Children in the Playground

In this paper I wish to expand on some of the themes hinted at in my earlier paper (Hardman 1973). It will also continue the discussion taken up by Vernon Reynolds (1974), although it is not a direct reply to that article. Some of the points I make here have previously been made, in a much less extensive form, in New Society (Hardman 1974).

To discover for myself what children were like on their own, I spent lunch-hour playtime with the children at St. Barnabas School in Oxford. My intention was to observe and play with them in their own style and idiom. But I wondered whether I could succeed in this as, being a tall grown-up person, the children would naturally regard me as an adult authority figure. The problem that I faced was that children act differently in the presence of an adult; they are reluctant to speak as openly and act as spontaneously as they do among themselves. An adult figure, moreover, commands the attention of a particular type of child: that is the younger children who cling, climb and pull, continually demanding attention, or those children left out of games who are anxious to act like an adult to show that they are above all the play.

It is not easy to explain how I came to be accepted as something other than adult. Gradually eyes were averted less; fewer clinging hands surrounded me; they asked fewer questions; began to tease, trick and hit me; and were not so careful to omit the 'naughty' parts of their rhymes or their 'rude names' for each other. To some I was 'the lady', 'Charlie' or 'skinny'. Others accepted me as an odd student-teacher who only came at play-time and was willing to crawl, balance on bars, play 'tig' and get both dirty and hurt. Whatever my position was, the novelty and awe soon wore off, as I gave neither cues nor reproaches. It was only after holidays or with new pupils that the shyness and submissiveness reappeared.

In consequence of this aim to be accepted by children as something other than a dominant yardstick, I became very aware of those 'mistakes' which plunged me back into the adult image. The contradiction between how I wanted to act as an adult but how I had to act (or not act) in order to be something other than adult confronted me with some important differences in expectations and attitudes between children and adults. Adults tend to restrain physical violence when they are confronted with it; children encourage it, up to the point where the fantasy and excitement of the tussle suddenly are irrelevant at the sight of tears or blood. Any of the children who intervene are scorned by the participants, 'min' yer own business', their means of stopping the fight was to find a teacher. Similarly when there were quarrels about who was the owner of an object, the normal adult response is to find out who it really belongs to, whereas to children what is important is the interest that someone else gives to the object. Henry dropped a penny, but it was Urmla who picked it up. 'Hey, it's mine!' said Henry, 'I was going to buy an apple with it'. 'No, it's mine, said Urmla. The exchange continued. But eventually Henry shrugged his shoulders and turned to someone else. Immediately Urmla returned the penny. It had no more value as soon as Henry lost interest.

On days when I found myself intervening in a particularly
pernicious fight, asserting adult tones of disapproval, I was back
again with clinging hands, and 'Oh, please, Miss, give me an
aeroplane (a 'turner)'. But the threats if I refused were also revealing
about what children consider will shock, what they know will annoy...
'If you don't, I'll pull your hair', 'I'll pull your trousers down' said
Sharon one day struggling to unbutton my belt. As an adult it was
the threat of loss of dignity which children thought would persuade.
When I was something less than an adult, it was the loss of friendship
which was threatened: when I sat secretively with Debbie and Sara
playing with old lipsticks and (stinking) eau de cologne, one said,
'You won't tell, will you? We'll go and play with Caroline if you do...'

The limits of my own observations are obviously revealed by the
wealth of the material the Opies collected. One particular difficulty
might be found in the limited possibilities and observations available
in only one playground. The Opies, for example, with their wider
studies were able to observe that,

> 'Two distinct streams of oral lore flow into the
> unending river of schoolchild chant and chatter,
> and these two streams are as different from each
> other as slang and dialect. The slangy superficial
> lore of comic songs, jokes, catch phrases, fashionable
> objectives, slick nicknames and crazes, in short
> that noise which is usually the first that is
> encountered in playground and street, spreads every-
> where but, generally speaking is transitory. The
> dialectical lore flows quietly but deeper; it is
> the language of the children's darker doings ...
> belongs to all time but is limited in locality ...
> the language which children use to regulate their
> relationships with each other.' (Opie and Opie
> 1959:15).

The implicated restrictions on any one study to know about the 'darker
doings' of children is not, however, as serious as might be supposed,
if we consider these at a different level from the Opies. That is, if
we recognise that although the dialectical lore is limited in locality,
varying from county to county, it has a level of meaning which is
common, and which may be at least in part understood from one playground
alone. Thus, although I was limited to the St. Barnabas type, we may
generalise from this and see that it is only the particular form of
a general pattern. The deeper lore is limited in locality, but at
another level we can say that it spreads everywhere.

When I first started going to the playground of St. Barnabas, I
thought it would be a long and perhaps even impossible task to find
out anything about the children. How to penetrate such an alien
world? The apparent chaos of screaming, running bodies of varying
heights and the secret impenetrable huddles momentarily blocked out
the material the two Opies had managed to collect. But there was
activity everywhere: numerous small groups each seemed to have their
own style of interaction and play, one group was playing football,
others hung around the sandpit, more congregated round the doors and
entrances to the playground, others swung on the bars, and so on.
Not even the physical objects of the environment therefore offered
any usual protective safety. The brick walls, the door separating

the two play areas all seemed taken over by scrambling or
secretive children. Even the sedate park benches were upturned
and put to various uses. An almost inevitable comment from one
of the teachers, wandering across to get her lunch, 'Just like
little savages, aren't they?', re-affirmed my decision to be wary
of their help. It was not going to be easy to become an acceptable
non-teacher adult figure. How could I get beyond their whispering,
giggling behaviour, their shy reserve and restrained manners, or
their complete rejection, the usual reaction of many children in the
presence of an unknown adult?

