

Sanctuary in the Spill: Milk, Melon, Mess and the Micropolitics of Touch

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Abstract

This post-qualitative, feminist new materialist paper traces the micropolitics of touch in an infant classroom through a diffractive engagement with milk, melon, and mess. Drawing on umbilical methods, an embodied, relational, and more-than-human methodology developed through my histories of midwifery, motherhood, and early childhood practice, I explore how everyday snack-time encounters enact pedagogies that exceed developmental correctness and normative regulatory frames. Through an expanded vignette of Toby, whose sticky fingers, milk droplets, and melon strands gather into a small sensory storm that animates the baby room, I read the baby room as an active assemblage of bodies, materials, policies, and affective intensities. This moment becomes a site for thinking with touch as intra-action, where matter and meaning coemerge and where the practitioner–researcher is unavoidably entangled. By staying with the spill, the paper offers a counter-narrative to no-touch policies and heightened proceduralism in early childhood care and education, foregrounding attunement, relational presence, and the subtle pedagogical force of material encounters. I argue that such moments open possibilities for sanctuary: spaces where children, educators, and materials move together in fragile, ethical, and affective ways that resist the tidy demands of institutional logics.

Keywords: touch; feminist new materialism; babies; diffractive analysis; post-qualitative inquiry

Introduction: thick beginnings

Touch arrives before language, before policy, before the regulated, linear, sequencing of developmental milestones. In the baby room where this work unfolds, touch is not simply physical contact but an ongoing intra-action, what Barad (2007) names the entangled emergence of matter and meaning. Touch moves through bodies, foods, surfaces, and atmospheres: milk gathering on a wooden tray, melon sliding between small fingers, a practitioner-researcher leaning in or holding back in shifting rhythms of attunement. These sensory moments are mundane yet pedagogically forceful, shaping relations long before they are codified in curriculum or assessment rubrics. As Ahmed (2004) reminds us, affects do not reside neatly within bodies but circulate, stick, and accumulate across surfaces, histories, and encounters. This renders moments like this milk-soaked snacktime pedagogically consequential long before they are formally recognized as such.

This paper stays with one such moment: a snack-time encounter with Toby, whose droplets of milk and scattered melon chunks form a small sensory event that unsettles developmental correctness and procedural expectations. It is through this material encounter that the theoretical and methodological contours of the paper become possible.

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Rather than illustrating theory, Toby's vignette operates as what Haraway (2016) would call a "thick" beginning: a material-semiotic knot from which thought unfurls.

Grounded in post-qualitative inquiry and feminist new materialism (St. Pierre, 2019), the paper reads the baby room as an assemblage of bodies, histories, regulations, architectures, and affective intensities. Assemblages are not inert collections of parts but dynamic gatherings of human, in-human, and more-than-human forces that produce pedagogical events (Malone, Tesar, & Arndt, 2020; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Within such assemblages, touch is approached as a distributed phenomenon rather than an isolated gesture attributed to an individual. Manning (2006) reminds us that touch is always "more-than" the bodies involved, a field of relational movement, and it is this excessiveness that animates the analysis offered here.

The methodological orientation, what I call *umbilical methods* (Schofield, 2024), is shaped by my histories of midwifery, motherhood, migration, and early years practice. Umbilical methods foreground tethering, leakage, and relational entanglement. They resist separating the researcher from the encounter and instead acknowledge how bodies, memories, and affective histories remain co-present during pedagogical events (Mazzei, 2013; Springgay & Truman, 2018). My own body - its movements, hesitations, and histories - becomes part of the analytic field.

By staying with the spill, of milk, melon, feeling, and gesture, this introduction positions the baby room not as a backdrop but as an active participant in pedagogical becoming (de Freitas & Palmer, 2016). Sensory encounters are read as micropolitical events that reveal the tensions shaping early childhood work at a moment of increasing surveillance, no-touch policies, and procedural compliance. Rather than seeking resolution or *neatness*, the paper leans into what Haraway (2016) calls "staying with the trouble": dwelling with the uncertainties, risks, and relational complexities that animate life with young children.

In doing so, the introduction opens a question that threads the paper: how might these messy, relational, material moments enact possibilities for sanctuary. Spaces where children, materials, and educators move together in fragile, ethical, and affective ways that resist the tidy demands of institutional logics.

