
Baby Events: assembling descriptions of infants in family day care

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ABSTRACT The idea that research on infants should ‘voice’ their ‘perspectives’, their experiences, what they are ‘really saying,’ is a central feature of current moves toward participatory research. While embracing the ethos of participation, this article steps away from the binary logic of identity that implicitly underpins such approaches – self–other, adult–infant, subject–object. Instead, it demonstrates the generativity of concepts of ‘assemblage,’ ‘event,’ ‘line of flight,’ in rethinking what should form the focus for the theorising, pedagogy and practices surrounding infants and toddlers. To that end, it assembles a description of mealtime, a common segment of the lives of four young children in an Australian Family Day Care home. The assemblage connects a variety of heterogeneous elements, human and non-human, animate and inanimate, including highchairs, bottles, researchers, technologies, ideas, regulations, food, gravity and our own attempts to enunciate and engage with mealtime. It is concluded that, through the relations afforded by and made between these diverse elements, the descriptions of mealtime show how highchairs and their allies may afford a new infant-world symbiosis that entails not just a time and place to eat, but access to unanticipated relations of power, opportunities for connection, and ways of becoming. Such is the ‘what’ that should inform theorising, practice and pedagogy involving very young children.

There is no such thing as a baby ... if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone else. (Winnicott, 1964, p. 88)

For ages people have used [concepts] to determine what something is (its essence). We, though, are interested in the circumstances in which things happen: in what situations, where and when does a particular thing happen, how does it happen, and so on? A concept, as we see it, should express an event rather than an essence. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 25)

Introduction

Worries about treating infants as objects have prompted policy-makers and researchers to advocate participatory research and to devise methods aimed to collect data *from infants’ own perspectives*, for example, by using ‘baby cams’ (tiny cameras built into a baby’s headband; Sumsion et al, 2011; White, 2011. See also Bitou & Waller, 2011). Yet we find a certain awkwardness in this move, however well meant. We feel with Deleuze the ‘indignity of speaking for others’ (Rajchman, 2001). And we ask if researchers can ever ventriloquise what infants are ‘really saying’ (Elwick, et al, under review)? How are we to resolve the radical ambiguity of infants’ non-verbal expressions and

behaviour without imposing concepts drawn from our personal knowledge and/or theoretical understandings of infants (development, language and capacities) to construct plausible interpretations? The very idea of divining ‘the infant’s perspective’ assumes such perspectives are objective entities that can be dissected out from the infant’s everyday life, collected, analysed and described in words. Worse, unlike participatory research with children who can speak, researchers studying pre-verbal infants have no obvious way of checking with infants whether they do or do not possess well-worked out and constant ‘views’ on their experiences.

Our first route out of this fix was to challenge the stress that ‘participatory’ research puts on epistemological questions such as ‘are we getting a “true” picture of the “real” infant, their life and “their perspective”?’ According to this focus, researchers strive to improve methods of interpreting non-verbal expressions and behaviour the better to plumb the ‘infant’s own perspective’; they develop measures to ascertain how close they are to hearing or voicing what babies are truly ‘saying’; they devise ways to disrupt their own construction of the ‘infant’s perspective’ in an effort to know the ‘real’ thing. Opposing this epistemic emphasis, we advocated adoption of an ‘ethical optics’ in infancy research (Levinas, 1969), arguing that there is an *ethical* responsibility that *requires* us to foreground the uncertainty or (im)possibility of the participatory research endeavour (Green, 2010). To treat infants as genuinely human required researchers to position infants as genuinely Other and hence, not fully knowable (Elwick et al, under review).

In this article we are taking a sideways step. We have grown aware that our argument for an ethical optics of (im)possibility draws its life from just the same dualistic self-Other logic that frames researchers’ attempts better to ‘voice’ what infants see and experience (Elwick et al, under review). We now seek ways to dispense with the infectious dualisms that structured both the pro and con of our previous argument – self/Other, baby/researcher, true/false, verbal/non-verbal, possible/impossible. Can we reframe inquiry into infants’ lives as co-produced in an open-ended way that does not dichotomise or prejudge the location of meaning or the growing points of change? How might we see the encounters that interest us as generated through a multiplicity of co-occurring agencies or elements, including both adult and infant desires, research methodologies, ideas and technologies, fashions, temporalities, bodies, relationships, and things (see Winnicott, epigraph, 1964; Selby & Bradley, 2003; Bradley, 2005)? In addressing these questions, we explore the value of work by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) for researching infancy, particularly that surrounding what they call ‘assemblage.’

