

Bringing play to life and life to play: Different lines of enquiry

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Abstract

This doctoral submission draws on a range of published material to pursue meandering lines of enquiry into the study of children's play. At its heart is a claim that playing is quintessentially the process of life going on in an affirmative manner (Lester, 2015a); not merely an outcome or activity but the grounding of life itself, a force productive of creative novelty that precedes its classification. In developing this account, the writings of Gilles Deleuze, including collaborations with Felix Guattari, and contemporary iterations of what might be termed 'new materialisms', take centre stage. It is a geo-philosophical quest that seeks to overcome the individualisation of life and its accompanying categorisation of playing as a subordinate state, something that can only be tolerated if it contributes to furthering the progress of a subject. The intention here is to go beyond such value, to re-position playing alongside life itself and by doing so to question the ways in which childhood, adulthood and space are constructed and practised.

This is not merely carried out at a level of abstraction: true to Deleuzian process philosophy this thesis is not concerned with the meaning of play but questions how does it work and how might it be worked differently? In response, it develops an 'exemplary method' (Massumi, 2002, p. 17) by drawing on a series of singular examples from playwork practice, everyday life, research projects and more remote sources. These are designed to be generative and bring forth new concepts rather than reducing things to more of the same. Above all it is an ethico-political manoeuvre, a tentative and modest experiment in

(re)thinking and thinking anew what constitutes a 'good life' and how we might increase capacities to create a more just and equitable world.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been presented to any other educational institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Gloucestershire.

Signed

Date: 17th March 2016

Acknowledgements

True to the central concepts developed through this thesis, this is not a single-authored work but assembled with a cast of thousands. Given the nature of this study, how could it be otherwise; life and its continuation through playing is not an individual affair. To attempt to list performers in order of appearance or significance would require more time and space than this format affords and still fall considerably short in accounting for their immense contributions. There are many significant conceptual influences in this writing, a cast of unusual suspects that rarely find their way into traditional accounts of play. As will be apparent some of these characters have a more prominent role than others and I am forever grateful for their inspiration and insight that collectively offer ways of getting out of oneself.

The countless children and playwork practitioners that I have had the privilege to work with in a variety of spacetimes remain an important part of this refrain. Encounters with committed and passionate 'play people', friends and colleagues across this territory continue to challenge and inspire. Hopefully, in some way, you will find yourselves in this piece.

I am indebted to co-script writers who have contributed to many of the ideas on show here, notably Wendy Russell, for accompanying me into new territories to see what more might be possible. I also would like to thank Professor Andrew Parker and Doctor Malcolm MacLean for their on-going attention to production values and editing and to Hilary Smith who has worked tirelessly to maintain a stage for play within the University of Gloucestershire.

And of course, a special thanks to my wife Mary, the starring role in this production, although 'thanks' is hardly adequate in expressing the deep gratitude I feel for all the ways in which she has contributed to creating this piece, both backstage, behind the scenes and in the wings prompting, supporting and encouraging and taking centre stage by performing all the unseen, intangible practices and routines that enabled lives to go on while this was in production. Also, thoroughly entangled in this are the two best-supporting actors, Tom and Ben: thanks for the innumerable shared moments of playfulness and enchantment that permeate our lives.

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Preamble and perambulation: Taking a line for a walk

We are all made of lines of different intensities, speeds, flows and force; a somewhat obscure starting point to write about playing but a central idea to what follows. A permeation and permutation of lines is a concept taken from the writings of Gilles Deleuze (including collaborations with Felix Guattari) who notes 'we have as many tangled lines as a hand' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 125), but complicated in many different ways. Deleuze's concepts of rhizoanalysis, assemblages, cartographies and others pursued in this study pay attention to the arrangement of these lines, in formations and as singular flows. What they all have in common is movement; 'only movement concerns me' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 127). The following lines, already introduced in this account as an opening declaration are movements made across paper¹:



The movement is in the writing of the lines and not the finished signature which is a representation that is fixed as a signifier of an identity; it is a mark that is replicable, standing for the same and therefore should be as true as possible to the original. If there is deviation, the authenticity of the lines may be questioned; 'representation should resemble rather than dissemble' (Doel, 2010, p. 117). The signature is a quintessential and original mark of identity that has to be repeatable and similar across multiple space/times (cheques, birthday cards, autographs, mark sheets). The finished product conceals the ways in which each of these repetitive signatures is formed from different movements and relationships: the pen,

¹ A minor digression – increasingly in the movement from disciplinary to control societies the 'signature' is replaced by passwords as 'key signatures because they allow or prevent access to information networks' (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 387).

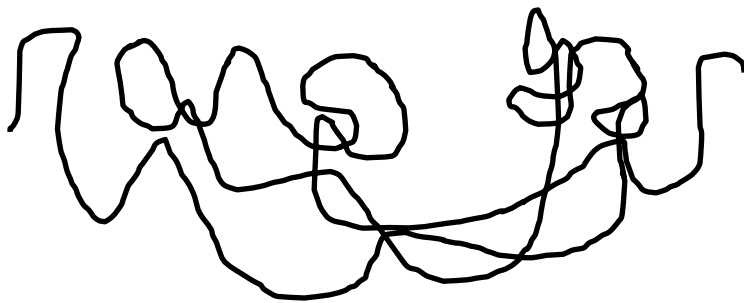
hand, paper, writing position of the body, emotional state, and so much more are all assembled in unique formations. There is a repetitive rhythm to the signature but always something new and unforeseen occurs within the repetition (Lefebvre, 2004). Without repetition and difference identity could not be established; all representation is differentiation and transformation. But problems arise when representation demands that repetitions are the same, copies are judged by their accuracy to an original, 'to give back a true semblance of that which it re-presents' (Doel, 2010, p. 119). What is contested here is the assumption that there is an origin, structure, or standard by which things can be measured and that somehow representations are apart from, rather than a part of, the domain of matter, substance and things. The world is not given in advance but emerges through a continuous process of differentiation; 'the whole of life is difference...the power to think differently, to become different and to create difference' (Colebrook, 2002, p13). Structures and order always leak; something deviates from the predictable in a line of flight. The intention of this piece is to pay more attention to these lines by placing play at the centre of life to see what might happen.

An experiment is introduced here that attempts to give some indication of what follows. It concerns a block of space/time of a single life and may be represented thus:

I approached the desk, placed the coffee on the table mat, turned on the computer, opened the curtains only to find that the end hooks had fallen off and so had to stretch to place them back on the rail, conscious that I might be seen by passers-by who may wonder what on earth I was doing. The computer was now active and the coffee going cold; I entered the password,

waited and checked messages. There were a couple that needed immediate response...

This could continue but there is sufficient here to make the point about this form of representation as a series of statements fixed to the page to form a coherent and linear narrative, a progression of actions, feelings and so on. But there is always something missing, something that refuses to be captured to the page. As part of this experiment there is an attempt to represent this period using a single line. The following pattern emerges:



This is a form of composition in which the feeling body produces a movement imbued with its own emotionality and action without recourse to words. The moving line becomes entangled with objects, habits, surprises, so often un-thought sensations and movements; it is, after Klee (1960), a line going for a walk, a performance full of openness and possibility.

Now of course there are many objections to be raised to this opening and this will be revisited later in the discussion; the intention at this stage is not to defend or justify; 'every time someone puts an objection to me I want to say: OK, OK, let's go on to something else' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 1). The aim is to add movement to the static representations that dominate and to pay more attention to the processes of the momentary events that

constitute life yet remain largely hidden. Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 224) exemplify the approach:

Deligny transcribes the lines and paths of autistic children by means of maps: he carefully distinguishes between 'lines of drift' and 'customary lines'. This does not only apply to walking; he also makes maps of perceptions and maps of gestures showing customary gestures and gestures of drift... Deligny opened his lines of writing to life lines. The lines are constantly crossing, intersecting for a moment, following one another. A line of drift intersects a customary line, and at that point the child does something not quite belonging to either one; he or she finds something he or she lost – what happened? – or jumps and claps his or her hands, a slight and rapid moment – and that gesture in turn emits several lines (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 224)

The line of movement cannot be reduced to linguistic form but so often the latter is privileged over the former. Language is used to represent a truth that becomes set apart from the messiness of life. Lines are expressive movements central to understanding life itself as processes in motion; life is always going-on. At the outset it should be made clear that the use of the term 'life' is not an expression of a singular and exclusive human existence but as an intra-active, emergent and open-ended process that is constituted from human, non-human, material, and discursive forces. Life is not contained to individual things; 'it is movement itself, wherein every organism emerges in a particular disturbance that interrupts the linear flow, binding it into the forms we see' (Ingold, 2011a, p. 13). The idea of emergence does not imply a connection between pre-existing entities that may form

a temporary alliance before returning to a self-contained state. Individuals are composed from their on-going intra-actions (Barad, 2007), entangled acts of intra-relating, always caught up and produced through relationships with other bodies and materials in non-linear and indeterminate ways. Who knows where lines will lead?

What if we start to imagine life not as the pursuit of a single already fashioned line but as a meshwork 'woven from the countless threads spun by beings of all sorts, both human and non-human, as they find their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are enmeshed' (Ingold, 2007, p. 3). What are the possibilities for thinking differently about life itself and how might this overturn long cherished assumptions about the position of humans in the world?

Children rarely walk in straight lines; they meander to points that appeal and attract, powerful things call out to them. The walls, curb stones, paving slabs, bollards, cracks and dents in pathways, the general detritus of consumption (cans, bottles, paper, sticks etc.) and general street furniture affect and are affected by the movements of life. Even when there are few landscape features, children will find creative and imaginative ways to use bodies ('how far can you walk with one breath, what is the fastest time you can reach...'). It also finds expressions in various jostling, pushing, chasing, dodging movements. Bodies and things are always in motion. For too long the study of playing has been fixated with determining the identity of play, to represent, define and classify into exclusive patterns, and to reduce the flow of life to a utilitarian account in which the movement and trajectory of subjects is already pre-established. The endeavour here is to follow other lines of enquiry and to give more attention to the ways in which bodies, symbols, and materials are always entwined in a trajectory of becoming and by doing so 'comprises the texture of the world'

(Ingold, 2011a, p. 14); indeed, as Ingold (2007) suggests, such lines have the power to change the world.

Chapter 1: An Introduction

Writing does not have its end in itself precisely because life is not something personal. The only aim of writing is life, through the combination which it draws. This is the opposite of neurosis in which life is constantly mutilated, debased, personalised, mortified, and in which writing takes itself as its own end (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 6).

The context for what follows

This PhD thesis ‘with publication’ has been a long time in the making. It draws on a body of published materials that have emerged from and merged into this text in an intensive and extensive manner. Intensive, in this context, refers to a movement from a steady state of certainty over a threshold beyond ‘common-sense’ to think differently about playing. This movement has generated a deeper reading of some key texts, notably the individual and collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze, which in turn has led to extensive connections and entanglements with other significant concepts. The five articles and chapters submitted in support of the thesis illustrate this process as they seek to add more to play and life itself by offering new patterns of relationships that might lead to different ways of experimenting with what it is to be ‘human’. These selections are introduced in Chapter 2 and copies are included in Appendix 4. The demands of this academic format place limits on what can be (re)presented; the publications are examples that stand only for themselves but each contains an experimental movement to set concepts to work and unsettle accounts of play. Along with all publications produced

during the writing of the thesis, what they have in common, above everything else, is a desire to enliven ways of developing ethical practices in supporting children's 'right to play'. As will be evident from the thesis itself, this 'right' is more generous and expansive than traditional accounts of children's rights and play; indeed, it may be expressed as a right to life itself.

A beginning that is not a beginning

This text is not fully formed, just as all the texts written over the past years. There is always a nagging doubt that something has been omitted and left unsaid. But no longer: things are never finished, there is always incompleteness; materials, persons, thoughts, affects, elude capture to the page. Writing is always becoming, striving to find ways to present the relational, multiple, and nomadic (Guttorm, 2012). The very process of writing/thinking is extensive; as one writes, new connections and possibilities are formed, more questions and uncertainties arise. There are so many ways of saying things.

This is a messy text both in the process of production and as it stands now in its apparent finality. It is composed from conversations, presentations, publications, observations and so much more. Writing, as with play itself, is an act of wonder; concepts are brought to life and not simply reiterated. It is also a process of joyful creation by releasing concepts from their fixed positions, inventing strange juxtapositions to see what more might be said and how the world might be thought and lived differently. And while the task ahead is daunting there is comfort to be found in Massumi's words (2002, p. 13):

If you don't enjoy concepts and writing and don't feel that when you write you are adding something to the world, if only the enjoyment itself, and by adding

that ounce of positive experience to the world you are affirming it, celebrating its potential, tending to its growth, in however small a way, however abstractly – well just hang it up.

Writing about play is mobile and wayfaring; it eschews situating things in certain times and space by recognising that life is always on the move and space is always lived and moved through. Indeed, these are the very foundations upon which ‘play spaces’ are produced. Such movements are everyday, relational, apparently mundane, habitual practices that matter and have profound significance. In this sense, habits, rather than being dull, apparently mechanical actions, are the ways in which living organisms creatively produce moments of stability in an ever changing world in which nothing truly repeats, always repetition with difference (Deleuze, 1994).

However, there is an immediate dilemma: children and adults are taught to reason, order, sequence and present in a logical manner, to cut the surface of life into limited and measured things that reaffirm propositions and imperatives (Deleuze, 1994; MacLure, 2010). But are there other ways of going about this? Rather than seek to appraise what is already produced the desire here is generative, extending beyond current ideas to see where it might lead. Already a significant force to what follows has been revealed: the writings of Gilles Deleuze permeate this narrative, offering a significant point of departure by injecting awkwardness into common-sense and orthodox thought, making things stutter and opening them out to new ways of theorising (Rose, 1999). My initial interest in Deleuze can be located in a very specific and influential passage, reproduced here:

Children strive to become what they desire to be, creating what Deleuze terms a ‘line (or plane) of immanence’. The creation of this line involves a dual activity.

Children plot a trajectory that negotiates the more rigid, settled structures and expectations that surround them, what Deleuze calls 'line (or plane) of organisation'. This includes such things as the family and the school, which are relatively segmented into separate institutions, or territories, each with their own rules and norms of behaviour. In general terms these rules operate by creating mutually exclusive dichotomies: culture and nature; male and female; child and adult; home and school. These strive to shape children, to fix them into 'normal' patterns – thus limiting their desire and creativity but, simultaneously, creating stability and thus making the world appear more certain and less fearful. In the process children are incorporated into the plane of organisation (which imposes its expectations of normality upon them) but they also plot flights away from it. This transforms them, allows them to enter into new forms of expression and content and thus create something new as the process goes along. Such lines of immanence tend to dissolve these segmentations and binary divisions, ignoring and hybridising them and creating new entities (Prout, 2005, p. 113).

This was a first encounter with the possibility of getting out of sterile but deeply-rooted binaries and it led to the pursuit of the origins of these concepts, starting with the challenge of 'A Thousand Plateaus' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) and extending into other numerous and equally challenging works. But from the outset it should be made clear that what follows is not a slavish fidelity to Deleuze; in line with Thrift (2008) the idea that social sciences should rest on the assumptions of a singular strand of western philosophy is highly questionable. The concepts developed by Deleuze, and notably his collaborative work with Felix Guattari, are set to work as a form of experimentation and invention to consider that

which is not yet known but not with any expectation of producing definitive answers. Rather than seeking theory that explains and orders the world, Deleuzian philosophy encourages the de-familiarisation of what may appear to be banal and mundane and to complicate and pervert the taken-for-granted. It marks 'an intellectual shift from a preoccupation with questions of significance and meaning to a concern with questions of function and use' (Zayani, 2000, p. 95). Theory, from this perspective, becomes a hybrid assemblage constituted from diverse elements that do not aim for comprehension, universality or mastery, 'not built of stages, levels, tables, themes, categories' (MacClure, 2010, p. 279). This account is an attempt to bring concepts to bear on 'playing' as a way of producing previously unthought questions, practices, affects and knowledge. Such possibilities are tentatively developed in 'Playing in a Deleuzian Playground' (Lester, 2013a) and there are further paths pursued in this account into areas not generally travelled in the study of children's play. Some of these have only been partially explored and remain in the background to this piece but that is not to deny their reverberations and influence in shaping ideas. While, as they say at award ceremonies, this list is endless, two notable contributions are acknowledged: firstly, Merleau-Ponty's (1968) later phenomenological work that re-positions consciousness as an inter-world phenomenon in which materials and ideas, body and mind, are irreducible, interwoven and dynamically entangled. The influence of Merleau-Ponty, and indeed Deleuze, is evident in the contemporary writings of Manning (2013, 2014) and this will be revisited later in this account.

Equally, Lefebvre's (1991, 2004) concepts of the production of space and rhythm analysis have been influential in forming ideas about the ever-present utopian potentialities that exist in the everyday. Lefebvre's spatial-political 'trialectics' foregrounds the energies and

liveliness of everyday life as a way of transforming it. Attention to affective encounters and the effects of such moments is a significant line of enquiry in this thesis that finds contemporary expression in, for example, McCormack's (2013) application of the Deleuzian concept of refrains and rhythm. It should be noted that there are differences between these concepts and they are used diffractively² in this analysis rather than attempting to produce a synthesis.

The value of the example

In order to navigate this route, some material is presented at the outset, drawn from a shared observation (Lester, 2013b). Not only does this material present an example of children's play but it also introduces an exemplary approach to the writing of this thesis. In this sense, and following Massumi's (2002) advice, examples are singular and cannot be held to represent the general nor particular features of any system. The observation of playing given below is not a signification of everything but a singular event that only relates to itself (Lester, 2015a); it is a small story that is important for its particularity and in its singularity acts as an 'entry point to the working out of conceptual ideas in local contexts' (Lorimer, 2003, p. 214). The self-relations of an example activate details; each minor moment matters as it opens up to more questions and digressions that lead off elsewhere (Massumi, 2002; MacLure, 2010). Traditional accounts fit the material of everyday life into pre-existing frameworks and thus transform experience; the material becomes consumed by the system of thought and is less to do with bringing more to the world than reducing it to more of the same. A process of exemplification avoids framing examples by what is already known. By doing so, it allows the possibility of presenting 'a sense of the specifics of participation while

² This term will be explored more fully later in the text

holding on to the possibility that participation has the potential to transform the sensibility that shaped it in the first place' (McCormack, 2013, p. 12). The accent is on process and not codification or positionality; it is a central point around which concepts begin to cohere and lead off into other territories. The thesis is littered with playful examples as a way of overcoming a form of writing that seeks to represent to establish meanings and explanations. The examples are not deliberately selected to prove this or that point, but are entangled with writing as an embodied process; concepts bring to mind particular occasions that resonate prior to representation, sensed before put into language. Each example is a 'mobius strip between language and the world' (Deleuze, 2004, p. 23), refusing to be cast either side of the binary that distinguishes matter from thought and language. And while situated at specific points in the discussion, they are mobile and could be interchanged without effacing their singularity. And, of course, there are many more examples which are unwritten here but form a significant part of this writing through the moments of enchantment they produce³.

As will be evident from the selection of published materials included in support of this thesis, this specific example has become a consistent refrain, marking out a terrain or 'a circle around [an] uncertain and fragile centre' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998, p. 343). The story concerns two young children, a boy and a girl, who are sitting playing with some 'gooey' like stuff, when the following conversation occurred (Lester, 2013b, p. 22):

Boy: What about if everything was made out of gooey?

Girl: Well, hmm, we would actually have all goo on our bums and stuff and we'd be all gooey and poeey and boeey

The boy laughs

³ The value of exemplification is re-visited in chapter 7

Boy: What if everything was made out of poo eugh!
Girl: Err, we would all have poo on our bums
Boy: And what about poo people?
Girl: Yuck
Boy: And what about poo willy's!
Girl: No [boys name], no
Boy: What about poo trees
Girl: Yuck
Boy: What about, this is the worstest thing, what about poo leaves!
Girl: Why would you want to make poo leaves?
Boy: What if everything was made out of poo?
Girl: I dunno.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1988) children are Spinozists, not pre-occupied with organisation or function but perceive and sense materials whose elements and possibilities are continually open to the future:

... in other words, to an aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movement and rest, the different individuated assemblages it enters ... Children's questions are poorly understood ... they are not understood as question-machines; Spinozism is the becoming-child of the philosopher (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 282).

This detailed example is just one of the multiple ways in which children continuously question materials and bodies. A world made from poo appears in everyday life woven with and through the materials at hand. In the desire to classify and categorise, this event may be termed 'play', glossing over its particularity and reducing to what is already known. The intention in this account is to look for more; it is additive rather subtractive, working with

the intensity that actualises a world made of poo and the extensive connections that may spring from it. The significant feature is the notion of ‘what if...’ deployed by the children to continually problematize the given order of things to co-create a space-time that is temporarily better and livelier by going beyond the limits, rationalities and sensibilities of the ‘real’ world imposed by dominant accounts. It is introduced to question ‘what if’ different ideas, a conceptual toolset from a range of diverse fields and across disciplines, are brought to bear on playing, what more might be possible? The remainder of this opening chapter will continue to set the scene by paying brief attention to the task of writing research.

Issues of representation – writing about play

In the act of writing there’s an attempt to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it... There’s a profound link between signs, events, life, and vitalism: the power of nonorganic life that can be found in a line that’s drawn, a line of writing, a line of music. It’s organisms that die, not life. Any work of art points a way through for life, finds a way through the cracks (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 143).

Playfulness and the very combination of contingent enjoyment, uncertainty and hope would seem to thread and sustain its way throughout daily life for children and adults alike yet often becomes deadened when fixed to words on paper. As noted in the preamble to this thesis, words, movements, sensations and materials have vitality and excess that lies outside the representation of the event. Yet all too often the creation of worlds made out of poo is separated into component parts, namely the active (and possibly deviant) minds of each

child and the inert materials at hand. Interrogating the event from a research perspective leads to a series of possible questions: what does it represent; what are the meanings behind the actions; what might this say about each child; how does it relate to their supposed age/stage of development and so on? But is it possible to hold off from such questions and be faithful to the event? Does a world made out of poo speak for itself, as a description of what happens rather than seeking to explain and interpret this in terms of research or analysis?

The desire is to let playing speak for itself and reinvent new worlds but this remains somewhat elusive as a 'devouring force comes at us from another direction, seducing us by playing on our yearning for a true real' (Tausig, 1993, p. *xvii*). If only and what if... there was a real world out there waiting to be discovered? But such a world is unimaginable, the way the world is accounted for is caught up in a set of 'representation gimmicks' (Tausig, *ibid*) and conventions which have an arbitrary relationship to the messiness and elusiveness of the world. At a more general level so much academic research is caught up in seeking to represent something that is beyond representation in rational terms (Jones, 2008). It relies on a historical and progressive narrative form that continues the accumulation and refinement of scientific knowledge, 'discoveries that lead the way out of the swamp of ignorance and uncertainty to the bedrock of solid and certain knowledge' (Barad, 2010, p. 244). The gimmicks of representation (classifications, exclusions, resemblances and identifications) have assumed a dominant position; foundational and transcendental differences (between child and adult, subject and object, structure and agency and so on) are achieved and maintained through philosophical, scientific, political and social forces. This dilemma has recently preoccupied both social and life sciences and some of the key ideas to

emerge from this disquiet will be discussed in due course (for example, Thrift, 2008 and Non-Representational Theory [NRT]; Barad's, 2007, 'agential realism'; Latour's, 2005, Actor-Network Theory), concepts that provoke resistance to the priority, power and privilege afforded to representation in traditional research studies. They are approaches that challenge the idea that there is an objective, current, real and external world that is then represented by thought 'as though it were a passive picture or copy of the world' (Colebrook, 2002, p. 1). Intra-active, messy entanglements of affects, bodies, sensations, forces and so on cannot be adequately or accurately captured by language in a manner that is faithful to them (Laurier and Philo, 2006). The basic tenet held under vitalist/non-representational approaches is that there is always an excess of living (Lorimer, 2005), always something that escapes; in spite of efforts to contain life with procedures and prescriptions the vitality and vibrancy of the world exceeds attempts to understand it (Bennett, 2010). It problematizes the belief in the power of language to mirror or mediate pre-existing phenomena, that somehow things that are represented are independent of the practice of representation (Barad, 2003). In one of the very few play studies to address this issue Sydnor and Fagen (2012) highlight the dilemma of explaining 'plotless' behaviour (e.g. constructing worlds made from poo) with conceptual tools that are designed to work with 'plots', i.e. to seek to establish some meaning that has universal application. Fagen (2011) also raises concerns about the domination of biological/psychological accounts of play and the continued search for definitive meanings and utility. Tellingly, in terms of this account, Fagen (2011) suggests that prior to fully appreciating ludic behaviour there needs to be a different understanding of the universe itself and it may be fruitful to turn to quantum physics, children's geographies and dance performance, a somewhat esoteric collection, but a line of enquiry that I tentatively pursue here.

The intention of this thesis is to switch focus from *post hoc* reconstruction of experience and imposition of meanings to the presentation of flows of practices, sensations and movements that precede all thinking and representation. There is hope that by resisting the arrival at fixed meanings one might develop an approach that recognises plenitude and not lack; as Derrida (1976) asserts, the play of difference creates meaning rather than destroys it. Contrary to the foundations of scientific research this is not an attempt at rationalisation; neither is it neutral, universal, apolitical, and value and emotion free - forces which are deemed to be things to be overcome if one is to write objectively. The scale of this is considerable; it is a philosophical, ethical and political stance to the world that ambitiously seeks to reposition play as the driving force of life itself. But the account is not simply performed at a level of abstraction; what is under discussion, namely playing, is an everyday, mundane and banal way of being in the world. Studies of play, so often carried out in the laboratory of natural science or developmental psychology, need to be extended to re-find or re-search the wonder of the perfectly ordinary (Laurier and Philo, 2006). Yet at the same time it is a modest endeavour; if one is to consider the possibility of a better future, it is important to overcome arrogant ideas of certainty and finite knowledge. In this sense, modesty is not a meek or weak position but simply a constant challenge to ourselves (Cilliers, 2005).

To conclude this section, and adapting Massumi's (1988) foreword to 'A Thousand Plateaus' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), the attempt here is not to analyse play into discrete categories or component parts 'reducing their manyness to the One of identity and ordering them by rank' (Massumi, 1988, p. *xiii*) but to turn to a nomadic exploration that can work with

heterogeneous matter without effacing such heterogeneity and thereby reducing the potential for future arrangements.

Plugging-in

And now it begins again, plugging-in the computer and opening a new document. The pristine, blank sheet awaits yet more words about playing. But the sheet is not blank: it is already densely populated, indeed over-crowded with personae, experiences, memories, dreams, concepts, materials. think there is no such thing as starting from scratch. A body is 'pre-populated— by instincts, by inclinations, by teeming feelings and masses of memories, conscious and nonconscious, with all manner of shadings in between' (Massumi, 2009, p. 3). This is not a relationship of a cognitive subject with passive and neutral objects (paper, pen, keyboard, screen and so on), lying dormant, waiting for some words of wisdom to be composed upon the surface. It is thoroughly embodied as idiosyncratic two-finger typing stutters across the page trying to keep up with thoughts that seem to race ahead while pausing to correct, never quite going in the direction one wants it to go. The writing subject always seems to 'arrive too late for myself' (Butler, 2005, p. 79). It is not a fixed position, the 'I' is always becoming in the process of writing, entangled in multiple connections, a mangle (Hekman, 2010) or assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) of scripts that somehow resist subject classification and do not quite fit together. The notion of entanglement is another prominent theme that pervades this account. To be entangled is not co-joining separate entities or intermingling pre-existing forms; throughout this thesis it is used to refer to the lack of an independent, self-contained life:

Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions, rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating (Barad, 2007, p. ix).

Writing opens the writer to becoming what is not yet known and to what can never be fully captured in words or known once and for all. Through this kind of writing the process of opening oneself to difference and to the movement of language, voice, body and subjectivity towards the as-yet-unknown, becomes possible. The art of writing is once and at the same time using, producing and questioning the practices that are and have been available – to embrace difference and disorder rather than seeing these as practices to be avoided (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013).

There are many invisible others: the audience for this writing performance; people who have considerable presence and affect, not all of which produce states of pleasure and joy! And as may be noted from the list of publications offered in support of this thesis many are co-created, most notably through a collaborative writing partnership with my colleague Wendy Russell. The traditional format for identifying the main contributor to these pieces (main author listed first) is followed here, but this does not fully represent the nature of these works. Following Wyatt *et al* (2010) what matters is not the individual subjective points (Stuart, Wendy, Ailsa, Martin, John, and so on) but the ‘collection of bifurcating, divergent and muddled lines’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. ix) which constitute these accounts as a multiplicity passing between these points. Collaborations bring diverse lines together, drawing focus to the ‘in-between’, the middle, and what overflows from this to the point where it becomes possible to reach:

...not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 3-4).

And what about the reader: the intended audience of the thesis? Do they need to be convinced of the veracity and rigour of what follows; are they expecting to read some significant explanation and interpretation, a profound analysis of play? Again, some guidance to this can be found from the writing of Deleuze (1995b) who notes that reading may follow two distinctive paths: one looks at what the writing signifies, annotating, questioning, and looking for meaning; the second reads the text as a 'non-signifying machine' with the only question being 'does it work, and how does it work for you'? If it doesn't work for you, has it failed? Or is it simply a case of moving on to read another book; 'something comes through or it doesn't...there is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 9). And here is another act of plugging-in, which in this case draws on Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 4), 'when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work'. It is a process of connecting and disconnecting disparate materials, texts, sensations, bodies; an assemblage of continuous 'self-vibrating intensities' that discards the tripartite division between what is 'out there' (reality), the field of representation (the text) and a field of subjectivity (the author) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). This text is an attempt to give up the old ways of signifying, making meaning and explaining (St. Pierre, 2006) and by doing so to take away the anxiety about getting things 'right'. So the invitation is to 'plug

in', to see what resonates and what tracks appeal. If it is discordant then skip it, find something else.

Digression 1

The writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but also to invite it. Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime (Massumi, 2002, p. 18).

This way of accounting for the world does not sit comfortably with 'academia' and often writing falls back into conventional and standard accounts as a safe and trusted formula.

This becomes more apparent and pressing when one considers the context for writing research and the increasing demand for proofs and truths. Some of the published material drawn upon in this thesis has been required to meet the expectations of others; to be produced in a certain style, follow accepted conventions and state ideas within the framing limitations of pre-existing concepts (Lester and Maudsley, 2007; Lester and Russell, 2008).

They are tailored to the needs of national play organisations and civil servants to produce what elsewhere has been referred to as 'policy based evidence' (Lester, 2007). Increasingly research is required to demonstrate that certain outcomes are possible and achievable; it is an act of commodification with results used by state apparatus or private interest to further their ambitions. Research (and writing research) is caught up in this as funding and the need for evidence based evaluations dictate 'gold standard' research methods (Lather, 2013).

Qualitative research is linked to quantitative and positivist approaches as a form of establishing increasing external control by the attendant army of audit professionals (Thrift,

2003). They are minor examples of the wider neoliberal research framework that pushes pure market logic further and further into the fabric of everyday life (Lather, 2013). Thus life becomes coded, divided and measured; research glides over the surface to reveal a limited set of relationships that elides the very messiness of life:

In general, week by week, in scientific practice sustainable knowledge rests in and reproduces more or less stable networks or hinterlands of relevant instruments, representations – and the realities that these describe. And this is why realities – together with the techniques and representations that enact these – generally feel solid and reliable (Law, 2009, p. 242).

There is a pervasive but illusionary belief in fixity, identity and stability, a dominant feature of minority world philosophy since the Enlightenment (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013). But to repeat: there is always something beyond the text, an excess which defies representation. As the story of children creating a world made out of poo is retold, mind and body ‘glows’ (MacLure, 2013). It resonates with the possibilities present in the encounter, affected in all sorts of unrestrained ways that disrupt the taken for granted order of things. Creating a world made of poo suggests a different perspective from a stable universe: a world of flux, differentiation, mundane delight and wonder in which bodies are always becoming and restlessly perceive, sense, and move in the world differently. The example of a moment of playing also invites, even urges, adults to perceive differently, to think beyond what is known, to discern movement and not fixations, to imagine more just worlds that admit the claims of children as Spinozists. Such playful accounts permeate recent publications in an effort to present the messiness and complexity of life rather than reduce it to simple cause-effect relationships. Another example is introduced here to illustrate this process, drawn

from Lester and Russell's (2013a) research report on the Welsh Government's (2010) initiative to establish a play sufficiency duty for local authorities. A more detailed discussion on this matter will feature later in this thesis; for now, attention will be given to an account relayed by an adventure playground worker which opens the report (Lester and Russell, 2013a, p. 2):

When the playground closes in the evening, the play and playworkers sometimes spill out into the local community. The playworker tells the story of being with a group of children where one boy was decked out in leopard skin wellies and a top hat and was carrying an old vacuum cleaner hose, all items brought from the playground. This spill-over makes playworkers and children highly visible in playful ways and the playworker said that since they started working, first in the community prior to the opening of the playground and then on the playground with this spill-over, local adults have become aware of children's play, and attitudes towards it have changed. This example highlights the ways in which everyday actions and relationships, over a period of time, have a powerful influence in shaping community attitudes and engagement.

Following Massumi (2002) it is possible to look at the detail in this example, follow digressions and develop further questions not as a way of drawing general conclusions or rubrics but to see what more might be said about the processes of this event, as Lester and Russell (2013a, p. 72) elaborate:

...analysing the notes reveals that this moment has tracings that connect with innumerable environmental/relational features: the presence of the playworkers, the development of the adventure playground and its

responsiveness to local conditions; the relationships between children, playworkers and adults on the estate; an emerging culture in which a resident can put an old trampoline onto an empty space for the children to play with, the provision of play priority signs by the community and so on produce the conditions that contribute to the child playing in that place at that particular time.

As one of the interviewee's comments, this moment may be viewed as 'weird' elsewhere and not everyone in this community welcomes children's playful presence on the estate. However, their visibility brings these tensions to the surface and people find ways of getting on together. Undoubtedly the Welsh Government's (2010) attempt to legislate for children's play through a play sufficiency duty is a challenging task; the conditions that might support children's play are complex, contextual, and contingent; 'it is not just one thing, but a whole assemblage of small things over a period of time that work together to shape a culture of acceptance that means that a child so attired is nothing remarkable and yet says everything about a play-friendly neighbourhood' (Lester and Russell, 2013a, p. 72). Such a movement allows the possibility of developing an intensive and extensive reading of the event, opening it out to consider the multiple forces at play in this singular example to reveal the complexity of policy formulation and practice. Note the inclusion of the term assemblage here, as a different way of thinking about policy implementation. This example is included to illustrate the delicate balancing act involved in bringing a different set of conceptual tools to bear on the intentions and actions of a multitude of players to open up possibilities for thinking differently rather than re-work existing frames of reference. Interestingly, when producing a follow-up report to the Welsh Government's (2010) legislation, a senior Welsh

Government official requested that the report be given a 'sensible' title, feeling that 'Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top Hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose' was too frivolous for serious research!

The pressure to make things neat, produce clear meanings and present a reality of play is considerable. But as far as possible this will be resisted. The subject matter itself (playing) is dynamic, uncertain, opportunistic, and the writing 'subject' equally so. Following Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) presentation of a philosophy of language, dominant narrative forms exists as clichés (Porter, 2010) or ideological tools that serve to order the world, pattern social relations and actions; 'we believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone has said to you' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 76). The cliché is a device to prevent words from escaping and flying about all over the place; they are order-words made to be obeyed and commanding obedience. But a pragmatics of language reveals it can be harnessed to challenge clichés as they always contain virtuality and other possibilities for expression:

The challenge here is one of sloganizing against the cliché, of taking away or scraping away the ideological veneer that might otherwise seal and pattern social action and social relations in a given way...the micro-political critique of ideology implies a cleaning or emptying out of the clichés that play through the canvas of our social-political world (Porter, 2010, p. 241).

Exploring the notion of writing itself could fully occupy the space available for this current narrative but a detailed exploration of the significance of text remains for another time; suffice it to say the world does not exist outside of its expression. Expression is often reduced to communication but it can never assign to the form of expression the function of

simply representing, describing or averring a corresponding content: there is 'neither correspondence nor conformity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 87). In line with the paradoxical and different realities generated through playing, this piece does not seek to resolve difference but celebrate its ever-present potential for becoming.

Summary

As may already be evident the influences on developing this account are multiple but may be broadly grouped under posthuman or new materialist approaches inasmuch as such a disparate collection of quite different perspectives and positions can be classified under a single label (Castree, 2006). The main thrust is an analysis of the ways in which humans have become separate from and gained control over an external world or 'nature' and how race, gender, age and so on are employed to hierarchically delineate some humans as more human than others through their distance from nature (Castree, 2006). It is, of necessity, a stance critical of the ways in which ideas of human, nature, culture and so on continue to have powerful discursive-material effects; certainly what grounds posthumanism is a deep scepticism about the nature of all origins (Kirby, 1997).

The key ideas of emergence, movement, life, multiplicity, affect, desire, assemblages, and heterogeneity give a flavour of the concepts to be brought to bear in this account.

Overlapping connections and disconnections, variations, and folds permeate the approach. Such mobile concepts scrutinise accounts and representations of 'play' and the wider issue of adult-child relationships to produce a speculative topography or critical cartography (Braidotti, 2013). This is not a unified account or truth claim, but rather a nomadic wandering through the vast amount of writings about play and beyond. It does not get

straight to the point, which as Ingold (2007, p. 4) comments is not something we tend to do in life or everyday discourse; 'we are drawn to certain topics or meander around them but by the time we reach them they seemed to have disappeared'. All lines, by definition, are linear, yet somehow in modern western thinking lines are expected to be straight as a mark of clear, rational thinking and 'moral rectitude' (Ingold, *ibid*).

It adopts a stance that expresses dissatisfaction with a monologue of knowledge production (Law and Urry, 2004) that produce dominant accounts of play, child, adulthood, space, and development. This is not to fully dismiss these productions or prove that they are wrong but to suggest that they have limited applicability; indeed, their continued application maintains a very partial account of life. The challenge is to expose these limitations by considering the ways in which the relationship between play, childhood, adulthood is represented in modern minority world contexts and to present lines of flight that resonate with the very concept of playing itself, i.e. to create multiple versions of situations and realities in novel formations.

What if...?

Chapter 2 - Writing play

I belong to a generation that had a dream. It was, and still is the dream of actually constituting communities of learning ... of producing socially relevant knowledge that is attuned to basic principles of social justice...In some ways my interest in the posthuman is directly proportional to the sense of frustration I feel about the human, all too human, resources and limitations that frame our personal levels of intensity and creativity (Braidotti, 2013, p. 123).

An introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the key themes drawn from my most recent publications about play, playwork, childhood, and space. It necessarily draws on professional experiences and contributions to the field through practice, education and training programmes, academic and practitioner papers, conference presentations, publications, and research reports. While eschewing a coherent and linear narrative form there is a particular pattern or lines of discovery that commences with an initial certainty about children's play. It marked a firm belief in reliable cause-effect relationships between adult design and children's behaviours, theory and practice. This was very quickly displaced by increasing uncertainty and a move from a state of precision to one of confusion and vagueness.⁴ This movement persistently and continuously reveals the possibility of a 'becoming concept' (Harker, 2005) of play that has established relationships with other adjacent concepts situated in diverse landscapes and territories, recognising that 'every concept will branch off

⁴ My first experience of working on a summer playscheme in Liverpool in the 1970s was a real education. Having completed playwork training (2 days of arts and craft and games to do with kids) and prepared an activity, as children arrived and I explained what we were going to do I was greeted with a comment that 'this is crap' and they ran off to play chase games throughout the centre.

toward other concepts that are differently composed but that constitute other regions of the same plane, answer to problems that can be connected to each other, and participate in a co-creation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 18). It evokes the final collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari (1994) in which they pose the question 'what is philosophy', and suggest that such a question may be approached only in later life through moments of 'quiet restlessness'; it is this restlessness that will hopefully become apparent through this account.

Contrary to the recognised conventions and advice about undertaking research the analysis is wide-ranging and meandering. But it does have an 'object', inasmuch as play may be held to be such a thing, and it is suggested at the outset that the very objectification of play is a major dilemma. In this thesis, play will be understood intransitively, 'alongside other intransitive verbs such as to hope, to grow and to dwell' (Ingold, 2011a, p. 6) rather than a transitive verb that is identified by a specific and definable product or activity. This restores playing as process over the identification of a distinct and final form. It has an elusive and slippery nature and always contains more than can be represented in scientific accounts. For play scholars, discontinuous, contingent and multiple forms of playful expression that pervade and persist across life present a constant challenge to the production of definitive accounts. Playing is essentially paradoxical, and 'the ultimate paradox may be that play can only be understood through itself' (Burghardt, 2005, p. 405). More recently Robert Fagen (2011, pp. 92-93), an eminent scholar of animal play, has noted that 'play is still totally mysterious and intractable' and after a lifetime of adopting scientific methods to study ludic behaviour concludes that a place must remain for novel, imaginative and bold perspectives. The legacy of scientific approaches is the separation of playing from other behaviours and expressions through identification, resemblance, and opposition for the purpose of

conducting valid, objective and reliable research (Burghardt, 2005). It ‘cuts’ play in a specific way and by doing so excludes other possible cuts; what is presented here are formations that begin to consider these circumstances and how they might be differently enacted to produce a more just and equitable account of the ‘real’ (Law, 2009). It is a stuttering attempt to find a way out of worn-out binary productions and to rethink causality, agency, power, and ethics that ‘undermines the metaphysics of individualism and calls for a rethinking of the very nature of knowledge and being’ (Barad, 2007, p. 23).

Digression 2

This somewhat nostalgic digression is taken from notes for a conference presentation (Lester, 2012a) to celebrate the life of Colin Ward (1924-2010). It is introduced here to emphasise moments of enchantment and the promise they hold for cultivating an ethical generosity (Bennett, 2001), key themes that permeate the remainder of this account. Ward was a classic autodidact (Burke and Jones, 2014) and roamed widely across planes of knowledge to express concern ‘for creativity and autonomy as qualities realised against the grain of state domination’ (Burke and Jones, 2014, p. *xviii*). The presentation focused on the significance of ‘The Child in the City’ (Ward, 1979), ‘a vibrant portrayal of children’s relationships with their urban environments’ (Lester, 2014a, p. 198) and afforded a moment of reflection that resonates with the opening quote to this chapter:

Looking back at the 1960s and 70s it seems such a heady period filled with the promise and illusions of revolution, of radical thinking and social protest and the hope of a more just society. So what happened? Here we are in the second decade of the 21st Century and the questions posed by radical thinkers and

activists are as urgent as ever as the forces of neoliberalism appear to have gained supremacy in national and global economics and politics.

But did the revolution die or was it that people simply did what they could within their everyday lives and spaces to resist oppressive forces, to counter injustice and to seek small alliances with others to just make life a little better? Did things change, and if so did they change for the better or worse? It may be no coincidence that the 70s and 80s were perhaps the halcyon days of the adventure playground movement in English cities – generally arising from local collective action simply to create different spaces for or with children. My experience of working on adventure playgrounds in Liverpool in the nineteen-seventies, and later in Manchester in the eighties and nineties, was part of a wider movement, a collective passion and commitment and a sense of playfulness, highlighted in the ‘Child in the City’. But the questioning of oppressive structures and power relationships seems to have subsided and been overtaken by an individualistic and economic account of citizenship, the ‘Big Society’ and so on (Lester, 2012a, p. 1).

