

Postdevelopmental Approaches to Play

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Refusing Perpetual Mediation

Playing in the Undercommons

Jayne Osgood, Victoria de Rijke & Matthew Maxwell

Introduction

The research and development project that we draw upon in this chapter Minibeasts of Barnet (2024) (www.minibeasts.org) might immediately be understood to be a form of ‘Environmental Education’ with reception age children in London. The apparent intention is to work with the ‘climate crisis’ generation and to cultivate attitudes and behaviour that will avert planetary crisis before these children reach adulthood. While laudable, as childhood scholars steeped in critical posthumanist praxis we are deeply sceptical that first, such an objective could work, and second, that such logic rests upon implicit (and flawed) assumptions about children, linearity and human exceptionalism. Following Harney and Moten (2013, p. 1) we propose that there is an urgent need ‘to look squarely into the fucked-up face of things’ and to issue fervent and relentlessly creative refusal.

‘Refusal’ is a praxis developed by Indigenous feminist scholars (Smith, 1999; Simpson, 2007; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Byrd, 2020) and Black feminist thinkers (Wynter, 2003; Camp, 2019) to ‘describe practices, stances, escape routes and epistemic spaces opened by various forms of “no”’ (Tuck & Yang, 2024, p. xv). Within the context of ‘minibeasts’, refusal involved playfully rejecting habitual (and often hierarchical) ways to be with young children – and instead called for affective encounters with the non-and-more-than-human to be privileged as ways to generate knowledge differently as it emerged from ‘serious play’ (Haraway, 1991). Our goal was to reanimate marginalized ways of being in the world, that is to refuse adultist demands for mind over body; rational thought over speculation; and seriousness over playful experimentation. Although not explicitly named as such, we argue that children fall into the category of ‘marginalised folk’ that Harney and Moten (op cit.) refer to (alongside Black,

queer, Indigenous and poor folk), which resonates with Braidotti's 'missing peoples' of humanism as 'real-life subjects whose knowledge never made it into any of the official cartographies' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 21). Braidotti goes on to urge that the ethical task is to turn painful experiences of missing peoples' 'inexistence into generative relational encounters and knowledge production'.

To live a life of the undercommons

For the marginalized and missing, which includes the young child (Osgood et al., 2023), the idea of the 'undercommons' promotes an ethos of 'getting lost and staying lost'. The undercommons privilege the nonsensical as it seeks new ways to live, think and become together that refuse perpetual mediation. Harney and Moten (2013) stress that to live a life of the undercommons we must learn to live with brokenness and to refuse to repair ourselves. This is quite a radical proposition for work with four-year-olds, but given that developmentalism in contemporary educational contexts rests upon a preoccupation to know the child against a normative yardstick; to assess where each child sits along that continuum; and ultimately fix the child that deviates from normativity – the imperative to live with brokenness and to refuse repair (against a white, western normative ideal) seems never more pressing. As this chapter unfurls, it becomes clear that entering the undercommons proved more challenging for adults who have become perpetually mediated by contemporary schooling with its constant preoccupation to know and fix, or conform and perform to narrow ideals (Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1 Perpetually mediated bodies: The squares and dots that contain squiggly child-body-minds.

With life in the undercommons in mind, our work in reception classes sought to put aside romanticized or simplistic ideas about children, and particularly how children (should) learn. Rather, we explored collectively what it is to live life in the undercommons. Taking a novel approach to re-thinking relationships to the environment involved investigating multispecies flourishing through various modes and mediums; through the nonsensical, the haptic and the bodily. Our ultimate goal was to mobilize critical posthumanist philosophies to directly trouble anthropocentrism and to make space for generative relational encounters and the production of knowledge otherwise. Figures 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 below are images captured on a photographic device that refuses to make obvious when and how photos are taken. As explored previously (Osgood, 2020), recognizing photographic equipment as agentic can allow for creative experimentation away from the usual practice of capturing evidence and visual representations of children through documentation and research. In contemporary early childhood education children are endlessly documented by adults; iPads are routinely used to gather evidence that learning is taking place. Within ‘minibeasts’ we wanted to disrupt this by shifting the role and purpose of photography as it took shape in the lives of these young children. Our intention was to shift ideas and practices about who gets to be a photographer and which photographs count as valid knowledge. Therefore, we invited children to make use of our photographic equipment without instruction or direction. The Polaroid Cube® is a robust device that can withstand water/spit/mud and being dropped/thrown/submerged, and it captures both instant-still and video-action recordings. Unlike most digital photographic equipment, what has been captured only becomes evident once the memory card is taken out and the photos are uploaded to a computer. This not-knowing and the constant element of surprise provided an ongoing antidote to the immediacy and certainty of so much that happens in modern day schooling.



