

Imagining Playwork using Sociological Perspectives from Mills, Foucault and Gordon

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Introduction

In this chapter I (re)turn to my background in social policy and my PhD, not just in the sense of going back but in a frame of mind to turn and look afresh, so a re-turn more than merely a return (Derrida, 2010, Usher & Edwards, 1994). The 're' denotes an impossibility, since I cannot, except in my imagination, go back to those times or their inhabited spaces. They exist in a ghostly form in my writing and my memory (Shaw, 2017). This is important to the ontological perspective adopted, which frames identity, including that of the researcher, as unstable, a self which is continually invented and reinvented (Foucault, 1993). In social anthropology this sensitivity to the power relationships inherent in the gaze of the researcher and its representation (or re-representation) when written up, is known as a reflexive turn (Foley, Levinson & Hurtig, 2000; Geertz, 1973). One consequence of the custom of performing reflexive turns is an attempt to recognise the relationship between writer and reader, so what I present to you of my own reality, knowledge, understanding and experience should be balanced with your own proficiencies as playworkers, carers, pedagogues, students, academics and so forth. As a reader you are an active, not a passive, interpreter of what I have written, with the freedom to take the ideas forward in your own work or leave them where you find them on the page.

In its original conception my thesis examined the spaces, artefacts and discourses of early childhood pedagogy (Shaw, 2017). In terms of the post-structural feminist perspective referenced in my research, this denotes something more than reflecting back on past experiences and data sets. It is, for me, a generative exercise which speaks of present and

future research opportunities as well as those of the past. For this reason, I have included a vignette (with permission from the partner organisation) of notes made in anticipation of a playwork research project. One of the many areas of interest which emerged from involvement with research, both prior and post PhD, is the tricky territory which lies between theory and practice (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Edwards, 2012; Russell, 2018). Post-structural concepts, as presented by Mills (1959), Foucault (1993, 1994, 2000) and Gordon (2008), have supported me in navigating this landscape with the intention of engaging with research which is sensitive to issues of fairness, equality and social justice. What they have taught me is that researching social institutions, including education, early childhood and playwork, is to enter contested spaces, in which complexity, competing discourses, dichotomies and juxtapositions (Foucault, 1994) cannot (and should not) be ignored. The first section of this chapter therefore looks in some detail at later chapters in Mills' (1959) text on the sociological imagination in research.

The second section gives an overview of concepts relating to power, selfhood and post-Marxist interpretations of 'technologies of production' in a number of works by the social philosopher Michel Foucault. I perhaps do not do justice to the depth and breadth of Foucault's work, but the intention is to construct a bridge between Mills and Gordon. It is Foucault and Gordon who most influenced the methodological approach of my PhD, although I have not dwelt at all on Foucault's theory of heterotopia, which was a central theme of the PhD. Philosophically speaking, heterotopia are cultural spaces which are part of a society but are both isolated and protected from the wider world by their internal rules, beliefs routines, cultural artefacts and who is allowed (or not permitted) to enter. Heterotopia simultaneously retain a physical reality and a reliance on the imagination, or as Foucault (1994: 184) explains them, either spaces of total illusion 'that denounces all real space' or a

localized space that is so well arranged and organised as to make the ‘disorganised, badly arranged and muddled’ spaces outside appear to be an illusion. This might be applied to both early years settings and playwork spaces (Shaw, 2017, Shaw 2019). In this way this chapter is very much a returning which reshapes selected (but familiar) theoretical perspectives to fit a more recent (or perhaps regenerated) interest in playwork and playworkers.

The final section introduces the post-structural, feminist sociologist Avery Gordon. It ponders her interpretation of both the sociological imagination and many of the themes encapsulated by Foucault. The emphasis here is on the power of the fictive and the notion of haunting as a post-structural metaphor of use to sociological research. Throughout all the sections the theoretical perspectives are related back to playwork practices and enquiry.

C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination

The first task is to build a convincing argument as to why 21st century playworkers might take an interest in a North American sociologist from the late 1950s. The simple answer is that in relation to playwork, playworkers (and I would argue the children using play services) are the potential social scientists of the present and the future in relation to adding to our knowledge of play and playwork. This section will therefore take apart Mills’ key ideas on the need for a different type of social science research and attempt to relate it to current constructions of childhood, play and playwork in the United Kingdom. The methodological focus is on post-modernism and post-structuralism as possibilities for seeing playwork from a different perspective, thereby adding to our knowledge and understanding(s) of theory and practice in playwork spaces. Mills highlights the need for ‘sociological imagination’ in social research, as a response to a shift from ‘The Modern Age’ to a ‘post-modern period’ (Mills, 1959). Ideas on how this unquantifiable transition in public and academic consciousness of

philosophy, economics, values and lived experiences is carried forward in the exploration of Foucault and Gordon's works as they might be applied to playwork.

