

Doll Clothes on a String: “Don’t Touch!”

Folding Force, Will and Desire.

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Abstract

In this article, I re-turn (to) a doll clothes event that takes place in a toddler classroom in kindergarten. The event, as data, entangles past, present, and future, diffracting and re-diffracting in multiple directions. Although this event is anchored in a specific place-space-time, it simultaneously exists as something that could occur anywhere and nowhere – like ghostly doll clothes affections lingering in bodies through history. To unpack the doll clothes event, I explore the vitality of the colourful, soft textiles through Nietzsche’s concept of will to power, understood as both ‘a complement of force and something internal to it’ (Deleuze, 2013, p. 46). Additionally, I

¹ Vibrant doll clothes hanging on a string. This photo was taken during a year-long action research project exploring the significance of materiality and objects in a kindergarten setting. Photo credit: The author.

draw on the Deleuzian concept of desire and Manning's (2007) notions of touch and tact to further unfold the event. These theoretical concepts serve as productive vectors for elaborating on thing-power (Bennett, 2004), understood as an affirmative, vital force that diffracts through materialization and will.

This article is situated within a posthuman paradigm that values more-than-human agencies (while not abandoning the human) as active, agentic forces that co-constitute the world. The aim is to explore the potentials, will, and values embedded within kindergarten pedagogies – becoming with the entanglements of doll clothes and the vibrant materiality of the toddler classroom.

Will-ful concepts: Doll clothes; Will to Power; Tact/touch; Hauntology

Introduction

Just as textiles twist and fold, the vibrant doll clothes event that serves as data in this article intertwines with Nietzsche's concept of will to power, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy – particularly the concept of desire – Manning's (2007) notions of touch and tact, and Bennett's (2004) thing-power materialism. Additionally, I engage with Deleuze's concept of the fold throughout the article, exploring its dual significance as both a philosophical idea and a literal act. Here, matter and theory fold into, out of, and over one another, generating intelligibility and revealing the entangled and co-constitutive nature of the world.

These intricate and, at times, messy entanglements of material and discursive forces – evoking the micropolitics of touch, will, and desire – resist resolution or closure. Instead, they invite ongoing negotiation, diffractive exploration, and an openness to what is yet to be known, imagined, and felt.

In the following sections, I examine how doll clothes mediate the relational dynamics of the toddler classroom within the kindergarten context. Drawing on the concepts of will to power, desire, and the interconnected ideas of tact and touch, I illuminate the vibrant energies that shape pedagogy and children's play. This approach underscores the deeply entangled processes through which phenomena emerge, emphasizing the relational and co-constitutive nature of knowledge creation and becoming through dynamic encounters. Together, these ideas position the doll clothes as an active force in the ongoing negotiation of matter, agency, and relational dynamics within the classroom environment.

My explorations are grounded in data from a year-long action research project that examined materialities as matters that matter within the context of kindergarten. This article, therefore, investigates the lively energies and the generative production of affects that have yet to be filled with meaning, as well as the diffractions that unfold through the vibrant doll clothes event, offering new insights into relationality and becoming.

Building on this foundation, and drawing on Barad's framework, I engage in the practice of cutting

together-apart² and re-turning³ – ‘not by returning as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again’ (Barad, 2014, p. 168) – to extract new insight from the doll clothes event. This iterative process embraces the event’s entangled and transformative potential, revealing its dynamic and multifaceted nature. Through this re-turning, the doll clothes event emerges as a site for exploring how relational forces actively shape play, knowledge, ethics, empathy, frustration, and pedagogy in a toddler classroom.

In the act of cutting, I must proceed with great care, handling the doll clothes delicately, as they are both expensive and precious. In the same way, I strive to approach the vibrant event itself with equal attentiveness and respect. The fragility of the doll clothes brings into focus the intricacy of the material-discursive relations they embody, demanding a thoughtful and deliberate approach to both engagement and care.

Building on a diffractive methodology⁴ rooted in the work of Barad (2007), this research positions my voice as a (re)searcher in affective entanglement with the data – the vibrant doll clothes event – evolving in tandem with the text. Similarly, the central concepts explored in this article remain continuously interwoven with the data and narrative, co-producing knowledge and shaping the unfolding story of the research. Within this framework, the iterative process of re-turning – revisiting the doll clothes event through entangled perspectives – reveals the potential for something ‘new’ to emerge. However, this ‘new’ is not entirely novel but instead something always already present, awaiting discovery through diffractive and relational exploration.

Now, let us pick up the doll clothes and explore their vibrant and generative potentials as the event unfolds, multiplies, and entangles with conceptual thinking, embodied practices, and theories that matter. Let us engage with the ghosts of past-present-future doll clothes events, tracing their lingering effects and examining how their presence continues to shape the unfolding dynamics of the toddler classroom, our shared experiences, and the fluid, ever-evolving narratives we create together.

Folding Doll Clothes within a Posthuman Land(e)scape

The act of folding doll clothes is not merely a human-centred activity but a dynamic intra-action (Barad, 2003), where both human and more-than-human bodies, along with their entangled agencies, fold into and through one another, continuously shaping new configurations of matter and meaning. In this process, intentional and affective bodies come together to co-create play and pedagogy. This co-creation emerges through the material and discursive entanglement of fabrics,

2 Agential cuts do not produce absolute separations but rather cut together-apart (one move). ‘Indeed, the quantum understanding of diffraction troubles the very notion of dichotomy – cutting into two – as a singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then’ (Barad, 2014, p. 168).