Since these heady times there has been a growing sense of unease, and certainly Ward’s (1979) ‘Child in the City’ was a significant contribution to this state. It did not offer any useful tips on how to design and build adventure playgrounds but proposed a radical approach to considering children’s relationship with space and the ways in which children anywhere and everywhere take advantage of environmental conditions simply to gain momentary control over their lives. This notion inevitably impacted on an approach to working with children by appreciating that adult plans for space and materials were always going to be frustrated and

challenged by children's use and therefore the intention is to design spaces that are more open to this very process. It involves thinking as much about adult-child relationships as the qualities of the physical environment. It also raised some important questions about removing children from their everyday spaces to some perceived sanctuary, or 'the fenced-off childhood ghetto [that] sharpens the division between the world of adults and children' (Ward, 1979, p. 86). These questions remain, and indeed have intensified since this period; of course, there should be no fence, but by not fencing these spaces, children are then admitted to the public realm and since the production of 'The Child in the City' it may be suggested that has become even harder to contemplate.

Moments of enchantment and hope

While this may appear to present a sense of disillusionment, the story unfolding in this account is a tale of enchantment, to be 'struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and everyday' (Bennett, 2001, p. 43). However, this is not an expression of naïve and romantic optimism, not so much an enchanted way of life but a life that is populated with multiple moments of enchantment. Being enchanted acknowledges that there are intolerable cruelties and injustices woven into the everyday. Being alert to this and the possibilities that are always present for re-working these conditions reveals the world to be a lively place, where matter is always animate, always has the potential to surprise beyond the world given by disciplinary power, rationality and scientific calculations:

Occasions when one's critical faculties are suspended and one is caught up in the moment can produce a kind of enjoyment...that temporarily eclipses the anxiety

endemic to critical awareness of the world's often tragic complexity (Bennett, 2001, p. 10).

And while engaging with complex ideas, the intention is not to present this as intellectual elitism in which discernment of such moments belongs to the privileged few. It is an act of will: bodies can learn to be affected and the world that appears given can be thought differently (highlighted, for example, in Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014). It attempts to overcome the rather sterile discussions and apparently oppositional positions of wanting to change the world while at the same time celebrate life. A desire for justice is sustained by being enamoured and delighted by the creation of a world made from poo and all the playful examples to feature later in this account. It marks an impulse to reconfigure things in the here and now rather than some far-ahead Utopian future. Abandoning the enchantment of the world is the path of the 'sad revolutionary' (May, 2005a, p. 519). May continues by claiming that one cannot be both sad and revolutionary: 'lacking a sense of the wondrous that is already here, one who is bent upon changing the world can only become solemn or bitter' (May, 2005, pp. 519-520). Even in the most mundane environment moments of enchantment are ever-present, as the following observation at a railway station and included in a forthcoming book chapter (Lester, 2016a) illustrates:

An adult (male) with 2 young girls, one who appeared slightly older than the other, were making their way to the platform, the two girls each holding a bag of sweets. As the adult walked ahead, the two girls paused to look inside each other's bags and the older one said to the other 'Wow, you have got pink mermaids, they can do magic', waving her arms in the air as though holding a magic wand and performing a pirouette; the younger girl held her bag open and

peered closely into it, smelling the contents as the older girl continued 'they are lovely and made from strawberries'. The other girl half smiled at this, faced the older child, but looked a little unsure and said, 'I don't think I like strawberries'. Her friend calmly said 'Never mind, I'll have them' and then quickly added 'but I am not going to give you any of mine'. Both girls closed their bags and skipped to catch up with the adult.

This exemplary account of wayfaring (Ingold, 2011a), or indeterminate intra-activity, draws attention to a minor moment of simple enchantment; these moments matter as a form of hope that emerges through children's and adults' everyday practices (Kraftl, 2008). It is, after Deleuze (1995b, p. 176) a modest belief in the world: 'if you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume'. They represent brief moments of simply coping with and enlivening the practicalities of ordinary life. In its own way play contains utopian impulses (Stevens, 2007), a subversion of existing social order and its limitations. This central theme will re-appear throughout this piece as a counter to the apparent state of disenchantment, fear, misanthropy, and vulnerability which seem to pervade accounts of contemporary minority world childhoods.

The 'research'

There are those who seek looking to find – even knowing they will almost necessarily find something other than what they are searching for. There are others whose research is precisely without an object (Blanchot, 1993, p. 25)

My work consists of two parts; the one presented here, plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 35; cited in Thrift, 2008, p. 150)

This narrative draws on a number of selected published materials that form the foundations of this thesis (see Appendix 4). However, it should be acknowledged that current theory/practice will also be included in this discussion; it is not a static or simply retrospective account. Appendix 1 outlines writings and miscellaneous publications (both from the past and the future); Appendix 2 outlines a range of different contexts in which ideas have been presented; and Appendix 3 summarises a number of recent and current research projects. Collectively these have significance in shaping ideas and are enmeshed within this text.

It utilises a number of excerpts that meander, contest, occasionally bump into each other and often divert down some strange byways; a movement toward writing that draws on emerging and incomplete thoughts. It is a stuttering voice that asks a number of interrelated questions:

1. How might one write play?
2. What more may be said about playing?
3. What might such a perspective offer?

The driving force for this, or in rational terms what might be referred to as a 'research question', is situated in what Foucault (1985, p. 8) refers to as an obstinate curiosity that is 'not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself'. This is not an autobiographical account that seeks to

establish some unity of narrative, 'a spurious sense of oneness' (Thrift, 2008, p. 7). Rather the aim is to bring a conceptual vitality to the study of play that allows for creativity, curiosity, and dare one even suggest, non-sense, into habitual ways of thinking as a mature and critical examination designed to release concepts into the world. These are questions that do not seek definitive answers but more ambitiously are generative in an attempt to promote greater social and spatial justice. Making sense of texts from this perspective rejects the existence of experiences that can be fully understood and directly represented through reflection (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008); following Barad (2007) these lines of enquiry are diffractive and attuned to discerning and producing disturbance and difference. It is a philosophical quest rather than scientific or artistic, although scientific research and aesthetics are important in shaping a philosophical position (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). Ultimately it is a political and ethical endeavour that seeks to challenge the binaries so prevalent in Western philosophy in general and more specifically the ways in which conceptualisations of play privilege cognition and abandons the body.

Selected writings

The following articles and chapters are submitted as a genealogy of writing about play and will form the basis for a critical and exploratory commentary:

- **Lester, S.** (2013a) *Playing in a Deleuzian Playground*. In E. Ryall, W. Russell and M. MacLean (eds.) *Philosophy of Play*. London: Routledge, pp. 130-140.

Developed from a conference presentation, this chapter sets to work key concepts from Deleuzian philosophy to reveal playing as problematizing the given order of things by asking 'what if' the world is perceived, sensed and acted upon differently. By doing so, it brings

about lines of flight that lead towards different becomings, responses, trajectories, and unheard of futures. Seen through a Deleuzian lens, playing affirms the vitality of life, opening up the world in more inventive and experimental ways; who knows what more bodies can do? A recent reviewer notes the chapter's innovative approach that builds a bridge between a 'philosophical understanding of children's bodily play world and a more metaphorical approach to play, centred round abstract conceptions as movement back and forth, to and fro, dialogue and openness, transformation, possibility, and virtuality' (Rasmussen, 2014, p. 246). Undoubtedly, the ideas in this chapter are a significant part of my refrain over the past few years and are developed further in this narrative.

- **Lester, S.** (2013b) Rethinking children's participation in democratic processes: a right to play. *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, Vol. 16: 21-43.

Originally presented at the International Play Association Global Conference (2011) that extended ideas developed in the Working Paper 'Children's Right to Play' (Lester and Russell, 2010) and subsequently adapted to a peer-reviewed journal article. This piece offers a critical exploration of the concept of children's 'participation' by looking in more detail at children's right to play and the possibilities this presents for a different understanding of children as political actors. The main themes in this article re-position children from being portrayed as autonomous and independent rights-bearers to a stance that introduces the notion of rights as a collective response-ability to enable life to flourish. From this, children's everyday playful participation may be considered as a form of minor politics that challenges the dominant discourse of children's participation and disembodied 'voice'. Ideas developed in this piece have been further extended to incorporate an ethical position on rights that stems from Deleuze/Spinoza to posthuman/new materialism concepts in a forthcoming

chapter to be included in the *Handbook of Children's Rights: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Ruck, Peterson-Badali and Freeman, 2016).

- **Lester, S.,** Strachan, A. and Derry, C. (2014) A more playful museum: Exploring issues of institutional space, children's play and well-being. *International Journal of Play*, 3(1): 24-35.

This peer reviewed article presents the findings from a participatory action research project at Manchester Museum. It is included here to illustrate how emerging ideas about playing, space, children, and adults have been set to work to produce 'a more playful museum'. The paper looks at the design, implementation and changes occurring from participation with Museum gallery staff and frames this in a wider discussion around children's presence in traditional museum space, notions of playing and the slippery concept of 'well-being'. Findings from the action research/appreciative inquiry approach developed for this project suggest that increasing attentiveness and sensitivity to children's moments of play throughout the museum has led to co-producing spaces where bodies, symbols, time and materials can take on a different purpose and form and where temporarily life is a little more pleasurable for everybody. The work developed in this project has gained increasing attention from the Museum sector, promoted by the Happy Museum's initiative and has recently received funding to publish a set of 'guiding principles' based on the collaboration with Manchester Museum. A recent update with museum staff suggests that the sense of playfulness initiated by the research project is being maintained, with an account of staff participating in secretive games of tag between children and adults as they move through the galleries. The findings from this project have also attracted international attention and a presentation of ideas and accompanying conference paper and proposed book chapter (A

more playful museum: life beyond the artefacts) featured in the 6th World Play Day Conference in Istanbul (May, 2015).

The experimental approach carried out at the Museum has been further developed and refined with an inner-city adventure playground (Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014) and introduced to playworkers through 'Thinking about Play', a continuous professional development programme (Lester, 2014c). The implications from this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

- **Lester, S.** and Russell, W. (2014c) 'Turning the world upside down: playing as the deliberate creation of uncertainty'. *Children*, 1(2): 241-260.

This peer-reviewed article is a recent manifestation of the ways in which emergent thinking is influencing writing. It includes some of the examples that are re-introduced into this discussion and employs these to challenge the instrumental relationship between playing, risk and health and their material-discursive effects. It introduces conceptual tools of relationality, materiality and performativity to reconfigure playing as an emergent co-production of entangled bodies, affects, objects, space and histories in ways that make life better for the time of playing. Such moments produce health-affirming potential as an intra-dependent phenomenon rather than an individual achievement. Finally, it considers implications for health promotion and health enabling environments. The article is due to be re-published in U. Navidi (ed.) (2016) *The Role of Play in Children's Health and Development*, Basel: MDPI Books.

- **Lester, S.** (2016a) Playwork and the co-creation of play spaces: the rhythms and refrains of a play environment. In F. Brown and B. Hughes (eds.) *Aspects of Playwork*. Latham, Maryland: University Press of America.

This is a chapter in a forthcoming edited collection of playwork concepts/practices due for publication in 2016. The chapter counters some of the reductionist approaches to the creation of adult-designed play environments by proposing spaces are always produced through the on-going intra-actions between bodies, materials, symbols, memories, ideas and so on (Barad, 2007). It offers, albeit briefly, a perspective on the process of life itself as continuous movement and change; a 'playspace' may be distinguishable as a co-constituted formation of moving bodies and things with a certain style of overlapping rhythms, tempos, and refrains. Such movements produce a degree of temporary stability that is generative of new possibilities; 'lines of thinking, feeling and perceiving that may allow one to wander beyond the familiar' (McCormack, 2013, p. 8). Playwork is thus concerned with discerning patterns of relationships and the possibilities they contain for the emergence of playing. It is a pragmatic ethical stance that takes account of the moment by moment flows of movements and encounters, their material-discursive effects, inclusions and exclusions, and acts responsively to maintain a prevailing playful atmosphere.

A wider context

These publications also need to be set in a wider context of other materials that are not included in the selection in support of this thesis but have undoubtedly contributed to shaping ideas and expressions. Some of these are briefly introduced at this stage to connect the selected writings and also signpost some of the significant themes that have emerged

from this process. In line with Deleuze and Guattari (1988), the invitation is to plug-in to what appeals rather than follow a set of prescribed readings.

- **Lester, S.** and Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: NCB. Chapter 3 'The importance of play in children's lives', pp. 36-126.

This extract from a much larger body of work is one of the first attempts to move to an interdisciplinary perspective on playing. It draws on research from neuroscience, psychology, biology and the broad field of the social studies of childhood to present an integrated approach to the nature and value of children's play and the possible relationship with developmental systems. This publication was influential in shaping the New Labour Government's development of the English Play Strategy (DCSF, 2008), and has subsequently informed national play policies in Wales and Scotland. Central to this chapter is an attempt to move beyond the traditional relationship between developmental psychology and play, as expressed in the dominant play and learning discourse, and to think differently about the idea of development itself. It is notable for introducing an alternative perspective in which development is presented as 'a heterogeneous and complex mix of interacting entities and influences that produces the life cycle of an organism' (Oyama, 2000, p. 1). The chapter introduces concept of a mind that is always embodied and embedded in the world in a dynamic coupling process (Thompson and Varela, 2001). The significance of this research still permeates much of the justification for paying attention to children's play and many play and playwork publications espouse the relationship between play and resilience. But with distance there are many things in this chapter that warrant a different focus as will be evident in this account. What is noteworthy here are the ways in which complex material

becomes reduced to meet the needs of research commissioners, most evident in the production of the English Play Strategy (DCSF, 2008) and the (mis)reading of research findings to support instrumental policy purpose. Ideas developed in this chapter are elaborated in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis.

- **Lester, S.** (2014a) 'Play as protest: clandestine moments of disturbance and hope'. In C. Burke and K. Jones (eds.) *Education, Childhood and Anarchism. Talking Colin Ward*. London: Routledge, pp. 198-209.

Arising from a conference presentation to celebrate the life of Colin Ward, a polymath and anarchist concerned with relationships between humans and their environment. The chapter argues that playful momentary expressions of desire and intensity of affect offer a form of hope that things can be different. They are fleeting acts of protest against the conditions of children's lives that maintain a sense of optimism both for the present and a 'wilful belief in acting out one's own capacity for the future' (Sutton-Smith, 2003). The chapter mobilises Ward's gentle anarchy to consider contemporary conditions in which childhood is a focus of both anxiety and regulation. As Burke and Jones (2014, p. xxiv) comment 'play contains within it micro-revolutionary and clandestine elements...fleeting pockets of anarchy [that] offer opportunities for adult-child relationships to be re-shaped on the interests of adults as well as children – a truly democratic possibility'. Ideas from this chapter are entangled with writings on children's rights and the everydayness of playful moments.

- **Lester, S.** (2015a) Posthuman nature: Life beyond the natural playground. In M. MacLean., W. Russell and E. Ryall (eds.) *Philosophical Perspectives on Play*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 53-67.

This chapter challenges the cliché of the natural playground and by doing so introduces a posthuman perspective on nature, childhood and play. As with other writings included in this overview, this work introduces further examples of the everyday ways in which play emerges from environmental conditions, notably Noren-Bjorn's (1982) account of two children idly tossing stones into a pool of water to be re-introduced later in this account. These are employed to work with ideas of entanglement and intra-activity (Barad, 2007). Following Deleuze and Guattari (1994) the chapter investigates the material-discursive effects of the nature-child equation and looks for ways out of the well-worn route that draws a categorical distinction between objective realism and relativist/constructivist approaches (Castree 2005; Braidotti 2013). In doing so it challenges the ontological schism of the existence of a separate nature and associated nature-culture dualism. In line with the general intention of this thesis the aim is not to dismiss concepts altogether but to think differently about the presumed relationship and what might this offer not only for reconfiguring childhood and play, but ultimately human/non-human relationships by provoking an ethics that is not human-centred but accountable to the material world that is never merely an external place 'but always the very substance of ourselves and others' (Alaimo 2010, p. 158). The arguments presented are extended into a wider discussion of childhood in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

- **Lester, S.** and Russell, W. (2013b) Utopian Visions of Childhood and Play. In A. Parker and D. Vinson (eds.) *Youth Sport, Physical Activity and Play: Policy, intervention and participation*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 40-52.

This chapter explores the role of play in English social policy and updates ideas first presented in '*Play for a Change*' (Lester and Russell, 2008). As with other recent publications,

it is an example of going beyond the playwork/play literature to consider broader ways in which play is understood and applied in policy-making. The experience of producing this account was also influential in shaping the approach to research into the Welsh Government (2010) Play Sufficiency Duty, see 'Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose (Lester and Russell, 2013a) and the recently published 'Securing a sufficiency of play opportunities' (Lester and Russell, 2014). The implications of this will be re-visited in chapter 7.

- **Lester, S.** and Russell, W. (2014a) Children's Right to Play. In E. Brooker, M. Blaise and S. Edwards (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*. London: Sage, pp. 294-305.

This chapter summarises the arguments for the significance of play in children's lives and presents the evidence for viewing play as fundamentally linked to children's rights in their entirety and as such should be safeguarded in all contexts. It extends ideas developed in the Working Paper '*Children's Right to Play: A Global Perspective on the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide*' (Lester and Russell, 2010), which in itself made a significant contribution to securing and informing UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31. The idea developed in this chapter and extended through the research into the Wales Play Sufficiency Duty (Lester and Russell, 2013a, 2014b) has started to develop discussion around what constitutes a 'good environment' for children, looking at the relationship between State governance, policy implementation and practice. A central feature of this piece is the exemplary account of 'children becoming trees', an observation that is re-introduced later in this account.

Work in progress

The focus for current writing and research is, in many ways, a return to practice roots by addressing issues of playwork. It is partly driven by the disproportionate budget reductions to playwork services both during and since the period of the Coalition Government and the need for playwork to once again justify the value of the service it provides for children.

- **Lester, S. (2016c)** *The value of playwork provision in Manchester*. Manchester: Playwork North West. A research report that employs a case study approach to explore the value of playwork provision for children, their families and the wider community. Commissioned by a city-wide Housing Association, the study is intended to inform the development of the Manchester Youth and Play Trust and makes a series of recommendations to guide the strategic plan for this embryonic organisation.
- **Lester, S. (2016b)** Children's right to play: from the margins to the middle. In M. Ruck, M. Peterson-Badali and M. Freeman (2016) *Handbook on Children's Rights: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Taylor and Francis. This chapter provides an update on thinking about the issue of children's rights, with particular reference to UNCRC General Comment 17, issued in support of Article 31 and children's right to play. It builds on previous publications (Lester and Russell, 2010; Lester, 2013) to incorporate ideas developed in this thesis and the issue of rights in general, and more specifically how posthuman philosophy offers a way out of sterile binaries.
- **Lester, S. (2017)** *Professional practice in supporting children's right to play* (provisional title). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. The overall intention of this

book is to address the ways in which professional practitioners take account of and act responsibly with moments of children's play and playfulness. While it is addressed to roles which have specific responsibility for supporting children's play (notably playwork and early year's practitioners) it is also relevant for other adult roles that directly influence the conditions under which playfulness thrives (for example, schools, museums, art institutions). As such, it is less concerned with the 'why' of playing and the attribution of meaning to individual players but 'how' does playing emerge and what are the conditions which give rise to this form of behaviour. Given the indeterminate nature of playing, there is no blueprint for this; each moment of playing is a singular example crafted from the prevailing circumstances of everyday life. Rather than fix and explain this relational messiness by drawing on pre-established concepts that prise things apart, practice is concerned with accounting for the ways in which bodies, materials and so on produce distinctive formations marked by their own rhythms and atmosphere. Accounting in this sense implies being attentive to the particularities of movements and sensations of playful moments and to experiment with methods that can discern these qualities rather than over-code them with ideas from outside the example. This form of practice accountability also determines adult response-ability i.e. the ability to develop a repertoire of practices that maintain favourable conditions in which play and life can flourish.

- Russell, W., Lester, S. and Smith, H. (eds.) (2017) *Practice-based research in children's play*. Bristol: Policy Press. This edited collection features the findings from 12 small-scale research projects carried out by experienced practitioners in the play and playwork sector in the UK and USA, most of whom were also

students and staff on the University of Gloucestershire's Postgraduate 'Play and Playwork' and 'Professional Studies in Children's Play' programmes. While there is growing interest in play scholarship and in adults' role in supporting children's play there is little published research into practice beyond conceptual studies, evaluations and 'how-to' functional text books. This collection explores a range of practice contexts and issues and diverse epistemological and methodological approaches. The editors have produced an opening and closing chapter that offers the foundations for a diffractive onto-ethico-epistemology, drawing on many of the ideas presented in this thesis

Summary

Life does not follow a given script in a prefigured world but emerges in a turbulence of forces and flows of energy that extend well beyond human boundaries. It carries on through a process of negotiation and intra-action always in dynamic tension in a field of immanent possibilities, an awkward, restless and pregnant vitality (Bonta, 2005). As with children marvelling at pink mermaids these familiar, tentative, uncertain and explorative moments, open out the unexpected when given more attention:

...we discover new ways of feeling, moving and thinking, however modest these may be, unsettling familiar and expected cultural resonances and the work of politics. Encounters like this may happen in increasingly diverse and complex ways across multiple spaces and in the ways in which we engage them. Even in familiarity and habitual rhythmic engagement, the meaning, our relationship

with things, can change in register; slight adjustments of feeling over time becoming more significant (Crouch, 2010, p. 5).

The idea of writing in this mode is exciting but one wonders how far it can go within a straightjacket of 'research' and the demands of form and structure. In line with the conditions for this PhD, this chapter has introduced a number of publications that contribute to this account. But the very idea that these are indicative of some greater whole or a coherent collection of materials that show steady accumulation and strengthening of a particular and singular line of enquiry falls short. However, these writings compose lines of 'latitude and longitude':

In other words, the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power of degree of potential (latitude) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 287).

This thesis is an intensive restless questioning 'what if' and an extensive mapping of other ways of approaching the conceptual, methodological and practical issues associated with representing children's play by asking 'what more'? It acknowledges that the enlightenment/humanist project of liberating individuals has largely failed in its task by rooting people to a certain place and position and producing a highly normative account of what it is to be alive. What might seem like a straightforward account of something apparently trivial and mundane may at a closer glance be far from insignificant. Lines of latitude begin to widen the focus of attention to issues of contemporary adult-child relationships and the economic, social and political context under which subjects are currently positioned in minority world accounts. The onto-epistemological foundations of a

more than human/posthuman world allow for the possibility to move beyond dualistic identity formation (adult/child, work/play, structure/agency and so on) to appreciate how such identifications operate, to problematize the production of such representations and seek the formation of new assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

The following chapter will map the conceptual and theoretical terrain to be explored, highlighting the significant entangled features in this landscape which have informed the journey to this point to present what a recent anonymous peer reviewer described as ‘an original and thought-provoking perspective on play and childhood’. It will offer an opening conceptual foundation that works with the emergence of nonsense rather than close it down by explaining and fixing the event into adult explanations and accountability. As the discussion progresses more and more of these concepts will be added to the mix.

Chapter 3 – Mapping the terrain

Children never stop talking about what they are doing or trying to do: exploring milieus, by means of dynamic trajectories, and drawing up maps of them. The maps of these trajectories are essential to psychic activity (Deleuze, 1997, p. 61).

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, presenting an ordered causal account or tracing of the development of ideas showing how things got from a starting point to here is resisted. This stage follows a different route by introducing some of the accompanying conceptual allies drawn from Deleuze and extending into disparate disciplinary fields. The limitations of this format prevent a detailed reading and application of these intensive and extensive ideas and invariably produce considerable challenges, questions, and provoke many objections. This is not an in-depth explanation or justification of Deleuzian philosophy; the intention is to see how concepts might work to reveal a different reading of playing. The playground of Deleuzian ideas (Lester, 2013a) is expansive and not fixed; Deleuze is renowned for changing terms across diverse writings and collaborations and few of the concepts have stable names. As DeLanda (2002, p. 157) explains this is not simply to create an impression of difference but also to develop a series of different theories on the same subject, 'theories which are slightly displaced relative to one another but retain enough overlaps that they can be meshed together as a heterogeneous assemblage'. To this end, some of the ways in which Deleuze's concepts help to make sense of a complex and emergent world will be introduced; it is a philosophy of difference to 'rethink the earth' (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p. *viii*).

A brief cautionary note

It may already be evident that the lines of enquiry pursued in this account are different from those normally encountered in writings about play. And while reiterating Thrift's (2008) cautionary note about pinning all one's hopes on a certain strand of philosophy, there is an endeavour to explore how Deleuzian concepts may create something new in terms of play. In doing so, it acknowledges the numerous critiques of Deleuzian philosophy, for example, Žižek's (2004) commentary suggests Deleuze's concept of difference sits within a Hegelian framework rather than overcoming it. Equally, Hallward (2006) offers a detailed critical examination of Deleuzian philosophy, suggesting Deleuze's insistence on equating being as impersonal and unlimited creative energy leaves little room for subjectivity, processes of historical and social transformation and political conflict. Set against these writers are a multitude of Deleuzian supporters (see, for example, Braidotti, 2013; Colebrook, 2010; Bonta and Protevi, 2004; DeLanda, 2002; Patton, 2000). This is not the place to debate the relative merits of both sides and I would at this point re-invoke Deleuze (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 1) who states that 'Every time someone puts an objection to me, I want to say 'OK, OK, let's go on to something else. Objections have never contributed anything'. This is not an act of arrogance or indifference but a way of getting out of turning in circles, to invent one's own questions rather than have others create them for you.

The previous chapter posed the generative question 'what more can be said about play and how might we say it' and the writings of Deleuze open a route that goes beyond either/or accounts of play that draw on oppositions, resemblances, identify and associated classificatory systems. Deleuze's critique of Hegelian dialectics, which may be crudely summarised as a binary logic in which 'one plus one equals two and two ends up reducing to

one' (Malabou, 1996, p. 115) is central to this thesis. Yet it often appears that Deleuze creates concepts that follow such logic. Thus, as will be developed in what follows, Deleuze distinguishes between virtual and actual, molar and molecular lines, arborescent and rhizomatic thought and other apparent dualisms and oppositions. But rather than either/or relationships, Deleuze presents these as quasi-dualistic or both-sided; i.e., there is a reciprocal determination between these terms and they may be seen as alternate vectors on a continuum rather than oppositions.

What is of vital importance to this study is Deleuze's (and Guattari's) move to think the 'new' in order to create conceptual transformations that reconfigure the coordinates of existing frameworks of theory and practice. Another brief example is introduced here to illustrate this point. It is drawn from a resource for playwork trainers (Lester and Russell, 2004) that presents the following scenario:

A child (aged 9) has some friends staying overnight for a 'sleep-over'. When it comes to bedtime, a parent helps settle the children down into beds and sleeping bags before saying 'goodnight', turning-off the bedroom light and going downstairs.

When asked to identify what happened next, course participants, often drawing on their own experiences, will share examples that illustrate multiple bouts of play emerging in an opportunistic, indeterminate and singular manner. Following a certain strand of playwork thinking, these moments of playing can be classified according to certain types of play (Hughes, 2012) and meanings attached to these forms. It employs the term 'is' to fullest effect – this *is* play, it *is* this type of play, it *is* children learning to ..., play is revealed and valued through what is already known. This process is significant and has important merits in

helping practitioners to make sense of complex behaviours. But they carry limitations, as Law (2004, p. 4) acknowledges, they are ‘badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular’ which are qualities of playing. Deleuze overcomes the determination of identity through ‘is’ and associated binaries by substituting the conjunction **‘and’**:

The AND is not even a specific relation or conjunction, it is that which subtends all relations, the path of all relations, which makes relations shoot outside their terms and outside the set of their terms... Relations might still establish themselves between these terms, or between two sets, from one to another, but the AND gives relations another direction and puts to flight terms and sets. Thinking with AND instead of thinking IS...empiricism has never had another secret. Try it, it is quite an extraordinary thought and yet it is life (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 57).

The intention here is to go elsewhere, to open up a different line of enquiry to see what this might also offer to practice. It is less concerned with the validity and applicability of existing concepts and drawn towards *how* playing might emerge from the prevailing conditions. As such, interest lies with the ways in which moments of playing come about, or actualised, from a virtual field of potential (e.g. a bedroom with lighting *and* bodies *and* materials *and* imaginations *and* movements *and*...).

As the discussion progresses, it will at times necessarily present an overview of ‘is’ positions, both in terms of play and the wider production of childhood. There are dangers in this as noted later in the account, particularly by reducing complex ideas to superficial generalisations that belie the subtlety, heterogeneity and power of these concepts. The

intention is to offer sufficient detail to enable a move to get out of this orthodoxy but this is always within the context of AND/AND rather than oppositional.

Creating concepts

The research questions presented in the previous chapter are expressions of a desire to do justice to the process of playing and the ways in which this produces moments when the world becomes a little more enchanted. It refutes teleological ideas of 'growing up' but, in line with the opening observation of children's wondering worlds, continually invites the question 'What if...?' to disturb conventional concepts, reconfigure and rearrange ideas to see what else might be revealed. It is a philosophical quest that embraces Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) avowal that philosophy is the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts that are always new; that is, they do not pre-exist the act of creation. It would imply that concepts which are a legacy should not be fully trusted. This is not to propose a disenchanting mood of anti-intellectualism and the turn towards and undue emphasis given to common-sense and its accompanying clichés that diminish the status of concepts and theory (Braidotti, 2013). Rather philosophy is a power to think differently by creating problems (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994) not merely as artful deconstruction but to increase the power to act and change the world in order to enhance life. It is not a coincidence that such a philosophy has great attraction for someone who has spent a lifetime at play (Lester, 2013a). Deleuzian philosophy also engages with artistic thought and the intensive plane of composition that actualises the virtual (the creative process that produces artefacts) and scientific thought that investigates the actual 'plane of reference' by calculating processes that generate laws and propositions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). There will be encounters with scientific and artistic thought at various stages through the remainder of this discussion.

This is a trans-disciplinary movement, not in the sense of simply borrowing from other disciplines to justify and add authority but to extract from them for itself 'which it then artfully goes about making its own' (Massumi, 2010, p. 4). By this means philosophy recrafts and reconfigures the potential of artistic and scientific concepts to lead philosophy into novel areas and directions that would not happen if it remained enclosed within the field of philosophy; 'It does this in the interests of passing the potential forward, to other lives, for other projects' (Massumi, *ibid*). It is a mode of thinking that can forge linkages between different systems of knowledge formation (Dewsbury, 2011) and rearticulates the manner in which the world is perceived, understood and lived in. Deleuze's philosophy consistently displays and invites acts of creation, not to explain, interpret or justify, but to see how they may assemble to reconfigure ways of looking at the world, to question 'How might one live' (May, 2005b).

What is presented here is an exploration of the possibilities of human and non-human relations and a way of engaging differently with life. From Deleuze's philosophical foundations, which in turn can be mapped through Nietzsche, Bergson and Spinoza, further lines of movement extend into contemporary physical and biological sciences, complexity studies and non-anthropomorphic accounts of life. It will engage with, for example, (post)human geography (McCormack, 2013; Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2008; Massey, 2005), critical Early Years writings (Taylor, 2013; Lenz-Taguchi, 2011; Olsson, 2009; Mozere, 2006, 2007; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), the growing field of Children's Geographies (Jones, 2008; Horton and Kraftl, 2006a), what might be loosely termed 'political and cultural studies' (Braidotti, 2013; Manning, 2013; Alaimo, 2011; Ingold, 2011a; Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2008; Latour, 2005; Massumi, 2002), childhood studies (Lee, 2005; Prout, 2005)

and natural and physical sciences (Damasio, 2010; Barad, 2007; Jablonka and Lamb, 2005; Rose, 2005; Thompson and Varela, 2001). But it is not an attempt at synthesis, consilience, or the development of a grand unifying theory about playing. The multiple concepts of play have irregular contours that do not correspond to each other; they are not jigsaw pieces that neatly interlock.

Philosophy must always be in a state of digression; philosophical concepts are creative unlike the representations and propositions of science. It is an exploration of possibility, 'if we limit thought to simple acts of representation and cognition...then we impose all sorts of dogmas and rules upon thinking (Deleuze, 1994, p. 135). It is here that clichés are created. It addresses the real (empirical), a form of ontology that precedes the creation of an epistemology (as opposed to fitting experience into pre-existing modes of thought), what Barad (2007) refers to as 'onto-epistemology'. Concepts are centres of vibrations, 'each in itself and every one in relation to all the others' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 23); they resonate with each other rather than cohere. As creative forces they can be used to build a courthouse of reason or thrown through a window (Massumi, 1988); it is the latter that playfully appeals in looking at the forces and actions that shape contemporary understandings and applications of playing.

Deleuzian ontology

Deleuze's ontology, or more accurately ontologies (Hiller and Abrahams, 2013), are complex and dynamic but it is possible to discern the continuous pursuit of a univocal philosophy (Deleuze, 1994), i.e. a position that proposes that differences of matter are brought about and emerge in dynamic, indeterminate and complex ways without any necessary

foundational differences of being (Colebrook, 2010). Both what happens and what might virtually happen (an endless plane of possibilities) are real; 'the virtual is a univocal plane of past, present and future, the totality of all that is, was and will be' (Colebrook, 2002, p. 1). At the risk of reducing this to over-simplified expressions, Deleuze discerns three different but always entangled and dynamic realms of reality: the actual, the process of actualisation (or the 'intensive') and the virtual (or the 'plane of immanence'). The actual is comprised of stratified human and non-human entities; it appears as a steady state that is often reinforced through classificatory practices. Stratified systems mask the processes that give rise to them, i.e. the 'virtual multiplicities' that are ever-present in a system and as such may be presented as 'actual' in themselves. Thus, for the most part the focus for children's play is the actual product of playing rather than the processes that bring this form of behaviour to life. The exemplary account of producing worlds made of poo becomes solidified and broken apart to classify and interpret individual behaviour at the expense of the processes (bodies, materials, movements and affects) that produce this moment of becoming different. Deleuze is concerned not with the fixed essence of the real but with the processes that bring them into being, how they might change over time to become different and what they might do to affect and be affected by other beings. It is important to retain the idea that actualities are effected from potentiality rather than the other way around where the actual is the presumed form that creates difference (Colebrook, 2005). On the plane of immanence there are only complex networks of forces, 'relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules, and particles of all kinds' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 23-4).

Deleuze's ontological stance announces the role of philosophy is to make the virtual (or the plane of immanence) intelligible. This cannot be performed by a set of propositions that refer to the virtual, but must construct concepts that are similar in process to it (DeLanda, 2002). At this stage, there is a movement that suggests playing itself may be such an isomorphic process by refuting common-sense in favour of nonsense, diffraction rather than reflection. Deleuze (2001) proposes that pure immanence and life will suppose one another unconditionally. This is not some abstract, mystical notion of life but an impersonal life that endures through the real singularity of specific events and at the same time also contains an ever-present virtuality. Life is freed from impositions of internal/external, subject/object relations and formations to become subjectless and present in all things. Every phase of being is constituted by Deleuze's two co-mingling dimensions of process: the pre-individual or virtual (the force of life that exceeds this life but cannot be experienced without it) and individuation (the actualisation of singular events).

And so the question is not what does life mean, but how does a particular moment of life, what might be termed 'reality', come about; how is this actuality produced from a limitless field of virtuality and how might it be produced differently? For Deleuze, drawing particularly on concepts from Simondon (1992), the actual is produced through processes of individuation or intensive morphogenetic processes that move a state of virtuality (plane of immanence) across a threshold to actuality. Thus, as De Landa (2002) explains, the process of embryogenesis is not an unfolding of pre-determined and sequential stages of growth but a complex and dynamic process of self-organisation. In very simple terms, the neuronal structure of a brain is a virtual field, a plane of immanence in which each individual neuron (among the billions present) has a potential that becomes actualised 'through significant

morphogenetic movements: the augmentation of free surfaces, stretching of cellular layers, invagination by folding, regional displacement of groups' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 214). In this sense, individuation refers to a constellation of processes that collude to foreground a singularity, or one measure of how the body expresses (Manning, 2013). The point of interest is not what does this signify, but how does this singular taking form happen from the complex collusions of organic and inorganic material moving at different rates? Manning's (2013) reading of Simondon proposes that Individuation occurs through dephasing, a non-linear and discontinuous process that unfolds through multiple phases; there is not a single moment of dephasing but it can be seen as the instance when the complex relations and flows cohere as a 'remarkable point' (Manning, 2013, p. 18). In creating worlds of poo, the multiple phases of movements, sensations, materials, ideas, imaginations, and expressions collude around the point of 'what if' – a point that both produces an individual or singular reality and contains within it the prospect of transformation:

Dephasings ... are at once how force takes form and how the rift in the continuity of an on-going process is felt...they generate a turning point that resolves momentarily into this or that singular event or discrete occasion of experience (Manning, 2013, p. 18).

The playful expressions of disgust between the children provokes further possibilities for movement, i.e. a shift in how an occasion continues to become by breaking apart the given order of things. The proposition is that playing is a process of dephasing, a form of collusion that instigates a remarkable point marked by a particular style that always contains within it the potential for becoming different (this will be further elaborated as the discussion

continues). Lester (2012b, p. 19) provides an exemplary illustration by drawing on a child's short story related by Loizou *et al* (2011, p. 72):

Once upon a time, there was a clown who did tricks and an elephant ran over the clown and then the clown ran over the elephant.

This is a minor example of seeing and representing the world differently through the inversion of the apparently natural state of things and conjuring up a picture of marvellous possibilities by a simple irrational connection. Rather than a stratified stable system in which behaviour is constrained to reproduction and where any slight disturbance is quickly suppressed, playing can actualise different virtual realms; it amplifies diversity and possibilities through positive and discrete iterations, phasings and dephasings, that exhibit creative adaptation.

From this point of view, virtuality is an open totality from which specific forms can be actualised. Life and the process of life going on is not a process of individual organisms striving for survival but is the ever-present and ongoing potential for change and becoming which passes through bodies and things. This can be further illustrated by drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) consideration of chess pieces and the counters used in the game of Go. In chess, the identity and the associated possibility for movement of each piece is pre-configured and seen as intrinsic to the character of the piece. But in the game of Go, the pieces contain no intrinsic features; their identity emerges through the relations that pieces enter (*assemblage*). Thus, over the course of a game, the identity of the counters changes, they are perpetually becoming, composed of movement and rest across the entire board. Deleuze and Guattari (1988), borrowing from Leibniz (see Deleuze, 1993), suggest each counter has the capacity to affect and be affected in a space of compossibility or

heterogeneous formations. A Go counter, as indeed a stable body, is extremely short-lived; it cannot be seen as something that holds together across space and time

Deleuze's account of individuation within his wider philosophy of difference overcomes the orthodoxy of re-presenting something as just another part of a category or original (Stagoli, 2005). It challenges dominant accounts that isolate bodies and things, roughly cutting life from 'a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 51). Instead attention turns towards process and the unique set of circumstances which bring about singular events; the focus falls on one's experience of this thing, here and now. These foundations and the possibilities they present for thinking differently about the state of childhood and play are explored in more detail in the next sections. But at this stage it is important to reinforce the importance of entangled processes of individuation and differentiation as they are central to what follows. Attention to intensive processes that bring about the actual refutes the possibility of a discrete individual identity and the existence of a stable, actual model of reality as the ground of life. For Deleuze (1994, p. 274):

Qualities, extensities, forms and matters, species and parts are not primary; they are imprisoned in individuals as though in a crystal. Moreover, the entire world may be read, as though in a crystal ball, in the moving depth of individuating differences or differences in intensity.

The next section further develops some framing concepts that arise from this opening ontological position and these will reappear throughout the remaining discussion. It adopts a materialist perspective that refrains from the prioritization of epistemology over ontology (Simonsen, 2012) by decentring the human subject and relocating humans and non-humans

as created through relational effects of generative forces (to be revisited later under the heading of *desire*). The reader might find that there are repetitions, overlaps and concepts that fold into themselves. This is somewhat inevitable given the extent of Deleuze's writings but it should be noted, true to Deleuze, that while it may appear to repeat, it is intended to be repetition with difference.

Mapping and assemblages

The possibilities of mapping appear and re-appear throughout this account which is a measure of the significance of this concept. A map can be seen as an open landscape in which movements are possible in all directions, fostering connections between fields and the removal of impediments that delimit the formation of ideas; 'the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions, it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 13). Mapping is rhizomatic, probably the most cited concept from Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative work, and performs as a counter to arborescent thought which fixes everything to a root in hierarchical formations: branch, leaf, trunk, are multiples of tree, many parts of one. A rhizome has the potential to connect any point with any other and cross heterogeneous domains and modes of expression; there are no positions in a rhizome that fix multiples to a central point of origin, only lines of movement (see later). As such, rhizomatics is concerned with connection, marked by the conjunction and/and rather than either/or (Lester, 2013a). A multiplicity 'has neither subject or object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions which cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 9). A rhizome is flat or immanent, neither a copy or model nor a fragment of a higher totality but is a purely unique event (Tampio, 2009). It may be broken apart but it will start up again on

one of its old lines or start a new line. A rhizome will contain segmentary lines, following self-organising principles, that seek to order, stratify, territorialise but also lines of deterritorialisation or rupture that lead off into new areas, what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) famously refer to as 'lines of flight'. Mapping is a process of paying critical attention to the intensive flows that bring about the actual. It is lively, performative, participatory, ethical and political (Crampton, 2009). As with all Deleuzian concepts, it is entangled with notions of hybridity, assemblages, intra-activity, desire, bodies without organs, and other concepts that will appear at various points in the discussion in order to replace teleological accounts of life and development and associated fixed beginnings, terminal end-points and clearly determinable trajectories.

Map production and reading is much more than a cognitive capacity; it is an embodied way of coping with and navigating through uncertain and complex terrains (Laurier and Brown, 2008). Mapping is nomadic, it ranges across territories; yet so much research into children's play produces tracings, applying 'scientific' methods to establish cause-effect relationships and certain outcomes. There is a significant distinction between making a map and a tracing: a map is the privilege of sensing and movement, while a tracing simply outlines a route between two points and by doing so seeks to fix everything in relation to these (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). A tracing may be seen as a rigid line that regulates and orders bodies, materials, spaces and relationships through 'either-or logic of value-laden binary oppositions' (Tarulli and Scott-Myhre, 2006, p. 190). Drawing a map rather than a tracing focusses attention to broader and often imperceptible forces that flow across the landscape by locating the excesses, reverberations, and perturbations that escape order and rationality. Concepts can roam and mingle freely, connect, and disconnect to open up the

possibility for nomadic movement away from order. It draws on a different set of trans-disciplinary navigational tools each of which can be bent towards 'opening the event to more, more; more action, more imagination, more light, more fun, even' (Thrift, 2008, p. 20). It brings focus to ways in which organisms and things intensively co-exist and co-create; everything does something and nothing can be delineated as separate and apart from everything else (Barad, 2007). It inevitably opposes an anthropocentric account of life; everything (matter and meaning, object and subject, nature and culture) are mutually entangled. This leads to another central concept, already intimated in examples to date in which worlds of poo and magical strawberry fairies are articulated in assemblages, a formation in which organisms use their capabilities and capacities to form extensive connections with other bodies and materials (Dewsbury, 2011; Bonta and Protevi, 2004). As Dewsbury (2011, p. 149) comments:

Less epochal, more affirming an alternative, assemblage thinking promises to be an antidote to [the] foreclosure of other questions, issues, interventions and politics through understanding the make-up and organisation of the social in more inventive and experimental ways.