‘Assemblage’ and Related Terms

The word ‘assemblage’ is gaining increasing purchase in the humanities and social sciences. Insofar as it relates to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, ‘assemblage’ translates the French word *agencement* – a process of *connecting*, gerund rather than noun. *Agencement* is commonly translated as ‘arrangement, ordering, disposition (of a house); fitting up, fitting together (of a machine etc.); lay-out (of a radio-set, etc.); construction (of a sentence)’ (Mension, 1967, p. A: 16). ‘Assemblage’ forms part of a family of Deleuzian concepts. All the elements of an *agencement* are *multiplicities* made up of ‘determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Thus a knifing connects up a multiplicitous knife *with* a multiplicitous knifer *and* a multiplicitous victim *and* many other heterogeneous elements (this connecting-up being the process of *agencement*) in an *event* (knifing) that has the *sense* of *becoming-knifed*, that is becoming something other than what it already is (Semetsky, 2006). ‘The event is coextensive with becoming’ (Deleuze, 2004, p. 11).

The topography of the plane an *agencement* constitutes is flat and consistent in the sense that it does not ‘allow itself’ to be hierarchically *overcoded* or ‘explained away’ by referring, for example, to the pre-existing designs of the knifer or to the views of an observing subject who ‘knows about it’ *qua* object, having analysed it in terms of, say, gendered power-relations (e.g. if the knifer were a man and the knifee a woman). All the relations that define *agencement* are external to/‘outside’ any of its constitutive elements, and all the elements – human or not, animate or not – share the same ontological status (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9; Grosz, 1994, p. 167). These elements may *include* historically specific ‘diagrams of power’ which can intervene in the assemblage only as any other element can (see below; Currier, 2003, p. 335).

Much of the excitement around the take-up of 'assemblage' in social theory relates to the ways that it can be used to displace the traditional 'logic of identity, expressed through binary oppositions, which underpins the western model of subjectivity' (Currier, 2003, p. 321), where entities are either 'this' or 'not this' (i.e. according to the law of the excluded middle). Our previous approach to the apparent (im)possibilities of adult researchers gaining access to infants' perspectives drew its life from this logic of 'difference from' (Elwick et al, under review). The concepts of 'adult' and 'infant,' 'self' and 'Other,' 'grown-up' and 'baby,' 'knower' and 'known,' form identity-couplets which are treated as mutually exclusive because each term is defined against its opposite – rendering forlorn any hope of interpenetration or synthesis between the two poles of each couplet. The logic of identity precludes anything beyond all-or-none 'difference from.' And it implies that the infant (like the researcher) is a unified but abstract whole who pre-exists any given context: a complete self-identical (albeit tiny) person or 'homunculus' for whom change is nothing but a pre-determined 'unfolding' (Lukes, 1973; Urwin, 1984; Morss, 1992, 1996; Selby, 1993). Viewed in this way, the terms of description severely curtail researchers' openness to learning about the generative, the multiplex or the unanticipated in their encounters.

When infants and adults form part of an assemblage, however, change is viewed in a far less constrained way. First change is co-produced in between a mix of elements that appear heterogeneous. Thus Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe 'lines' that weave through such multiplicities all at the same time. These lines may be more or less rigid. Rigid lines or 'striations' mark where there are clearly-defined and prescribed orderings, habits, logics, contents and forms in an encounter. For example, a toddler's day in a childcare centre will typically conform to a regular 'linear' timetable in which arrival, eating, sleeping, excreting, playing, and departure are predictably sequenced or 'territorialised' by rules and routines. In this article we will be looking in detail at one well-defined segment of the day in a Family Day Care home: 'mealtime.' Mealtime will itself be seen to have a certain rigid segmentation, a linear predictability or regular 'cadence' (Fiese et al, 2006; Alcock, 2007). Nevertheless, from time to time there are cracks in the routine, where something new or different happens in between the children, the researchers, the educator, the regulations and other non-human elements of the assemblage 'that increases all participants' capacity to act and create interesting connections and features' (Olsson, 2009, p. 62). A 'zig-zag crack' has formed, making it difficult to keep the prescribed segments in sequence: 'It is as if a line of flight, perhaps only a tiny trickle to begin with, leaked between the segments, escaping their segmentation, eluding their totalisation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238.) These leakages or 'lines of flight' (de-territorialisations) are where something new and different can come about, something that can engage the desires of all concerned, lead to heightened excitement and engagement and affect, thereby generating sense for infants, educators – and researchers. Lines of flight, encounters where 'sense' emerges, will be one focus in what follows. Such 'sense' is not to be confounded with the 'significance' of an 'event' seen as a state of affairs: 'what seemingly takes place' at 'mealtime' in its nailed-down, typically sequential 'cadence' (as in Fiese et al, 2006; Brennan, 2007; O'Connell, 2010). For Deleuze, sense is not ready-made. 'Sense is produced on the very border of things and propositions. Sense is the very moment of becoming. *This is how sense is considered to be the event itself*' (Deleuze, 2004, cited in Olsson, 2009, pp. 110-111; our emphasis).

