An Analytical Ethnography of Children's Agency, Power and Social Relations

An Actor-Network Theory Approach

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Declaration

I declare that none of the work contained within this thesis has been submitted for any other degree at any other university. The contents found herein have been composed by the candidate, Sharon A. Ogilvie-Whyte.

Sharon A. Ogilvie-Whyte

For My Father

Thomas Henry Ogilvie

~ Thank you Dad.

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I would like to thank...

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There are so many people I should mention who in their various and not always obvious ways have helped and supported me over the last few years. First and foremost, however, I need to thank the children, parents, teachers and educational professionals who allowed me, for a short time, to invade their worlds.

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Abstract

This thesis connects with and extends *inter alia* the recent but as yet peripheral move within the sociology of childhood to open up children's agency to empirical analysis. Drawing heuristically upon actor-network theory and thought of this kind its aim is to expose the networks of heterogeneous associations upon which children's agency and power depends. Focusing upon children's every day play activities; the analytical lens is extended to consider the role of nonhumans that are embedded in children's mundane play interactions within their local neighbourhood and within their school playground. In doing so, this thesis argues that nonhumans are crucial participants in social interaction that are implicated in and pivotal to the heterogeneous networks of associations that children, as heterogeneous engineers, actively create to achieve their particular goals and desires. As a corollary to this, an analytical incorporation of nonhumans has drawn attention to the wider role that nonhumans play in the life worlds of children. In respect to this, the argument this thesis advances is that nonhumans, in their diverse forms, are functionally important in holding children's social relations in place. Drawn from ethnographic fieldwork with children, this thesis argues that children's agency, power and social relations, take their form and are an outcome of the heterogeneous associations that take place between humans and 'things'.

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Glossary

Scottish Words, Phrases and Terms Used in the Text

Ach Oh.
An And.
And all and everything.
Aw All.
Aw thing Everything.
Aye Yes.
Ba Ball.
Bairns Children.
Batter Beat; Physically assault.
Cannae Can not.
Cos Because.
Crap Rubbish; Not Good.
Dae Do.
Dead Really.
Doesnae Does not.
Doon Down.
Dose; dosser or dosses A person lacking intelligence.
Dug Dog.
Dunno I do not know.
Fives Five-a-side football.
Footie Football.
Gettin Getting
Gid Good.
Goalie Goal keeper.
Greeter Person who cries a lot.
Greetin Crying.
Hae Have.

Hee Haw Trouble.
Isnae Is not.
Jannie Janitor.
Ken You know.
Midget A small person.
Mink Poor Person.
Mong A derogatory term for a person with either physical or mental impairments.
Naebody Nobody.
No Not.
Roon Around.
Roond Around or round.
Rubbin Rubbing.
Sap A person lacking in strength.
Tae To.
Titchy Small.
Totsie Small.
Trainees Trainers.
Wee Small.
Wee'er Smaller.
Wellie To hit, strike or kick with force.
Wi With.
Woose A person lacking in strength.
Yeah Yes.
Yi You.

In practice research needs to be messy and heterogeneous, because that is the way it, research, actually is. And also, more importantly, it needs to be messy because that is the way the largest part of the world is. Messy, unknowable in a regular and routinised way. Unknowable, therefore, in many ways that are definite or coherent...Clarity doesn't help. Disciplined lack of clarity. That may be what we need...We need to understand that our methods are more or less unruly assemblages.

~ John Law, 2003.

Chapter One

Taking Account of the Means of Production: A Reflexive Biography of the Development of the Thesis

Introduction

Liz Stanley (1990) suggests that good research is that which takes account of the means of its own production. Failure to do so, she implies, results in alienated knowledge. Here, Stanley is of course discussing issues of reflexivity in ethnographic fieldwork and the notion that through invoking self-awareness researchers should creatively use their insights into their own personal, cultural and historical context in their ethnographic pursuits (Okley 1975 cited in Davis 1998). This process is considered to involve 'personal exposures' (Davis 1998:331) by the researcher that facilitate the recognition of the role of the self in the research process, so minimising, although not completely eliminating, subjectivity (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Ely and Anzul 1991). Commenting on reflexive practices, Geertz (1973) considers that the researcher's self-awareness can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the culture being researched. The perception being that the differences that exist between researcher and researched can be exploited through hermeneutics as way of developing and understanding data (Rabinow 1977).

It is commonplace for ethnographic texts to contain reflexive narratives that incorporate these 'personal exposures' in the name of reflexivity almost as a matter of complicity. Invariably, these personal narratives appear at the beginning of an account in

introductions, first chapters or brief autobiographical statements as a prelude to formal description (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Here positionalities are confessed although usually reduced to the essentialised attributes of class, gender, ethnicity and race (Cupples 2002; Butler 2001). Once done, the researcher can rest easy in the knowledge that he / she has perhaps satisfied the requisite condition to acknowledge the effects of their positionalities upon their research and lessened audience worries over personal subjectivity (Bulter 2001).

I have thought at length about what it means to acknowledge the effects of the self upon research in such ways and what the standard treatment of reflexivity in ethnographic practice and writing, particularly in the context of a PhD, excludes. For the most part, it appears that reflexivity is conventionally understood and considered in relation to the non-academic self of the researcher. Here, the researcher is urged to critically reflect upon and conceptualise how the sum of their life experiences outside of academia impacts upon the research process and the subsequent construction of the knowledge that is produced. What appears to be missing from this is a consideration of the academic self of the researcher and how this self influences the research process, the data generated and the explanations that are advanced.

Davis (1998:331) draws attention to this in a discussion of reflexivity when he argues that the 'researcher's world has two parts'. Drawing on (Campbell 1995) he suggests that one part of this world incorporates the non-academic based self which contains the researcher's cultural prejudices and preconceptions out with academia. The other part is

the academic self which contains the researcher's academic prejudices and preconceptions. Thus, he argues that the researcher may recognise 'that there are two voices at work in their head' (1998:332).

Exposure of this academic self in ethnographic practice and writing rarely seems to go beyond obligatory discussions of theory and methodology. One reason for this is that it is taken almost as a given that the influence of, for example, a particular theoretical position or stance will result in a different interpretation or set of explanations than that which would occur had another been advanced (cf. Denzin 1997). This is emphasised by those who engage in the reanalysis of their own existing ethnographic work (Burawoy 2003).

Generally speaking however, the academic self with its various preconceptions and prejudices appears to be presented as static in research accounts, that is, as a stable, non-moving entity. Reflecting here on my own experience, I wish to suggest that this peculiar vision of the academic self is perhaps misleading. I say this because it denies what I have experienced as an unstable and continuously changing relationship with my own discipline, in so far, as I have questioned, resisted and changed my own academic preconceptions and prejudices many times over before reaching what could perhaps be considered as a stable viewpoint. In part, this could be related to what I suggest to be a third, albeit related, voice at work in the head of the doctoral candidate – that of the 'student researcher'.

This voice is silenced in the final written account of the doctoral thesis. Yet, it is, I argue,

as integral to the research process and its final outcome as either the voice of the non-academic or academic self. Its narrative is as rich a resource on the decisions and choices that have influenced and informed the development and execution of the work as either the reflexive narrative of the non-academic or the less reflexive (but nevertheless present) academic self. These arguments can be contextualised in relation to the accepted objectives of a PhD.

