Abstract: Research, as a form of knowledge production, is an ethico-political event. This assertion forms this chapter's starting point for reconsidering and reconfiguring the epistemological, methodological and analytical framework for my doctoral research study into the dialectics of playwork. The original study was ethnographic, using Cultural Historical Activity Theory. It argued that playwork's fundamental contradiction was presented as that between understanding children's play as autotelic and self-organising on the one hand, and on the other seeking and accounting for public funding that requires services to address policy agendas. Insights were drawn from moving to and fro between empirical data and literature not frequently used in playwork research. In this chapter, those insights are read through more recent engagements with literature to suggest that whilst traditional playwork theorising is invaluable, there is more that can be said about play from a playwork perspective. This seeking to disturb comfortable and common sense understandings of play is a political and ethical endeavour.

3
Nomadic wonderings on playwork research
Putting a dialectical and ethnographic methodology to work again

Wendy Russell

> We need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections.
>
> (Haraway, 2015, p. 160)

> There is no moving beyond, no leaving the 'old' behind.
> There is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then.
> There is nothing that is new; there is nothing that is not new.
>
> (Barad, 2014, p. 168)

Wo(a)ndering about the ethics and politics of knowledge production through research

> The zipline seat had been put out of action and the children were not tall enough to get it. I set it down for Jacee and she had a go, screeching as she hurtled towards the tyre stop at the other end. Yousuf came and was waiting on the platform. Jacee stayed on the zipline seat in the middle of the wire, leaning back and swinging round, refusing to get off. Then Jamal came up and tried to get the zipline seat off Jacee. Jacee, in the face of competition from her older brother, got down, so now I had the situation that Jamal had the seat and I had told Yousuf he was next. Yousuf was complaining that it was his turn. I was standing close to the zipline seat and put out my hand to hold onto the rope. Now both Jamal and I were hanging on to the rope. I got the feeling that if he had really wanted a go, he would and could have forced it away from me. But he didn't. I was kind of smiling, saying, "Come on, Jamal, you can have a go when Yousuf's had a go, it's his turn, he's been waiting, give me the zipline or you take it up to Yousuf," "No," and it turned into yes, no, yes, yes, no, and a game. So: "Give me the zipline." "No." "Yes." "NO." "Yes." Lots of smiling going on. And so on, then "This is a game isn't it?" "Yes." In the same singsong reply voice. "Are you enjoying this?" "Yes." "Why?" "Because it's fun." More smiling. Eventually, Yousuf says, "Forget it, let him have a go." Yousuf walks off and Jamal relinquishes the zipline – the game is over and he doesn't have a turn anyway.

This is a moment of everyday playworking as recorded in the field notes for my doctoral research. Nothing special, it cannot claim to encapsulate the essence of playworking, nor be presented as an example of 'good practice'. Yet it says much about the messiness and mundanity of movements, desires, materiality, relational power, emergence and the throwntogetherness (Massey, 2005) of playwork spaces. For me, after over 40 years of trying to make sense of both playwork and children's play, it is the vignette's very ordinariness that matters, since it is this that offers rich possibilities for exploring a different take on both (Karen Barad calls this a 'cut'; more on this a little later). As a provocative opening position, I thought I would 'play' with the suggestion that maybe playworkers (myself included) have been putting play too much centre stage and that this is a political and ethical issue for playworkers.

In this chapter, I return to and put to work again selected elements of my doctoral research in order to explore what researching play from a playwork perspective might mean for me. This 'putting to work again' is inspired by the opening quotations from Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. It does not move beyond nor does it leave behind the original research; it does, however, explore the potential of stories – and theories – that can make connections and leave space open for becoming different.

The original research was an ethnographic study of the dialectics of playwork using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a framework for analysis. Playwork's fundamental contradictions stem from the tensions between the sector's definition of play as "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005, Playwork Principle no. 2) and claims made for the instrumental value of playwork in order to access public funding. Both are pertinent to a discussion on researching play from a playwork perspective, since playwork's theories are *situated*: that is, they have developed within a particular context in order to show a particular value for both play and playwork. In addition, they are situated within what many have argued was the 20th century's dominant academic discipline for theorising childhood, that of psychology (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; 7Moss, 2007; Rose, 2008).

The process of knowledge production is not neutral: researching play from a playwork perspective does not produce universal, fixed, objective truths about play. To trouble this idea further, I draw on the work of theoretical physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad. I am no physics expert, but I can understand the difficulties that the physics community had to contend with when it was discovered that light can be both a wave and a particle, two phenomena hitherto understood as mutually exclusive. According to Barad (2010), it was Niels Bohr who suggested that the problem might lie in the nature of concepts (wave, particle) themselves, and that concepts themselves are "specific material arrangements of experimental apparatuses" (Barad, 2010, p. 253). The starting

point of the researcher (for example, classic Newtonian physics) and the apparatus used to observe phenomena enact what Barad (2007) calls an 'agential cut', a particular meaning that excludes other meanings. Furthermore, what this also does is dissolve the boundaries between what Newtonian physics saw as distinct entities: researcher and researched, self and other, subject and object become entangled in co-constituting movements and meanings. The apparatuses used for research, including language itself and the power given to particular ways of knowing, delimit the cut of what is produced in terms of knowledge and accompanying practices. Research, therefore, is an ethical and political event: as such, we have a responsibility to imagine how things might be otherwise and to deliberately seek a different cut in order to bring to light what our habitual perspectives exclude. Given this, I also draw on Braidotti's (2012) notion of nomadic ethics to continue my wanderings and wonderings on childhood, play and playwork in an attempt to resist the fixing and codifying of ideas. The analysis offered is not so much *reflective* (an accurate mirror representation) as *diffractive*, spreading in different directions, an interference of things-as-they-are in order to imagine how they might be otherwise.