3 ‘We might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it’ (Barad, 2014, p. 168).

4 ‘A diffractive methodology seeks to work constructively and deconstructively (not destructively) in making new patterns of understanding-becoming’ (Barad, 2014, p. 187).

teachers, and toddlers, as gaze, fingers, textures, and the resistance of the cloth intra-act with colours, sizes, buttons, Velcro fasteners, and ribbons.

Far from being passive objects, these materials – in conjunction with human bodies and the atmospheric conditions of the kindergarten – actively shape the encounter. They disclose their possibilities, potentials, and limitations, guiding the actions of both children and teachers while simultaneously contributing to the emergence of new knowledge about the relational intra-play of entangled bodies and their performative capacities. This perspective aligns with Bennett's (2004) concept of thing-power materialism, which highlights how 'things and their powers can have a laudable effect on humans' (p. 348).

Building on this, the entangled process of agency raises critical questions about how materiality and relational dynamics unfold within the toddler classroom, where constant motion subtly reshapes the pedagogical landscape. These questions form the foundation of my discussion, offering a framework for examining how the vibrant materiality of doll clothes – entangled with toddlers and teachers in kindergarten – opens new opportunities for reconfiguring pedagogy, play, and relationality. The doll clothes evoke a spectrum of affects⁵ and sensations: they spark desire, provoke frustration, awaken curiosity, nurture determination, and foster both knowledge and affection. As co-creators of meaning, they actively shape how children engage, feel, and learn – and, in turn, how teachers engage, feel, and learn.

Existing in various states within the play space, doll clothes dress dolls and teddy bears: their tiny sleeves welcome doll arms, buttons wait to be fastened, and ribbons invite hands to tie them into bows. Scattered across the floor, resting atop doll beds, tossed into corners, or suspended high on a string – out of reach but brimming with potential – doll clothes, through their presence, colours, placement, scent, and materiality, actively participate in the unfolding of imagination, creativity, aesthetic sense, play, and tactile learning. They remind us that all matter, whether, tangible or intangible – including objects, thoughts, affects, emotions, nature, failures, and ideas – possesses the capacity to generate foldings of wilful becoming and transformative potential.

This generative capacity of matter resonates with Deleuze's concept of the fold, which represents the forces that shape and constitute reality. Foldings, in this sense, are not merely physical movements but deeply entangled processes of becoming, where energy and matter converge with affects, sensations, and determination. In this continuous process, the world folds upon itself repeatedly: folding un/willed doll clothes with desire and a will to power, folding vibrant thing-power that disrupts the harmony of the toddler classroom, and folding together pedagogy, play, fabrics, ghosts, and monsters.

Building on this notion of folding as a generative and relational process, my research further draws

5 Massumi (2015) elaborates, '(...) one always affects and is affected in encounters, which is to say, through events' (p. ix).

on Baradian agential realism⁶. Within this framework, there is an ‘ongoing flow of agency through which “part” of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another “part” of the world’ (Barad, 2003, p. 817). This methodological approach is further grounded in the principles of diffractive analysis, which highlight the generative potential of difference⁷ and the ongoing entanglement of matter and meaning.

The Doll Clothes Event/Fullness: Touch That Lingers in Bodies

Let us begin with a glimpse into the toddler classroom in kindergarten as an initial step in unpacking the doll clothes event. The vignette, or short story, presented below diffracts from an event that occurred during our research project in kindergarten, re-turning waves of potentialities that intermingle with futures yet to come. I frame the vignette as an onto-speculative data production, allowing for multiple readings while exploring the speculative nature of being and existence. Rather than merely observing what is, it becomes a means of speculating on what might become.

Furthermore, the diffractions stirred by the vignette may transfer to you as a reader, as the text folds (with) body-lingering ghosts and monsters. As the vignette continues to diffract and re-diffract (Barad, 2014) through affectivity and space-time motions, the entanglement of reader, researcher, and data may unfold and co-become anew, forming a shared experience. In this way, the vignette serves as both an invitation and a provocation, opening a space for collaborative meaning-making where the boundaries between observer, observed, and the event itself blur, merge, and undergo transformation.

Vignette 1. Doll Clothes on a String

Soft, colourful doll clothes dangle on a string, temptingly out of reach for the toddlers. The clothes are hung just above their heads, beyond the grasp of their eager hands. The vibrant fabrics captivate the toddlers’ attention, dazzling them with their colours and textures. Yet, the doll clothes are delicate and require careful handling, necessitating assistance from the teachers. Don’t touch, wait for help! Still, the forceful thing-power of these vibrant fabrics has already begun to exert its pull. The attraction is undeniable, stirring curiosity and desire even before the toddlers’ hands can reach the doll clothes hanging above them.

In alignment with Deleuze, ‘everything is event’ (Williams, 2011, p. 80). An event embraces both minor and major transformations, unfolding as slow/er or fast/er flows of energy in varying

⁶ Agential realism is a theory developed by physicist and philosopher Karen Barad that offers a new approach to metaphysics – the study of what exists and how things come into being.

⁷ While drawing on the concept of ‘diffraction’ from Karen Barad (2007) and Donna Haraway (1992), I remain mindful that diffraction owes as much to the rich legacy of feminist theorizing about difference as it does to its origins in physics (Barad, 2014, p. 168). In this sense, diffraction constitutes ‘patterns of difference’ that challenge and destabilize dichotomies (the cutting into two), opening space for complexity, sensitivity, and processes of becoming. Diffraction, therefore, is not a static concept but an ongoing process of differentiation, an entangled becoming, and a dynamic patterning of worlding (Barad, 2010, p. 265).

forms. The doll clothes event may diffract these slow/er and fast/er flows of energy as textiles, senses, skin, desire, tension, will, and con-tact fold together – soft, like the beating of butterfly wings, yet capable of sparking a revolution.