PhD handbooks and guidelines inform the student researcher that the PhD has two primary objectives: First, and most explicitly, that the student researcher is required to produce a substantial and original contribution to knowledge (Nightingale 1984). Second, and less explicitly, the student researcher should become proficient in the process of doing research (Phillips and Pugh 1990). Hence, and as Hanrahan *et al.* (1999:401) state, 'doing a doctorate is an experience in learning'. Yet the traditional genre of writing empirical doctoral research seemingly requires that the act of learning is divorced from both the act of research and the communication of that act. Thus, the choice of question, theoretical framework, methodology, findings and so on are usually presented to the reader of the thesis as if they were preliminary thoughts that developed in isolation from the executive processes of the PhD. Little, if anything at all, is said of the interaction between learning and the research process.

Contrary to this, narratives of the sort to which I refer frequently appear in post-doctoral publications after the PhD has been conferred, presumably because the need to bear in mind an audience that may be perceived as reluctant to accept deviations from the

standard genre of thesis writing perhaps no longer present as a issue of concern (cf. Pole 2000). This suggests, that for some, the communication of the interaction between learning in the context of a PhD and the research process is worthy of serious consideration.

My own view is that this interaction informs and is crucial to the eventual form that the thesis takes and the knowledge that is produced within it. Consequently, I wish to suggest that if *I am the instrument of research* (Guba and Lincoln 1989) then there is a place for the documentation of these aspects of the learning process in the written presentation of the PhD thesis. Here, I share affinity with Mary Hanrahan's (1999:404) stance when she writes:

> 'I see my own task of making 'an original and substantial contribution
> to knowledge' as being a larger process than that of doing and reporting
> some linear process of empirical research, from a supposedly objective,
> or at least, stable, viewpoint. For me research is much more of a
> hermeneutic process, with its meaning being rewritten many times
> along the way, as the whole is continually being reconceptualised in the
> light of new learning.'

These sentiments are particularly relevant to the processes involved in the production of this thesis. The 'new learning' that I did had an incontestable influence upon the development of the work, the changes made to the research problem and the adoption of a

radically different theoretical and methodological approach than that contained within the original research vision. The documentation of this process I consider essential for a coherent and faithful reading of how and why this thesis came into being. I consider that a failure to do so would seriously obscure from the reader an important facet in the production of the knowledge presented here.

In this chapter, I wish to draw on and amalgamate three different reflexive narratives in my account of the means in which this thesis was produced: the narrative of the non-academic self; the narrative of the academic self; and the related narrative of the student researcher. Through these three subject positions I unfold the 'story' of how this thesis *became*. In doing so, I attend to the motivations that influenced the original research vision, the changes made to this vision as a result of my engagements with the literature prior to and during the exploratory and main phases of fieldwork and the iterative process of reflection and modification of the focus of observations in accordance with analytical developments.

It is difficult to adequately communicate the complexities of this story and I am mindful that I have edited my voices for a public stance. It is also inevitably partial, in so far, as it draws out only those aspects that I consider to have had a major effect upon the development of the thesis. For reasons of clarity and also because it seems the most logical approach, I have presented this story chronologically. I begin with the motives that informed the original topic of investigation and move through a discussion of how my identity as a sociologically trained student researcher influenced my engagements

with a research literature firmly colonised by psychology. Following this, I reveal the discrepancies within this literature that led to my focus on power. My discussion then turns to the interaction that took place between the conceptual and empirical world as I 'entered the field' and the subsequent shaping of my thesis in light of this interaction.

My main objective here is to communicate how this thesis metamorphisised into an analytical ethnography of agency, power and children's social relations. Part of this objective is to illustrate how actor-network theory came to both inform and shape my analysis. I conclude my discussion by outlining the main themes addressed in this thesis as result of this process and the structure of these themes in the text.

The Original Vision

My original intention was to conduct a study into children's perspectives on bullying. My choice of research topic was motivated entirely by a combination of my youngest son's then current difficulties as a 'victim' of verbal bullying in school and the memory that this prompted of my own experiences as a bullied child. At the time my then six year old son was in contact with an educational psychologist charged with the remit of teaching him 'coping strategies' to deal with the verbal bullying he was experiencing. The process had angered me. The relevant authorities within my son's school had informed me that they were more concerned about how my son would eventually react to those children who constantly chastised him, than the chastisement itself. Verbal chastisement, I was told, was to be expected. As a child whose physique and strength was relatively large compared to his peers, (which incidentally was the reason he was

chastised) and because it had been noted he was beginning to react aggressively towards his chastisers, I was told that my son had to learn to 'manage his anger' and 'to react appropriately'.

Whilst I acknowledged his aggressive response had been becoming a source of concern, I was angered by the way in which his own narrative of how the chastisement was affecting him had been ignored. When he asked me why no one had listened to him, I realised that he also recognised that his voice had not been heard. Although I was a teenager when I experienced my own victim career, my son's recognition that his voice was not being heard resonated with my own memory of how the relevant authorities treated my case. Like my son, I experienced verbal chastisement founded upon my difference vis-à-vis my peers. As a rural child attending a city centre school I was subjected daily to verbal taunts and name calling that drew on negative connotations of rural citizens as 'interbred', as 'bumpkins' (a simple rustic person), and as 'teuchters' (a stupid person) [1]. This was interwoven with taunts based upon my status as an adopted child which resulted in my having to endure daily renditions of the song 'nobody's child'.

In so far as these were vivid and painful enough memories for me to empathise with the emotional dimension of my son's experience, the failure of the school to adequately deal with my bullies and dismiss my views through repeatedly telling me (and my parents) that this was 'character building' and 'part of growing up' gave me some understanding of how it felt as a child to have my opinions silenced. My own case resulted in school

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[1] The meaning of this colloquialism varies in Scotland. For example, in the west coast of Scotland it is used to refer to any person who lives in the north of Scotland.

refusal, truanting and my eventual early exit from compulsory education. Therefore, I recognised that bullying, if left unresolved, can have serious and lasting consequences for a child or young person.

Against this background, I developed a thesis proposal with the explicit aim of putting the child's voice at the centre of the analysis. My concern with the voice of the child naturally led me towards an *a priori* and pragmatic adoption of the social actor paradigm. At the time I had no prior academic engagements with the sociology of childhood or its theoretical paradigms. The approach seduced me because it appeared to support my remit to privilege the voices of children. Additionally, some initial 'dipping' into the psychologically dominated literature on school bullying suggested a lack of empirical research that took children's perspectives and understandings into account, something which is now becoming increasingly recognised (cf. Gumpel and Meadan 2000; Oliver and Candappa 2003). More recently, this is becoming increasingly linked to children's rights discourses (cf. Smith 2000; Smith 2004).

Somewhat relatedly, was the issue of the choice of an appropriate method for privileging the voices of children and the recognition that psychological research on bullying was firmly monopolised by quantitative methods and experimental techniques that did not appear (even when claiming the contrary) to seek or listen to children's perspectives and understandings. This is something which Woodhead and Faulkner (2000:11) comment on when discussing, in more general terms, psychological research into children and childhood:

'Much of this research expertise is all about empathising with the children's experience, understanding their beliefs and respecting their concerns. But in another sense this research is not about 'listening to the child'. While research transcripts are often rich in this kind of material, they are generally analysed and interpreted in terms of more abstract questions which, as a rule, reflect researchers' rather than children's experiences, beliefs and concerns....Most often, children's actions and thoughts are interpreted against models of psychological processes, stages of relative competence, and / or deviations from 'normality'.

Critiques of this sort (including Woodhead and Faulkner's) recognise, that for the most part, this is intimately bound up with a cultural research climate in which the orthodoxy of the scientific model dominates. In so far as privileging the child's voice is concerned, sociologists of childhood have argued that ethnographically informed techniques are perhaps more suitable:

'Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research' (Prout and James 1997:8).