Assemblages are formed through acts of deterritorialisation or the intensive ways in which new connections are formed with other assemblages (what if?). Deterritorialisation marks a movement or escape from a given territory (whether it be a social, linguistic, conceptual or affective). This contrasts with the process of reterritorialisation which refers to the ways in which movements of deterritorialisation coalesce to form a new system of relations or bring about changes in the previous assemblage. The two processes, as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) consistently emphasise, are not separate from each other: deterritorialisation is

always present within a system and 'in turn inseparable from correlative reterritorializations' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 509). It is never an escape from or return to the old territory. What happens is indeterminate and often deterritorialisation is subject to forces of reterritorialisation that obstruct and suppress further movement and a new set of transcendent laws are applied (Bonta and Protevi, 2004). In the exemplary account of 'strawberry mermaids', the attendant adult might say to the two children 'If you can't share your sweets nicely I will take them off you', or children making worlds from poo are admonished by an adult and told to 'go and wash your hands immediately' or even more severely, as a recent workshop with education professionals illustrates, be seen as a 'safeguarding issue'. But there are always opportunities for further acts of deterritorialisation within the system. At other times there may be more positive and affirmative movements where lines of deterritorialisation connect with others' movements in mutually supportive ways and escape capture. As this account develops, acts of deterritorialisation will be presented as important ethico-political manoeuvres and of primary consideration as ways in which bodies collectively increase their power to act, to 'create new becomings and joyous affects' (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p. 55). This will be revisited in more detail in the section on ethics in chapter 6.

Summary

This brief chapter has introduced some of the key conceptual tools to be adopted in thinking differently about play and the wider constructions of childhood, adulthood and space, and indeed life itself. Following Deleuze, concepts are intensive and creative; they bring forth new possibilities for thinking/acting and the formation of new connections.

This ontological position is mobile and complex and it is impossible to do justice to Deleuze's volume of work on the matter. The intention at this stage is not to define specific terms or to endorse and develop an accurate interpretation; 'any philosophy is more than its manifest terms, more than its context' (Colebrook, 2005, p. 1). The virtual, intensive and actual, rhizomes, maps and assemblages, de-and reterritorialisations are productive forces from which a different sense of life emerges. They are foundations for more elaborate ways of thinking about playing. As the discussion moves on it will introduce further creative concepts from Deleuze (and Guattari) as a process of intensive and extensive nomadic wayfaring. It is a desire to develop a more intensive account of playing by joining forces, or assembling, with more extensive creative and experimental approaches to see what more might be done.

Chapter 4: Traces of development and childhood

Developmental psychology, more than any other variety of psychology, has a powerful impact on our everyday lives and ways of thinking about ourselves. Its effects are so great that they are often almost imperceptible, taken-for-granted features about our expectations of ourselves, others, parents, children and families (Burman, 2008, p. 2).

Born of nature, moulded by society, impelled by the promptings of genetic predispositions and guided by the precepts of transmitted culture, human beings are portrayed as creatures whose lives are expended in the fulfilment of capacities bestowed at the outset (Ingold, 2011a, p. 3).

Introduction

Having introduced some key concepts to be applied to the topic of children's play (or indeed playing in general), this chapter starts to set these to work by looking specifically at the production and reproduction of childhood. In so doing it critically considers the clichés and orthodox dogma of certain readings of biology, developmental and evolutionary psychology that present children as becomings, i.e., immature beings who must overcome this state to achieve maturity. In undertaking this task it is important to stress that what is presented here is an overview of dominant themes and there are numerous dangers in this generalisation. Childhood is not a uniform period; it is constructed, enacted, negotiated and resisted through everyday practices, relationships and habits that are idiosyncratic, contingent and contextual (Kraftl, 2006; Prout, 2005). There is considerable potential to reduce this to universal statements that belie this complexity. Equally, understandings of the

nature and value of children's play are constructed and situated in time and space. The work of Sutton-Smith (1997) has been influential in revealing the underpinning rhetorics of play studies which are reflective of a particular perspective on the nature and value of childhood, a point noted in the working paper produced to inform the development of the UNCRC General Comment on Article 31 and children's right to play (Lester and Russell, 2010). While wary of adopting an overly critical tone, Lester and Russell suggest that the philosophical, conceptual and practical foundations of childhood, and by association playing, rooted in modernity and a dominant neoliberal model of development are detrimental to both children and adults. Free-market capitalism, combined with developmental psychology are the foundations for discourses, institutions, laws, policies, scientific approaches and measurements, and associated practices that constitute a *dispositif* (Foucault, 1980) of childhood. The cliché of neoliberalism alone warrants a more expansive and critical investigation. Within the limits of this thesis it is taken to refer to a form of capitalist governance based on principles of liberalisation, privatisation, individualisation and deregulation. Harvey's (2005, p. 2) oft-cited definition of neoliberalism provides a useful introduction:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free market, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

The term neoliberalism is not a satisfactory one in adequately encapsulating the complex forces that drive the global form of capitalism (Hall, 2011) and in many cases becomes little

more than a radical-theoretical cliché (Peck, 2004). It has acquired a somewhat fuzzy and unquestioned position that elides too many things to warrant a single identity (Castree, 2006); 'it is reductive, sacrificing attention to internal complexities and geo-historical specificity' (Hall, 2011, p. 706). Neoliberalism may be understood as historically and locally specific, unevenly developed, with hybrid and contingent patterns of organisation brought about by dominant structures of economic and political regulatory systems (Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2010).

While neoliberalism is mobilised in multiple ways there may be commonalities across these diverse contexts without reducing important differences to 'fallacies of monolithism' (Peck, 2004, p. 403). The intention at this point is to consider some of the wide ranging social forces that have patterned childhood and by association understandings of play. It draws on a critical line of argument (see for example, Ansell, 2009; Marston, Jones and Woodward, 2005; Katz, 2004; Philo, 2000) which acknowledges that neoliberal politics and economic globalisation are transforming childhoods across the globe but that such forces are rarely apparent in small-scale participatory research findings (Ansell, 2009). In response, multi-scalar perspectives extend the increasing focus on just the spatialized particularities of childhood to also consider the bigger picture that encompasses many different sets of children in multiple locations and the 'macro-scale, structure-based geographies of childhood as shaped by broad brush political-economic and social-cultural transformations' (Philo, 2000, p. 253). For example, Ansell's (2009, p. 199) (de)scaling 'flat' ontology recognises that children and adults are nodes of material connections to places near and far, 'embodied, perceiving, acting, expressing, connected with other humans and with objects, both natural and social beings'. While Ansell adopts this ontology from Latour's (2005)

account of nodes and networks, the intention here is to follow a slightly different line of thought, i.e., that which is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of assemblages and rhizomes.

The neoliberal agenda is in part at least characterised by a constant and unrelenting desire to achieve hegemony over bodies and processes of life through the exercise of 'biopower', or what Foucault (2008) refers to as 'bio-politics,' to construct and consolidate a coalition of the willing (Amin and Thrift, 2013; Garrett, 2009). It marks the 'strategic coordination of the multiplicity of forces that make up life or living beings' (Anderson, 2012, p. 30) in the service of global capitalism. As modern forms of neoliberal government have progressed, so too have the means to capture, entrain and foster biological capabilities and behavioural tendencies (Foucault, 2008). States and other agents attempt to forge connections between forces of life processes (including reproduction, maturation and ageing), beliefs and values, and political legitimacy to secure a particular future (Lee and Motzkau, 2011). In perpetuating and strengthening its hold, bio-politics features two interrelated characteristics: firstly, by producing knowledge of the processes of circulation, exchange and transformation that make up life, increasingly recognised as a self-organising, affective process (Anderson, 2012). Such forms of knowledge are applied to powerfully over-code those elements which could be classified as potentially unruly (in this context, to include the period of childhood and play). Secondly, bio-politics makes strategic interventions based on the value of certain forms of life over others as the very existence of difference may be perceived to threaten order. Judgments are made about what constitutes normal development and what might fall outside of this regime. For Foucault, both the disciplines of the body and the bio-politics of the population coalesce to form 'liberal mentalities of rule'

(Miller and Rose, 2009, p. 203). Biopower operates partly pre-consciously on bodies and their desires to create a humanist subject: an individual that is presumed to be free and have agency but something to be kept under external and self-control for fear of sprouting deviancy or getting out of joint (Mozere, 2006). At the same time neoliberalism demands creative forces to drive forward innovation without which capitalism would stagnate and suffocate. Processes of de- and reterritorialisation are encouraged and managed to keep such forces in check:

So as soon as desire explodes – one could say, agency is empowered – there is a double movement for the axiomatic of capitalism. One aspect is the recuperation of that which has given life (or birth) to innovation, and the other is the recuperation of the excess of desire, channelling the overflow back into old or newly patterned identities, keeping them under control (Mozere, 2006, p. 112).

Thus, children's desires and impulses are valued for the contribution they make to their progress and this becomes an overriding feature in the design of State systems (institutions, policies, environmental design and so on). Bodies become the object of political strategies and practices (Foucault, 2008), to be controlled and regulated. Childhood is produced as a movement from disorder to order with associated material-discursive effects, as delineated in the next section.

Tracings of development⁵

The predominant mode in western thought is the assumption that human development follows a pre-existing design pattern; growth is presented as the phenotypic materialisation of this inner design (Jablonka and Lamb, 2005; Lewontin, 2000; Oyama, 2000). Models of development (largely from a minority world perspective but increasingly exported to the majority world) present the period of childhood as an unfolding of biological material accompanied by the acquisition of the appropriate social/cultural skills required to become a fully functioning and contributing member of society. Ideas and ideals of development presume and assume a maturation process achieved by progression through universal stages that mark a journey from simple to increasingly complex, to become 'an ideal-typical citizen-subject who is knowable, known, docile and productive' (Burman, 2008, p. 26). Childhood is caught up in the struggle for future economic well-being and as such is seen as an important site for intervention, one that has intensified and diversified in modern times (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Burman, 2008).

This framework or line of development and progress proposes scenarios in which the future is known and thus pre-exists the unfolding of life. Development becomes a process of 'achieving full potential'⁶ or becoming filled with what a child needs in order to become an adult. Life from this perspective begins with possibility but progresses towards 'terminal closure, a gradual filling up of capacity and closing down of possibilities' (Ingold, 2011a, p. 3) and may be simply represented:

⁵ This section draws on my own published and unpublished work developed over a period of time to present a critical examination of the production of 'childhood'. Given the scale of this task, some of the key points are developed here to establish some guiding principles for the next section.

⁶ This is a notable cliché of New Labour's *Every Child Matters* (DCSF, 2004) agenda for children and still pervasive in educational and social policy.

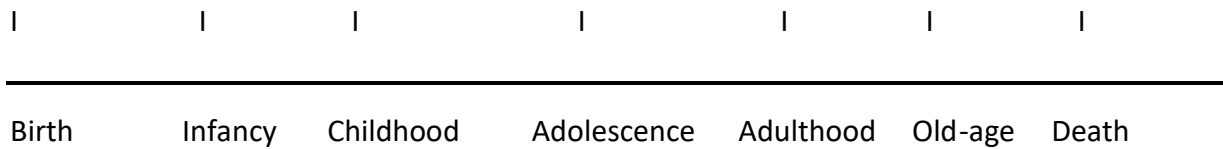


Figure 1: A line of development

A review of developmental psychology textbooks notes the almost universal application of a chronological timeline spanning birth to death, often specifying age limits to distinguish separate time and developmental periods (Burman, 2008). Such texts pay little regard or sensitivity to cultural and class variation in life expectancy. Conventional accounts portray human destiny unfolding on this line; in relation to childhood it is often typically represented in the following manner:

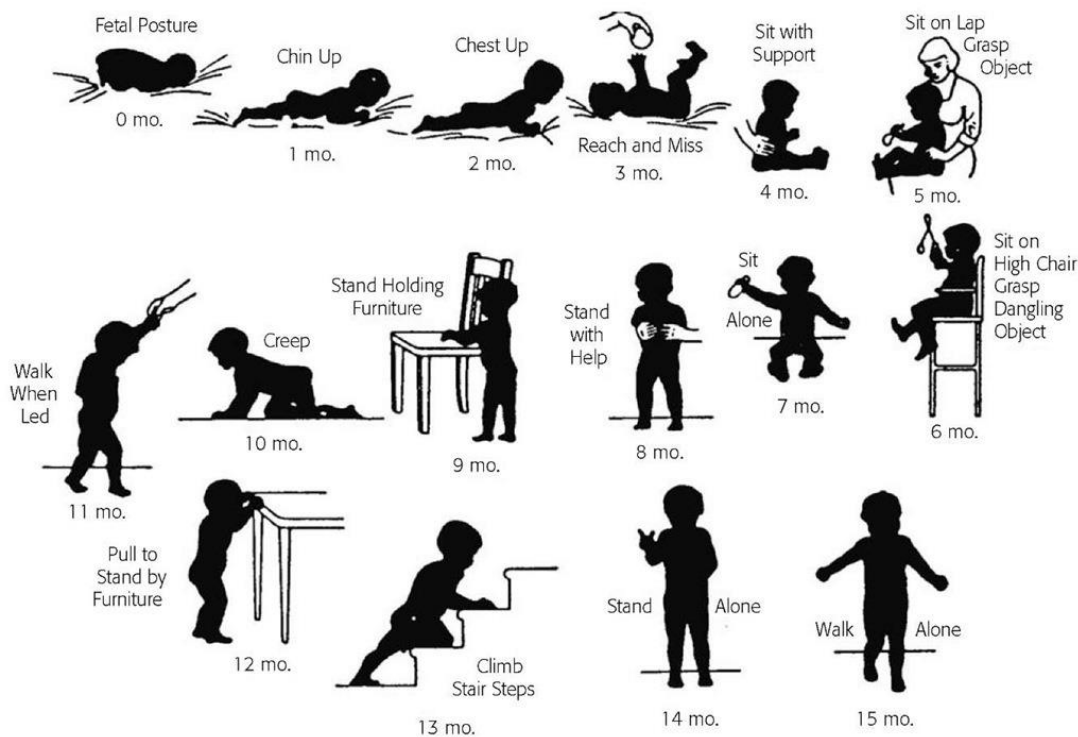


Figure 2: Growing Up ('what-when-how', nd)

Children are expected to follow these rigid and delimiting patterns of movement; as they pass along the line they leave things behind to grow up and out of childish ways. The segments of the child's progression of walking (see Figure 2) are 'dotted lines' in that they appear to join up and connect but life is fixed into temporal moments as an apparent 'succession of instants in which nothing moves or grows' (Ingold, 2007, p. 3). Bodies become gridlocked and fixed in temporal/spatial locations.

Life is rarely given its due attention, largely treated as an insignificant background against which the unoriginal output of patterns, codes, structures or systems variously defined as genetic, cultural, natural, social, and so on, play their privileged part and by doing so eradicate life from their accounts (Ingold, 2011a). The force and vitality of life, its exuberance and suppleness, becomes over-coded by the reactive demands of the social world (Dahlberg and Moss, 2009). Childhood becomes a State project designed to steer children to become the compliant, productive and consuming citizen-subjects of tomorrow (Lester and Russell, 2014c). The organisation of childhood assumes there is an individual natural child whose progress can be discovered and traced against the representations of normality that developmental psychology and biomedicine has created (Borngon, 2008; Burman, 2008). An increasingly sophisticated barrage of classificatory and regulative techniques, what Massumi (1988, p. 57) terms a 'rapid inflation of the normative', are used to measure progress. Universal norms are drawn from limited studies to generalise solutions for a range of social problems. It also assumes a particular social construction of 'the body', as a relatively stable thing that is pre-social and pre-discursive, ready to be over-coded by adult interventions:

Complex assemblages would constitute the possibility of state departments, government offices, and so forth, acting as centres, by enabling their deliberations to be relayed into a whole variety of micro-locales within which the conduct of the citizen could be problematized and acted upon by means of norms that calibrated personal normality in a way that was inextricably linked to its social consequences (Miller and Rose, 2008, p. 208).

Thus, in the context of this thesis, normativity is enacted by institutions of childhood (for example, family, school, nursery, health centres, playgrounds), a collective State apparatus and the conduit through which lives are governed and become self-governing. They are sites of technical practices, ‘seeking the best methods and procedures for delivering predetermined outcomes – a stable, defined and transmittable body of knowledge but also implicitly a particular subject’ (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p. 2). As Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 159) famously assert ‘you will be organised, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body, otherwise you are just deprived...you will be a subject nailed down as one’.

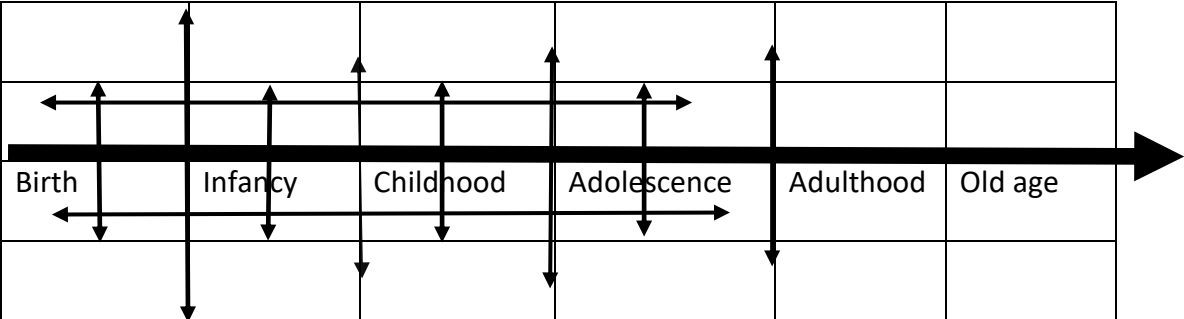


Figure 3: Segmented lines of development

Clearly defined institutional segments operate in all kinds of directions to appropriate life (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002). Each segment works in concert with adjacent territories to

regulate movement and collectively establish a 'plane of organisation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) that concerns 'both forms and their development, subjects and their formations' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 130). It builds an aggregate of systems that work together to construct an imaginary norm and organise the processes and relations that legitimise the power and associated status of that norm (Garland-Thompson, 2002). In the desire to avoid uncertainty and stress, uncritical, accepted wisdom and conventions assume a 'taken-for-granted sense that harbours given solutions that correspond to given problems and given answers that correspond to given questions' (Olsson, 2009, p. 82). Categorical distinctions between right/wrong, true/false, and safe/risky are carried out with good intentions and the best interests of children. In doing so the plane of organisation establishes a variety of sophisticated identities (schoolchild, son/daughter, healthy/unhealthy) switching from one to another as long as it doesn't endanger the axiomatic of capitalism which needs everyone's compliance towards its ends (Mozere, 2006).

The formation of rigid segmentary lines has discursive/material effects that bind adults and children into certain forms of relationships. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ways in which adulthood and childhood are constructed through dichotomy (Prout, 2008), each attributed with opposing values e.g. rational/irrational, competent/not yet competent, independent/dependent and so on. Children are positioned as 'other' than adult, separated as a distinct group in need of special and exclusive attention (Cloke and Jones, 2005).

Separation arises from difference, used in this context as a relative measure of sameness, i.e. different from the same. Childhood, or the not-adult, becomes a unitary and universal category. Distinctions of 'sameness but separate' (Dahlbeck, 2012; Lee, 2005) also imply that there is a teleological and transcendental trajectory between the inferior child and superior

adult; a binary categorisation that reinforces the crucial distinctions between these states. Adults, as the protectors of children, need to be scrutinised, made accountable and carefully regulated to avert any threat to children’s presumed innocence (Fenech and Sumison, 2007). It is enacted through a series of judgments and comparisons (policies and standards) and associated practices of symbolic and material rewards and sanctions that come to represent the worth and value of individuals and organizations (Lester and Russell, 2014c), constraining and restricting human possibilities.

Enclosures of development

It is here that another linear expression is introduced, (adapted from Ingold, 2011a), that extends the straight teleological line of development shown in Figure 1 through a tracing that circulates thus (Figure 4a):

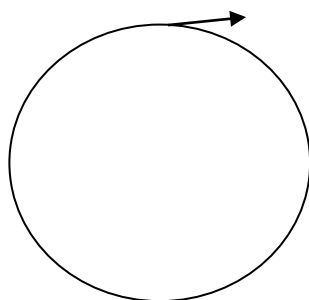


Fig.4a

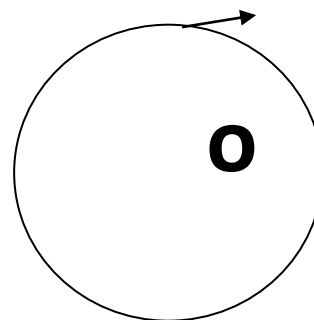


Fig. 4b

Figure 4: Life and mind turned in on themselves

This simple act of inversion illustrates the ways bodies are turned in on themselves and by doing so are taken out of the environment. Bodies become closed off; the organism is ‘in here’ and the environment ‘out there’ (Ingold, 2011a). Individuals are created as autonomous agents, atomised and insulated from an external world. A further act of inversion takes place (Figure 4b) by situating the mind as a self-enclosed organ within the

body; there is clearly an inside and an outside and indeed an inside the inside which assumes the role of command centre. As discussed later in this section, this enclosure follows a wider philosophical movement from the time of Plato onwards that distinguishes between nature and culture (Lester, 2015a). This is the traditional Cartesian dualism where the mind is made of matter that is distinctive from the body. It is an abysmal yet powerful separation that lingers today (Damasio, 1994) and the privilege afforded to such a movement has profound influence on minority world thought and practices; the mind is something to be cultivated, the body and its affects are to be controlled, policed, subdued and exercised (Paechter, 2006). Given that the mind has transcended nature, child development is presented as movement from an irrational, heteronomous and presumed natural state of neediness, unruliness and dependency to a rational and autonomous being. The closing of the circle masks any movement of the line: it appears static, folded back and closed off from the outside.

These acts of inversion have far reaching consequences not least through the individualisation and commodification of all aspects of life (Garrett, 2009); indeed, life itself has become the main capital of neoliberalism (Braidotti, 2013). The ways in which bodies and desires are subjugated to economic imperatives has become a dominant cliché of global capitalism. However, the disenchantment and totality that such regimes may present are not given and prefigured; there is always an excess, a way of overcoming the 'fascism' that is in our heads (Foucault, 1972). This may be one of the main features of play, as noted in Lester (2013a, 2014a) and the micro-revolutionary possibilities it contains for re-working oppressive power structures. The intention is not to overthrow or escape but merely to compose arrangements not fully constrained by a plane of organisation. Playing is a

disruption of constraining habits and practices, a process of deterritorialisation that reconfigures or differently orders ways of being in the world. This will be further developed later in this account through the consideration of desire and affect but for now the next section will explore how dominant understandings of the nature and value of child development are manifest and enacted in the common-sense attribution of value to children's play.

Throwing play into the mix

Childhood is marked as a distinctive period in human development; children are guided to progress along the pre-established line and as they do so the boundary between the inner self and the outside environment is strengthened. A significant marker of this separation is the attribution of this period as a time of playing (Wyness, 2006; Harker, 2005). This section briefly focuses on particular viewpoints of play as an expression of natural freedom and instrument for progressing children and the contribution these make to perpetuate the divide of children from adults (Lee, 2005). The ideas expressed at this stage are drawn from a range of my writings and readings about play, playwork and the broader field of childhood studies. As a preliminary to this it is useful to recall Sutton-Smith's (1997) opening to '*The Ambiguity of Play*' which notes that adults have all played and may well remember the feeling of playing, but when it comes to making theoretical statements there is descent into silliness. Children appear to know intuitively and pre-consciously what they are doing is play yet it continues to create conceptual problems for adults (Lester and Russell, 2010).

Academic interest in play crosses many disciplines including psychology, sociology, biology, cultural studies, geography, and anthropology, each seeking to develop and put forward

their own distinctive rendition of play and claiming validity against the claims of other disciplines (Sutton-Smith 1997). As with the division of labour, the academic world is highly compartmentalized with tightly bounded segments (Henricks, 2006); the academic structure in minority world countries still largely maintains narrow specialisms with little incentive or opportunity to cross disciplinary boundaries (Alanen, 2012; Prout, 2005). Disciplines are not neutral but establish boundaries that cut the world in particular ways and by doing so legitimise forms of knowledge, ring-fencing claims while leaving others outside of the boundary (Oyama, 2000). This is a highly political act; disciplines discipline their disciples (Barry, Born and Weszkalnys, 2008) to exclude un-disciplinary accounts. Yet singular disciplines are not homogenous states but 'multiplicities or heterogeneous unities marked by differences which are themselves enacted in multiple ways' (Barry, Born and Weszkalnys, p. 27). Each broad discipline tends to approach play largely as an afterthought with prominence given to the more serious and important aspects of disciplinary study. There is also a disciplinary disparity afforded to the study of children's play with dominance established by the fields of developmental psychology and biology (Sutton-Smith, 1997). In minority world accounts play is presented as a childish pastime, often evoking an adult sense of romanticism, nostalgia and sentimentality that is coupled with and reinforces childhood as a state of innocence, creativity, naturalness, and fanciful imagination (Aitken, 2001). Alongside this play is also valued for utilitarian purposes as a way of promoting learning and healthy child development (Lester and Russell, 2008, 2010). Thus, for example, biologists have proposed that young animal play fighting and chasing games contribute to adult repertoires for hunting and prey avoidance. Equally, scholars of human play forms suggest that playing enhances cognitive, social, and emotional skills that will have value later in life. A 'belief in progression or advancement through play is a cherished ideal that maintains

considerable status for understanding play and influences the ways in which adults seek to organise and structure children's play experiences' (Lester, 2009, p. 535). This deferred benefits approach (Burghardt, 2005) has assumed a dominant position in everyday articulations and practices to support play. Yet in reviewing the evidence Smith (2010) acknowledges that the numerous experimental attempts to connect play with learning have been largely flawed in design and implementation. Equally Sutton-Smith (1997) suggests that much of this belief is based on assumption and self-referential presupposition rather than empirical evidence. When subject to critical examination, ideas that play behaviour may replicate real world skills necessary for progress and survival are found largely unsubstantiated; for example, the design features and performance of animal chase and rough and tumble games may actually run counter to the necessary skills of prey capture/avoidance. Lester and Russell's (2008) review of wide-ranging research into children's play also indicates the traditional claims of the relationship between play and learning may be tenuous and often misleading.

An instrumental value of play, or what Sutton-Smith (1997) refers to as the 'progress rhetoric', is tied to a broader set of utopian beliefs that see children as redemptive agents; they hold the promise of a better future if only the right forms of guidance are in place to steer them to this promised land (Lester, 2010b). Actions by adults, from everyday encounters to the formulation of social policy, are framed within these broad perspectives forming a common-sense, orthodox view of childhood and play. From this perspective:

Play becomes an 'activity', subsumed into the plane of organization, ordered, structured, and situated in dedicated time/spaces and for specific purposes. A discourse of 'play and learning' purports to welcome children's freedom to

discover and explore through play, but such freedom is developed through objectification of the child by pedagogical gaze and scrutiny; children's freedom to discover is strictly monitored and controlled as it is essential that children are discovering the right things (Lester, 2010b, p. 1)

While play studies range across a disparate field what most have in common is a desire to distinguish playing from other forms of behaviour, to classify and categorise the boundaries and defining features and through this process reduces it to a specific activity⁷. The next stage is to further elaborate classifications with typologies, age and gender specific categories, and so on. It adopts a pseudo-scientific approach that confirms Sutton-Smith's (1997) assertion that, all too often, play is treated as a separate text in which the form and products of playing take precedence over formation, process and flow. The modern progress rhetoric, reinforced by particular readings of play as identity-forming and self-fulfilment, what Henricks (2015, p. 2) refers to as a 'mythology of individualism', dominates minority world perspectives. This can be evidenced by a common-sense definition of play as being 'freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated' (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005). This definition, drawn from accepted conventional accounts, becomes another form of the introversion of bodies, turned in on themselves through acts of personal consumption and choice to become responsible citizens. Making wrong choices, which from an adult perspective are largely associated with Sutton-Smith's (1997) ancient rhetorics of play as power, fate, phantasmagoria, and frivolity, will bring approbation and demands to 'play nicely'.

⁷ (See, for example, Henricks, 2015, summary of various attempts to determine the characteristics of playing).

Such positivism masks the vagueness of space, time and play. Miller (2006) recalls the ‘Sorites paradox’ which questions the precision of properties; if it is agreed that one, two, or three assembled grains of sand cannot be called a ‘pile’, at what precise point will this occur as more grains are added? A pile of sand contains vague, indeterminate properties that defy scientific representation just as space, objects and play cannot be fixed into discrete categories; ‘vagueness is an inevitable part of the use of language and experience of the world but also that recognition of its condition (as opposed to imposing a false precision on it) was of fundamental importance to depictions of truth and “the real”’ (Miller, 2006, p. 456). The desire to rationalise and categorise play works against vagueness, ambiguity and openness of everyday life. Limiting concepts of play to childhood perpetuates the separation of play from other forms of expression and activity (Woodyer, 2012) and maintains fruitless discussions around instrumentality, subjectivity, freedom and so on. Seeing play (or more accurately playing and playfulness) as an ever-present possibility for becoming different opens up another perspective – one rooted in a political and ethical stance that will be considered in more detail later in this account.

Natural childhood, natural play

The ways in which childhood and play are currently entangled, particularly in the UK and US, is exemplified by the material discursive effects of the ‘natural childhood/natural play/natural playground’ movement. Lester and Maudsley (2007) present an overview of the developmental benefits of children’s playful contact with natural environments, making a contribution to the childhood and nature zeitgeist of this period. While emphasising the point that children ‘do not necessarily differentiate between natural and artificial environments in their play’ (Lester and Maudsley, 2007, p. *xiii*), the publication was

promoted as an endorsement of children's innate affiliation with natural settings and raised concerns about the threat to contemporary access to nature and potential harm for children from this state of affairs. Revisiting this publication reveals a curate's egg of ideas. While wary of developing a *post hoc apologia* the review marks an early and tentative transition from traditional accounts of play as an instinctive biological drive (and therefore indisputably 'natural') to a more complex reading that introduces ideas from epigenetics (Blasi and Bjorklund, 2003), Gibson's (1986) environmental psychology, Damasio's (2003) reading of Spinoza and emotions, and the social studies of childhood (Prout, 2005; Aitken and Herman, 1997). This publication also introduced concepts from Deleuze and Guattari (1988) to make the critical point that:

... the romantic view of children and the natural world, the myths and narratives of children's playful encounter with nature need to be carefully balanced with our adult perception of children and childhood... In placing children within these meta-narratives we reproduce a single category of child that greatly oversimplifies the complexity of young children's lives and reduces their experiences to fixed and predictable patterns (Lester and Maudsley, 2007, pp. 20-21).

This line of argument, however, was largely ignored in favour of a reading and promotion that lent support to the growing 'nature deficit disorder' cliché (Louv, 2005).

What follows draws largely on a paper presented at the Philosophy at Play Conference 2013, subsequently developed into a chapter in a publication of collected conference papers (Lester, 2015a). It considers the foundations of the 'natural childhood/play' discourse as an example of the ways in which understandings of play become entangled with other

dominant beliefs about childhood and space that stands as a totem for a range of concerns around 'childhood in crisis' (Kehily, 2010), as evidenced by Moss (2012, p. 2):

Our nation's children are ... missing out on the pure joy of connection with the natural world; and as a result, as adults they lack an understanding of the importance of nature to human society. If we do not reverse this trend towards a sedentary, indoor childhood – and soon – we risk storing up social, medical and environmental problems for the future.

This alarmist passage fully encapsulates the legacy of philosophical tracings of nature and childhood combining to act as a potent 'ideological node and cultural repository of norms and moralism' (Alaimo, 2010, p. 4) against children. While Lester and Maudsley (2007) make the point that 'nature' is perhaps 'the most complex word in the language' (Williams, 1983, p. 219) the current use of nature in much of the campaigning, promotional and popular media accounts of childhood is rarely explored in any depth; the very idea that something is 'natural', in contrast to the unnaturalness of society, assumes an unquestionable advantageous position (Castree and MacMillan, 2001). Nature stands as an inert, passive, ever-present, unitary background against which humans construct their lives. As noted in the opening to this chapter, the idea that there is an external environment apart from being human is a powerful act of inversion founded on and perpetuated by philosophical arguments that promote human mastery or control over nature and natural forces (Harvey, 1996). It sets human agency apart from the world, delineating one from the other by highlighting human qualities of self-realisation, freedom and autonomy. The origins of the natural childhood discourse can be found in a Romantic philosophical movement, notably through the Enlightenment ideas of Rousseau

and an equally influential counter movement that stems from Kant's celebration of man's transcendence over natural forces (Lester, 2015a). For Rousseau (1762/1979), the period of childhood is the closest to nature; all things have their origins in nature's goodness in contrast to the contaminating influence of adult society. Nature is an antidote to the evils of society and at the same time holds the promise of society's ultimate salvation (Taylor, 2013). A different strand of Enlightenment thinking celebrates the fact that the human condition has transcended primitive nature through logic and rationality, no longer deceived by basic perceptions and bodily sensations. Only those with the ability to construct and order meanings from senses, i.e. humans and more specifically 'man', can have a sense of 'nature' as something apart from mind. Therefore, to be human is to transcend the confines of nature to which the lives of all other creatures are bound (Hinchliffe, 2007).

While apparently paradoxical, the two strands combine to powerful effect on the western adult imaginary of childhood, presented as a 'natural' phenomenon (Lester, 2015a). This relationship between child and nature is the result of centuries of scientific and popular discourse that portrays children as asocial or pre-social; children are valued as products and wonders of nature, prized for their natural beauty and state of innocence and purity. It is largely taken for granted that children are innocent, naïve and 'closer to nature' (Aitken, 2001, p. 27) to the point where it becomes incontrovertible. In contrast to the autonomous rational adult, children are heteronomous, subject to laws of nature, irrational and emotional (Hinchliffe, 2007). The purpose of childhood is to progress from this state to become reasonable, i.e. beyond the laws of nature. In order for this to occur, children should retain their natural innocence and sense of wonder by being close to nature and it falls to

adults to protect them from the violence and ugliness of contemporary society. Childhood and nature become entangled and invested with hope, 'a powerful utopian vision of adult hopes enacted through multiple practices designed to both protect and propel the child forward to moral maturity' (Lester, 2015a, p. 57). It has powerful performative effects notably in the growing demand to restore children's contact with so-called natural environments (see Louv, 2005 for a particularly influential account). For Louv and other passionate advocates of the 'natural child' movement, children's and the planet's salvation rests with reuniting children with natural restorative environments and re-conferring nature with the role of 'moral teacher' (Louv, 2005, p. 187). In doing so Louv insists on the clear demarcation between nature (good) and technology (bad) for children. As Taylor (2011, p. 429) comments:

The parallels between these moral discourses point to the mutually constituting relationship between childhood innocence and pure nature, but they also shed light on the ways in which highly essentialized discourses of nature authenticate and morally justify essentializing discourses of childhood. In other words, the moral authority of nature lends enormous weight to the truth claims of childhood innocence.

An adult desire for children to be located in nature marks the search for a utopian other time (lost childhoods) that can be reclaimed through a utopian other place (pure nature); a seductive idea expressed in many therapeutic programmes as searching for the 'inner-child' within, and by doing so to become 'more natural and hence more morally authentic' (Taylor, 2011, p. 429).

Given that children's play, as previously suggested, is held to be a defining feature of childhood it is invariably entangled across the above themes as an expression of children's innocence, sense of wonder and their future success. Play as progress merges with other modern play rhetorics of self-expression, identity formation, self-actualisation and creativity (Sutton-Smith, 1997) to produce idealised and 'organic' play forms (Brewer, 2012). When placed alongside romantic characterisations of play as natural, free, instinctive, non-literal, irrational and so on, playing is presented as a distinct form of behaviour that is a mark of children's heteronomy. This fixing of nature, childhood and play generates a range of contemporary spatial productions and practices, most notably the production of 'natural play environments', increasingly a key tactic in the management of childhood. The following is a typical illustration of the natural playground rhetoric (Stoecklin, 2000, no page number):

Discovery play gardens offer children chances to manipulate the environment and explore, to feel wonder and to pretend, to interact with nature, animals and insects, and other children. They are environments that encourage children's rich and complex play and greatly expand the learning opportunities of old-style playgrounds. Children's discovery play gardens are places where children can reclaim the magic that is their birthright - the ability to learn in a natural environment through exploration, discovery, and the power of their own imaginations.

While the natural playground movement is generally well-intentioned such an uncritical account perpetuates and strengthens the long-standing romantic construction of childhood and aligns with proximate segmented spatial productions to silence and denigrate critical accounts of other ways of life (Alaimo, 2010). In spite of claims of 'naturalness', natural

playgrounds are organized bounded environments that act upon the desires of children; the playground is a technology of conduct built from a dual understanding of play that acknowledges this form of behaviour as an expression of freedom and its instrumental value in shaping children as citizens (Ryan, 2010). They are spaces to overcome the deficits of being a child by being a certain child (a player) in a specific location and time. They govern fields of action of both children and adults by constraining what can be legitimately thought, said, and done and configuring certain forms of relationship between adults, children, space and play. The production of knowledge is stabilised and innovation constrained, adding up to what Clegg (1989) calls an 'obligatory point of passage'. The associated rhetoric of the movement is designed to win adult hearts and minds, to produce valid knowledge on the best ways to raise children and becomes both the source and the destination of authoritative statements and actions (Ryan, 2010). As this discussion continues dominant productions of 'play environments' will be critically revisited, not simply as an act of wilful deconstruction but also to question why certain discourses and their material effects prevail and for whose benefit and loss.

Summary

This chapter has established how particular readings of developmental psychology, set within the wider context of modernity and neoliberalism, have produced an enduring configuration of the child as a being-in-the-making across multiple and diverse sites; a figure that is valued for its potentiality (Castañeda, 2002). The tracing of the line of development and associated segments of a plane of organisation constantly situates and freezes children at a 'zero-point of stasis' (Massumi, 2002, p. 3). The determination of the point is the first priority. The problem is then to add movement/development into the line when in fact the

positions are already fixed; the child is always positioned in relation to adult, defined by what it lacks and thus by what it needs to progress. Play is commandeered to this regime, behaviour that can be utilised to fix the identity of the child. In this account play is defined and classified as an ordered, structured, and situated activity in specific time-spaces. It becomes fully implicated in the neoliberal project through a range of strategic promotions designed to inculcate values and norms of appropriate behaviours to support progress towards economically productive and healthy adults. In doing so it reduces complex and lively behaviour to narrow instrumental purpose based on a biomedical model that reflects and perpetuates a series of binary relationships. Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 81) write that 'linguistics [as a plane of organisation] can tolerate no polyvocality or rhizome traits: a child who runs around, plays, dances and draws cannot concentrate attention on language and writing, and it will never be a good subject'. The idea of a natural child produces a metanarrative that positions childhood as risky and needy, a condition defined by multiple and omnipresent threats to progress that are analysed with little regard for the multiple and complex ways in which children feel about, negotiate and act in their everyday lives (Lester and Russell, 2014c).

This separation process has been a particular focus in recent writings, heavily influenced, by Deleuzian philosophy (Lester, 2013a, 2015a), and the application of these mobile concepts to playing and associated issues of space and politics (Lester, 2014a), rights and relationships (Lester, 2016b, 2013b; Lester and Russell, 2013a, 2010). Collectively they present a challenge to the concepts delineated in this section, most notably the fixation of development to the progressive line and accompanying material-discursive effects. To conclude this section, and as a preliminary opening to what follows, there is a return to the intransitive nature of

playing (after Ingold, 2011a). What if, rather than being a specific, situated and defined activity, playing (and the associated term playful) is presented as a performance that involves ambiguous behaviours found in the 'the ongoing, underlying process of off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring, and transforming the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood below, behind and to the side of focused attention' (Schechner, 1993, p. 42). Playing acts as a reminder that no matter how far systems seek to totalise, construct borders, and delineate children's desires they can never fully capture life and movement. A plane of organisation is porous and open to children's playful inversions and subversions; 'people cross these borders bringing with them conflicting ideas, experiences, ideals, values and visions (all the things that make up discourses) and different material resources' (Prout, 2005, p. 82). The collective power that children hold over bodies at play may be presented as participatory political 'mo(ve)ments', a dynamic process of 'negotiations, challenges and re-constitutions' (Curti and Moreno, 2010, p. 414) of adult attempts to contain children's bodies. Children are no longer passively caught up in adult constructed spatial demands but have power to reconfigure order in their favour (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011).

This presents a more affirmative and valuable perspective in which play is not a specialised activity at all but simply a creative force or desire of life itself. It is this different movement of becoming different that is examined in more detail in the next chapters.

Chapter 5: Drawing a map, not a tracing

[A] monistic philosophy of becomings rests on the idea that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organising. This means that matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, not to technological mediation, but continuous with them... Subjectivity is a process of auto-poesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti, 2013, p. 35).

The posthuman subjectivity I advocate is ...materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere (Braidotti, 2013, p. 51).

Introduction

The previous chapter follows a particular line of enquiry along a dominant ideological construction of childhood rooted in developmental psychology and neoliberal economics. As previously noted this is not a totalising system; there is always an excess and other ways of accounting for life that unsettle universal and normalising versions. The concept of a natural childhood as a period of biological growth and teleological development has been challenged from numerous disciplinary perspectives, in particular the broad field of the social studies of childhood (see for example Prout, 2005; Mayall, 2002; Lee, 2001; James and Prout, 1997). The promotion of childhood as a social construction contests grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984) by pointing to the multiplicity of childhoods (Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Holt and Holloway, 2006; Katz, 2004; Punch, 2003), questioning the presumed immaturity of

children, the limitations of developmental psychology (Burman, 2008; Mayall, 2002) and adopting a sceptical stance towards adult understandings of and value given to play (Lester, 2013b; Lester and Russell, 2008). This multi-disciplinary field has established both the contingency and agency of childhood; children are no longer seen as passive in their own development and playing is portrayed as an expression of children's agency and creativity (Tisdall and Punch, 2012), thus repositioning children's play in time and space. A parallel move has occurred in strands of physical and human geography which challenge the existence of a real, idealised and external nature. The basic premise is that without humans there would be no nature; nature is social through and through (Castree and MacMillan, 2001). A constructivist account maintains that there is no unitary pre-given foundational space/nature but many spaces/natures that are active and entangled outcomes of cultural, economic, social, historical, material and political forces and relations (Lester, 2015a).

At this stage, it is necessary to briefly draw a distinction between Deleuze's ontology and an intellectual movement generally referred to as 'social constructivism' and the privilege such a movement affords to representation. The social/cultural turn challenges the idea of a fixed universe subject to immutable scientific laws and rational explanations. Social constructivism acknowledges that the world is open to innumerable interpretations and contains an openness that is always socially produced. Each culture creates its own world and there is divergence between different constructions (DeLanda, 2002). The general claim from a social constructivist view is that the world, rather than fixed and objective, can only be revealed through human representation and intervention.