Deleuze and Guattari equate assemblages with desire: 'to desire is to construct an assemblage' (Deleuze, quoted in Olsson, 2009, p. 149). Assemblages have various aspects. They are 'machinic,' meaning that they work only through being actively put together: a bicycle does not work without a rider, a flattish surface and laws of motion and gravity. A highchair does not work as a highchair without a baby, an adult, and a supply of food (or toys). An assemblage does not occur 'naturally.' An assemblage arises out of the relations that are made between its elements. Signs may form parts of assemblages. Assemblages of signs are called 'assemblages of enunciation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 155). But assemblages of enunciation always include more than just signs (as Foucault has shown), being 'words and ways of speaking corresponding to the material processes of bodies and actions in assemblages of desire' (Olsson, 2009, p. 150). Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 4) describe books as assemblages. This article too is assemblage – of desire, its authors' desire – though it could not exist as such without the other elements of the multiplicity it enunciates; to which we will now turn ...

Babies-in-Highchairs: an assemblage that affords events

Mealtimes are becoming a popular focus for research on young children. They are relatively stationary set-pieces for the easy observation of social routines, group-interaction and early conversation. They are 'events,' in the non-Deleuzian sense. Such research has previously focused either on the 'event' of mealtime as a site for 'enculturation' and 'social reproduction' (e.g. Fiese et al, 2006; Brennan, 2007; O'Connell, 2010); or on the less striated, less rule-governed aspects of mealtime such as the building of 'co-narratives' or playing 'in-between' the rules (e.g. Ødegaard, 2006, 2007; Alcock, 2007). Rethinking such research in Deleuzian terms, we must describe the heterogeneous encounters into which infants enter and through which they move at mealtime without prioritising a set 'state of affairs' in which baby, educator and researcher have unified identities, and without ontologically prioritising the human over the non-human, the animate over the inanimate, mind over matter – all the time looking for 'leakage' and 'lines of flight' which may allow 'time to take off on a new path' (Colebrook, 2002, p. 57). How can we frame babies within assemblages? How can we configure the disparate and changing elements of infancy, and how infants appear, as occurring within more complex assemblages of 'other bodies, objects, institutions, technologies, regimes of signs and relations of power, which achieve a meta-stability' (Currier, 2003, p. 327)?

Procedure

We construct an answer to these questions by enunciating encounters that were recorded in the course of gathering data intended to illuminate the experiences infants have in Family Day Care (FDC). In each FDC setting we focused on 'study' children, that is children whose parents had agreed that they be 'focal' children in our study. While every effort was made to include the 'context' of all the focal children's actions, we employed just one research assistant per setting, so it was sometimes only possible to prioritise (in this case, video-record) one infant at a time. In this case-study, the focal child was Charlie. Note that, on ethico-political grounds, the educators in the FDC settings we recorded were excluded as foci in our analyses. However, we did interview both parents and educators, showing them ambiguous or interesting snippets from our recordings, to pick up any clarifying comments they might make (see later).

All the names used are pseudonyms. Ten visits, each lasting two to three hours, were made by one of us (TS) to Charlie's FDC home over eleven weeks. On the first visit Charlie was 14 months old. Data were gathered through a mosaic of methods including observational and reflective notes, video, parent and carer interviews and the completion of a time-use diary. Approximately ten hours of video footage was recorded during the eleven weeks, our intent being to capture experiences and behaviours that seemed typical of Charlie's lived experience in the setting.

Besides Charlie, there were three older children being cared for in the setting, one of whom was the carer's (Amanda's) daughter Bianca, age 18 months. The others were a boy Angus, aged 19 months, and a girl, Kaia, aged two years. Charlie had been coming to this setting for around eight hours a day (from 7.50am to 4.00pm), once a week for the previous four months. The setting upon which we are going to focus is mealtime. This was a regular segment of the FDC visits and occurred three times a day: morning tea usually followed by outside play (weather permitting), lunch followed by a sleep, and afternoon tea followed by more play either inside or outside. We have just over two hours of video relating to mealtime from six visits. Mealtimes lasted between 19 and 24 minutes.

The Highchairs

A feature of mealtime was the deposition of all four children for its duration in highchairs. Part of our attraction to the concept of assemblage was its capacity to explore connections between Charlie, and indeed all the children, with these inanimate but crucially intra-active (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) objects and the spaces they helped to structure. As noted above, the highchairs were central players in mealtime. Just as grass 'affords' farmers and bread, and apples 'afford' orchardists and eaters, the highchairs 'afforded' mealtime (Mol, 2008). A highchair never functions as a highchair

without small children, floor-space, shelter, an adult, food, desires to eat and to feed. This is all 'intended by' a functional highchair and can therefore be 'logically unpacked' from it in a relatively rigid sequential way. But highchairs in our study, along with the relations they formed with particular toddlers, and with Amanda, her ideas and concerns (e.g. about hygiene), with gravity and with objects such as drinking bottles and bananas – not to mention our own evolving ideas – generated unexpected 'lines of flight' in our research, as we describe below.