Figure 8.2 Taken by surprise.



Figure 8.3 Whose photos count?



Figure 8.4 Documenting the researcher.

Through these open-ended explorations we were seeking to reposition the young child – as ‘valid knower’, whom we could learn with and from. We actively rejected *teaching* children what or how to think, or how to move through the world. We refused to *teach* them to be responsible for the future of the planet but welcomed them into world-making practices shaped by experimentation and uncertainty, where it was not possible to get it wrong or to be the best. Rather, children were invited to attune to the world in its intricately interwoven becomings, at multiple scales and to playfully contemplate their interconnections and co-dependencies with microbial and insect life, and how that might open up other ways to think about and live in the world. As ‘subversive intellectuals’ we ‘enjoy the ride and want it to be faster and wilder, we do not want a room of our own, we want to be in the world, in the world with others and making the world anew’ (Halberstam, 2013, p. 10). As such, we were very much in the thick of things. For us this project was a vital opportunity to mobilize Haraway’s conceptualizations of play, where humans and animals continuously remake one another. As she states, ‘it might be precisely in the realm of play that serious worldliness and recuperation become possible’ (Haraway, 2016, p. 29). Figure 8.1 above powerfully captures one of the many disciplinary technologies that are common features of reception classrooms. Fastness and wildness, an eagerness to be in the world and making the world anew have little space to find expression in contemporary schooling. We sensed an atmosphere infused with strained adult:child ratios, inflated class sizes, national curriculum demands, concerns for school readiness, lack of resources due to chronic underfunding, staff retention issues and rises in un/diagnosed SEN for the ‘Covid generation’ – all of which coalesced in a rigidly gridded carpet space. As the weeks passed by and the children squiggled their way through carpet time, following instructions to ‘hear with their listening ears’, ‘see with their looking eyes’, ‘sit on their dots’ and ‘raise their hand, wait for their turn’ they also picked away at the tape, and the squares came away at the seams.

Perpetual mediation . . .

Meanwhile, Figure 8.5 captures a moment of encounter that drew into sharp focus the challenges, complexities and lostness that we were confronted with while on a ‘nature trail’, on a damp and freezing February morning. Away from the confines of dots and squares of carpet time, perhaps venturing outside could ‘free’ us to explore and to allow ourselves to get lost. Happening upon this long

discarded doll, now infested with microbial life and weathered by a long (too) damp winter, we were offered a lesson in learning to live with brokenness. The doll incited enthusiastic engagement; a swarm of children circled the doll, inquisitive fingers pointing and a frenzy of excited questions filled the air. We were instructed by the teacher to return the doll to the far corner of the playground where we had originally found it since it was now a 'health and safety hazard', that 'would need to be disposed of appropriately' and we would need to 'go and thoroughly wash our hands.' Our attention was then redirected to the primary task at hand – searching for the limited array of minibeasts to be found in the tail end of winter: worms, slugs, spiders and woodlice. The plastic, cloth, mud, microbial infested, sodden, decaying doll was not welcomed into the 'Environmental Education' that was apparently underway.

Our lostness was quickly lost to perpetual mediation . . .



Figure 8.5 In the world.