Therefore, it seemed logical to conclude, that given the relative absence of children's perspectives in psychological studies of bullying, the implication that this may be interwoven with the dominance of quantitative methods and my own concern with children's voices, a more qualitative approach would be more timely and more suited to my objectives. However, such an approach also coincided with my own, and Strauss and Corbin (1998:28) describe this as 'obdurate' rejection of quantitative methods and my then belief that quantitative methods are unable to yield anything meaningful. I have since shifted my position to a consideration that both approaches have their benefits and drawbacks and that 'also with statistics, as with qualitative data collection and analysis, one can never be certain whether one has captured the essence of the situation' (Gephart 1998 cited in Strauss and Corbin 1998). Additionally, I have also considered that it is good advice to adopt a more pragmatic position where questions of method are concerned (cf. Bryman 1988), that is, to allow methods of data collection and analysis to be selected on the basis of their strengths for answering the research questions (Punch 1998).

Most crucially, and lending further legitimacy to a qualitative approach, the lack of engagement with children's understandings of bullying had led to research that was dominated by adult understandings of bullying. In particular, many studies were explicit in their adult defined assumptions regarding understandings *and* also in their readiness to dismiss children's understandings as invalid (cf. Whitney and Smith 1993; Miller 1995; Mellor 1990). It appeared that research into bullying has commenced by if not telling children what bullying is, certainly by establishing the language and criteria through which children's views have since been sought. To put it more directly, instead of

seeking an understanding of what children perceive bullying to be in their own terms, research has been built upon what adults have understood and defined bullying to be.

A particularly alarming example of this can be found in the reported findings of Whitney and Smith's (1993) study into bullying in Sheffield in the 1990's – a study which has been credited within the UK research context as paving the way for British research into bullying. Most explicitly, the study was conducted and analysed through an adultist framework. The study utilised a pre-existing questionnaire developed by the Swedish researcher Dan Olweus. Part of the underlying logic for the application of this questionnaire was posed in terms of how it was recognised and considered to circumvent issues of children's (mis)understandings of what the term bullying was considered to mean. This suggests, that not only have children's own interpretations been dismissed, they have also been devalued within research agendas. There is plenty of evidence to support this further. Smith and Leven (1995) for example, openly problematise children's understandings of bullying, emphasising their opinion that children mis-interpret and over-interpret the term bullying by including in their accounts behaviours and acts that do not coincide with accepted research definitions.

Implicitly, statements such as these seemed to carry with them strong notions of children as incompetent, or less able to report on their own lives than adults. Recognising that children can communicate and participate effectively as research participants (Harden *et al.* 2000), sociologically informed understandings of children's competencies in this respect have emphasised a view of children's competencies as different from adults,

rather than comparatively lesser (James *et al.* 1998). Although both Harden *et al.* (2000) and James *et al.* (1998) both point out that the methods that researchers use reveal assumptions about these competencies, this stance questions the validity of implicit notions of incompetence within the research literature appertaining to bullying. It also suggests, that what is considered as knowledge about children's experiences of bullying may be fundamentally flawed.

For at least the first six months of my doctoral programme, this original vision remained more or less unaltered. Having engaged with the literature, I considered that were good academic grounds for this research programme. However, during this time I failed to adequately acknowledge or reflect upon my reasons for developing this research agenda or how these reasons were affecting my approach to this area of investigation and the arguments and choices I was making.

Whilst it is not unusual for research agendas to be influenced by the personal experiences of the researcher, retrospectively, I have recognised that this original vision was emotionally charged. My unresolved feelings about my own experiences, my anger about my son's situation and the related guilt I felt as a parent struggling to support and protect my child, had a direct effect upon my approach to the topic. It was, however, an effect that I did not fully recognise or consider problematic at the time. In fact, I considered that my own experiences with the problem of bullying in schools might have given me some insight into the issues involved – at least from the point of view of the victim.

My personal bias or empathy with the plight of victims did not go unnoticed in my early attempts to review the literature and justify my research plan. A written comment on my work by my then additional supervisor testifies to this when she wrote: 'is this a PhD or a campaign'. I recall being quietly incensed by this comment and dismissive of the implication that I was being less than 'balanced' in my views. In revisiting this early work I can now appreciate why the comment was made in relation to the content of the arguments I advanced and the emotive rhetoric of the text. It is also now obvious to me that I was almost in a state of self-denial about the motivations of my work which clouded my ability to think reflexively about the impact that my highly subjective thought processes had upon my research at this point, despite being acutely aware of the need to recognise and act to minimise these influences. This was evident in my attempts to conceal in all but the most superficial of terms my motivations for my choice of topic.

I am not quite sure why I was reluctant to 'confess' my motivations to others. In part, I believe that it was because I was subliminally aware that I would be 'forced' to address the consequences of this upon my project. However, I would also say, that I was reluctant to fully (and I considered publicly) subject myself to a 'personal exposure' of this kind to people I knew only within the confines of the student-supervisor relationship. Saving me from sinking entirely into a subjective void from which I may not have fully emerged was my background in sociology and the gradually emerging influence that this had upon my engagements with a research area that had been firmly colonised by psychology.

Psychology and Sociology: Contrasting Themes in the Literature

The more intensively I engaged in the sociological literature on childhood, the more problematic the psychological approach to the study of bullying appeared to me. What became apparent in my comparisons between the sociologically orientated literature into children's peer culture and the psychological literature into bullying, was that in many circumstances, the two sets of literature were effectively discussing the same sorts of phenomena but reaching different sorts of explanations.

Firstly, whilst the psychological literature focused solely on the negative effects of a range of behaviours defined as bullying, the sociological literature offered a contrary view. Verbal chastisement serves as good example of this. Here sociologically informed work had considered the positive benefits of verbal chastisement for children's relationships. Goodwin (1990) for example, has argued that this phenomenon has often been found to serve as an important mechanism through which friendships and affiliations between children are built and group boundaries are strengthened. Corsaro (1994) and Corsaro and Maynard (1996 cited in Corsaro 1997) draw attention to their observation that children who are skilled at verbal chastisement and teasing can increase their status within their peer group. Examples such as these, suggest that verbal chastisement is not only a negative feature of children's peer relationships. Opie and Opie (1959) have previously indicated that the everyday discursive practices of children, that is speech, is a part of children's culture which is often misunderstood by adults. Here, there is at least the suggestion that within the study of bullying the practice of verbal chastisement has not been fully grasped.

Another very good example is children's exclusionary practices. In common with verbal chastisement, the deliberate exclusion of a child from the peer group is defined both as a form of bullying and a negative practice. Corsaro (1997:123) discusses exclusionary practices in relation to children's protection of interactive space which he defines as, 'the tendency on the part of preschool children to protect their ongoing play from the intrusion of others'. Corsaro highlights that children often resist attempts by other children to gain access to the activities of established play-groups. He argues that whilst parents and teachers may perceive this behaviour as selfish and uncooperative, what is overlooked is that these children are already intensively involved in cooperative play. In their attempts to deny other children access, he suggests that these children are protecting the threat to group equilibrium that these attempted intrusions present.

These illustrations present, if not alternative, perhaps more open ended perspectives on the same sorts of practices. One reason for this might be the different approaches taken to the study of children's peer relations. For the most part, sociological studies have engaged in understanding children's behaviour within the wider repertoire of peer culture and also within the wider social, cultural and historical context. By contrast, the psychological work into bullying has predominantly focused upon the individual child (victim or bully) without any substantive consideration of the wider context. Related to this, is the evident monopolisation of quantitative methods and a feverish application of psychometric testing within psychological studies of bullying, neither of which leave much room for examining bullying within the context of peer culture (this contrasts with

the ethnographic tendencies of sociological work). However, more latterly, there has been a peripheral move within psychology to extend the focus of research on bullying to include the social context (Naylor and Cowie 1999), although the conceptualisation of these behaviours as primarily negative has remained.