The chairs themselves were always set up in a shallow arc facing towards the centre of the kitchen, an area which formed part of a larger living space, which included non-kitchen domains with comfortable chairs surrounding a 'play space' sided by boxes of toys. Behind the highchairs was the family dining table. The kitchen area towards which the highchairs faced had an L shape containing a fridge, stove and the bench to the left of the children where their lunch bags were kept and where food was usually prepared. Straight ahead of the highchairs at the other end of the kitchen was the sink where washcloths were washed and drink bottles re-filled. Our camera-operator (TS) would typically set up her tripod on the breakfast bar to the right of the highchairs where used washcloths and dropped drink bottles were often placed. This meant both that the children were all facing the camera, and allowed for the camera to be zoomed out to include all of the children or zoomed in on just one or two children, depending on what was taking place. In all the mealtimes we saw, Charlie was positioned at the left-hand end of the arc. And in all but one (i.e. the first) of our visits, Kaia was placed next to Charlie. Generally the children were within touching distance of their neighbours, though this could be varied (see below).

Once the children were in their highchairs, they could not get out. This gave their carer some freedom (e.g. to make herself coffee; to converse with or be hospitable to the researcher, e.g. by offering her a drink; to prepare the children's food; to go to the bathroom).

Highchairs Afford Babies ... with Bottles

The highchairs comprised plastic booster seats that were strapped to high-backed wooden dining-room chairs. Three boosters were of the same design, green and white with a removable mini-table, but Bianca's had a swing-tray and was distinctively pink. The four dining chairs with highchairs attached remained in position throughout the day. One by one, each child was strapped into a chair and a plastic mini-table slotted at waist-level onto their booster. Each mini-table (except Bianca's) was moulded with a surrounding rim but was otherwise smooth, white and flat except for a ring of elevated plastic at the far right corner to serve as dock for a drink.

By repeatedly structuring space in the way they did, each booster, depending on its relative location in the arc of boosters, developed a powerful magnetism that lured a specific toddler toward it. After which Amanda merely had to hoist them in, leading her to remark 'You all know which one you're going to, don't you?' Over the back of each dining-chair would be folded a clean facecloth, ready to wipe hands and faces. Once in their chairs, drink-bottles were docked on the tables, one by one, often from left to right, which meant Charlie got his first. These bottles were fairly large and top-heavy when full. They were not simple in design, having a fixed internal pipe or 'straw' and a swivel-top that had to be snapped open before the child could suck up liquid through the 'straw.' Once the bottles were out, food (e.g. pieces of banana) would gravitate to each mini-table in turn.

The highchairs create a highly structured or 'striated' space (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Lenz Taguchi, 2010, pp. 77-80) that afforded the (re)production of standardised 'care' routines: strapping in the child, fixing the mini-table, providing clean ready-to-hand wipes, doling out bottles, distributing food. But this was not all they afforded. Given the limited size of the kitchen area, the children were close and therefore handy to the carer's central work-surface – but the children were also 'automatically' placed within touching distance of each other (which has various kinds of dimensionality, see below). Furthermore, the *height* of the highchairs above the floor, in conjunction with the existence of *gravity* (another element in the assemblage) afforded the audible (because the floor is made of resonant wooden planks) dropping of objects, which, given the constraints on the children's movements, meant that only the carer could retrieve whatever was dropped. Dropping objects, especially bottles, connected up with various other elements of the assemblage: the growing friendship between Charlie and Kaia, Amanda's ideas about hygiene (the

floor was not a preferred site for food), her levels of energy (repeatedly picking up bottles was 'tiring') and her attitude to State regulations about sharing food – and drinking-bottles. Much of the talk Amanda did, her enunciations, welled up from this nexus of relations.

This brief elaboration on the intersections between bottles, height, hygiene, energy and regulations underlines Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, p. 36) point that assemblages are formed of elements, which are in themselves 'interpenetrating multiplicities.' Elements interpenetrate through their ability 'to press out of their current configuration and enter into new compositions of self as well as into new alliances and rivalries with others' (Bennett, 2005, p. 447). However hard the plastic from which the bottles and highchairs were moulded, they had porous boundaries so far as the assemblage was concerned, a porosity which made possible the intermingling of elements, abstract, human and inanimate. Each element – to whatever degree animate – offers affordances. The children have agency, but so do the highchairs and bottles. They deflect, make possible, refuse what people and other things can, want or intend to do. They 'addle and rearrange' thoughts, trajectories, actions and perceptions, manifesting 'thing-power' (Bennett, 2004, p. 348).