The chapter opens with a brief summary of major playwork perspectives and then moves on to explore critical ethnography as a research methodology that can open up space for difference in playwork theory and practice through focusing on multiplicities and on everyday messy practice like the opening scenario. My own engagement with playwork and play scholarship is introduced, particularly in terms of my interest in playwork's contradictions. This interest led me to use CHAT – a dialectical method – as the epistemological, methodological and analytical framework for my study, which is described in the following section, together with an exploration of the particular (Lefebvrian) approach to dialectics that I employed. The process of using CHAT to explore ethnographic data led to an immersion in literature not commonly used in playwork theorising, including space (Lefebvre, 1991); the politics of childhood (Katz, 2011); violence (Ray, 2011; Springer, 2011); playwork subjectivities as multivoiced (Engeström, 2001), emotional (Hochschild, 1983) and performative (Butler, 1999; Powell & Carey, 2007); and ethics (Levinas, 1969; Rushing, 2010). In this sense, the original study offers what might be called a 'minoritarian' (Braidotti, 2012) playwork perspective on researching children's play. Space does not permit in-depth discussion of all these aspects here: rather the focus is on providing just enough background to allow an exploration of the interrelations between CHAT and further musings and what this can tell us about researching play from a playwork perspective. In particular, the chapter reconsiders playwork's definition of play and explores what the desire to define play might do, together with an exploration of what a shift from a psychological to a spatial perspective on play can offer.

What is 'a playwork perspective'?

Playwork, as with other communities of practice, is multivoiced, although some voices are louder than others. Playwork has its dominant theorists who have served the sector well and whose work has influenced the development of official articulations of playwork, as seen in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) (SkillsActive, 2016) and in the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005). Having been involved in playwork education and training, and for a while playing a role in the development of qualifications and the Playwork Principles, I take some responsibility for the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning the dominant playwork perspectives on children's play. Over the last 15 years or so, however, I have been seriously questioning these, not in order to expose them as 'wrong', but to pay attention to what they might exclude. Playwork theory has developed over time and those who have contributed to it have served it well: what is offered here is a diffractive analysis that reads new insights through existing ones. As Barad says, "diffractive readings bring inventive provocations; they are good to think with. They are respectful, detailed, ethical engagements" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50).

Mostly, playwork articulations of play are somewhat defensive, making a generalised and principled case for playwork practice not to defer to the hegemonic construct of the child as in need of professional adult protection, correction and socialisation. Playwork's foundational theories can be (all too) briefly summarised thus:

> An evolutionary standpoint (Hughes, 2012) asserts that playing has evolved in order to provide children with the mechanism by which they develop adaptive capabilities, yielding both ontogenetic and phylogenetic benefits. A psychotherapeutic perspective (Sturrock & Else, 1998) claims that playing is healing or that it can prevent the development of neuroses or psychosis originating in childhood. A developmental approach (Brown, 2008) sees a rich environment for play as fundamental to children's development. All three stances aim to illustrate why over-protective and over-directive adult practices ('adulteration') can constrain children's engagement in a wide range of play forms and therefore be detrimental for their health and development.
>
> (Russell, 2013a, p. 4)

What all these strands have in common is that they are grounded in psychology, a discipline which offers a powerful and particular agential cut on childhood and play and understands 'the child' and 'the playworker' as discrete selves in isolation from, but interacting with, other discrete selves and environments. Playwork's ethos, although unique, reflects the dominance of psychology in the 20th century and the increasing reach of its gaze in the lives of children (Rose, 1999). How might a different playwork perspective open up what else can be said

about children's play? I explored this through ethnography and an engagement with less commonly employed theory, and have continued to explore it since.

Critical and performative ethnography put to work again

I chose ethnography as the methodology for my fieldwork, because I wanted to write (*-graphy*) the tribe (*ethne*) that is playwork. I wanted to work alongside playworkers in order to *feel* again what playwork was like over a period of time and to document the everyday material discursive practices of playwork, its messiness and its routines, habits and rituals, its affects and emotions, its very ordinariness. Playwork's literature mostly "presents a particular understanding of children's play and consequent justificatory account of the value of playwork together with normative assertions of how playworkers should ply their craft" (Russell, 2013a, p. 97). This can be seen, for example, in Brown (2003), Brown and Taylor (2008), Hughes (2012), Kilvington and Wood (2010), Sturrock and Else (1998). Although there is a move towards a more narrative style (for example, Brown, 2014; Nuttall, 2012, and playwork blogs), there still remains little on what playwork actually looks like.

