

# Eating Relationships in an Early Years Setting: More-Than-a-Kiss Assemblage

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**Abstract:** Moving away from more familiar narratives of healthy eating and promoting a balanced diet in the early years, this research closely examines a powerful story around food, which could have been usually silenced or overlooked by practitioners or/and the researchers. This work seeks to foreground the affective relationships children have with food in order to understand why some children enjoy eating, whilst for others, it is a situation that is fraught with tension, anxiety and frustration. Using a diffractive analysis as a methodological practice, this study moves qualitative analysis away from expected readings around snack times in a nursery. Enabling the decentering of the human subject, the author was able to see and think with ‘data’ without privileging humans over non-humans. Collecting pictures, videos, notes, experiences, feelings and a lot more human and non-human entities, through entangled more-than-observations, this article attempts to think, feel, read and write along with food, young children, textures, liquids and theory in a snack time event in an early years setting. More specifically, during a process of intra-actions and affective flows between heterogeneous entities, the author aims to examine the way senses activate feelings and emotions during eating. This relates to the author’s main objective, which is to contribute thinking and writing to emerging new materialist literature around young children’s embodied engagements with food in early years settings while gaining knowledge around food and eating that goes beyond notions of healthy eating and a balanced diet.

**Keywords:** Non-humans, Embodied More-Than-Observations, Diffractive Analysis, Intra-actions, Assemblage

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last couple of decades in the United Kingdom, food and food consumption within schools has raised several concerns in relation to young children’s health and well-being, with particular studies highlighting the obesity crisis among young children [13] but also the benefits of eating together or eating more healthily as a means to well-being [47, 42, 2, 61]. This paper takes up the idea of young children’s relationship with food in ways that augment these and other studies. It is based in a nursery that offers free places to ‘disadvantaged’ two-year-olds as part of a policy introduced in September 2014 by the UK Coalition Government, which targets what are described in policy terms as ‘economically vulnerable families’ [22].

Journal articles, government documents, green papers, reports from schools and policy documents, as well as critical academic research have highlighted how young children and their eating habits, carry particular concerns around

children’s eating, health and well-being [50, 60], especially when examining eating in a nursery environment. The role adults play in young children’s relationships with food has also been explored in relation to the influence adults have on children and their eating practices [31]. Emphasis has been placed on the practices and pedagogies in schools’ and nurseries when educating children about the value of healthy eating in an attempt to prevent obesity, anorexia and other eating disorders [54].

Statistical and numerical data have been collected via surveys and correlational studies in the field of young children’s eating habits, that document the factors influencing children’s eating behaviours, such as gender, age, parental and practitioners’ involvement, cultural and socioeconomic background etc. [8, 11, 10]. However, the nature of, and heavy-reliance on quantitative data alone has led to limited information being available regarding intricate ways socio-cultural factors affect children’s eating. In cases where qualitative research has been undertaken [1, 14], very little

research attention has been placed on the non-human's agency and the way they influence and are being influenced in a snack time compared to the role of humans and more specifically, adults.

In this paper, my aim is to produce a version of some of the many things activated at a particular moment when two children are having their milk and pear at snack time. To do this, I return to some fieldnotes, together with a series of photographs contributing to a more-than observation that emerged in 2016 of children during snacktimes to consider how different bodies, human and non-human, create different relations with one another. More specifically, the main aim of this paper is to understand something more about children's embodied relationships with food, augmenting knowledge around food and eating that goes beyond notions of healthy eating and a balanced diet. Through this work, the intention is to examine the intricacies and complexities of food stories in early years that are often silenced or overlooked. In addition, the research focuses on the affective encounters that emerge in-between children and food, generating more distributed ways of knowing about children who enjoy eating experiences in a nursery, as well as those for whom eating presents a situation that is fraught with tension, anxiety, and frustration.