There was evidence then, to suggest, that employing a sociological perspective that considered children's behaviours and interactions with their peers in the wider context of peer culture, had the potential to undermine some of the major and by then established strands of thought on school bullying. These observations certainly led me to begin asking questions about the validity of current understandings of bullying which focused upon bullying as a wholly negative set of behavioural practices and divorced these practices from wider social processes. I also began to ponder that perhaps what was considered as bullying was not quite the benign phenomena I (and those who have researched the topic) had originally considered it to be. Whilst I am not implying here that there is not a problem with peer victimisation in schools, what I began to realise was that there was little research that considered the positive functions that these behaviours served or an adequate appreciation of alternative understandings or explanations for the role of behaviours defined as bullying in children's peer cultures. In any case, I was beginning to consider the benefits of an approach that bracketed current thought on bullying and took a more open ended and flexible approach to researching the topic. Additionally, I was by this stage convinced that there was a need for a more ethnographically orientated study that would perhaps provide me with the opportunity to capture the peer context.

I am without doubt that my sociological background and training had fed into this critique and that my disciplinary biases and my engagements with the sociology of childhood were strong influences upon the conclusions that I was reaching at this stage. This is supported, in part, by the fact that I was subsequently informed that I was not the first doctoral student in my department to have reached a similar stance and set of conclusions on the psychologically informed research that existed on bullying. A former doctoral student who began with the intention of researching bullying in residential child care facilities had also questioned, for example, the problematic nature of research that had overwhelmingly stripped the analysis of the phenomena from the wider repertoire of peer behaviours. Here also, it had been considered that bullying as a research topic needed resituated (Emond 2000). Perhaps then it was not surprising that a sociologically trained student researcher would, after extensive engagements with psychologically orientated work, begin to critically question many of the arguments and explanations this literature advanced, given the differences that exist between the traditions.

Workplace Bullying Vs School Bullying: Discrepancies in Research Foci

These discrepancies in understanding between the psychological and sociological literature orientated my move towards considering an ethnographical approach to my research in order to gain a more holistic understanding of bullying that did not exclusively focus upon these behaviours as negative. However, in widening my ongoing review of the literature to examine the research into adult bullying within the workplace and institutional facilities such as prisons, it began to emerge that although there were

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similarities between the areas of childhood bullying and adult bullying there was one principal difference.

A major research focus within studies of adult bullying was a concern with power, specifically the abuse and use of power, as a dimension of bullying (cf. Rayner *et al.* 1999). Often cited within the childhood literature as being intimately connected to bullying (cf. Craig and Pepler 1997; Pepler and Connolly 1997; Olweus, 1999), there was a distinct lack of either an empirical or analytical concern with power. For example, in an extensive volume which brings together the substantive findings of cross-national research, Smith and Morita (1999), in their introduction to the volume, begin almost immediately by describing bullying as an abuse of power and identifying relationships of power as an inevitable feature of human groups. Yet, nowhere in its twenty-two chapters does a thorough or even tacit consideration of power or power relationships appear.

There seemed no obvious reason why the issue of power had been glossed over in research into school bullying. A possible explanation is that perhaps it has become a focus of research within workplace bullying because of the transparency of defined and identifiable status hierarchies within work place settings. Certainly, within the pertinent literature, discussions of status hierarchies sit alongside discussions of power and power relationships. Indeed, there is a curious situation here in so far as there exists an entirely different language and set of definitions for adult-adult bullying which appear to oscillate around organisational factors such as status hierarchies within the workplace. For example, it is common for the terms victim and bullying to be supplanted with the terms

'subordinate' and 'superior' (cf. Zapf 1999).

In relation to school bullying, it is possible that the existence of status hierarchies and so on in children's peer groups has perhaps been less visible to researchers or perceived to be of less importance. Although discussing teenage sexual harassment, Fineran and Bennett (1999:628) advance a similar explanation for the neglect of power as a feature of teenage sexual harassment, suggesting the 'apparent absence of a hierarchy in a community of peers'. Perhaps, it is simply the case that researchers have assumed a relative equality between children. However, in stark contradiction to this, within psychology studies of children's use of power under the auspices of the more general study of group processes is quite advanced. Schwarzwald and Koslowsky (1999) for example, examined the use of power strategies by adolescents in conflict situations. Yet, research of this sort has failed to filter through to the study of bullying.

Against this context, my interest in power in children's relationships first emerged. It had emerged however, alongside my conclusions that any study of bullying (although as a result of the arguments advanced in the sociological literature I was questioning both the appropriateness of the term and the consequences of working within a restrictive definition of behaviour as bullying) should be located within the wider context of children's peer relations in order to reveal the wider functions of these behaviours within children's peer groups. However, my thinking had become chaotic and although I had these notions of the direction my research should take, I was not entirely sure how to proceed and how to 'focus down' my research agenda. At the suggestion of my

supervisor, I 'entered the field' with the remit of conducting a pilot phase based upon these interim ideas of the direction in which my research should develop.

Exploratory Fieldwork: Interactions Between the Conceptual and the Empirical

In identifying and accessing participants, as a matter of convenience, proximity and quickness, I chose to capitalise on my role as a parent in order to gain entry to an established community of children through my own children. In part, this choice arose because I had gradually begun to keep a 'sociological eye' focused on the happenings of the community of children around me. As my family home of some 12 years now was adjacently situated next to a 'green space' used daily by my own children, their friends and other local children as an informal play space, and as I was at the time continuously thinking over various aspects of children's peer relations, I had begun to pay attention to the daily routines of these children. As a site of interaction which I had previously given little thought to in my personal life, it began to emerge as rich in terms of the opportunities it provided for studying children's peer relations in a non-formal setting. Consequently, the community of children to which my own children belonged became a large focus in this research.

Whilst this approach is perhaps unconventional precedents do exist. The most recent and most relevant of these is Patricia and Peter Adler's (2001) ethnographic study of preadolescent culture and identity. Referring to the approach as 'parent-as-researcher' (PAR), the Adler's conducted an eight year study based on their own children's community. The Adler's consider that the approach has much in common with other

role-fused research approaches, such as teacher-as-researcher and counsellor-as-researcher. Whilst, I consider the practical, methodological and ethically advantages and problems with this approach in more detail in Chapter Three, the major benefit of this approach was that it allowed me to access a population of children outside institutional settings. Moreover, as I was already an established member of their community and a part of the everyday lives of these children I was able to observe their daily lives without them paying me much attention. As a variety of opportunistic research, Riemer (1977:474) considers this a major advantage of such an approach because the researcher 'already 'fits' into the setting by having a legitimate reason to be there'.

Working with the notion that I wanted to find something out about the role of power within children's relationships, I approached the pilot phase with flexibility and a good measure of hope that observing and asking children about the interactional dynamics of their peer relationships might result in the production of some analytical themes.

As this suggests, I was at this time, without any clear theoretical framework for approaching the issue of power / power relations. I had begun to engage in the theoretical literature on power only to find that it was vast, diffuse and confusing. Enthusiastic about the fact that in recognising that power had been a hitherto unstudied area of bullying and that I had found the magical 'gap in the literature' my fellow doctoral students informed me I must at all costs find, I had been ferocious in my attempt to gather as much of the sociological (and social psychological) material on power as I could practically gather.