I soon found out, however, that the attribution of chaos is
the reaction of the outsider, who does not belong and who does not
understand the idiom of the playground and the kind of order it
contains. To realise its significance and to understand its reality,
it is necessary first to contrast the possibilities and activities
of the playground with those of the classroom. A considerable portion
of children's days are spent cloistered in the classroom, where
movement and verbal demonstrations are restricted, where being told
what to do within an inert routine is the norm. Adult-type behaviour
is imposed in the form of organisation and disciplinary rules, and
time is spent preparing for examinations or other scheduled work
within a rigid timetable, characterised by the dreaded school bell;
a place where there is little room for energetic excitement and risk,
but much time for concentration, mental effort, worry, boredom
or listlessness. All these aspects are, I think, well recognised,
but they come over very clearly in a collection of children's ideas
on 'The School that I'd Like'(Blishen 1969).

> 'Give me the school where discipline, regimentation
> and good manners are <u>not</u> everything' (Ibid:19),
>
> 'There would be a 'screaming room' where anyone
> could go and make as much noise as they wanted
> to without anyone hearing and objecting' (Ibid:37),
>
> 'free expression, free thought, freedom to work at
> one's own pace' (Ibid:30),
>
> 'If in English you were describing running, fighting,
> standing on your head, or anything active you have
> feelings about, you would leave the classroom and do
> the action in question' (Ibid:68).

Little wonder, then, that activity in the playground is full of movement
and noise. It is a world where children are allowed to be free as
they would like to be in the classroom; where they can run, chase,
jump, throw, shout and shove, without fear of rebuke; where there is
freedom limited only by one's own rules or those accepted by the
group: the children's own kind of order, by which they can become
the characters they aspire to and indulge in the activities they enjoy.
In the playground they can relish the atmosphere of their own fantasies,
of their own limits, fears and expectations, without the limiting
inhibitions of adult 'facts', more of which we shall see as I proceed.

Just as children are made to feel inadequate in the teacher's
idiom, so I began to realise the incongruities of an adult in the
style of the playground. But what is the idiom of the playground which

makes it so unacceptable to adults? It is, I suggest, an open-ended
way of looking at things (see Hardman 1974). Whereas the physical
behaviour of adults has conformed to the way their particular culture
has bounded the possible from the impossible, the approved from the
disapproved, the public from the private, children's play and games
may be, in part, interpreted as testing where to place these boundaries.
The range of movements which they appreciate is certainly very extensive.
As Lévi-Strauss writes, 'every newborn child provides in embryonic form
the sum total of possibilities, but each culture and period of history
will retain and develop only a chosen few' (1949:93). For children it
is as though the 'thresholds of excitement, the limits of resistance,
... different in each culture' had not yet been fixed. 'The "impossible"
effort, the "unbearable" pain, the "unbounded" pleasure' (Lévi-Strauss
1955:xii) are still open to experimentation.

This physical open-endedness helps to explain the physical extremes
that can be seen in the playground. Children slowly stretch their legs
as far apart as possible in the effort to reach a knife thrown into
the ground, in a game called 'Split the kipper'. The game has meaning
by virtue of the exertion and the nerve that it demands. The interest
is in seeing who will give in first. '"It goes on ... until one of the
boys gets scared and gives in", says an 11-year-old. "He is then called
Chicken"'. (Opie and Opie 1969:221). In 'Rumblin Rhinos' three boys
are held horizontally on the shoulders of eight others, four linked
together in a line in front and four behind. The weird, heavy animal,
with its rolling, wrinkled flesh, is aptly symbolised by the human
monstrosity. But it is the ability to join as many people together
as possible, defying all adult restrictions, which is what is valued
in this game and makes it so attractive. This can also be seen in
'Hi Jimmy Kracker' a popular form of leapfrog consisting of one long
back made of four to six children linked together. The first person
jumps over three or four backs landing far enough forward to leave
room for the others to mount behind him, a game in which 'players
are most frequently hurt,and which requires the greatest amount of
stamina, esprit de corps, and indeed fortitude' (Ibid:255). There
are many games, too, which involve almost nothing but physical endurance,
such as 'knuckles', in which one boy holds up a clenched fist while
the second strikes the knuckles as hard as he can before the first can
avoid the heavy blow. Physical endurance is the necessary conformity
to this game. As one boy explained, 'you mustn't give in - the first
to cry is a baby'. The children's values indicate the context in which
'knuckles' is to be understood. Bravery and endurance are here esteemed
and these are soon made manifest at St. Barnabas in the bleeding
knuckles. The Opies comment on the game, 'some lads seem constitutionally
unable to give in, and the game (so-called) continues long after the
skin has been torn from their hands. Two 11-year-olds were observed
in a playground taking turns at each other; both were in agony, yet
they were found to be still at it 10 minutes later' (Ibid:223). But
the 'agony' was possibly more an indication of the Opies' limits than
a value of importance to the children, who were still testing out what
pain was 'unbearable' for each of the participants. This testing out of
physical possibilities is later better understood by the Opies, though
they call it 'Misplaced Audacity'.