Theoretical Orientations: Touch, Matter, Micropolitics

This paper is situated within post-qualitative inquiry, informed by feminist new materialism and relational ontologies that foreground matter, affect, and the more-than-human in early childhood. Rather than assuming a human-centered account of meaning, post-qualitative work attends to what Barad (2007) describes as the ontological inseparability of matter and meaning - an understanding that dissolves the distinction between bodies, environments, objects, and the practices that bind them. In this view, touch is not a discrete action enacted by one person upon another, but an *intra-action*: a mutual, constitutive becoming in which bodies, emotions, histories, and materials participate.

Haraway's (2016) call to "stay with the trouble" is central to this orientation. Her work opens possibilities for thinking with complexity, uncertainty, and relational entanglement, refusing simplistic developmental explanations or linear pedagogical narratives. Touch, mess, and the sensory textures of early childhood constitute such trouble. Material events that pull educators into affective, ethical, and political relations that exceed intention.

Feminist new materialist scholars (Braidotti, 2002; Lenz Taguchi, 2010) extend these ideas by challenging anthropocentric and developmentalist assumptions that continue to dominate early childhood practice. Their work emphasizes vitality, movement, and the generative capacity of the more-than-human. In this paper, such perspectives illuminate how milk, melon, wooden trays, clothing fibers, moisture, and gesture participate in the pedagogical event. These materials are not props or backdrops, but lively forces shaping encounters. Attending to the vibrancy of these materials echoes Bennett's (2010) insistence that matter is never passive but possesses agentic capacities that participate in political and ethical life.

Baby Room as Assemblage

Assemblage theory also threads through this work. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the baby room is conceptualized as an assemblage. A temporary, shifting gathering of humans, objects, discourses, architectures, and affects. Assemblages are not inert collections of parts but dynamic configurations of human and more-than-human forces that produce pedagogical events (Malone, Tesar, & Arndt, 2020). This way of thinking troubles any assumption that behavior, touch, or learning originates solely within an individual child or educator. Instead, agency is understood as distributed, relational, and material.

Manning's (2006) conceptualization of touch as a field of relational movement further expands this framing. Touch, for Manning, is always "more-than" contact. It is atmospheric, affective, and durational. It accumulates and dissipates, reverberates and settles. This view aligns closely with the micropolitical lens taken in this paper, drawing attention to the subtle tensions, pressures, and openings produced in the everyday encounters of early childhood.

Finally, the work of de Freitas and Palmer (2016) informs the paper's attention to the pedagogical potential of material engagements. They argue that learning emerges through "material-affective flows," a notion that resonates with the milk and melon vignette at the center of this article. Snack-time becomes a site where material forces coconstitute relations, possibilities, and pedagogical meanings.

Together, these theoretical orientations provide a framework for reading the Toby vignette not as an anecdotal moment to be interpreted *about* a child, but as a lively, relational, more-than-human encounter. They offer a lens through which to consider the micropolitics of touch and the subtle ways that institutional regulations, bodies, materials, and affective intensities come together to shape practice. Through these theoretical threads, the paper foregrounds a mode of attending to early childhood that is sensitive to entanglement, complexity, and the sensorial contingencies of the everyday.

Sensory, Affective, Political: Toby, Milk, Melon

The door swings open, suction dragging the blinds flat against the window-clang. A stillness settles across the baby room. The nursery cook appears tray in hand: plastic cups, melon, banana, milk, water, spoons, colour, tense energy, unforgiving glances, saliva. Snack-time arrives.

The black and white rug - almost indistinguishable from the green one it touches - becomes the designated site of waiting for the children. Some of the older babies begin to self-position. Others are gently placed there by practitioners. A practitioner begins to sing "Miss Polly had a dolly who was sick, sick, sick...", hands fluttering with the lyrics. Most babies join in with gestures, smiles. But Toby does not.

Instead, Toby leans sideways, palm flat on the rug, eyes on the shifting tray. He babbles something, then bangs both hands on the rug. A practitioner lifts him gently and seats him at the table. Milk is poured into brightly coloured plastic cups. Some with lids, some without (Research diary 05.06.18).

Toby sits in the highchair closest to the window, where late-morning light drags itself across the floor in slow, slanted strips. The room hums with the familiar rhythms of a baby room at snack-time: the clatter of bowls, the creak of wooden chairs, the soft breathsounds of children concentrating on grasping food. A faint sweetness hangs in the air, the smell of squishy decomposing melon, the cool tang of milk, the lingering scent of disinfectants that never fully disappear from the surfaces it claims to protect.