Yet, I was also worried about bringing the authority of an academic researcher's gaze to those aspects of playwork that do not constitute a part of playwork's public identity. Presenting a different picture of playwork felt risky. As Denzin (2006) points out:

> Ethnography is a not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political . . . The pedagogical is always moral and political; by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other.
>
> (p. 422)

I give one example here of an aspect that is not explored in depth in this chapter but may serve to illustrate the point being made: that of violence. Although I had set out not to pay attention to peak experiences or exceptional events, I ended up devoting a chapter to this topic in my doctoral thesis, because it was so much a part of the everyday playwork I experienced, both in my playworking days and in my fieldwork (including interviews and workshops where I shared my early thinking). Whilst older texts talk about violence (for example, Hughes, 1975; Turner, 1961), I found it to be all but invisible in contemporary playwork literature (which talks a bit about aggression and a lot about behaviour, but little on violence). I offered two responses to this. First, universal psychological statements about children and their play obscure the heterogeneity and the spatiality of children's lives, particularly in terms of class and poverty. My analysis brought these issues to the fore and situated them within theories of the politics of space (Lefebvre, 1991) and a class politics of childhood (Katz, 2011) to explore the entanglements of capitalism, social policy, poverty, violence and play as resistance. Second, "the silence may also have something to do with protection of a romantic construction of play together with an internalisation of (gendered) feelings of shame if violence does erupt" (Russell, 2013a, p. 175). Disturbing this silence felt a little risky, as if I might reveal something that could shatter the promotion of children's play as an unmitigated force for good. And yet, I also felt it was important, that there was another story to tell about children's lives that was being obscured. Playwork has multiple perspectives.

There is a growing body of work in contemporary writing on ethnography which embraces multiplicity, actively seeking to disturb classical ethnography's desire to explain and to represent the group under investigation in terms of universal, fixed and essential stereotypes that elide difference and that reproduce colonialised versions of the same. Post-colonial, more-than-representational, posthuman and post-qualitative approaches seek to disturb the comfortable familiarity and certainty of such knowns and to look instead for multiplicity, difference, movement, affect, assemblages, vitality, performativity and corporeality (for example, Lather, 2015; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013; Vannini, 2015). Such approaches can build on what playwork has already said about play and explore what more can be said. Taking such an approach also helps to move beyond static binary distinctions of 'insider' or 'outsider' research that assumes objectivity is both possible and desirable. In classical ethnography, 'going native' was considered bad research practice, as it threatened objectivity. Yet, I was not seeking objectivity: rather, I was looking at what more could be brought to the study of everyday playwork and what this might mean for researching children's play. Just as well since, in classical ethnography terms, I went native over 40 years ago.

I discovered adventure playgrounds in the mid-1970s when I worked on one in East London over the school summer holiday. I was smitten and have worked in the play and playwork sector ever since, first as a playworker (mostly on adventure playgrounds in north London), then moving into development, research, and education and training. It is possibly relevant that my entry into the playwork community of practice was at a time when playwork was much more closely allied to radical community work and youth work rather than early years and education (a shift that emerged following the 1989 Children Act). As Conway (2005) recalls, "most playworkers I knew were a mixture of hippy idealists, anarcho-punks and grass-roots community activists with strong libertarian and left-wing beliefs" (p. 2). Certainly, my memories were of a practice that felt itself to be apart from 'the establishment' and on the side of the children and families with whom we worked. If we read any books about childhood at all, they were more likely to be Colin Ward or John Holt rather than Kathy Sylva or Jerome Bruner. These foundations still influence playwork theorising, and the sense of recalcitrance (Battram & Russell, 2002)

and the need to question the powerful voices of authority has remained strong with me. For the last 15 years or so, I have been working as an academic, and this has allowed me the opportunity to read beyond the dominant sources that playworkers have used, opening up new areas for exploration. This shows the unpredictability and idiosyncrasy of the process of knowledge production. That I was in an academic environment with access to a wide range of literature and colleagues was happenstance, leading to a particular entanglement of my own passion for playwork, history, literature, conversation and so on.

The dialectics of playwork

My research explored how playworkers navigate the tensions and contradictions they face in their day-to-day work. There is a fundamental tension between supporting play for its own sake and seeking public funding for work which can address identified problems of social policy. As Cranwell's (2003) historical studies show, public provision for children's play has always been driven by whatever problem of childhood was exercising the government and society at that time, with play being corralled in the name of physical and moral health, school attendance, social education, crime prevention and so on. Today's themes could be addressing obesity and physical inactivity, crime reduction, community cohesion, contact with nature and the development of resilience. The increasing instrumentalisation, commodification and marketisation of public services within a context of austerity that shifts responsibility for health and well-being onto the individual (Hoedemækers, Loacker, & Pedersen, 2012) means that now more than ever playworkers seek ways to articulate value (as a rationale for funding) that move away from appreciating play's intrinsic value (Russell, forthcoming). The way that this particular contradiction was theorised in my doctoral study was through dialectics, using the Marxist concepts of use and exchange value. Exchange value for play*work* as a form of labour lies in its capacity to effectively and economically address social policy concerns, and the urgency of this in the current economic and political climate is reflected in the moves towards research projects aimed at providing evidence of such instrumental and exchange value (see for example, Gill, 2014). Playwork's use value has been articulated in a number of ways, but generally lies in the co-production of spaces that support children's open-ended and autotelic playing. Any attempt to direct playing towards policy outcomes risks commodifying it and turning it into something other than play. These contradictions are not straightforward dualistic opposites, and the study needed an epistemological and methodological approach that could embrace the complexities and entanglements of childhood, play, playwork, common sense understandings and social policy. This is where CHAT came in.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory and dialectics