While the turn to the social has rescued the child from universal truth claims about development the identification of children as active agents may well have served its purpose

and indeed inhibit future study and analysis (Prout, 2005). In the desire to overturn the privilege afforded to 'natural' accounts of life, the nature/culture binary is maintained, i.e. an autonomous material world that operates according to essential and rational laws against a relative world of human construction (Lester, 2015a). It has resulted in a reversal or mirror image of the binary relationship between developmentalism (becoming and structure) and social constructivism (being and agency) reinforcing the hegemonic adult/child dualism rather than seeking other possibilities (Ryan, 2012; Strandell, 2005). The idea that everything is a representation of human making by privileging epistemological over ontological issues renders matter mute (Hinchliffe, 2007), presenting it as merely a stable background upon which humans construct their lives. Traditional accounts of childhood as nature or nurture, gene driven or environment shaped, gives primacy to one particular set of foundational causes while accepting the secondary role of the other. Various interaction models suggest it is formed from a mixture of both elements which reinforces the existence of the two foundational states. Natural and cultural properties in this interactionist mode are immutable; forms spring out from these two terms yet the foundations remain unmoved in the process of interaction (Barad, 2007; Hinchliffe, 2007; Oyama, 2000). Analysis revolves in a fruitless and self-defeating cycle of how much goes into the mixture rather than thinking differently about the ingredients that constitute life. All the action is passed backwards to pre-formed origins; children's development is framed by what has already been determined by foundational conditions and inversions (the biological form); 'the trouble is that in this account of the world, nothing new could actually happen...there's no time-space for difference' (Hinchliffe, 2007, p. 50). The ways in which human are differentiated from non-human, animate from inanimate, cultural from natural and so on, produces crucial materialising effects. They are 'inaugural gestures' (Massumi, 2013, p. x) that establish and

activate the very orthodoxy of thought that needs to be overcome; it is impossible to think differently within this framework. What is needed is an analysis that does not 'presume that the terms of either side of the equivalence relations are given' (Barad, 2011, p. 123) and to defer the reduction to subject/object identification until it is apparent that they are functions and products of process rather than original self-enclosed states (Manning, 2013). Processes are always more intensive and extensive than what is produced. Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) encompassing concept of individuation refutes either/or distinctions and the ways in which bodies and materials are cut through opposition and resemblance. Instead attention is given to the ways in which unique non-personal assemblages form without resorting to breaking these apart and reducing to individual elements. To reiterate and re-emphasise, life is not an individual affair but goes on through the multiple arrangements that are composed by movement and rest, as counters in the game of Go. These foundations, and the possibilities they present for thinking differently about the state of childhood are explored in more detail in the next sections.

Beyond binaries

Matter is not a passive resource for human manipulation and consumption, nor a deterministic force of biological reductionism, nor a library of codes, objects and things to be collected and codified... matter, like meaning is not an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification (Alaimo, 2010, p. 142)

The importance of non-human constituents of life have been recognised for some time across earth sciences, genomics, ecological science, neuro-dynamics, economics and

developmental cognitive science and sociology. While the need to bring an interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary lens to the study of childhood is increasingly recognised (see Alanen, 2012; Thorne, 2007; Lee, 2005; Prout, 2005) there has been a general reluctance within the field to engage with childhood as more than social processes (Kraftl, 2013; Ryan, 2012; Prout, 2005). Elsewhere, particularly in the field of 'more-than-human' geography (Hinchliffe, 2007; Whatmore, 2002), eco-philosophical studies (Braidotti, 2013; Alaimo, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1991) and anthropology (most notably in the work of Ingold 2007, 2011a, 2011b) attention has turned to developing ways out of the powerful nature/culture divide. This is influenced by continental European philosophy and what may loosely be described as a posthumanist or new materialist⁸ movement while recognising that any attempt to characterise these under a single terminological umbrella negates the very foundations of these philosophies. However, these disparate ideas do initiate reverberations that offer the prospect of thinking differently not simply about play or childhood but about the very process of life itself. A posthuman movement is characterised by a number of key interrelated principles: the rejection of any central organising system that determines relationships (de-centring); the rebuttal of any principle outside of life that governs living systems (immanence); and a challenge to the primacy given to cognition and calculation in favour of relations that are always contextual, contingent and specific (affective) and not determined by general and universal rules and patterns (Hayles, 2005). In contrast to the straight line proposed in the previous chapter, a posthuman lens on development acknowledges that childhood is not a unitary phenomenon, but may be viewed

⁸ There are different conceptual frameworks under the umbrella of posthumanism. See for example, Castree's (2006) three themes and Braidotti's (2013) genealogy of the constellation of posthumanity, through a feminist/philosophical lens. It is Braidotti's reading of critical posthumanism that largely informs the present discussion.

as 'heterogeneous, complex and emergent, and because this is so, its understanding requires a broad set of intellectual resources, an interdisciplinary approach and an open-minded process of enquiry' (Prout, 2005, p. 2).

Deleuze's 'passive vitalism' offers a way forward at this point: for Deleuze representational systems (language, logic, scientific positivism) have their origin in animating life but then come to operate independently from it (Colebrook, 2010). It addresses the central issue of how the movements of a living, creative body are reduced to technical accounts that develop a 'monstrous and alienating life of their own' (Colebrook, 2010, p. 1). The foundational principle of Deleuze's ontology of immanence is a commitment to perceiving life emerging through continuous and discontinuous self-organising connections and relations whose outcomes are not determined in advance by intrinsic properties of already formed matter (Colebrook 2005). There is no form or principle which guides life; 'all we have is the potential for difference and variation' (Colebrook 2005, p. 293). Life proceeds through successive waves of singularities that trigger consistent qualitative changes that affect the milieu of an organism (Deleuze, 1994). Mind and matter are attributes of one substance from which possibilities of difference can be actualised. This counters the dominant philosophy of transcendence that would have a difference of being between some beings, replacing it with a view that the earth is an indivisible generative entity, 'a pulsing body of productive forces' (Clark 2011, p. 19). The idea of intelligent and mobile matter challenges the centuries-old philosophical tradition that reduces matter to immobility and defines intelligence as the life-force that produces movement. In opposition to this static position, individuation and rhizomatic thought works with non-deterministic, non-linear and non-teleological processes. In Deleuze's difference philosophy attention is given to the intensive

forces that actualise virtualities, the processes of becoming-other, and the power to affect and be affected (Braidotti, 2006).

Life, in all its forms, is always going on in an emergent, self-organising manner, 'complex behaviours can emerge out of simple operations that do not depend on a central representation of the world' (Hayles, 2005, p. 135). Such a perspective inevitably re-conceptualises a body as thoroughly interconnected with the material world and not a self-contained unit; life is 'trans-corporeal' (Alaimo, 2010), all sorts of things cross through our bodies (Guthman and Mansfield, 2012). Re-visiting Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) relationship between philosophy and the sciences, a vitalist approach appropriates and re-works concepts from developmental systems theory (Protevi, 2010; Oyama, 2000) with the biological principle of autopoiesis and its subsequent articulation as enactivism (Thompson and Varela, 2001; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991; Maturana and Varela, 1972) as the self-organising principle of life:

The body [is] the ultimate source of significance; embodiment means that mind is inherent in the precarious, active, normative, and worldly process of animation, that the body is not a puppet controlled by the brain but a whole animate system with many autonomous layers of self-constitution, self-coordination, and self-organization and varying degrees of openness to the world that create its sense-making activity (Di Paulo *et al*, 2010, p. 42)

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) extend the concept of autopoiesis to incorporate living organisms and inorganic matter and by doing so overturn the idea that only humans can compose a self-organising system (Braidotti, 2006). The phenomenological concepts of Bateson (1973) and Merleau-Ponty (1968) also assert that separation between

mind/body/action is limiting and that actions cannot simply arise from cognition but are acts of situated, embodied knowing; 'materiality and ideality, matter and meaning, body and mind must be conceived as irreducibly interwoven and folded at every level, from the corporeal to the philosophical' (Simonsen, 2012, p. 15).

Equally the field of epigenetics, briefly discussed in Lester and Russell's (2008) research review, highlights the limitations of genetic determinism and by implication the foundations of evolutionary psychology (see for example Jackson and Rees, 2007; Lickliter and Honeycutt, 2003). For brevity's sake epigenetics may be crudely summarised as the study of the morphogenetic processes of cellular context i.e. ways in which cells (as an assemblage of genetic, chemical, physical, processes) are open to and shaped by the surrounding environment rather than having a fixed and pre-existing purpose. What happens in development is the consequence of complex forces operating across multiple scales of analysis that indeterminately shape what genes will be expressed or suppressed. Thus, genes do not exist as isolated phenotypic determinants of life. Epigenetic processes suggest that beings are always in a state of becoming; organisms are not passively adapting to an external environment but the environment seeps into the body and through such idiosyncratic and loose relational encounters, genes are shaped and shape mind/body/environment relationships (Guthman and Mansfield, 2013). The taken-for-granted distinctions between nature and nurture are being obliterated; the body is always changeable and influenced by bio-socio-chemical pathways operating across multiple locations from the cell nucleus to the global atmosphere.

Following Fagen's (2011) exhortation to pursue new lines of enquiry into the study of play that draw on different explanations of the universe itself, attention has also turned to the

field of quantum physics. This is not to delve into the complex science of this discipline – the merest sight of an equation evokes traumatic experiences of attempting to study mathematics at school, but rather to consider the beauty of quantum ideas that bring the world of matter to life. Deleuze and Guattari's (1998) plane of immanence, or the field of the virtual, resonates with quantum field theory (Plotnitsky, 2006); for Deleuze and Guattari (1994) chaos is not merely disorder but a virtual realm that contains all possibilities/particles that draw out possible forms of being. Philosophy, art and science conspire to bring a little order from chaos, but this proceeds by processes of disturbance and tension; they are diffractive struggles that resist totalising forces that seek universal accounts of motile matter. Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 203) consider orthodox science to be the underside of an umbrella that protects from the elements with conventions and clichés, but philosophers and artists (and children's play) 'make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent'. It offers an alternative vocabulary, replacing a fixed and knowable world with one of continual differentiation that reveals the world to be a lively place.

Of particular relevance to ideas developed in this thesis are Karen Barad's (2011, 2007, 2003) feminist materialist, science and philosophical studies that extend ideas from the renowned quantum physicist Nils Bohr (1885-1962) to declare that entities do not have an inherent ontological identity. This is exemplified by the ways that light can behave as a wave and particle (considered an impossibility under classical physics) according to the apparatus used to measure light. Suddenly 'impossible things become possible' (Barad, 2011, p. 43). Barad's (2011) account of the liveliness of lightning, the strange forms that certain bacteria can take,

and the indeterminacy of atomic particles reveal life and the world always open to deviation. Barad's (2007) complex and compelling concept of 'agential realism' proposes that all matter *performs* and has agency; nothing exists in isolation and everything affects. This suggests that agency is an enactment and not an individual possession, it is a matter of intra-acting. Everything is caught up by a collective force or power that is less specific and more indeterminate, overturning traditional attribution of agency as a matter of choice in liberal humanist terms. This immediately brings into question the idea of an autonomous child 'freely choosing' to play. Lester's (2015b, p. 4) observation of children at a museum offers a useful example at this point:

There are large square floor tiles in the main entrance to the museum. A young girl is carefully balancing along the grooves between the tiles in a seemingly random fashion. A short while later another girl joins in, setting her own pattern of movements. As they pass each other, the new arrival turns to the first child and says, "What happens if you fall off?"

Life emerges through these movements as individuals are composed from their on-going intra-action or entangled acts of intra-relating, always caught up and produced through relationships with other bodies and materials in non-linear and indeterminate ways. But these entanglements are 'real', not in the sense of representation of something that already exists but each moment of intra-activity has real effects and these effects become components and forces for further intra-activity. All kinds of organisms and matter are performative agents caught up in acts of co-creation.

This singular moment of wayfaring the grooves between the tiles is an example of what Manning (2013, p. 25) refers to as 'transindividuation', a 'node of activity that is intensively

relational', passing points of contact, expressive culminations drawn from on-going phasing's and dephasings. Thus, the actual, the here and now of the moment, always contains within it a virtuality for becoming different; it is the process of life in action as a force that problematizes and generates continuous movement and modifications.

From this, there can be no division between bodies, discourses, things, and matter since they are always in a relationship of intra-action, mutually shaping in all sorts of iterative and prospective patterns (Barad, 2007). Materials do not present themselves as objects with a common essence that bestows a fixed objectness/objectivity; rather, they actively partake in the very processes of the world's ongoing generation and regeneration (Ingold, 2011b). As Bennett (2004, p. 354) observes:

This is not a world, in the first instance, of subjects and objects, but of various materialities constantly engaged in a network of relations. It is a world populated less by individuals than by groupings or compositions that shift over time.

Materials affect discursive understanding just as much as discursive understandings affect materials: they are material-discursive practices (Barad, 2007). Such a move offers a way out of the stifling binary productions of nature/culture, adult/child and work/play to be replaced by concepts of emergence, connection, disconnection, and openness. This brief introduction is further elaborated in the following sections by a consideration of two more entangled Deleuze-Guattarian concepts.

Bodies without organs

You will be organised, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body, otherwise you are just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter

and interpreted – otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be subject, nailed down as one...-otherwise you are just a tramp (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 177)

Every living organism...is itself a site of infestation: a seething colony of lively, jostling materials alternately compressed into blobs and stretched into filaments that twist and coil around one another to form configurations of extraordinary complexity. The organism may look outwardly composed. Lift the lid, however, and you find something more like a compost heap than the formal architecture that anatomists and psychologists like to imagine (Ingold, 2013, p. 93).

Science is good at looking for cause-effect and straight line linearity (as a tracing). The alternatives of emergent, multi-layered, causally diverse, nonlinear systems in constant constitutive and intra-active flux are difficult to manage conceptually. As may be apparent by now what I am attempting to develop here is an account that defers reducing the mind to merely a collection of synaptic connections and refuting the idea that genes drive behaviour in favour of a body that is situated and intimately connected to and constituted in the flow of matter of the world. Another Deleuze-Guattarian concept, the 'body-without-organs' (BwO), is of value at this point; a BwO breaks out of the organising and constraining circle illustrated in Figure 2 to follow lines of intensity where the patterning (or assemblage) is flexible and the virtual can be more easily reached (Bonta and Protevi, 2004). A body is an assemblage or multiplicity rather than a single organism and by its very nature this assemblage must be open to its surroundings including inhuman, inorganic matter and the imaginary. The extensive parts that make up the complex body are constantly entering into

differential relations with other bodies, getting out of its organisation (Bennett, 2001). Bodies emerge through these contingent and continuous relationships. They are 'leaky' things (Manning, 2014); and if the skin is not the boundary between a self and other then all sorts of possibilities for thinking differently about life emerge. But as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) emphasise this is not a thoughtless or unconscious process; bodies can compose themselves in a manner that cannot be contained by the plane of organisation, they can twist and tweak habits and routines. For Deleuze, children are a generative force, a vector of affect and an activator of change (Hickey-Moody, 2013).⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1984) portray a child as a productive desiring machine; it exists in relationships with 'partial objects' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p. 50), always moving to overcome the hegemony of a plane of organisation:

...gestural, mimetic, ludic and other semiotic systems regain their freedom and extricate themselves from the 'tracing' ... a microscopic event upsets the local balance of power (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 16).

For Deleuze and Guattari (1988), the body-without-organs is a machinic assemblage, embodied, affective and intelligent, an in-between that can be plugged into a meshwork to transform energies and forces (Braidotti, 2006). In extending the possibilities of this idea concept, two significant and entangled Deleuzian (1998) concepts are introduced to this analysis with a reading of Spinoza's *conatus*, or desire, as the driving force of life and affect.

⁹ It should be highlighted, after Hickey-Moody (2013), that Deleuze's relationship with the concept of the 'child' is somewhat ambiguous, on occasions a state to be pitied (Deleuze, 1997), while at others an affirmative and creative state of being and becoming in the world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988)

Desire

[Desire] constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p. 5).

The impulsive force of life is traditionally accounted as a series of biological drives, a fairly straightforward account that maintains a strong nature/culture binary; drives are 'just-so-stories' (Rose, 2000) that presume a foundational state upon which a veneer of socio-cultural influence is overlaid. The genotype is positioned as the locus of organic form and motivation while the environment offers the material conditions for its realisation (Ingold, 2000). Internal drives (a concept of inversion and interiority) suggest structural invariance. It is interesting to note the almost universal acceptance of a 'play drive' (see for example Hughes, 2012), an assumption that it is natural and innate. Reading Damasio's (2003) 'Looking for Spinoza' awoke counter thoughts by presenting 'desire' as the force of life. Damasio (2010) acknowledges that existence is based on value, i.e. the extent to which a situation affects the viability of a self-organising and precarious meshwork of processes. Value may be seen as arising from the relentless endeavour to preserve life, what Spinoza refers to as *conatus*, a force that ascribes to bodies a peculiar vitality: 'Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its own being' (Damasio, 2003, p. 36). This is not a fixed state but operates within certain parameters; when an organism (bearing in mind that this is not a self-contained body but always relational) reaches the extremes of these limits the integrity of life is threatened (manifested through illness, depression of vitality and disease) and action needs to be taken to move away from this (Damasio, 2010). Equally there is a homeodynamic range where the organism/life flourishes (Rose, 2007), a zone that

may be described as 'well-being'. The notion of value, in this context, relates not simply to survival, but the quality of survival and a desire to seek the best possible position, i.e. a state of joy (Damasio, 2003).

Deleuze's (1988) reading of the immanent philosophy of Spinoza furnishes a toolbox of ontological and epistemological resources to work with the complexities of social life (taken here to include the 'sociability' of matter) and associated processes of being-and-becoming well (Duff, 2010a). Desire is the material process of 'connection, registration and enjoyment of flows of matter and energy coursing through bodies in networks of production in all registers, be they geologic, organic or social' (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p. 76). This extends Damasio's inverted reading to a more productive and extensive concept. It is important to highlight that desire, from a Deleuze/Spinoza standpoint, is not seeking to complete a lack or replace something that is missing; desire in this modern sense and application of the term implies a negative 'need' to acquire what one fantasises about. Yet having acquired the object of fascination one no longer desires; the need has been fulfilled or indeed frustrated because the object of desire does not match the reality of the object. This negative version assumes an important position in capitalist consumption that rests on the continuous creation of a market for needs/desires, endlessly fuelled and never satiated (Fox, 2012). Thus, mind/body shape and condition are created and fashioned as desire or aspiration to achieve the ideal. Molar forces go to work on the body to establish and satisfy needs, and of course, children's needs are, in general, adult normative expressions that enable judgments to be made about their satisfactory progress and deficiencies. But for Deleuze/Spinoza, desire/*conatus* is the affirming force of production (not consumption) and a creative life-force (Fox, 2012).

This is not the self-contained organism of science but a body assemblage as a dynamic, ever changing ensemble of connections between human and non-human bodies and materials (Duff, 2010). Desire is impersonal and immanent to the productive process, always striving to become more, but is actualised in concrete relations within the assemblages it co-produces. Children creating worlds made from poo, or moving along the lines in the museum are desiring machines, breaking apart regular patterns and expectations, creating 'time-out-of-joint' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984), pursuing a line of flight that contains the potential for configuring new and extensive assemblages with the widest possible materials at hand to increase the body's force of existence or power (*potentia*¹⁰) of acting.

Affect

To live in the world is to be involved in the constant changing of direction (constant variation), not the determinism and normativism of a straight line (Harrison, 2000, p. 499).

Bodies have a desire or incentive to be restless (*agencement*), moving towards the things that will increase well-being and avoiding those that decrease this state. It is a continuous urge to affect and be affected to gain a state of 'being and becoming well', to seek a joyful union with other 'things' and to avoid assembly with things that lessen the capability to act. Affect, in this sense, is more than emotions and feelings but a 'transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)' (Anderson, 2006, p. 735). It implies that bodies are always in relation with and open to other bodies and things, a transpersonal, agentic quality of 'bodies-without-organs', i.e. in-and-

¹⁰ *Potentia* is used here to distinguish an enabling power from that of power to subjugate and hinder affirmative encounters (*potestas*) and this will be revisited later in the discussion

between bodies. (Pile, 2010). An organism's state of health fluctuates according to the intensity of relations that impinge upon the body. Desire operates by forming relations, resisting capture by territorialising forces and experimenting with what it might become; a world of poo is an experimental desire to become different. It marks an accumulation of affirmative relations, feelings, movements and capacities that compose a particular and singular moment/event, a continuous process of dynamic change (Duff, 2010b). The following example, a moment of accidental ethnography and featured in Lester (2016c, p. 10), reveals an impromptu moment of playfulness that further illustrates this point:

Two children (boys, about 6/7 years old) are standing at a bus-stop with an adult. One child starts to walk around the adult, lightly holding her coat as he moves slowly in an anti-clockwise direction; the other boy follows slightly behind, holding on to the child's anorak sleeve. As the coat becomes twisted around the woman, she shrugs the child off – he lets go, but the other boy continues to hold his coat. The first child moves slightly away from the adult and begins to pivot on one leg; the increasing speed of this movement also spins the other child around. As the speed increases so too does the volume of laughter and giggles before the child releases the sleeve and makes a grab for the hood of the anorak. The child dodges the lunge of the other child and spins away in an almost balletic movement. At this moment another person arrives at the bus-stop and stands close to first adult, slightly apart from the children. There is a brief pause as both children become stationary before the second child starts to balance along a very faint line/crack in the pavement tracing a move away from the adults, walking with one foot in front of the other, and arms outstretched. The first child follows

this movement but then stops and turns his body so he is standing sideways on the line. He traces a semicircle on the floor out from the crack with his right foot and returns to the line, at which point his feet/legs are crossed; he lifts his left foot and traces a semi-circle to the rear and back to the line to uncross his legs and carries on along the line, repeating this sequence – after a couple of moves he is joined by the other child, who follows this pattern; again the tempo increases and on a couple of occasions they lose balance and brush against each other which provokes further bouts of giggling. Throughout this period the children have not spoken directly to each other, but seem to communicate through giggles, look, nudges and so on. A short while later the woman calls to the children that the bus is coming and they meander over to where she is standing, and the child resumes a position of holding on to the adult's coat as they climb on board.

This is an ordinary, embodied, mobile way of going on with life and life going on. Such moments may occur anywhere in multiple repetitions and variations, particularly where children are expected to 'stand still'. It is a 'dance of now as a kinetic dynamic' of desire (Engel, 2008, p. 2).

Following the ideas already introduced, the desiring machine of movements, affects, materials, and bodies is productive of an assemblage in which there is no single author of the experience, just flow, intensity and lines of extension. Thinking and representing differently leads to a line of enquiry thus (adapted from Ingold, 2011a, p. 69):



Figure 5: A line of movement

This line has no inside or outside but is simply a continuous flow of movement pushing at the point with a desire to affect and be affected intra-actively with the bodies/materials at hand. Each trail reveals a relation ‘not between one thing and another – between the organism “here” and the environment “there” ...it is a trail *along* which life is lived’ (Ingold, 2011b, p. 69, authors emphasis). As a minor aside, the existence of physical lines appears to be quite significant in generating playful movements (see also the example of children in the museum introduced earlier).

The introduction of this line of enquiry opens up new ways of thinking about the process of development, movement, and life. Turning once again to Ingold (2011a), there is exemplary attention given to the developmental process of walking – not as a genetically coded programme which unfolds over a predictable period and with a universal pattern as delineated in Figure 2 (or indeed a socially conditioned and acquired skill). The capacity to walk and to use feet in countless other ways emerge as properties of systems of relations, from micro to macro scales of organisation and interpenetration. Walking is always contingent and situated; it is the on-going production of assemblages between bodily and environmental properties with all their complexities, as the above example suggests. For Manning (2013), walking is to move with an infinite composition of micro-movements, each step is virtually imbued with all previous steps, an embodied activation of productive instability necessary to propel oneself and mobile stabilisations that enables one to regain

balance. It is generally a pre-conscious habit of bodies in relation, but while habitual, it is always repetition with difference. Every movement within the assemblage of feet, body, mind, sensations, ground, air and everything else redistributes what has already happened with what might come. The forward foot's movement through the air and contact with the ground marks the propulsion of life; the momentary point of the flowing line. But it carries with it a tracing of where it has come from and a projection of where the movement is heading; the foot is connected exquisitely with the body and the environment, all the while balancing, sensing and moving, not as a self-contained unit but in a state of constant flow and flux:

We walk in a future-pastness whose virtual plenitude of experience and experimentation assures a metastability of balance. It's not exactly that we remember how the ground touches the foot and the weight shifts as the body transfers from step to step. It's that stepping recalls itself in the act...*The memory of having walked is in the walking* (my italics). This is a memory on the edge of perception, a memory in-act that activates in the moving the multiple metastabilities that make this singular choreographed movement possible (Manning, 2013, p. 85).

This presents a picture of human life as wayfaring (Ingold, 2001a), constantly on the move and looking to sustain itself both perceptually and materially with the environment (the space that surrounds). It is an on-going process of renewal *with* rather than autonomy from the environment. There is no final destination, only intensive and extensive movements, lines of latitude and longitude. Another example is introduced here, one that has a strong personal resonance both with the struggle of assembling new concepts to think differently

about childhood and play and also as a would-be surfer. It is drawn from Borgnon (2007)¹¹ who counters the dominant progressive linear movement of children learning to walk by another perspective – the child as surfer (see Figure 6). Thus, as Olsson (2009) details, a child's (Stella Nona) early attempts at walking shows multiple movements: dragging across the floor with help of arms, sitting and shuffling on their bottom, using arms and legs to jump forwards/sideways, crawling on all fours, holding things for support; 'learning to walk is about the joy of increasing your body's capacity to move through joining your body with other bodies and forces' (Olsson, 2009, p. 2).



Figure 6: Stella Nona as surfer

To counter the segmented line of development (see Figure 1) Borgnon (2007) carries out an act of deterritorialisation by proposing that the child's movements have all the requisite components and capacities of surfing, or at least becoming a surfer and 'joining your body with the sea' (Olsson, 2009, p. 2). Stella is responsive to the constant shift of the wave, the

¹¹ My original encounter with this came from Lisselot Borgnon's (2007) paper and then I somewhat fortuitously encountered it again in Olsson's (2009) application of Deleuze and Guattari's experimental empiricism to Swedish kindergarten – they are one and the same person but names are used interchangeably at this stage according to the specific source of ideas.

vast flows of the sea, which in turn are the production of local and global forces; an environment that is constantly moving and being moved through in a seamless manner, where everything 'its constant folding, unfolding, and refolding intensities constitute an image of a world that moves in all directions at the same time, where there is no origin, no cause and effect and where everything is being made anew (Borgnon, 2007). The production of the image of child-as-surfer is no more a truth than the production of child development manuals, but the very creation of the concept of surfing/walking disturbs the common-sense, dogmatic truth that currently prevails. Similarly, the children at the bus-stop may be presented as dancers; the movements are not merely a succession of actions with a beginning and end, before and after, but are the lively expression of 'moving forms as co-existence, ordering and transformation' (Engel, 2008, p. 3). Bodies have unlimited possibilities for experimenting with movement and rhythm in everyday contexts. Walking is no longer a progressive stance, a movement towards some future pre-determined destination, but a production of time space in which one is being becoming with the flows of material, riding the wave, dancing the line. This environmentally situated/surfing/dancing subject is a collective entity (Braidotti, 2006) no longer grounded to the confines of humanism and anthropocentrism.

Summary

If the realities being enacted by current dominant ways of producing childhood and, by association, play are limited and limiting then it becomes imperative to counter these by presenting other hinterlands or territories that propose more equitable and lively accounts (Law, 2009). This chapter has elaborated and extended Deleuze's vital materialism to offer a way out of the sterile binaries that pervade contemporary thinking.

In line with Ingold, Manning and Borgnon/Olsson, there is an ambition here to counter a dominant perspective of an end-directed, teleological view of life by looking at life's capacity to overtake the 'destinations that are thrown up in its course' (Ingold, 2011a, p. 4); life is a movement of opening and going on rather than closure. It is the difference between a continuous flowing line and a dotted or segmentary line that traces a series of disconnected fixed points with point-to-point connectors (Ingold, 2011a). Children's early movements are constantly assessed against some blueprint and wayfaring is reduced to progressive transport, i.e. a process of getting to the next stage of development, always moving forwards following the pre-established line. A child learning to walk is framed by a set of concepts, understandings, and practices about how this developmental period is supposed to work; it is recognising a child that is already known and letting this act as a representation to confirm what is known. Material-discursive practices define what counts as meaningful from a field of dynamic and contingent possibilities, they are productive rather than descriptive and arrange life in certain ways to the exclusion of others (Barad, 2007). Such knowledges and the practices they evoke become sustainable by firstly creating knowledge that works; they are convincing and do whatever job they are asked to do (Law, 2009). At the same time, they generate realities that fit this knowledge. And so childhood institutions become entangled in a self-referential process, practices are invested in and turn around these knowledges in a professional landscape composed of multiple forms that are constantly refined and up-dated but rarely deconstructed and replaced. But, as Massumi (2002) argues, where is the possibility of change and diversion? How can a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very construction but seems to prescribe every move from a limited repertoire of possible permutations? How can this gridlock be unravelled?

A turn towards Deleuzian concepts reveals that 'development occurs as a dynamic, affective, indeterminate, relational process of continuous variation and differentiation through dynamic transformations arising from the myriad encounters of bodies and things' (Lester, 2103b, p35). Bodies organise themselves by actualising the different virtualities which are always present in the system at any time; there is no pre-determined programme to say what a body can do and become (Ansell-Pearson, 1997).

Moments of dancing at bus-stops are lines of movement set free from the straight-line vectorisation of life. They mark a restless energy or desire to create and transform everyday situations. The central point here is that life strives to preserve and enhance itself through connecting with other desires (Colebrook, 2002); it is the exuberant creativity of life (Thrift, 2004). In the world of Spinoza/Deleuze, affect is the process of intra-activity and emergence. Time, space, bodies, materials and meanings come into co-existence and are 'iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future' (Barad, 2007, p. ix). Agency is cut loose from traditional humanist accounts: there is no individualised autonomous 'agent' but rather agency is perpetually and inexhaustibly distributed between bodies and things that congregate to form a temporary 'identity' in which the components collectively have more power to act. Even when it appears that the potential for intra-activity is constrained, agency is never foreclosed:

Particular possibilities for (intra-) acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the

world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering (Barad, 2007, p. 235).

This opens up an ethical space which questions the legitimacy of the real and how this might be better enacted. No longer can a child be judged against externally-derived competencies as there is no blueprint against which 'progress' can be measured (Lester, 2013b). Rather attention is drawn to the on-going relational conditions of life and the possibilities they present for the formation of moments of collective being-well.

The introduction of this different way of thinking about life and movement has prepared the way for looking in more detail at playing but hopefully by now it is evident from this vitalist viewpoint that it is much more than a trivial and purposeless activity (although paradoxically these qualities are an important component of playing) or an instrument to be utilised by adults in pursuit of the ideal child. Life is always at play, indeed without this the universe would be inert and therefore non-existent.

Chapter 6: Movement, sensations and lines – bringing play to life

The body lives in space but not like a sphere with a closed continuous surface...Being in space means to establish diverse relationships with the things that surround our bodies (Gil, 1998, p. 127).

In a very real sense, only when we understand the nature of play will we be able to understand how to better shape the destinies of human societies in a mutually dependent world, the future of our species, and perhaps even the fate of the biosphere itself (Burghardt (2005, p. *xii*) [But perhaps not bios but *zoe* – after Braidotti, 2013].¹²

Introduction

In the previous chapter I have suggested, following Deleuze, that life is a continuous process of stratification and de-stratification. Organisms desire to order themselves into arrangements that will preserve life *and* compose new emergent properties, formations and patterns, ‘an aggregate of consistency that disrupts orders, forms, and substances’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 336). Life is ‘desiring production’ – immanent, self-organising, autonomous, generative and creative. Such a viewpoint overturns dominant accounts of child development and also opens up the possibility for a radical reconfiguration and new lines of enquiry into the process of playing. This will be pursued in this chapter by briefly reprising dominant ways of representing play in play studies, sufficient to develop the argument, before setting a number of key concepts to work to bring play to life.

Accounting for play

While appreciating that definitions of play are problematic, most play scholars would agree that playing is a clearly observable behaviour and therefore must contain certain properties that make it distinguishable from other expressions (Henricks, 2015; Smith, 2010; Pellegrini, 2009; Burghardt, 2005). In developing this particular line of enquiry, definitions often use structural (physical movements of play and the ways in which these are organised in comparison with non-play behaviours), functional (seeking to explain the purpose of play behaviour) and motivational criteria (the conditions that give rise to play, often divided into internal/external features) to arrive at a definitive statement. As Pellegrini (2009) comments, to understand play requires paying attention to all the above criteria and their influence on animals and humans across the life span. Evidence of approaches that combine structural, functional and motivational accounts are fairly standard in attempts to define play, exemplified by Burghardt's (2005) definition (condensed here): play has limited immediate function; an endogenous component; features structural or temporal difference from 'real' life; contains repeated performance; and takes place in a relaxed field. Within this broad analysis there are considerable differences and tensions, for example, between immediate and deferred benefits of play; instrumental and autotelic function; purposeful and trivial value.

In his analysis of play as a 'rhetoric of self', Sutton-Smith (1997) acknowledges that many of the attempts to define the qualities of play in human terms focus on the psychology of the individual player - a reflection of the dominant developmentalist paradigm that evidences a strong ethnocentric and cultural bias based on western developmental psychology and psychoanalytical approaches. It invariably situates playing as an expression of individual

preference carried out in relationship with other individuals. Playing is portrayed as a process of interaction that can then be turned back into individual bodies, classifying behaviour and attributing foundational cause-effect relationships. Irrespective of the particular focus that the diverse field of play studies brings the one thing most have in common is the isolation of play from the flow of heterogeneous materials and forces in which children are entangled (Lester, 2013a) in yet another example of binary thinking that draws distinctions between work/play, adult/child, rationality/frivolity, reality/fantasy, and so on; privilege is afforded to the first term of these oppositions with powerful material-discursive effects. This 'ideological fiction' (Lee, 2005, p. 157), derived from forces of neoliberalism, erects and maintains molar assemblages, segments of spacetime replete with their own apparatus – practices, discourse, taxonomies, classifications, measurements – designed to produce a particular version of what it is to be human.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the increasing interest in the relationship between playing and neurological development, encapsulated in an interview which appeared in the *Observer* newspaper in October 2014, (Laverne, 2014) featuring Stuart Brown, an acknowledged 'expert' in play, who states that 'play (of any kind - there are seven different types from object play to narrative play and storytelling) is essential to brain development'. 'Nothing' Brown says 'lights up the brain like play'. The popularisation of scientific research (which acknowledges its own limitations) leads to numerous claims that play makes your brain bigger, better and so on. While there is insufficient space within the present narrative for a full discussion around this issue, and notwithstanding the valuable contribution that neuroscience has made to the study of play (for example Pellis and Pellis, 2009), the reduction of complex research studies to simplistic, often exaggerated statements and

clichés mark the strengthening of neoliberal forces. The brain is held to be the control centre of individual organisms (Henricks, 2015) and shows great plasticity in its ability to be responsive to a range of environments and contexts. Neural plasticity becomes a valuable asset in the contemporary biopolitical economy in which there is insecurity in labour, reduction in the welfare state and market-based political systems that inculcate individual responsibility and self-care. Brains can increase their flexibility, efficiency and performance; all brains have the *potential* to improve themselves but it requires work on the self. Popular neuroscience discourse links brain enhancement to a ‘flex-subject’ who thrives on individual responsibility, industry and adaptability in neoliberal economies (Pitts-Taylor, 2010). Certainly, policy formulation in the early years is increasingly driven by limited, pseudo-scientific and selective application of neural research to reinforce certain styles and patterns of child-rearing and associated blaming strategies for those who do not follow these regimes (Edwards, Gillies and Horsley, 2016). From this perspective, play may be valuable as a brain-enhancing task, further evidence of Sutton-Smith’s (1997) progress rhetoric in action, and utilised to promote desirable neuronal-subjects. But, as noted on several occasions, systems are never totalising and there are always other ways of accounting for the world and the processes of life. Attention now turns to such an alternative reading.

A different movement (a return)

The ideas presented thus far – desire and individuation, lines of movement, bodies-without-organs, assemblages, and so on – offer the possibility of a different reading of play. To repeat, life is always in process, relational and open-ended; representation is superseded by giving attention to pre-conscious, embodied movements, and affective intensities that occur anywhere and everywhere (Woodyer, 2012; Lorimer, 2005). In contrast to the dismal tale of

disenchantment promoted by the application of neuroscience research to maintain processes of individualisation, normalisation and self-governance introduced in the previous section, there are alternative readings that draw attention to inter-subjectivity, pre-conscious movements, sensations and affects. Of particular interest, in the context of this thesis, are studies that highlight the central role of motor systems in maintaining life. The main suggestion is that movement is the sole way that organisms have of interacting with the environment. From this perspective, the 'purpose of the human brain is to use sensory representations to determine future actions' (Wolpert, Doya and Kawato, 2003, p. 593); the significant point of departure 'is the proposition that perceptual activity consists not in the operation of the mind upon the bodily data of sense, but in the intentional movement of the whole being (indissolubly body and mind) in its environment' (Ingold, 2011b, p. 166). This brings perception and motor systems to the foreground in considering the ways in which organisms maintain homeodynamic states. Perception is a mode of action rather than a prerequisite for action. It is an active process of keeping in touch with the world, 'an experiencing of things rather than having an experience... and involves awareness *of* instead of just awareness... perceiving is a psychosomatic act, not of the mind or of the body but of being a living observer' (Gibson, 1986, p. 240). If this is the case, then what is perceived is a direct function of movements that are disposed or attuned to discern particular patterns of information (Ingold, 2011b). A playful disposition, it may be proposed, attunes mind/body/environment intra-actions to compose assemblages of being and becoming, a greater power to create uncertainty, joy, and desirable stress (Lester and Russell, 2008). There is an inexhaustible range of information that is potentially available, an ever-present field of virtuality. It is always possible to see new things, not by re-arranging mental concepts, but by a sensitization or fine-tuning of the perceptual-motor system to new

information. Here again there is support for Sutton-Smith's (2003) assertion that what play prepares you for is more play by maintaining a playful disposition to seek out or perceive novelty within the environment to discover what more can be done with things and bodies.

Lines of playing

The preamble to this thesis alludes to the central position of lines within the discussion and this section returns to this theme in order to build upon some of the concepts established in the preceding chapters. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) maintain that the world cannot be explained by a singular signifying approach but rather the ways in which signification can be assembled is multiple and boundless. The intention at this point is to introduce another line of enquiry that extends Deleuze's claim that 'only movement concerns me' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002). The following example, adapted from Lester (2016c, p. 25) offers a useful singular turning point that brings together a number of conceptual strands:

Three girls are in the corner of the hall and have assembled a range of materials that were lying around (black foam pieces, plastic bricks, small cable reels and other bits of stuff); two girls balance lengths of the black foam between the cable drums and then carefully support this by placing the plastic bricks underneath. One of the girls then positions herself at the end of the bridge, preparing to step on to the foam. Close observation of movement reveals she is already positioning herself to fall, arms outstretched, body alert to the possible movements that will occur once she leaves the ground. She carefully lifts a foot and lays it very gently on to the foam, feeling the movement, body adjusting. As she prepares to move on, a playworker offers a helping hand. The structure collapses almost immediately as the girl steps onto it. There are shrieks of

laughter and the girls start to rebuild it – this time it is even more precarious with a similar outcome as the girl tries to walk along it and more fits of laughter as it once again collapses before the girls move into the adjacent area.

These precarious steps are, as with Stella Nona, moments of surfing/walking. The ability to move freely through life is not about escaping constraints of gravity and balance but forces to be worked with, to let oneself go into a fall and regain balance. A posthuman account does not freeze movement by inverting subjects and extracting them from the environment or any other expression of externality (as in Figure 4) but rather proposes the world as always in motion (Manning, 2014; McCormack, 2013; Ingold, 2011a, 2011b); ‘a body never pre-exists its movements’ (Manning, 2014, p. 164). Life is presented as lines of concerned and affecting intra-actions, that coalesce, persist or fall apart in short time scales, move from one register to another. While the notion of an individual is not entirely surrendered, it is presented as a much more open formation with porous boundaries over which individual bodies have only limited control (Thrift, 2008). In line with the discussion in the previous section, Massumi (2002) notes that bodies may be distinguished by two complementary forces: they move and they feel. Thus a body:

...moves as it feels and it feels itself moving. Can we think of a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other’ (Massumi, 2002, p. 1).

The slightest movement of a body instigates a qualitative difference: movement evokes feelings and sensations that fold into each other, resonate, interfere, and intensify in unquantifiable (non-representational) ways to unfold again in movement ‘felt and unforeseen’ (Massumi, *ibid*). Deleuze and Guattari’s process philosophy emphasises the

intertwining relationship between the actual and the virtual; the virtual field of movement is ever-present, a 'field of movement moving' (Manning, 2014, p. 164), and contributes or insinuates itself into all forms of what actually happens, which is always a brief moment of what the movement has become. For Manning (2014), this suggests it is not a subjective 'I' that creates movement, but movement co-composes subjects. It is not simply the child acting on inert objects to make a bridge but everything is entangled in the movement between. From this perspective movement may be presented as a form of wondering and wandering, a 'what if' process that brings about differences. But this is not something out of the ordinary, as Manning (2014) asserts, wondering the world occurs all the time often in the most apparently mundane everyday movements but they become lost in habits and routines. However, as previously noted, it is possible to develop a greater sense of enchantment and wonder with movement's potential, not as individual acts but as processes of individuation and dephasing. Another exemplary account is introduced to set these ideas to work by reproducing an extract from an observation¹³ during a visit to see an exhibition of landscape paintings by David Hockney and later reproduced in Lester and Russell (2014a, p. 298):

The gallery was very busy, and movement was restricted as we followed the flow of people through the various rooms. My attention was caught by two young girls (probably aged around 5/6 years old) with attendant adults who appeared very immersed in the paintings, certainly more so than the children who spent time chatting, moving through the crowd holding hands and occasionally

¹³ The observation developed from an anticipatory readiness or preparatory enchantment to movements, developed while writing a conference presentation on the train journey to London – an example of bodies learning to be affected.

breaking out into skipping movements around bodies, at one point sitting on the floor together and doing a small hand-clapping routine. My gaze became more focussed as one child stood in front of one of the large landscape paintings stepping over the marked line on the floor which tacitly placed a restriction on adult encroachment to the immediate space around the canvas. Placing her back towards one large tree in the left of the picture, the young child positioned her arms to align with the main branches, effectively mimicking the shape of the tree. The other child stood facing her friend and helped to manoeuvre her arms into a closer copy before standing alongside and adopting a position to represent another tree. This child then proceeded to 'blow' as if it was windy and her friend began bending and shaking in the breeze, and reciprocating with blowing on to the 'other' tree and provoking a similar shaking response. Shortly afterwards they appeared to become conscious of being watched and moved away, giggling before disappearing into the crowd.

What this observation reveals is that playing may be (re)presented as a precarious relational achievement, a 'performance involving off-the-cuff behaviour created by affective and expressive encounters between bodies, space, symbols and materials' (Lester and Russell, 2014a, p. 298), and capacities to become together. It is movement with a certain style, an experience with its own singular dynamic intra-activity and dependencies marked with an atmosphere and rhythm of calmness and joy. A relational perspective suggests bodies and materials are continually and inextricably mutually responsive to local conditions and resistant to standard accounting through resemblances and oppositions; subject/object, self/other distinctions are redundant as the material and the social become entangled in all

kinds of 'promiscuous combinations' (Whatmore, 2002, p. 4). It is a direct and largely unmediated process that presents a counter viewpoint on the nature of neural and body plasticity that operates in the spaces between.