> 'on the swings ..., children do not merely sit on the
> seats and see who can swing highest, but try to see
> who can climb furthest up the chains while swinging,

and who will jump off his seat from the greatest
height, and who, by swinging hard, can leap the
furthest off the swing ... Yet roller-towels, when
children make free with them, can be as dangerous
as swings. They put their head in the loop of the
towel and wind themselves up until they can lift their
feet off the ground. They play 'Dangling Man', a game
of extraordinary attraction, twisting the towel tight
and letting their neck take the weight of their body
until they go blue in the face' (Ibid:273).

I suggest that here we see children testing the limits of excitement
and resistance checking the adults' bounded category of the 'impossible'
and the 'dangerous'. Part of this propensity for the fantastic, is
as the Opies perceive 'not bravado ... so much as wonder and curiosity,
those twin attributes of inexperience which, for instance, prompt a
child to turn round and round until he is giddy and can "see the world
going round". So it is, when a rumour sweeps through the school that
a person who stands on wet blotting-paper, or who puts wet blotting-
paper in his shoes, is likely to faint, repeated trials are made'.
(Ibid:274). The example that is given is worth including here for
it demonstrates the extent to which children will test themselves:

'in a Lancashire primary school ... "We can make
a boy faint for a minute, sir," ...
"Oh yes?" said Sir, tolerantly.
They sat on their hocks, knees bent, arms outstretched,
and took ten deep breaths, then stood up holding the
tenth breath, and some one from behind squeezed them
round their waist. One boy was flat out for a minute'.
(Ibid:274).

This interpretation of the physical aspect of children's activities
may help to explain why the similarity of children's activities always
strikes the ethnographer. Kidd in 1906 commented, 'Nothing makes
the European feel his kinship with the Kafirs more than watching the
games of the children. Nearly every game we play in Europe that does
not require much apparatus, is also known by the Kafirs' (1906:162).
Amongst others he describes a game in which 'players pinch the skin
on the backs of others' hands, holding it firmly between his first
finger and thumb .. (until) .. suddenly, at a given signal, they all
jerk their hands away, each one pinching the skin of the hand he is
holding as hard as possible. Large pieces of skin are frequently
pulled off in this way, but no boy would dream of crying' (Ibid:168).
Kidd's final comment on the games that he describes is 'some children do
not seem to feel the pain amid the fun of the game' (Ibid:169). Raum
too noticed that 'soon the normal performance of the body is found to
be an insufficient measure of skill. Boyish ambition concentrates on
twisting and distorting the limbs' (1940:266), and he describes other
hitting and fighting activities similar to those observed by the Opies
and which I have seen in St. Barnabas. Rejecting Kidd's explanation
in terms of the 'dull nerves of the Kafirs' and seeing Raum's interpretation
as telling us what these games do rather than say, I hope to add some
understanding to these physical 'games' by repeating that in children's
models of society, their view of themselves, and their physical
limitations are not bound by a distinction between the possible and
the impossible. There is thus available to them a whole range of
physical techniques and activities which they continually test out.

Elsewhere (Hardman 1974), I have tried to show how children's attitudes, aims, motives, and activities do not need a view of the world which makes a strict distinction between fact and fantasy. I now turn to look at the way the children at St. Barnabas viewed their environment, including their bodies, to show what a Protean world it is in which they live.

The possibility that children might be able to say more with things than words was suggested to me by Ardener's ideas on the non-linguistic semiotics of archaic, folk, or 'minority' forms of society. In his hypothetical case of the total absence of the power of speech the semiotic system would, he argues, depend upon the apperception by the human participants of contextually defined logical relations among themselves in space. Let us say: the relative position of each participant to another in a gathering, and to items in a fixed environment (1971:xliv). And working from de Saussure's likening of language to chess, Ardener suggests that we see the elements, including the participants, in a system as containing a certain 'valency' weighting.

> 'The elements of the semiotic would be stated by
> their existential presence and would acquire
> 'meaning' ('value') through the 'relations',
> which would themselves be apperceptible as some
> kind of syntax ... Careful structuring of the
> biophysical environment would be required, for
> the actors themselves are symbols in the semiotic,
> and a recognisable set of theatres for action must
> be provided' (Ibid:xliv).

Here then was a possible means of recognising the significance of the physical and the environment if it could be shown to be part of a meaningful system of communication.

Children are obviously not devoid of speech, as in Ardener's hypothetical case, yet perhaps they cannot be fully appreciated or best interpreted by their speech alone. We may learn more by looking at how the bio-physical environment can be used as an alternative form of communication. As we shall see there is almost no limit to what their bodies and things in the environment may be.[1] What is important is their association with each other in various ways.

The environment as a whole has no intrinsic meaning. Objects of the playground, the children's own bodies, and movements are the main 'elements' as can be seen from the list in Appendix I, which was drawn up from Iona and Peter Opie's book Children's Games in Street and Playground and from my own observations at St. Barnabas.

This list of the main elements of the environment and aspects of the children themselves cannot be exhaustive since all these objects, positions and combinations, which might seem an odd mixture to adults, are constantly being added to by children to vary, lengthen, modernise or increase the excitement of their games. To anthropologists this list should not perhaps seem so odd, for there are certain 'things' which are widely and frequently used as symbols. Leach has mentioned some of the more prominent symbols which occur "in the context of a

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1. Fortes describes how children in Taleland see objects as having multiple uses in their play (1970:61).

ritual sequence" in an article for Hinde's book on Non-Verbal Communication (1972). The symbols which crop up more frequently than others are:

1. Adornments of the body
2. Actual parts of the body
3. Gross differences of posture
4. Relative position
5. Limb movement (gestures)
6. Pace
7. Nutrients
8. Bodily excretion
9. Facial expressions

All these are certainly manifest in the context of children's games; and we may also add the following as being categories of elements likely to be meaningful:

10. Movements of progression
11. The immediate environment
12. Boundaries (territorial layout)
13. Family
14. Animals
15. Objects that can be extensions of self (e.g. sticks, ropes).