Building on this, Manning (2007) asserts that ‘touch is an event’ (p. 141). Within this framework, touch becomes an eventful and affective movement that stirs reality – a minor gesture (Manning, 2016) that continuously and relationally constitutes a reality in flow and flux through small, often overlooked actions. These gestures hold the potential to open new ways of thinking, feeling, and being. They are not necessarily intentional or tied to a single subject but emerge in the interstices of agentic forces folding together to produce something new. They are part of a rhizomatic, ever-evolving process – a ‘process of becoming and differentiation’ (Beck & Gleyzon, 2016, p. 329). Minor gestures are not grand acts of change but rather subtle, almost imperceptible shifts, carrying the potential for transformative and far-reaching effects – effects that linger in bodies and reverberate across histories.

Extending this idea, the doll clothes event becomes multiple and vibrant as it folds together (with) bodies, theories, culture, pedagogy, conflict, play, creativity, and discomfort in the kindergarten. Layers upon layers of gestures of force and will fold into larger movements that both challenge and embrace what might become – like virtual potentials swirling around the doll clothes. In this sense, the diffractions of touch act as generative forces, creating devotion, drive, and frustration as children eagerly reach with outstretched hands toward the doll clothes hung high above them. These movements intermingle with the teachers’ need for control, as the vibrant fabrics encounter both tactful and violent touches of wilful desire.

The doll clothes event thus becomes a site where fabrics, bodies, rules, and affects converge, producing not only moments of friction and negotiation but also opportunities for new knowledge, relational transformation, and shared becoming.

Manning (2007) traces the etymology of tact and touch, both derived from the Latin verb *tangere*, meaning ‘to touch.’ She observes, ‘Tact, like touch, etymologically emerges from the stem *tangere*. In its first definition tact is touch. Yet, something has occurred, in time, that has created an uncanny rift between tact and touch: tact is interpreted as a certain prescience that keeps me from touching, from moving forward’ (p. 134).

This entanglement reveals the complexity of touch, intricately tied to tact and related terms such as tangible, tactile, and contact (AlloLatin, 2023). *Tangere* extends beyond physical touch to encompass sensory impressions, including gentle or forceful contact, tasting, or subtly affecting something in injurious ways (AlloLatin, 2023). This etymological exploration underscores the layered and multifaceted nature of touch, positioning it not as a singular or isolated act but as a profoundly relational and dynamic phenomenon.

Building on this nuanced understanding of touch, its significance becomes particularly evident in the toddler classroom, where the doll clothes – vivid and textured – captivate curious minds and eager hands drawn to tactile exploration. The allure of the fabrics exerts a powerful pull,

stirring the senses and awakening a deep desire to touch and feel. Here, touch is not merely a simple act but a site of friction, dialogue, and becoming, where the relational entanglements of human and more-than-human bodies fold (with) discourse, expectation, love, play, will, and affection. The dynamics of touch foster new possibilities for play and pedagogy within the toddler classroom.

Touch/ing Will/ingness and Desire: Doll Clothes Productions

This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And even you yourselves are this will to power – and nothing besides (Nietzsche, 2017, p. 586).

The vibrant doll clothes cling to the toddlers' cravings, simultaneously affecting and being affected by their touch. These small garments, dangling delicately on a string, possess an almost magnetic allure. Heartbeats quicken as blood pulses through eager bodies reaching upward toward this tempting, vibrant presence. Rapid muscle movements ripple through outstretched arms; excited gazes fixate on the clothes, while tense hands stretch to grasp them. Meanwhile, the doll clothes' energies flow in all directions – slow/er and fast/er – entangling with the toddlers' desires, the teachers' concerns, rules, and efforts to maintain control over the doll-dressing activities.

Nietzsche (2017) describes the world as 'a monster of energy, without beginning or end' (p. 585), depicting it as a realm of eternal becoming, where the will to power permeates all existence. Within this framework, the will to power is both inherent in force and serves as its complement, driving the continuous unfolding of the world (Deleuze, 2013, p. 46). Expanding on Nietzsche's ideas, Deleuze and Guattari (2009, p. 26) develop this notion further with their concept of desire. For them, desire is not defined by lack or absence, nor does it seek to fill a void. Instead, desire is a constitutive force that actively produces reality, operating as the energy that folds the world into being.

Detached from any fixed subject, desire exists as a dynamic and affirmative force that propels life forward. Much like burdocks clinging to fabric, desire adheres and attaches, continually shaping reality through an ongoing process of becoming. Drawing from Nietzschean and Deleuzian philosophy, the will to power and desire can be understood as intertwined forces driving production and transformation. These forces, far from being limited to human experience, extend beyond individual subjects to encompass nature, objects, and social institutions (Gao, 2013, p. 406).

Building on this notion of interconnected forces, Manning (2007) suggests that touch is eventful and expressive, filled with intensities and flows of energy circulating amongst, in, and through bodies and matter. This perspective aligns with Barad's (2003) view that matter is not a passive end product but an active participant in processes of materialization. Even the seemingly static doll clothes are entangled in these energy flows, actively participating in the mutual constitution of relational agencies. With their slow yet vibrant motion, they invite toddlers into moments of ingenuity, problem-solving, empowerment, hesitation, play, and persistence, while also engaging

teachers in efforts to maintain order and to monitor the situation as it unfolds.