Dialectics is at the core of CHAT and is understood here as a method. It is a vast and contested terrain, and I have tried to steer a path through it in a way that can accommodate fluidity, movement and difference. Although dialectics is often understood as the analysis of opposites, it offers much for acknowledging and moving beyond static binary oppositions and as such is the basis for perpetual change. I ended up drawing a lot on the work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in this research, particularly his work on the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991) and on dialectics (Lefebvre, 2009). Lefebvre was also critical of over-simplistic dualistic opposites: for him, there was always something more, always a third. His approach to dialectics had three influences: Marx, whose dialectical materialism focused on social practice; Hegel, whose dialectics was about thought and language; and Nietzsche, who considered the role of poesy, the irrational and, of course, play (Schmid, 2008). These three 'cuts' of dialectics become entangled, in tension with each other to produce something new, but not in any complete or finished way, as dialectics is a form of ceaseless becoming. It is this non-essentialist, non-dualistic, non-deterministic triad and its possibility for irrational Nietzschean play that makes it such a fitting foundation for a diffractive analysis of play and playwork.

CHAT developed from the work of Vygotsky, whose method sought to move away from the then-dominant behaviourist conception of activity as stimulus and response and towards seeing it as object-oriented and *mediated* through material and symbolic tools, creating a triad of subject, object and mediating artefact. In later developments of the theory, Engeström (1987) broadened the original model out beyond individuals' actions to a *collective* activity *system* (see Figure 3.1), adding the rules that guide the activity, the community of actors and the division of labour. It also encompasses the four processes of labour identified in Marxist theory: production, distribution, exchange and consumption.
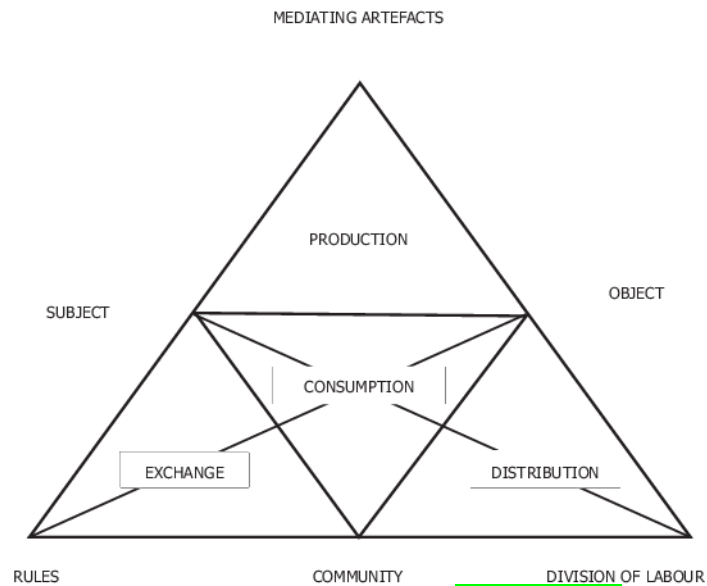
```
                    MEDIATING ARTEFACTS




                          PRODUCTION

        SUBJECT                                    OBJECT


                          CONSUMPTION


              EXCHANGE              DISTRIBUTION



           RULES            COMMUNITY        DIVISION OF LABOUR
```

Figure 3.1 Second-generation model of an activity system adapted from Engeström (1987)

It was this model that was used to analyse playwork as a collective activity system networked with other collective activity systems. There is a tension in the model between seeing the collective activity system as a whole and analysing discrete elements of and processes within it (Jones, 2009). Engeström (1987) addresses this through noting that his model allows for "the possibility of analysing a multitude of relations" (p. 94), but that "the essential task is always to grasp the systemic whole, not just separate connections". The relationships within the activity system as a whole can shift and change: objects can become mediating artefacts, as can rules, which can also become objects, and so on. In this way, the points and processes of the triangle do not exist as discrete components, they are constantly being brought into being through 'intra-actions', a term Barad (2007) uses in preference to 'interaction' to emphasise how phenomena (both human and non-human, including material and symbolic objects, affects, knowledges and spaces) do not pre-exist but emerge through entanglements. For Barad, "the so-called subject, the so-called instrument, and the so-called object of research are always already entangled" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 15). In my analysis, the points and processes of the CHAT model were used as heuristic devices and as a way of structuring the written thesis rather than being seen as independently existing entities, although this will inevitably have affected the analysis itself. A central principle of Vygotsky's method is that phenomena should be studied as processes rather than fixed, static entities: each phenomenon has a history characterised by changes (Cole & Scribner, 1978). Any analysis needs to take histories into account (which is why part of my study considered playwork's history and interviewed pre-1989 playworkers). However, as Vygotsky (1978) noted, development is not a neat, linear progression; it is idiosyncratic, uneven and characterised by ruptures and upheavals. Development occurs through efforts to resolve internal contradictions in the system: it is this that makes it a dialectical and historical model.