Lines of entanglement

The single line of movement introduced in Figure 5 gets away from the binary of inside/outside but is an over-simplified representation. Pursuing a relational perspective, and the exemplary account of becoming trees, a single line is but one of the multiple trails that produce the event and constitute the ongoing 'texture of the lifeworld' (Ingold, 2011b, p. 70). Equally, for Deleuze, rather than development unfolding (*vectorisation*) along a single line, life may be presented as 'a swarm of small inclinations, a swarm of difference...an endless network simmering with differential micro-variations' (Deleuze, 2004, p. 61). Life progresses as a bundle of lines of movement, or what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) refer to as *haecceity*, that is, non-personal individuation that produces a unique block of space time.

Such lines do not connect points (as in a tracing) but pass between structures and order as an unbounded, dynamic entanglement in fluid space. Playing, as a classification and representation given to a certain style of performative entanglement of inseparable bodies, materials, elements, and affects, emerges as a meshwork¹⁴ 'woven from the countless threads spun by beings of all sorts, both human and non-human, as they find their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are enmeshed' (Ingold 2007, p. 3). The

¹⁴ There is a distinction to be drawn between Ingold's (2011a) concept of the meshwork and the term 'network' which is the mapping of interconnections between pre-existing points i.e. the relationship between distinctive elements requires an act of inversion prior to delineating connections.

children's movements in the art gallery weave a meshwork with, between, over, under all the assembled bodies and materials to a point of becoming trees.

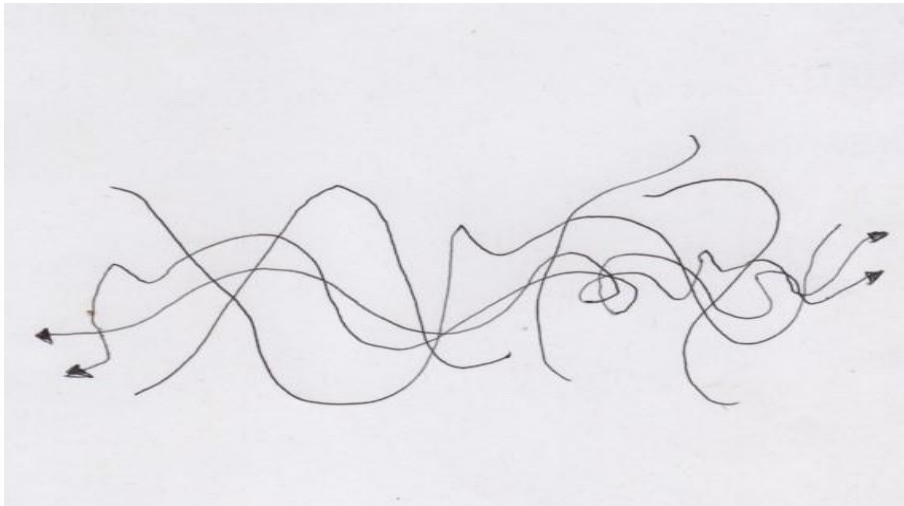


Figure 7: An entanglement of lines (after Ingold, 2007).

Another exemplary account is introduced at this stage to provide some further context. It is taken from Noren-Bjorn (1982, p, 29) and given a new lease of life in Lester (2015, p. 62):

A girl throws a stone in the water. She listens to the plop and watches the rings forming. Another girl comes up and tries to hit a “target” in the water. The girls begin to keep score of how many times they get a hit and to discuss what “counts”.

As Lester (2015a) comments, a traditional account would privilege individual human agency (freely chosen and personally directed) and prise play apart as a distinctive activity that takes place against an immutable and inert background. A vitalist account defers reducing this to presumed foundational origins:

The event is emergent and situated; time, space, bodies, materials and meanings come into co-existence and are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action... The intra-active event produces a diffractive pattern of relationships, a 'dance of relating' (Haraway 2008, p. 25) with overlapping ripples of encounters and actions (Lester, 2015a, p. 62)

Thoughts of self-enclosed individuals unravel as bodies and materials intra-act in original patterns of movement, the constitutive dynamics of playing. The event is produced by a series of vitalising attunements and affect synchrony with the materials at hand (Schoore, 2001). Lines cohere to achieve a fragile and barely-stable equilibrium composed from a multitude of micro-movements or 'vibrational forces' around a singular point (Manning, 2014, p. 170). What if, what happens, what counts, are collective desires to maintain affirmative relations by producing sufficient stability to sustain further possibilities for joyful action. The playful intra-activity of the children in the art gallery begins to coalesce in front of the Hockney painting to compose an identity of becoming trees before fading off. They are compositions in which, for the time of playing, bodies and materials can be different or become-otherwise (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994), no longer fixed to adult meanings and identities. The productions of playful timespaces are moments of enchantment with the world, a particular refrain (extended here to include sound and movement). The effect of this is to create a space or territory around this point, 'pushing back disorder beyond a borderline' (Bennett, 2001, p. 167) while at the same time opening a crack, 'one launches forth, hazards an improvisation...to join with the world' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 343-344). Playing is produced by movements that diffract (following Barad, 2007), not a mirror that reflects but as a prism that acts upon the surroundings, extracting various

vibrations, disturbances, interferences, decompositions and transformations. These mo[ve]ments are embodied and embedded entangled lines of response-ability, i.e. an ability to maintain anticipatory readiness and be responsive in a manner that is always experimental; nothing is certain in where it is going. Playful formations show 'no distinction between the natural and the artificial' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 294); they do not have a supplementary dimension to that which emerges upon it. The idea that there is an external nature, accompanied by cultural interpretation of this real nature no longer works (Law 2004); 'we inhabit a corporeality that is never disconnected from our environment' (Alaimo 2010, p. 156).

The examples of playful entanglements introduced to date are not best accounted for in terms of causality and independently existing identities. They are always points of entanglement in which there is no individual locus of agency but moments when, through the complex weavings and extensions, the state of beings becomes livelier and begin to generate a temporary stability or identity from the field of relations. And so life may be represented as 'entangled knots' (Ingold, 2007, p. 82) or a manifold woven from the countless threads spun by beings of all sorts, both human and non-human. As Ingold (2007) suggests, such a perspective challenges the very idea of evolution and development; no longer a progressive, unfolding, accumulation, refinement and enhancement of pre-configured potential as suggested in Figure 1, of ontogeny replicating phylogeny, and bodies as gene carriers but an open-ended process in which matter continually and intra-actively forges the conditions for life.

More Deleuzian lines

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) note that everything is composed of three kinds of lines: lines of molar or rigid segmentarity; lines of supple or molecular segmentation; and lines of flight. It is important not to see these as separate strands or forces; on the contrary, they are intimately connected and caught up in an assemblage (block of space/time) of lines of all different flows. As such, they are not dualisms, but a multiplicity of dimensions of lines and directions that intersect and cut across each other (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002); action emerges from forces conducted along lines. The desires of the children in the art gallery become enmeshed with everything else in the environment to produce a moment of becoming trees, formed by lines of latitude and longitude that mark an extensive relational capacity of the body combined with an intensity that augments the power to act (*potentia*). But equally lines of movement and desire may be suppressed and blocked by more powerful forces that restrict the range of potential connectivity (*potesta*); a warning from the gallery attendant about not over-stepping the mark, a casual comment from a parent fearful of disapproving looks from other adults and so on might rein in children's movements. Such spatio-temporal relations are not predicates or essences of a thing but as 'dimensions of multiplicities' (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p. 94). Tellingly Ingold (2011, p. 40) asserts:

...every line describes a flow of material substance in a space that is topologically fluid...the organism should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space.

Figures 1 and 2 are classic examples of a molar line; life is segmented on a plane of organisation, children fixed and ordered to this normative line. The plane of organisation seeks to establish the rhythms of everyday life by attuning movements to a particular end by

establishing taken-for-granted habits, repetitive movements and routines that choreograph daily life and ways of being. As Lester (2016a) notes, these orderings may be necessary to make space work but they also have exclusionary effects.

However, this can never be a fully totalising force: 'there are multiple arrhythmic movements that temporarily break apart order and stability and generate creative expressions' (Lester, 2016a, p. 9). While molar lines segment and produce stability, molecular lines and lines of flight cross through the segments to varying degrees. While one organises, the others are a flow running through as lines of disorder. And while one establishes codes for a predictable world, the others are impulsive and indeterminate. Children's play can mimic, parody and mock the constraining forces of the plane of organisation, initiating change through the formation of different relationships to see what more can be done with the 'reality' that others seek to impose (Lester, 2014a). This can be exemplified in Iona Opie's (1993, p. 31; cited in Lester, 2014a, p. 202) conversation with two schoolchildren as they seek to trick the adult by playing at the margins of decency:

Two of the boys jumped on a shoe locker... 'try putting your fingers in your mouth and pulling it sideways, and then say 'I was born on a pilot ship'. It comes out 'I was born on a pile of shit'.

This is a minor collusion, an attempt to rework power relationships in children's favour and break apart the given order of things; they are different differentiating lines of movement by 'just playing'. (Lester, 2012b). Lines of segmentarity or molecular lines are supple and trace out little modifying movements; segments are not fixed and immutable but have thresholds which can be crossed - many things can happen on this second kind of line.

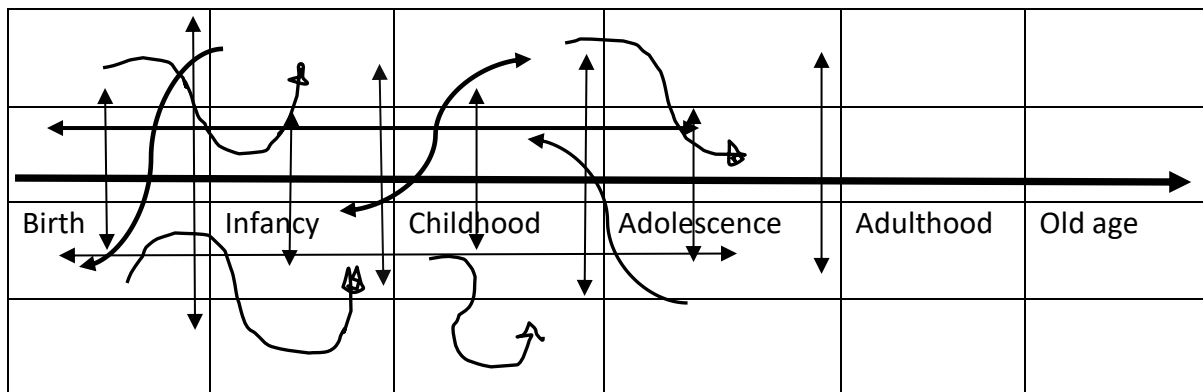


Figure 7: Molecular lines and lines of flight

These lines elude molar coding but flow and become entangled within the constraints of the system (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002) – they are walking, falling, balancing motions that modify order. Such forms of novelty and creativity are necessary within segmentary lines otherwise the system would stagnate. In capitalist terms, progress is achieved through new formations and creations but these must always be carefully managed and reined-in or reterritorialised (Hardt and Negri, 2009). As previously noted, the play and learning discourse encourages children’s creative expressions but over-codes this with adult interventions and meanings; it is important that children are creating the right things. A third Deleuzian strand is expressed as a strange ‘line of flight’, which ruptures and escapes from the previous two lines. Molecular lines and lines of flight initiate processes of deterritorialisation, operating at the threshold between assemblages, teasing apart and breaking free from segmented lines (Bonta and Protevi, 2004).

All these lines are intersecting and cut across each other, sometimes connecting and assembling multiple desires and differences while at other times blocking these flows (Blaise, 2013). Dominant relations of power ‘are never stable or eternal and as functional elements

of an assemblage, they are open to becoming otherwise in shifting fields of connection (Currier 2003, p. 336). Playful acts of creation are not simply temporary variations added on to a stable and inert life, as though there is life and then the superimposed event. They are constitutive of life itself. From this perspective playing may be seen as an on-going process of differentiation and breaking away from molar lines and the plane of organisation by reconfiguring bodies, materials, symbols, histories and so on to see what more they are capable of doing. Children can and do reconfigure space; the possibilities for minor novelty offer the potential for appropriating new environmental properties. The list of small novelty is unlimited and it is assumed that great novelty rests on 'developing heterogeneous patterns of small novelty which the child unfolds in her activities across different settings in her on-going life' (Bang, 2009, p. 163). This is further explored in Lester's (2014a) analysis of Ward's (1979) notion of play as protest or a form of micropolitics that involves small everyday encounters that bring about change and difference; but just because it is minor doesn't mean it is insignificant. Children desire to subvert or reconfigure [adult] authority and order, yet this is often expressed through molecular lines and supple re-workings that do not seek to completely break away in a quest for total freedom.

While children's lives may be highly regulated, they can de-limit adult authority through playful permeations of routine spaces and practices and often seek adult collusion in this process; we laugh at the nonsense of all the impish antics (Lester, 2014a). A notable illustration of this is Maritta Hannikainen's (2001) research into adult/child playful actions and ways of being and getting on together in a kindergarten in Finland. The observations from this study, and subsequent conversations with Maritta at the International Council for Children's Play conference in Estonia (2012), have been significant in shaping my

thinking/doing, and one specific extract, performed at the IPA Global Conference in Cardiff (2011), and further developed in one of the selected publications in support of this thesis (Lester, 2103b) will be re-introduced in this section.

Kindergarten (along with schools, health care settings, playgrounds, and so on) are segmented spaces aligned to a plane of organisation. They are abstract/conceived productions (Lefebvre, 1991), planned and designed to reflect the dominant values attributed to education and articulated in policy, curricula, standards and inspection regimes. The value attributed to this time/space correlates with the overall intention of education, the purpose of childhood, and by inference, adulthood (Kraftl, 2006). Their physical design reflects the primary function of space for education and learning (terms which in themselves tend to become conflated), and there are constant reminders to children about their place within the institution through teaching practices, design of furniture, seating arrangements, educational symbols and materials, codes, and protocols for behaviour which collectively act upon children's mobility and agency (Lester, 2011a; Leander, Phillips and Taylor, 2010). The school space is produced as a site that privileges adult status and power and this is communicated in everyday spatial practices and routines (Devine 2002). Yet there always remains the possibility of children's and adult desires reconfiguring dominant accounts, as illustrated by the following observation of circle time (Hannikainen, 2001, p. 127; cited in Lester, 2013b, pp. 32-33) a fairly mundane routine that generally reinforces power relations – the teacher sits on a chair with children sitting on the floor around this. On this occasion, the normal pattern was disturbed by an injection of nonsense:

The kindergarten teacher, Sara, begins the roll call: 'Magnus?'

Magnus replies: 'Yes, [here]'.

Sara: 'Peter?'

Peter: 'No, [not here], I am down inside Magnus'.

Peter, Magnus, Tine, Natalia and several other children nearly split their sides laughing.

Peter, too, smiles at his success.

Sara asks, with a twinkle: 'Are you down inside Magnus?'

Peter asks: 'Yes, isn't that a rather silly thing to say?'

Sara: 'Frankly, yes.'

When the roll call reaches Katrine she says that she, too, is down inside Magnus. The children laugh.

Sara points out in a surprised voice: 'Now there are two children down inside Magnus'.

Nadja: 'Then he must give birth'.

Tine: 'Two in his belly, no, two in his ears (the other children laugh) ... no, two in his nose (all the children giggle and laugh) ... no, two in his little peter (meaning: penis)

Peter continues: 'No, two in his bum'.

Peter and Magnus laugh so much that they almost fall off their chairs.

This is an act of co-creation: the teacher and children's shared desire to affect and be affected initiates molecular mo[ve]ments that temporarily hold-off the mundane routine of registration. For this brief period, a normalising account of being teacher and pupil is suspended and re-worked and by doing so the space (composed from bodies, materials, imaginations and so on) is livelier, 'allowing for an intensity of becoming different while creating the extensive possibility that things can go on becoming different' (Lester, 2013b, p. 33). 'I am down inside...' is a collusion or individuation productive of a playful haecceity, a non-personal block of spacetime with a different speed or rhythm (longitude) from

established patterns and different affects (latitude) as laughter ripples around the circle with increasing intensity. This act of deterritorialisation is almost seamlessly reterritorialised as circle time comes to order, but it is never the same – always repetition with difference – as there is a greater possibility for more of these shared moments to emerge in daily habits and practices, as Hannikainen’s study illustrates.

Equally children may subvert and directly counter adult authority and rules. For example, when the class teacher’s attention and gaze is not directed at children (writing on a board, back turned to the class) or leaves the room, children may ‘doodle, pass notes, whisper, make faces, giggle, mock and satirise adults’ (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 111). However, the teacher, ‘while ‘absent’, is still present as an invisible reminder of the ways in which normal boundaries are maintained, adding to the precarious nature and excitement of playing’ (Lester, 2014a, p. 202). These irruptive events allow for a world in which new relations and assemblages are always possible, what Hardt and Negri (2009) refer to as ‘biopower from below’. This acknowledges that freedom – taken here as an expression of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘plane of immanence’ – is always a precursor to power and forms of resistance to dominant forces are ‘simply the effort to further, expand and strengthen that freedom’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 82). Deleuzian excess proposes that affective life must always exceed attempts to make it into an object-target for biopower and State practices. Another exemplary account from Sutton-Smith (2004, p. 25), cited in Lester (2012b, p. 18) neatly illustrates a two-year old child’s play with the idea of ‘sitting on’:

The cat went on the cakies. The cat went on the car. The cookie was in my nose. The cookie went on the fireman’s hat. The fireman’s hat went on the

bucket. The cookie went on the carousel. The cookie went on the puzzle. The cookie went on the doggie.

The montage presented above offers unusual combinations of events that collude around 'went on' to form strange juxtapositions that surprise, make one look again and disturb ways of seeing things. Rather than ordering in a logical manner, with a beginning, middle, and end, children's playful expressions contain an alternative way of creating and structuring the world. In playing, virtual possibilities which are ever present are actualised; ideas, materials and bodies are not fixed and immutable. For the time of playing spatial productions and practices are made indeterminate and vague through nonsense, subversion, inversion and irrationality. Moments of playing are productive of space rather than reproductive.

Developing a 'play space' – the playground

The common-sense application of the term 'play space' generally refers to a segregated environment where the design intention is that children play. Lester (2014a) notes that adult space/time productions of childhood are founded on the basis of children as something other than adult, and this 'otherness' has led adults to write (right) childhood into one form of space or another (Jones, 2008). The traditional approach to supporting children's play in the public realm is through designing environments to a 'fairly predictable pattern and making a causal connection between what is offered in these sites in terms of equipment and materials (playthings) and what children are expected to do with them' (Lester, 2014a, p. 203). The history of playgrounds reveals a consistent pattern of attempted control over children's spatial movements (Gagen, 2000; Hart, 2002). The desire to physically contain children in specific sites (including staffed play centres, school playgrounds and free

kindergarten) was driven by social and moral reformers in a move to get children off the street and away from bad influences (Hart 2002). The depiction of (working class) children playing in their immediate environments, portrayed as squalid and dangerous, collides with the image of Rousseau's natural child (Read, 2011) and there are traces of this dilemma in much of the rhetoric around natural playgrounds discussed in chapter 3. While modern day versions and accompanying rhetoric lack the explicit and stark intentions of the founding playground movement, the descriptions of contemporary play sites still present a particular image of the child at play and contribute to governing the child (Ryan, 2010). They are the right places for play and other possibilities for different spatial productions and arrangements are 'out-of-place'. The desire to situate, position, and represent in relative terms freezes movement; bodies are confined to a pre-determined grid, traced and fixed as a local embodiment of dominant orthodox ideology.

The 'playground' and all its variations of staffed play provision are Lefebvrian (1991) conceived and perceived spaces. They form the ideological content, truth claims and the conceptual imaginations of spaces. It is just one of the multiple abstract representations conceived by politicians and associated technocracy (for example, planners, developers, architects and engineers) and mediated through a range of verbal/non-verbal codes and signs that emerge in a dominant discourse of space in any society. Space is specialized and compartmentalized, establishing barriers of containment maintained by experts, who from their lofty position create an official representation of a 'true space', a homogenizing force that seeks to reduce the vitality of life to induce minimal difference and 'serves the most nefarious enterprises of economic and political power' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 398). Playgrounds fall neatly into neoliberal public management systems as they are readily accountable

through a range of quantifiable methods (number of users, amount of space, distance of travel) a universe of statistics that demonstrate action is being taken and a strategy is being successfully implemented (Ryan, 2010). While abstract representations, they come to play a decisive role in the production of space through political and social practices. It forms a minor part of the common-sense ways in which people manage to go on with life, and develops into habits and routines of space that are largely taken-for-granted.

But space, as well as being a conceptual production, is the primary locus of lived experiences; for Lefebvre (1991) space is not simply abstract or inert but is 'organic, fluid and alive it has a pulse, it palpitates, it flows and collides with other spaces' (Watkins, 2005, p. 211). Lefebvre's triad of conceived, perceived and lived space highlights that social, economic and political dynamics of production cannot be considered merely from use and exchange values of space. Simply understanding space as the product of hegemonic powers in a determined-determining manner omits the multiple ways in which space may *not* be produced as a commodity; the dimension of lived space suggests that interwoven from these elements is a 'misuse' value of space (Ozkan, 2008). Lefebvre's analysis resonates with Deleuzian lines of enquiry: a playground is part of the molar assemblage or plane of organisation with use value in the progression of children. They may also have value for adults and accompanied younger children in the formation of habits and routines of everyday life. A number of studies highlight the contribution they make to creating social capital (Smallacombe, 2006; Jones and Shen, 2014) which may crudely be presented as an investment in social relations that have expected returns in the marketplace. However, formal and segregated playgrounds may have limited appeal for older children (see for

example, Frost, 2006; Armitage, 2004; Rasmussen, 2004; Thompson and Philo, 2004; Worpole, 2003; Hart, 2002).

The concept of the playground is another inaugural gesture; once in place as a product or object, the processes of its formation become hidden. Thus, while there may be critiques of design and recommendations for improvement/upgrading (see for example Woolley, 2008) the original and contemporary rationale for abstracting space in this manner is rarely brought into question. This thesis resists this ‘transcendental error’ of presenting or tracing the empirical qualities of constituted things/beings into the formative process of its constitution and the scale of assumptions made about the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups. As Cloke (2002) suggests issues of space, place, environment, landscape and so on are often built into the very heart of moral arguments and assumptions and in keeping with this, the remainder of this chapter will present an alternative position on ‘play space’ that opens up the possibility for a different form of ethical responsibility.

Life beyond the playground

Thus far, the discussion has been focused on movements, flows and forces but this does not take place over a Euclidian abstract space; life does not move over a surface but through it (Ingold, 2011a; Barad, 2007). Moving bodies and things co-constitute affective spaces with their own overlapping and diffractive rhythms, refrains and atmosphere (McCormack, 2013). Refrains, as in becoming trees, balancing the lines and throwing stones, are territorial assemblages or *milieus* with their unique rhythms and tempos drawn from the chaos of the world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). While they establish a temporary degree of stability and consistency, refrains are always open; ‘while they may be repetitive [they] are always

potentially generative of difference (McCormack, 2013, p. 8). It is here that attention turns to a processual understanding of space: movements of bodies and things create space/time – space does not pre-exist movement but is a relational achievement and as such always open to the future. The children in the art gallery or at the bus stop and all the associated paraphernalia that constitutes the atmosphere of these environments co-create a ‘play space’; playing does not pre-exist movement but is always present as a virtuality on a plane of immanence. Intensive movements and dephasings actualise a timespace of becoming trees.

Playing, as a process of life, always has a spatial element; playful assemblages are always composed and produced rather than given:

Matter’s dynamism is generative not merely in bringing new things into the world but in the sense of bringing forth new worlds, of engaging in an on-going reconfiguring of the world. Bodies do not simply take their places in the world. They are not simply situated in, or located in, particular environments. Rather environments and bodies are intra-actively co-constituted. Bodies...are integral parts of, or dynamic reconfigurings of what is (Barad, 2007, p. 170)

What emerges from a geophilosophical reading of Deleuze and Guattari is an emphasis on ways in which space and ‘spacings’ (Massey, 2005) are configured through movements and encounters. A relational view of space does not differentiate between space and time but rather sees events and processes as the combined operation of *spacetime* (Harvey, 2009). Drawing heavily on Deleuze’s (1966) reading of Bergson, time (or duration) is presented as a continuity of a multiplicity of temporal and continuous becomings through differentiation and elaboration. Intra-activity is driven by and productive of difference, the elaboration of

difference within a thing (Grosz, 2005) that undoes as well as makes. It 'involves the fracturing and opening up of the past and the present to what is virtual in them, to what in them differs from the actual, to what in them can bring forth the new' (Grosz, 2005, p. 4). Time cannot be broken down into discrete units but must be merged with space to produce an event that is always open to multiple experiences and modalities and therefore always in the process of becoming; 'spatiality is intra-actively produced...an on-going process of the material (re)configuring of boundaries – an iterative (re) structuring of spatial relations' (Barad, 2007, p. 181).

Disparate influences flow from everywhere to everywhere else (Crouch, 2010). These flows and forces can assemble to form an event, or identity. Identity, in this mode, is different from that of absolute space (fixed and determined) and even relative space (where things may be more mobile but always identified in relation to other things). In relational space identity becomes open, messy, fluid, multiple and indeterminate. Massey's (2005) compelling argument for revitalising an imagination of space establishes three key propositions which have critical value. Firstly, space is recognized as the product of interrelations constituted through interactions (although in the context of discussions to date this would be intra-action) that occur at all levels of analysis from the global to the intimately tiny, which in this reading would suggest at molecular level of bodies and atomic level of matter. This accent on relatedness challenges essentialist accounts of identity and replaces it with the idea that it is constantly being formed through encounters with other bodies and objects. Secondly, space is the sphere of the virtual-real and the actual - there are many ways of forming relationships and equally multiple ways of perceiving the world. Massey (2005, p. 11) contends that any 'serious recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity

itself depends on a recognition of spatiality' and by doing so opens the world up to greater imagination of what is possible. The final proposition established by Massey is that space, because of first two propositions, is always emergent, on-going and open to the future; there are always connections yet to be made. In line with the intransitive use of play in this discussion, Massey's (2005) analysis opens up the possibility of the intransitive use of 'spacing' that carries with it the idea that space is processual and performative of the everyday. This replaces a vocabulary of stasis, representation, reification and closure with one of intensities, capacities, forces, rhythms, cycles, encounters, events, movements flows, affects, atmospheres, and assemblages/entanglements (Foucault, 2007; Cadman, 2009).

Thus a Deleuzian inspired reading of a 'play space' is something totally different and more intriguing from a relational perspective. It is a composition or meshwork that has a certain style, force and rhythm. Playing is a momentary occurrence of liveliness, a performance that has no original identity (Harker, 2005), but is emergent (in Barad's application of this term). It is how life takes place and goes on. They are always sites of co-creation in which children become partially and temporarily separate from being possessed to become self-possessed (Lee, 2005). This momentary self-possession enables children to play with the materials of their everyday worlds at the borders and thresholds of separateness.

The matter of play - an ethical account

The previous discussion repositions and liberates playing from common-sense; no longer portrayed as a separate activity undertaken in dedicated timespace under the watchful gaze of adults with purposeful play materials designed to progress individual children and to limit desires to the optimum level to become productive and consuming citizens. Rather a

Deleuzian vitalist/materialist perspective presents play as 'quintessentially the process of life going on in an affirmative manner' (Lester, 2015a, p. 63). The co-creation of playful moments, with their unique refrains and rhythms, produce spacetimes where/when life is more vital. They are expressions of collective agency to overcome the limitations that others would seek to impose, playful compositions where life is better and there is greater satisfaction in being alive (Sutton-Smith, 2003). As such, playing contains hopeful and joyful utopian impulses far removed from the common-sense, orthodox attribution of value. It is an estimation, projection and coordination of moving bodies and materials into the almost future; pleasurable dephasings and collusions replete with relational potential (Manning, 2013). Perhaps the only certainty about playing is that it maintains Deleuzian lines of latitude and longitude expressed as an intensive and extensive desire for more play. The co-creation of playspacetimes allow for new possibilities: for pleasure, pain, anger, frustration, tranquillity and the whole range of emotions that contribute to being human and a 'stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life' (Massumi, 2002, p. 214. The opposite of play is not work but depression and reduction in the capacity to act (Sutton-Smith, 2003). Given this, playing matters: they are intimate meshworks that make more liveable worlds and as such are of important ethical consideration.

As a brief aside before the main event, it is worth noting a number of research studies which highlight the value of playfulness and humour in protest movements as a way of forming collective solidarity (see for example Crossa, 2013; Routledge, 2012; Pinder, 2005; Katz, 2004). Play, laughter and fun are important qualities in a politics of resistance that challenge the array of injustices and exploitation associated with neoliberal economics (Crossa, 2013). Routledge's (2012) reflection on clowning at the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005 portrays

playful action, or 'ethical spectacle', as a challenge to dominant ways of producing the world by presenting alternative views. Ethical spectacles are 'participatory, open-ended, and playful' (Routledge, 2012, p. 431). They are self-organised creative acts of improvisation, 'always being in motion and involving contingency at the level of form and meaning' (Routledge, 2012, *ibid*) by using absurd re-configurations of a presumed reality to provocatively question the given order of things. This is redolent of Lester's (2014a) account of children's play as protest against the conditions of their lives in which acts of ridicule and incongruity are turned against authority. By playing, everyday routines are exaggerated, made larger than life, subverted and re-configured, creating spacetimes of political and ethical possibility. As previously noted, they are not a complete overthrow of existing order but forms of 'soft subversion' (Guattari, 1996) or micro-political lines of flight initiated by a collective desire to break away from the plane of organisation by generating emotional resonances that are life affirming. They are instigated with due caution:

You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, situations force you to and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality...You don't reach the BwO [body-without-organs], and its plane of consistency by wildly de-stratifying (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 178).

There is a fruitful connection here to Spinozan ethics and politics. For Spinoza, read through Deleuze (1994) and Damasio (2003), the intensive state of joy (*gaudium*) is an active mode which continues and extends as long as a body's powers increase; it pursues new

possibilities that expands imaginations, refines an ability to feel and be affected, and extends capacities for action and passion (Hardt and Negri, 2009). In line with key themes discussed to date, a posthuman ethics pays attention to the entangled intra-actions in which bodies and materials are always enmeshed and the possibilities they present for creating the world differently. Ethics cannot be confined to an abstract notion of individual rights or universal rules of law. But it also refutes the idea that all that is left is a vague relativism:

Deleuze's philosophy proposes a posthumanistic but robust alternative... such a vision can provide an alternative foundation for an ethical subjectivity that respects the complexity of our times (Braidotti, 2012, p. 170).

An ethics of immanence renounces judgments of good and evil, right and wrong, the moral codes of orthodox dogma. Rather the diversity of living things and singularity of events demands tangible methods of immanent evaluation, concerned with what emerges in unique formations to consider what bodies can do, and immanent experimentation, a creative and responsive approach within the particular event to evaluate how relations with other bodies and materials enhance or decrease the power to act.

Pursuing this, Braidotti's (2012) interpretation of Deleuze's ethics stresses an active relational ontology; the ethical instance is not located within a subject with individual moral agency but is caught up in a set of intra-actions with both human and inhuman forces intent on co-creating ethical sustainability ('what counts', 'what happens if you fall off' and 'what if...?'). Subjectivity is not a matter of individuality but a relation of response-ability to all the components (the 'others' that are not other but part of) that constitute the environment in a 'world that is always already an ethical matter' (Barad, 2012, p. 69). For Deleuze, life is not *a priori* but is immanent to and coincides with multiple actualisations; the emphasis is on the

ways in which these are generated and the contribution they make to ethical sustainability. As such, ethics is *practice* 'that cultivates affirmative modes of relation, active forces and vitality' (Braidotti, 2012, p. 173) and responsibility lies with establishing and sustaining empowering relations (*potentia*) between human and non-humans as well as transforming negative and constraining forces (*potesta*) that seek to inhibit the power to affect and be affected. An ethics of mattering is to take account for our part in the meshworks of life in which we are entangled, an awareness of one's condition of intra-action and the capacity to affect and be affected to enable life to flourish (Braidotti, 2006). At its most fundamental, ethics is concerned with becoming different to bring about new and ever increasing capacities towards happiness (Hardt and Negri, 2009). But this cannot be a pre-determined state given that the entanglements that constitute are always emergent and creative; it requires an 'account-able' orientation towards that which is being created while at the same time being open to the possibilities that might emerge (Olsson, 2009).

Account-ability, in this sense, implies taking account of the ways in which discursive-material practices effect cuts and what is excluded from mattering (Barad, 2007); it is not a given that humans are autonomous and independent, development is teleological and so on. A messy, multiple and material posthuman ethics is concerned with movement across time, space, matter, bodies and 'reconfigures the human as a site of emergent material intra-actions inseparable from the very stuff of the rest of the world' (Alaimo, 2010, p. 156). Deleuze is not concerned with the imposition of universal and pre-established judgments that somehow exist outside of relations. Ethics is reconfigured to take account of the local, contingent, relational and collective everyday practices that constitute environmental intra-connections. What is presented here overturns segmented life-spaces and offers a promising

approach to how they might be differently enacted to produce a more just and equitable account. It is a move to extricate thought, movement, desire from worn-out binary productions and to rethink causality, agency, power, and ethics that 'undermines the metaphysics of individualism and calls for a rethinking of the very nature of knowledge and being' (Barad, 2007, p. 23).

Summary

Life, and the world, is always in process of continuous, indeterminate and emergent variation rather than order and predictability. It is constituted by haecceities and events that cohere and fall apart; singularities strung together through joints, intervals, and folds. Dynamic discontinuity and difference is generative and productive; such productions are temporary and always open to change. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy works with the messiness of everyday life rather than reducing and categorizing it into discrete and isolated entities. It is about how things work rather than what they mean.

Their concepts creatively reconfigure material-discursive practices of childhood, adulthood, playing and spacing, and by doing so opens-up the world to different possibilities. As noted, this is an ethical movement that subjects the encounters, formations and flows that constitute everyday life to critical scrutiny to reveal the ways in which they may include/exclude. But it is more than acts of deconstruction; attention is drawn towards the possibilities that playing presents for composing affirmative relations that encourage all life to flourish and not privilege the needs of the few over the multitude. Such ethical manoeuvres are crucial in challenging and resisting hegemonic forces that seek to fix adult and child identities. Children's minor playful co-creations are singular moments of political

participation in everyday life that may be more powerful than adult major politics (Bennett, 2010). The formation of playspacetimes displays a greater power to act and to rework segmentary forces to produce more favourable conditions.

Fagen (2011, p. 98) questions 'what if mind/bodies are not pre-formed and separate but distributed over time and space'? And if this is the case, as is suggested in this thesis, a new approach may follow a different line of enquiry in which playing may be a primary force in the continuation of life, 'some sort of creative, symmetry breaking process...has long been felt necessary to complete the picture of what would otherwise be a lifelessly static universe populated by inert minds' (Fagen, 2011, *ibid*). What is classified as play is one of many forms of intra-activity in which humans compose themselves in encounters with other bodies and materials to produce a more powerful collective pleasurable state (Lester, 2013b). The idea of the child as surfer 'perpetually becoming and not being defined once and for all' (Olsson, 2009, p. 14), dancing at bus-stops, and becoming trees draws attention to things in motion rather than cut-off and enclosed.

Playing, as an event, may be seen as a form of partial de-subjectification (Hardt and Negri, 2009); children no longer becoming-adult but forming other temporary possibilities for becoming different. It is an innovative force composed from within the milieu; any notion of a pre-figured teleological individual life is displaced. Too often events of playing are valued and considered retrospectively, the intention here is to emphasize the productivity and vitality of the event itself; 'the event is inside existence and the strategies that traverse it' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 60). Attention now turns to how this might work by generating a different approach to children's play and the promise this holds for producing environments that admit the playful claims of children.

Chapter 7: What more can be done and how might we do it: setting the concepts to work

Where children are is where they play (Opie and Opie, 1969, p. 11).

Children will play everywhere and with anything (Ward, 1979, p. 86).

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have mapped out a different reading of the relationship between children, play and space by drawing on Deleuzian philosophy and associated concepts. This chapter explores ways in which these concepts can be set to work to consider how adults may act ethically and responsibly in co-creating favourable conditions in which playfulness may thrive. It is underpinned by recent attempts to introduce new ways of thinking/doing playing that extend common-sense orthodoxy to appreciate that children and adults are not separate entities; the lives of children and adults are inextricably connected even when adults may be temporarily absent. But not only are they entwined with each other, they are entangled with the material flows and forces of life itself. Focus is drawn towards the intra-active micro-movements that constitute life going on and the possibilities that these present for becoming different, to make the world anew. To reiterate: life is not an individual affair but the dominant ways of cutting life apart are injurious to valuing movements founded on ethical relationality. A Deleuzian processual-materialist approach is drawn towards the formation of assemblages of animate and inanimate matter and the ways they become entangled to affect and be affected in complex relationships.

Research projects – a brief overview

This section will introduce examples of research projects that have worked with approaches and concepts discussed in previous chapters (also see Appendix 3). It is important to recognise that these are not self-contained pieces of work but research practices move in nomadic fashion across different sites and contexts; it is a meshwork rather than a tracing. Within this, a significant formation or block can be found in the growing body of writing that addresses the current formulation of children's rights as enshrined within the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), with specific focus on Article 31 and children's right to play (Lester and Russell, 2010; Lester, 2013a, Lester and Russell, 2014; Lester, 2016b). Lester and Russell (2010) assert that a reading of playing, founded on ideas extended in this thesis, would extend this apparently individual right to encompass all articles of the UNCRC, most notably the right to life (Article 6). Since this early exploration of life beyond the individual further writings have employed Deleuzian and new materialist concepts to question the notion of rights in a humanistic framework, a theme that will be revisited later in this chapter.

A concern with children's rights inevitably leads in to the field of policy formulation and a critique of the territorialisation of children's play for social and political purposes (Lester and Russell, 2008, 2013b). For the most part policies aimed at children adopt an instrumental understanding of play and enlist it to support and realise a series of policy objectives such as reducing obesity, cognitive and emotional development, citizenship, and so on. In contrast to this approach, the two studies of the Welsh Government's (2010) Play Sufficiency Duty, reveal a different understanding and value of play by drawing attention to the conditions under which playing and playfulness may thrive. As the first national attempt to legislate for

children's play (Lester and Russell, 2013a, 2014b) and working with UNCRC (2013) General Comment 17 on Article 31, this signifies an ambitious and innovative experiment that has attracted increasing global interest. Lester and Russell's studies highlight ways in which the everyday communicative intra-actions between professionals/stakeholders and materials of policy implementation (statutes, implementation guidance, tool-kits, etc.) cuts policy into meanings and practices that unfold over time and across contexts. Policies are mobile and operate across multiple scales, interests, actors, media, materials, and relations within and beyond state apparatus (McCann and Ward, 2013). The existence of law, policy and customary practices are contingent and performative, and as such can always be differently performed. From this perspective, it becomes possible to develop a critical and diffractive understanding of how things work.

Following the two small-scale studies, a larger collaborative bid 'Legislating for Children's Play', believed to be the first to examine the relationship between legislation, policy and practice in supporting children's right to play, was submitted to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2015. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful but given the significance of this legislation the application will be re-worked with European partners. Meanwhile the principles which underpinned the ESRC submission have been tested with a Welsh local authority in an experimental approach that examines relations and milieus rather than individuals (Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Renold and Mellor, 2013), processes rather than products (Law, 2004). Practitioners across a range of professional roles (housing, planning, youth criminal justice, early years, social work, play development, town centre management, art and cultural institutions) have engaged in a series of workshops to generate a critical cartographic approach to produce multiple and often divergent readings

about children's play that are much richer and more complex than the reductive sense of control over presumed cause-effect relationships. An expanded posthuman conceptualisation of play supports critical interrogation of diverse discourses, materials and practices and contributes to the formation of collective wisdom that is always partial and open-ended but attracted to forms of spatial justice. A re-encharmed material-discursive meshwork has led to a series of minor actions, notably through a burgeoning collaborative partnership between arts and culture development, town centre management and the play development team leading to series of playful, experimental interventions in public space.

While Wales may be leading the way in re-configuring notions of what constitutes a good environment for children, the same cannot be said for England where services and support for children's play have drastically diminished both during the lifetime of the Coalition Government (2010-2015) and continuing under the current Conservative Government. In response to this situation, there has been a move to take key principles of 'play sufficiency' into a small-scale action research project ('Playful Places') with two Local Authority neighbourhoods in the North West (Lester, 2015d). In developing this approach, it is acknowledged that simply trying to maintain existing services and ways in Local Authorities with ever-decreasing budgets hoping that things might improve is not sustainable. But there may be other ways of doing things which connect with a broader agenda of building more resourceful communities, that is, communities that can respond positively to current conditions to reclaim resources for themselves and co-create environments in which life can flourish rather than simply adapt unquestioningly to external circumstances (Lester, 2015d). This is not a naïve, idealised, romantic or nostalgic vision for what counts as a 'healthy community'. Rather it pursues a radical approach to community development that

acknowledges the existence of, and explicitly identifies, conflicts of interest that are embedded in community life and aligns itself with groups that are marginalised and oppressed. In children's play terms, there has been an erosion of children's presence in public space (for a variety of complex and interrelated factors). Radical community development aims to reduce injustice and inequality, emphasizing human rights, 'seeking to develop political consciousness and powerful forms of collective organizing, or to effect social change through a redistribution of power and resources' (Gilchrist, 2009, p. 40). Such an approach, while being radical in terms of challenging unfair and oppressive systems, deals with the everyday 'stuff' of community life, within the here and now rather than some grand utopian future. Each local area has its own strengths and areas of concern but paying attention to conditions that support play may provide the foundations for improving ways in which adults and children can get on and go on together.

This chapter also draws on approaches and findings from two participative action research projects. The first of these was conducted at Manchester Museum (Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014) in response to an institutional desire to develop a more playful space. The second project took place with an adventure playground in East London as part of a continuing collaborative partnership (Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014). This was an opportunity to see how emergent ideas about space, movement, materials, rhythms and so on could be applied to an adult-designed play environment. The formation of practice concepts developed through these research projects have been introduced to a wider playwork audience through a continuous professional development programme (Thinking about Play), conferences, workshops and of course the 'Professional Studies in Children's Play' postgraduate programme at the University of Gloucestershire (see Appendix 3 for more

details of these projects). More recently they have also informed a small-scale study into the value of playwork provision in Manchester (Lester, 2016c).

These experiences will be set into a wider critical discussion about (re)search into children's play and the possible implications for adults. By doing so the range is broadened beyond the traditional academic research boundaries to take account of the everyday intra-actions in which children and adults are enmeshed both directly (formally and informally) and from a more apparently remote perspective (recognising that the scalar distinction between near/far, micro/macro and so on mask the multiple ways in which these interpenetrate). Returning to Digression 1, the event of the child wearing wellies, a top hat and carrying a vacuum cleaner hose occurs through an entanglement of immediate forces which themselves are shaped in all sorts of complex and wanton ways: the training of the playworkers, the history and customary spatial practices within the estate, the availability of local open space and associated planning regulations, the desire of adults to make the estate more liveable and so much more, all play a part in creating intensive and extensive lines of latitude and longitude. Taking this one step further, the following section considers in more detail the ways in which 'research methods' are part of the everyday ways in which adult bodies can learn to be more attentive and enchanted by moments of playing to produce a more capacious and generous state.