The task of collecting this material was far easier than the task of either getting through it or making sense of it. Engaging in the literature on power was a bit like jumping into a bottomless pit. I struggled not only with the volume and diversity of thought on the concept of power but also with what I thought to be the inaccessible and esoteric style of writing that characterised the works of many of the authors I read and their respective texts and articles. Feeling self-defeated and anxious over the anti-intellectualism giving voice to these thoughts might have implied, I wondered why things could not be articulated in a more straightforward fashion. Ironically, later on in my doctoral studies, I found myself justifying this style of writing to undergraduate students on a social theory course who repeatedly issued the same complaint. My justification was, that sometimes, in grappling with complex and difficult problems and the communication of these problems, a complexity of language is required. In part, I had come to believe this to be true but empathised with the difficulties these students were experiencing. From the fieldworker's point of view however, I believe that part of the problem I experienced with the literature on power was as Scott (1999:xi) states, that it 'is too distant and unidimensional to catch the realities of power as lived experience'. By this, I take Scott to mean that there are difficulties for the researcher in the field who is seeking to apply sociological thought on power in the context of understanding local and situated relations between humans.

I had been attempting to find a way to study power that allowed me to ask and make sense of how children became powerful within the peer setting, that is, how children 'do'

this thing called power and how it is they achieve it. As I thought that this should also be studied within the interactional context of the peer group, I was seeking a framework that focused upon generic social processes. However, I found little within the literature that I thought would provide a satisfactory framework for studying power in this way. Prus (1999) considers this to be related to the way that power has been studied, conceptualised and analysed. Prus (1999:4) states, that the problem is that, 'most analysts have failed to attend to the ways in which people experience (or engage) the power phenomenon on the 'here and now' basis in which human group life takes place'. Related to this, he argues, is that power has generally been understood and studied as a structural element or macro-level force and depicted as 'something out there' therefore, those theorists who have endeavoured to study how it (power) is actually accomplished by people in everyday settings and in the mundane activities that characterise every day life are proportionally few (Prus 1999:xv-84).

Invoking an interactionist stance, Prus (1999) gives an impressive (although, by his own confession, not exhaustive) critique of the social science literature on power. Focusing particularly on structuralist thought within both classical and contemporary social theory he illustrates, quite convincingly, his point that theorists of power have failed to attend in any meaningful way to how power is accomplished by people in everyday settings. For example, whilst he acknowledges the currency of Weber's thought on power and authority in respect to organisational or structural positions amongst contemporary scholars, he also argues that Weber's thought is conceptually deficient because it pays little attention to the ways in which people negotiate authority in practice. This Prus

attributes to Weber's zeal with constructing elaborate (structural) typologies to explain human arrangements within society. Whilst his treatment of Weber's thought on 'charisma' is less critical and he recognises that here Weber attends more explicitly to issues of process, Prus maintains his central argument by emphasising that Weber discusses the charismatic leader as an 'ideal type' without the provision of a focus upon how charisma is accomplished by social actors in everyday settings.

Whilst points of emphasis differ, Prus draws similar conclusions about the works of an assortment of theorists who have commented on power (e.g. Hobbes, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Durkheim, Merton, Giddens, Parsons, Lukes, Clegg, Marx and works associated with the Marxist tradition to name but a few)[2]. The arguments Prus advances corresponded closely with my own frustrations at the time with statements on power and what I considered to be their lack of relevance to the analysis of how power between people at the micro level and their usefulness for unravelling how people [children] 'do' power. However, akin to my own frustrations with the existing thought on power, arguments of this sort reflect the fact that a great deal of theory about power has been formulated at the 'grand level'. Therefore, the lack of empirical connection to practices at the micro level to which Prus draws attention has been a frequently cited problem of grand theory for the practitioner sociologist 'in the field' (Erickson 1997).

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[2] It is not possible to give a theoretical overview of these works here. Whist Prus (1999) provides a critique the thrust of this is aimed at convincing the reader of the merits of his own interactionist approach to the study of power in social relationships at the micro level (although he makes a case for extending his methodology to examine power at the macro level). Consequently, his critique is rather harsh and effaces in all but the most fleeting terms that most, if not all, of the theorists he discusses are concerned with power as an element of the human condition and also that they would probably be of the opinion that the 'structures' they consider and discuss are developed in associations between people (cf. Scott 1995). For a less bias overview the reader may wish to refer to Ng (1980) who gives an excellent and more detailed description of work on power.

Few (2002) argues that turning such theories of power into research practice is no easy task. However, he indicates that the problem lies not in the inadequacies of grand theory for the study of power at the micro level but rather the relative absence within social science of theorists and studies that have aimed to 'unravel the mechanisms involved in the exercise of power by human actors' (2002:27) despite the recognition that power and power relations operate at different levels of scale in society (e.g. societal structures or individual agency) (Heiskala 2001). Micro level studies of power, Few (2002) argues, are concerned with the coupling of power and agency and the way it is exercised through the 'mechanics of social interaction' which is distinct from the project of grand theory and its concern with, for example, the analysis of deeper systems or modes of power that are operant within society (e.g. domination). Given this, he suggests that the analyst must come to rest on some working model of how power comes to be exercised in human relations at the micro level. However, the problem the analyst faces in this task is finding the conceptual tools from which a working model can be developed.

Social Psychological Models of Power in Interpersonal Relations

My own attempts at finding such a model eventually led me towards the compliance and influence literature within social psychology. Within this field of study models that approach the analysis of power in social interaction are relatively well developed (Bruins 1999). The primary attraction of this work was its apparent relevance to the analysis of power in children's interpersonal relations and the fact that these models had already been used in empirical studies of children's power at this level of analysis (something

which was lacking within sociologically informed work[3]). Whilst a considerable number

of empirically orientated models exist, the majority of these conceptualise power in terms

of tactical enterprise by persons (agents) as they attempt to influence another person or

persons (targets). French and Raven's (1959, Raven 1965, 1983) taxonomy in

conceptualising interpersonal influence which dominates social psychological studies of

power serves as a representative example of this tendency in approach (Podsakoff and

Schriescheim 1985, Yukl and Falbe 1991)[4].

Drawing on the theoretical work of Kurt Lewin (1941 cited in Bruins 1999) who

considered power as the potential to exert force on someone else; French and Raven

(1959) defined influence (or power) as 'a force one person (the agent) exerts on someone

else (the target) to induce a change in the target, including changes in behaviours,

opinions, attitudes, goals, needs and values' (Bruins 1999). From this definition, French

and Raven (1959) developed a classification of five different bases / types of power or

sources for gaining compliance: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power

(Schwarzwald and Koslowsky 1999) with informational power latterly being added to the

classification as a sixth base (Raven 1965).

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[3] It is worth noting however, that much of this work has been developed through the use of the theoretical insights of those early social theorists of power that Prus (1999) has considered to have ignored power relations at the interpersonal level. As Bruins (1999) notes, these insights serve as the groundwork for the approach taken to power relations in modern social psychology.