The Flight of the Banana (and its Proxies)

The common-sense point of 'doling out bottles, distributing food' was to nourish the children and hence that nourishment was *the* 'function' of a mealtime. So we might adopt a materialist ontological perspective which framed nourishment as an abstract but desirous entity that 'drove' Amanda's distribution of the food and drink (Bennett, 2004, 2005). But things are not this simple. As soon as we allot bananas and biscuits an agency of their own, we discover in Deleuzian style, that bananas 'invite' not just eating ... but other things (Mol, 2008). The 'distribution of drink and food' turns out to be multiplicitous. Track the weaving lines that run through mealtime by following the zig-zag dance of a sample food. Let the banana be our example. If mealtime were solely a routine of eating, the trajectory of a banana would be simple. It would move from the fruit-bowl to the toddler's mini-table, into a child's mouth and then via stomach into the blood stream and beyond. The banana's motion at mealtime is far more haphazard than this, however. Tracking a banana – and its proxies – is one way to bring out some of the fault-lines or 'lines of flight' afforded by the mealtime assemblage.

Adult perceptions. First of all, the banana may never make it to a child's mini-table because the child may not *be perceived by the carer* to be hungry. Or when they are perceived to be hungry, they may not be. Thus a brief ambiguous vocalisation by Charlie as he was waiting for the other children to be strapped into their highchairs got the quick response: 'Are you hungry Charlie? Is that the problem?' So: vocal ambiguity + positioning in highchair = attribution of hunger. Presumably the same vocalization *out of* the highchair might have got a quite different interpretation. On the other hand, during a research visit to replay snippets of video of Charlie to his mother and Amanda, the mother pointed out that at one point some way into a mealtime, Charlie, having already eaten but sitting in front of an empty mini-table, patted his chest with both hands. The mother revealed that this kind of chest-patting means 'more' in baby sign language, so Charlie would have been asking for more food. The carer and researchers were previously unaware that Charlie had been taught baby signs.

Researcher: 'So maybe he's getting a bit impatient?'

Mother: 'I think he is, I think he's sitting there ...'

Amanda: 'Oh yes, because he loves his food.'

Researcher: 'Is that [Charlie's signalling] because he wants food or because he doesn't want to be sitting there for ages?'

Mother: 'Ah, a bit of both. But I'd say he wants the food.'

Children's desires and other complications. Children can like, dislike, accept or refuse food. So the route of banana to mouth may intersect with and so be disturbed by many other elements in the assemblage: friendships, desires, feelings about the carer, joy in negation, fleeting fads, the properties of the foods available, the proximity of highchair to highchair and the carer's sense of 'doing a good job' – both nutritionally and educationally, in the scaffolding of language and desire.

Witness this example. Amanda is offering around more food after ‘successfully’ distributing three slices of banana to each child (successfully = all the slices had been eaten). When Bianca gladly accepts more banana, Amanda says ‘Mmm, nice!!’ Bianca: ‘Noishhhce!’ Carer: ‘Nice!’ Bianca: ‘Noice!’ But, unlike Charlie, Angus and Bianca, Kaia refuses more banana: ‘Nooo!’ she says vehemently, head shaken dramatically from side to side. ‘No?!!’ the carer repeats, stopping in surprise. ‘I’ll get you something else. Mummy’s got you something else ... [walking out of shot to the lunch bags and returning with a container of food] What’s here? ... Do you want your bikkies?’ [proffering a biscuit]. ‘No,’ says Kaia, with a quick shake of her head and both hands raised palm-forward in a Stop! sign. ‘Do you want sultanas?’ ‘No,’ flapping her arms expansively up and down. ‘No?!’ exclaims the carer incredulously.

Finding Kaia something to eat then becomes a preoccupation for the carer. The banana doesn’t work, so Amanda starts offering Kaia a sequence of banana-proxies. First it is sultanas. But, no, not today thank you. Bianca *would* like sultanas however. Amanda responds: ‘No, you eat up your banana first, please.’ Amanda returns to Kaia: ‘Do you want a biscuit then Kaia?’ she asks repeatedly, even though Kaia clearly does not. Eventually the carer abandons the biscuit. She decides to try Kaia with a chewy, individually wrapped fruit roll but, cunningly, offers a similar bar to Charlie first. Charlie accepts his bar with aplomb. Kaia refuses again. ‘I’m not having any success today,’ mutters Amanda.