Toby's fingers trace the rim of his brightly coloured green cup. He lifts it slowly, carefully - then deliberately tips the milk out. First a trickle. Then a pour. He intensely gazes at the droplets of milk as they leave the spout of the drinking cup and connect with the wooden table... he continues to do this.... over and over again....The milk cascades down the table's surface, pools meet his open palm....uses his left hand/fingers to play with the milk and move both the milk and melon around the table in front of him...he is banging his hand down into the small pockets of collected milk and then raising his hand to repeat the same movements. He slaps the table. Milk flicks. The melon follows. Sticky melon and milk coagulate. Toby picks it up, pushes it to the table's edge, lets it fall, follows it with his eyes, delighted. He laughs with joy. A practitioner, previously seated with the children, rises to intervene. Her tone rises, "Toby, no, we don't do that - let's keep the milk in the cup." She wipes the spill, repositions Toby. He watches her intently, silent for a moment. Toby loses his table milk and melon... he looks in wonder... although non-verbal he expresses his frustration of no longer having his table milk and melon. The practitioner fills his milk cup up "drink nicely Toby - we don't play with our food do we". Within seconds Toby tips his cup upside down, milk drops from the spout onto the table, he is now shaking his cup to force more milk to come out, again he uses his hands to move the milk around the table....the practitioner catches a glimpse of Toby tipping his milk out, and with speed walks around the table with a wet cloth. The practitioner sighs and looks at me - not for answers, but as if I might hold the edge of a question she has not yet dared to speak (Research diary 05.06.18).

Toby's movements are careful, not tentative but exploratory, as though the milk's stickiness and shine offer him something to think with. A thread of melon, stringy and wet, clings to the underside of his palm; he lifts his hand slightly, feeling its weight, its refusal to let go. I stand close enough to sense the warmth radiating from his body but far enough to avoid imposing a direction on his gesture. My own hand hovers, not to intervene, not to tidy, but to remain available. Toby glances toward me, not seeking permission but registering my presence as part of the unfolding. Our bodies co-compose the moment, each adjusting according to the other's movement, breath, and pause.

When Toby lowers his hand again, the milk slips down his wrist in a slow, deliberate line. It pools at the base of his sleeve where fabric begins to darken and cling. Melon slides from his thumb onto the tray with a soft, wet sound - a thud too gentle to be noticed by anyone else. These tiny spills, insignificant in most policy documents, become here a choreography: a series of material gestures that bind us in a shared rhythm of noticing, responding, and waiting-with.

Around us, the institutional logics of the setting press in laminated lists of "expected behaviors," reminders of hygienic procedure, the unspoken but ever-present pressure to keep the room orderly, clean, timely, safe. A laminated poster above the sink offers a diagram of "developmental milestones", a prescriptive timeline against which bodies like Toby's are quietly measured. These forces gather in the room like additional actors, shaping the conditions of the encounter even as they remain unacknowledged.

And yet, Toby continues touching, sliding, dragging, lifting. Milk becomes a medium for thinking. Melon becomes a texture for exploring relation. My role is unsettled, I am practitioner, researcher, witness, body-with. Touch, here, is not something I apply or withhold; it is something we participate in. The moment refuses the tidying impulses of developmental trajectories, pulling us instead into a relational, sensory, more-thanhuman choreography.

This small event - sticky fingertips, pooled milk, damp melon, a shared glance - holds a micropolitical force that exceeds its size. It becomes a site where institutional expectations, bodily histories, material agencies, and affective intensities converge. Toby's gestures do not simply illustrate learning; they disrupt and reconfigure the possibilities of what learning, relation, and care might be allowed to become in this room.

The spill - of milk, of melon, of affect - invites us to stay with it.

Tethered Histories and Embodied Entanglements: midwifery, motherhood & migration

My orientation to the baby room, its textures, tensions, and micropolitics, is shaped by the histories I bring with me. As Haraway (2016) reminds us, knowledge-making is never disembodied; it emerges from the tethers that bind us to particular pasts, practices, and affective lineages. My own tethering is multiple: trained initially as a midwife, becoming a mother, migrating across countries, and working as an educator and researcher in early childhood. These histories do not sit behind the background context; they pulse through it, shaping what I can see, sense, and respond to.

Midwifery taught me to read bodies not as closed systems but as relational surfaces - porous, leaky, contingent. It taught me that touch is never simply applied; it is negotiated, witnessed, restrained, and felt-with. These sensibilities remain present in my body, forming an umbilical tether through which I encounter children's gestures, hesitations, and intensities. When I watch Toby let milk pool across his wrist, senses incline me toward attunement rather than correction, toward dwelling-with rather than redirecting.