[4] Whilst it is not possible to discuss in detail other approaches it is worth noting that there are many other similar models to French and Raven's within social psychological work which examines power in social relationships. While points of emphasis and terminology differ between the models, the basic approach and the concepts used are similar. For example, Kipnis (1976) describes a 'Power Act Model' and Bruins (1996 cited in Bruins 1999) proposes 'The Power Use Model'. Both approach the study of interpersonal power and influence primarily from the perspective of the agent of influence although attention is also given to target perspectives. Akin to French and Raven, these models concentrate on identifying resources or bases of power and examining the rational processes of the agent's choice of resource and how agents

The first two of these bases, reward and coercive, are seen as dependent upon the principle that the target perceives the agent as having the ability to confer either positive or negative outcomes upon him or her (e.g. rewards and / or punishments). Legitimate power works on the principle that the agent has a legitimate right to impose behavioural constraints or to exert influence / power over the target. Referent power operates where the target identifies with the agent and may for example comply simply because they like or have respect for the agent or that the agent gives them feelings of personal acceptance or approval and so on. Expert power is based on the target assuming that the agent has expert knowledge / is an expert, or that the agent possesses special information. The sixth base of informational power is a variant of legitimate power stemming from the perceived ability of the agent to control the availability and accuracy of information (Bruins 1999, Schwarzwald and Koslowsky 1999).

More recently, this original formulation of the taxonomy was extended by Raven (1992, 1993) into a power / interaction model of interpersonal influence. Taking into account the subsequent research findings of studies that had used the original taxonomy, this reworked model further elaborates on and differentiates between each of the six bases of power extending the taxonomy to eleven sources of power (Bruins 1999). However, the main difference in this more detailed model is that it moves beyond simply providing a classification system to considering the agent's motivations in influencing the target and analysing agent's choices from the available sources of power (Schwarzwald and

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may modify the strategies they adopt. Attention is also paid to targets in terms of examining why they either yield or resist to the influence attempts of agents.

Kosloswsky 1999). This model also considers events from the perspective of targets, particularly in terms of the reasons targets have for either resisting or complying with influence attempts by agents. Additionally, it integrates the possibility of analysing how influence attempts are evaluated by both agents and targets and the implications that such evaluations have in respect to informing future situations. In doing so, it moves towards conceptualising power / influence in terms of 'active processes' and focuses more attention to the interactive dimensions of power / influence attempts from the perspectives of all parties involved thus offering a more dynamic view than the original taxonomy.

The work of French and Raven has informed and influenced the work of many researchers that have sought to unravel the ways in which people exert power /influence across a number of areas of study, such as health and medicine (Raven 1988), familial relations (MacDonald 1980, Rollins and Thomas 1975) and marketing and consumer psychology (Gaski 1986, Mackenzie and Zaichkowski 1980). Indeed as Bruins (1991) points out a vast and complex literature has developed around the work of French and Raven. However, the majority of the studies represented in this literature have aimed to understand power primarily within adult relationships. Therefore, research which has aimed to examine children's use of power is relatively thin on the ground. However, a small and increasing body of work does exist (e.g. Clark and Delia 1976, Haselett 1983 and Jordan *et al.* 1995).

Focusing upon conflict within the peer group and the strategies that children use to resolve disputes, these studies have highlighted that children, like adults, actively chose from and employ a range of strategies to influence other children. Moreover, in examining children's decisions concerning which particular strategies to employ, research has drawn attention to how decision making in terms of why children choose the power strategies they adopt is influenced by situational and personal variables such as classroom norms, sociometric status, gender and so on (e.g. Bonn 1995 and Jordan *et al.* 1995).

Whilst these studies share some common ground with previously cited work which has mapped out and highlighted status and hierarchy within children's peer groups (and how this influences peer group dynamics), the major difference in studies that have been conceptually based upon French and Raven's work (and work of this kind) is that there is an additional focus upon process in so far as attention is given to the ways in which children as agents achieve influence in their interactions with each other and the processes which inform the strategies they employ to do so coupled with some consideration of the effects of context. Moreover, attention is also given to the perspectives of children as targets and the analysis of why they either yield or resist to the influence attempts of others. Therefore, the resulting analysis is less static than those works which explain children's power exclusively via recourse to status differentials within children's friendship groups and so on. Indeed some studies have shown that children who are perceived to have no status advantage over each and / or children who occupy a subordinate position via others quite consistently manage to influence higher

status children. However, Schwarzwald and Koslowsky (1999) highlight that the strategies these children use tend to be more subversive than the strategies employed by children who are perceived to wield higher status than the children they attempt to influence.[5]

In the first instance, the approach taken to analysing power within social psychological discourse appeared useful in so far as this work contained a substantive focus on how power is achieved in interpersonal relations within micro settings such as the peer group. Therefore, in being more actor-orientated in approach social psychological models of power appeared to be able to penetrate the question of how children 'do' power in their relationships with each other through recourse to the analysis of strategies that children employ in their influence attempts and how the perspectives of children as either agents or targets shapes these processes.

However, whilst the approach does provide insight into children's power in these ways, it does not attend to how children (or adults) achieve this in actual practice nor has there been much effort to examine this in anything other than the most artificial ways. Most

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[5] A small number of studies have utilised the power / interaction model to examine children's power in child / parent relationships. These studies are novel in so far as research into child / parent dynamics has tended to concentrate on analysing parental power and have almost exclusively ignored children's power (MacDonald 1980, Peterson *et al* 1985 and Smith 1986). It has been suggested that this is a direct result of the assumption that parents have complete power over children (Hoffman 1960). However, studies of children' power in child / adult relationships have shown that children do have a certain degree of power over parents. This was first empirically demonstrated by Peterson (1986) who not only highlighted teenager's use of power and power strategies but parental perceptions of their children's power. Specifically he demonstrated that teenagers had and parents perceive them to have reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power and referent power. Given that children are somewhat inherently subordinate within the child / parent relationship (or at least they are assumed to be so), what Peterson (1986) demonstrates and others who have examined children's power (eg. Kim *et al.* 1991) is that the notion of children's power as being interwoven with children's status or sociometric positioning within social relationships is much less tenable a proposition than has been assumed.

studies that have aimed to grasp how power operates in practice in people's daily lives and their relationships with significant others have relied on retrospective reports of influence attempts (Orina *et al.* 2002). The standard method applied has involved asking participants to recollect a particular situation where they attempt to influence someone and provide details of the specific strategies they used (e.g. Bui *et al.* 1994, Falbo and Peplau 1980, Raven *et al.* 1998 and Roskos-Ewoldson 1997). In attempting to grasp a sense of how children's power operates in practice Schwarzwald and Koslowsky (1999) participants were presented with a serious of vignettes depicting different conflict scenarios and asked to describe the type of power strategies that they would use in such situations in order to gain compliance. However, in common with the majority of other social psychological studies into power, Schwarzwald and Koslowsky's participants underwent a serious of psychometric tests used to ascertain the influence of variables such as gender, self-esteem and so on upon their participant's choice of power strategy.

Whilst social psychological studies stood out as having been attentive to power in social relationships it is mostly characterised by a quest for factors or variables intended to explain the behaviours of agents and targets. Thus, these studies are suggestive of actual practice but they have not engaged in analysing children's power or applying theoretical models to, for example, the observation of children's power as it spontaneously emerges in naturally occurring social interaction[6].

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[6] There have been attempts to replicate natural occurring behaviours in order to overcome this missing dimension within the social psychological study of power. Orina *et al's.* (2002) study reports to have accomplished this by video taping conversations between adults in 'dating relationships' in order to

In taking on the insights of this type of work during the pilot fieldwork phase, the limitations of this sort of approach to understanding power within the ethnographic setting became all the more apparent. Although this work was a useful reference point for identifying the resources children used in attempting to influence each other and directing analysis into why children as agents invoked particular strategies and likewise why other children as targets either yielded or resisted, the power / interaction model and work of this kind was unable to deal with the ethnographic complexity of children's attempts to influence each other within the peer group settings. For example, the power / interaction model invokes a bilateral view of power in so far as analysis concentrates solely upon exchanges between two parties. Yet the application of the model at this level of empirical research (that is, in an exchange between two people) is troublesome in most except the simplest of exchanges. However, most observed exchanges of influence between children were not simple, often involving repeated influence attempts that invoked a number of different, sometimes multiple strategies. Additionally, many influence attempts did not achieve quick results and a child's efforts to attain a desired goal could span quite lengthy time intervals. Moreover, influence attempts which were previously abandoned were prone to being restarted at a later point during the day or even the next day or several days later. This reflected a point made by Heiskala (2001) in her multi-level approach to power that even at this level of empirical research analysis of a single face-to-face episode between two people is complex.