How does this bio-physical environment, which constitutes the main equipment for the apparent confusion and anarchy, obtain meaning and become important as part of the communication in the playground? At St. Barnabas the specific environment at the mercy of the children's imagination consisted of benches, a main door leading into the ground, the door dividing the two play areas, a pot of sand, some stairs leading down to a shed, two drains in the middle of one play area, and the brick walls. As I have said, each object acquires meaning or value through its relative position with other objects of the specific context. Thus the two drains have value in races in so far as they present different possible starting places. The little ones use the drain nearest the wall, the older ones use the further one. With this view in mind, St. Barnabas playground begins to appear at odds with any values which might be applied by any adult visitor. There are two benches. These are, however, the boxing-ring. This is made explicit by the two upturned benches placed at right angles against one of the brick walls. Inside both boys are standing on one leg with their arms folded. This, then is no ordinary fight: it is a cock fight. Hopping all the time each boy tries to butt and unbalance the other. Attention is focused on the exertion and skill involved. Who will be forced to put his foot on the ground first, or worse who will be pushed over and have to face the jeers of the onlookers? Balance and courageous buffeting are the values here esteemed. These values indicate the context in which the activity is to be understood. Thus the boy who is unbalanced must give up his place in the ring and allow another boy to be the 'cock'. The presence of the benches emphasises the dual nature of the combat, and its serious aspect. Nobody outside of the ring may intervene. It is the combination of all these elements which gives the meaning to the whole. Yet hopping, the benches, the presence of two boys only, the folded arms, the attitude of the onlookers all take on different values in other contexts. Hence, on another day, the benches take on the meaning of the basic structure for a house and the greatest value for

the children is the pleasure of actually making the house, the gathering of jackets and bits of wood or anything else at hand to make the benches domestic. These same benches provide the equipment for whatever is valued at that moment, whether horses, hospitals or army tanks. Likewise other children may be seen hopping around the playground, but no-one would consider that a cock-fight was in progress if there is only one person hopping and many other children acting in a taunting fashion around him or her. In this situation the value of hopping is as a handicap so that the others may represent foolish chickens, trying to escape the fox. The advantage for the chickens on their two legs to get away is so obvious that the children have to act in an artless and scatty way to ever get caught. Sometimes there are several boys surrounded by the benches, but they will rarely be fighting each other. They are a gang. The benches here represent a fortress which has been captured, and which must be protected from rebel invaders, so that the crossed arms demonstrate the strength of the fortified territory. The outsiders are a danger and show it by trying to scramble over the defending benches. All the time there are war-cries, grabs, pushes, taunts, each act conforming to the defending and usurping demands of the game.

This same pattern of changing values continues day after day and in every corner of the playground. The door between the two play areas, in their relation to the two platforms on either side, is valued as a swing over a dangerous moat, as a way of 'showing off' and distracting the attention of a group of girls busy dressing and undressing a model-like doll, whilst on another day the two platforms alone represent the distance between teacher and pupils. The walls are castles for a king to sit upon, or 'safety' in a game of 'chase'. The hands of several children in a ring represent a decision, whilst two hands joined together can be understood as the making of a bargain. From this type of analysis of the environment of the playground in terms of a meaningful system, we indeed find that it reveals a structure of great range. The objects of the environment are incorporated into play not for what they are in themselves but for the meaning given them. But as Gombrich points out, the objects have to qualify (1963:4).

I shall now go further into this approach adding some of the Opies' material to my own. I hope however to see the 'games' from a point of view different from that of the Opies, and that is the view that I have suggested above, which maintains that the contexts which define the meanings of the biophysical environment are the imaginary or 'fantasy' situations agreed upon by the group. It seems that certain situations are played so often that children know the rules which their behaviour should adhere to. I found myself making many mistakes at St. Barnabus because I often did not possess the know-how of play. All the children know that in 'warfare' you aim your machine gun at others, but occasionally you must fall down dead for a while and then get up and continue as before. You must know the minimum correct procedure or you are not playing correctly. One must know the criteria appropriate for play, but there is nothing absolute about them.

In many activities that one can see in playgrounds, one child's hand and the act of touching are the most important elements. Children know the meaning of these two units from the other elements that are present, and the imaginary situation involved. When one child is identified with the idea of a chaser, all the others focus on avoiding

direct contact with that one hand. The possibility of a touch
from the hand is what is significant and all attention is fixed
on using space to its utmost to increase the distance between
oneself and the hand. As soon as someone has been touched attention
turns to avoiding the new hand which has taken over the power of
potential touch. The value of the hand is contained in its power
to touch which is also transferred by means of touch. However, in
another situation, a scarf twisted as tightly as possible with the
ends brought together, can be seen to act as an extension of the
hand, for it also touches; but it also adds its own value. It does
not only touch as the hand does but has the power to 'hit' and
therefore also changes another element, accentuating the space
available and the need to keep away as far as possible from the
extra-potent hand of the pursuing player. When elements are
added or substituted, the meaning of the other elements alter too.
In a game very similar to the well known 'tig' the power of touching
is not contained in one hand but in two hands clasped together in
front with two fingers pointing forward. The running in this context
has a different value, for now as with the scarf, the children are
running away from what for children stands for the dangerous horns of
a 'bull'. This allows the 'bull' to make bellowing noises and the
children to scream in pretend fear. But also there are specifications
about the power contained in the horns. The bull's touch can be seen
to be ineffective if the hands are not held properly when he touches,
or if he has not held his horns in fornt of him in the appropriate
fashion when chasing. Attention in this activity focuses on how the
bull holds his horns as much as on avoiding contact with them. The
element of pace, in the chasing and the running is also affected by
the change in the type of touch, for no-one can run as fast or as easily
with their hands in this awkward 'bull' position. Thus the imaginary
element of being chased by a bull may emerge and the aspect of running
at all costs is slightly eased.