Motherhood added another layer of tethering. It brought an embodied knowledge of sleeplessness, patience, rupture, and repair - a knowledge of how care unfolds unevenly, sometimes clumsily, always entangled with matter. Becoming a mother sharpened my awareness of the micropolitical pressures placed on children's bodies and on the adults who care for them: pressures toward cleanliness, compliance, quietness, safety, and the performance of developmental "readiness." These pressures vibrate in the baby room, shaping how touch is permitted, disciplined, or surveilled.

Migration, too, carries its affective weight. Living and working outside my country of origin has made me acutely aware of how policies, expectations, and norms vary across contexts, and how the body becomes legible - or illegible - within institutional systems. My Englishness sits with me in the room: not as a stable identity, but as a reminder that belonging and recognition are always contingent, always in flux. This awareness attunes me to the politics of being witnessed, judged, or legitimized within educational institutions.

My experiences as an early childhood practitioner form yet another tether. Years spent wiping spills, negotiating snack-time rhythms, and navigating regulatory demands inform my understanding of the labor involved in staying present with children's bodies. This labor is affective, material, and often undervalued. It is also deeply pedagogical. These practitioner histories shape the way I read Toby's gestures, not as (mis)behavior or delay but as material thinking, relational inquiry, and sensory communication.

Taken together, these histories form what I call *umbilical tethering*: an ongoing relational pull that binds my body to the bodies, materials, and movements in the room. Umbilical tethering resists the illusion of researcher neutrality. It acknowledges that I do not stand outside the event but am folded into it. Through my breath, my posture, my memories, my hesitations, and my hopes. My body is not merely present; it participates in the unfolding of the moment, shaping and being shaped by it.

This positionality is not confessed to legitimizing the research, nor offered as a disclosure to satisfy methodological convention. Instead, it is part of the analytic fabric. It makes explicit the affective and material conditions through which this research becomes possible. To attend to Toby's milk and melon spill is also to attend to the spillages of my own histories, the ways they leak into the room and into the writing. This is a positionality that is not clean, fixed, or singular, but tethered, shifting, and entangled - always becoming with the worlds it encounters.

Umbilical Methods: A Methodology of Tethering

Umbilical methods emerged as a way of naming the relational, embodied, and material entanglements that shape the moments in which as 'researcher' I encounter. Rather than positioning myself as a detached observer or neutral analyst, umbilical methods foreground the tethers that bind the researcher to the event. Tethers formed through bodily histories, affective intensities, professional experiences, and more-than-human relations. This orientation is grounded in post-qualitative inquiry's insistence that data, researcher, event, and analysis cannot be separated into stable parts (St. Pierre, 2019; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This refusal of separation resonates with St. Pierre's (2011) early call to move beyond representational logics of data and method toward forms of inquiry that remain open, processual, and entangled.

Umbilical methods resist methodological neatness. They embrace what Manning (2006) describes as a *politics of touch*, where knowledge emerges through movement, proximity, hesitation, and the minor gestures that compose everyday relations. These methods attend to the body as a site of sensing and intra-action. My own body - leaning, waiting, bracing,

responding - is read not as a source of bias to be bracketed out, but as part of the analytic apparatus through which meaning-materialities take shape (Barad, 2007).

This methodology is therefore both conceptual and visceral. It draws on the bodily attunements cultivated through midwifery, motherhood, teaching and early years practice - attunements to breath, pause, tone, moisture, spill, and proximity. These embodied knowledges became analytic tools: not to interpret Toby's actions, but to be moved by them, to sense the micropolitical tensions that gathered around the spill, and to notice the regulatory forces that shaped the moment.

Umbilical methods also work through *leakage*, recognizing that research encounters are never fully contained. Memories leak into the present; policy logics leak into gestures; histories leak across bodies and materials. This methodological stance acknowledges that the event does not begin or end at the moment of observation - it stretches across temporalities, affects, and discursive structures.

Finally, umbilical methods position analysis as an act of intra-action rather than interpretation. Analysis emerges through careful return to the moment, where milk, melon, textures, gestures, and tensions participate in the production of analytic musings and makings. The vignette is not treated as data to be coded or extracted, but as a relational-material encounter to be diffracted, felt, and stayed-with. In this sense, umbilical methods align with feminist new materialist commitments to relational ethics, multisensory knowledge-making, and the vitality of matter.

