

“NESTS”

Stories of Intra-acting Agencies

Valhalla Center & Wee Ones

It was spring, we briefly saw a robin flit in and out of the play yard.

Brooklyn quietly went off to create. A while later, Arthur noticed her busy-ness and went over...

Brooklyn doesn't speak when she creates. Arthur knew this, he took his cues from her. They worked together. Her actions were purposeful, she moved the dirt out, held it from falling off the log, and pressed with her body leaning into it. She knew when the dirt would move, she was ready for it. She watched Arthur's inexperience with the dirt and quickly came over to pat, press, in just the right place.

When Dylan cam over and asked if he could play, Brooklyn told him to sit in the nest, "you can press the dirt tight."



Finally the others noticed and came over. They were impressed when Arthur and Dylan told them what they were doing: “sitting in nests, making them hard”

They all took a turn to sit in them. Brooklyn offered to help them if they wanted to build one of their own.

During the days that followed, they made “mud eggs”, of course..

Sometimes, they added grass, dried or green, rocks, flowers, sticks, mud cakes and worms.

Those nests lasted through the winter snows. The children were pleased to see them as the snow melted away. and they were discovered

Then Brooklyn invited everyone to help her break them, They were HARD!!!



Reflections

As I watched Brooklyn, I had a sense that she wasn't alone even before Arthur arrived. The dirt was her "pal", no more just dirt, but "an object of encounter rather than a medium for representing thought"(Kind,2010). She carried her partner and supported it from falling off the log and knew exactly what and when it needed assistance.

When Arthur arrived, following her lead, he too joined the encounter.

The other children approached these nests with fascination. Their encounters surprised me. These nests were regarded with honour, like one might approach royalty. Yet they quickly joined in by strengthening, guarding, adding things for beauty (decorations), comfort (covering with dried and green grass so they will be warm), fed them mudcakes and brought them playmates (worms). The dirt nests became a part of their group. They responded with empathy, courage, sadness and joy. These nests were not a created product from a dirt medium. Children and nests, "intra-acting agencies"(Barad)

Other nest creations...each a “condition of possibility of humans and non-humans”(Barad)



Mouse “House” or “Nest”?

Elijah found a tiny hole under a large rock on the hillside. He voiced his query:

“I think an animal lives in here. It is too big for an ant...and a worm. Maybe a mouse lives in here.”

Emmett came over to see what Elijah found. They debated what to do: make the hole bigger? “We’ll cover it up so nobody finds him.

Later: “We’re making a nest for the mouse to keep him warm and to hide in and be safe”.



At the top of the hill...

Chloe had been collecting, she stopped to watch the mouse nest building.

“I am going to make a bird nest” and went in search of a site.

She finally chose a spot at the top of the slope and began smoothing the ground. Brynn went to see what she was doing and offered to help.



Making Nests: intra-actions with materials



“We’re making nests, squishing the leaves into the bottom.”

“You have leaves in your hair.”

Leaves are tossed into the air, to land on their heads, “That’s fun! We’re making nests”.

“Stomp, stomp...stomp...crunch...”



“Look at the leaves now!”
 (As they crawl out) “That was fun!”



Elijah and Hannah had been watching and building with pieces of board. “We are building a road. It’s going to the nests. It’s a dangerous road. We have to be careful.”



Snail's Nest

Enya and Mya found a snail's shell. Shortly after, they began building a nest for it.

They decided to put a roof over it “so it will be safe and cozy.”
Once that was done, they added a pathway “so it didn't get lost”.



More snail nests...



“Intra-acting”

Pondering...



“That was fun!”



Reflections

According to Karen Barad's theory of agential realism, the world is made up of phenomena which are "the ontological inseparability of intra acting agencies". Things or objects do not precede their interaction, rather "objects" emerge through particular intra-actions. They are the condition of possibility of humans and non-humans.

The plans begin with "nests", or do they? Did not the "nests" emerge through the children's intra-actions with various materials? This intra-action might stop at the "nests" stage, but it doesn't have to. The intra-acting agencies (child and mud, leaves, grass, etc) could continue.

There is a fascination, a comfort, an open-ended process of intra-activity that can allow the child to feel good . The "nest" object is simply a pause in the intra-activity.

A "nest" emerges from the "intra-action" of their bodies with any material's agency. There is the feel and/or the weight of the dirt being pushed into a form and the child answers back. There is the stiff (or spikey, lumpy, soft, cool...) material speaking it's story and the child's hands respond, with resistance or give, of being, intra-acting and changing thought.

A "nest", a momentary condition between child and material.

A "nest", a child's secret of intra-action we can only guess at.

It is an interrelationship that changes both child and material forever.