To address these aims, ideas from Feminism New Materialism and Posthumanism were applied to explore how they can contribute to different understandings of children's embodied relationships with food and what such alternative understandings have to offer to literature around children's eating relationships. The diffractive reading of this data produces a new event [30], which as Deleuze and Guattari [21] explain, is an effect of forces, mutually affected by each other. Diffractive methodology was particularly helpful in this study, as it enabled the decentering of the human subject [56] and enabled me to look beyond binary opposites such as human/non-human, researcher/researched, practitioner/young children, to think in new ways about young children's relations with food in a nursery. It also acknowledges the agency and vibrancy of the material world as well as the human world [4, 7], a democratisation between all activated heterogeneous components within an assemblage [45]. Therefore, my intention here, is to experiment with ideas around diffractive analysis and entangled more-than-observations (ideas which will be discussed below) in order to examine a particular food story in an early years setting that could have been easily silenced or overlooked.

## 2. Research Assemblage

### 2.1. *Diffractive Analysis*

Within this research study, the meaning-making process is understood as a result of dynamic entanglements of a variety of elements [57]. With no 'outside' position from where to 'observe', there are only a multitude of participatory elements that interact, constantly entering into and leaving encounters with one another. These elements include the 'event' or

activity being focused on, the researcher ('I'), the research tools, the methodology, the data, the findings, the participants, the camera, the photographs, the videos, the researchers, the nursery, the smells, the food, the plates, the voices, the conversations, the voices, the colours, the researcher's, the school's and participants' cultures and traditions, to name few. For this reason, in the following section, emphasis is placed on the research tool (embodied more-than-observations) as well as the method of analysis (diffractive) to gain understanding about children's relationship with food, before it turns to attend to how the process of data analysis might disrupt representational logic.

In this research, and specifically in the analysis of the following story, an attempt was made to engage with different ways of seeing and thinking with data in educational research while using video, photographs, and words. In this more materially-engaged process of analysis, the aim is to think how the research event is composed of both human and non-human elements without privileging one over the other [39]. This diffractive analysis is an experiment of how thought and practice and how human and non-human intra-act with each other and how they affect each other in an attempt to make new mappings around eating relationships with food [16]. Particularly, I aimed to think, write, feel, and try to sense something different with data, with food and its literature network, with smell, children, and theory.

I am composed by, and I am composing data while being made and unmade through this process of 're-turning' [6] theories, theorists and concepts [39]. With the term 're-turning', the aim is to do what Barad ([6]: 168) describes as making a turn over and over again in order to make something new, to find new patterns by intra-acting and re-diffracting, terms that will be explained and discussed during this and the following chapter. I am not proposed here that 'reflection' and 'diffraction' are in opposition, or that the one is better than the other. However, these two approaches highlight different "patterns, optics, geometries that often overlap in practice" ([6]: 168). In the following discussion I will experiment with a diffractive analysis of a particular food event; snacktime, whereby food is considered from a range of perspectives, including the role of place in its consumption, its value, and importance, as well as food's symbolic, relational and affective character.

In the following snacktime event, I see myself and all participants (humans and non-humans) being produced through intra-actions, becoming something different from what we were before [15]. This intra-activity is developed by a mutual constitution of humans and non-human data within this research assemblage, as no entity can exist as individual elements but only as relational [26]. Latour [32] talks of 'infra-reflection', a suggestion that reflection should always be done from an internal point of view and not from an external with the individual isolated from the event. As Deleuze and Guattari [21] argue, it is always something that makes us think, there is always a stimulus that forces us to think. This can be any object or subject and it is always so important as it takes place in-between heterogeneous

components rather than being something isolated [30].

According to Davies [15], when undertaking research, researcher (s) and participants are seen as multiplicities and there is an interdependent relationship between knowing and being, becoming a diffractive methodology.

“The concept of diffraction replaces the more usual concept and practice in qualitative research of reflexivity. [...] Diffraction does not reflect an image of what is already there but is actually involved in its ongoing production. [...] Whereas reflection and reflexivity might document difference, diffraction is itself the process where difference is made” ([15]: 2).

The need to move away from reflexivity is explained by Barad ([4]: 87) who highlights that reflexivity “still holds the world at distance” as the researcher needs to take a step back and reflect on the event. Therefore, the knower and the known are still at a distance and “cannot bridge the epistemological gap between the knower and the known” ([4]: 88). Hultman and Lenz Taguchi [30] suggest a relational materialist perspective when it comes to thinking and reflecting, a relational perspective that allows us to inter-connect with something.