Post-modern thought frequently troubles concepts such as truth, freedom and rationality as they have been constructed since the Enlightenment. This seems to me to be particularly interesting in thinking about playspaces as contributing to the freedoms of childhood; play as a right (Clements & Fiorentino, 2004) during the 'special' status awarded to childhood and adolescence, and playwork as a rational field of human action in contemporary societies. 'Rational' is used here in the sense of existing due to legitimate arguments for its contribution to social justice and rights, which are rarely achieved without struggle, but can only operate within the social, economic and legal framework of the time. Play and playwork have long jostled for recognition as contributors to children and young people's wellbeing and as facilitators of greater equality in post-industrial societies; as genuine areas of 'rational', professional and ethical enactments (Howard, Miles, Rees-Davies & Bertenshaw, 2017, Osgood, 2006). In this way rationality is very much a human and political trait, rather than a natural, apolitical one. A thread of European thought on ethics, individual freedom and civic responsibility runs from the 1798 French 'Declarations on the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' (Jellinek, 2009) to the Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005) published by member states of the UK, originally through the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group via Play Wales and then by SkillsActive in England and adopted also by Play Scotland. What connects these two documents, I suggest, is their potential for inspiring positive change. The former is the basis of Western democratic constitutions which have worked towards universal suffrage: the latter a guide towards best practice in playwork and a basis for the widening of play provision. More than this, both texts have their place in the engagement of ordinary people, you and I and parents and children, in the moral and

political debates of our time. These documents, or declarations, or statements of principle are not written on tablets of stone; rather they are an invitation to political discussion, across time and place, on what it is to be human, on how resources should be distributed; how work and citizenship should be reward and what constitutes ethical practices. The French declaration of rights was taken up by Thomas Paine, placing the values of ‘freedom, equality and brotherhood’ into a British context. Paine (1791) proposed that justice, in an enlightened modern civilisation, should be based on both the ‘natural rights’ of freedom of speech and conscience and ‘civil rights’, relating to security and protection (Paine, 1993). Parallels with the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) are not difficult to conceive; the first speaks of play as ‘a biological, psychological and social necessity’ (Principle 1), a common good and a basic right. The role of the playworker is framed as one of protecting and securing the spaces in which children are free to create play. As discussed earlier, the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) have been adopted across the UK, but are also taken to other places by playworker researchers such as Shier, whose work is further explored in the section on Mills below.

Critiques of the enlightenment idyll highlight its unbending monoculturalism and patriarchy (Burman, 2008; Gordon, 2008; James & Prout, 1997; Mahoney, 2007; Usher & Edwards, 1994). This is a major dilemma for playwork; how to achieve equality and guard conflicting freedoms of choice in the everyday minutiae of playwork enactments. One such tension which manifested itself within my ethnography was that between indoor and outdoor play. A brief example of how this was analysed within the thesis (Shaw, 2017) provides an illustration of the type of scenario which made up the ethnography. The first three lines are taken directly from fieldnotes and what follows is the first few lines of the analysis

Kris tells me that he made the Lego building with the animals but ‘the boys messed it up’. Other boys go out to play but Kris says he isn’t going out-he doesn’t feel well.

We discuss the cloudy sky and play with the post box, plastic letters and writing materials' (Fieldnotes, St Egbert's 23.6.2011).

The extract exudes tensions around gender, around reasons for staying in when you could be outside and between participant research and practitioner interpretations of what should be prioritised at pre-school. Kris (on this occasion) positions himself as 'other' than the boys in the group. It is they who messed up the Lego and he doesn't want to go outside when they do. Even so it is not quite acceptable not to go out once the door is open and the others have exited through it, unless you are unwell (or when the sky is cloudy and threatens rain).

Although this incident takes place in a pre-school, something very similar, in terms of expectations and valuing of outside play might conceivably be observed in an out of school club. The out of school club which features in the thesis had employed a male playworker, specifically for the provision of outside 'games', perhaps unconsciously conveying the trope that the inside is the domain of femininity while the great outdoors is the province of male playworkers. You will see that this theme is repeated in the second illustration of field notes, further down, during which a child participating in a holiday play scheme questions the use of the outside space exclusively for sports activities.

Gordon (2008) might express this as a 'haunting of practice', albeit a somewhat dominant one in the multi-ethnic, post-feminist era. Gordon's work (and potential contribution to playwork research) will be discussed further in the final part of the chapter. However, it would be remiss to leave the story of enlightenment politics without a brief visit to Mary Wollstonecraft. Often cited as the foundation stone of Western feminism, 'A Vindication of

The Rights of Woman' (Wollstonecraft, 2004) is a response to Paine and possibly the earliest evocation of gender difference in politics. Her claims about femininity and the place of women in society has been contested, not least by feminists (Brody, 2004). Wollstonecraft does not speak for all women, but her voice does echo down the centuries. The point to be made in this chapter is that writing is a powerful tool, an important part of the research process and dialectic regimes. Both have agency, however unpredictable, to influence politics locally (for example, within individual play schemes and local provision) and more widely at regional and national levels. In employing the word dialectic, I aim to convey a conversation between ourselves, as academics and practitioners, and theorists of the past as well as policy makers of the present. Much of human understanding is based on imaginings, put into a playwork context this might relate to the ideals of the adventure playgrounds of the past and their influences on current playwork perspectives (Russell, 2018).