The dynamics of touch can be understood as a site of relational and transformative potential, where forces of energy and matter intra-act, continually reshaping one another. In a similar vein, Michelangelo's iconic Sistine Chapel ceiling painting comes to mind, where the outstretched hands of God and Adam symbolize creation, connection, and potential. The divine touch depicted in this image evokes the intensities and flows of energy moving through and connecting bodies and matter. However, this is not a fixed moment of contact. Even Michelangelo's fresco is entangled in processes of becoming – haunted by decay, pollution, dust, restoration, and the passage of time. Touch, no matter how divine, is never static; it remains in everlasting flux, shaped by forces that endlessly assemble and reassemble.

As Manning (2007) writes, 'Touch is eventful ... Touch is expression' (p. 146), highlighting its open-ended nature and its capacity to continuously reshape and redefine what it encounters. Expanding on this, Manning likens touch to the ghostly traces captured in a photograph – distortions of time and space that pave the way for a spectral politics of becoming (p. 140). These traces, like lingering ghosts, connect us to what is intangible yet profoundly felt – the forces of history, memory, and potential futures. As Varga (2022) aptly notes, this spectral move links us to what 'we' cannot touch but nonetheless continues to touch 'us' (pp. 4–5), a dynamic that in our case becomes tangible during the doll-dressing activity.

Haunting warnings echo: Don't touch the doll clothes! Wait for the teacher's help! Handle with care! In this moment of anticipation, touch transforms into more than a simple action; it becomes a site of push, pull, and transformation. The hesitation evoked by these warnings generates a charged atmosphere where friction, will, and desire intertwine, exposing the intricate web of relational forces at work. The teacher's attempts to maintain order collide with the children's eager movements, aspirations, and longings, creating a dynamic tension between restraint and yearning. These moments of suspended action invite deeper exploration of the entangled relationships among bodies, objects, and social expectations.

The warning to pause and hold back encourages us to look beyond the immediate dynamics of human-object intra-actions to consider the broader ontological and affective forces shaping these relations. What might emerge if we linger with these tensions, embracing the ghosts and monsters of tradition, authority, rules, expectations, competition, failure, care, kin, and trouble that haunt the toddler classroom atmosphere? The doll clothes, vibrant and alluring, draw us into this web of forces, urging a reconsideration of the productive potential of touch, desire, and the will to power in shaping shared worlds.

Tic Tac(t), Tic Tac(t): Tactful Doll Clothes Encounters

The concept of pedagogical tact – encompassing qualities such as perceptiveness, respect, sensitivity, care, empathy, and thoughtfulness – is often associated with pedagogical practices in kindergarten settings. Drawing on Manning (2007), being tactful involves knowing when not to touch, recognizing that touch can trigger affects and effects beyond (our) control.

In this context, refraining from touching the doll clothes signifies an understanding that material objects are not passive or inert but are instead entangled with the potential for events to unfold – some unexpected, some unwanted. This restraint reflects a human-centric assumption of control, an effort to pre-emptively manage the intra-actions among human and more-than-human bodies, will, and affects. It suggests an attempt to ‘know’ in advance – to predict and contain the relational possibilities embedded in the encounter.

Manning (2007) writes, ‘Tact is anathema to a politics of touch, but never wholly disjointed from it. Touch is always at risk of being tactically re-secured’ (p. 135). In this sense, tact holds the ghosts of past-present-futures in check, while touch, restrained by tact, strives forward as a pure life force driven by desire and the will to power. Tact embodies a delicate sense of what is fitting or proper in relation to both human and more-than-human ‘others’ as the world unfolds. It diffracts an intuitive and ethical understanding of what is appropriate and respectful when engaging with ‘others,’ aiming to avoid causing offense, instilling fear, and losing goodwill. Thus, becoming (with) doll clothes in the toddler classroom embodies a mode of ethical touching (Springgay, 2022, p. 10). This suggests that ‘we’ are always imbricated in all that ‘we’ touch and all that touches ‘us,’ as mutual attractions fold into one another.

What might happen if toddlers were free to engage with the doll clothes on their own terms? How might these material objects actively participate in shaping the event? No longer mere objects, the doll clothes hold the potential to provoke play, inspire cooperation, and even spark conflict. They may invite acts of care as they are carefully dressed on dolls, acts of destruction in moments of frustration or curiosity, acts of loss when they are taken away, and acts of disregard as they are momentarily overlooked. These objects might become cherished treasures, chewed on, forgotten, traded among children, or hidden. They might be folded neatly, tossed into a corner, washed in the bathroom sink, cut, torn, or transformed into something entirely new.

As the toddlers reach for the doll clothes, the outcome remains uncertain – virtual potentials swirl with possibilities of what may emerge. How might the teachers’ responses not only reflect, but also actively participate in shaping the entangled dynamics of this moment? Could their actions – or their silences – amplify certain relationships while muting others?

What if the toddlers are not simply reaching for doll clothes, but engaging in a deeper negotiation with the material and relational forces of the classroom? Are their actions a search for autonomy, connection, or recognition – or something else that we cannot fully grasp? How do the doll clothes, the furniture, and the histories embedded in the space invite or resist the children’s touch? How do these materialities participate in the event as it unfolds?

What ghosts might be reconfigured within the entanglements of the toddler classroom? Ghosts of love, worry, curiosity, regret, and fear – haunting presences that are neither fully here nor entirely absent but instead co-constituted within the material-discursive relations that shape the shared space. Perhaps these ghosts are not merely echoes of past moments but are themselves actively shaping the possibilities of the future, lingering as silent participants in the unfolding story.