## 2.2. Embodied More-Than-Observations

As discussed in the Introduction, the data explored in this paper through a diffractive analysis, were produced through embodied more-than-observations as I was interested in ‘capturing’ many of the elements (human and non-human) involved when young children experience eating in a nursery. The process of ‘collecting’ data involved more-than more typical ethnographic observations, as links were made between the environment, my self, the smells, tables, food, photographs, phone, my fieldnotes and conversations. The relationality between the components participating in events documented in this project exceeded the information created and provided by any single photograph or/and video. That enhanced any thoughts and consideration of what lay outside of what was able to be re-presented visually as relations seemed to be more important, creating patterns for example, between children’s relationship with food and their socioeconomic background, culture, and customs.

Understanding embodiment as the use of the body as the medium of exploring and being in this world [41], during the collection of these sensory data, the “resonance of bodies” was understood in a particular way by me, as someone dealing with data having been in the ethnographic place ([48]: 145). Sharma et al. [53], suggest emotional embodiment is important when describing and understanding senses and experiences. The way I felt in the nursery provided valuable feedback and information about the environment the research took place and about the range of participants, especially, on occasions when my feelings were confronted by language, culture, beliefs, race, age, gender, religion, and values [53].

In the nursery, I was very aware of my emotions and maybe how these related to the other participants. I was also aware of the nonverbal communication, the facial expressions, and bodily movements in the room. I was aware of my identities as

researcher and as a Greek-Cypriot woman, realising that these can overlap, be multiple and complex [53]. I have also experienced the importance of different cultural backgrounds and the ways these impact on the interactions between myself and the participants, co-constructing knowledge [53].

The more-than-observations did not begin when I first visited the nursery and did not end as soon as I left the scene. The entangled looking began a long time before I made any fieldnotes or pressed ‘record’ on the phone; my gaze was not innocent, executed with clarity or unbiased. It included traces of theories, experiences that had in my life that shaped the way I was understanding the situation. In addition, the more-than-observation and the informal conversations did not only ‘capture’ information that happened or was said during the time they were conducted. The process was continuous and lasted long after the actual real-time observation or interview, as relations between the data, the theories, myself as the researcher, the experience, the conversations and the places continue to develop and transform every time I go back to the data I have collected. For instance, although most of the entangled looking was conducted at a very early stage of this research, where evoke an expression, new materialism, and assemblages, I managed to ‘capture’ something of an assemblage of meanings produced by combining photographs, videos and field notes with previous and recent knowledge, historical and social events and theories [29].

## 3. Snacktime Event

The next section brings the concept of diffraction, together with the ideas around intra-action and agency together in an attempt to read a snacktime event differently. This assemblage opens up ideas that challenge what traditional notions around eating amongst a complex eating event. I begin by setting the scene and by providing part of the fieldnotes collected during an embodied more-than-observation from a gathering in a nursery room when children were about to have their snack.

This research was undertaken in 2016 in an early years setting around 10:20. The particular event I want to focus on evolved in a room where snack time happens; a different eating place to what the children might be used to in their home environments. In the nursery the playroom augments to become an eating space for children to eat their snacks. In this space at times, the children play with other children or adults, objects, and toys, but then at other times of the day, this space is arranged differently, for snack time. This movement from one designated playing space to another eating place produces different feelings and affects.

The sight of a mat on the floor, the movement of toys being stored away, the noise of the practitioner visiting the kitchen, a story book being taken from the bookshelf and the musical sound of a song, all signify affective changes to the room. A quietness descends on the room. The mat is the first calling for what was to follow. The arrangement of the furniture produces a particular way of feeling and being in that space. More specifically, the material agency of the lack of furniture during snack time connects to an openness and more casual way of

behaving and feeling in that environment, together with the food and the storybook, which all contribute to a series of connections, a very particular snack time milieu.