After the carer has offered Kaia every item in the lunch bag her mother has provided and all have been refused, the carer is led to exclaim: ‘No? Well okay, that’s all there is, Kaia. I’m sorry, I’ve run out of options.’ A little later she gives Angus some flavoured mini rice cakes from a bag his mother has provided. Kaia suddenly zeroes in, gazing at the bag and demanding ‘Ah-aha-aha-haha!’ kicking her legs excitedly under the mini-table. ‘No, these are Angus’s sweetheart. There you go, Angus.’ Angus puts the rice cake in his mouth and the carer deliberately steps back, open bag in hand, facing her charges. Bianca then points at the bag, and vocalises interrogatively: ‘Eish?’ ‘You want one?’ echoes the carer, doling one out to her daughter. ‘And one for Kaia then too. We have to share,’ and gives one to Kaia, who straightway pops it in her mouth.

Here we have looped forward to another strand of the multiplicity, that of ‘sharing.’ Later on, we will see that sharing was threaded through mealtime in a variety of ways. Usually sharing seemed to be ruled out by the educator (a reflection of State regulations about hygiene, possibly exacerbated by the presence of the camera and TS). So Amanda’s statement ‘we have to share,’ enunciates an exception, perhaps motivated by her desire to ensure Kaia ate ‘enough.’ Apropos, after Amanda gave Kaia the rice wheel, she said to Kaia: ‘I don’t know whether your mummy would like you having those. So you’d better only have one.’ Then she whispered conspiratorially to the researcher: ‘They can’t tell [their mothers]: “Oh, she gave me some of that,” “Do you know we shared that?”’ The carer added that Kaia’s mother was quite particular about what Kaia was allowed to eat. That said, once Kaia had eaten Angus’ rice-cake, her banana was trashed.

Friendship

Why did we write above: ‘Then she decides to try Kaia with a chewy, individually wrapped fruit roll *but, cunningly, offers a similar bar to Charlie first*’? Because, when focusing on Charlie-in-his-highchair, a key dimension of the multiplicity must be his friendship with Kaia. It is no accident that, after the first mealtime filmed, Kaia’s highchair was always the one next to Charlie’s. Amanda referred to Kaia as Charlie’s ‘special friend.’ And typically, once Kaia had been lifted into her highchair, the two would reach over to look at and touch each other. Kaia would sometimes greet Charlie verbally once the highchairs had fixed them in altitude and proximity: ‘Hello Charlie? Hello?’ with a pronounced rising intonation. They would often lean over to grasp at each other’s clothes. Thus, when replaying to Charlie’s mother and Amanda a snippet of video showing Charlie grabbing Kaia’s tee-shirt at the start of a mealtime, his mother announced: ‘I’d say that he’s trying to get Kaia’s attention, trying to play with her, trying to interact with her. He hasn’t got any speech but he’s trying to interact in the way that he can with her.’ Amanda confirmed Charlie and Kaia’s friendship: ‘Those two in particular, they have clicked ... They seem to have clicked together and because both of them don’t have a lot of speech they will like pull each other or –, to get the other one’s attention.’

While the positioning of Kaia's highchair meant she sat in touching distance both to Charlie and Angus, and while she did gesture towards Angus occasionally, or 'fix' his topple bottle (place it neatly back in its ring), she was far more engaged with Charlie. They would touch each other or hold hands, eat each other's food or exchange bottles. A notable feature of their engagement was exchange. Charlie would offer or give his bottle to Kaia, who would then drink out of it. Kaia also seemed more interested in the food Charlie was consuming than in 'her own' – giving a logic to the carer offering Charlie a fruit roll before Kaia, when Kaia was loath to eat. Kaia would ask Charlie if he was 'alright?' and draw attention to him if he seemed upset.

Exchanging bottles (and food) was a 'line of flight' that emerged fortuitously amidst a number of closely entwined elements of the mealtime assemblage: the height of the chairs, their relative proximity, Kaia and Charlie's friendship and enjoyment in sharing, the unwieldiness and weight of the bottles, the resonance of the floor, Amanda's (and the children's) sense of what was naughty. Thus dropping bottles, particularly repeat offences, would sometimes lead to their confiscation. This might have been due to worries about germs. But the confiscation appeared to be temporary, and no wiping of the mouthpiece preceded them being handed back to their 'owner.' Often bottles would be dropped through clumsiness. The bottles were top-heavy when full and required some skill to place in their proper place, docked in the ring on the table-top. More than once Charlie's bottle was dropped through poor coordination in trying to share it with Kaia. For one mealtime Charlie was deliberately placed so far from Kaia (though she was still his nearest neighbour) that they couldn't reach each other (which of course led to Charlie dropping his bottle again and again as he tried to pass it to her).

An important rule seemed to be 'don't share food and drink.' Thus, at one point when Kaia had accepted Charlie's offer of his half-eaten fruit roll (though she was only holding it and turning it over to inspect it; she was not eating it), Amanda noticed and swooped on the roll, returning it to Charlie, admonishing: 'No-no-no! That's Charlie's. You can't bite it and give it back.' Likewise, if two bottles ended up on the same table (always Kaia's), this would lead the carer to admonish in a way that a dropped bottle would not.