These ghosts are not passive remnants of the past but active agents, intra-acting with the present to reconfigure possibilities for knowing, being, and becoming. They shape how teachers navigate the intricate web of relationships in the toddler classroom, where care, attention, and sensitivity are entangled with the materiality of the encounters themselves.

Ghosts participate in the becoming of phenomena, not as static residues, but as dynamic reconfigurations of time, space, and matter. Through their presence, they provoke responses, inspire support and protection, ignite creativity, and generate new entanglements of trouble, frustration, potential, and becoming.

Yet, as ghosts illuminate and provoke, might they be accompanied by monsters – shadows of the unknown that emerge not as external threats, but as co-produced companions entangled in the same processes of becoming? What if monsters are not merely agents of fear but generative forces, materializing empowerment, desires, and possibilities that emerge through the entangled intra-actions of material and non-material phenomena?

Doll Clothes Explorations: Revealing ‘Another’ Child

Folding doll clothes is not merely a simple act but a material-discursive event involving fabrics made of diverse materials – stiff, soft, rough, or smooth – each possessing its own agency, its own capacity to act and resist. These materials intra-act with small hands, gazes, and will, alternatively inviting or resisting certain movements, refusing to conform, refusing to button, and demanding attention. The folds of fabric and the folds of touch become entangled, creating moments of fragility, negotiation, and response.

In this process, folding extends beyond the manipulation of objects, emerging as a site for affective and material-discursive relations. It involves the folding of skin, will, concentration, materials, and eager persistence, as small fingers fumble and struggle with Velcro, buttons, and jacket sleeves. These everyday encounters reveal the relational entanglements of human and more-than-human forces, where the agency of the fabric, the will of the child, and the teacher’s presence intra-act to co-create new possibilities, outcomes, and understandings.

Now, let us re-turn to the toddlers in kindergarten as they encounter the doll clothes, hung high and seemingly out of reach. This moment, simple at first glance, quickly unfolds into a dynamic entanglement of agency and power. The doll clothes, vibrant and alluring, become more than mere objects of play – they disrupt the carefully maintained harmony of the classroom, inviting both children and teachers into a shared negotiation of boundaries, desire, and choices.

Vignette 2: Doll Clothes Disturbing Harmony

The children do not wait to reach for the doll clothes. Their movements are swift and determined as they pull the doll bed beneath the hanging clothes, climbing up and grasping what they want. This spontaneous act disrupts the carefully maintained order of the classroom, leaving the teachers momentarily stunned. The once predictable flow of the day is now unsettled, and the teachers find

themselves at a crossroads. How should they respond to this act of ingenuity and defiance? Will the teachers lower the bar and hang the doll clothes within the children's reach, raise the bar by hanging them even higher, or leave everything as it is? Perhaps they will decide to put the doll clothes away for safekeeping?

The concepts of child and childhood engage us in numerous ways, often awakening an adult's instinct to provide care, help, love, and protection. Historically, the child has been interpreted in terms of lack, incompleteness, and dependence on others, suggesting that the role of care and education is to guide the child toward adulthood – toward independence, competence, and completeness (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 531; Prout, 2005; Lee, 2001).

In contrast, contemporary discussions about childhood challenge this view by conceptualizing the child as competent, strong, and autonomous (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 531; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

Relational materialisms offer another perspective, suggesting that the child emerges through and as part of their entangled relations with everything around them, transforming their powers and their powers and characteristics as they move through dynamic, ever-changing assemblages (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 531; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Lee, 2001). This perspective reframes the vignette, presenting toddlers as becoming-with doll clothes, hangers, doll beds, regulations, opportunities, smiles, teachers, expectations, and revelations – highlighting the doll clothes' potential to evoke 'another child.'

Hickey-Moody (2013) emphasizes the need to rethink teleological notions of childhood and growing up, calling for a liberation of children from entrenched biases, particularly those related to gender and age. This critique resonates with the long history of attempts to define and control childhood, where philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, biologists, teachers, parents, and others have analysed, categorized, and theorized children's needs, development, learning, play, and behaviour. But what might emerge if we shift our focus from defining children to uncovering the possibilities for 'another child' – one that exists beyond these entrenched categorizations?

The doll clothes have finally reached the toddlers' hands. In the toddler classroom, love and conflict unfold as the doll clothes' thing-power diffracts and pierces bodies like arrows of affectivity. These intra-actions reshape values, will, and relational dynamics, while simultaneously challenging the law-and-order established by the teachers.

Tic-tac(t), tactful touch – a delicate balance between care and chaos. The doll clothes are expensive and delicate – so precious. Be careful (with them)! Dress and undress: carefully dress the doll, with or without the teacher's help. Dress and undress: tear the clothes apart, fight, break the rules, assign blame, and impose restrictions.

Zuckerman (2006) coins the phrase 'learning objects' to describe physical objects, such as dolls and doll clothes, which are commonly found in kindergartens. These intended learning objects are defined as 'physical objects, specifically designed to promote learning through hands-on

interaction' (abstract). Yet, as doll clothes-child-teacher assemblages fold in flightlines of affection, expectation, hesitation, perplexity, doubt, and confusion, they release unexpected potentials. These assemblages challenge the idea of a linear, predictable learning process. Instead, they reveal the emergent, relational nature of knowledge, where hands-on intra-actions mingle with porous surfaces, and touch becomes a site of transformation.