Methodologically, this entails allowing the pacifier, the milk stain, or the baby's recoil to act as co-analysts, agents that select the researcher as much as she selects them. It also requires resisting the sanitization of touch in research spaces, where "no-touch" discourses risk collapsing encounter into observation. Umbilical methods insist that research is itself a form of touching - of skin, memory, sound, and smell - through which the researcher is ethically implicated and materially transformed. In doing so, they expand the political ecology of touch, where seemingly mundane acts, such as wiping melon from a table, become entangled with histories of maternal care, pedagogical governance, and the intimate labors of survival.

Diffractive Analysis: Reading the Spill

Diffractive analysis provides a way of thinking with the Toby vignette that avoids reduction, interpretation, or the search for underlying meaning. As Barad (2007) outlines, diffraction is a method of reading insights *through* one another in ways that work with difference rather than against it. A diffractive reading attends to what the encounter produces - affectively, materially, politically - rather than what it represents.

The milk and melon spill becomes the analytic center not because it is symbolically rich, but because it gathers forces. Through diffractive reading, Toby's gestures are considered alongside theoretical concepts (intra-action, assemblage, micropolitics), institutional regulations, my bodily responses, and the material textures of the room. These elements do not reflect one another; they interfere, bend, amplify, and distort, producing patterns of understanding that would not appear through conventional analysis.

What follows is not interpretation but an attempt to stay with the event as it unfolds materially, affectively, and methodologically. This spill is not just an accident. It is an event. It shimmers with meaning. It resists containment. Somewhat like Alys, shaping her broken clay heART in silence (Renold, 2025), Toby crafts a dartaphact of babyhood - matter, data, and act entangled. The milk-play is a material performance of what matters. I write not to decode this baby room moment but to unfold-fold into it. My own memories ripple underneath, white hospital sheets, the sterile scent of latex gloves, the sound of my

child's first gulp of colostrum, the fear in my fingers as I reached to soothe and startled instead. These memories cling like milk to skin. I write to remain with the residue. To honor the viscosity of pedagogies not yet legible. This is not curriculum-as-pathway. This is curriculum-as-compost. Each touch, each spill, each muttered redirection turns over the soil of what we assume educating/teaching to be. With the earthworm, the fruit flies, and the bruised clay heart, we are tunnelling, folding, decomposing and regenerating. We are shaping a pedagogy that does not seek clarity but holds space for murk and emergence - a sticky pedagogy, alive with possibility.

A pedagogy of swarming, molting, being moved.

A pedagogy of staying with the mess (Haraway, 2016).

“A pedagogy of being-with.”

For example, the milk's slow movement across Toby's skin diffracts with Manning's (2006) notion of *more-than* touch, highlighting the relational field that forms between child, practitioner, material, and institutional constraint. The melon's stickiness diffracts with developmental timelines, unsettling the prescriptive logics that seek to discipline children's bodies into orderly sequences of “readiness.” My own hesitation - my partial movement toward and away from the spill - diffracts with regulatory discourses of risk, hygiene, and professional propriety.

To dismiss Toby's actions as mere defiance is to ignore the vibrancy of the moment. Toby is not simply “making a mess” - he is responding to the materiality of the baby room, engaging in meaning-making through milk, melon, gravity, and skin. His gestures speak. His touch is a form of inquiry. The milk is not incidental; it is agentic - cool, white, splashable. It invites relation. It leaves a trace.

In the diffractive analysis of this moment, Toby's body, the milk, the practitioner's gaze, the structure of the table, and the protocol of snack-time all intra-act to co-produce the event. The spill becomes more than an accident: it is an interruption, a resistance, a choreography of the unexpected. A pedagogy of saturation.

This moment was read through the umbilical method - a method that recognizes knowledge not as abstract, but as felt, relational, tethered, and seeping. Just as the milk seeps into the grooves of the table, so too do pedagogical meanings emerge in seepage, not separation. Toby's coos, smears, and squeals are data-events. They are not coded or counted; they are touched, felt, and interpreted through the folds of proximity - *More Than a Spill*.

Through diffraction, the event becomes a micropolitical site where competing forces meet: the child's sensory exploration, the educator's embodied response, the room's material conditions, and the institution's regulatory expectations. This analysis reveals not the “truth” of the moment, but the web of relational, affective, and political energies that shape it. Diffractive analysis, then, is not a technique but a practice of attunement - an ethical, material, and sensorial way of staying-with the encounter. It refuses distance. It refuses tidiness. It follows the spill.