The idea of constraints and variations may help us to understand
other situations in the playground. For example, if children add
the element of an area of 'safety' (as in 'Off-Ground He'), we can see that
the emphasis on running away from the touch is exchanged for an
emphasis on running for 'safe spots'. In addition, other objects
in the playground such as flowerpots, railings, walls, or dustbins
begin to have a value, that of 'safety', from being 'off-ground',
whereas previously they were insignificant. The actions of the chaser
change too because now he has some relation with those on the safety
areas as well as those running around. He can closely guard an unsteady
safety spot until the unfortunate player loses his balance and is
touched as soon as he puts a foot on the ground. On the other hand
the players also have an advantage; they can taunt the chaser and then
suddenly return to a hidden 'safety spot'. We can see again that each
element acquires its value in relation to the others.

To understand more fully the significance of these changes it is
important to realise that behind all of them lies a chain of elements
which is constant. Certain elements follow other elements producing
a sequence which conveys the specific context to the children, but in
the semantic space of one element there is the possibility of the many
alternatives I have been talking about. Table I shows the sequence and
the possible substitutes of the activities I have been talking about.
From it we can see that the main sequence of the type of activity I
have been describing must -

1. Identify and number those "who are 'it', or 'he'
   or 'het', i.e. those who take the part that is
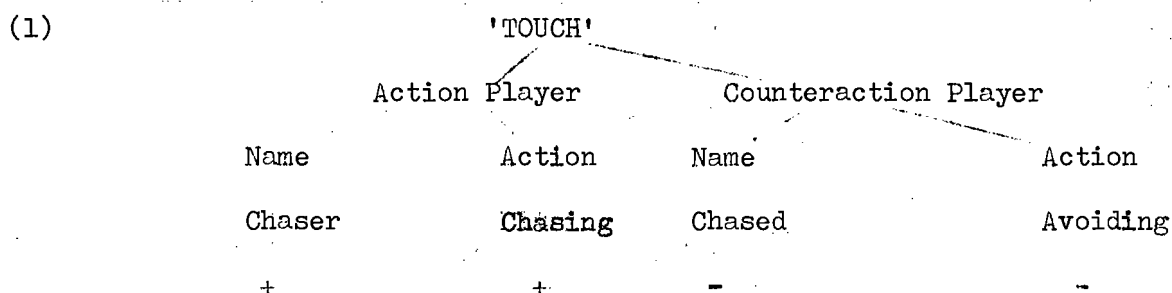   different from the majority.

T A B L E   I

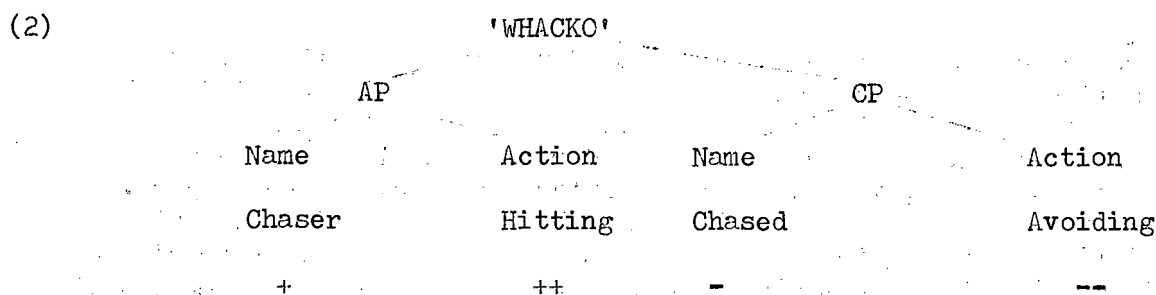| One person	running	touch	others	running	with no safety	if touched.. become chaser	no release
One person with part. character	walking	with hands together	their shadows	walking	safety off-ground	become chaser when 3 lives lost	released by other player crossing in front
Bull	hopping	with scarf	specific part of the body	hopping	safe if wearing colour	join chaser	by other players touch
Witch	bunny jumps	with stick		bunny jumps	safe if touching iron	beaten & then become chaser	by other players going under legs
Pairs	on all fours - inside out	with 2 sticks		on all fours - inside out	safe if touching wood	excluded from game	by other players leapfrogging one
Pairs - facing diff. ways	bicycling	with 3 whackings		bicycling	safe if touching colours	paralysed	
Pairs - one on back	swinging	with ball		swinging	green black brown red	hold part of body touched	
Pairs - eyes shut	running in a chain	with slipper		off ground	safe if crouching		
No person - Ball	off-ground	pushing to the ground		on trees	safe if released		
Many persons	on trees only			following lines			
Many persons + holding hands	following lines			on roundabouts			
	on roundabouts			holding parts of the body			

2. Specify a movement or boundary or environment
which particularise the style of action of 'it'.

3. Decide whether the 'touch' is to be a) person (s)
    b) extension of person(s)
    in objects.
    c) other additional qualifi-
    cations for the effect-
    iveness of the 'touch'.