This relational complexity comes into sharper focus in moments when children's eager fingers concentrate on getting it right. Be careful! Handle (us) with care! – as if the objects themselves are whispering a reminder of their own fragility and agency, inviting a deeper attentiveness to the entangled relationships at play.

Thinking with Bone (2019), 'ghosts haunt educational contexts' (p. 133), and pedagogical and learning objects like dolls and doll clothes may themselves embody ghosts that continue to haunt the kindergarten. These are inherited ghosts, passed down through generations, subtly influencing the present while shaping futures yet to come.

However, these ghosts are not limited to educational settings – they are always present, as 'the world "holds" the memory of all traces' (Barad, 2010, p. 261). Layer upon layer of memories and traces are etched into receptive bodies, weaving together the past, present, and future in complex and often unseen ways. What spooky matter is this?

'The time is out of joint' (Shakespeare, 1599/1601; Derrida, 2006; Barad, 2010). 'The new' returns 'the old' in futures yet to come. The world, then, is haunted by ghosts from past-present-futures. Although ghosts cannot be touched hands-on, they continue to affect and transform realities: ghostly matter shaping haunted futures. The past lingers in the present, carried by nostalgia and affects that haunt and shape our being.

So, what ghosts haunt the kindergarten? What ghosts must 'we' confront? How can prejudice and discourse foreclose the potentials of what 'another child' might become? The helpless child, needy child, robust child, angry child, good child, fun child, doll-dressing child, caring child, wild child, sad child, headstrong child, playful child, and ... and. What kind of child is cultivated in kindergarten? How do assembling forces – matter, desire, and will – shape the making of a child?

I cannot teach you: I teach us⁸ – in a felt/ed togetherness, empowered by thing-power materialism, touch, and affectivity. Teachers guide children in how to un/dress the doll, accepting children's bodies with love. Teaching as becoming-with(out) tactful touch.

The Force of 'Things': Doll Clothes Commanding Attention

Stuff that commands attention, exudes dignity, provokes poetry, or inspires fear embodies what Bennett (2004, p. 350) describes as 'thing-power' – the vitality of material objects as active participants in the world. For Bennett, materiality is not inert but a dynamic flow of matter-

⁸ This saying, informed by Manning (2007), continues to diffract and re-diffract throughout the text, generating new meanings and connections. 'I cannot affect you (...): I affect us' (Manning, 2007, p. 13).

energy, where human and more-than-human forces overlap and ‘slipslide into each other’ (p. 349). This perspective emphasizes the vibrancy and agency of things, acknowledging their capacity to influence and reshape human experiences.

Radiant doll clothes vividly illustrate this thing-power: their intense colours – pink, red, green, blue, and yellow – and soft textiles adorned with stripes and flowers create a delicate yet compelling presence as they hang on small hangers along a string. The clothes invite hands to grasp, stretch, and pull, drawing the children’s wide, focused eyes as their small fingers fumble to fasten Velcro and ribbons. Frustration sometimes arises when the clothes resist cooperation, yet the children remain determined, absorbed in the task. For some, the act of doll dressing fades in importance; the doll clothes transform into objects to chew on, hold, or savour – soft, lovely, and soothing to the touch.

As part of the kindergarten assemblage, the doll clothes become active participants in shared encounters. They pierce the children’s affections from a distance, swirling with potentialities and silently asking: What if? Their vibrant shapes and colours catch the eye and, eventually, invite hands to engage. Everything transforms in relation to the other: soft textiles, vibrant colours, and productive friction are shaken and stirred into new possibilities. The doll clothes remind us that they are not passive props but vital players in the ongoing becoming of the toddler classroom. Their agency resides in their ability to provoke, resist, and invite – reshaping the dynamics of learning, play, and connection.

Here, the doll clothes become an expression of force – every force inherently related to another, as the being of force is fundamentally plural (Deleuze, 2013, p. 6). Potent forces command attention: doll clothes hung on a string insist on being noticed. The doll clothes vibrate with energy, stirring needs and desires in their wake.

How does it feel to come close – to come even closer? I cannot feel you: I feel us! In this charged atmosphere, will and desire clash with law and order, as both children and teachers reach for the doll clothes. The doll clothes, no longer mere objects, are now haunted by futures that can, will, or may (not) eventuate. Don’t touch! Wait for help!

I cannot control you: I control us! There is no returning to what existed before – no going back to a time before the doll clothes entered the toddler classroom in kindergarten. Their arrival has irrevocably transformed the atmosphere, creating new entanglements where past, present, and future continuously converge, opening possibilities for new becomings.

The toddlers’ insistent reaching uncovers ghosts that had previously gone unnoticed – ghosts that disrupt the delicate harmony of the classroom and expose the entangled histories and expectations that linger in the space. These ghosts are not merely shadows of the past but active agents that shape the present. They embody a complex dynamic of creativity and control, freedom and regulation, innocence and authority.

In reaching for the doll clothes, the toddlers unknowingly navigate and renegotiate the boundaries

of the classroom's order, exposing both the fluidity of its rules and the complexity of its relational dynamics. The doll clothes, imbued with their vibrant thing-power, provoke new forms of touch, will, desire, and transformation. They invite both children and teachers to grapple with the ghosts and monsters that inhabit their shared space, creating opportunities to rethink the roles of care, authority, and play in the kindergarten.