For us, 'minibeasts' was never intended to be an 'Environmental Education Programme' but rather a series of speculative interwoven doings that took place over an eight-week period in two primary schools in London. Our work began after daily phonics, a strategy for early reading literacy in the UK characterized by inspection, testing and measurability, which is therefore regarded as an unalterable lesson of the day. Following numerous reading tests, teachers, schools, districts, regions and countries are ranked worst to best in literacy, without acknowledgement that advantage gaps are the overwhelming reason for any discrepancies. Despite the research evidence that disadvantage affects

reading more than anything else (Save the Children, 2014), the government policy of compulsory Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) happening all over the country remains unquestioned. But we wonder what is actually tested? Is it not like trying to explain or test thinking, or playing? As argued previously (de Rijke, 2020) the very discourse is impoverished.

The approach taken in ‘minibeasts’ was intended as a direct challenge to the dominant logic that argues learning is only ever developmental, that play is developmental and that play is a means by which children can learn. Rather, our project became an overt resistance to ideas that play can be colonized for learning. Through arts-based, playful research-creation, our anti-methods share Huizinga’s ‘operation of the agon’ (1938) that became Sutton-Smith’s ‘agon motif’ (1997, p. 76), more recently described by Harney and Moten (2013, p. 112) as

a kind of ongoing experiment with and as the general antagonism, a kind of way of being with others, it’s almost impossible that it could be matched up with particular forms of institutional life. It would be cut through in different kinds of ways in different spaces and times.

Agreeing with Sutton-Smith that play cannot be reduced to rhetorics of power, we were not concerned about the learning that had taken place or the accuracy with which facts about microbial and insect life had been logged in these child brains. Our concern was to ignite curiosity and set free wild imagination, whether cerebral, bodily or nonsensical – our goal was to encourage a different engagement with which to pursue matters of multispecies flourishing relationalities and to consider our place within the world in ways that undoes human exceptionalism. What could space and opportunities to notice through sensory exploration make possible? How else might childhood relationalities to the more-than-human take shape? But our ambition to explore these questions – and the realities of lives-lived in contemporary reception classrooms: atmospheres and regimes, expectations and fears – worked together and meant that play metamorphosed in ways that were not always joyous, or free, or fun, but they were often nonsensical, chaotic and generative of other ways to encounter our human place within the world.

Privileging the nonsensical through artful play

A series of playful arts-based activities designed to agitate fantastical imaginings through haptic, bodily, sensory feltness were central to the project. Again, on the surface these activities (nature trails, photography, collaging, mark-making to

music, dance, storytelling, paper making and poetry) were more or less familiar in the context of young childhood and therefore seemingly unremarkable. Yet, bringing post foundational philosophy to the inquiry was a means for playful praxis to offer modes of both activism and refusal (Osgood, 2024). Posthumanist praxis is characterized by a series of unanticipated, affectively charged processes that attend to what gets produced through intra-actions where human, more and other-than-human events and encounters open up enquiries and allow the everyday, taken-for-granted to be reimagined, in often deeply political, ethical, enmeshed and accountable ways. This scholarship is shaped by, and rests upon, a feminist commitment to ‘put theory to work’ or to ‘think with theory’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2024) and so generate knowledge that has the capacity to tell other worldly stories (Haraway, 2016) that seek to address some of the silences that Braidotti’s ‘missing peoples’ (children included) have been subjected to.

The project was committed to putting theory to work through the design and delivery of each ‘minibeast’ activity and also through a persistent willingness to embrace ‘failure’, to improvise and witness the generative potential to be found in chaos. These features of the project became our conscious mismanagement of pedagogy that is associated with the undercommons. The activities, books, analogue and digital resources that were used in each school were carefully chosen, responsive and adaptive to what endlessly emerged in the moment and throughout the project. ‘Minibeasts’ emerged through care-full and response-able (Haraway, 2016) processes of creation, curation and open-ended exploration rather than any defined or definitive outcome. Or as Harney and Moten (2013, p. 104) stress, when ‘building any kind of collectivity; it’s not the thing that you do; it’s the thing that happens while you’re doing it that becomes important, and the work itself is some combination of the two modes of being’.