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understand how they attempted to influence each other. However, far from being naturally occurring, the conversations were conducted in a laboratory setting.

The power / interaction approach became even less suitable when the scope of influence attempts extended to include: more than two people; the use of multiple strategies by sometimes multiple agents; attempts were directed towards more than one target and therefore involved the agent using a variety of different strategies simultaneously whilst trying to influence multiple targets; and when the use of resources belonging to others were used in influence attempts. In other words, when multiple actors in the ethnographic scene were implicated in the project of attaining some desired goal resulting in there being a complex web of power relations the power / interaction model was not capable of dealing either with the multidimensionality (cf. Sharp *et al.* 2000) or the complexity of these interactions without either filtering out the detail or dislocating particular fragments of interaction from the analysis of the whole ethnographic event.[7]

Heiskala (1999) considers that there is a need in such instances to find a controlled way of reducing the complexity of analysis whilst maintaining the ability to move, if necessary, from a more simple model of events to a more complex one and vice versa. In addressing similar issues in researching actor power at the micro level, Few (2002) draws on actor network theory because as an approach to power which can be applied to the analysis of the mechanisms of power in realms of social interaction it is able to capture the complexity of the processes involved when 'multiple heterogeneous actors in an arena

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[7] By this I mean that the model could be applied if particular aspects of the event were examined in isolation from

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create a complex web of power relations rather than a purely binary exchange of forces' (2002:34).[8]

Actor network theory conceptualises a relational interplay between all the actors involved in complex configurations of power relations and interactions wherein power is seen as an effect or outcome of a process of alignment between actors (Cordella and Shaikh 2004). The way in which actor network theory conceptualises power is then somewhat different from the approach discussed above. In common with many 'resource' theories of power social psychological approaches conceptualise power as 'power over' (i.e. as possessing the potential to influence or control others or control over resources and / or outcomes) (French and Raven 1959; Henley 1977; Johnson 1976; Carli 1999). Drawing upon Foucauldian notions of power;[9] power in actor network theory on the other hand is decentralised (non individual) and considered to be dispersed thoughout and among the actors (and resources) implicated in these configurations (see Chapter Two).

What is novel about actor network theory, however, is that the actors which participate in these configurations are not perceived to be necessarily human. Actors can also be nonhuman (material artefacts, objects and so on). Whilst the benefits of actor network theory in terms of its ability to grasp complexity came to be a valued feature of the approach later on in the study – it was this incorporation of nonhumans into analysis that provided the approach entry into this thesis.

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[8] The analytic approach to handling complexity taken by actor network theory is fully discussed in Chapter Two (see in particular pp. 72-78). Therefore, I will not provide a discussion of these issues in the present Chapter.

First Encounters with Actor-Network Theory

Struggling with how to deal with the literature on power for my own comprehension and with finding within this literature an approach which would lend itself to ethnographic enquiry, actor-network theory was suggested as a possibility. I recall being told that actor-network theorists considered power as an effect generated in heterogeneous networks. However, I also vividly recall thinking to myself: (a) what is actor-network theory and (b) what on earth are heterogeneous networks. Actor-network theory had been hitherto unknown to me. It was not an approach I had encountered as an undergraduate, nor did I recall any reference to it within the literature I had been reading.

Akin to the literature on power, I found the writing on actor-network theory equally abstruse for both similar and different reasons. In particular, I had problems with what actor network theory had to say about nonhumans *and* what sociologists should be doing with them. Specifically, I am referring here to the symmetry principle, that is, actor-network theory's insistence to abandon all *a priori* distinctions between humans and nonhumans and the related notion that nonhumans should also be considered as actors. I had read that this was 'radical'. I had also read that this was 'controversial'. However, I was not particularly interested at this stage in my research in how radical, controversial or otherwise that this stance may or may not have been, given that I thought the whole idea was antithetical to the sociologist's task. The study of objects and other nonhuman things I had understood as being peripheral to the sociological enterprise and of interest only in the sense that humans endowed them with meaning But then I had missed the point of

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[9] The relationship between Foucault's ideas on power and actor network theory's is discussed in Chapter Two.

the '*a priori*' (amongst other things) and confused it with an ethical position and not the analytical stance that it is.

In the first instance then, I had dismissed actor-network theory, although more latterly, I have thought that it would be more accurate to state that I attempted to 'resist' it. However, because my first reading of the actor-network literature had been conducted with power in mind, all the talk about nonhumans had me thoroughly confused. I could understand the thinking behind the notion that power was an effect but the thinking on how this was generated seemed to escape my comprehension. On reflection this lack of understanding was related to my readiness to cease engaging with actor-network theory because it seemed such an alien line of thought. Therefore, my reading of the relevant literature was sparse and much less than thorough.

Child / Object Partnerships: Resisting Symmetry, Resisting ANT

As my early and fleeting engagements with actor-network had occurred concurrently with my pilot fieldwork phase, I cannot say with certainty that actor-network theory and its concerns with the nonhuman was not an influence upon the themes that began to emerge from my observations of events in the field. A concern with the material and in particular, the interweaving of the material with the social, gradually and erratically began to emerge a substantive empirical focus. Quite early on in the pilot work I had begun to notice and fix my attentions upon the use of material artefacts by the children I was observing. In particular, I had become intrigued and fascinated by how children used artefacts of various sorts during the course of their interactions with each other. At first,

it did not strike me as unusual that materiality was a feature of children's life worlds. The use of material objects such as toys in play is unsurprising after all. However, what did strike me as surprising was how some of these children were using their toys to achieve various positions of status and influence among their peers.

One child in particular was remarkably skilled at using the various gadgets and gizmos he possessed to elevate his status within the peer group. Through the use of objects, he frequently managed to disrupt, reorganise and control the activities of the peer group. For the most part, he seemed able to achieve this because he possessed and had access to a range of toys that most of these children did not but desperately desired. His actions communicated that he himself was well aware of this desire in others. This child regularly entered the scene of activity and set about seducing the other children away from whatever the current activity was by offering access to whatever object accompanied him. From here, it was commonplace for him to organise the others into a queue to await the possibility of a chance to play with the object – a chance they frequently did not get.

These observations and others similar to them began to slowly open the door to a consideration of objects as partners in interactions. However, I continued to resist the implication that objects should be considered as symmetrical partners. My own stance on this was perhaps similar to Suchman's (1997) stance in which she views nonhumans as 'inferior partners' in the interaction (cited in Gomart and Hennion 1999:221-222). It was clear to me that children were using objects to achieve desired effects but it was not my

view at this time that these effects were collectively generated between these children and their nonhumans partners. I began to think, however, that there was at the very least an exchange of properties from the object to the child, that is, that in some circumstances objects either gave something to children or children took something from objects that enhanced their abilities or their capacities to act in some ways.