Researching children's play

The issue of researching children's play is problematic: the dominant mode is to isolate play, categorise and represent it in order to apply meanings. The opening quotes to this chapter serve as a timely reminder that contrary to attempts by adults to classify, situate and utilise

play for their own purposes, the fact remains that moments of playfulness will emerge wherever conditions and circumstances allow. The exemplary accounts introduced previously are affirmative encounters that appear in everyday life. They bring more to the world as inventive moments that make a difference. Playing is an expression of desires that matter not only because of the ways in which they produce an intensive difference (lines of latitude and longitude) but also because they hold the promise of keeping whole clusters of affects attracted to them (Stewart, 2007); they are extensive in scope, maintaining an appetite, or anticipatory alertness and readiness (Bennett, 2004) to the possibility of further moments of playing. This is play's immense affective and life-enhancing significance. Given this, attention switches from what playing might mean in an order of representations or whether it is good or bad in the bigger scheme of things (Stewart, 2007) and turned towards how moments of playing come about and where might they go. What follows is an attempt to consider the intricate relationship between the notion of playing that I have proposed thus far and research into children's play to suggest that they share the same qualities.

Moments of playing are constituted through and with the 'live surface' – the sensations, textures, rhythms and intensities of everyday life (Stewart, 2007). The familiar ways in which glances are exchanged in the street, precarious balancing along a curb stone, running on to the grass at school playtime, casual tossing stones into water and asking 'what counts', running fingers through gooey stuff, following lines at a bus stop and waving arms in response to an imaginary wind, are amongst the most ordinary yet meaningful elements of life. They are also moments that go largely unnoticed (Laurier, 2013). The unremarkable nature of everyday life, in itself, is not a failing but an expression of the ways in which we are 'at home in the world' (Stewart, 2007). Habits are so often taken as mundane routines of

little value or something to be cultivated (good habits) or overcome by interventions from others (bad habits). However, they are vital constituents of the pre-representational real, 'made up of forces that stimulate and transform living beings through their ability to accommodate routines, activities, projects that the emergence of life amidst the real requires' (Grosz, 2013, p. 218). Grosz proposes that habits not only establish sites of regularity in a world that is constantly changing, they also generate changes in the apparently unchanging world by initiating ease of action to form links with a world that is always open to innovative behaviour. Habits are performative by establishing rhythms and refrains that are a vital component of an affective atmosphere:

Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences. They're things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something (Stewart, 2007, pp. 4-5).

While, by definition, the everyday is pervasive, it remains one of the most overlooked and misunderstood aspects of life (Gardiner, 2000) and so often ignored because of its inherent messiness. There always seems to be something mysterious and hidden about the commonplace and mundane (Lefebvre, 2004). From a research perspective, it is far easier to look at presumed discrete and bounded matters and their effects, employing long established, tried and trusted research techniques that are deemed to be the benchmark of

rigour (McCoy, 2012). Such an approach seeks to provide reassurance that what is being studied will lead to a categorical proof or denial of a pre-established hypothesis or question. Indeed, if the object of study cannot be reduced and measured in a supposed objective manner it is deemed to have failed the validity test. It assumes that the world has particular and definable features that can be reported and accounted for through accurate and detached analysis of data. Findings based on their truthfulness and trustworthiness also determine, predict and control the outcomes of similar future studies (Barone and Eisner, 2012). For Law (2006, p. 2) this is a hygienic process:

Do your methods properly. Eat your epistemological greens. Wash your hands after mixing with the real world. Then you will lead the good research life.

Your data will be clean. Your findings warrantable. The product you will produce will be pure. It will come with the guarantee of a long shelf-life.

The idea that research methods can be clean is comforting but it implies an uncomplicated world (McCoy, 2012) and the reduction and isolation of the social to fixed forms continues to be a basic error (Williams, 1977). The idea that there is a real world that can be made knowable by accurate representation is no longer tenable from an agential realist perspective (Barad, 2007). Cutting the world apart by research instruments as material-discursive effects; methods are performative as they bring about realities and at the same time bring into being what they discover (Law and Urry, 2004). Selected research methods help to 'reproduce a complex ecology of representations, realities and advocacies, arrangements and circuits' (Law *et al*, 2011, p. 13) that drags order from the proliferation of life in an exclusive manner (MacLure, 2013). Not everything can be brought into these productions no matter how comprehensive the account; 'if things are made present (for

instance representations of the world) then at the same time things are also being made absent (the world 'itself') (Law, 2006, p. 8). Representations of the real can never be total or complete and dangers arise if this incompleteness and associated exclusions are denied.

Transcendental empiricism: forming a cartography of playing

To think is to experiment, but experimentation is always that which is in the process of coming about – the new, remarkable and interesting that replace the appearance of truth and are more demanding than it is. What is in the process of coming about is no more what ends than what begins (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 111).

It is at this point that attention is given to how we might better get at the messiness of the world. How to produce a map and not a tracing? Such an endeavour requires a different form of movement by adopting the craft of cartography, continuously ranging across the territory in nomadic fashion. Simply following a well-worn path leads to familiar positions in a binary relationship between start-finish points which are poles apart. In contrast to transcendent logic which organises and fixes movement, sensation and perception with abstract thoughts, Deleuze's (2001) transcendental or experimental empiricism is opposed to everything that makes up the world of the subject and object; it presents life as a process of impersonal individuations rather than personal individualisations. While many critics berate Deleuze for apparent abstraction, Deleuzian concepts are only sufficiently abstract to work with everyday matter in new and different ways. For Deleuze theory *is* practice, and empiricism is 'a commitment beginning from singular, partial or molecular experiences...we do not begin from an idea, such as human culture, and then use that idea to explain life'

(Colebrook, 2002, p. 8). Ideas emerge from specific formations and connections between bodies:

Transcendental empiricism thus begins with singular experiences and traces the ways in which the virtual is actualised, and may be actualised differently. In methodological terms, this is to attend to the ways in which social realities are made through methods and might be made in other ways (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013, p. 11).

To repeat and reinforce a central idea introduced at the outset to this thesis: empiricism in this context is not the application of pre-existing concepts to explain or interpret the state of things. Playing, as a multiplicity or productive 'desiring machine', is nothing more than its connections; bodies never pre-exist their movements. For a short time, the performance of playing enlivens and unsettles the order of the normal course of life (Harker, 2005). It is emergent and the gaze (i.e. movements, perceptions, sensations) of the researcher is brought to bear on bodies and things co-joined in situated action that produces something that may be classified as playing (as a meshwork of movements and affects, a milieu formed from the middle). Each act of playing occurs in the present as an unpredictable, joyous assemblage of disparate bodies and materials, a singular event with its own conditions, forces, flows and time-structure. It has neither unity nor totality but composed of a set of lines and movements which are irreducible to some presumed original parts. Singularities are much more complex than surface appearance; they can generate events in all kinds of promiscuous ways and all of them equally or com-possible.

This marks a return to the notion of exemplification as a methodology pursued throughout this thesis. The playful examples introduced to date have a specificity that arises from the

unique set of arrangements produced in an assemblage. An exemplary methodology reintroduces 'playful and profane notions of difference and heterogeneity into qualitative research' (Koro-Ljungberg and Barko, 2012, p. 258). While specific examples cannot be evaluated and represented against a unity to reveal a universal and stable reality, the exploration of the intensive and extensive movements and their affects uncovers the relationality of each event. It is not about isolating an event but seeing how it might work and where it might lead. True to Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, the example always has room for extend-ability beyond itself by activating more and more detail. This is not a move from particular to general or vice versa but from the particular to more particularities (Gambis, 2013), to make more of the event by creating and experimenting with concepts, techniques and materials that extend beyond abstract intellectualism. An exemplary approach has the potential to disturb, unsettle and animate existing ideas in ways that open up the possibility for thinking otherwise (McCormack, 2013). It does not simply utilise disciplinary insights but questions the ways in which these establish and maintain boundaries. Ideas and concepts are not innocent or neutral but actively engage in diffractive entanglements to produce conditions in which new concepts may emerge or dissipate. The challenge is to produce concepts that are sensitive to the prevailing conditions of the event rather than over-code it; to extract, abduct, or 'shamelessly poach' concepts:

A concept is by nature connectable to other concepts...defined by the regularities of connection that have been established between it and other concepts: its rhythms of arrival and departure in the flow of thought and language.... When you uproot a concept from its network of systemic

connections with other concepts you still have its connectability (Massumi, 2002, p. 20).

The focus of attention is not to account for play by looking at sameness but to extend thinking through multiple readings; it is generative rather than reductive by producing more and more descriptions of events to discern patterns and potentials. It draws in all sorts of uninhibited possibilities that lead to more and more questions and lead off to who knows where. It is a position that must inevitably incorporate the senses, interest and involvement of the observer. Sense, following Deleuze (1994), marks a pre-personal and pre-conscious stance of resistance to fact and meaning-based analysis. Sensing holds off the common-sense language relations of denotation (comment), manifestation (interpret) and signification (reflect) that close down events with their respective truth claims (Deleuze, 2004). If the focus moves away from these three linguistic representational dimensions it is possible to explore the production of sense in children's playful thinking, talking, doing, in more open and mobile ways (Olsson, 2009). By doing so it can begin to work with the 'virtual-real' as a field of potentiality 'that may or may not be actualised in specific forms, according to chance alignments and divergences within series... that are not within our control' (MacLure, 2013, p. 662). Sensing may be the most expansive aspect of research yet it is generally over-looked in the drive for objectivity. In terms of children's play, it requires paying attention to moments of uncertainty, ambiguity and indeterminacy and their affects, 'a sense of the tone of any situation, the play of singularity, which might (and only might) produce new virtualisations' (Thrift, 2004, p. 85). Given the ubiquitous nature of playing, so succinctly expressed in the opening quotes to this chapter, whenever children are present

there is always the possibility of play emerging; we do not need to go into the field to discover it.¹⁵

The potential for thinking/doing differently is reduced if the focus falls simply on the actual course of events. Everything is cut through and entangled with powerful forces of determination that bring about points of unity, identity and subjectivity that restrict movement. However, these are not outside of the multiplicity to which they belong: 'in a multiplicity what counts are not the terms or the elements, but what there is between the between, a set of relations that are not separate from each other... every multiplicity grows from the middle' (Deleuze, 1986, p. *viii*). What is determined is always provisional yet may appear to be fixed and stable through repetitive normalising rituals (Butler, 1993). Given that power is found within the milieu it can always take off in another direction (lines of flight) to de-territorialise arrangements and become re-territorialised into a different formation. These forms and accompanying processes are rhizomatic, not arborescent, always moving and as such changing; they are lines of becomings. But importantly not everything can happen: the self-organising process produces inclusions and exclusions which bring powers of generation and constraint into the system: things can be more or less open, creative or fixed.

This, as previously noted, is not a naïve and romantic viewpoint: entanglements of playing are imbued with power relationships but these are collectively, tentatively and momentarily assembled to generate conditions which produce a greater power to act by being open to

¹⁵ There is a wider discussion here about the production of the 'research field' as a bounded site, where the boundaries are determined by the outside researcher, performing a cut that always involves exclusions. Yet what is outside is always of interest – see, for example, Katz (1994)

the possibilities that each moment holds for shared joy. The following brief observation from an after-school club illustrates this process:

Two children, girl aged 8 and boy aged 6, are playing a make-believe domestic game in which the girl, evidently taking the dominant role in deciding the play, is the 'mother' and the boy plays her 'husband'. The girl issues a series of instructions to her husband – time to get up, come and eat your breakfast, now you go off to work – and the boy follows these leads (a shared desire to affect and be affected). But as the 'husband' walks-off the girl shouts to him – “and then you die” which provokes a look of astonishment on the boy's face accompanied by a plea 'do I have to'? At this point the girl responds 'Alright then, you just have an accident and you have to go to hospital'. The boy is happier with this instruction and falls to the floor, screaming in pain and holding his leg at which point the game has changed from domestic roles to a surgeon/patient scenario as the girl prepares to saw off his leg (Lester, 2015c, p. 13).

This refrain contains tentative, fragile movements and balances produced by the active force of the constituents to continue to generate affirmative affects. But it could always be otherwise as reactive forces may diminish and bring this formation to closure. It is a timely reminder of a key theme which permeates this thesis: affects are a distributed, indeterminate and diffuse field of intensities circulating within and between bodies and things (Massumi, 2002; McCormack, 2013).

Transcendental empiricism pays attention to these diffractive patterns, that is, the processes that produce different flows and movements when encountering other forces that play

through space. Returning to the scenario of ‘what counts’, as the children toss stones into the water the waves flow over each other to produce ripples that interfere and disturb and may cancel each other out to produce a temporary smooth space. Each movement changes through intra-action with other ripples and obstacles and accumulates new form as each ripple partly remains within the new formation after its transformation. Equally the constant movement between children’s bodies and materials (stones) initiates different movements, an affective synchrony that composes new relationships between things and bodies.

A diffractive methodology eschews, or at least defers, processes of reflection and reflexivity, metaphors that presume there is an original image or object and the task is to accurately represent what is already in existence, independent of the gaze of the observer (Mazzei, 2014; Davies, 2014). This cherished assumption maintains a determinate and pre-existing boundary between subject and object, privileging representation and the belief that words mirror things; the challenge, from this perspective, is to find authentic mirror representation of separate things (Barad, 2007). But as should be readily apparent by now things stubbornly refuse to be pinned down as discrete objects of scrutiny. Diffraction refuses foundational subject-object relationships; it is impossible to know in advance what will emerge from the assemblage of bodies, materials, ideas, symbols, images and their affects. It is a methodology that attempts to illuminate differences as they emerge and to read these by the insights that the event produces. The traditional divide between ontology and epistemology falls away and opens to an onto-epistemological space of encounter. This significant shift has important implications and warrants a more detailed account at this point by drawing further on Barad (2007, p. 185):

We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. Onto-epistemology – the study of practices of knowing in being – is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that we need to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter.

The task is to produce an immanent subjective account of the 'reality' produced ontologically and epistemologically in the encounter. Such a process is always experimental (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010), who knows what will emerge from the mix: children becoming trees and making worlds of poo are tentative and stuttering formations that cannot be explained from an outside or from slavishly following a pre-established formula to extract meaning (Davies, 2014; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013). Rather than seeking to verify, attention is drawn towards the ways in which something different comes to matter. For Barad, this is a considerable challenge. Each entanglement is a specific configuration and changes with each intra-action:

The point is that the specificity of entanglements is everything. The apparatuses must be tuned to the particularities of the entanglements at hand. The key question in each case is this: how to *responsibly* explore entanglements and the differences they make (Barad, 2007, p. 74, my italics).

This opens onto-epistemology into an always ethical movement by being attentive and responsive to 'the specificity of material entanglements in their agential becoming' (Barad,

2007, p. 91). Presence in the world is always a process of affecting and being affected by encounters; an ethical perspective (as discussed at the conclusion to the previous chapter) acts responsibly with the everyday conditions and the opportunities that are present at any given moment to co-create affirmative connections. The intention is always to make a difference in the world, to perform ethical choices and open critical interventions that follow certain paths and not others. It necessitates taking account of the fine detail of entanglements and to engage in a conversation with a range of disciplinary perspectives (Massumi, 2002). It also requires an ethics of novelty based on 'out-of-jointness' (Thrift, 2008), a stance that continually makes the familiar strange, and by doing so to re-configure and constitute new forms of engagement and relatedness. It is a quest for 'more life... a particular form of boosting aliveness, one that opens us to our being in the midst of life through a thoroughly ontological involvement' (Thrift, 2008, p. 14). Transcendental empiricism, most notably articulated in Deleuze (2001) and Deleuze and Guattari (1994), makes it possible to develop methods that can account for collective experimentation with material-discursive entanglements, an approach that fully recognises the productive aspects of the world and admits 'to the fullest that we all partake all the time in producing, inventing and augmenting the world' (Olsson, 2009, p. 52). The remaining sections in this chapter will pay more attention to these methods and the contributions they make to the formation of a critical cartography of playing.

Doing research

Studies of play are not conducted by autonomous agents engaged in rational, scientific ways of choosing and disposing of material. The researcher is always part of an assemblage of materials, concepts, bodies, histories that are distributed and powerful with the capacity to

affect and be affected; data affects, it arouses interest ‘something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over’ (MacLure, 2013, p. 661). Becoming a tree is a chance encounter, and ‘I’ am caught in a momentary web of relationships as the performance unfolds. The important point here is that an attending presence is not adult-child, observer-observed, but connected and enmeshed. The observer is embroiled in the performance, not outside of it, and is ‘infected by the effort’ (Dewsbury, 2009, p. 326): no longer participant observation but observant participation in life (Dewsbury, 2009; Blaise, 2013). In order to grasp the rhythms of everyday life one must firstly let oneself go, ‘give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration’ (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 27). It necessitates caring about the possible worlds that we all help to bring about and sustain; one cannot stay detached, clean, innocent, and impose hygienic methods.

Some of the exemplary accounts included in this thesis are moments which are opportunistically noticed through what might be termed ‘accidental ethnography’ (Fujii, 2014) to signify the unplanned ways in which they emerge; there is no forewarning and no deliberation other than anticipatory readiness to be open to the possibilities that the world presents. As with other research methods, this form of playful apprehension can be developed and refined through practice; bodies can learn to be attentive and form an enchanted attachment to the world. It is a state of receptive and generous ethical sensibility towards other things and bodies (Bennett, 2001), productive of moments which glow and glimmer, diffractions which resonate and reverberate to sense nonsense (MacLure, 2013).

Examples are drawn from witnessing events that glowed, whether through direct presence or a more removed position; but all instigate a sense of enchantment and embodied response to the ways in which play, in particular children’s play, appears in the fabric of

everyday life. It is a research position that is more akin to surfing and riding the waves, a precarious state of balance and focussed attention to the unfolding movement (after Borgnon, 2007) rather than post-event imposition of knowledge. Another example, taken from a recent participatory action research project within the context of an adventure playground (cited in Lester and Russell, 2014, pp. 251-252), is introduced here:

Two boys (aged about 10/11 years-old) were playing a game of tag, using the circular platforms that surrounded a rope swing. It was evident that these two were part of a larger group of players, the rest safely ensconced in the hut at the top of a tower. It was also apparent that the game had a rule of not going on the ground, which constrained the two adversaries to the platform and other structures. There was also another implicit rule which meant that these two could engage in reciprocal bouts of tagging. This led to the two children standing facing each other, in very close proximity, but not touching. The person who was “it” would tag, and immediately receive a tag back from the other, often increasing the force of the contact in an attempt to push each other away and create a moment to flee; and then there were brief moments when both stood poised ready to tag without actually doing anything. There was a restless dance between the two, as one looked to retreat the other followed; it was almost balletic in the choreography of action, bodies and affects, tensions and laughter and so on. But this was also situated; the platforms were an integral part of this dance, and there was only one way out from the circular platform i.e., the walkway that led to the tower, and so the space had strategic meaning within the context of this play. Both children sought to manoeuvre the game to the part

of the circular platform closest to the “escape” route and then one child decided he was going to make a break, tagged the other child and turned to run away but was pushed/tagged in return, diverting the child beyond the escape, and the other child seized the moment to run along the platform and up into the next level.

This is the process of life going on, embodied rhythms of the everyday expressed over a short time-period in rapid and less frantic co-ordinated movements. It is a process of thinking-in-movement rather than thinking about movement (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). As Cooper (1998, cited in Law, 2004), notes it is very difficult to pay attention to the minor details in this event. For the most part, the intra-active subtle and impulsive movements are downplayed or ignored altogether and replaced by the imposition of thoughts, meanings, and classifications that fix and locate the children to a specific place. The analytic coding of data imposes macro categories and subsumes or ignores the detail of the event while affirming the validity of received knowledge and practice (Mazzei, 2014). Thus, the example might be represented in a straightforward manner as children engaged in physical play on the swing platform, and valued for the exercise that this offers to the children and so on; this simple act of location re-territorialises the diffractive movements of playing to produce finished subjects and objects.

To treat the on-going singular events of the world seriously requires a move from a form of empiricism that seeks to codify and denote to one that is oriented towards the task of descriptions that contain a fidelity to what they describe (Latham, 2003). Description is a high and rare achievement (Latour, 2005) yet simply describing may, in traditional research terms, suggest there is something missing. This is the legacy of orthodox academic

requirements that privilege explanations. But Latour (2005, p. 35) counters with the claim that if 'a description needs explanation it means it is a bad description'. Transcendental empiricism supports such moves by paying attention to the instability of life and the ways in which thoughts come to life through movement and encounter, demanding a different set of tools that adopt a practical standpoint, methods that can experiment with such messy everyday actions and add to the liveliness of intra-activity. It brings closer attention to those forms of expression, routines, habits, improvisations, sensations, materials and so, on that constitute the practices and events of everyday life that normally escape. Bodies can no longer be passive vehicles of objective perception and meaning making; they are central to the practical accomplishments and movements of becoming, 'of matters spooling out without a predetermined destination' (MacLure, 2013, p. 662). It is an attempt to animate rather than deaden life. The above example pays little attention to what is verbalised but attempts to show children's 'doings', flows of movement at different speeds and tempos and their affects, a process of attuning to the subtle diffractive patterns of complex interferences while holding off the louder noises of academic conventions.

The representation of these events is not a passive, detached recording, but embodied re(sensing), (re)assembling and (re)presenting what was happening at the time. Writing notes and drawing lines after the event attempts to relate bodies and movement to the physical environment as the playtimespace emerges. It is an act of visualisation that brings to representation the body responses of the children and the observer in order to take corporeality seriously: the direction of gaze, a body positioning that wanted to see and not be seen, the effort and effects of paying attention and so on are considered anew. This is an inherently ethical stance by becoming more aware of what is being looked at and how it is

taking place. It also presents the possibility of doing research on children's play that draws on the researcher's sensations and movements – indeed, following Rossholt (2009, p. 59) one's own body becomes a methodological strategy:

I am suggesting that by analyzing children's movements as energies, as slow and fast tempos and as movement, research can show how children become affected and affect each other. I suggest bodily events may be known and spoken into existence through the embodied gaze of the ethnographer.

This is a position of being witness to the event, observing, attesting, accounting and being accountable to one's visions and representations (Haraway, 1997). It is tentative and doomed to fall short, something always escapes. But in a sense, it thrives on these limitations by recognising that what counts as 'knowledge' is always open to further (re)arrangements (Dewsbury, 2009). As Jones (2008, p. 209) comments, 'we can hope to do children justice by witnessing their lives and making space for them without trying to occupy those lives and render them in adult discourses'. It is this move from representation to witnessing that may hold greater possibility for beginning to think about ethical relationships and encounters. Witnessing holds off classifications and meanings by attuning embodied attention to the multiple ways in which bodies, materials and so on momentarily assemble with a force and flow that we might represent as play.

Becoming minoritarian

Representation of the event is not a 'truth' but adds to the material-discursive agential production of 'reality'. A descriptive, embodied and mobile process of writing and its products performs a different 'cut' than common-sense accounts of playing that downplay

movement and their affects. They may also have different material-discursive effects: one seeks to reveal the complex intra-active processes and diffractive patterns of the encounter while the other extracts movement from life to produce a 'majority' account that is rooted in a dominant development logic that persists in fixing things through inclusions and exclusions. It is the difference, following Deleuze and Guattari (1988) between 'becoming-minoritarian' and 'becoming-majoritarian', concepts taken up by Lenz-Taguchi (2010) in an early-years context to explore the ways in which documentation might be used in practice. The example of children playing 'tag' can be re-lived both during the process of representation and at later times. This process is beyond empathy, imitation or some spurious attempt at pretending to be a child: becoming-minoritarian/child is achieved by reproducing and de-territorialising the characteristic features, affects and movements of being a child situated on a solitary line of development, breaking away from the standard or norm that defines the majority (Patton, 2000). In contrast to trying to become the other or take a position of someone else 'this is about re-installing yourself in the event to become different *in yourself*, that is to put yourself in a process of *change and transformation* to be able to experience the event differently (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p. 172, authors italics). For example, as children are creating worlds of poo, it is not taking a position of being a child but the process of changing oneself, becoming different by imagining running hands through gooey stuff, the sensations of it slipping through fingers, the possibilities for more and more disgust, the surprise of the 'worstest thing ever' and so on. It is re-living all the material-discursive intra-actions that constitute these moments to become other than adult as a process of enlivened transformation (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010); not simply 'as if' but 'what if'.

At the heart of this approach is a recognition that we are never outside of life and play; as such the task is to draw upon all the available tools and create new ones to make visible the dominant formations of everyday practices, to generate new concepts and ways of living that produce more equitable distribution of resources (St Pierre, 2011). Such a move has benefits beyond childhood: the actualisation of desire as moments of playing reminds everyone they are much freer than things might suggest. The key here is active participation in life, an ethos of openness and generosity to cultivate affectively imbued ethico-political dispositions (McCormack, 2008). These are tentative, stuttering and often minor movements that are significant processes of plugging-in to seek affirmative connections to that increase the power to affect and be affected. They are everyday ethico-political acts that, as with children's play, do not seek to overthrow systems for that would often be too much to bear, but attempt to reconfigure power relations with affective manoeuvres:

We are in a social formation: first we see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are: then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. It is only there that the BwO [Body without Organs] reveals itself for what it is; connection of desires, conjunctions of flows, continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 178-179).

This advises that adults become aware of their position within the stratifications of adult-child relationships and the ways in which assemblages (symbols, concepts, materials and practices) shape and define the expectations of their role and their subjectification as 'adults

who care for children'. But this is always open to deterritorialisation, just as the kindergarten teacher in Hannikainen's (2001) study temporarily relinquishes control over circle-time to accompany children in a moment of nonsense. These shared tipping moments or dephasings are not grand actions but rather minor, everyday and often subversive expressions that attempt to reconfigure the power structures and segmented arrangements that impact on adults and children. The following story, another exemplary event, was recounted by a Primary school playground supervisor participating in a series of playwork continuous professional development workshops (see Lester, 2014b, for the latest iteration of this format). Midway through the programme she recalled an event from a lunchtime playground session. There was one particular child, aged 7 years-old, who spent a large part of playtime pretending to be Batman, with his coat spread over his shoulders as a cape and making accompanying noises. He would fly around the playground bumping into groups of children, sometimes to their annoyance, while at other times children would play along for a while before he drifted off again.

On this particular occasion a teacher was also on duty with the playground supervisor, and seeing the child's behaviour and the disturbance he caused to other children at times, called the boy over to reprimand him for disrupting other children's play and 'why couldn't he play properly'. As the playground supervisor commented, she felt powerless to say anything at this time and stood alongside the teacher with a sense of unease. Having carried out his role, the teacher started to walk away issuing a final comment to the child 'and anyway, you are not Batman'. At this point, the playground supervisor, who was still facing the child but preparing to walk off with the teacher turned to the child

with a smile and said 'Na na na na na na na na, na na na na na na na na na¹⁶...',
winked and walked away (Lester, 2011b, pp. 19-20).

This is a minor engagement, an example of the ways in which children's difference can be both suppressed and supported. In discussion, the playground supervisor spoke of her discomfort with the actions of the teacher and her own sense of relative powerlessness, but because of her participation in the workshops asked herself the question 'what would Stuart do', not with an expectation of getting an answer but as a way that her 'little machine' plugged into another assemblage, another way of imagining the world differently and acting accordingly. This act of becoming-minoritarian encounters the child's world, not to colonise or over-code it, but simply to make a friendlier world with them; a move 'to undo ourselves, and the adult geographies of the world, or at least loosen them, by tugging away at the tight, ossified and ossifying knots of adult being, space and knowledge' (Jones, 2008, p. 211). It also suggests that participation is not neutral or apolitical; as previously noted, the moment of confirmation of becoming Batman marks a collective ethical desire to affect and be affected to enable life to go on in a livelier manner.

The process of plugging-in explains the preference for a participatory action research (PAR) methodology in the small-scale research studies undertaken over the past few years. As Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell (2014) suggest, PAR aims to give all participants equal power in the partnership (understood as a way of affecting and being affected to increase the power of all components to act in collective desirable ways); it values expertise and situated knowledge, while recognising the flow and direction of research is unpredictable and organic in nature, creating perhaps some dilemmas and tensions which in themselves can be a focus

¹⁶ My representation of the theme tune from the Batman TV series

for collaboration (Banks *et al*, 2013). While mainstream action research methods may pursue a formal cyclical process, often with a utilitarian or instrumental purpose, a Deleuzian application takes the virtual into account as a field of possible relations that can be actualised, rather than starting with a causal concept of the actual and therefore limit what might be by blocking off potentialities (Drummond and Themesl-Huber, 2007). One of the unique features of the approach is that the process is fluid, responsive and grounded in creative action rather than being a series of well-defined steps that are rigorously adhered to irrespective of what happens. It also recognises that while practices may be bound by habits, routines and customs, there is no intrinsic requirement for them to be performed in this way, it is simply the way in things have turned out and they could (and still can) work out differently. Hence action research can actualise different ways of doing things (Drummond and Themesl-Huber, 2007). While a range of performative methods are presented separately in what follows, they work intra-actively and diffractively to compile what Lester and Russell (2013a, 2014b) refer to as ‘collective wisdom’ in recognition of the multiple ways of ‘knowing in being’ and that sustainable and ethical ways of knowledge production and action might ‘come after and not before awkward mixtures of knowledge and material’ (Fitzgerald and Callard, 2015, p. 19). The application of these methods is always singular and contextual, the melange of disparate, multi-sensual approaches collectively compiles the ‘matter’ of research fieldwork (Childers, 2014). The materiality of bodies, movements, policies, theories, practices, and other animate and inanimate objects are mutually constitutive and carry equal weight. Many of the methods are now generally accepted as standard approaches – field notes, interviews, observations, mapping, video and sound recordings - but they are utilised with a different focus to create new conditions of possibilities. They have value for both discovering a little more about how children move/act

in their everyday environments and digging beneath the surface of adult response-abilities. And while foregrounding singular events, this is not to the detriment of appreciating the molar socio-structural patterns and constraints (Mitchell and Elwood, 2012). As discussed later in this chapter, an intensive and extensive reading of the event as critical cartography must inevitably pay attention to forces that might shape and hinder affirmative formations. But the approach developed here is less to do with majoritarian mastery and control over singular moments but drawn towards a mobile methodology that asks how movements, affects, and the not yet known may be ethically acted with and through relations and encounters.

Performative methodologies: setting concepts to work

Once it is understood how many entities there are in the world, of which we are able to name but a few, then capturing the traces of these entities, even for a brief moment, will clearly involve unconventional means, a kind of poetics of the release of energy that might be thought to resemble play (Thrift, 2008, p. 12).

The question remains: How can research be attentive to the ways in which things, people and all matter of beings are intra-actively entangled in the world? Is it possible to find ways of describing the world while keeping it open and at the same time make judgments about issues of justice and equity? One of the dilemmas of Non-Representational Theory (NRT) (Thrift, 2008) is that it appears to present the futility of trying to capture something in language (Laurier and Philo, 2006). If this was the case any representation appears doomed to fail. But the point about NRT is that it works primarily on *presenting* the world, not on representing or explaining it. A performative understanding of discursive/material practices

challenges the dominance of representationalism and associated belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things (Barad, 2003). But this is not to dismiss representations out of hand, far from it. The broad thrust of NRT takes representation seriously not as something to be explained or simply an act of deconstruction but rather representations are seen as performative in themselves, as doings. The point here is to 'redirect attention from the posited meaning towards the material compositions and conduct of representations' (Dewsbury *et al*, 2002, p. 438). Performativity, in this sense, is not an invitation to fix life in words, but rather to contest the use of language to determine what is 'real' by bringing focus to entanglements of practice (Barad, 2003).

As such, more-than-representational approaches turn towards the active creation of present reality that is not prefigured but intra-actively produced in timespace. As with other foundational concepts introduced here, performative theory is not a uniform or monolithic approach and has diverse applications.¹⁷ There is a distinction to be drawn between performance as a discrete act and performative which slides between actual performance; 'the performative is the gap, the rupture, the spacing that unfolds the next moment allowing change to happen' (Dewsbury, 2000, p. 475). While there may be disputes amongst the various strands, most recognise the limitations of representation and counter the privilege given to language at the expense of the materiality and corporeality of the body (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). In line with the discussion so far, performativity is drawn towards a world where subject and object are emergent, always coming into being in unstable formations and repetitions with difference (Salter, 2010). For Dewsbury (2000), the promise of performative approaches can be found in three key interrelated themes: first, that it is non-

¹⁷ See for example Glass and Rose-Redwood, 2014, for a genealogy of performance/performative).

textual in the sense that it is concerned with the vitality of immediate and not-yet-happened experience; secondly, performativity is indeterminate and anti-humanist, it does not assume that there is individual human premeditation behind expression; thirdly, performativity is expressive and generative – it works with the multitude of possible outcomes within an encounter. While recognising the diverse compositions of performative approaches, a common feature is proposed here: they are focused on real-time embodied, situated practices that incorporate acts of co-creation; events that are amenable to spectating, witnessing, and active participation (Salter, 2010; Dewsbury, 2009).

Given the liveliness of the world, techniques designed to pay attention to moments of playing need to be multiple, composed of many things and creative and novel arrangements. It is a movement to situate a philosophy of difference into practical, pragmatic contexts that avoids reducing things to the already known or categorical oppositions. It reinforces Barad's (2007) concept of agential realism by recognising the different timespace relations and distinctions drawn between things are not pre-existing facts about independently existing objects but are brought into existence by material-discursive practices (Shotter, 2014). Diffraction, as noted, interrogates the ways in which 'ethnographies' produce material and representational stories and how they might act to make the world a fairer place (Schneider, 2002). It is always an act of courageous and nomadic experimentation that leads to the possibility of enacting the not-yet-known by forming new assemblages and relationships between concepts that describe a different territory. As may be evident, performative methodologies resonate with the process of playing, concerned with the movement of the event and the power of imagination to re-enliven creative engagement with the world (Thrift, 2008).

Increasingly Deleuze's experimental empiricism and broader concepts from what might be tentatively labelled materialist/posthuman studies are being employed in a wide-range of contexts: health studies (see for example, Fox, 2012; Duff, 2010; Fox and Ward, 2008); planning (Buser, 2014; Hillier, 2011, 2008); early-years settings (Renold and Mellor, 2013; Lenz-Taguchi, 2010; Leafgren, 2009; Olsson, 2009); schools (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011), policy and governance (Van Wezemael, 2008), and exploring the boundaries between human and physical geography (Taylor, 2013; Hinchliffe, 2007; Whatmore, 2002). Collectively they provide growing material-discursive resources that counter traditional ways of studying play and ideas will be extracted from these studies (and more besides) to set alongside stuttering steps to transform ways of thinking/doing 'play' across a range of diverse research projects. It should be acknowledged that while issues of performativity have contributed to a cultural/spatial turn, there is little evidence of this breaching the conceptual underpinnings and disciplinary boundaries of play studies which remain largely entrenched in scientific accounts that draw on readings of evolutionary and developmental psychology and biology or alternatively study play from a purely socio-cultural perspective, portraying play as an expression of children's agency and culture. The primary concern from these studies is to show that playing has specific developmental benefits while at the same time a majority also point to the limitations of research to establish any possible cause-effect relationship; 'these play theorists may not lack all conviction but their absence of *passionate intensity* (my italics) reflects purposed caution' (Fagen, 2011, p. 84). Fagen offers the foundations of a different reading that draws on a relational, sensorimotor, rhythm-based construction of space and time that counters mind/body dualisms. This is a minor voice from an ethologist who has spent a lifetime studying animal play behaviour but it opens a crack in the field and invites other

ways of going about this, as this thesis hopefully suggests. Certainly, the issue of rhythm and dance has been of interest to more-than-representational geographers (see for example, McCormack, 2013; Thrift, 2008) and in more general studies of embodied and embedded movements, notably Morton's (2005) study of Irish musicians and Woodyer's (2008) participative research into children's video game playing. These are just two examples where researchers are finding ways to access and engage with everyday practices between human and non-human objects in order to write about them as they are taking place, 'the emergent geographies of the now in practice' (Morton, 2005, p. 661).

Mobile methods

It can be argued that both pedestrian policy and academic writings have yet to adequately address the everyday walking experiences of those who navigate, negotiate and traverse the city street in their day-to-day lives (Middleton, 2010, p. 579).

The fields of anthropology and human/cultural geography have become more prolific in taking note of the everyday mobile relationships and encounters with other people and things. However, as Cresswell (2010) points out, the idea that somehow this is a new paradigm in research studies ignores the long history of the study of movement, but what may be 'new' is the emergence of a trans-disciplinary approach that acknowledges the 'fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations and practices' in a constellation of mobilities' (Cresswell, 2010, p. 18). One of the key areas of interest is

'walking' as a fundamental process in the everyday practice of social life (Lee and Ingold, 2006; Middleton, 2010). Idiosyncratic physical movements are generally overlooked in the production of standard measurements, templates, and model mobilities, as noted in chapter 3's discussion around the process of learning to walk (see Figure 3). However, a mobile, multi-sensual methodology no longer considers walking as a taken-for-granted instrumental process to be side-lined in everyday practices and treated as inconsequential in favour of presumed objective data (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008). The act of walking is performative in that it determines the kind of knowledge produced: 'how a person moves through a landscape and among the people living in those spaces, constitutes how they relate to that place and how and what they learn about it' (Banerjee and Blaise, 2013, p. 241). And in a reciprocal, entangled manner, what is sensed and learned about the landscape influences mind/body responses as it moves through the landscape. Such mobile approaches are moments of 'becoming-with' the events one encounters rather than being a detached observer (Haraway, 2008). It is also opportunistic; something takes the walker's interest (sounds, movements, artefacts) and the body's attention is turned towards these 'glowing moments' (MacLure, 2013).

There is a growing body of research that utilises walking/mobile/movement focussed approaches, for example: a reflexive embodied awareness of walking in the countryside (Edensor, 2000); a descriptive, reflexive narrative of a solitary coastal walk (Wylie, 2005); a playful chance mode of walking through Paris (Fenton, 2005); everyday experiences of being a pedestrian and the relation to public policy formulation (Middleton, 2010) and the role of walking and memory in developing a sense of place (Degan and Rose, 2012). While these are set in diverse contexts, they present the process of walking as 'wayfaring' (Ingold, 2011a)

rather than the functional 'transport' of getting from A-B. This process has been utilised in a number of small-scale participatory research projects; for example, the observation of the two children playing tag on the swing platforms occurred opportunistically from wandering the adventure playground prior to commencing participative research with the playwork team (Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014). This process of meandering and lingering afforded the possibility to be alert to the minor movements and encounters between bodies and things and attentive to moments of interest. Another example of this process can be found in the 'Happy Museum' action research project (Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014). The opening stages of the project featured researchers wandering/wayfaring gallery spaces, apprehending the possibilities the environment might afford for playing. This movement, for one of the research team, evoked memories of being at the Museum with their own young children, and the games of hide and seek/chasing among the display cabinets, with parental concerns to avoid disapproving glances from Gallery attendants (a memory also shared by the now 'grown-up' children). For some of the researchers this was a new environment and they hold no memories of this specific cultural institution but this sharing of a memory provoked playful memories from different places (both as children and adults). This minor example highlights an underplayed element in non-representational approaches with a focus on the affective and performative experience of the present (Jones, 2011). It resonates with Horton and Kraftl's (2006b) memory-work of significant and parallel everyday experiences of childhood, not as an exercise in straightforward remembering but as an active process of creating something new, in Deleuzian terms becoming minoritarian. An innovative memory experiment entailed revisiting specific childhood sites, of 'being (t)here again' and 're-doing' childhood to see new things (Horton and Kraftl, 2006b, p. 261). This ability is not the preserve of researchers but becomes a method that brings about small moments of

transformation and change; they are not specialist techniques but ways of reconfiguring awareness of movement and encounters with other bodies and materials. The role of adult memory and childhood spaces is currently being explored in more detail with the 'Sharing Memories of Adventure Playgrounds' (SMAP) research project¹⁸ with five playgrounds in Bristol and Gloucester. In undertaking this, it is recognised that adventure playgrounds are produced by multiple people and materials across moments of time, they are processual spaces rather than a fixed product; movement does not start and finish with an individual body (Manning, 2013). The encounters and entanglements (meshworks) of bodies, materials, imaginations, histories and so on generate a unique atmosphere and refrain, a collusion of forces that brings together 'an extraordinary juxtaposition of signifying objects, images, and practices' (Bednar, 2011, p. 18) that may cohere materially, visually, and spatially to provoke a distinctive form of 'public or collective memory'. In SMAP, adult memories of being at the playground are brought to the foreground by a range of mobile and lively techniques. Rather than treating memory as cinders, which would imply some lifeless residue of the past, adult memories, are 'embers': they still have life and when stirred, breathed upon, can burst back into flames, into renewed life (Jones, 2011). Given the main themes developed in this thesis, the study is not simply about capturing and recounting individual stories but an opportunity to explore how memories, materials, movements, and their affects mattered and still matter.

Adopting a nomadic approach across these research projects invites adults to wander the environment and pay attention to events and encounters between disparate materials, more-than-human encounters between people and things (Banerjee and Blaise, 2013). Such

¹⁸ See Appendix 3 for more details of this project.

events are moments of instruction and reveal the implicit conventions and tacit compulsions that orientate child and adult movements. It is also an invitation to sometimes 'stay still', to closely observe the patterns and modes of movements across other people and things and consider the ways in which mutually shaping entanglements in specific situations (Banerjee and Blaise, 2013). The encouragement to be attentive produces stories of movement and relationships that would previously have been unremarkable, as the following extract from the Museum research indicates:

One Visitor Services Assistant (VSA) commented his attention was drawn towards a child who appeared to have created an imaginative game and associated movements involving the pattern of tiles in the main entrance, something perhaps previously unnoticed. Slowing down to pay closer attention also initiated a conversation with the parent who commented that of all the things in the museum this seemed to be the most attractive at this time. This recollection, rather than objective classification, reveals the ways in which child, adult, floor tiles and so on assemble to produce a singular moment of movement and playfulness. It also marks an enhanced ability to look at the opportunistic formations that occur anywhere and everywhere and to reveal these relationships by telling their stories (Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014, p. 31).

Crouch (2010) refers to this process as 'flirting' with landscape, coming across familiar sites but sensing strange juxtapositions and movements; as these discoveries are made bodies become more attuned to the possibilities of their existence everywhere and anywhere, as Crouch (2010, p. 5-6) acknowledges, 'even in familiarity and habitual rhythmic engagement, the meaning, our relationship with things, can change in register; slight adjustments of

feeling over time becoming more significant'. It also highlights the significance of the patterned floor in the entrance to the museum (see the earlier story about the two children passing each other on the tiles in the same location). Flirting is not simply concerned with human movements, as the study into the value of playwork provision in Manchester illustrates (Lester, 2016a). Faced with the challenge of observing frantic activity between children in a playwork setting, attention turned towards a giant teddy bear (TB) lying in a corner of the room and the ways in which this moved through the environment. This edited extract from observation notes presents the liveliness of TB (Lester, 2016c, p. 30):

TB sitting in a corner of an area with settees and large floor cushions. A boy and girl enter the area, pick up TB and start playing tug-of-war with it before the girl lies on TB while the boy drags her along the floor before being discarded. TB is then picked up by three boys who start chasing around the room... one child hit another with it, child fell over and child just checked to see if he was ok – not a big deal – child gets up and carries on chasing other boy with TB. The three boys abandon the TB mid-room – a girl picks it up and carries it into the corner with cushions – a boy runs by and casually kicks it (like football) – another boy then takes it into the corner and sits on it, gets up and runs away – at this point TB is in corner between wall and settee. A small girl picks it up and puts it on her back, runs over to a playworker and bumps into him with TB, leaves TB lying on the floor where it stays for a while before a boy dives on TB and pretends to fight it, picks it up and play fights with one of the playworkers who then holds TB and gives voice to it while wrestling boy with it and then makes playful threatening gesture with TB to a girl before talking to her via TB and gesturing with arms.