Mills (1959) declares "In such a world as ours, to practice social science is, first of all, to practice the politics of truth" (p. 178). Mills is contesting a positivist paradigm which seeks to root out a single universal truth. In the fields of playwork and early childhood this may relate to the value of play or what it means to be a playworker and what constitutes 'quality' play/playwork (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). This is not to suggest that there is no such thing as good (or bad) models of play provision. For me it is a prompt to consider truth for a particular group of parents, children or playworkers in a specific play context. How might a problem be approached from a different angle, or viewed through an alternative theoretical lens, in order to produce deeper or broader understandings and alternatives for enactments of practice? Mills (1959) is an invitation to think (research and write) about playwork within the wider milieu of politics, the media and wider social movements or problematics. For example, my own work has been particularly interested in the tension between policy,

practice and presentations (including self-constructions) of female workers as carers, as opposed to professionals, in spaces such as out of school clubs, reception classrooms or nurseries and pre-schools (Shaw, 2017).

At stake are the roles and identities of the players within the research process; problems relating to whether adults or children hold power to shape the research; whose voices are privileged in the writing and dissemination of findings; who listens at a local, national or international level and who wields economic influence. Mills argues that none of us can stand outside of society (socially or economically), but it is imperative to acknowledge where each is positioned in the field of action and the research process (Mills 1959). These are themes which appear in both Foucault's writing and that of Gordon and will be developed as the chapter progresses. For Mills, it is a matter of the social scientist bridging the gap between personal troubles and public issues, but for Foucault and Gordon it highlights more complex patterns of power, (in)equality and social justice. What all three authors might be said to challenge is "the scientist imagined as a pure and disembodied intellect" (Mills, 1959, p. 193). In this enlightenment informed, logic there is a clear distinction between the all-knowing researcher/writer and the subject(s) of their investigation (parents, children, trainees or colleagues) who hold no agency. Value is placed on objectivity. Subjectivity, even in relation to lived experience, is exorcised from the methods of examination and reporting. The human sources of data become spectres, their agency buried and ignored in the data presentation. Mills (1959) draws a distinction between skills and values, so for him the practical application of playwork knowledge would be at one end of a scale, with the principles and values of playwork at the other extreme. Between these two polar points, and of import to social research in playwork settings, is what Mills terms sensibilities. These are the topics which may become of interest to playwork researchers as part of their observations

and participation in playwork. For Mills, a research question is always ‘emergent’, arising from observations noted down, research journals, areas unexplored in previous projects, personal responses to training or conferences and other work products. This is a characteristic feature of post-structural philosophies and methodologies, in which all accounts (of our own lives and of our research) contain elements of fictionality. Starting (and ending) points are arbitrary (Bennington & Derrida, 1993); sequences of events, meanings which are awarded to proceedings, incidents which are prioritised or ignored, are always authored. This goes beyond Mills’ initial conceptualisation of ‘the sociological imagination’ and will be explored further in the section on Gordon (2008).

It should be remembered that Mills is writing from a white (mainly male) North American, academic perspective. Even so, it is worth considering the emphasis he places on the contributions to be made by social science which strives to take account of both liberal and socialist views of “reason in human affairs” (Mills, 1959, pp. 188-189). My interpretation of this in relation to playwork is that participants in any size of study, regardless of age or status, should be given credit for understanding their own place in the world, with the ability to think, interpret and express their understanding of lived experiences. Take, for example, Shier’s (2018) chapter on his research in Nicaragua. Shier draws on his own background in playwork in Britain but hands over much of the data collection to the adolescents working in the coffee growing area, which is the site of his fieldwork. The perspectives, agency and superior knowledge of the cultural context of their lives rings out loud and clear in the writing up of the research. It is only by immersion in the field, taking into account our own role as player or worker (Waters, 2018); researcher or student; past and present; that we can come to an understanding of our own informed position in relation to values and freedom (Mills, 1959) in playwork spaces.

In his appendix to 'The Sociological Imagination', Mills (1959) draws on his teaching and research experience to recommend a process for investigations sensible to the relationship between personal problems and public issues, which he entitles *On intellectual craftsmanship*. Within this he considers how such research questions might be conceived, acted upon and written up: in other words, the process and skills (or craft) of researching. In the final part of this section on Mills I suggest how this might be applied to research into playwork practice and how it can be linked to the works of Foucault and Gordon, explored in the remainder of the chapter.

Mills (1959) stresses the multidisciplinary of work within the social sciences. Any problem of human endeavour can (and should) be considered from a range of viewpoints and he gives the examples of political science, experimental psychology and history. The evidence which forms a platform for work with children and young people has always been a collective (or maybe contested) field. My original PhD work (Shaw, 2017) strongly challenges (but nevertheless acknowledges the importance) of developmental psychology in the study of early childhood. Other viewpoints taken into account include those of ethnographers and anthropologists (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001); historians of childhood (Aries, 1962; Cunningham, 1995) and feminist theorists (Butler, 1990; de-Lauretis, 1987; Gordon, 2008; Irigaray, 2007). Playwork crept in (by the backdoor) in the sense that the focus of the study was early childhood settings, specifically pre-schools and reception classes. Playwork appeared in the guise of practitioners whose work crossed the thresholds between nursery and out of school provision and thus migrated between the theoretical landscapes of early childhood education and playwork. This is the data to which I am

returning after several years, just as Mills (1959) describes how work on labour organisations and leaders led him into a new study of upper-class elites.