Wild theorizing: Playful childing in the undercommons

Play in childhood has preoccupied our thinking and praxis for some time. Through our existing work on the issue we have argued that play has capacities to reconfigure gender (Osgood, 2014, 2015), to expose the non-innocence of childhood (de Rijke, 2023), to find value in dark and taboo play (Osgood, Sakr & de Rijke, 2017) and to unravel the accepted orthodoxies of the world (de

Rijke & Sinker, 2024; Osgood & Mohandas, 2024). Our persistent concern to investigate how play takes shape, what it makes possible and to consider where it might take research and pedagogy stems from a concern that play framed by developmentalist logic is reductive, co-opted for utilitarian purposes and only tells part of the story. We want to argue that play can be understood as a dance that brings nonsense, concepts, transgression and refusal together in a speculative praxis. Further, it is our contention that play is unrelated to age. As argued elsewhere, ‘to child’ is not the sole preserve of children. Drawing upon Kennedy and Kohan (2008) and their concept of *childing* as a verb, we argue that *childing* is praxis that can be taken up by children and adults alike (see Osgood et al., 2023; Osgood & Mohandas, 2025). ‘*Childing*’ invites attunement to surroundings, the environment, the sedimented layers of history encapsulated within place, the atmospheric forces circulating and to embrace a willingness to be surprised. To play with scale, to speed up, to slow down, to spin, jump, balance, dance, rhyme, stutter, to falter and fail – to encounter the world in ways long since forgotten or not yet imagined. As Kennedy and Kohan (2008, p. 7) stress, ‘childhood seems to be a possibility, a strength, a force, an intensity, rather than a period of time’. *Childing* then would seem to offer a way to play in the undercommons, as Kohan outlines:

If childhood is understood as playing, curious, loving and inquired life, then education might be approached as the caring, remembering and nurturing of childhood. If childhood can be born anytime, then education might be felt as what sets the conditions for the emergence of a childlike life at any age

(Kohan, in Tesar et al., 2021, p. 13).

As Figures 8.6 and 8.7 depict, messy encounters through movement, music and mark-making propelled us into life in the undercommons where *childing* offered the conditions of possibility from which knowledge was generated in ways that defied the logics of developmentalism. Or as Harney and Moten (2013, p. 116) remind us, ‘prematurity, your immaturity, your not-being-ready, is also a kind of openness to being affected by others, dispossessed and possessed by others’. This openness to being affected by others extended to more and other-than-humans; as the project unfolded and furled in new and often unanticipated directions the learning that sedimented through our doings together leaked beyond the school walls and playground fences. With each playful encounter we became ‘queer messmates in mortal play’ (Haraway, 2008, p. 4) as such ‘minibeasts’ took on porous vitalism with multiple temporalities.



Figure 8.6 Messmates: Swarmed.



Figure 8.7 Messmates: In the thick of it.

Play is a door to something new

Mobilizing Harney and Moten's (2013) worldly concept of the undercommons in this chapter extends our previous work on child(hood) play. We persist in seeking to disrupt mainstream debates that position play as something that children normatively and naturally do, as evidence that learning is taking place. We contest that this framing both colonizes and regulates play (and by proxy (the) child(hood)). Stenros and El Sherbini (2025) stress that

It seems when play is talked about by pedagogues or psychologists, there is this idea that play is wonderful, play is beautiful, play is uplifting. . . . It's idealised. It's very positively loaded . . . play is all of those things. However, play is also dangerous and illegal and disgusting and terrifying and selfish and harmful. I don't think play in itself is moral, play isn't good or bad. Play *is*.

Our work with these young children sought to create opportunities for play as it *is*, in all its messy, non-innocent complexity. Following Scheckner (1993) we were committed to subverting the constraints of the everyday (which can be both chaotic and deconstructive) with the conviction that ultimately, the coexistence of contradictory realities opens a door to something new. The playful, art-based activities we introduced to these classrooms opened doors to something new, children embraced the chaos, nonsense, the invitation to bend and sometimes break the rules. Inspired by Harney and Moten (2013, p. 110) then,

we are committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice.