4. Indicate what is to be 'touched'.

5. Specify a movement, boundary or environment which
particularises the style of general action.

6. Decide what effect the 'touch' will have on its
victims and whether there is any possibility of
reprieve from it.

Obviously the choice of elements within these categories alters the
equilibrium of the game either in favour of the 'it(s)' or in favour
of the players in general.

The game of 'touch', as I shall call it, like other children's
activities, might be seen as the development, equilibrium and resolution
of the values attributed to two opposing sides centred around some
activity which for each side has a different meaning. In this view
it is the central activity, and the nature and balance of the opposing
sides which decides to a large extent what a game will be like and what
rules will be involved. Perhaps some diagrams may make this clearer.
If we see the simple game of 'touch' in which one person chases the
rest, and no sooner has the chaser succeeded in touching someone ...
then that person becomes the new chaser (Opie and Opie 1969:62)
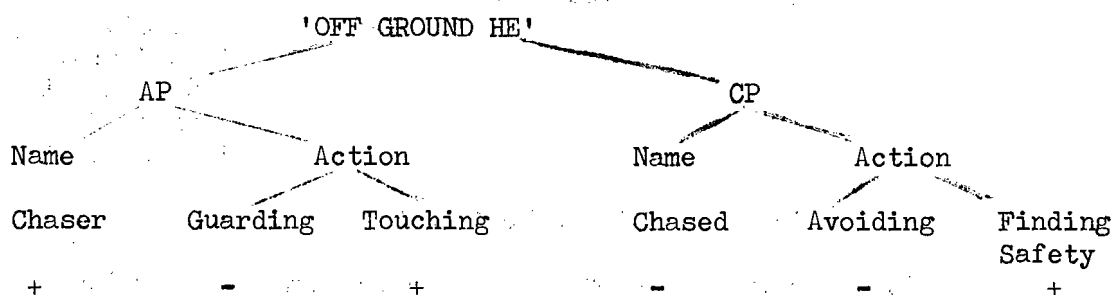as follows:

(1)

	'TOUCH'		
Action Player		Counteraction Player	
Name	Action	Name	Action
Chaser	Chasing	Chased	Avoiding
+	+	-	-

and the game of 'Whacko', which uses a scarf or a slipper instead of
the hand as:

(2)

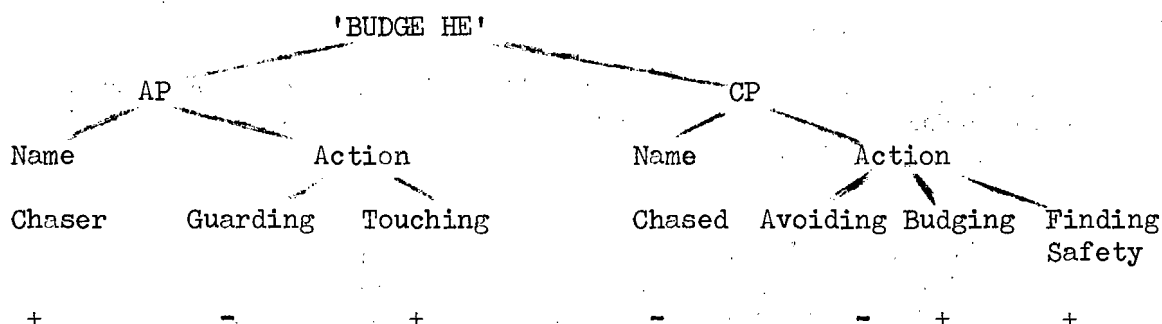|	'WHACKO'		
AP		CP	
Name	Action	Name	Action
Chaser	Hitting	Chased	Avoiding
+	++	-	--

then we can see that the basic pattern is the same, while the balance is
slightly in favour of the 'Action Player'. In 'Bull' the pattern is also
the same, but the balance this time is in favour of the 'Counteraction
Player', who has no handicaps as does the Action Player. However in the
game that is known as 'Off-Ground He', the Counteraction Player has more
layers of activity to deal with, ones which are active as well as passive.
The game seems to be much more popular than those in which the counteraction
is totally negative.

(3)

```
                    'OFF GROUND HE'
        AP                              CP
   Name        Action            Name        Action
  Chaser   Guarding  Touching   Chased   Avoiding  Finding
                                                   Safety
    +          -         +         -         -        +
```

'Budge He', where the general activity is even more complicated, is even more popular.

(4)

```
                      'BUDGE HE'
       AP                              CP
  Name        Action            Name        Action
 Chaser   Guarding  Touching   Chased  Avoiding Budging Finding
                                                        Safety

   +         -         +          -        -      +       +
```
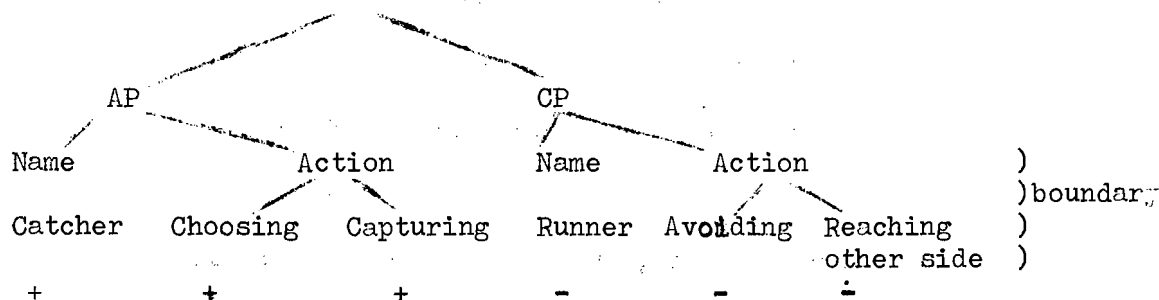
Although each game can be elaborated by adding a relevant supplement from the repertoires of elements, the main attention still focuses on touching and avoiding, on chasing and being chased.