An important point being made here is that data collection, whether through practice observations – ethnographic research (Atkinson, 2001); filling out paperwork- documentary evidence (McCulloch, 2004) or taking personal notes of meetings, training, conferences and professional dialogue, are important skills to both playwork practice and playwork inquiry. However, they do not become research until they are put together with theory, analysis and writing up. The attribute which pulls together these separate elements of the research process (or story) , in my reading of Mills, is a willingness to play with ideas and with data. This places playworkers in a unique position to engage with and develop social research in playwork settings and beyond, as explored in the previous book of ‘Researching play from a playwork perspective’ (King & Newstead, 2018). As an illustration of how the sociological imagination might feature as part of an ethno-methodological ethnography of playwork, here is a story of an initial visit to a prospective site of research, taken from my notes on the day. The pre-arranged drop in is at one of a number of open access holiday clubs. The social enterprise which organises the schemes works closely with, and draws funding from, government and local organisations such as food banks, housing associations and the police. More widely they offer expertise with children and young people that falls into the categories of outreach youth work and sport, as well as holiday play. There is an overarching emphasis on community health and wellbeing (Sporting Communities, 2019), but this specific project has a focus on cooking and healthy eating as an enjoyable activity in which younger children and their parents can participate. There is an engagement with the current issue of ‘holiday hunger’ (Forsey, 2017). I am accompanied by one of the MDs (who will be referred to as MD), who I already know in a professional capacity from this and other work arenas.

MD and I arrive at the park at 10am and walk across to the sports pavilion where the play scheme is held. We pass a library (not currently open), which MD tells me is now run by the local community. A large banner attached to the railings advertises the service. There is a large room with a kitchen and serving hatch attached. One side is occupied by soft seating and a pool table. The other has tables and chairs ready for activities. I am introduced to the two playworkers (both male). The younger of the two is a qualified youth work and also leads on other initiatives run by the social enterprise. The two are making preparations in the kitchen area. A local journalist writing a piece about the scheme also arrives. He and MD discuss the aims and objectives but also other local politics; specific meetings, services, issues and difficulties. Parents and children begin to arrive and soon there is a buzz of greetings, pool playing, art activities and general chit chat in a variety of languages. The journalist knows one of the fathers from a local refugee and asylum seeker charity at which he volunteers. They spend some time at the edge of the room talking privately, while the parent's children are playing pool at the other side of the space.

MD pops out to the supermarket to buy in provisions and leaves me with large sheets of paper designed to gain children's views on the activities and future possibilities for play. I sit with a Polish family. The eldest of the girls (9 years old) writes that she likes going outside and as we discuss she decides that she would prefer to do something other than organised sports in the outside space. We talk about other possibilities. Some older boys, out on their bikes in the park, try to gain access but are turned away by the youth worker, who knows them. When MD returns space is cleared, and children and parents take part in some group games (the games are described in the notes). My 9-year-old friend tells me about a Polish game they play

at home. I suggest that she could teach it to others at the holiday scheme and she considers whether she could translate the accompanying song into English. She is more fluent and confident than Mum. It is then time to design, cook and eat mini pizzas.

In the park a group of young men have been carrying out community service work, supervised by probation officers. The boys on the bikes have been hanging around and goading them. MD pauses to share information with the probation officers. The police have been called.

The first thing that leaps out for me on rereading these notes is the entanglement of relationships and knowledges: myself with MD, the journalist and asylum-seeking father, the youth worker and adolescent boys and so on. The private troubles of those present cannot be disconnected from public and political policies (Mills, 1959); education policy and the historical pattern of school holidays, immigration policy in relation to refugees and asylum seekers; youth and criminal justice systems, the benefits system, the cost of food and of course play and playwork funding. Mills (1959) postulates that it is the duty of academic work to ‘present controversial theories and facts, and actively encourage controversy’. The key rationale presented for this is that, without wide and inclusive political debate, ordinary people are denied the realities of the world in which they live and their own identities. This, for me, has profound implications for a profession such as playwork, in which there are invariable battles for recognition in relation to status and funding (King, 2015, King & Waibel, 2016). There is a suppression of the voices of both playworkers and the children/young people participating in play projects when the funding and provision of play is not constructed on the basis of universal play services, but is presented by media and

politicians as a compensation for parent's need to work, an extension of school learning (Fordham, 2004) or as a solution to other social problems such as holiday hunger (Graham et al, 2016). I am not arguing that playworkers do not rise to the challenge of providing high quality play within these remits, but that the intrinsic value of this, as embedded in the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005), is concealed by a complexity which does not privilege the views of children, young people and playworkers on the matter of play. There is an obscuring of the realities of our lived experiences; an absence of recognition of the effects of politics and our engagement with its discourses and instabilities and consequently our potential to initiate change for the better (Gordon, 2008).