*A practitioner comes from the kitchen carrying a tray with one empty glass, one glass filled with milk and two jugs, one with milk and the other with water. The practitioner says that the glass with the milk is for Andy because he needs to have a 'special milk' that his mum brings to school. The snack for today is sliced pear served in small concave dishes with a monkey's face on the bottom. The practitioner gives the two small plates to the children, and the glass of milk to Andy and she asks Bianca, also using hand gestures if she prefers milk or water. Bianca wants milk and then her two small hands take the jug helping herself by filling her plastic glass with milk. The children's bodies are in constant movement, touching the pear, picking it, eating it, and drinking their milk while the practitioner reads them a story from a book she takes from a shelf.*

*In the room there are no distracting noises; I listen to the practitioners reading stories to children, while children are eating, drinking, smiling, and quietly talking to each other. I am drawn to Andy's playfulness as his fingers are touching and squeezing the pear as it hovers on the end of his tongue, just inside his mouth. He is not eating it, but squeezing it on his teeth letting the fruit's juices cover his lips and drip down under his chin. He seems to be enjoying the sensation, taste, and noise of this activity. Then the practitioner turns to me and says 'Andy doesn't like pear's peel; he never eats it'. Andy turns to look at me and while smiling, he continues squeezing the flesh of the pear in his mouth. Then he took the skin out of his mouth, looking at it but not eating it, placing it back on his plate. Bianca, after finishing her fruit and milk, is looking at Andy and smiling at him. Although she does not speak much English yet, she is communicating with Andy by smiling, touching and playing with a plastic small snake.*



Figure 1. Pear-milk assemblage.

#### 4. Making Meaning: Intra-acting Humans and Non-humans

During the entangled looking and feeling of the 'data' presented above, I found particularly challenging the shift away from humanity, leaving me wondering, how I could move away from this static and fixed way of thinking around food. Haraway [27] and Barad [4] push me to consider further, the materiality and agency of nonhuman and

more-than-human bodies, especially while I spend increasing time in the nursery. Haraway [27] refers to the relational connections between entities as 'becoming-with' and Deleuze and Guattari [20, 17] propose that such relationality involves of deep sense of negotiation between entities. Reflecting on the work of Barad [4], her theory of agential realism, states that the world is composed of intra-acting agencies. Barad [4] proposes that intra-actions between our bodies (living and non-living) produce enactments allowing the active role of material in the process of analysis [39]. This intra-activity, is described as "the dark matter that binds these continually changing, partially understood objects together in an ontogenetic becoming-universe" ([45]: 417). The capacity to 'become-with' by entities binding together, were at the heart of the methodology employed because it enabled me to contemplate the effects of human and non-human entities coming together and moving with each other while producing new meanings around the topic under investigation. As Hammarström [26] states, it is this relational intra-activity between the entities that constitutes reality and defines subject and object.

During 'data collection' in the nursery and later during the analysis of that 'data', I realised that thinking through the body does not provide enough information about what happens outside of it, especially when it comes to relationships with other entities [9]. However, when I began to understand 'data' in intra-active relationship with my body [9], bodies, materials and matter became much less clearly discernable as in/outside entities. Therefore, 'data', whether that is children, me as a researcher, food, smells as well as objects are produced through our entangled intra-actions with everything around us [33]. My own and the participants' subjectivity were constituted in the intra-actions with the materiality of how the environment affects, and at the same time, is affected by us, something that kept producing different encounters and engagements with the data and different analyses [39].

Therefore, intra-active and affective dimensions of data were considered while preparing for, and then writing this piece of work. These different relational dimensions afford movements so that different questions could be asked of the data [52]. During the data analysis that follows, I work with a process of diffractive data analysis that draws affective and intra-active notions of data into assemblages as generative sources of thoughts, questions, agentic capacities, ideas and sensations, that incorporate both human and non-human relations within the research-assemblage [23, 24]. As noted earlier, this paper is attempting a diffractive analysis where senses, ideas, feelings, memories, research problem, images, videos, researcher, and participants, affect each other and interfere between them, aiming to examine some of the intricacies and complexities of food stories in early years that are often silenced or overlooked [4, 15, 16].

Beginning with the place where the children experience snack time, a range of intra-actions and negotiations are provoked by and produce the things around them. Place in that event plays an interesting role in the event-assemblage. In that

story, the eating area is not just a physical space containing passive objects that are waiting to be used by human bodies [58]. The physical space is already intra-acting with the pear, Andy's previous experiences, Bianca, fluids, story, teacher, researcher, and toys. The pear produces moments of disruption to Andy and the milk produces moments of playfulness and joy to both Andy and Bianca.