When the World is 'Out of Joint': Doll Clothes Worldings

Like a Kafkaesque⁹ world – where common sense is out of joint, governed by laws we neither comprehend nor know, where these laws haunt us like ghosts, appearing out of nowhere, judgmental – the toddler classroom folds (with) norms and rules. These norms are based on values deemed important, as teachers become role models for children during doll-dressing activities. However, these values are neither universal nor eternal; some may hold greater significance than others in fostering wellbeing and living.

Thinking with Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals, the value of values and morality can be reconsidered (Nietzsche, 2017). However, this does not suggest that anything goes, whether in kindergarten or life at large. As Zembylas (2020) argues, reframing critique as an affirmative practice in addressing post-truths in schools and kindergartens involves creating pedagogical spaces that foster care for the world and transcend the post-truth, negative critique, and us-versus-them dichotomies. I propose such an affirmative critique, one that challenges us to ask: How do morals shape and inform actions?

As assemblages form and transform in the toddler classroom, affectivity sparks and adheres to bodies through intimate gestures. Doll clothes become ghostly matter that matters, caressing us with both love and fear. These ghosts – these monsters lurking in the shadows and under our beds – cannot be escaped, yet they can be confronted, if we dare. Haraway (1992) invites us to consider how 'monsters' define the limits of community. Here, the community is the kindergarten, where teachers establish the boundaries of the centred polis of doll-dressing activities, creating a space governed by law and order, theories, atmospheres, order, discourse, ethics, pedagogy, and economy – folding monsters upon monsters.

Yet monsters are not always something to fear or avoid; they can also be cherished, nourished by guilt and pleasure. Sometimes, we cling to our monsters, as they keep us safe in their own way. Stay in control; don't challenge the monsters! Or perhaps: Cherish your monsters; let them go! Confront them, battle them, and face their ghostly influence!

Thinking with Bone (2019), doll clothes, as objects that furnish human lives, can surely haunt those lives and emit contradictory messages of dis/comfort, need, joy, control, participating, learning, confidence, fun, and more. Both now and in futures to come, the doll clothes remain traces, symbols, and instruments of both distress and desire. They embed themselves within collective histories and individual life stories, embodying an ambiguity that demands exploration. Taking this

⁹ Kafka, F. (2019/1925) *The Trial*. Penguin Classics.

exploration seriously raises a compelling question: What can doll clothes become in relation to children and teachers in the toddler classroom? And what might they not become?

The world is out of joint! Ghosts and monsters linger perpetually, haunting the present and futures yet to come. They reveal that eerie zone where time collapses, and memories haunt our minds (Macintyre, 2022). The doll clothes, as both material objects and symbols, expose the entangled threads of past experiences, present practices, and future potentials. Their presence in the toddler classroom unsettles the structure, norms, ideas, rules, and values that typically govern such spaces, inviting us to question: What stories are being told, retold, and resisted through these objects?

We cannot escape these ghosts, as they subtly and persistently influence pedagogy, ethics, play, accessibility, happiness, and morals in the toddler classroom every day. Yet rather than fear or avoid these ghosts and monsters, perhaps the task is to confront them, to let them teach us about the hidden dynamics that shape learning environments. The doll clothes, in their ambiguity and vitality, remind us that teaching and learning are never neutral. They are always haunted by histories and shaped by the relational forces of human and more-than-human agencies, continuously opening new ways of knowing, being, and becoming.

When the tables turn in the doll clothes event, the dynamics of the toddler classroom shift, exposing dominant discourses and power hierarchies while unsettling the underlying values and morals. This moment forces us to consider: What matters more – or the most – in kindergarten? This question demands value judgments and perhaps even the deconstruction and re-evaluation of deeply held beliefs. Don't touch! Touch! Take care of me! Help me! Teach me! Don't interfere! Play with me! Stay in control!

The children climb onto the doll bed, determined to grasp the doll clothes from the hangers – objects that serve as both symbols of love and sources of conflict in the toddler classroom. Innocent attractions collide with Kafkaesque realities, where the law and order established by the teachers – rules that the toddlers neither fully understand nor consider – clash with the children's desires. The right to irresponsibility pushes itself to the forefront, demanding a recalibration of values and morals as the toddlers' innocent touch, desire, and will walk a precarious line.

In the doll clothes event, toddlers begin to resemble mini monsters, challenging and exceeding the laws of touch and activating teachers' confusion as they grapple with an instinctive need to reassert control. Even the teachers, in their attempts to restore order, take on monster-like qualities themselves. Monsters, it seems, haunt educational contexts, embodying the tensions among structure and freedom, control and chaos, law and desire.

Folding Doll Clothes for Futures Yet to Come

As my article draws to a close, I return to my core concerns. The potentials of the doll clothes are boundless, sparking creativity, care, confusion, adventures, confidence, learning, joy, play, hope, expectations, delight, sadness, frustration, and even moments of tragedy. In kindergarten, the doll

clothes and other matter that matters unfold, shaping relational entanglements and new possibilities. Their thing-power draws eager hands, while the forces of will and desire diffract in all directions, summoning ghosts from past-present-futures and monsters lying in wait for the right (or perhaps wrong) moment to appear.

The disruption caused by the doll clothes in the toddler classroom is something many kindergarten teachers may find familiar. It serves as a powerful reminder of how easily love, conflict and confusion can arise when bodies, will, and desire collide. These collisions create ripples of struggle and unpredictability, challenging the dynamics of the space. Yet, these seemingly 'minor gestures' – the touches of will and desire – contribute to the emergence of something far greater: an event that leaves lasting imprints on bodies, relationships, and the collective atmosphere of the toddler classroom.