The stories that I have created from my research are not presented as a universal assertion concerning the truth of playwork. Nor are they an entirely personal fantasy superimposed onto my research participants via the literature. A conclusion that embraces the dialectics of playwork allows for multiple ways of making sense of play and playwork. The idea of the researcher as bricoleur seems fitting here. Bricolage involves using multiple tools, methods and disciplines: it requires a critical appreciation of competing discourses and paradigms, emphasising the hermeneutic and dialectic nature of interdisciplinary enquiry. It involves moving to and fro between data, literature and different ways of knowing (theory, affect, intuition and my 40 years' immersion in the sector). As Kincheloe (2005, p. 341) states, "bricoleurs are not aware of where the empirical ends and the philosophical begins because such epistemological features are always embedded in one another".

What follows is a brief account of some aspects of playwork as a collective activity system by way of illustrating how this cut can reveal other ways of knowing about play. In particular, the analysis considers two things: first, aspects of the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) as mediating artefacts that affect playwork understandings of play, and second, playwork's object as the production of a space where children can play, which allows a spatial perspective to researching play to add to the dominant psychological one.

Playwork's contradictory understanding of play as a mediating artefact

My research sought to pay attention to how the politically and geographically situated everyday practices of playworkers have developed over time and place and how playworkers navigate the contradictions inherent in their work. These contradictions are not straightforward oppositions, nor is there one single playwork story that

can pronounce which practice is right or wrong, although broad principles can, and have, been established. Currently, the sector asserts its professional and ethical framework in the form of a set of Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005). The Playwork Principles make a bold statement of service ideal "For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas" (Playwork Principle no. 4).

This makes playwork the only section of the children's workforce that explicitly professes at least a levelling, if not a reversal, of power relations between professional adult and playing child, thereby bringing playwork's fundamental contradictions to the fore. The playwork concept of 'adulteration' (Sturrock & Else, 1998), understood as the pollution of children's ludic habitat with adult desires, rests on the assumption that adult intervention into children's play alters it, compromising the espoused belief that play should be "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, Playwork Principle no. 2). Such characteristics of play can be found in much of the literature (for example, Burghardt, 2005; Caillois, 2001; Garvey, 1977; Huizinga, 1955) and are useful in curbing the excesses of adult desire to teach or control. Yet, if taken literally, they become nonsensical. This section explores the contradictions such definitions give rise to for playworkers.

Although playworkers' relationships with children aim to be democratic, ultimately playworkers operate in adult-provided and adult-supervised institutions of childhood. In this sense, playwork itself is as an intervention: children's play can be 'freely chosen' only up to the point at which responsible adults deem it to be unacceptable for whatever reason. There is much debate in the sector on the topic of intervention and what such a point of unacceptability might be (see, for example, Hughes, 2012; Kilvington & Wood, 2010; Russell, 2013a; Sturrock & Else, 1998).

Common sense also tells us that children's freedom of choice may equally be restricted by the resources available and by other children. As Sutton-Smith (1997) points out, if children play in groups then there is necessarily the need for compromise and negotiation, as the opening vignette shows. Freedoms are limited – and simultaneously supported – by the resources that can be brought into play.

However, there is a more fundamental critique of the notion of play as freely chosen and personally directed. The language of 'choice' implies a rational weighing up of options, something that does not fit well with play's emergent, spontaneous, opportunistic and self-organising characteristics. Questions about whether children can choose how to play, or whether playworkers might be adulterating play (as in the opening scenario perhaps) share a particular starting point grounded in what Lester (2015) terms "an unquestioned orthodoxy of thought with its accompanying clichés and material effects" (p. 53). This orthodoxy understands humans as isolated, autonomous and rational beings who can choose how to act upon a world that is separate from them. In this worldview, agency – the capacity to act on the world – is seen as something which individuals possess. Yet this basic premise, unquestioningly accepted as common sense, is challenged by scholars across a range of diverse academic disciplines, including theoretical physics (Barad, 2007), science and technology studies (Haraway, 1991, 2015), geography (Whatmore, 2006), political science (Bennett, 2010) and philosophy (Braidotti, 2013), to give but a few examples. It is no longer adequate to envision humans as apart from others both human and nonhuman. Old binary distinctions of self and other (subject and object), human and nonhuman, nature and culture, time and space are melting. This thinking has been applied to research methodologies (for example, Lather, 2013, 2015; MacLure, 2010, 2013), and to other contexts, such as early years education and childhood studies (Lenz-Taguchi, 2014; Taylor & Blaise, 2014), but to date has not been very evident play scholarship or playwork research (see Lester, 2015 as an exception).

Barad's (2007, 2010) ideas of intra-action and entanglements require a different way of understanding concepts such as self and identity, as we have seen. Similarly, agency, the power to act, does not reside in individuals but emerges through intra-actions. This raises a challenge to the idea that play is freely chosen, and that playworkers can choose to intervene in particular ways. Yet, far from absolving people from responsibility in a world understood as intra-active, Barad also suggests that this make ethics even more important. If responsibility does not lie with individuals alone, this means that responsibility is even greater than if it did: "entanglements are . . . irreducible relations of responsibility" (Barad, 2010, p. 265). Ethics itself is entangled with ways of being and with the processes of knowledge production: the particular cut taken excludes some ways of understanding (and therefore being in) the world in favour of others. The ethical responsibility lies in looking for different cuts (Russell, 2015).