Something new: Collage and agential cuts

'Minibeasts' opened a door to art forms that the four-year-olds had not encountered previously. Each activity morphed and melded through the previous and into the next. Our time spent with the Reception classes was characterized by storytelling, moving, making, exploring, inquiring and collectively crafting something new from that which had been foraged and collated. Conceptually this iterative, non-ending, aerating practice was reminiscent of Haraway's (2016) concern with composting and Barad's (2007) eternal re-turn. The children were encouraged to take up space, go wild and accept the (by now possibly counter-intuitive) notion

that there was no ‘correct’ way to be or to do. This encouragement was picked up by children diagnosed or awaiting diagnosis of SEN. These children engaged enthusiastically, they became messmates in the thick of things – dancing as ants on hot sand; mark-making to the rhythm of cockroaches; leaping as far as a cricket; navigating with eight imaginary eyes; sensing a way through like a spider on a web; and writhing worm-like across the floor. Such activities underscore the potential for chaotic, nonsensical, playful praxis to foster inclusivity where accepting brokenness and a refusal to be repaired are valorized.



Figure 8.8 Hannah Hoch-inspired multispecies collage.

Collage (inspired by the Dada-ist work of Hannah Höch, see Figure 8.8) proved to be a very popular intervention in the project. Again, children were advised that there were few expectations and that it was not possible to collage incorrectly. They were provided with materials that had been gathered in nature trails around the local area, as well as magazines such as the *National Geographic*, *The Week Junior* and shredded curriculum materials found discarded in the staff room, and other junk materials readily available in the classrooms. As explored elsewhere (de Rijke, 2023), collage is a versatile art form that accommodates multiple texts and visuals in a single work. Harding (1996) proposed collage as a model for a ‘borderlands epistemology’ that values multiple distinctive understandings and that deliberately incorporates nondominant modes of knowing, such as visual arts.

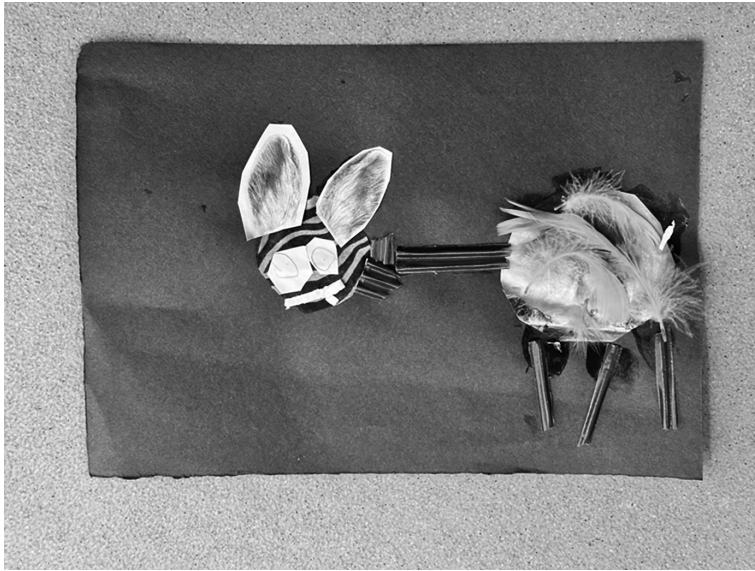


Figure 8.9 Collage: Fantastical Minibeast.

Collage is particularly suited to feminist, postcolonial inquiry that values multiple distinctive understandings and that deliberately incorporates nondominant modes of knowing and knowledge systems. Not an ‘or’ method but an ‘and’ method. In fact, in the sense that play is as messy as one can imagine (multiple, partial, context dependent and contingent), it could be argued that *only* multimodal research can do justice to the complexity of play. The varied forms that collages took across the two Reception classes and the almost universal willingness to collage otherworldly minibeasts (see Figure 8.9), with surprising (and sometimes intergalactic) capacities, set in motion tentacular storytelling that resurfaced in other activities and through general chat over the life of the project. The porosity and leakages from one research activity to the next sat in stark contrast to the clocking practices that have come to more readily demarcate and characterize early childhood education (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012).