For Mills (1959) this is "... no less than the presentation of conflicting definitions of reality itself" (p. 1910). This post-structural construct of the complex interweaving of power relations with contradictory interpretations of social reality and social justice is the territory of both Foucault and Gordon, and as such will shape the focus for the ensuing arguments. Before moving on to the discussion of Foucault, I wish to touch on three more significant aspects of Mills' thoughts on researching and writing from the standpoint of 'a sociological imagination', which also impact my interpretations of Foucault and Gordon in relation to investigating playwork 'from a playwork perspective' (King & Newstead, 2018). These are playfulness of mind, creating a story and what to study. Mills (1959) alludes to a research stage prior to collection of data which measures or counts a particular phenomenon. During this phase of playing with what is already known about the field of enquiry, an imaginary world is conjured in which the researcher has control over scale of time and space and the outcomes of interventions. Like Prospero (Shakespeare, 1958) controlling the elements and inhabitants of his island, a small rural playscheme could be imagined on the scale of an inner-city adventure playground or a play environment in the global south transported to the forests

of Scandinavia. The purpose is to explore the historical, geographical and cultural nuances which have informed the development of play and playwork as a universal force for good and to consider the problematics of ‘the universe’ to be studied from as many perspectives as possible. This playfulness of mind can be extended to the analysis of field notes, a playfulness when organising and interpreting what we have previously written provides the potential for new ways of seeing, knowing and responding to research data. Mills suggests mixing up notes from different projects or scenarios, playing with the language used and searching out different possible stories from those originally conceived through the activities recorded. In this way my notes from the playscheme visit might be put together with records of early years’ play events during the data collection for my PhD, with the intention of revealing theoretical convergences or divergences and new and interesting questions for studying play. This brings us finally to what to study, which means a turn to the balancing of private troubles with public issues and the positioning of the researcher within these two extremes. What Mills argues is that the personal and the structural are both important and that academic research must remain morally and politically autonomous in the selection and approach to research topics. Biography (the stories told by play participants, adult or child) and history (of playwork as a professional act for social good) will both be important in reflecting the breadth and complexity of playwork in contemporary society.

The next section considers how Foucault’s philosophical works on technologies of production; power and the self might contribute to the possibility of reaching Mills’ ideals of social research in a field such as playwork. In other writing (Shaw, 2019) I have considered how Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (Foucault, 1994) might inform an alternative methodology for playwork research. Here I will take a much broader brush to paint in connections between a spectrum of works by Foucault and the single texts of Mills (1959)

and Gordon (2008). The objective being to trace threads of the running themes of discourse, power, haunting, social imagination and reality as they may pertain to playwork research. Haunting is a post-structural metaphor which does not appear in Mills' text, but for both Foucault (Faubion 1994) and Gordon it represents the entanglement of relationships, theories, assumptions, discourses, people and objects, from the past and the present, which inhabit and interact with one another in social or institutional spaces such as out of school clubs, holiday play schemes and playgrounds. This is a conscious reworking of my PhD literature review and methodology chapters (Shaw 2017), a performance of sociological imagination.

Michel Foucault: Technologies of Power, Production and the Self

Foucault's most cited post-structural texts centre around analyses of mental health institutions, hospitals and prisons. His theories have also been linked to work with children and young people because of his interest in ways in which regulatory practices can be detected within modern institutions such as schools, early years settings, youth work and playwork spaces. Studying these regulatory practices highlights the tensions they provoke for social policy and practices in work with children (Ball 2013; Francis & Mills, 2012; Kirk, 1998; MacNaughton 2005; Russell, 2013). In the narration of the visit to the playwork setting above, the notion of an open access scheme in the shared space of the park is challenged by the appearance of the youths who neither have a parent with them or fit into the age range catered for in the regulatory framework of the specific provision, addressing the problem of families unable to afford nutritious meals during the school holidays. Equally the social project of rehabilitation for young offenders is threatened by the freedom of the youths to use the park and interact freely with others. This in turn is disciplined by the summoning of the police. Play and youthwork have traditionally seen themselves as existing outside of many of the constraints of schooling and thus more able to resist the reproduction of traditional values

and inequalities sustained through the modernist discourses of education systems (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Even so, they are subject to the limitations of their own histories, cultural traditions and theoretical frames, which Mills is imploring practitioner-researchers to trouble and reach beyond. Ball (2013) suggests that engagement with Foucault provides an opportunity to problematise the contemporary shift from welfare to neo-liberalism which means that the provision of play, alongside other services, is subject to the uncertainties of a liberal free market economy. The implication is that the consequences of turning exclusively to traditional sociological methodologies, which draw primarily on the physical sciences as engendered through Enlightenment thinking (Burman 2008; Mills 1959; Usher & Edwards, 1994), are that research into the experiences of children and young people become lodged in a scientific paradigm which excludes many of the questions playworkers feel are important but are not able to articulate as such. Engagement with post-structuralism provides a vehicle in which to go beyond individual disciplines and encompass a multi-disciplinary approach to research into play, which is inclusive of methodological approaches from the arts (particularly literature) as well as the human sciences.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1995) sets out the changing perceptions of penal justice in Europe. He considers the gradual decline of physical torture and capital punishment in favour of more 'enlightened' forms of state justice (community service and restorative justice for example). What is transferable to a theorisation of playwork is his interest in the interplay between power, knowledge and discipline (Payne, 1997) and the ways in which institutions exert power to produce populations which conform to the norms of social institutions, which is apposite to the deconstruction of data suggested by Mills, as explored in the previous section. Foucault identifies hierarchical observation; normalizing judgement and the examination as three technologies of power which train