In the opening scenario, the playworker is already implicated in the unfolding event, not apart from it. It is not a question of identifying one isolated intervention that can support the freely chosen play of each individual child. The complexities of the entanglement matter in a way that can shift attention (offering a different agential cut) from each child's individual right to freely chosen play towards the ongoing co-production of a space in which play can emerge: a spatial rather than individual cut. This is more than a purely theoretical matter. The idea of an agential cut acknowledges that the way we perceive things affects our actions: it is *performative*. The singular outcome of this event becomes one phenomenon within the ongoing process of the co-production of relational

space and so less an issue of who can freely choose what and more a question of how the space works. That the negotiations became a game, or that nobody ended up using the zipline, in and of themselves perhaps matter less than an appreciation of the ongoing entanglements that can help create conditions that support playfulness. In this sense, play is self-organising, where 'self' refers to the play itself rather than each individual child. It emerges from the flows and movements and from the entanglement of bodies, desires, material objects (the zipline, the platform), histories and so on and then moves on in a way that is singular and could not have been predicted in any accurate manner.

This is where the chapter returns to the opening provocation that maybe playwork has been paying too much attention to play as a concept. The provocation is used playfully here, just to see what more it might offer. Having explored playwork's definition of play, attention is now taken to what the practice of defining play might do. Defining is a boundary-making process. In order to define play, there needs to be a boundary between 'play' and 'not-play'. The debates within play scholarship rest on whether definitions of play can be applied always and only to the myriad phenomena that might be called play (for example, Burghardt, 2005; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Categorisations are helpful in helping to make sense of the world, but they are also performative. As Sutton-Smith (1995, p. 283) says, such boundary-making processes turn play into a 'separable text', apart from all other aspects of children's lives. In practice and policy terms, play becomes a time and space bound activity, rationalised into a thing to be provided, with particular forms of play (physical, outdoor, natural, risky, etc.) being accorded greater value.

Let's return again to the opening scenario. Who is playing here, when and how? Where might the boundaries between play and not-play be? What matters in any analysis of this short scene? And finally, what might such questions do to our attempts at meaning making?

Or: what if we think of different questions to ask that can help us move beyond the binaries of "play and not-play, this play and that play, good play and bad play" (Russell, 2015, p. 198), and pay attention instead to the dynamic flows and forces that produce that particular entanglement of zipline, children and playworker? This assemblage is then freed from the fixing of categorisation, becoming one very ordinary fluid mo(ve)ment in the co-production of a space where playfulness can emerge, constantly shifting with the ever-open possibility for becoming different. We can move away from arguments about whose choice mattered and pay attention instead to how the space works: to the flows, affects and assemblages that come together and fall away again in a ceaseless movement that at times might be recognisable as playing. In my research, I did this using Lefebvre's (1991) work on the production of space.

Playwork's object as the production of space where children can play

Given that the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) state "the role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play" (Playwork Principle no. 5), this was taken in my analysis as the object of playwork as a collective activity system, recognising what has been said regarding the already-entangled nature of the CHAT activity system. This aspect of the research has been published in detail elsewhere (Russell, 2012, 2013b) and is introduced here briefly in terms of its capacity to offer a different cut on play and playwork, with the potential for different material discursive practices.

In Lefebvre's (1991) analysis, space is more than a neutral container: it is *produced* by interrelationships between physical, social and symbolic elements and the actions of individuals and institutions. These interrelationships are political because they represent power relations. Space is produced through the entanglements of three interdependent moments: the perceived, or experienced space of mundane everyday spatial practices; the conceived space of planners; and the lived space of art, love and play.

> A key feature of lived space is that it defies the representations of conceived space: it cannot be planned, provided, measured or reduced to exchange value. It cannot be represented in the modern, rational science of certainty, determinism and absolute truths and thus sits uncomfortably with current evidence-based policy discourse that provides the basis for public funding.
>
> (Russell, 2012, p. 56)

In my original analysis, I suggested that this cut allows playworkers to appreciate the tensions between adult ultimate control of the space and ideas of exchange value (perceived space), planning in terms of designing the space and the naming of zones and resources that assumes particular correct usage and outcomes (conceived space) and the importance of recognising small moments of nonsense and playfulness as a significant aspect of how the culture of the space is co-produced (lived space). These small moments can often get buried under the hegemonic rationality of conceived space and the humdrum of everyday perceived space, yet should be appreciated as fundamental to a space that is *designed* to support children's play, that is, a space where the rationality, boredom and fear of the everyday world can be transformed into any fantastical, scary or ordered world of the players' own desires (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Because of play's very nature, playwork settings will be volatile places: in a sense, that is what they are designed to be. What my fieldwork showed was the complex messiness of small and singular moments, the fuzziness of boundaries between what is and is not playing and the many ways

in which situations can escalate or die away as a result of the whole entanglement which produces that space at that time.