Re-turning to Manning's refrain, 'I cannot affect you (...): I affect us' (2007, p. 13), we are reminded of the shared experience of touch – an experience where touch not only folds relationships but also shapes the 'you' that emerges through my touch. In these moments, things intra-act with vivid and sometimes unsettling touches, taking on newfound significance. Such moments are neither fleeting nor isolated; they are charged, entangled, and transformative, as agencies intra-act, continually shaping and reconfiguring relational dynamics as the world does not simply move forward but feels its way through vibrant entanglements and ongoing processes of becoming.

Doll clothes, as an event, reveal the monsters that often emerge within the frameworks of morals, pedagogy, theories, discourse, ethics, and economy. The economic dimension is particularly relevant, as the doll clothes are valuable and must be handled with care due to the kindergarten's limited resources. Yet, unaware that they are playing with fire, the toddlers climb onto the doll bed to reach the doll clothes – and so the Kafkaesque trial begins. Don't touch! Wait for help! Handle with care!

Desire asserts its force, uncontainable and untamed. Curiosity, trespass, innocence, ingenuity, determination, adaptability, and finesse unfold in ways that resonate perfectly with the children's own sense of logic, even as they leave the teachers bewildered and hesitant. It is a moment of profound disruption, a game changer that challenges the presumed boundaries of order, revealing the complexity of these unexpected encounters.

This event unsettles the implicit structures of order in the toddler classroom, highlighting the fluidity of rules and the relational interplay of control and freedom. It invites exploration of the teacher's multifaceted role in navigating authority, care, participation, and the evolving boundaries of autonomy. In this moment of disruption, the doll clothes become more than mere objects of play; they inspire creativity, will, and speculation while uncovering the intricate entanglements of desire, agency, and the systems that shape everyday life in kindergarten. What unfolds next is not predetermined; it is an open-ended process of becoming, rich with potential for transformation and emergence – for the toddlers, the teachers, and the doll clothes as well.

The doll clothes event has haunted me for years. By confronting the ghosts, I hope to gain a

fragment of wisdom. What can we learn from the eventful doll clothes? Perhaps they invite us to face the ghosts that cling to our backs and stick to our bodies for years to come – ghosts of ignorance, love, worry, narrow-mindedness, play, inadequacy, failure, fun, and a lack of trust and imagination. These ghosts shape our actions and beliefs. They heighten our senses. They disturb and unsettle us. They propel us forward yet paralyze us with fear. They are ghosts we love to hate – and hate to love. How should we learn to live better with these ghosts in the context of the kindergarten?

Perhaps it is necessary to state the obvious: this is not about finding solutions or expecting straightforward answers in terms of practice. Instead, I propose that the injunction ‘Don’t touch!’ can be productive if we linger with it and confront it, allowing us to acknowledge the monsters that seem to arise from nowhere. By embracing a diffractive methodology, I have been able to think more deeply about the doll clothes’ significant thing-power and their capacity to evoke will, desire, and the profound experience of touching and being touched as a practitioner.

The warnings of ‘Don’t touch’ echo through the toddler classroom, highlighting the delicate balance between rules, freedom, and the unpredictable dynamics of desire and agency. The doll clothes event compels us to consider how small, everyday moments can unsettle the norms and values we so often take for granted. It reminds us that teaching and learning in kindergarten are neither linear nor predictable processes but are instead shaped by the entangled forces of materiality, history, and relationships. The doll clothes, with their vibrant colours and soft fabrics, are not mere objects of play – they are active participants in the ongoing becoming of the toddler classroom, drawing attention to the relational nature of learning and the power of touch to disrupt, transform, and connect.

How can we handle the ghosts? When do the monsters come to life? Moreover, how can something as seemingly ordinary as a doll clothes event – where toddlers’ hands reach out and grasp the soft textiles – create such a profound ripple effect?

By lingering with the tensions and uncertainties that arise in the doll clothes event, we are invited to embrace ambiguity and to see such moments as opportunities for deeper insight and growth. Rather than attempting to control or resolve these moments, we might instead allow them to unfold, teaching us about the complexities of care, authority, and the shared experience of being in the world together – as children, teachers, and things. In this sense, the doll clothes become more than a point of conflict; they become a site of possibility, where new ways of knowing, being, and becoming can emerge.

Care is a highly valued quality in kindergarten, but how do the concept’s virtual potentials materialize in the toddler classroom? How does an emphasis on care influence the values of play, doll-dressing activities, ethics, learning, and pedagogy? Touch, as a collection of minor gestures, creates ripples beyond any control. I cannot touch you: I touch us!

In these entanglements, care becomes more than an action; it becomes an ongoing negotiation of ethical relations, a practice of ‘staying with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016). It asks us to linger with

dis/comfort, to confront the ghosts and monsters that haunt our will and pedagogies, and to recognize how they shape our shared worlds.

The doll clothes, as simple as they may seem, remind us that even the most ordinary objects can provoke profound questions about power, agency, will, and relationality. They challenge us, as practitioners and researchers, to reimagine care as a form of reciprocal becoming, where touch is not merely physical but ontological – a gesture that transforms both the toucher and the touched.

The doll clothes event, therefore, invites us to rethink the relational dynamics of the toddler classroom and to explore how thing-power, desire, and will to power might open spaces for new possibilities. It is not about control or resolution but about embracing the unpredictability of intra-actions and the transformative potential they hold. Through these encounters, we are called to reconfigure what it means to care, to touch, and to be touched – not in isolation but as part of an ongoing, entangled becoming.

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