individual to take on roles within social institutions; for example, as units of production at work; pupils in school; playworkers in out of school provision or play therapists in hospitals. All of these use observations as a tool for judging children's behaviour within their separate contexts, but it is perhaps in out of school care where the development psychology-based, normalizing judgements and testing of 'achievement' is most evident (whether accepted or resisted), due to their close proximity and/or relationship to schools (Fordham, 2004).

In addition to the technologies of power introduced in the previous paragraph, Foucault's work also talks about technologies of the self – in a playwork context, the roles taken on by adults and children as they enter a play space; technologies of production – the way in which play must be paid for, by individuals or organisations and assigned an outcome or prove its worth through evaluation and reporting back to funders. Technologies of the sign – the language in which play and playwork is talked about, within and outside of the playwork profession. Feminist writers, such as McNay (1992) translate Foucault's work into a defiance of the traditional gender binary and the 'natural' traits awarded to masculinity and femininity. The concept of other genders was for many years denied and silenced within the public domain. It now has a growing prominence, shifting from a hidden private trouble to a public issue of social injustice (Butler, 1990, Irigaray, 2007) of as much importance in the field of playwork as gender studies, because it is an important aspect of children's social experiences which will be present within all play settings whether acknowledged or ignored.

The use of Foucault's work as a theoretical frame led me to question the tensions between care and education; mother and teacher; carer and professional; teaching and learning; playing and learning; child and pupil (Shaw, 2017). These began as sensitivities towards rigidities encountered in my life as a teacher, early years (and playwork) local authority advisor and a sometime researcher. By the latter I mean that research has always played a

part in my professional life, whether reading and interpreting the research of others, researching to gain a qualification or participating in research projects. This is an illustration of Mills' plea that the sociologist never begins work on a project but is always already working on it through note taking, professional reflection or "guided endeavours" (Mills, 1959, p. 222). This, I suspect, is as true of playwork as of work in early years education and care, although the tensions may vary, for example between types of play, maybe sports and other possibilities for outside play, as in the observation in the open access play scheme in the park. Returning to Foucault's 'technologies of the self', which he explored in a series of lectures in the 1980s, he elucidates the concept as practices and techniques through which individuals actively fashion their own identities (Foucault, 1993; Foucault 2000). This is a continuous process for both adults and children, but I think may be particularly observable when regarding or interacting with children's play in playwork contexts. The aim would be to approach practitioner (and childhood) identities in play as historically and culturally specific constructions, rather than innate phenomena. The data analysis could then seek to trouble incidents in which players appear to assert themselves against systematic forms of knowledge which rest on universal truth claims about gender, childhood, adolescence and so forth. In playwork theory this might be linked to Sturrock's work on being and becoming, hermeneutics and the play cycle (King & Sturrock, 2020).

Mentioned or implied in both this section and the section on Mills is the notion of professional reflection and reflexivity within research, which is the engagement of the researcher with her own position within the research and the subjectivity of other research participants (or spectators) (Christensen & James, 2008; Finlay, 2002). Foucault philosophises on reflection as the ultimate (un)reality. The place where physical actuality, in the form of a mirror (or other reflective object) and imagination in the configuration of seeing

a reflection, meet one another (Foucault 1994). A mirror reflects only the space in which it is placed, removing the viewer's gaze from the surrounding space but enabling them to look at themselves "there where I am absent" (Foucault 1994, p. 179). In social research this not only acknowledges that the researcher occupies some of the space within the research, but also that research subjects see and can be seen from perspectives other than those of the researcher. Taking this into consideration has the potential to support the playwork(er) researcher in making the familiar strange (Ybema Dvora, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009), thus opening the way for new and politically subversive research questions, as previously discussed. The reflexive, or reflective, turn is well established in ethnography and anthropology as a mechanism for illuminating the inevitability of some measure of partiality in the collection, interpretation and analysis of data in the social sciences (Shaw, 2017). According to Venkatesh (2013), twenty-first century sociology has seen a resurgence of methodological reflexivity within research which draws on the ethnographer turning the research gaze in upon herself in order to "generate insights, establish patterns and bring the voice of [her] research subjects to light" (Venkatesh, 2013, p. 4).