What this moment produces is not only a re-reading of children's actions, but a disturbance in how educators come to know, decide, and respond.

Implications: Toward Practices of Sanctuary

The baby room breathes. Its rhythm is irregular, pulsing with the small dramas of brightly coloured plastic-tipped cups and the sticky symphonies of melon (of all varieties), milk (of all varieties), and squished banana.

We come together - not just early childhood practitioners and babies, but, dirt, smells, noise, memories. I acknowledge that I do not write this alone. I write with fruit flies that hover over sweetness, mosquitos, with the murmur of the air-conditioning unit, central heating pipes, with the scratch and scrapes of food utensils against the serving bowls, silent screeches of joy and tears (Research Journal entries 05/20/25, 04.05.19 & 04.28.25).

The practitioner's initial resistance, reasserting the cup's role, cleaning the spill, might be read as disciplinary. But her body also hesitates. Her voice softens. Later, in reflection, she wonders aloud: "I think I just didn't know if I was supposed to stop him or watch him. I didn't want to shut it down. But I didn't want him to be wet and sticky either."

This hesitation is pedagogically rich. It marks the practitioner's own becoming-touched by the mess. Her uncertainty is not failure, but an opening - a moment of hopeful notknowing that makes space for reconfiguring response. Her pause is a sanctuary. A soft fold in the procedural - *Becoming-With the Spill*

The micropolitics of the Toby encounter reveal the tensions shaping early childhood practice today. Increasingly, educators navigate environments governed by no-touch policies, procedural compliance, and heightened surveillance - forces that restrict relational, sensory, and embodied forms of pedagogy. The spill becomes a small but potent reminder of how children's bodies often exceed the limits of institutional expectations.

One implication of this work is the need to resist developmentalist timelines that privilege linear, regulated progress. The encounter with milk and melon exposes how children learn *through* mess, texture, rhythm, and relational attunement. Forms of knowledge not easily captured in assessment frameworks emerge. Sensory exploration, far from trivial, becomes a site of pedagogical possibility.

A second implication is the necessity of recognizing practitioners' embodied knowledge. The hesitation, pausing, and leaning described in the vignette are not incidental; they are forms of relational pedagogy. Professional development and policy frameworks rarely acknowledge these micro-gestures of care, yet they shape how children experience safety, presence, and connection.

A third implication concerns the institutional politics of cleanliness, order, and perceived risk. The pressure to maintain tidy surfaces and compliant bodies often constrains children's agency and sensory engagement. By attending to the more-than-human relations in the room - milk, melon, moisture, fabric - educators might cultivate practices that honor children's embodied inquiries rather than suppress them.

These implications gather into a broader argument for sanctuary. Sanctuary, as used here, does not mean shelter or escape. It names a space of relational holding - an atmosphere where children and educators can move with uncertainty, vulnerability, and material intensity. Sanctuary emerges when educators remain open to spill, mess, and affect; when they resist the tightening grip of proceduralism, when they honor the fragility and boldness of children's gestures. It is a pedagogical stance that values relational risk, shared presence, and more-than-human co-becoming.

Conclusion: Staying With the Spill

To stay with the spill is to refuse the pressures of preciseness - regulatory, developmental, or interpretive - and instead dwell in the complexities that animate early childhood life. The Toby vignette offers no simple lesson. It offers, instead, an invitation: to notice how bodies, materials, and institutional forces converge in ways that shape the possibilities of pedagogical relations.

Through umbilical methods and diffractive analysis, the moment becomes more than an anecdote. It becomes a site for thinking-with touch, matter, and micropolitics; for unsettling developmentalist expectations; for foregrounding the embodied labor of educators; and for imagining pedagogical practices that honor relational vulnerability.

The baby room, in this telling, is not a controlled environment but a dynamic assemblage. One that gathers histories, regulations, textures, gestures, emotions, and materials. Milk and melon, far from trivial, become partners in thought. They mark the material entanglements through which pedagogy becomes possible.

Sanctuary, then, is not found in order or certainty. It is found in the willingness to remain present to the spill - to the sticky, leaky, unpredictable moments where children's bodies insist on being felt, not managed. Sanctuary emerges in the fragile, affective spaces where educators choose relation over regulation, attunement over compliance, and material thinking over developmental correctness.

To conclude is not to straighten out the event but to acknowledge its ongoingness. The spill lingers. On the tray, on the skin, in memory, in writing. Reminding us that pedagogy is always a matter of entanglement, always more-than human, always becoming.

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