Lefebvre's (1991) theorising on the production of space, and particularly his dialectical triad of conceived, perceived and lived space, emerged as a fitting basis for analysing playwork within the CHAT dialectical and historical framework. The dialectic here is that articulations of playwork's value (for example, Gill, 2014; Manwaring & Taylor, 2006) tend to reside in conceived and perceived space, and necessarily so, because lived space defies representation in this way and cannot be planned in any precise or predictable way. Nonetheless, this analysis allows an appreciation of how space is co-produced through entanglements of people, histories, contexts and material and symbolic artefacts and, through this, an appreciation of the contingent and situated nature of each mo(ve)ment and encounter. This helps to move the analysis beyond simple cause-and-effect in terms of planning, intent, intervention and value articulations and beyond individual children. Yet, this is not an either/or binary: conceived space and perceived space are not the opposites of lived space.

Closing wo(a)nderings

> I remember hearing Brian Sutton-Smith speak about his lifetime research into children's play. Having regaled his audience of playworkers with some of the fantastical, rude, sometimes offensive and cruel stories children told and the things they did, and weaving these stories into his theoretical synthesis of play as a parody of emotional vulnerability, the first question from the audience was about how playworkers should respond to some of the more extreme forms of bullying that he described. I remember thinking that this was not a question that applied to his research; its great strength was that it did not have to address that issue.
>
> (Russell, 2013a, p. 198)

I opened this chapter with the observation that researching play from a playwork perspective produces knowledge which is *situated*. Playwork's *locus of enunciation* (Mignolo, 2009), its starting point, has a normative purpose: to profess the importance of play and, by extension, of playwork, and to articulate what playwork is and how it should be practised. As Barad (2007) points out, knowledge, being and ethics are inseparable. We can get stuck in habitual ways of advocating for play and playwork, and these habits, as apparatuses, enact an 'agential cut' (Barad, 2007): they perpetuate particular perspectives that exclude others. I have argued here that disturbing these habits of thought and action is an ethical endeavour, and I have offered a diffractive analysis of my ethnographic research in order to see what more might be said about play from a playwork perspective. Using CHAT as a heuristic framework, whilst at the same time persistently resisting categorising and shoe-horning raw data into themes, allowed me to pay attention to playwork's inherent contradictions without being paralysed by them. In particular, bringing a Lefebvrian spatial cut to explore playwork's object allows us to go back into a political analysis and can help us move beyond seeing play as a time- and space-bound activity residing in individual children. The mundane opening scenario becomes one example of how the space is co-produced, how everything is entangled to produce that moment. Attention can be paid to "small moments in lived space, the importance of caring and openness, of being comfortable with uncertainty, alongside (and often in a dialectical relationship with) the bigger instrumental and universal assertions of the value of play and playwork" (Russell, 2013a, p. 234).

References

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. London: Duke University Press.

Barad, K. (2010). Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come. *Derrida Today*, *3*(2), 240–268.

Barad, K. (2014). Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax*, *20*(3), 168–187.

Battram, A. & Russell, W. (2002). *The edge of recalcitrance: Playwork, order and chaos*. Paper presented at Spirit of Adventure Play Is Alive and Kicking, Play Wales Conference, Cardiff, June.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2012). Nomadic ethics. In D. W. Smith & H. Somers-Hall (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Deleuze* (pp. 170–197). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brown, F. (Ed.) (2003). *Playwork theory and practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brown, F. (2008). Fundamentals of playwork. In F. Brown & C. Taylor (Eds.), *Foundations of playwork* (pp. 7–13). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brown, F. (2014). *Play and playwork: 101 stories of children playing*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brown, F. & Taylor, C. (Eds.). (2008). *Foundations of playwork*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Burghardt, G. M. (2005). *The genesis of animal play: Testing the limits*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Butler, J. (1999). *Subjects of desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Caillois, R. (2001). *Man, play and games* (trans. Meyer Barash). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Cole, M. & Scribner, S. (1978). Introduction to Vygotsky. In L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (pp. 1–14). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Conway, M. (2005). *From guerrilla playwork to the centre of government policy on play*? PlayEd 2005: What Is the Future for Playwork? The 17th Play and Human Development Meeting. Ely, Cambs, 1st and 2nd March. PlayEducation.

Cranwell, K. (2003). Towards playwork: An historical introduction to children's out-of-school play organisations in London (1860–1940). In F. Brown (Ed.), *Playwork theory and practice* (pp. 32–47). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2013). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Denzin, N. K. (2006). Analytic autoethnography, or déjà vu all over again. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *35*(4), 419–428.

Dolphijn, R. & van der Tuin, I. (2012). Interview with Karen Barad. In *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 48-70.

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit. Retrieved from http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Paper/Engestrom/Learning-by-Expanding.pdf.

Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, *14*(1), 133–156.

Garvey, C. (1977). *Play*. London: Fontana.

Gill, T. (2014). *The play return: A review of the wider impact of play initiatives*. London: Children's Play Policy Forum. Retrieved from www.playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/Play%20Policy/The%20Play%20Return.pdf.

Haraway, D. J. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Haraway, D. J. (2015). Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin. *Environmental Humanities*, *6*, 159–165.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hoedemækers, C., Loacker, B., & Pedersen, M. (2012). The commons and their im/possibilities. *Ephemera*, *12*(4), 378–385.

Hughes, B. (1975). *Notes for adventure playground workers*. London: Children and Youth Action Group.

Hughes, B. (2012). *Evolutionary playwork and reflective analytic practice* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Huizinga, J. (1955). *Homo ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Jones, P. E. (2009). Breaking away from *Capital*? Theorising activity in the shadow of Marx. *Outlines*, *1*, 45–58.