Towards the end of the session, TB can be found lying on a table as a small group of girls perform heart surgery. A passing playworker casually comments that they have saved TB's life, to be met with a response from one of the girls "no, he's got worse" as they place their hands on the TB to give him an electric shock.

The process of walking through the museum, adventure playground, local neighbourhoods and school playgrounds at different times also builds an opening picture of the flows and rhythms of the respective environment, revealing some of the embodied practice based insights of children and adults in relation to movement and space. 'Flirting' and the accompanying stories make valuable contributions to perceiving and appreciating the important material-discursive lines between people, environment, things and structures and their possibly exclusionary effects (Jung, 2014). This form of 'mood walking' also leads to chance encounters with adults and children. Like participant observation (but unlike sit-down interviews), 'walk-alongs' can enable researchers to observe and facilitate discussion around situated spatial practices and can often merge with audio-visual methods (Degan and Rose, 2012). Returning to the Manchester Museum study, (Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014, pp. 30-31), casual meetings with VSA's on a quiet afternoon led to discussions about how they occupy their time when there are no visitors:

One VSA commented on the importance of reverie and imagination 'you sort of become good at daydreaming very quickly in this job', while another shared her way of dealing with the quiet periods by balancing along a narrow line formed by the mosaic pattern on the floor, trying not to 'fall off'.

Further walking discussions drew from gallery assistants a range of tactical manoeuvres designed to cope with the different flows, interruptions, and moods of the environment;

material wanderings become connected with wondering of thoughts, memories and affects (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012). Walking facilitates movement into new places; they are productive of new spaces of narrative so that the interview becomes a three-way conversation, with interviewer, participant and the specific environment engaged in an exchange of ideas, 'place has been under discussion but, more than this, and crucially, underfoot and all around and as much more of an active, present participant in the conversation, able to prompt and interject' (Hall, Lashua, and Coffey, 2006, p. 3). As such, the method facilitates the production of different data: mobile, place-sensitive and open to a little uncertainty and ambiguity (Moles, 2008).

While the methods outlined above invite adults to think/act differently, children rarely make such deliberations in their everyday mobilities and ways in which they get on with their lives through 'just walking' (Horton, Hadfield-Hill, and Kraftl, 2015). Walking is the primary form of transport for children but journeys might be quite short and do not feature prominently in thinking about children's everyday mobility (Lester and Russell, 2013a). There is also an important distinction to be (re)drawn between walking as a form of transport, i.e. a method of getting from A-B, and Ingold's (2011) depiction of 'wayfaring' which in this context implies children playing their way through the environment, which may often mean just lingering or 'hanging out' in public space with friends. The term 'through' is used deliberately here as an expression of the ways in which children's (and adults') lives are embedded within environments; environments are not mere surfaces on which people move. As the examples to date have shown, playing is highly mobile (both physically and imaginatively) and children can make use of apparently mundane landscape elements in all kinds of playful ways.

The field of children's geographies and childhood studies has contributed a great deal to attempt to work with such mobilities (Barker *et al*, 2009), but often this is reduced to raising concerns over the loss of children's independent mobility, generally presented from a parental perspective and concerns over unsafe environments (see for example Carver *et al*, 2012; Prezza and Pacilli, 2007). Lester and Russell (2013b, p. 52) elaborate on this distinction in their report on the first stage of implementation of the Welsh Government (2010) play sufficiency duty:

The notion of independent mobility is a central issue in thinking about children and space, but is often presented in a binary relationship (that is, mobility is either independent or dependent), and it is worthwhile briefly exploring this here to situate this issue in the context of the Play Sufficiency Assessment. The term independent suggests children are allowed to manage their own movements in the environment, and thus demonstrate the exercise of 'agency'. However, children's capacity to move is intimately connected to the relational qualities of the space (people, spatial features, technologies) rather than being apart from such attachments; children continually have to negotiate the social and environmental conditions of their lives that both limit and enable their movements (Kullman and Palludan, 2011) The term '[in]dependent' qualifies the polarity of autonomy and independence by recognising children are interdependent and can establish favourable conditions for themselves through continuous negotiation.

Increasingly mobile technologies are utilised to map children's movements; GPS devices have been used to identify children's travel routes to school (see for example Easton and

Ferrari, 2015; DeLyser and Sui, 2013) and children's patterns of mobility in their environments (Jones *et al*, 2009). They can produce a complex set of highly detailed individual data collected over specific periods of time (Cooper *et al*, 2010). Also innovative SMS survey approaches (see for example Christensen *et al*, 2011) have been used to develop a 'rolling mobile survey' with basic questions to ascertain what children are doing, where and who with at repeated intervals during the day. When used in a sensitive and diffractional manner the data can add to planners and policy maker's wisdom about the importance of local connections with place. However, in isolation they offer general technical representations that emphasise location above the relational features of movement through the environment (Evans and Jones, 2011). This was highlighted in Lester and Russell's (2013a) research report and the use of general surveys by most Local Authorities to collect data about children's movements that fail to get to grips with the daily characteristics of walking and the intensive, apparently aimless meandering that constitute children's vital and playful ways of getting on with each other (Horton, Hadfield-Hill and Kraftl, 2015). It also fails to fully reveal moments of walking that are largely stationary, those more fragile and passive involvements of doing nothing and nothing doing (Aitken, 2001) which have considerable significance for children (Bissell, 2010). However, one of the case study authorities experimented with a range of walking methods with children to support wayfaring through their local environment to produce rich and situated knowledges/practices that challenge the general notion that children no longer 'play out'. These techniques are drawn from a long history of approaches designed to elicit children's experiences of place (see for example Moore, 1986; Hart, 1979; Lynch, 1977). A range of mobile methods (accompanied walks and guided tours, children's peer walks etc.) allowed researchers to observe children in everyday

contexts where they can express their lived experiences of place through movements and emotions (Mikkelsen and Christensen, 2009).

There are numerous studies which engage children as co-researchers in experimental, informal mobile and audio-visual methods (see for example Loebach and Gilliland, 2010; Burke, 2005). Such approaches complement walking methodologies by producing data that extends mobility patterns through audio-recorded interviews pre-, during and post- walking events, often accompanied by video/photographic recordings of moving through the environment. Pink (2008, 2007) suggests that video recording participants while 'walking along' creates spaces and materials at different flows and speeds. Again, returning to the PAR projects, video recordings were used to detect the multiple ways in which children playfully moved through the respective environments of museum galleries and adventure playground. The use of stop-motion techniques with the adventure playground PAR team presents a different perspective on the range of children's movements and encounters as two hours is distilled into 5 minutes. Equally, recordings of children's movements through the museum gallery space reveal the richness of the fabric/atmosphere of the environment and the playful ways in which children appropriate time/space, along with a range of materials strategically placed by museum staff.

As with visual ethnography, the complementary use of audio methods beyond recording interviews has attracted increasing interest. Audio recordings or 'soundtracks' can provide insights into the distinctive audible features of spaces and hold the potential to complement more traditional forms of data by adding a sensory dimension and the ambience of an environment (Gallagher and Prior, 2014). This can be illustrated by an example from the adventure playground participatory research (Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014) in which

a playworker wandered the playground with a concealed recorder to pick up the ambient sounds and then invited other members of the staff team to situate the sounds against specific locations. Through attentive listening, it was possible to discern and become attuned to different qualities of sound, for example, the swing area, the sand-pit, and aerial runway each had a distinctive soundscape. A similar experiment was carried out with playworkers in the Manchester playwork study (Lester, 2016c), with playworkers carrying a digital recorder for a 5-minute period before passing it on to a colleague to produce an intriguing soundscape of background noises (the sound of table tennis, a balloon being released with accompanying 'fart-like' sound which brought the setting to a standstill) and fragments of conversations in the foreground ("I had to do 4-minutes", "4-minutes of silence, wow", "I had to do 5-minutes and at the end I got a cross"). The full recording reveals a complex and multi-layered soundscape that might appear, on first listen, to be just 'noise' but it expresses 'ways in which bodies and things create their own unique spaces alongside, between and interpenetrating the environment and all that it contains to compose the feel of the setting' (Lester, 2016c, p. 39).

The images and recordings produced with these mobile methods are not simply a reflection of a pre-existing reality but are cut from and effect cuts in the world according to norms, values, contexts and processes. The dilemma in research with both adults and children is to overcome the inherent power relationships between researcher and adult/child. The demands of research protocols, selection of methods and participants, limitations of research funding, time constraints and so on are further powerful influences that organise spatial arrangements and practices. Children's 'voices' become disembodied (Lester, 2013b), and the transcription of what children say in response to adult questions assumes veracity.

Given that playing is often a way of subverting adult intentions, these tactical manoeuvres generally resist articulation and representation. The challenge is to bring these minor political actions to the surface which means that the researcher intervenes into the onto-epistemological intra-actions that constitute these moments. The description of the children playing tag on the swing platform, becoming trees and dancing at bus-stops is a desire to not fix and reduce play by classification but be more attentive to affective resonance and the ways in which playspacetimes emerge and cohere into a recognisable form. It is a performative practice concerned with describing the details of each singular event. But it is more than assumed objective description as it incorporates a sensing state of enchantment, alert to movement and associated novelty, surprise, twists and tensions or 'the capacity to move and be moved by bodies at a distance' (McCormack, 2013, p. 140). Rather than using methods to produce data, the multi-sensual/mobile approaches outlined above pay attention to the everyday movements and meshworks (between bodies, materials, symbols, and so on) that constitute spaces that are amenable to playing. From this perspective, the researcher is always caught up in a set of relations with other bodies and materials, not to trace what is already known but to create mappings from which new meanings might emerge (Davies, 2014). This replaces questions of whether methods are 'good' or 'bad' with an appreciation that all practices that contribute to the production of reality are valuable for what they can add to the mix and at the same time recognise that what is produced is always an incomplete and partial connection (Law, 2004).

Mapping methods: steps towards a critical cartography

The artistic angle to mapping has meant a disruption of the conventions of mapping (e.g., legend, scale, symbol, geophysical terrain) and a new aesthetics

associated with mapping that involve abstract or metaphoric representations of place and space; reconfigurations of place to address nonlinear perceptions of space and time; the play of scale, borders, and symbols; and the cartography of concepts (e.g., identity) rather than physical places. Artistic media such as collage, assemblage, drawing, painting, and installation art have influenced and changed the aesthetic conventions of maps (Powell, 2010, p. 540).

The previous section has offered different approaches to appreciate the conditions under which playfulness might emerge by drawing on key concepts introduced in this thesis. They are methods designed to work with the messiness of everyday encounters, to enliven rather than fix life. The overall intention is to further an appreciation of adult ethical responsibilities to affect and be affected to co-constitute more favourable conditions for playing. Another experimental method is introduced at this stage to elaborate on the concept of diffraction and features a return to mapping and cartography introduced in chapter 3. The use of diagrams or alternative forms of representation can be a 'creative force, inventive and experimental attempts that disrupt the taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world, a creative act of proliferation and rupture' (De Freitas, 2012, p. 557). They are the spatiotemporal movements formed by lines of becoming; 'every animate being, as it threads its way through and among the ways of every other, must perforce improvise a passage, and in so doing it lays another line (Ingold, 2013, p. 132). Consistent with a major theme which runs through this account, the process of mapping in this context is not about accurate representation between points but a more performative, aesthetic and artistic way of paying attention to the non-linear, indeterminate, multi-sensory lived experiences of space (McCormack, 2013, 2004; Powell, 2010). McCormack's (2013, pp. 67-68) application of

Deleuze's concepts of refrains and diagrams offer an insight into the more-than-representational constitution of rhythms of space; 'a refrain composed of differentiating patterns of affects, percepts, and concepts that exceed any effort to explain' composed from sounds, light, bodies, and materials intra-actively mingling with different forces and flows, a style 'drawn out as series of lines of continuous variation' (McCormack, *ibid*). Another exemplary account is briefly presented here based on a personal recollection of the emergence of a milieu between an anxious parent and child when it came time to separate at nursery school. After several weeks of becoming distraught at leaving time (both adult and child), a rhythm or refrain emerged that involved drawing lines on the reverse side of a photocopied colouring-in picture, readily available at the start of the nursery day; the movement of large wax crayons flowed across the paper, gradually covering all the white space and marking the time to separate. These micro movements assumed considerable significance, far greater than the Nursery teacher's exhortations to the adult to encourage the child to draw properly and stay within the lines of the prepared picture. The line tracings of two wax crayons over a sheet of white paper establish a milieu, working from the middle to the outer edges, with different speeds, the child's movements slowing as the paper becomes increasingly filled with colour. It has its own rhythm, a minor mo(ve)ment in everyday practice that lessened the pain of separation for all concerned. This rhythmic pattern is an example of the multiple routines and habits that emerge to cope with life and provide the foundations for playful improvisations (Grosz, 2013; Edensor, 2010). It is a refrain or repetition that holds off falling into chaos and despair while at the same time is always creative and offers moments for becoming different. In this instance there are/were multiple diagrammatic representations of this process – the paper covered with coloured crayons - but the meanings of this only exist within each singular moment of intra-activity;

each picture is a representation of moving bodies and their affects. There are multiple possibilities for producing refrains: for example, the adult and child could have developed a song, the ending of which could have served the same purpose. Equally it could be a set of gestures, a compilation of materials and so on. But as McCormack (2013) asserts that experimental diagrammatic practice can overcome the distortions of linguistic representations by taking lines for a walk and to apprehend the continuities, discontinuities and rhythmic effects of encounters and movements.

This can be further illustrated by a series of mapping/diagramming experiments developed with playworkers at an adventure playground that foregrounded movement through the environment to reveal hitherto unnoticed patterns, rhythms and habits (Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014). Each application of this method is singular but different maps, when assembled, begin to reveal complex entanglements and affects that continually and intra-actively constitute the playground space. Diffractively reading a map constituted by drawings, recordings, stories, interviews, minutes, policies, visual records and so on reveals subtle movements and flows, contradictions, encounters, resistances and avoidances. These superimpositions bring to attention the dominant material-discursive forces at play. One specific reading disclosed a complex pattern that was largely unnoticed (or possibly avoided) by the playworkers. It concerned a difficult relationship between some of the playworkers and a young person, a regular at the playground, who often adopted an aggressive manner with the playworkers with accompanying and significant influence on the behaviour of other children. Connecting with the broader theme of the research project, i.e. to explore the 'co-production of a play space', a playworker began to map movements of children during the first 15 minutes at an adventure playground session (using different colours, thickness of

lines and so on). Repeated mapping revealed an interesting pattern of domination, or line of articulation, of the territory by the older boys (including the previously mentioned young person who had considerable influence over the group), staking their claim to the chairs on the veranda on one side of the playground building. This becomes a point of attraction for this group accompanied by a series of complex and eventful performance rituals (banter, teasing, initiations and posing to the on-looking group of older girls). But because of the proximity and visibility of this space to the gate, these behaviours can be intimidating for younger children who may decide not to enter the site. As such, this process of mapping movements revealed hitherto unremarked patterns that potentially limit younger children's opportunity to actualise the affordance of the playground.

In response, the workers decided as an exercise in 'what if' experimentation (a fundamental principle of the participative action research approach) to reposition the chairs prior to opening for an evening session. The young person arrived and made disgruntled murmurings to the adults, picked up a seat and took it over to the veranda. The other chairs remained in the middle of the playground. Over time this experimental manoeuvre initiated a process of adults and young children occupying this space with an associated change in the atmosphere of the playground. Habitual patterns were disturbed/ de-territorialised, and re-territorialised and as a consequence there was a more equitable distribution of spacetime for the diverse desires that constitute the formation of the playground and this, in turn, offered greater possibilities to get on together. Further experimental mapping and discernment of movement produced a revelatory pattern of adult movements (Figure 8). Here playwork positions in the environment were plotted every five minutes along with a brief description of activity.

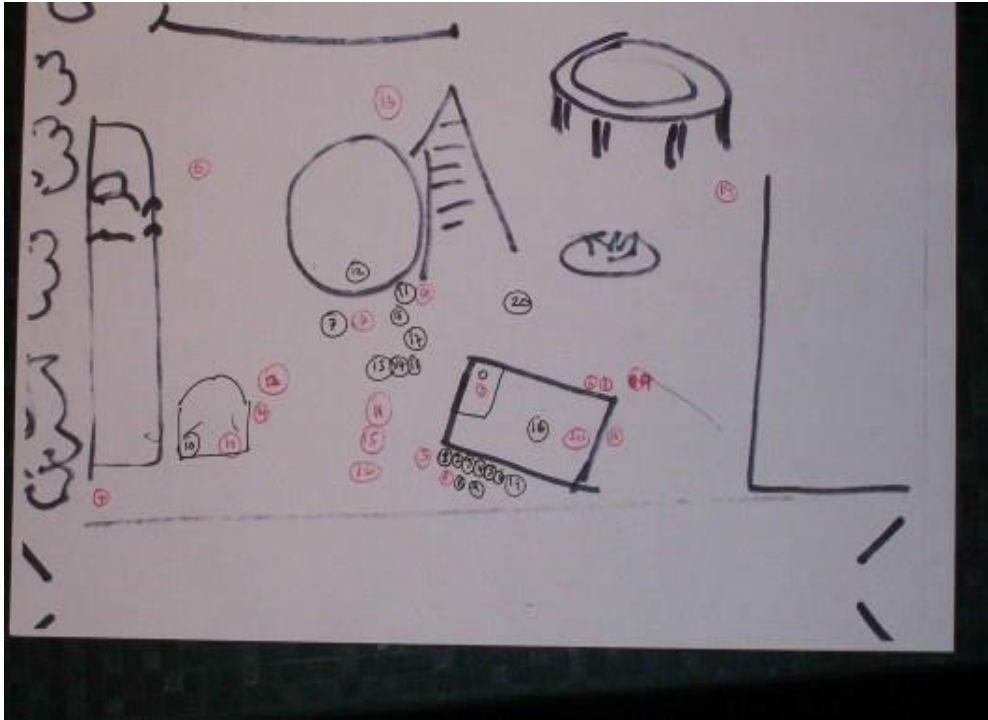


Figure 8: Playworker movements

When subject to diffractive analysis it became apparent that playworkers spent most of the time away from each other, a manoeuvre that was based on mobile supervision of children while feigning to be 'busy'. This pattern was interrupted by a deliberate experiment to meet up and sit together at a specific location to see what might happen. This apparently simple spatial tactic caused significant waves into habitual practices of both adults and children; as playworkers stayed together around the swing platform, younger children congregated around them to chat and also to play on the swing, practices that they rarely undertook in the absence of adults. The following comment from a playworker illustrates the effect:

Those young children that seek out interactions with you, it opens up that little space for whatever it is they might want to say to you or whatever conversation... they might want to chat about. Its showing you've got time. You are not always busy. And if you are busy they can help you if they want

to. There are those pauses that they can fill. You are waiting for that as well
(Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014, p. 17).

Mapping draws attention to discursive, social, and material formations in terms of their constitutive lines of force, their organization into lines of articulation and potential dissolution into lines of flight. Ultimately, mapping discloses potential organizations of reality rather than reproducing some prior organization of it (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013). It is possible to map encounters and intra-actions while simultaneously being alert to the possibilities for seeing the world in a new way; detailed attention can discern different patterns, movements and linkages that unsettle common-sense accounts to open up new ways of organising reality (McCoy, 2012; Martin and Kamberelis, 2013). Again, it is important to highlight that mapping is not an exercise in precision or something that can be accurately interpreted but a fluid, open, nomadic process that encourages experimentation and explorations (Ulmer and Koro-Ljungberg, 2014); they are movements that counter grand narratives and molar lines.

Mapping's concern with possible relationships and new ways of looking at disparate materials and phenomena allows for thinking and acting differently with individual and collective experiences. This can reveal new insights, raise further questions and disturb orthodox practices leading to a range of interventions; 'what if' the chairs are moved from the veranda? The 'what if' is not a random act but draws on shared experiences, intuitions, sensations, movements, affects etc. to see what more can be done to keep the environment open to multiple playful possibilities; they are always experimental in the sense that there is no pre-determined outcome to be achieved. But there is always an underlying ethical movement to affect and be affected to maintain favourable conditions for the emergence of

playing. Another example concludes this section, based on observation of a deliberate intervention in a playwork setting (Lester, 2016c, p. 29), designed to question what if and what more might happen:

A playworker laid some bubble wrap on the floor and children began jumping along it with higher and higher jumps to make loud 'pops' – lots of noise and the cabin shakes with the heavy landings – the playworker then walks along trying to be as quiet and light as possible to avoid popping the bubbles, some children follow but soon revert to jumping heavily – the digital recording highlights the noise of children moving along the bubble wrap, and also the casual conversations that accompany this, 'I am a giant'¹⁹.

Analysing data: a critical cartography

The concepts, approaches and examples introduced in this account raise important questions about research data collection and analysis. If one removes the traditional certainties and the supposed control over research contexts, the foundations of objective and wise analytical judgment crumble. No longer can complex material be simply subject to thematic examples, codes, sub-categories or inference of what research subjects intend (MacLure, 2013). Indeed, such a stance questions the very nature of data as something inert, lying 'out there' waiting to be uncovered and analysed by a detached researcher. Rather than extracting a representation of the world (*a priori* or *ex post*) there is a constant struggle to engage with the ongoing messiness of everyday life as it is intra-actively co-constructed with human/non-human materials (Thrift, 2000). The diffractive superimpositions of diverse

¹⁹ On a follow-up visit, the floor of the setting was being repaired!

processual materials (maps, walkabouts, sound and video recordings etc.) bring the dominant forces at play to attention and make them available for critical scrutiny to form temporary and incomplete judgments about their capacity to maintain an open environment for playing. This may be referred to as a 'critical cartography of play' (Lester, 2016b) that features a lively process of mapping flows and forces, rhythms and movements, and intensity of affects. In doing so, new and non-pre-existing, concepts are formed by mapping, unmapping, remapping (de- and reterritorialisations) that work with heterogeneity and difference (Ulmer and Koro-Lujunberg, 2014). It is not a matter of interpretation by adding concepts into data but a process of plugging-in data into theory into data, a rippling diffractive pattern, of 'reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory, of entering the assemblage and making new connections' (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743).

Given the emergent nature of the formation of blocks of playful timespace, there can be no determination of simple cause-effect relationships. Drawing a map, with multiple lines and components is 'oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 13). It enables connections across diverse forces and elements that are 'open and connectable...detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification' (Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid*). Concepts fold into each other, disturb and create something new. Data analysis is thus a creative process by crafting maps that are always open-ended. Over time and through multiple layering's and iterations with visual, spoken and written materials, maps and diagrams draw attention to the diffractive patterns²⁰ which contribute

²⁰ The term 'pattern' is used here to describe the contingent, partial, stuttering movements that intra-actively produce spaces and not as an expression of a repetitive and routine relationship. Patterns are rhythms or refrains that produce a familiar territory that holds off the forces of chaos – but it is always repetition with difference, a dynamic process of subtle and not so subtle changes. In this sense patterns are always open and non-constraining

to the ways in which the environment is 'cut' and offer signposts to other ways of thinking/acting with these patterns. From this perspective, data analysis is always an integral feature of the on-going participatory relationships that emerge during everyday practices contributing to the compilation of collective wisdom, not as an accumulation leading to comprehension but apprehension of the ever-changing patterns and rhythms of everyday encounters and their effects.

Pursuing an ethico-epistemological-political line of enquiry, attention is given to the ways in which this bundle of mobile relations affect and are affected to produce more, or less, open environments for playing to emerge. It maps the molar forces constituting a plane of organisation and the ways in which they striate space along with the counter forces which open-up spaces of possibility for becoming different. A critical cartography produces maps of being and affiliation that reflect shifts in thinking about who we are and where we are going (Amin and Thrift, 2013). It invites the ethical question: how might molar lines and segments be de-territorialised to create conditions of fairness and counter some of the dominant trends in the contemporary production of childhood and public/institutional spaces? In support of this movement map-reading draws upon a range of concepts attuned to this diffractive process, adding to Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) transcendental empiricism. Thus, for example, Hardt and Negri's (2009) concept of the multitude, Braidotti's (2013) posthuman critical cartography, Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis, McCormack's (2013) study of rhythm and movement, Amin's (2006) registers of the good city, Massey's (2005) concept of 'throwntogetherness', Ingold's (2011a, 2013) exploration of lines of movement, Ungar's (2008) principle of navigation and negotiation, and so much more are assembled to work with the vibrancy of the data. It is a form of 'postcoding' (Childers, 2014) that attends

to the way in which analysis is a product of material-discursive practices that ‘promiscuously disrupt prescriptive tendencies’ (Childers, 2014, p. 819). In this way the distinction between theory and practice becomes blurred; the physicality and affectivity of experiences with the empirical are always already dynamically entangled with theory.

Ethico-onto-epistemo-logical movements

This approach to data analysis has been refined through practice across previously mentioned studies (museums, schools, and playwork settings). They are minor movements designed to bring more to the world by remaining faithful to singular events, and by doing so to generate new practice-concepts for ethical accountability and responsibility. From this perspective, the playful entanglement of bodies and materials that comes about through movement, encounters, affects, and so on, also constitute the emergence of practice wisdom (Lester, 2014c). What is known and the ‘knowers’ of this knowledge co-emerge and shape each other through ‘doing’ to continually and collectively co-create practice (Keevers *et al*, 2012). This overcomes the orthodox theory-practice divide, and the privilege afforded to the first element in this binary relationship; theory is not something ‘out there’ but is always performed and materialised through practice in an indivisible manner. As such, the intention of critical cartography is not to introduce new ideas, *per se*, but to subject existing practice-concepts to scrutiny, to unpick and re-work them and reassemble into new forms; it is always experimental - what more can be done and how might we do it? (Lester, 2014c).

This will be further developed at this stage by a closer examination of the Welsh Government’s (2010) Play Sufficiency Duty (PSD). Lester and Russell (2013a) present a genealogy of this innovative piece of legislation in a research report entitled ‘Leopard Skin

Wellies...’ (see Digression 1) and at this point I wish to give further attention to the emergence of key sensitising concepts that have also proved invaluable in developing an opening cartography of children’s play with diverse research settings. Reading case study data and policy materials from the first stage of implementation of the PSD reveals the complex and mobile assemblage of policy formulation and implementation in creating conditions for children’s play. As Lester and Russell (2013a, p. 78) comment in their concluding statements to the report:

Children’s play is emergent, unpredictable and opportunistic: it erupts whenever conditions allow. These conditions are, as has been emphasised throughout this report, a complex assemblage of material, symbolic, temporal, social, political and cultural factors...Given the messiness and complexity of the issue we do not assert single or absolute truth or causal explanations from the analysis...the Duty is enacted in contingent ways through the formation of relationships constituted from multiple components, each with a power to affect and be affected in the process.

In considering this challenging process, Lester and Russell (2013a) appropriate and reconfigure Amin’s (2006) account of the constituents of the ‘good city’, a concept to be plugged-in, worked on, and work with data. It is applied not to arrive at definitive statements but to offer a diffractive reading of research materials, to extend thoughts, knowledges and practices, and to develop ‘multiple readings that are much richer than an easy sense produced by the reductive process of starting with coding and returning to experience’ (Mazzei, 2014, p. 744).

Amin's (2006) account eschews a distant utopian vision of the good life in favour of pragmatic, everyday actions to unsettle inequitable patterns of spatial production through the formation of fragile alliances which collectively de-territorialise existing practices and conditions and guide them towards 'outcomes that benefit the more rather than the few' (Amin, 2006, p. 1012). It proposes a number of interrelated 'registers' that take account of and subjects prevailing conditions to critical scrutiny. The registers and the general terms of their application are briefly summarised here to illustrate the cartographic process and the ways in which concepts work with data and data with concepts in an intensive/extensive manner.

- **Repair and Maintenance:** Environments are held together by a complex web of vital maintenance routines and practices that operate at different rates, intensities, speeds and scales simultaneously (Thrift, 2008). These are necessary to make life liveable, to enable citizens to go about their everyday lives; they run largely in the background unnoticed and unquestioned in a reliable, regular and predictable manner. They are systems which perpetuate molar assemblages and carry with them a whole series of injunctions, prohibitions, intimidations and exclusions that are targeted at the 'other' i.e. anything that threatens the stability of the system by being different which in this particular case includes the not-yet-adult child. Maintenance routines have material-discursive effects, most notably in historical and contemporary accounts of children being at risk and presenting a risk to others through their unsupervised presence in public space. The traditional playground and its modern iterations, exemplified by the 'natural playground' movement, is an important part of routine spatial productions and, as previously discussed, they are the right places for children's play. Lester (2015c) uses the

example of the skate park as a modern version of a playground targeted at specific users. The performance of skating (boarding and rolling) occupies many attractive public spaces – car parks, pavements, shopping precincts, public buildings - and ‘just about any other paved space they could get their wheels on’ (Howell, 2008. p. 476). Skaters use the urban fabric in unique ways and by doing so challenge capitalist norms and reassert use value over dominant exchange value (Woolley, Hazelwood and Simkins, 2011; Borden, 2001). The normative tendencies in urban governance (Local Authority officials, police, architects and planners, business people and others who may act collectively to produce and determine public space use) appear to conflict with the ways in which skateboarding is embodied and enacted in practice (Stratford, 2002). While local bye-laws may be used to criminalise these forms of behaviour and specific design features introduced to prevent the performance of tricks and stunts, there is also recognition from urban managers that some provision should be made for this activity. But this is rarely made in the spaces that skaters value (Howell, 2008).

At a wider level of analysis children’s play is a heterogeneous form of behaviour that is expressed in diverse spatial contexts. While children will play anywhere, features in the contemporary environment have significant material-discursive effects on many children’s ability to create time and space to play. There is no universal pattern and there are significant variations in children’s spatial lives. While wary of making reductive and normalising statements that diminish the creative, mundane ways which children negotiate their way through their everyday environments²¹ it is generally accepted in research studies, policy discourse and popular media accounts that children are losing the

²¹ See, for example, Morrow and Mayall, 2009; Myers, 2012, for a counter perspective on the contemporary production of ‘needy’ children’.

freedom to explore and play in their immediate environments (Malone and Rudner, 2011; Prezza and Pacilli, 2007; Karsten and van Vliet, 2006; Veitch *et al* 2005). Research, in general, would suggest that contributory factors for the apparent decline include changes in education policy and the de-zoning of school admission policies, perceived safety of the residential environment and 'stranger-danger' fears (Carver *et al*, 2008; Gill, 2007), and urban design/planning which privileges the movement of cars and increases fears about children's safety (Malone and Rudner, 2011). A critical cartography subjects the taken-for-granted, local, common-sense habits and routines of space to scrutiny to discern how they might include/exclude as the basis for countering exclusionary forces and practices. The intention of this register, following Amin (2006), is to revitalise and foster a sense of hope and generosity to overcome the sense of disenchantment which currently prevails in relation to children's playful presence in public and institutional space. These are small local experiments, for example, rearranging routines at school lunchtimes to enable an equal distribution of timespace for playing, temporary street closures, and protecting local 'waste ground' from economic development (see Lester and Russell, 2013a, 2014b, for further examples).

- **Relatedness:** This register is concerned with the ways in which adults (parents, professionals and others) 'take care' of children's position as children and not only as adults-in-waiting within their communities. As such it addresses how understandings of childhood and play shape relationships, attitudes and actions at various interwoven scales of organisation. This is a central feature in terms of an ethico-political approach to supporting conditions for playing and counters the humanist/individual tendencies which position childhood on the progressive line of development, an organism cut-off from the

environment. It also critiques the ways in which difference is 'cut' along a range of performative axes (age, gender, disability, race, class and so on). These movements are not simply about mapping difference but diffractively reading how difference is constituted and the ways in which these processes are embedded in power structures (Aitken, 2010). It draws on alternative concepts including rhizomes, assemblages, lines, meshworks, and intra-action, to present life as an emergent relational achievement that is always going on. It refutes the separateness of children while recognising their separability (Lee, 2005) and desire to sometimes be away from adults to co-create moments of playing. This is not simply the preserve of children; numerous authors have highlighted the value of playing and creative activities for adults and children in building relational connections and obligations (Duff, 2009; Anderson, 2006; Burkitt, 2004). Children are [in]dependent and the ways in which they negotiate their degrees of dependency are complex, contingent, entangled and always provisional. Spaces are not pre-figured and fixed but formed through 'a myriad of practices of negotiations and contestation... and intersecting trajectories' (Massey, 2005, p. 154). They are always open to becoming different through everyday heterogeneous encounters and movements that complicate notions of identity and difference (Duff, 2009; Massey, 2005). Attention to the conditions of relatedness highlights fluid everyday 'spacings' that open space to vibrancy, liveliness, and disruption and by doing so calls attention to the possibilities they afford for more democratic processes through addressing rights of presence and contests the facts of difference (Amin, 2004).

- **Rights:** Intimately connected to issues of relatedness and contrary to the dominant discourse of individual rights and entitlements, the approach taken here moves away

from seeing children as individual rights bearers to holding rights in common. The contemporary approach to children's rights, grounded on the notion of a universal childhood, presumes that separate rights are inherent to any being that falls into this category. As Lester (2016b) comments, the issue with grounding rights in terms such as freedom, rationality, responsibilities and choice are presuppositions of a universal and abstract subject (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). The dominant discourse of human individuality positions bodies as isolated and thus negating the movement of life as a process of continuous variation that occurs through dynamic negotiations and transformations in myriad encounters of bodies and things (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). By doing so, it creates a subject that needs to overcome their childish desires and transcend their current heteronomous state and establishes all-embracing conditions to steer children to this end. In this context, rights act as molar lines that seek to appropriate and dominate the desires of children and in the process also fixes 'adults' to this plane of organisation; adults are expected to protect children being exploited by disruptive forces (Tarulli and Skott-Myhre, 2006). The argument developed throughout this thesis is that playing is creative expression that re-configures bodies, materials, relationships and so on to become different, not the same. The focus is on what bodies can do rather than on who they are; rights are not externally administered but constituted through intra-active encounters, which marks a return to an onto-epistemological ethics, 'a positioning of rights as immanent potential... [concerned] with the process of situated, particularized, embodied rights *creation*' (Tarulli and Skott-Myhre, 2006, p. 193, authors italics). This is not an anti-rights gesture but preference for an on-going relational, open-ended, and creative process of rights formation that is always situated and inventive in response to the prevailing conditions (Lester, 2016b). Lines of flight, and their respective expressions

and representations as moments of playing, are molecular forces which create a path between adult and child (see examples of circle time, batman in the playground) undoing molar accounts of these identities, notably the power of adult expectations of children's behaviour. It is here that adult and child are becoming minoritarian, abandoning molar distinctions to co-create conditions that enable the common desire of living beings to flourish.

Common-sense productions of space and spatial practices subjugate the identities of both children and adults through subtle and not so subtle institutional materials and symbols that pattern relationships in an un-reflexive manner (Mozere, 2006). Disciplinary power (Foucault, 1990) produces a 'subject', a position that is always situated in diverse spaces and restrained or liberated by accounts of what it is to be a subject. Playing, as a process of de-subjectification, can transform humanist subject positions. Just as children may temporarily disturb order, adults can also overcome the constraints on their actions by more powerful others, contributing subversive acts to the disturbance of adult-child relationships and 'engage in a performative politics of re-inscription' (Youdell and Armstrong, 2011, p. 2). The following interview with a playworker is another example of this process in action, drawn from Lester (2011b, p. 11):

The playworker works in an after-school club situated in a community centre, sharing space alongside a range of other community-based projects. The manager of the space has some very clear ideas about children and play, particularly around the idea of play fighting and children's aggressive superhero/war play. This leads to the imposition of a zero tolerance approach to these forms of play, reminiscent of Holland's (2003) analysis of approaches in

Early Years Centres that reprimand children, when moving into these play behaviours, 'we don't play with guns here'. The playworkers, who are directly accountable to the manager yet at the same time sympathetic to children's desire to engage in these forms of play have evolved a response that ignores play-fighting while the manager is away from the setting, but collude with children in being aware when the manager is around and adopt a much more secretive approach which may include such things as using fingers as 'guns' and shooting each other behind the back of the manager, playing dead and even threatening to 'tell' the manager when this form of play emerges (both adults and children).

This minor and cautious engagement is concerned with the here-and-now to open cracks in molar productions of space and identity. It suggests that rights are enacted with adults who bear witness to and attempt to favour children's movements, becoming attentive to, and enchanted by, the possibilities in molecular events for becoming different and learning how to affect and be affected by them. (Duff, 2013; Jones, 2008).

- **Re-enchantment:** Amin's (2006) final register is adapted to consider the ways in which environments (private, institutional and public) may be made more open to children's playfulness by re-awakening a sense of enchantment, a common theme that appears throughout this thesis. To be enchanted is to 'assent wholeheartedly to life' (Bennett (2001, p. 159); that is not to deny the numerous challenges that life presents, but an attachment to wonder enables an ethical, generous response and holds-off an overwhelming cynicism that is so prevalent in the clichés of neoliberalism, notably the mantra's that 'there are no alternatives' and 'we are all in it together'. The exemplary

accounts introduced throughout this discussion are minor affirmative moments of being enchanted with the world, a constant reminder that it is possible to become-others, to 'receive and provoke surprises' (Bennett, 2001, p. 163). The idea of initiating surprises coincides with an approach that seeks to open up space to disturbance, pursuing a line of 'what if' to imaginatively disorder the world on behalf of others (Cloke and Jones, 2005). What emerged from a Welsh local authority's detailed research into children's play movements and patterns as part of a response to the Play Sufficiency Duty (Lester and Russell, 2013a) was the value children attributed to indeterminate or banal spaces that result from a temporary lack of planning and suspension of the driving economic and aesthetic forces that seek to eradicate friction and disorder, reduce complexity, and privilege the needs of adults in public spaces.

However, it is a considerable challenge for adults with responsibility for everyday 'maintenance' routines (planners, architects and so on) and ethical acts of relatedness to consider the possibility of indeterminate spaces, where things are not fixed once and for all. Playing, as an assemblage of bodies and materials and their affects produces a different form of reality, actualised from a virtual field that is beyond the aims and linearity of planning and design systems:

...planners typically start with the actual, move into the pre-actual and then back into the actual. When they do this, the intention is not to explore becomings in their own right, but to explore the becomings that are likely to be actualised. Or, in other words, the focus of existing methods of plan making are always anchored around the actual realm (Abrahams, 2013, p. 6)

While planning is inherently a highly speculative task, it is driven by economic/political forces that promote certain forms of desirable (consuming) behaviours while restricting others (performative and disorderly). These forces act to control public and institutional space to serve particular interests and deny the idea of 'democratic publicness' (Paddison and Sharp, 2007). When it comes to 'planning for play', designers always work backwards from the actual, most notably, the 'playground', and embellish this with other possibilities that fit this already existing template. As market forces, unleashed from regulation, increasingly dominate the shaping of the urban landscape, there is a need to consider a counter perspective that prioritises those dimensions of urban dynamics that contribute to the enrichment of life, a different form of governance that admits the right to the city for all citizens. For Lefebvre (1991) this includes the right to meet and gather, to use space and objects according to one's desire rather than a unitary function, and to play (Lester, 2014a).

It is here that attention switches from the provision of segregated space to the spatial-relational features in which playfulness may thrive. This resonates with Hillier's (2007, 2011, 2013) application of Deleuze's plane of immanence to planning theory and the challenge for planners to work with the virtual realm and to consider 'what might be' without becoming caught-up in how things might be actualised in practice. The environments that children and adults move through are dynamic and always open to more; as Massey (2005) reminds, spaces are always relational. The encounters and entangled connections between humans and non-humans generate an affective atmosphere – sometimes vibrant and playful while at other times scary and threatening. These positions are not fixed and immutable. As Lester and Russell (2013a, p. 77) assert:

Re-enchantment is an experimental approach; it eschews end-states and outcomes and works with things in the making, uncertainty, surprise and astonishment – the very qualities that distinguish playing. This, according to Healy (2004, p. 89), leads to a consideration of ‘the role of governance in relation to the generation of events, objects and situations which encourage people to feel wonder and awe, enjoyment and pleasure’. It is an approach that moves away from old ways of thinking to focus on the dynamics of spatial interactions (as in leopard print wellies) with matching dynamic sensibility and sensitivity that switches attention from providing play to consider the conditions under which playfulness thrives.

The research studies featured in this chapter and Appendix 3 highlight a range of spatial interventions designed to open up space for playing by the provision of a number of experimental ‘playful prompts’, for example marking a hopscotch grid in a main gallery or unrolling a length of kitchen roll along the middle of another (Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014), putting a line in the after-school club (Lester, 2016a), moving chairs at the playground (Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014) and hopefully some prompts in public space with the ‘playful places’ project (Lester, 2015d) and recent work with a Welsh Local Authority (see Appendix 3).

As may be evident from this brief overview, Amin’s (2006) registers are inextricably connected, mutually influential and cross-cutting. Thus, ‘no-ball games signs, road arrangements, work patterns, media influence, institutional timetables, layout and practices, adult attitudes and so on, collectively structure the rhythms and patterns of children’s spatial lives’ (Lester and Russell, 2013a, pp. 42-43.). And of course, this

patterning is dynamic, contingent and contextual. As the 'leopard skin wellies' example introduced in Digression 1 illustrates, children are very good at negotiating favourable conditions from the materials at hand to navigate and negotiate their way through their everyday environments. These movements are not readily accounted for by technical research processes (counting the amount of greenspace, measuring children's ranging behaviours, supposed qualitative judgments about playgrounds etc.) and children's rich situated knowledge is rarely captured in common forms of consultation. A critical cartography and associated methodologies attempt to work with the messiness of everyday entanglements to map local ways in which children get on with their daily lives. It forms the basis for the on-going and open formation of 'collective wisdom' (Lester and Russell, 2013a) as the foundation for adult response-ability to enact 'affective disruptions' (Aitken, 2010) that bring about more equitable forms of spatial justice for children and adults alike.

Summary

At the heart of a performative approach is the recognition that realities emerge from the ongoing, local, everyday intra-actions and practical engagements with the world, a world that is constituted from the 'deep pluralisms' of political, ideational and ontological entanglements (Wagenaar and Wilkinson, 2013). Humans do not act outside of the world, but are immersed in and apprehend the world by moving, sensing and intervening in it; such interventions are productive of continuous change. Importantly, the changes brought about through action in the world have emergent and generative properties; they are not prefigured and cannot be fully accounted for retrospectively:

Actors live in a world where the outcome of decisions is generally not immediately or completely known, where problem formulations are unclear and fundamentally contested, where no one can oversee the implications of alternative course of action, where in short the answer to the question 'what to do' is shrouded in fog (Wagenaar and Wilkinson, 2013, p. 4).