A major criticism of the 'reflexive turn' within traditional research methodologies is that it fails to redress the power imbalances between researcher and subject(s). It is always the researcher who wins out in the final selection, analysis and writing up of the enquiries (Pollner, 2012; Venkatesh, 2013). Even within the scope of Practitioner Action Research (PAR), in which reflexivity is built into the action research cycles (Carr, 2002, Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; McNiff, 2010), the academic researcher has the greatest access to the knowledge resources of a university and often takes on the prestigious tasks of reporting, writing and conference presentation (Barron, Taylor, Nettleton, & Amin, 2017, Jones,

Homes, MacRae & MacLure, 2010). Perhaps this is one of the challenges to be addressed as part of the continuing process of building a playwork (or playworker) research community.

This section has merely scratched at the surface of some of Foucault's work. It is far from comprehensive, but it is hoped that some of the ideas and citations will be of use to those readers engaged with researching play from a playwork perspective. To sum up, the section has tried to advance Mills' ideas on research which draws on the sociological imagination to trouble the position of the playworker (or indeed the non playworker) within playwork research. The aim as Foucault (2000) expresses it is to arouse an awareness of the location of the body in time and space and the outlooks which this might illuminate (or conceal). There has been a nod towards feminist theorists who have drawn on Foucault and other-post structuralist philosophers in order to trouble the ontological construction of gender (Butler, 1990; de-Lauretis, 1984, 1987; Irigaray, 2007; McNay, 1992). These writers pose gender not merely as a social construction, but as many representations of what it might mean to be female, male or an alternate gender to that which we have historically designated as female or male. de Lauretis (1987 p3) points out that "the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction". In other words, by critiquing, querying and reinterpreting notions of gender, feminist writers are complicit in regulating the terms in which gender is presented and represented, ignoring what lies outside of (feminist and non-feminist) discourses as a 'potential trauma' which might further destabilise orthodox thinking (Shaw, 2017). There has also been reference to the power of storytelling and understandings of reality through the fictive as well as the actual in post-structural research. These are the themes which will now be progressed by considering Gordon's (2008) book which references both Mills and Foucault in her consideration of the sociological imagination; metaphors of haunting and the 'meddlesome fictive' in sociology.

Avery Gordon: The Meddlesome Fictive

Undertaking a PhD is often described as a journey of discovery (Lally, 2012; Thomas, 2016). This was certainly true in my case, since I started with an idea of employing Participant Action Research but somewhere along the way became fascinated by post-structural ways of seeing and thinking about the world. Gordon's (2008) book lingers in my memory as the defining discovery of my PhD journey. It not only spoke to my desire to find a methodological approach which might do justice to the complexities of work with children, but also drew in my love of literature and its importance to my professional life as well as my leisure time. Children and adults telling and listening to stories is an integral element of play and of interactions between young people and playworkers. This is true of dramatic play, the sharing of books, oral storytelling and sharing of culturally significant legends and literature, whether formally or in everyday talk and references. A picture may paint a thousand words, but a story opens up at least one thousand different worlds of shared meanings, empathy and human experiences.

Gordon explores all of the themes already encountered in the discussion of Mills and Foucault; the need for a sociological imagination; the intricacies of dynamic power relationships in matters of social justice and research; haunting as a post-modern metaphor and ways in which these forces interact with capitalism to generate dichotomies of the normative (and abnormality) in relation to race and gender. In the case of my own research, this translated into a key interest in the tensions between images of the child and the adult in relation to work and play. She does this through the political novels *Commo en la Guerra (He who Searches)* (Valenzuela, 1977) and *Beloved* (Morrison, 2004). The two layered story of how she came across a photograph in which the absence of a female associate of Freud

haunted the representation of a psycho-analytical Congress in 1911. It is the search for the story of Sabina Spielrein (Gordon, 2008) which throws new light on understandings of female identity in relation to Freudian and post-Freudian enactments of gender (or technologies of the self).

Gordon sees the complexity of lived experience and our efforts to express it as such in social research as profound and inherently theoretical. This enables her to amplify Foucault's theorisation of power as productive of social change and unpredictability, of desires attainable and utopian, to better articulate the ever-present import of power relations in all our lives. As she says, "Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic it can be dull and routine" (Gordon, 2008, p. 3). For Gordon, the fictive is meddlesome because it simultaneously aids us in understanding realities other than our own and prevents us from ever truly knowing or expressing reality. As soon as my PhD research was completed it became a fiction, my hand shaped it in the way I wished it to be told and is now reshaping it to tell a story more closely related to playwork in this chapter.

While the story of Sabina Spielrein invites new considerations of gender enactments in social spaces such as those designed to accommodate playwork, the novel *Beloved* explores the legacy of slavery in the United States. Vlazuela's text takes a literary approach to the disappearances and other human rights abuses in Argentina. The latter is a clear example of how personal problems are inextricably linked to political structures in the most violent as well as seemingly more innocuous societies, such as our own. A central theme of *Beloved* is the way in which injustices of the past are always waiting around the corner to manifest themselves in the present. At first glance this may all seem a long way from the provision of play (particularly in the context of 'out of school care'), but the baggage carried by those

entering a playscheme are always unknown in the first instance. The hauntings and experiences of injustice or violence that children and adults transport with them into the playwork space may well take on some sort of significance in the social dynamics of play, and it is this which is so difficult to do justice to in research. Children come from other countries seeking refuge from violence or economic insecurity, encountering a new language and culture; others go hungry during the school holidays and some present a threat to those younger or more unfortunate than themselves, as illustrated in the vignette of my own visit to a holiday play scheme. All of these, and many other topics, are worthy of research by and for playworkers. What Gordon (2008) emphasises is that:

Complex personhood means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward (p. 4)

For me this reinforces the imperative of listening to the children and adults who inhabit playwork spaces and including their contributions, interpretations and desires from the inception to the writing up of playwork research.

