing objects) and creating new ones (e.g., tight, frenzied circling), and establishing new rhythms (e.g., savouring, loss, re-appearance, elicitation of responses from others). The heightened intensity generated by Nadia-and-carnation drew in others (e.g., Ms Connie, Ms Maria, Joey), creating moments of shared intimacy that, in line with Massumi (2002), presumably heightened a sense of belonging for Nadia and for others involved. Consistent with Massumi, it seemed that, for Nadia, ‘intensifying’ the space was a way of expanding its possibilities. This was not, however, an apolitical process. Indeed, as foreshadowed by Spyrou (2018), the flows of affect and desire, entangled with spatial and temporal

arrangements of the room produced discernible patterns of power relations. Nadia's positioning as senior baby, for instance, afforded scope for spatial navigations, identity enactments and performances and co-performances of certain scripts that were arguably not as readily available to Joey, despite only a 1-month difference in their age. In this sense, her positioning could be said to reflect and reproduce a status hierarchy within the babies' room.

Other Possible 'Stories-so-Far'

'Nadia and the pink carnation' is but one of many possible 'stories-so-far' (Massey, 2005) about Nadia's navigating movements through and around the babies' room and of how she negotiated the complexity of the continual movement within the space. Each of these possible stories has multiple and fluid potential meanings and trajectories. Another story-so-far that could have been told was one that played out in the intervals between the fragments from which we constructed the 'Nadia and the carnation' story. It could have told of another means by which Nadia managed to expand the space of the babies' room: for example, through mobilising various alliances with educators, adults passing by the room, and non-human beings such as the half-height, stable-like door and the internal window into cot room to gain new spatial vantage points. This story-so-far would also have been about desire, intensity and affect. It would have emphasised Nadia's rich repertoire of embodied practices through which she manifested desire, for example her wriggling bottom; upraised waving arms; balancing on tiptoes with outstretched fingers, gripping the window sill or door so that they supported almost her entire body weight; contorted facial expressions; expertly timed, strategic eye contact and smiles. It would have emphasised, as well, as her persuasive vocalisations, especially, her distinctive, difficult to ignore "oooOOO" utterances, repeated at increasing volume, in an increasingly deep, pained determined tone.

It would have conveyed how the intensity of her embodied practices and vocalisations contributed to her being able to exercise agency; not as a resource residing in her as an individual but rather, following Spyrou (2018), within the various assemblages within the babies' room of which she was part. More often than not, for instance, her embodied practices and vocalisation repertoire succeeded in leveraging her — via assistance from assorted, amused and sometimes possibly bemused adults, as well as from non-human occupants of the room — into mid-air vantage points that would otherwise have been beyond her reach. For Nadia, access to these vantage points expanded the spatial scale and "social geometry" (Massey, 1994, p. 3) of the babies' room; for instance, by allowing her to peer through the inter-

nal window, into the cot room and to greet, with a handblown kiss against the glass, other babies as they awoke from their naps.

This story-so-far would have emphasised, too, how her access to these vantage points consolidated and reproduced her generally privileged positioning within the babies' room. This positioning seemed influential in securing what appeared to be her own sense of belonging within the babies' room, and in how she participated in and contributed to the broader dynamics of doing belonging in the babies' room. Perhaps above all, though, to paraphrase Spyrou (2018) it would have highlighted our efforts to shift the focus from questions about the capacities that very young children possess that help to foster their own and others' belonging, to questions about the capacities that emerge from their relational encounters with other entities (human and non-human) that contribute to their own and others' belonging.

Reflections

This article began by highlighting the resonance, for the first author, between the fictional Room in Donoghue' (2010) novel and her initial discomfited response to the babies' room in the Happy Families centre. We soon realised, though, that throughout much of the article, we were endeavouring, "to evoke the corporeal and experiential feelings of *being there* ...". (Pink, 2015, p. 164, original emphasis). It is from, and in, these feelings, Pink continues, that "... academic understandings are produced and ... entangled" (p. 164), which we see as both a potential strength and limitation.