The bodies of the two children and their anatomy and physiology interest me in relation to all the forces participating in the process of materialisation ([3]: 809). The intra-actions include the properties of those bodies and the observations of those bodies along with the camera (technology used) to capture this event [12]. Human bodies consist of fluids such as saliva, urine, tears, sweat, vomit, mucus, blood and ... and ... and ... [34]. Focusing on the mixtures and combinations of such fluids internal to Andy and Bianca's bodies and those that appear on the outside but in relation to the body, such as saliva, juice, and milk, helps me to contemplate the intra-active capacities of all bodily matter which acts upon the body, changing its form. The intra-activity of the liquids, suggests liquids can be materialised as a form of bodily matter which has its own capabilities to act and be active while causing effects [12].

In this story, neither the liquids nor the children alone have agency. When focusing on the intra-action between the liquid element and human bodies, I can sense the mutual production of agency between them [30]. The fluids cover the faces of the children and their 'game' continues as they seem to enjoy it, and the children are engaging with each other, with me and the teacher in the production of this joyful atmosphere [12]. Andy and Bianca are caught up in the intra-actions around, and co-constituting them. That event is an assemblage of flowing liquids intra-acting with children's faces and bodies, with the plasticity of the mat, the atmosphere, the air, the lighting, the smells, the comfortable location of their bodies on the floor, which then are already intra-acting with the building (place), the rainy weather, their wellies, and the snake toy Bianca has on her legs. Children as well as the liquids are continually becoming. Children have agency as 'iii' and not 'I', as posthuman children do not independently exist in this study but they are seen always in relation to the researcher, the teachers, the food, the senses, the liquids, the data, the photographs and ... and ... and ... [44].

The presence of the milk seems to affect the two children as they share laughter and eye contact. The atmosphere of snack time shifts with laughter and the children's playfulness. The rules that usually apply when the children eat are interrupted and almost suspended for that moment by the children's giggles. Perhaps these noises and disruption to the usually more sedate event of eating allowed Andy to approach Bianca's face. As Barad [4: 159] argues, "bodies in the making are never separate from their apparatuses of bodily production". For this reason, the mat, milk, the lack of chairs and tables and bodies are all entangled and intra-active in the nursery room's assemblage.

Seeing intra-actions as the "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" ([4]: 33), enabled me, as a new

researcher, to understand how the focus can shift from the human individual to the material-discursive production of entities that intra-act. Therefore, moving intra-actively with this fragment of data, I want to focus more on the continuous making and unmaking of things, specifically when food, juices and sensations come together and the way they all contribute to the production of Andy and Bianca's enjoyment of each other. Being entangled with the images presented in Figure 1: Pear-milk assemblage, while unfolding and refolding with the pear, the milk and children, and the juices, in this analysis I see us all as being performative mutually intra-active agents [4, 38].

Taking the role of non-humans seriously [46] in relation to the work of Haraway [28] in this event, milk here is a fluid biological-mechanical-political transgression that traverses the human/non-human boundary, moving from its complex system of production inside the animal's body, to the machinery that forces it outside, to mechanical equipment that purifies and sanitises it and into plastic or paper cartons that contain its liquid and fluid form, into cups, onto lips, mixing with saliva, moistening tongues, coating teeth, special milk mixing with normal milk (almost) as it passes eventually into the human body. The role of milk in this assemblage is defined in relation to all the roles that milk has or takes during its production. The milk and its network in this story can be seen by practitioners and nutritionists as a source representing a healthy fluid that young children usually include in their diet; a source that is also associated with breakfast, healthy eating, and calcium which is associated with strong bones. However, milk's assemblage is not just this, milk's assemblage is active, it nourishes, it tickles Andy's face, it is responsible for giggles and a relaxed atmosphere. The lips touch the milk and within seconds, the milk touches the inside of the body, something that changes emotions and feelings. The taste of the milk, which was in the glass held by the children's hands, moves from the glass to their lips and then into their bodies, creating movement whereby the milk relates to, and becomes with, their bodies and minds.