   In other games the focus of attention on touching is linked with the idea of specific boundaries. The basic pattern is similar to those we have seen above but the extra focus of attention allows the possibility of an even greater number of variations. A diagrammatic expression of these games might be as follows -

(5)

```
          AP                        CP
    Name        Action        Name        Action           )
                                                            )boundary
  Catcher  Choosing  Capturing  Runner  Avoiding  Reaching  )
                                                  other side )
    +         +          +         -        -         -
```

There are considerable possibilities of variations on the number and formation of the actor and counteractor positions, in the kind of boundary, in the form of the AP and CP actions, in the type of balance between the two sides (such as the use of space, direct or indirect contact, type of movement allowed), in the extent of interdependency of the players, in how safety and respite are achieved. What is interesting is that the same variations occur again and again in games which the Opies have divided up into Chasing Games, Catching Games, Seeking Games, Hunting Games, Racing Games, Duelling Games, Exerting Games, Daring Games, Guessing Games, Acting Games and Pretending Games. But since these so-called 'variations' occur so frequently, perhaps they should be seen as the main patterning themes, and those aspects, such as running, hunting etc. which the Opies

consider the classificatory themes should be seen as the variations.
Leach has warned us in Rethinking Anthropology against 'butterfly
collecting', that is comparison 'of the arrangement of things
according to their types and subtypes' (1961:3). Possibly for children the
important aspect of a game, its reference point, is whether a ball is being
used, whether the action is hopping, whether they join the 'it' when
they have been 'tigged'. Classification in terms of one almost arbitrary
frame of reference is, as Leach says, like arranging 'your butterflies
according to their colour, or their size, or the shape of their wings,
according to the whim of the moment' but in doing this 'you must realise
that your prior arrangement creates an initial bias from which it is
later extremely difficult to escape' (Ibid:3).

In spite of this warning Leach himself does not object to the Opies'
'types and sub-types' kind of classification of games. In a review of the
Opies' book Children's Games in Street and Playground 1969, Leach accepts
the twelve different types of games offered and compares them to grammatical
rules in language,

> 'within the framework of a single set of grammatical
> rules and a limited vocabulary of words, each of us
> is capable of making an indefinite number of new
> utterances. We don't just go on repeatedly saying
> the same thing. And children's games have this same
> quality: the basic types (the grammatical rules)
> are rather limited - the Opies distinguish only 12 -
> but within these types the capacity for new invention
> and combinations has no limit' (1969:565).

I have already shown the patterns, variations, and rules which can be
derived from the types as related by the Opies. But as I have also tried
to indicate the basic elements in the games and the variations occur
again and again. Who then is to say which is the basic pattern and
which the variation? What are the classificatory types and what should
be treated as the 'new invention and combinations'? We should remember
the words of Wittgenstein on family resemblances, that is,

> 'the tendency to look for something in common to all
> the entities which we commonly subsume under a general
> term. We are inclined to think that there must be
> something in common to all games, say, and that this
> common property is the justification for applying the
> general term 'game' to the various games; whereas games
> form a family, the members of which have family likenesses.
> Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows
> and others again the same way of walking, and these
> likenesses overlap' (1964:17).

This perspective leads me to look and see whether there is anything in
common rather than accepting the distinctions between 'Chasing', 'Catching',
'Running' and so on, as labels for different classes of games or 'Play' and
'Games' as concepts for different forms of activity. The Opies themselves
are aware that there is running through children's games a relationship
between those which are 'fanciful', between those which are more 'ritualistic',
those which are 'romantic' and those which are 'severely competitive'
(see Opie and Opie 1969:4), the child's preferences changing as he matures.
And yet if we look again, those which are called 'fanciful' such as
'Mothers and Fathers', 'Playing Schools' or 'Playing Horses' also have

something in common with the supposedly more 'formalized' style of the
other games. Rejecting the Opies' distinction 'Play is unrestricted,
games have rules' (Ibid:2), I suggest that we may extend our appreciation
of children's activities if we see the similarity between 'play' and 'games'
as revealed by Vygotsky. He proposes that there is no such thing as play
without rules or games without some imaginary situation (see Vygotsky, 1966).

All I want to emphasise here is that the groupings of games as chosen
by the Opies is as arbitrary as anyone else's. If we look for example at
the games of 'Poison', 'Crusts and Crumbs' or 'What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?',
described under the subtype 'Suspense Starts' in the chapter on 'Chasing
Games' (Ibid:99), we can see a close relationship with other games described
in the chapter on 'Catching Games'. The idea of touching is linked with
that of boundaries, and the action involves elements of choosing and
capturing, avoiding and reaching a particular place as in those called
'Catching Games', such as 'Farmer, Farmer, May We Cross Your Golden River?'
or 'Cigarettes'. However if we wanted to emphasise the choosing and
suspense style of the games we would have to admit a close similarity with
those called 'Racing Games', such as 'May I?', 'Aunts and Uncles', 'Letters'
etc. in which players can only move when a certain letter, relation or
instruction has been given.