Ghosts are usually thought of as features of fiction rather than temporal reality. However, they do recur as a metaphoric theme in post-modern and post-structural thought, for example Derrida (2006) in *Spectres of Marx*. In this final paragraph I will briefly deliberate on Gordon's interpretation of the allegory of haunting in sociological research and the sociological imagination. As a paradigm, haunting is a way of studying what is usually missed in data collection, both ethnographic or more positivist, because it confronts

something taken for granted. Similarly, Gordon presents it as a way to enter into complexity and begin to face it (or commune with it) head on. This is not unlike Mills' (1959) suggestion that the researcher should dialogue with characters real and imaginary, articulated in the first section of the chapter. Also, like Mills, Gordon accentuates the interdisciplinarity of her undertaking in writing about haunting and the sociological imagination. This echoes my own experience of playwork, early years and education (in fact most, if not all, research involving children, young people and the adults who work with them) as a fundamentally multi-disciplinary field. Undertaking research into play or playwork is, for me, a social, political and epistemological enterprise (Gordon, 2008). It is bothered with (and by) both the production and interpretation of social and cultural stories of children, young people and play (or other) workers. The most powerful thoughts which I (personally in my guise as a researcher and in other professional capacities) have taken away from Gordon is that the Ghost is the question at the very edge of my vision or consciousness. It is that niggle that something is not quite right and should be investigated, or that something which should be present is absent: an activity person or interaction, such as a different type of opportunity for playing in the outside space, as expressed by the 9 year old in 'the not yet' fully conceived research described. Haunting denotes a certain restlessness of spirit; maybe a desire to understand how we got to where we are, in order to influence the future (Shaw, 2017). You may query what spooks and spectres have to do with the lived experiences of playworkers and their charges. The response would be that ghosts are troublemakers (Garfinkel, 1986): they confront us with a strange vision of what is (or was once) familiar and point us in the direction of a cultural ethnography suited to making the familiar strange in our own workplaces. Of course, it would be unethical, both professionally and academically, to go into playwork spaces with the intention of causing trouble or disrupting play. However, it is possible to trouble accepted explanations of how and why activities take place, or indeed

take place at all; for example structured, adult initiated play, in a set location, at a particular time of the day. These seem to me to be questions eminently important to playwork and worthy of researching with children, parents and professionals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, within the constraints of time and space, I have tried to cook up a flavour of ways in which the theoretical perspectives presented by Mills, Foucault and Gordon have influenced, and continue to influence, my research into the worlds of childhood and those of practitioners (such as playworkers) who co-inhabit these universes.

From Mills I have taken up suggestions on what was (in the middle of the last century) a novel way of approaching sociological research. In the section on Foucault I have attempted to demonstrate how the late twentieth century saw an expansion of the philosophical, ontological and epistemological refrains of the post-modern era alluded to by Mills. I have speculated on how these motifs of power and technologies of the self and the other in regimes of capitalist production might be accounted for in playwork research. Finally, in the visiting of Gordon's work in the post-structuralist feminist vein, I have explored the notions of the fictive and haunting in social research. All three are extremely selective and somewhat personal accounts, but I hope that they may inspire other playwork researchers to read and interpret the texts for their own projects.

In relation to the four themes explored in this chapter which emerged from the previous book of *Researching Play from a Playwork Perspective* (King and Newstead, 2018), the notion of rights-based play has been considered in relation to post-structural thinking on the politics of scientific research (Mills, 1959, Foucault, 1995, Gordon, 2008). I have suggested that the

conception of a set of Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) could be seen as a catalyst for discourse beyond as well as within the field of playwork. In writing the chapter I have been conscious of my outsider status and lack of direct experience in playwork from a practitioner perspective. I have been enormously grateful to those who are already writing about theory and practice in the field (Fiorentino, 2004; Clements & Shier, 2018; King & Newstead, 2018; King & Sturrock, 2020; Russell, 2018). I have enjoyed the intellectual exercise of applying the theories used in my work to the practices and enactments of playwork, and perhaps this in itself says something about complexities and juxtapositions of the terms ‘work’ and ‘play’. I have approached the themes of playfulness, process and critical reflection through a deconstruction of my own past and future theorisations and how they might look in the context of ethnographies of playwork practice. As a sociologist it has been fascinating to reconsider Mills (1959) original framing of *the sociological imagination* within the milieu of playwork research. One thing which strikes me is the inherent interdisciplinarity of work relating to children and young people (Garvis & Manning, 2017), not only in the established (and contested) links with early childhood studies and youth work, but much more widely in view of theories and readings which might be taken from sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, geography and other domains.

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