Kaia herself would sometimes tell Charlie to 'Shhh!' Amanda commented to one of us (TS), 'Oh she tells him that all the time.' The children would also appear to respond to the 'naughtiness' the highchair-bottle-mealtime assemblage afforded. Thus when Charlie or Kaia dropped their bottles they would – unless the carer was out of the room – swiftly sit up straight and look away 'innocently,' as if they knew they had done the wrong thing.

Diagrams of Power and Their Fate

While power structures never 'overcode' (superimpose meaning over) an entire assemblage, they may take part as a 'diagram' forming one element among others within it (Currier, 2003). Hence the height of the highchairs gave the children and the objects they could affect a potential energy that derived from their connection with the 'diagram of power' that is gravity. Many elements of mealtime can exert power, even invisible elements such as 'germs' (the power to invoke hygienic practices). The highchairs, food and bottles also influence by drawing forth or constraining actions, noises, supporting, falling. The carer can wield great power: to feed and handle the children, to confiscate and restore precious objects, to discipline, interpret and facilitate. But her power is limited by a number of more or less formal codes, including the relevant government regulations and surveillance effected by the Family Day Care coordination unit. The children exercise power, over each other, over objects and over the carer. This last might operate in more or less subtle ways. Less subtly, Kaia simply refuses to eat much of what Amanda offers her, forcing Amanda to 'work harder' to feed her. For a different example, witness the following transcript of discussion with Charlie's mother and Amanda as she watches video snippets of mealtime:

After watching Charlie drop his drink, the carer takes it right away. Kaia says, 'Ta, Ta,' – then Charlie reaches out and makes a whingey vocalisation.

Charlie's mother laughed at this and said Charlie was 'being a sook. He's a little actor, over-exaggerating, I think.'

Researcher: 'Oh really?'

Mother: 'I think.'

Researcher: 'Do you think he wanted the bottle?'

Mother: 'I think he wanted that but did he *really* want it or did he –'

Amanda: '– or did he just want it because he couldn't have it?'

Mother: 'Because he was just playing games with Amanda.'

Researcher: 'And would you know –'

Mother: '– I'd bet on that he wanted it because he couldn't have it and that if he got it back he probably would have a drink just ...'

Amanda: 'Just because he got it back –'

Mother: '– because he got it back. Not because he really desperately needed a drink because otherwise he, I don't think he would throw it in the first place. But I think yeah, it's just playing, sort of, games.'

Another 'diagram of power' that we were initially keen to insert into the assemblage (of enunciation) was the panopticon. As is well known, Foucault (1977) took Bentham's diagram of an idealised prison to stand as a metaphor for the epidemic tendency in modern 'disciplinary' societies to observe and thereby normalise their populations by means of an 'unequal gaze' in which a more powerful observer can see and control but not be seen or controlled by the 'objects' of observation. At first, it didn't seem hard to place the panopticon as an element, both metaphorical and real, in mealtime.

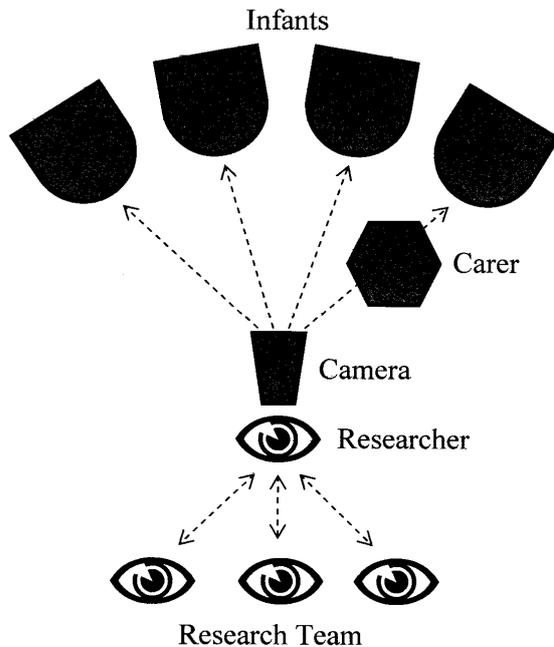


Figure 1. The diagram that leaked.