The problem of which salient features to emphasise has bothered most
writers who have tried to classify or find some common order in different
games. Should the observer try and find order in terms of some underlying,
organising syntax, as Leach has suggested; in terms of certain conspicuous
features, as the Opies have done; in terms of different capabilities involved,
as Culin has done, with the concepts of chance, dexterity, pure skill, or
calculation - (see Culin 1907 or Roberts, Arth and Bush 1959 who followed
the same line of approach); or in terms of some general expression, the
view taken by Callois (1961), who saw games either dominated by impulse
or control or allowed opportunity for human experience? Or perhaps we
should try to look at games in terms of children's own classification -
the approach I myself prefer?

I would suggest that one of the clues to the children's classification
of the games may be found in the names they give them. When they shout
'Let's play sardines', what they are choosing is the fun of squeezing
together tightly in a small hidden corner. In 'Strokey Back', the value
is the opportunity to thump another player on the back; and in 'Block' the
possibility of preventing somebody from making their way back to the
starting-place. In 'Tin Can Tommy' it is the clatter of the can which
determines the moment for hiding. By looking at the names the same game
is given in different parts of the country, we can see that the variations
tend to enhance and support one main value. Sardines, for example is also
known as 'Sardines in a Tin', 'Sardines and Tomatoes', 'Squashed Sardines',
'Squashed Sardines and Tomatoes'. These could scarcely be more expressive
names; the mingling of sardines and tomatoes in a tiny tin accentuates the
cramped position the children have to maintain while waiting for the
seeker to find them.

From this viewpoint we begin to see more clearly how children evaluate
their games and what their main purposes are in playing them. What they
seem to enjoy most is identifying themselves or one of their number with
some animal (often called "Mr _____ ") or with fairies, witches, ghosts,
monsters, Kings, Queens, old men or women, farmers, policemen, mothers

and fathers and so forth. Or certain old-fashioned names, Jack, Johnny, Polly are used, which again suggest an element of fantasy. Sometimes the pleasure is found in doing things which handicap or restrict movement in some way, like blinding the eyes, or hopping - or movements may be extended by the force of an object such as a ball or even by each other when they link together in a chain. Corners or positions may be endowed with a deciding influence in a game involving such actions as finding, kicking, kissing, knocking somebody, releasing someone, running, or stealing. 'Tig' depends on the importance of touch.

There is almost always the desire for a formal start yet the game itself often restarts almost automatically as though it had a momentum of its own to give everybody a chance. Then there is the allure of luck indicated by the numerous counting out games.

In this paper I have made some attempt to show the problems and possibilities of understanding the activities and values of children in the playground, and of trying to apprehend them in their own idiom. Meanings and values have emerged from what initially appeared in the playground as chaos; but they are meanings and values specific to children, perceptible to them but not to adults.

<div align="right">Charlotte Hardman.</div>

Appendix I.

Person; Two Persons; Many persons; Persons in chains: holding hands; Two persons holding hands; Persons holding hands in a circle; Persons holding hands in a line; Persons sitting piggy-back; Three persons sitting on backs; Four.. six.. eight persons on backs; Persons facing different ways; Person blindfold; Person blindfold and hands behind back; Hands clasped together; Hands holding particular part of the body; Elbows; Person suddenly turning round; Person with one leg tied to partner; Immobile as directed; Immobility of body-part hit by ball; Immobile in posture as pushed; Position of fingers; Clenched fist; Feet running; Running backwards; Running sideways; Hopping; Hopping with both feet together; Hopping with arms folded; Hopping with arms folded and turning around; Walking; Crawling; Creeping; Rolling; Skipping; Crouching; Ducking head; Walking on hands (someone holding feet); Moving forward heel to toe; Jumping; Jumping over another person; Jumping from crouching; Jumping over sticks; Jumping over dice and moving forward as indicated by dice; Jumping over lying down figures; Bob jump; Jumping with legs apart; Slide forward; Dodging; Dancing; Turning somersaults; Spinning around; Stepping through own linked hands; Spitting; Whirling arms; Slapping; Hitting knuckles; Stamping on feet; Hitting back of the neck; On all fours (inside out); Touching; Touching with hands together; Touching special part of the body; Touching the ground; Crawling under someone's legs; Tickling; Seeing; Naming;Particular words (to be elaborated on later); Releasing; Releasing three times; Counting; Hiding; Giving orders; Guessing; Chance; Kissing; Choosing partner; Choosing opponent; Choosing subsequent action; Running between two set lines; Safety; Divided territories; Lampost; Walls; Trees; Drains; Pavement; Kerb; Netball pitch; Corners; Door bells; Colour; Iron; Wood; Green; Yellow; Cigarette Names; Names of relations; Letters; Initials; Film star-names; Comic names; Number of fingers; What was eaten for breakfast; Articles in shop window; Time; Handkerchief; Similarities; Differences; Wet; Dry; Hot; Cold; Shadow; Lines; Off-ground; A tin can; Bicycles; Swings; Roundabout; Scarf; Slipper; Hat; Own clothes; Personal characteristics; Eggs; Birds; Beasts; Flowers; Towns; Lolly-sticks; Flower-heads; Rope; Knife; Ball; Conkers; Sticks; Stones; Manhole; Twigs; Matchstick.

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