The ‘slow’ movement in early childhood education which features *the Mosaic Approach* (Clark, 2017), *Slow Looking* (Tishman, 2018) and more recently *the Unhurried Child* (Clark, 2023) all employ collage as visual, participatory research frameworks for listening to young children’s views and experiences and as a means of inquiry and representation. For Rosa Cran, ‘collage is about encounters. It is about bringing ideas into conversation with one another . . . it is multidimensional and interdisciplinary: artistic systems of order’. Cran

points out that collage not only ‘declares the continuity of realms, it also declares the *contiguity* of realms, and carries the implication of life beyond art’ (Cran 2017, pp. 4–5). Sepällä et al.’s (2021) claim that arts-based methods contribute to decolonizing the processes and practices of participatory research by challenging hierarchies, fostering pluralism, increasing multivocality and facilitating dialogue in research is borne out by our experiences with ‘swarms’ of children scrabbling about collecting and recording data, whose approach was invariably that of ‘and’ rather than ‘or’ (Figure 8.10).



Figure 8.10 Collage: Natureculture-Minibeast.

Something else new: Nonsense poetry as refusal

In refusal of the hegemony of phonics and related pressures for four-year-olds to demonstrate literacy against normative developmental milestones, we introduced nonsense poetry in the style of Spike Milligan’s ‘*On the Ning Nang Nong*’. This activity invited fastness and wildness, and responded to an eagerness to be in the world and to make the world anew through fantastical, nonsensical rhymes connected in some tangential way to insects and microbes. Collectively the class volunteered words and phrases that incited subversion and laughter. The children’s poems featured mirror writing, with many letters in reverse, effectively pushing the aesthetics of the nonsense further still (Figure 8.11).

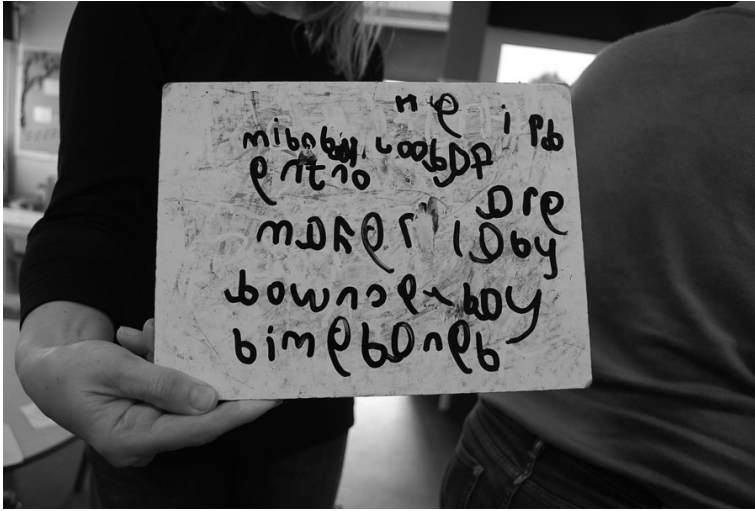


Figure 8.11 Nonsense poetry.

Sigman's (2017) neurological explanation of mirror writing emphasizes that 'the brain is not a blank page on which things are written, but rather a rough surface on which some shapes fit well and others don't'. Just as researchers cannot stand apart from the assemblages of their study and are embedded and implicated in what is produced, causing what Barad (2007) terms 'agential cuts', mark-making, cut poetry and collage reveal the enormous complexity of play as an assemblage of messy associations and doings.

As Halberstam (2013, p. 8) states, 'one has to inhabit the crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other, the other who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism'. Therefore, as we sought to do in this project, taking children seriously, as valid knowers, active in world-making practices, gifted ways to generate knowledge in the undercommons that reanimate marginalized ways of being in the world, that refuse adultist demands for mind over body, rational thought over speculation and seriousness over playful experimentation. In many senses, play is anything **but** learning (e.g. how to write or dance to a formula). Working with children using collage and nonsense poetry, we noted how 'hooking up on the energies, intensities and speeds in an assemblage can then be a research strategy to explore an alienation from our usual expectations' (Sandvik 2010, p. 37). Like the improvised (insect and microbial) dances that came before and after mark-making – full of energy, force, chaos and risk – the rough surface of our agential cuts pointed to play as a nonsensical assemblage.