As the two children come closer together, frictions and tensions of muscles pulling occur, grasping, lips pursing, bodies moving against plastic mat, gravitational, friction, tension, the multicoloured mat with all the fruits and vegetables, the glasses of milk that are positioned between the hands of the children are all active forces that intra-act with the children's bodies and minds. Although from an anthropocentric perspective, children might be seen as the most active elements, from a relational materialist perspective [30], they are not thought to have more capabilities, intentionality or be any more autonomous. Reflecting on Deleuze's [19] thinking, the children as well as the senses, triggered by the milk, are forces that come together in that event; an event of exchanging fluids, lips touching the glass, milk touching children's lips and moving to their mouths, their pharynges, oesophaguses and then their stomachs, milk covering their upper lips, legs and body movement, hand supporting Andy's body, bodies balancing, head leaning sideways, eyes closing, mouth closing, hands squeezing the



juice from the pear, mouth stretching creating a smile. A process that includes as Small ([55]: 54) argues “gustatory, oral-somatosensory, and retronasal olfactory signals” which, as explained in the ‘eating sensorium’ actor-network can influence the way people experience food.

Touch produces childhoods and in this context where Andy and Bianca are sitting and enjoying their snack together, they are both touching and being touched by others (subjects and objects) [51]. Initially, touch seems to be between bodies, externally, skin to skin. However, looking at the fluids entering the children’s bodies, touch is happening internally and not just on the surface. Therefore, touch can relate to the skin outside a body but also inside the body, and for this reason, it is a visual and an invisible movement [51]. These two children are creating relations between them and between the fluids, the fruit and other objects around them through touch, even if that touch is through their eyes. In addition, they were both touched by the fluids, the body becoming differently every time through these relations. The force of milk is active, as well as the juice from the pear, the glasses, the plastic mat, etc. as they all contribute to the playfulness atmosphere of the event. These notions are produced through intra-actions between entities which are never stable but in a continuous process of becoming and unbecoming [44].

## 5. More-Than-a-Kiss Assemblage

I now want to ‘re-turn’ the data ([6]: 168) to explore more closely the ‘pear-milk’ assemblage. I re-turn my research diary alongside the image below, as an assemblage composed by multiple encounters; a mixture of different bodies and matters that all co-exist at that time and that particular moment [18].



Figure 2. More-than-a-kiss assemblage.

*Bianca asks for a second drink. With the teacher’s confirmation, she helps herself and puts some more milk in her plastic glass. The two children’s bodies are seated, their hands supporting the two plastic glasses with milk, their body, nervous system, digestion system, lips, esophagus, stomach, mind, teeth, facial muscles, energies all participating in that moment when children are enjoying their drink.*

*The boy’s body makes a move closer to the girl’s body, which is steady. They continue drinking their milk, looking each other and laughing between them every time milk covers their upper lip. This event makes them both laugh*

*and come even closer (physically and perhaps emotionally) showing each other their lips covered with milk. The practitioner’s body and hand move closer to the two children. Suddenly she intervenes, stretching out her arm in-between the children to avoid their lips touching.*

As I read the data, I feel a diffractive intensity alive within the data, and the event of kissing glowed [36]. In that moment, these few seconds where things seemed to pause after a repetition of actions of squeezing, licking, sucking, laughing, touching, drinking, tasting, smelling, remembering, Andy’s eyes appear to be closed, relaxed while leaning forward, a position that almost lets their bodies touch, almost kissing. Bianca looks directly into his lips. Andy supports his body with his right arm, a move that helps him to bring his core closer to Bianca’s face. During that moment of silence and anticipation, the mind and senses are free to make new thoughts, to feel new emotions, to live new experiences. A smile appeared on Bianca’s face; something satisfies her. Food brings pleasure and satisfaction, it brings people together, evoking smiles, loud conversations between siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, friends.

## 6. The Meaning-Less-ness of the Kiss

The idea of ‘kiss’ fires up connections in my mind ([35]: 282). This ‘not-quite-a-kiss’ gesture in the data seems to glow, affective relations spark inside/out of/around the event, as a range of bodies come together. The ‘kiss’ is an event that may (or may not) have happened. If a kiss is ‘a touch or caresses with the lips’, the same could apply to the pear juice, the fruit’s flesh and the milk that each of the children enjoyed independently on their lips. This affective event has come to move and rest in particular trails, tentacle-like threads through thoughts, feelings, literature, images, and interpretations. Trying to dismantle the overcoded ‘kiss’ and make (non)sense of the event between the two young children and the theoretical-discursive-material context around kissing, I am wondering what else this kiss can do.