It has been a strength in that Pink's methodological 'validation' of attending to these feelings has encouraged us to return to the portrayal of the fictional Room to clarify analytically the differences between Room in the novel and babies' room in the Happy Families' centre. In this respect, it has been useful, as well, to return to Pink et al.'s (2015) conceptualisation of texture. The texture of the metaphorical walls of the fictional Room were almost entirely non-porous, with visits from the jailor holding its occupants captive the only incursions from the outside world. In contrast, the babies' room was far more porous⁸. It allowed the movement in and out of a range of humans and non-humans, including the pink carnation, making it a space of lively and engaging encounters. And yet, it *was* also a confined and, in some ways, confining space. The simultaneity of this space as lively and engaging *and* confined and confining highlights the importance of continuing to see

⁸ We would like to thank the Editors of this Special Issue for bringing this to our attention.

specific spaces, as well as space in general, as fluid and dynamic, rather than fixed or settled, and to eschew dichotomous representations.

Indeed, as Massey (2005, p. 18) reminds us, how we conceptualise space “has effects”, and how we conceptualise, respond to, interpret, and portray a particular space has particular effects. We are beholden, then, to reflect on what kind of space we have produced through our interpretations, mapping and portrayals (Dewsbury & Thrift, 2005). As we look back over our analysis and interpretations discussed in this article, many questions arise. For example: Has our initial ambivalence about the confined physical space of the babies’ room unduly skewed our interpretations and representations? In particular, does our reading of Nadia’s navigating movements in the babies’ room as driven, in part, by desire to expand its spatial possibilities, say more about our own motivations and desire than Nadia’s? Has our desire to highlight the relationality of the texture and spatial practices within the babies’ room, which seemed such a strength in fostering a sense of belonging, led us to romanticise how belonging works in the room, and possibly inadvertently downplay power relations, for instance by overlooking instances of exclusionary practices, and other related manifestations of the politics of belonging? And might our emphasis on human and non-human interrelations undermine the potential for policy salience and impact? We can offer no conclusive responses to these questions, other than to say that they continue to exercise our thinking as we continue to work with the data generated in the Happy Families centre, and in the other case study centres in the Babies and Belonging project.

More broadly, questions arise about whether and how attention to spatiality might add value to the growing literature about belonging in ECEC and other early years settings. Put differently, what might spatial perspectives make possible in terms of enriching and deepening understandings of belonging that might otherwise be elusive? In our view, the spatial perspectives of the theorists we have drawn upon for this article have much to offer, in part because of their resonance with contemporary understandings of early years settings as complex, relational and dynamic sites in which belonging, in turn, must be understood as a complex, relational and dynamic phenomenon (see, for e.g., Juutinen, Puroila & Johansson, 2018; Kustatscher, 2017; Stratigos, 2015a; Sumsion & Wong, 2011). But they also extend existing understandings, for instance, by demanding attention to the relational *and* the granular materiality of ECEC and related settings in ways that, with notable exceptions (e.g., Millei & Cliff, 2014; Stratigos, 2015b), are arguably not yet common in the ECEC literature —especially in relation to infants. In addi-

tion, they challenge assumptions of an inbuilt coherence and predictability within ECEC settings and their programs, as implied in technicist forms of measurement and reductionist conceptualisations of space still evident in many ECEC quality assessment instruments and mechanisms (Osgood, Scarlet & Giugni, 2016). Massey's (2005) emphasis on the 'throwntogether-ness' of space, for example, highlights the inevitability of the unexpected (such as the sudden appearance of the pink carnation in the babies' room). Careful and creative consideration of how to mobilise spatial concepts and perspectives discussed in this article, in ways that support practitioners in resisting and challenging simplistic or unidimensional conceptualisations of space and of belonging, seems likely to be needed, however; especially as practitioners may not have the luxury of time to step back from rapidly unfolding day to day events, or to repeatedly view in fine-grained detail, video footage of those events that we, as a research team, have enjoyed. In short, while spatial perspectives 'matter' in the sense used by Thrift (2008) and in an everyday sense, how to mobilise them in ECEC practice and policy in ways that fully realise their potential poses an important challenge.

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