Figure 8.12 Play as nonsensical assemblage.

In-conclusion

Masquerading as ‘Environmental Education’ our arts-informed playing was intended to create space and opportunities for children to become deeply entwined with that which they encountered, storied and became-with; we extended an implicit invitation to dwell among and with the new sets of relations as they emerged. Haraway’s (2016, pp. 34–36) notion of ‘sympoeisis’ has radical implications for play, as ‘a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems [. . .] a word for unfolding with, in company.’ For Haraway, ‘sympoeisis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it’ in order to provoke new ways of thinking in/about play. When we are playing or playful, we are at once ‘part of the phenomenon and an enmeshed ‘listener’, ‘observer’, ‘being-with’, ‘making with’, ‘thinking-with’ – part bound, part free within a ‘sympoeitic system’; as such the objective of our research praxis with four-year-olds in an ‘Environmental Education’ project was never to arrive at a single solution or thesis but to constitute what Haraway terms ‘staying with the trouble’.

Our artful play praxis was intended to rupture orthodoxies that underpin contemporary early childhood education in order to create space for knowledge and knowing to take other shapes (see Figure 8.12). Manthalu and Waghid (2019) propose that Agamben’s¹ (2007) idea of play as a contemporary frame of reference, with its ‘disruptive presence’ connects learning through play into the realm of decolonizing education, arguing that when play ruptures orthodoxies through carnivalesque² acts of resistance, such as liberating things from their

proper use and putting them to new use, ‘enactments of dissent’ surface. This resonates with Harney and Moten’s (2013) undercommons as a provocative world-making project, wherein the task is to rethink or to rediscover what we need, where to find it and how an endless array of apparatuses and institutions that stand in the way can be navigated.

Therefore, in our work with four-year-olds in London primary schools we took up these alternative theorizations of play as some sort of generative muddle. Harney and Moten (2013, p. 106) urge that ‘concepts are tools for living or toyboxes for playing. . . don’t take this too seriously, go out and play with it’. Our praxis then has been about playing with concepts through a series of loosely choreographed arts-based activities. In the undercommons:

What’s most important is . . . play. What’s most important about play is the interaction . . . there are these toys and if you pick them up you can move into some new thinking and into a new set of relations, a new way of being together, thinking together . . . it’s the relation and the activity that’s really what you want to emphasise . . . what matters is what they do with it; it’s where they take it in their own relations.

It is notable for all the ‘minibeast’ activities we participated as equals with the children. Other than offering initial introductions to the concepts, and some further provocations, prompts and materials we were persistently in the thick of things, down on the ground, participating fully – dancing as ants on hot sand, hugging and listening to trees, curious about the soggy microbial ridden doll and so on – active in childing, welcoming the opportunity to play as a rupture to orthodoxies that contain and regulate. As Halberstam (2013, p. 11) stresses,

Learning to be with and for – in coalition, and on the way to the place we are already making, you will feel fear, trepidation, concern, disorientation. you will already be part of the movement of things (which) can be felt and touched and exists in language and in fantasy, it is flight, it is motion.

Our praxis therefore refuses the widely held assumption that adults are excluded from childlike forms of play. A postdevelopmentalist and post-age-related view of play emphasizes that it is not something contained to childhood, but rather it might be thought of in Bennett’s (2010) terms as ‘vibrant matter’, or as a ‘swarm of vitalities at play’. A more expansive and speculative engagement with play, one that understands it to be iterative, confederate, multimodal, irrational and impermanent, produces other accounts of what it is, what it makes possible and where it can take ideas about contemporary childhood. Such a reformulation of what play is, what it makes possible and who and what can

be a player creates opportunities for adults to question, reformulate and refuse dogmatic ways in which perpetual mediation shapes early childhood education.

Notes

- 1 Agamben's idea of 'studious play' opens up the possibility that 'being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around'.
- 2 'Carnavalesque' here to mean the largely black and enslaved cultural traditions of socially disruptive play and performance of masking, costuming, uprising and critique, picked up by social movements of global dissent.

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