Perhaps the affective journey of the kiss starts from the moment children were asked to meet for their snack. Eating for these two children was a moment that excited them and as they ate and enjoyed (or not) the textures, consistencies, feelings, and tastes of the different liquids and solids on their lips and in their mouths, their bodies were brought closer to each other. The kiss assemblage is relational, enabling moments of laughing, silence, eating, touching, feeling, and becoming. It is also an affective material event, which was (or not) about to happen in a relational place where bodies (human and not) affected each other and exchanged actions and passions with each other [21].

The affective glow [36] as Bianca smiles and Andy’s face comes closer with his eyes closed for few seconds, is interrupted by the practitioner. The event changes when the practitioner cuts into it, producing opportunities for particular readings and meaning-making moments in data analysis. The question about what could have happened if the trajectory of the event had not been shifted plays on my mind. This ‘kiss

assemblage' was produced in a specific place and time, with one practitioner who was informed, motivated and inspired by specific rules and ethical considerations, her own upbringing, ideas, education, and training and an event that happens to emerge in a school environment, governed by certain practices and policies.

The milk is already caressing the children's lips, as was the pear flesh and its juice. The children seemed to be interested in touching lips, adding more slime to saliva, wet skin, Andy's special milk mixing with normal milk, pear flesh, juice and ... and ... and ... As the fluids were covering their lips and face, children became entangled with this material. Children were satisfying their thirst, and fluids were simultaneously pleasing them by satisfying their curiosity and playfulness. A moment of co-construction between humans and non-humans, as Barad ([5]: 124) notes, "this was a moment where one cannot take for granted that all the actors, actions, and effects are human".

Drawing on Turner's [59] analysis of the Haraway's 'interspecies kiss', I sense something similar. The saliva and fluids (water-milk-juice) in this picture intimates a reproduction of humans and emotions that constitute a moment of pleasure while communicating through eyes, body movements and are driven by senses. What matters in this moment is what else the idea of the 'kiss' can do. Here, I found the thinking of Golding ([25]: 71) helpful to see the way 'orality' is at work. Golding, ([25]: 71), discussing the event of breastfeeding, extends the relation between mouth and breast to the tongue, the "voice, the listening, hearing, aurality, tempo, timbre, tone". This way of understanding orality goes beyond language boundaries. Miller's [43] idea of treating the 'kiss' as an alternative to speech, especially in this event, where children were still not using a shared verbalised language is interesting. Encountering 'kiss' as an affective relational mute gesture in moving and changing assemblages, is a way of re-turning (to) things, feelings, emotions, thoughts, that resist a single explanation, a solely discursive narrative. It evokes an entanglement of matter and materials among discursive pasts-presents-futures. The in-between-ness of the 'kiss', helps to de-centre the human element in this story and opens up the intra-activity with other bodies.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper the 'not-quite-a-kiss: more-than-a-kiss' assemblage was discussed and analysed using a diffractive analysis. Attempting to see and think with data in different ways, I tried to produce this story without privileging humans over non-humans while thinking, feelings, reading and writing along with food, young children, textures, liquids and theory. In this event, human bodies and objects are mutually implicated, and as Massumi ([27]: 95) highlights, "'body' and 'object' exist only as implicated in each other". Bodies are what they are and they become what they become after they have been assembled without being clear every time who or which is used by whom/which ([37]: 95). This new way of

thinking changes also the way of conducting a research and analysing data. As Renold and Mellor ([49]: 38) argue 'Taking Deleuze and Guattari into the nursery has afforded us a way of mapping, seeing and attending to events (things, feelings, sounds, bodies) and has enabled a textured multi-sensory way of knowing'.

This analysis has been experimental as I have attempted to stay away from static assumptions when it comes to eating. Each reader will see things differently, will feel differently and will make different connections between the images used in the analysis producing different thoughts. As Massumi [38] argues, the aim was to use a methodology that would help me to think and feel about ideas and theories which would allow me to see children becoming in multiple and affective ways. For instance, as a researcher, I now feel more able to pay attention to the many (and indeed infinite) heterogeneous elements that come together as part of ongoing events in the nursery. I feel better equipped to resist focusing on individual subjects, enabling to see the human as a more distributed system dependent on connections between all entities and not as one autonomous subject.

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