Katz, C. (2011). Accumulation, excess, childhood: Toward a countertopography of risk and waste. *Documents d'Anàlisis Geogràfica*, *57*(1), 47–60.

Kilvington, J. & Wood, A. (2010). *Reflective playwork: For all who work with children*. London: Continuum.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). On to the next level: Continuing the conceptualization of the bricolage. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *11*(3), 323–350.

Lather, P. (2013). Methodology-21: What do we do in the afterward? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *26*(6), 634–645.

Lather, P. (2015). The work of thought and the politics of research: (post) qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of research* (pp. 97–117). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (trans. D. Nicholson-Smith). London: Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H. (2009). *Dialectical materialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lenz-Taguchi, H. (2014). New materialisms and play. In L. Brooker, M. Blaise, & S. Blaise (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of play and learning in early childhood* (pp. 79–90). London: Sage.

Lester, S. (2015). Posthuman nature: Life beyond the natural playground. In M. MacLean, W. Russell, & E. Ryall (Eds.), *Philosophical perspectives on play* (pp. 53–67). London: Routledge.

Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority* (trans. A. Lingis). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

MacLure, M. (2010). The offence of theory. *Journal of Education Policy*, *25*(2), 275–283.

MacLure, M. (2013). The wonder of data. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, *13*(4), 228–232.

Manwaring, B. & Taylor, C. (2006). *The benefits of play and playwork: Recent evidence-based research (2001–2006) demonstrating the impact and benefits of play and playwork*. London: CYWU and SkillsActive.

Martin, A. D. & Kamberelis, G. (2013). Mapping not tracing: Qualitative educational research with political teeth. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *26*(6), 668–679.

Massey, D. (2005). *For space*. London: Sage.

Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and de-colonial freedom. *Theory, Culture and Society*, *26*(7–8), 1–23.

Moss, P. (2007). Meetings across the paradigmatic divide. *Eucational Philosophy and Theory*, *39*(3), 229–245.

Nuttall, E. (2012). *Possible summers*. Retrieved from https://possiblesummers.wordpress.com/.

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG). (2005). *Playwork principles*. Cardiff: Play Wales. Retrieved from www.playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/Playwork%20Principles/playwork%20principles.pdf.

Powell, J. L. & Carey, M. (2007). Social theory, performativity and professional power: A critical analysis of helping professions in England. *Human Affairs*, *17*, 78–94.

Ray, L. (2011). *Violence and society*. London: Sage.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Rose, N. (2008). Psychology as a social science. *Subjectivity*, *25*, 446–462.

Rushing, S. (2010). Preparing for politics: Judith Butler's ethical dispositions. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *9*(3), 284–303.

Russell, W. (2012). 'I get such a feeling out of . . . those moments': Playwork, passion, politics and space. *International Journal of Play*, 1(1), 51–63.

Russell, W. (2013a). *The dialectics of playwork: A conceptual and ethnographic study of playwork using cultural historical activity theory*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester.

Russell, W. (2013b). Towards a spatial theory of playwork: What can Lefebvre offer as a response to playwork's inherent contradictions? In E. Ryall, W. Russell, & M. MacLean (Eds.), *The philosophy of play* (pp. 164–174). London: Routledge.

Russell, W. (2015). Entangled in the midst of it: A diffractive expression of an ethics for playwork. In M. MacLean, W. Russell, & E. Ryall (Eds.), *Philosophical perspectives on play* (pp. 191–204). London: Routledge.

Russell, W. (forthcoming). Nonsense, caring and everyday hope: Rethinking the value of playwork. In B. Hughes & F. Brown (Eds.), *Aspects of playwork*, *Play and Culture Studies* (Vol. 14). MD: University Press of America.

Schmid, C. (2008). Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space: Towards a three-dimensional dialectic. In K. Goonewardena, S. Kipfer, R. Milgrom, & C. Schmid (Eds.), *Space, difference and everyday life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (pp. 27–45). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

SkillsActive. (2016). *Playwork national occupational standards*. London: UK Commission for Emploment and Skills.

Springer, S. (2011). Violence sits in places? Cultural practice, neoliberal rationalism, and virulent imaginative geographies. *Political Geography*, *30*, 90–98.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2013). The posts continue: Becoming. In*ternational Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *26*(6), 646–657.

Sturrock, G. & Else, P. (1998). 'The Colorado Paper' – The playground as therapeutic space: Playwork as healing. In G. Sturrock & P. Else (Eds.) (2007), *Therapeutic playwork reader one 1995–2000* (pp. 73–104). Eastleigh, Hampshire: Common Threads.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1995). The persuasive rhetorics of play. In A. D. Pellegrini (Ed.), *The future of play theory: A multi-disciplinary enquiry into the contributions of Brian Sutton-Smith* (pp. 275–295). New York: State University of New York Press.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, A. & Blaise, M. (2014). Queer worlding childhood. Discourse. *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *35*(3), 377–392.

Turner, H. S. (1961). *Something extraordinary*. London: Michael Joseph.

Vannini, P. (2015). Non-representational ethnography: New ways of animating lifeworlds. *Cultural Geographies*, *22*(2), 317–327.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Whatmore, S. J. (2006). Materialist returns: Practising cultural geographies in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural Geographies*, *13*(4), 600–610.