Experiences of the world are not a private state of affairs but are messy and contingent; assemblages coalesce and fall apart, acts of de- and re-territorialisation break through rigid structures to reshape and reform the world afresh. The commotion of real world actions can shape environments in democratically favourable or inhibiting ways, formations which are more or less resilient and resistant to contemporary economic, political, social forces and their discursive- material effects. It is under these circumstances that children's play emerges or is suppressed. While retaining an appreciation that there is no causal relationship between adult design of the environment and play, it may be possible to pay closer attention to the multiple yet always singular formations of playing to better appreciate the prevailing patterns and circumstances which may support 'a sufficiency of opportunity' to play. It is from this basis that ethical manoeuvres are enacted, not with any degree of certainty but as a responsive and experimental 'what if' stance. An ethics of enactment attends to the ways in which performances take place and how 'they might enhance affective capacities and engender new forms of engagement and responsibility' (Popke, 2009, p. 82). This is not a grand utopian project; it does not require great powers of insight or deep analysis of meanings to produce understandings. It is simply composing *sensible* participation in life that values ways in which affective processes and gestures are embedded in intra-active relations between animate and inanimate matter.

The maps and movements, encounters and relationships, and accompanying stories associated with critical cartography bring life to the environment; they are read diffractively, not reflectively, to consider the ongoing and multi-faceted flows of action that play across and through space. In the adventure playground, museum, playwork setting, school playground, and public space the environment is revealed as constituted through, productive of and permeated with flows and forces that establish ever-changing patterns, rhythms and moods. At a broader level, the accumulation of different multi-sensual points of view can be mapped to produce an open landscape of possibilities; the collective (and always partial) assemblage of artefacts and bodies bring a critical lens to bear on everyday rhythms and the ways in which space is always a process of becoming. The sensitising concepts developed and applied in the Wales Play Sufficiency Duty research draw attention to the aggregation of a diverse set of actors/actants with a shared and shifting desire orientated to repairing and enhancing the everyday conditions of childhood. Improving these conditions is an accomplishment that is generated in emergent real time, in novel situations (repetition with difference), in a process of organised improvisation. It is not a technical-scientific process but an integral part of the formation of democratic collective wisdom oriented towards spatial justice. It may well be there is no universal, ultimate and revered truth to act as moral authority, but pragmatic ethical judgments have to be made about the equitable distribution of timespace. Before concluding this thesis there is a final thought which although titled a digression is central to the discussion to date and will feature prominently in future research and writing projects.

Digression 3

This thesis originated as a desire to re-configure understandings of playwork but this has been overtaken by meandering lines that attempt to produce a different reading of play and life. The implications for playwork practice are largely implicit in this process and a more explicit account remains for another time (Lester, 2017). At this stage, there is a brief digression that considers some of the professional dilemmas associated with the practice of co-creating time/space for children to play. Playwork's underpinning theoretical concepts and associated practices developed over the past couple of decades so often fall back on cause-effect relationships, proliferated with a language of encouraging, enabling and empowering children to play, as though somehow this could be in the preserve of adults. Its epistemological foundations are mixed, limited and largely restricted to psychological accounts (evolutionary, developmental, and depth – see Hughes, 2012; Brown, 2003; Sturrock and Else, 1998). A default position remains that playwork is important for children as it ensures healthy development, and often justifies this position on their 'play needs' or lack that children will face if they do not have access to play [*sic*], most notably presented in negative terms of 'play deprivation'. Practice to support children's play becomes caught up in measurements (type of play, levels of creativity expressed, range of social skills demonstrated, ability to problem solve and calorie expenditure) and pseudo-therapeutic interventions designed to ameliorate presumed psychological deficiencies. Such material-discursive practices shape what playworkers 'see' in playing, and by doing so reinforce this 'cut'. Adult designed and managed play spaces may represent a segment or molar lines on the plane of organisation, ordered to keep children's desires and intensities of affect within safe and beneficial limits. This stratifies space/time, ordering the arrangement of the environment to a pre-determined pattern (arts and craft table, quiet corner, den-making

area etc.) in order to steer children's play to adult purpose and to guide children to become the same rather than become different (Lester, 2011a). The history of playwork may be viewed as a response to keep children on the straight and narrow, to maintain separation of children from adult worlds while at the same time ensure that children are making progress to attain this destination (see for example Kozlovsky, 2007; Cranwell, 2003; Ward 1979).

Within such spaces there are inevitable mo(ve)ments by children in, across and between the boundaries established by adults. Children's play, as an expression of desire and intensity of affect, cannot be permanently contained and will find expressions of becoming-other.

Where these affects have no little or negative impact on the plane of organisation they are welcomed and praised but where children seek to develop a line of flight away from the plane they are undesirable. Any attempt to deterritorialise is blocked by a powerful assemblage that imposes normalising moral authority over children's expressions. Universal (adult) accounts of equality, fairness, manners and so on impose rigid stratifications that suppress desires. Multiple practices, habits and routines consciously and pre-consciously actively organise and operate on moving bodies and produce dominant affective registers or atmospheres that constrain possibilities for becoming-other (McCormack, 2013).

The ideas presented to date in this thesis suggest a different way of cutting play that affords the possibility for new instruments and practices to be brought into playwork; they have started to find their way into playwork contexts (see Lester, 2016c, and Lester, Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2014, for examples) and the material-discursive effects of these minor movements are briefly discussed at this point. From a 'posthuman' perspective, playwork provision is the creation of lightly stratified space where the intention is (paradoxically) to create time/space in which mo(ve)ments of playing emerge. Whereas the majority of

childhood institutions and practitioners are caught up in progressive acts *on* children to propel them along the narrow line of development with accompanying patterns of dressage (Lefebvre, 2004), playwork practice intra-actively co-creates *with* all the available materials at hand to actualise possibilities for the 'emergence of playspacetimes of becoming... otherwise' (Lester, 2016b, p. 7).

Playwork environments are territories marked by a persistent playful refrain or affective atmosphere imbued with distinctive registers (laughter, excitement, pleasure, comfort alongside temporary moments of discomfort, distress and pain). Lester (2016c) asserts that a playful atmosphere is constituted from a constellation of playful moments and that critical attention needs to be paid to these everyday rhythms and movements. The following example, drawn from a small-scale case study into the value of playwork practice with three City Council commissioned settings in Manchester illustrates such a playful mo(ve)ment (Lester, 2016c, p. 3):

It is a busy evening at a playwork session based in a youth centre in North Manchester. Children are moving all over the setting, when at one point a playworker passes an older child, they both pause, stand facing each other and break out into a clapping routine, synchronising movements and rhythms before continuing on their way with smiles on their faces.

The playworker acknowledged that she could barely recall where this movement came from, other than it is 'just something that happens'. It is a habit of being-together that exists between this playworker and this child and appears in unpredictable ways. The entire session is replete with further events of nonsense between playworkers and children that constitute the rhythms of the environment, the prevailing playful feel of space. These appear

to be mundane and banal moments that would largely go unnoticed in the frantic movements and noise within each setting. Yet the clapping example, along with countless others from three case study settings are significant and matter. In their small way, they contribute to creating an environment that is different from other settings in which children pass through in their daily lives.

However, playwork practices that contribute to maintaining a prevailing playful feel largely escape explicit articulation and become lost in externally derived technical accounting systems. As the findings from the research suggest, practitioners, children and parents primarily value provision as a place where children can ‘mess about’ and make friends (Lester, 2016c). The accompanying observations of children’s play across the three settings reinforces this viewpoint as children co-create moments of playful participation that would generally elude formal consultation methods (Lester, 2013b). But this is undervalued and bypassed in reporting against the pre-established Commissioning outcomes, expressed in extremely vague terms, for example:

Provision understands and meets the needs of communities at a locality and neighbourhood level, and is targeted to where need and demand is greatest to tackle child poverty and deprivation (Lester, 2016c, p. 16).

The apparent vagaries of this ‘outcome’ is further confounded by City Council compliance systems that require settings to input numbers, backgrounds and residences of children attending playwork sessions; this generates statistics which can then be traced against local indicators of deprivation. As one playworker comments, ‘we have stories to tell...but there is nowhere on the reporting forms to tell these stories’ (Lester, 2016c p. 50). In responding to this state of affairs, the research report revises an understanding of accountability as the

‘ability to articulate [take account of] how practice affects conditions for playing, what happens, and how this contributes to policy objectives’ (Lester, 2016c, p. 50). The City Council’s desire to tackle the worst excesses of child-poverty is laudable but the commissioning outcomes and recording processes fall desperately short in establishing a congruent practice-evidence-policy framework.²² The conclusion to the study notes there is a compelling case to be made for the relationship between children’s play and being-well that foregrounds the intrinsic value of playing (‘messaging about’); yet ,at the moment, this is under-stated in local policy formulation and resource allocation. This has an influence on playwork’s expression of value: playworkers may intuitively favour the multiple ways in which children co-create moments of nonsense but this has little worth in accounting systems and funding bids. There is also a real possibility that practitioner’s highly creative, novel, sensitive and responsive ways of co-creating timespace for play are devalued in a policy and management landscape where ‘effectiveness’, ‘quality’ and ‘outcomes’ are externally defined and pre-established. Indeed, practitioners often have difficulty in articulating the value of their practice; as interviews with practitioners’ reveal, they are infused with doubts that descriptions of practice may not be valid in terms of expected outcomes. Lester (2016c, p. 56) observes:

While actual practice may ward-off the worst excesses of this (planning and delivering specific activities with children to meet pre-determined outcomes), it also limits the development of practice-based evidence to inform policy. Given the proposed development of the Youth and Play Trust there is an opportunity

²² See Lester and Russell, 2008, for a wider discussion on this issue.

over the next period to develop a cohesive and coherent strategy that brings together policy with practice-based evidence.

To support this recommendation, the report continues by suggesting that the three case-study settings in which the initial research was conducted should be supported through a participative action research project to experiment with the practice-based methods developed for the study (a critical cartography of playwork), disseminate findings and mentor other commissioned play projects. As this progresses, 'evidence' should be used to inform the development of values, principles and strategic focus for the embryonic Manchester Youth and Play Trust. It will also support conditions for growing a community of practice that can make a significant contribution by increasing the value of playwork in a supportive policy context, and more ambitiously, to take a lead role in introducing community-based approaches to 'play sufficiency'. Overall, the intention is to contribute further to the limited and patchy published evidence base 'for the efficacy of playwork practice' and to give justice to the role that playwork makes, and can continue to make

Chapter 8: Concluding remarks

An ending that is not an ending

Introduction

The general requirement of writing a thesis of this nature is to bring everything together at the end, draw some neat conclusions, reflect on the experience, outline possible limitations and make recommendations for the future. In line with the general tenor of this piece, this will be resisted as far as possible. The focus on processes (*how*) rather than the product (the *'is'* of playing), and the accompanying concepts and practices developed in this account hold off the idea of reflection and reflexivity which would seek to subject and judge experiences to an ideal image of thought and maintain a boundary between an individual subject and an external object. Life goes on through a process of diffraction – disturbances and agitations that keep life moving. This is a thesis that attempts to illuminate differences as they emerge in everyday encounters and to, as far as possible, remain faithful to these singular examples. It is beset by limitations of representation but does not dwell on these; it continues to experiment with ways of getting out of one self and to open-up an onto-epistemological space of encounter.

This is not an end but another line of becoming; there is much more to say and do. I have wrestled with this narrative alongside writing for different audiences over a considerable period of time. Concepts coalesce, rub up against each other and diverge in all kinds of unrestrained ways. They compose a plateau where there is no origin or destination, just intensive movements that generate more concepts and lines of enquiry that demand further

attention. However, within the limitations of this form of writing there has to be a product. But it should be reiterated, narrative is a process rather than an end-state.

Following Deleuzian lines of enquiry, the question is not what playing means but how does it work and how might it be worked differently. Common-sense valorisation of play and associated material-discursive effects would situate it to certain times and places and structure and organise progressive activities in which choices come already produced, weigh(t)ed, packaged and promoted to ensure individuals make the right choices. It is just one way in which life is cut apart to meet the demands of capitalist processes of consumption and production; a closed-circuit where forces of production create things to consume and consumption creates ideas of what needs to be produced (Ingold, 2011a). On this plane of organisation, value is ascribed to ways of being that accumulate capital (social, cultural, economic); playing nicely is a prime cliché of this movement, and not to do so is a sign of deviancy. Children's positioning as largely needy, immature, and separate from adult worlds operate to the detriment of children and adults alike. It places notions of children's rights in a dominant protectionist mode which in turn reinforces children's subordinate status. New Public Management systems, with accompanying quality standards, outcome measures, tight performance management, pseudo-scientific impact assessments and cost-benefit analyses are just some examples of the technology of government designed to maintain a steady course to some distant and universal utopian vision and constrain alternative ways of seeing and being in the world. At a time when the discourse of austerity (and all that this implies) permeates social and economic policy, and 'hope' seems to be fading, it is timely to remember the ways in which everyday encounters and clandestine acts can permeate and reinvigorate life. Deleuze's philosophy presents life as both finite and

infinite; a single life is temporary and frail (Bennett, 2001) *and* life is always going on. Bodies are not self-contained but only defined by a longitude and latitude. The lines of movement presented in this account re-positioning a right to play (Article 31) as an intra-active indivisible process productive of particular ways of being; indeed, it may be re-written as an all embracing ethico-political 'collective right to desire', a statement of plays micro-revolutionary possibilities to bring more to life.

Re-tracing lines

The main thrust of this thesis is that life is sustained and sustains itself through play; it is a process of continuous, indeterminate variation to see what more can be done. The main themes that extend from Deleuze into a materialist onto-epistemology overcome the sterile and constraining dualisms of nature/culture, structure/agency, adult/child and so on to present a world that is always being made anew through intra-active assemblages of animate and inanimate material that affect and are affected in the formations they compose. Assemblages are always contingent and emergent; life does not follow a pre-given script or line of development. This alternative presents life as a meshwork of lines, a tangle of relationships and wandering threads that cut through the segmented line of a plane of organisation; they are supple lines 'where the child produces a loop, finds something, claps his hands, hums a ritornello, retraces his steps' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p. 128).

Playing, following the concepts that I have developed here, is a singular process of individuation, intensive movements and lines of flight that cross thresholds to produce blocks of playspacetime that de-territorialise the given world. Dephasings initiate temporary coherence or collusion of forces that simply enlivens life. It unfolds from the middle, creating a milieu of its own that allows for experimentation with affirmative affective

experience; it always contains within it the possibility for further transformation - 'what if', 'what happens if you fall off', 'what counts'? Children's ordinary minor acts of disturbance actualise a different form of ordering, an unexceptional yet potentially magical form of hope (Lester, 2010b). It is an expression of belief, not for some out of reach utopian ideal, but an everyday form of hopefulness that denotes life can go on. They are reminders that people (adults and children) can change practices, conditions and categorical understandings on however a modest scale (McCormack, 2013).

Plugging-in again (and again and...)

Writing this thesis and associated publications has been a highly challenging yet productive process. Productive in this sense is not the repetition of a fixed set of pre-existing concepts and practices but a reconfiguration of previously disconnected ideas to generate something new. It started with a desire to think differently about play and has pursued intensive lines that flow from Deleuzian ontology and extend to become entangled with multiple threads drawn from (or shamelessly poached, after Massumi, 2002) diverse disciplinary perspectives. It adds more to current thinking and practices that are largely concerned with the 'is' of playing by cutting play otherwise to see what more might be possible. In doing so, it brings focus to the ontological processes by which moments of play might emerge. As with the process of play itself, it is involved with loosening the rigid segments that would seek to fix adults and children into certain positions to produce other possibilities. But of course, the concepts and practices presented in this account also perform a cut in the world. The intention here is to present an onto-ethico-epistemological manoeuvre (Barad, 2007) that has been, and will continue to be, performed in a variety of practice contexts to overcome the forces of disenchantment which prevail in adult anxieties and concerns over children's

futures. It is ultimately, after May (2005a), a desire to change the world by celebrating the playfulness of life. This is not to set to one side the considerable inequalities and abuses that children face across the globe but to confront and redress these by bringing to the foreground issues of spatial justice and to work towards a more equitable distribution of timespace for playing and all the potentialities this may actualise for creating the world differently.

As noted in Chapter 7, the concepts that have emerged from these writings (recognising that they are not fixed but always intra-actively produced) have been set to work in a variety of contexts. This is not a revolutionary position that seeks to overthrow but a continuous process of plugging-in, i.e. using whatever formations are at hand to reconfigure arrangements to re-form anew. As illustrated throughout the thesis, new assemblages re-shape across multi-scalar locations. For example, the working paper produced for the International Play Association (Lester and Russell, 2010) becomes entangled in UNCRC General Comment 17 on children's right to play, which plugs-into the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty, which plugs into the production of 'Leopard Skin Wellies...' (Lester and Russell, 2013a), which, in turn, plugs-in to a series of workshops with a Welsh Local Authority in which new formations are enacted through a series of playful interventions in public space and so on. Similar movements are evident in the small-scale research projects with 'institutional spaces' (museums, adventure playgrounds, schools, playwork settings) and drawn on in this thesis as examples of ways in which concepts become entangled with practice to enliven space. Alongside this, the MA in 'Professional Studies in Children's Play' at the University of Gloucestershire has offered a wonderful testing ground for working with practitioners to consider what more might be done with play and adult response-ability;

some of the 'outcomes' from this process are featured in the forthcoming edition of practice-based research studies (Russell, Lester and Smith, 2017).

The process of plugging-in establishes extensive connections and many of the enmeshed strands of practice developed during the production of this piece will continue to be explored in future projects (notably with playwork settings, cultural institutions and continuing support for the implementation of the play sufficiency duty in Wales). As with playing, this is not the pursuit of a deliberative strategic plan but taking advantage of opportunistic encounters to form coalitions that have a collective desire to affect and be affected to produce conditions that enable life to flourish. Writing is not separate from this process but is also a desire to add more to the mix; it is here that the value of the singular example comes to the fore as it draws attention to processes of life on the move to co-create moments of enchantment with the world

Entanglements of writings, creating concepts, practices, encounters, materials and everything else that is presented here are for the most part. micro-political acts to form alliances that can make new connections and animate generous response-abilities, i.e. the ability to respond to our part in entanglements with the 'other' that is never apart from and always more than human. At the heart of this is an ethics concerned with the ways in which adults account for and take care of the conditions in which children can play, and by doing so create space for challenging the dominant assumptions and practices of inequitable social and spatial production by imagining and actualising other virtualities.

Moments and movements of hope

The story told here is one of enchantment: children's play, with its 'infectious vibrations and energetic morphing' (Bennett, 2001, p. 168) is evidence of an attachment to life. It is a belief that the 'not-yet' can be actualised and expressed through joyful instants of nonsense and disturbance. They are moments of wondering and wandering that resist the pressure of conformity by producing contemporaneous possibilities or compossibilities (after Deleuze, 1993). And for adults, who all are once-children, playing also retains and restores a sense of enchantment, a reminder that life continues to surprise, delight, and mystify. It marks a state of openness to the fragile and disturbing moments encountered in everyday experience. While disenchantment tales promote a sense of vulnerability, sadness and anger, playing reminds that things can be different by generating 'feelings of being connected in an affirmative way to existence...it is good to be alive' (Bennett, 2001, p. 156). Enchantment is a sensibility which can be cultivated by pausing and witnessing the apparently mundane movements of children and things. To take advantage of this movement requires rethinking and reconfiguring our position in the world and fostering relationships with other bodies and materials to create new conditions for working with the messiness of singular events.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1994, p. 1) opening to their final joint publication asks 'what is it I have been doing all my life'. A personal response would be quite simply 'playing', which may suggest a somewhat frivolous and trivial use of spacetime. Hopefully this thesis has convinced otherwise. A playful refrain persists over time, driven by a desire to explore the possibilities found in the here-and-now of existence, an 'on-going practice of being open and

alive to each meeting, to each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into every new possibility for living justly' (Barad, 2007, p. x). What if...?

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Bringing play to life and life to play: Different lines of enquiry

Appendices

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Appendix 1 - Publications

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Appendix 2 – Conference presentations and papers

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Lester, S. (2009) *Children's play: a different time/space*. Paper presented at London Centre for Playwork Education and Training Seminar, Islington, October 2009.

Lester, S. (2010) *Utopian Visions*. Paper presented at University of Gloucestershire Professional development event.

Lester, S. (2010) *Play and ordinary magic: the everydayness of play*. Paper presented at Playwork London Conference, June 2010. Available online at: <http://www.playworklondon.org.uk/upload/files/Playandordinarymagic3.pdf>

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Lester, S. (2011) *Playing in a Deleuzian Playground*. Paper for 'Philosophy at Play' Conference, University of Gloucestershire, 12/13th April.

Lester, S. (2011) *The production of play time/space in schools: working out ways of being together*. Paper for launch of Play and Recreation Research Centre, University of Greenwich, May 12th.

Lester, S. (2011) *Moments of nonsense and signs of hope: the everyday 'political' nature of children's play*. Paper presentation at IPA conference, Cardiff, July. Available online at:

<http://www.ipa2011.org/login/uploaded/tuesday%20papers/Stuart%20Lester.pdf>

Lester, S. (2012) *Perspectives on playing: Putting the brain back into the body and the world*. Seminar Paper, Playwork London and Hackney Play Association.

Lester, S. (2012) *Rethinking children's participation in democratic processes: a right to play*. Keynote presentation, Play Wales Conference, Cardiff.

Lester, S. (2012) *What if...?* Workshop, Play Wales Conference, Cardiff

Lester, S. (2012) *Vibrant spaces: Reconfiguring adults 'providing play'*. Paper presentation at ICCP Conference, Tallinn, June. Available on line at: [http://www.iccp-](http://www.iccp-play.org/documents/tallinn/lester.pdf)

[play.org/documents/tallinn/lester.pdf](http://www.iccp-play.org/documents/tallinn/lester.pdf)

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Lester, S. (2013) *De-naturalising nature: life beyond the natural playground*. Presentation at Philosophy of Play Conference, University of Gloucestershire, April.

Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2013) *Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top Hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose*. Keynote presentation at Play Wales Conference, Cardiff, May.

Lester, S. (2013) *Bringing play to life*. Keynote presentation, Playboard Conference, Belfast

Lester, S. (2013) *Bringing play to life*. Keynote presentation, Play Scotland Conference, Edinburgh

Lester, S. (2014) *Bringing play to life and life to play*. Paper presentation, IPA Global Conference, Istanbul, May.

Lester, S and Russell, W. (2014) *Leopard Skin Wellies, a Tophat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose*. Presentation, IPA Global Conference, Istanbul, May.

Lester, S. (2014) *Life beyond the playground*. Natural Playgrounds Conference, Dublin, October.

Lester, S. (2014) *The Vitality of Play*. Keynote presentation and workshops, Midlothian Play Conference, November.

Lester, S. (2015) *A more playful museum*. Keynote presentation at Turkey World Play Day, Marmara University, May.

Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2015) *Enrichment and enchantment: playing as a very ordinary magic*. Keynote presentation, Network of Community Activities Biennial Conference 'Enriching Childhood', Sydney, May. This presentation and accompanying workshops was also delivered in Griffith University, Brisbane, and Melbourne.

Lester, S (2015) *Enrichment and Enchantment: Towards a sufficiency of play opportunities*. Workshop, Network of Community Activities Biennial Conference 'Enriching Childhood', Sydney, May.

Lester, S. (2016) *Articulating the value of playwork*. Presentation of findings from Manchester playwork study, National Playwork Conference, Eastbourne, March.

Appendix 3 – Research activity

This is a summary of key research projects and the ways in which the emergence of concepts explored in the main thesis are entangled with ‘doings’. It should be reinforced that while presented as separate projects, they are nomadic in nature; concepts, experiences, sensations, experiments, imaginations, bodies and materials continually assemble and collude across the apparent boundaries of each study. Links to relevant research reports are also included should the reader find a track that appeals.

- **2006 Play, Naturally**

A literature review (with Martin Maudsley) funded by Play England to bring together research findings that explore the relationship between children, play and the natural environment. As noted in the report (Lester and Maudsley, 2007, p. 2):

The intention of this review is to give an indication of the connections across disciplines and open the possibility of reaffirming childhood as a period of natural emergence. Children, through their play, encounter their physical and social environments; they express their ideas, perceive possibilities and pose questions that invite a response. Through this dynamic, constantly changing process both player and environment have the potential to be transformed. The child, through playing in the world, is both being and becoming.

This key paragraph was an opening attempt to present playing as a dynamic, open, interactive process between mind/body, drawing on Prout (2005) to highlight that childhood is not a unitary phenomenon but is composed from heterogeneous biological, physical, discursive, historical, cultural and technological materials. With this in mind, the review focussed on the growing research studies that explored the role of ‘nature’ in supporting healthy development. Findings from the review suggest that there is substantial evidence that playful contact with natural environments has benefits for children’s health and well-being, fostering a sense of wonder, place and attachment and establishing the foundations for a positive environmental sensibility. These key messages, as noted in the main thesis, contributed to the ‘nature play’ movement of the period –

largely by-passing the broader context to the study. Since this period, my ideas about play, nature and natural childhood have shifted while still retaining the central premise about the emergence of childhood in relationship with organic and inorganic materials without recourse to maintaining the nature/culture binary (see Lester, 2015a).

- **2008 Play for a Change. Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives**

Another literature review (with Wendy Russell) and commissioned by Play England, this major work crosses disciplinary boundaries to appraise contemporary research into animal and human play. In doing so it identified three main strands for consideration:

1. The policy framework and context for supporting children's play in the UK which inevitably situates playing in the wider study of childhood
2. The research literature on the benefits of children's play and contemporary play patterns
3. Adult attempts to provide environments for play.

The findings from the review were published by the National Children's Play Bureau (2008), both in a full version and short summary. Following a somewhat rushed completion of the report, the New Labour Government introduced the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) and Fair Play (2008) – both of which largely disappeared under the Coalition government (2010-2015). In developing a framework for presenting such a diverse range of studies, Lester and Russell suggest that there may be a connection between playing and the enhancement of a range of adaptive systems that support resilience, or what Masten (2001) refers to as 'ordinary magic'. This has been appropriated by a number of national and international play organisations and in the process the tentative claims made in the research report reduced to a number of headline statements. Undoubtedly, the opportunity to undertake this review has shaped subsequent thinking about play and childhood and also informed the development of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the University of Gloucestershire. One of the key tasks over the next 12 months is to re-visit and update some of the findings to develop a response to the challenges identified in the study into the value of playwork provision in Manchester (see later in this appendix). A copy of the full report is available at:

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/play-for-a-change-play-policy-and-practice-a-review-of-contemporary-perspectives/>

- **2009-2010 Children’s right to play. An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide**

The publication of ‘Play for a Change’ in turn led to being commissioned by the International Play Association to develop a working paper that addressed children’s right to play from a global perspective. This was an opportunity to extend ideas developed from a UK perspective to take account of the notion of children’s rights, in particular Article 31 and the right to play. Tellingly the working paper notes that playing is not a luxury or something to be considered when the main purpose of life (education and work) is fulfilled. It also makes the point that playing embraces all articles of the CRC across participation, protection and provision rights:

It suggests that children can create their own self-protection through play and that play is the principal way in which children participate within their own communities. Given this starting position adults’ responsibility to provide for play involves ensuring the conditions are right for play to take place (Lester and Russell, 2010, pp. *viii-ix*).

The report was used as part of a successful campaign to request the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to issue General Comment (GC) 17 in 2013 as a reminder to all signatory states of their obligations to fully support Article 31 rights. Significantly, the GC is wide-ranging in scope and ambition with a clear focus on supporting environmental and relational conditions under which children’s playfulness thrives. It also makes a strong recommendation that countries should legislate for play through the notion of ‘play sufficiency’, a theme that has been pursued in Lester and Russell’s long-standing relationship with Play Wales and research into the Welsh Government’s Play Sufficiency Duty, the first country in to world to legislate for children’s play (see later). Since the publication of the English version in 2010, the working paper has been translated into Spanish and Chinese.

Alongside this, as intimated in the thesis, increased critical attention has been given to the concept of children's rights with a number of articles and book chapters published on this matter (Lester, 2013a; Lester and Russell, 2014a; Lester, 2016b). A copy of the report is available at:

<http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/BvLF-IPAWorkingPaper-Childrens-Right-to-Play-Dec2010f.pdf>

- **2010-2011 Opal Evaluation**

A small-scale evaluation project into South Gloucestershire's 'Outdoor Play and Learning' (OPAL) programme carried out by Stuart Lester, Owain Jones and Wendy Russell in 2010. The study featured two stages: firstly, a review of programme documentation from 19 primary schools who participated in the initial stages of the programme and interviews with 10 head-teachers from this group. The second stage adopted a case study approach, working with three schools to carry out observations of children's playtimes, semi-structured interviews with key staff involved in the programme and focus groups with parents, teaching staff and lunchtime supervisors. Given that children spend a considerable part of their daily lives in educational institutions, the issue of developing a 'playful environment' is of considerable importance (as later recognised in CRC General Comment 17). The report highlights both the overall effectiveness of the OPAL programme in enabling schools to enhance opportunities for playing and at the same time highlights some of the tensions and challenges faced by individual institutions as they attempt to move away from 'traditional' practices of 'playtime'. The conclusion to the report prophetically notes:

Since the evaluation of OPAL began, there has been a change of government, bringing with it fundamental changes to state education alongside significant reductions in public spending. This suggests that there is a risk that the important issue of play within schools, and play in society more generally, will slip down the agenda of government, education authorities and individual schools. We sincerely hope that the evidence presented here, both from the literature and from the OPAL Programme, presents a strong case for the importance of OPAL as a model for creating

conditions that support children's play within schools. Perhaps the final word should be left to the headteacher of School S, who comments: 'I have been in education for 15 years, and by a long way this is the most successful and rewarding project I have ever been involved with.' (Lester, Jones and Russell, 2011, p. 57).

The research report, 'Supporting school improvement through play' is available at: http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/340836/supporting_school_improvement_through_play.pdf

- **2013/2014 Research into the Welsh Government's (2010) Play Sufficiency Duty (PSD)**

Two small-scale studies into the implementation of the PSD arose from a long-standing collaborative partnership with Play Wales during the lead-in to the design and development of this innovative approach to 'legislating for play'. As Lester and Russell, (2013a) note, dialogue with Play Wales officers, responses to consultations and facilitating a seminar for senior local government officers in 2010 to look at the requirements of legislation meant that we were not 'outsiders' or neutral in this research study. As such, our approach to researching this specific piece of legislation was informed by wider commentaries on the ways in which policy (both at national and local level) addresses the issue of play and associated material-discursive effects (see for example, Lester and Russell, 2008, 2013c, 2013d, 2014a). Limitations of space prevent a full analysis of this area but suffice it to say that for the most part policy has attributed a utilitarian value to play, i.e. that it can be harnessed through policy directives for some utilitarian purpose; for example, the recent connections established between play and exercise and the contribution that increasing children's active play can make to government health priorities (this issue is developed further in Lester and Russell, 2014c)

The first study (Lester and Russell, 2013a) paid specific attention to the ways in which Welsh local authorities approached the requirement to 'assess a sufficiency of play opportunities'. It applied an inductive qualitative methodology supported by limited quantitative analysis of key stakeholder responses to an online survey. The overall intention was to gain some sense of the diverse approaches from local authorities and

the ways in which the materials of enactment shaped the assessment of sufficiency. This was enhanced by working with three case-study local authorities to examine the complex processes involved as they negotiated their way through the demands of the PSD. The analysis of data was informed by Amin's (2006) analysis of the constituents of the 'good city', a key sensitising concept that was further applied in the follow-up study in 2014. The report highlights the complex ways in which all aspects of children's lives are entangled across multiple scales of analysis from national government legislation to daily encounters between children and adult; 'play is not a separate phenomenon that happens in designated spaces and prescribed times but is interwoven into children's everyday lives and will erupt whenever conditions allow' (Lester and Russell, 2013a, p. 9). It concludes with a series of recommendations designed to cultivate relational conditions that will sustain the opening moves in re-dressing inequitable distribution of time/space for children's play, notably the importance of developing 'collective wisdom', a key theme pursued in the follow-up study in 2014.

The experience gained from these two studies, as noted in the main thesis, led to the (unsuccessful) ESRC bid to develop a three -year study that extended the interconnected conceptual and methodological foundations developed by Lester and Russell to incorporate a legal and rights based analysis. Hopefully, this will be re-worked, but in the meantime the issue of collective wisdom has been further explored in a recent experiment with one of the case study authorities, an opportunity to test out concepts and approaches from the ESRC bid in practice (see later in this appendix). Findings from this on-going study will inform future research bids.

Copies of the two PSD reports can be found at:

<http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/research>

- **A More Playful Museum 2012/2013**

This participative/appreciative action research project evolved from a collaborative partnership between myself, Manchester Museum, and an independent consultant (Charlotte Derry) with financial support from the Happy Museum fund. The overall intention of the research was to consider ways in which the museum might become

‘more playful’, which in this context required moving away from the traditional value afforded to ‘play and learning’ and often confined to segregated time/space within the institution to perceiving the entire museum environment as potentially attractive for children to move. Central to this study was an appreciation of the important role that Visitor Services Assistants (VSA’s) played in determining the ‘feel’ of gallery spaces by their movements and perception of children’s presence in the museum. As such, the opening stage to the study featured semi-structured and informal interviews with VSA’s, while wandering the museum. Following this, a series of participative workshops introduced some key concepts to help re-configure ways of thinking about children., play and space. Interspersed with these sessions were opportunities for VSA’s to pay more careful attention to children’s movements and to share examples of this within the group. A growing appreciation of children’s playful movement led to a series of ‘what if...’ interventions in the environment (some of these experiments are introduced in Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014)

The conceptual foundations, approach and findings were presented at the Museum’s Association Conference in 2012 and there have been a series of professional development events with Museum staff from diverse settings to develop a growing community of practice to explore issues of the relationship between playing and well-being in cultural institutions, resulting in the recent publication of ‘Rules for a Playful Museum’ (Derry, 2015).

- **Co-creating an adventure playground 2013/2014**

This study was a collaborative participative action research project between an adventure playground (AP) in East London and Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell. The foundations for this specific project arose from a shared desire to extend beyond traditional ways of thinking about AP’s as a physical site marked by a range of structures and activities designed to promote ‘adventure’ to a more nuanced appreciation of the ways in which play spaces emerge from the relational conditions of the landscape.

Using an action research approach, the study explored articulations of design intentions and practices, and from this introduced conceptual tools that enabled practitioners to develop a critical and analytical approach that works with uncertainty and openness. The

study was notable for providing an opportunity to experiment with concepts outlined in this thesis, particularly the significance of 'movement' and the ways in which bodies and materials, in their movements, become entwined and entangled or fall apart. Thus the playground may be understood as constituted through, productive of and permeated with flows and forces that establish ever-changing patterns, rhythms and moods. The intention of action research was to bring a lens to bear on these everyday rhythms and the ways in which the playground is 'always a process of becoming, seething with emergent properties, but usually stabilised by regular patterns of flow that possess particular rhythmic qualities whether steady, intermittent, volatile or surging' (Edensor, 2010, p. 3). As such, rather than a methodology designed simply to gather data to answer standard research questions, the study experimented with a variety of mobile, performative methods that were intimately connected to practice and designed to develop approaches get to grips with the messiness, complexity and response-ability of co-creating environments to support playing.

Experiences from this study, in particular, led to refining 'cartographic' concepts and tools that are responsive to diffractive patterns of movements and this has subsequently influenced more recent projects, including 'Thinking about Play', a Continuous Professional Development programme for playwork practitioners and the workshops developed with a Welsh local authority to explore the concept of 'collective wisdom' in the context of the Welsh Government's (2010) Play Sufficiency Duty.

The study report is available online at:

http://hcvs.org.uk/resources/community_insight/grants/CAPS_report_final_for_publishing.pdf

- **Towards cultivating collective wisdom – an approach to play sufficiency assessment 2015/2016**

A series of workshops designed to support a Welsh local authority in an approach to assessing and securing a 'sufficiency of play opportunities'. It is based on key themes developed in the University of Gloucestershire's MA 'Professional Studies in Children's Play' programme and draws on experiences, ideas and principles identified in two

research studies into the implementation of the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty (Lester and Russell, 2013, 2014).

The workshop sessions are intended to be responsive to local conditions; as Lester and Russell (2013) note each local authority has a contextual approach to supporting children's play that is composed from complex and unique arrangements of multiple factors – history, relationships, resources, priorities, economics, local politics and so on. Therefore, programme design starts from these conditions i.e. sessions were negotiated both beforehand and constantly reviewed during delivery.

Rather than being 'taught' sessions, the programme was participative, experimental and emergent. There was also an expectation that it involves 'action', i.e. that participants apply ideas, principles and methodologies in practice and share findings – as a process of building 'collective wisdom' that supports the assessment and securing of sufficient play opportunities.

Given this, there was no standard programme or template to apply. However, given the parameters established by the Duty it may be possible to discern some general themes that would support Local Authority play partnerships in enhancing their approach.

Five workshop sessions took place between October 2015 - February 2016 with local authority professionals (housing, planning, arts, play, criminal justice, social work, early years and family support, town centre managers) and voluntary sector organisations. The opening period introduced and explored new approaches to understanding the relationship between children, play and space, drawing on many of the concepts developed in this thesis and encouraging greater attention to moments of playing that occur anywhere and everywhere. The examples generated from this process were set to work to discern singular arrangements, compositions, rhythms and refrains of 'space' as the basis for 'critical cartography', i.e. subjecting these local patterns and conditions to critical scrutiny to explore how they might include/exclude children from navigating time and space for playing – introducing interrelated registers of repair, relatedness, rights and re-enchantment (the 4 R's) based on Lester and Russell's (2013a) adaptation of Amin's (2006) account of the good city .

The opportunity for professional practitioners from diverse departments and backgrounds enabled cross-fertilisation of experiences and knowledges, and the introduction of new concepts acted as an attractor for the emergence of new possibilities. A number of small alliances have formed to work with the entangled ideas of the 4 R's to address some of the local inequalities in terms of distribution of time and space for playing and the group will continue to meet to share experiences of these actions.

- **The value of playwork provision in Manchester 2015/2016**

This small-scale study of the value of playwork provision in Manchester was commissioned by Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and developed in discussion with the newly formed Manchester Play Network to inform the development of the proposed Manchester Youth and Play Trust, due to come into existence in 2017. This marks a significant change to the ways in which the Local Authority non-statutory services for children and young people will be delivered, and the study was designed to address a number of interconnected themes:

- Capture the value of playwork provision in supporting children's play and disseminate findings to support all providers in enhancing the 'quality' of their service
- Make a significant contribution to the development of an evidence base for playwork – historically a significant professional weakness that contributes to a general lack of clarity and understanding of the purpose of playwork
- Inform the development of a coherent and robust set of values and principles for the proposed Play and Youth Trust that in turn will help shape approaches to the commissioning of play services
- Look ahead to the changing context for service delivery and outline the role that playwork could have in supporting the development of play-friendly local communities. This paid particular attention to UNCRC General Comment 17 (and the notion of 'play sufficiency') and the recently published Play Report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (2015)

The research adopted a case study approach, working with three well-established community organisations commissioned to deliver playwork sessions across the city. It adapted a model previously utilised by Beunderman (2010) to consider the entangled values of playwork provision and utilised observations of children’s play and relationships (with each other, adults and the environment); semi-structured interviews with playworkers; critical review of relevant organisational documentation; and focus group sessions with Management Committee members and parents/carers whose children regularly attend the setting. The central recommendation from this study is the development of a coherent practice-evidence-policy framework for the future development of playwork provision. There is a compelling case to be made between children’s play and well-being (and associated benefits that arise from this). This relationship lies within the intrinsic value of playing – play for play’s sake – but this is undervalued and under-stated in policy and resource allocation. This also influences playwork expression of value: playworkers may intuitively value the ways in which they co-create moments of nonsense with children but this gets lost in accounting system and appeals to funders, replaced by largely instrumental value. While actual practice may ward-off the worst excesses of this (planning and delivering specific activities with children to meet pre-determined outcomes), it also limits the development of practice-based evidence to inform policy. Given the proposed development of the Youth and Play Trust there is an opportunity over the next period to develop a cohesive and coherent strategy that brings together policy with practice-based evidence. Coupled with this is a recommendation that the three case study settings continue to work with the methods adopted for the research through collaborative and participative action research to generate practice-based evidence and disseminate findings with all commissioned play projects across the city.

But, as the report notes, there is an even greater ambition for the embryonic Youth and Play Trust. The findings from the study clearly highlights the valuable role of playwork provision in supporting *some* children’s opportunity to co-create playful moments. However, if playing is vital to a healthy childhood, then there needs to be more done to redress some of the inequalities in the distribution of resources (time and space) in children’s everyday environments:

Parents are generally reluctant to let children play outside unsupervised and place great value on playwork provision as a safe place for their children. At the same time, parents often wish that children could play out close to home with friends in a more spontaneous and unstructured manner. Studies with children would certainly support this desire. While playwork settings offer valued 'compensatory' space, more needs to be done to challenge the conditions that limit children's opportunity to play out in their local neighbourhoods. The principles for this approach are established in UNCRC General Comment 17, and evidenced by the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty (Lester, 2016c, p. 53).

The study report will be available from April 2016

- **Sharing memories of adventure playgrounds (SMAP) 2015/2016**

A research project funded by the University of Gloucestershire to explore the 'mimetic inheritance' of four adventure playgrounds in Bristol and one in Gloucester. The overall intention of the study is to consider how memory of playing/working at the selected playgrounds is not merely historical but is bringing the past to the present and future. In SMAP, memories of being at the playground are brought to the foreground; contrary to Thrift's description of memories as 'cinders' which would imply some lifeless residue of the past, adult memories, following Jones (2011) are 'embers' – they still have life and when stirred, breathed upon, can burst back into flames, into renewed life. Given the themes introduced above, the study is not simply about capturing and recounting individual stories but an opportunity to think about how memories, materials, movements, affects are productive of 'value', particularly at a time when the existence of adventure playground's is under threat.

The study involves searching archival materials relating to each playground and displayed at an 'open event' which invites past generations of players and playworkers to participate in conversations and a series of memory prompts that seek to dig beneath the surface to get at the 'more-than-representational' ways in which habits, routines, movements, rhythms and relationships assemble to constitute each unique playground. As such, it draws on many of the creative, performative approaches discussed in this

these, including mapping exercises, walkabouts and interviews, a time capsule of important material, audio and photographic recordings and so on. They are not designed to elicit a 'true' memory but rather to bring forth affect, memory and desire merging the past into the present so that time folds in on itself to reveal the ways in which an adventure playground affects and is affected in an emergent and indeterminate manner.

The materials generated from each event will be explored using a critical cartographic approach that works theory with data and data with theory to produce new concepts; it is a diffractive analysis that is productive of new maps of past/present and future compossibilities.

Appendix 4 – Selected publications

The following texts were submitted in support of the thesis:

- 1 **Lester, S.** (2013) Playing in a Deleuzian Playground. In E. Ryall, W. Russell and M. MacLean (eds.) *Philosophy of Play*. London: Routledge, pp. 130-140.
- 2 **Lester, S.** (2013) Rethinking children's participation in democratic processes: a right to play. *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, Vol. 16: 21-43.
- 3 **Lester, S.**, Strachan, A. and Derry, C. (2014) A more playful museum: Exploring issues of institutional space, children's play and well-being. *International Journal of Play*, 3(1): 24-35.
- 4 **Lester, S.** and Russell, W. (2014) 'Turning the world upside down: playing as the deliberate creation of uncertainty'. *Children*, 1(2): 241-260.
- 5 **Lester, S.** (2016) Playwork and the co-creation of play spaces: the rhythms and refrains of a play environment. In F. Brown and B. Hughes (eds.) *Aspects of Playwork*. Latham, Maryland: University Press of America (*in press*).