Panopticon spectacles on, we quickly noticed how Amanda arranged the highchairs – putting the chairs in an arc and strapping the children into the chairs so that they could be easily observed and their behaviour regulated – reading the arrangement as a 'mini-panopticon.' And couldn't Amanda herself be the object of a panopticon, viewed more metaphorically? After all, a panopticon could aptly 'stand for' the 'production,' regulation and normalisation of carers' behaviour by administrative structures such as Government regulations and the Family Day Care coordination unit, not to mention her internalised model of 'what the toddlers' mothers would like' (Foucault, 1977). Then of course, we could make *another* 'panopticon' link between the visible theatre of the kitchen and we researchers working invisibly in the academy, extending the potent knowledges of

early childhood education and care and developmental psychology that open out in turn into the governmental technologies of surveillance, not to mention the discursive practices of observation and classification that produce, normalise and control the lives of young children (Walkerdine, 1984).

However, we have never been quite happy with Figure 1 (over time we developed seven different versions of it). After all, mealtime was far from being a one way, top-down process. Yes, we were observing the children and, indirectly, Amanda. But Amanda was also observing the children. And, the children were observing and affecting Amanda – as she, and they, were observing, thinking about and affecting the camera, the researcher behind the camera and all the other researchers who view the recordings. All these elements continue to interact with how we think and write this article, that is, mealtime's 'assemblage of enunciation.' Indeed there would be no point in our research if there weren't these multidirectional weavings of influence. Journal reviewers raised further questions. Was Figure 1 not a 'tracing' (something Deleuze and Guattari [1987] argue to be reductive, unhelpfully unrhizomatic; unlike 'maps')?

We tried experimenting with two-way arrows, shifting Amanda to be more 'on a level' with the researchers, and re-orienting the diagram to a horizontal layout. But problems remained. In short, from being a diagram that was supposed to illuminate or explain the research-setting and its dynamics, we have come to see the panopticon-picture as a somewhat-exploded idea that we have toyed with – and dropped. We include it here as an illustration of a 'line of flight' wherein the rest of the assemblage we have been constructing and constructed by has 'spoken back' in an unexpected way to change our ideas so as to produce a new more interwoven and multiplicitous sense of becoming from the elements that have produced the described events.

Conclusion

Success in investigations where adults aim to capture the 'real' of infant experiences or perspectives is always likely to prove elusive. We have argued here for a different strategy in research on infancy, one that neither divides off the researcher so as to 'other' the baby, nor sets up a 'subject' of knowledge that is opposed to an 'object' (the baby's being). Using the concept of assemblage, we have shown how events are generated by, or 'de-territorialise' themselves from, the relations between the non-human and the human in the moving weave of highchairs, bottles and small children, a carer, researchers, technologies, ideas, perceptions, speech, colloquial and academic language – and a diagram – that we have called mealtime. We have not treated mealtime as an 'event' in the sense of 'an occurrence.' Events from a Deleuzian angle are rather 'the new' that emerges or wells up from 'multiple interactions running through bodies,' human and non-human, 'ideal structures (such as language and moral codes),' our own literary efforts and 'virtual structures' such as changes in the 'ratios' of apprehension and attraction in a friendship (Williams, 2008, p. 1). As a result, this article has produced, we hope, a reader with a rather different stimulus than 'the [essentialised] child' for thinking about the theorising, pedagogy and practices that address infants and toddlers in early childhood education and beyond.

Deleuze hoped his ideas would be seen as a 'tool-box' to help others think in new ways, to create new concepts (Massumi, 1987, p. xv). Massumi (1992, p. 8) suggests that when working with Deleuzian concepts we should ask ourselves the questions: 'Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?' And so we ask, have the concepts of assemblage worked for us? Returning to our earlier questions, have they helped us to look beyond binary opposites such as adult-infant, human-non-human, researcher-researched as we attempt to think in new ways about baby events? Have we been able to see babies and change as elements producing and produced by multiplicities of 'other bodies, objects, institutions, technologies, regimes of signs and relations of power' (Currier, 2003, p. 327)?

The idea of assemblage has forced us to examine anew the interconnectedness of the various elements of mealtime and to rethink what they can produce in the way of sense. It has made us recognise the generativity of those parts of the non-human world that it is easy to dismiss as 'context' or 'background' when intent on 'the' development of 'the' child. A highchair produces infant experience unexpectedly through and in despite of the spaces it striates and the relations it

forms with other highchairs and bottles, gravity, flooring, language, rules, friendship and food. Our descriptions have helped us to recognise moments of de-territorialisation ('lines of flight') as the highchairs and their acolytes conjure the unexpected from the routine.

When discussing the non-human world of tools and technology, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 90) wrote: 'tools exist only in relation to the intermingling they make possible or that make them possible. The stirrup entails a new man-horse symbiosis.' In response, we suggest that describing mealtime shows how highchairs and their allies may afford a new infant-world symbiosis that entails not just a time and place to eat, but access to unanticipated relations of power, opportunities for connection, and ways of knowing and becoming. Such is the 'what' that should inform theorising, practice and pedagogy involving very young children.

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