Thus, whilst it was clear to me that children could use objects to achieve effects, I was unwilling to credit the objects involved with anything other than a 'walk on part'. I was certainly not willing to lend them agency. Agency (potential or actual), as I understood it implied some element of intentionality on the part of would-be-actors. As far as I could see these objects and artefacts of childhood were quite obviously lacking intent. Pickering's (1993) point that intentionality is a stable and real distinction between humans and nonhumans seemed valid to me. Therefore, I remained fixed in my presumption that agency was exclusively human.

In recounting these observations from pilot fieldwork, I was again recommended to consider what actor-network theory had to offer. I could see a place for utilising some strands of thought from actor-network theory in relation to these observations but I remained reluctant to reject 'human-only agency' (Hakken 1999:187). Moreover, I could not fully comprehend a sociology that suggested I should be following artefacts. The concept of doing so seemed not only alien but acutely antagonistic to my original task of privileging the child. In any case, I worried about the repercussions of adopting an approach that was perhaps too anti-anthropocentric.

This was further complicated by the lack of sociological work on childhood that was informed by actor-network theory or thought of this kind. Whilst there are notable exceptions (cf. Prout 2000; Place 2000; Lee 2001) some of which remained unknown to me until much later on in my work, the apparent lack of a comparable study that provided an exemplar on the empirical application of actor-network theory to children's life worlds seemed problematic. This was of course provided in abundance elsewhere and perhaps here this implies a problem with imagination (or lack thereof) rather than the absence of methodological instructions. However, here, the lack of a reference point of some kind was both troubling and troublesome – a bit like floating in uncharted waters without a map. Then again, perhaps I was looking for the comfort I thought would be found in the discovery of a comparative case.

In part, at this stage, the problem I had was in relating an approach that was derived from the sociology of science and the sub-disciplines of science, technology and society and the sociology of scientific knowledge, to the sociological study of children's peer relationships. The 'diasporic' (Law 1999:10) distribution of actor-network theory across these and other disciplines such as geography and management did little to aid my attempts to render actor-network theory and the divergent ways in which it is used by 'anters' coherent for my purposes. Those areas had generated a collective literature that discussed such things as 'quasi-objects', 'quasi-subjects', 'entities', 'actants', 'hybrids', 'topology' and the like. In the different fields of application in which actor-network theory was incorporated these categories seemed to make sense. However, in the context

of the everyday play activities of children that I was observing I severely struggled to make connections. This, I think, was exactly the point. I was not making connections. I had been so caught up in rejecting actor-network theory because of the divisions that I considered existed between humans and objects that I did not alter my analytical focus to thinking about the connections made between humans and objects. Neither was I taking on board the point made by actor-network theory that it is not that divisions do not exist, 'it is rather that such divisions or distinctions are understood as effects or outcomes. They are not given in the order of things' (Law 1999:10).

Out of the Mouths of Babes: Enrolment to Actor-Network Theory

As I moved into my formal fieldwork site of the local primary school I continued, in practice, to resist actor-network theory. I say 'in practice' because although I was not formally applying actor-network theory, I was almost sub-consciously following 'things'. When I now look over my written field notes from the time, it is quite obvious that I had been developing a gradual preoccupation with documenting the materiality of the interactional settings and goings on I was observing. Whilst I was actively resisting actor-network theory, it is also obvious from these notes (and also in my recollections) that it was lingering in the background of my analytical thinking. Beside, for example, references to the various toys that the children brought into and played with in school there are also many words and phrases from the analytical vocabulary of actor-network theory. For example, phrases or questions to myself in my notes such as, 'is this a quasi-object?', appear frequently. Therefore, whilst I remained sceptical about adopting an actor-network approach, I was also increasingly moving my thinking towards it.

It is common for researchers to talk about 'defining moments' or 'breakthroughs' in the field within their research accounts. I have always thought discussions of these to be interesting but rather clichéd. My own defining moment is perhaps just as clichéd as my eventual transition to a rigorous analytical application of actor-network theory occurred, quite literally, because of the words spoken to me by a child. Before, considering the impact of the words of this child and the context in which these words arose, I would like to pause for a brief moment to situate these words within the analytical thinking of actor-network theory.

Put simply, actor-network theory asserts that social relations are not only made in the associations that occur between people and things but also that social relations are held together by things (Law 1992). During my fieldwork period within the primary school a perplexing period of 'inaction' arose. Quite literally, and for no obvious reason, the children apparently stopped interacting with each other. I found myself at odds with myself trying to figure out where all the action had gone and more importantly why it had disappeared. Children who previously had been quite boisterous in their activities had been transformed into motionless and passive beings who seemed unable either to act or interact. The climate of the playground was depressed and there seemed to be an undercurrent of silent frustration and confusion amongst the children. Bewildered, I asked a child, who looked particularly dejected, what the matter was. His reply, although seemingly innocuous, was a revelation:

'There is nothing to play with'

This is the sort of commonplace statement a child would say that normally would pass by as unworthy of even the most fleeting of second thoughts. Had I been completely unfamiliar with actor-network theory, I would have dismissed this statement as the grumblings of a bored child. However, instead, and because of my until then, acrimonious relationship with actor-network theory, I stopped to consider the meaning in what this child had said. In particular, I thought about the meaning of the word 'nothing':

no-thing; not anything; not any thing – absence; absence of things

In this play on words, I realised that in a setting that had not long since been rich in materiality only bodies remained. This child was right. There were no things. The things had gone – the 'missing masses' had gone missing. In this moment I became conscious that what I had been observing were unmediated bodies incapable of social relations and incapable of holding social relations in place because the objects that had previously served to bind these children together – to weave the collective - were no longer active participants in the social setting. It was here then, in the absence of the material, that I came to realise that the material mattered and was woven into the fabric of social relations and it was here that my 'enrolment' into actor-network theory formally occurred.

Recasting the Vision and the Shape of the Thesis

I am not quite sure what came first; actor-network theory or the observations that resulted in my serious adoption of the stance. Perhaps the process can best be described as a 'messy interaction between the conceptual and the empirical' (Bechhofer 1974:73). I have often thought about what the story of the development of this thesis would have looked like if I had subjected the whole messy business to an actor-network analysis. I have resisted the urge but perhaps, in brief, it would have looked something like this:

The heterogeneous engineer aligned all her allies

The heterogeneous engineer enrolled them and took them back to a centre of calculation.

Through a process of translation the heterogeneous engineer attempted to make them speak on behalf of the centre of calculation.

For a while they did.

They dissented.

The heterogeneous engineer aligned other allies.

They resisted.

The heterogeneous engineer became the target of enrolment.

The engineer was not convinced that her interests were the same.

She resisted, her interests being elsewhere.

Again she became the target of enrolment.

Again she resisted.

And so on, recursively.

Another spoke on behalf of the enrollers.

Her interests become aligned with those of these others.

She was enrolled.

…..or was it counter-enrolment?

Regardless of whether I enrolled actor-network theory or vice versa, my adoption of the stance recast my analysis and informed the eventual shape of this thesis. I retained my focus on power and because, as I see it, one implies the other, I shifted to a concurrent concern with agency. Both of these I have considered within the wider context of children's social relations. I have also considered more directly the wider role that the nonhuman plays in children's social relations. In particular, the ways in which the nonhuman holds children's relations in place. These themes inform the structure of the thesis.

Within this chapter I have made many references to actor-network theory. As yet, the concepts and thought referred to have not been fully explained. The purpose of the next chapter is to address this and provide the reader with a more thorough critique of actor-network theory and its methodology. I then proceed in Chapter Three to discuss in more detail the methods used and in particular to draw out the practical, ethical and methodological implications of the parent-as-researcher approach. Here I also address more general issues of concern when one is conducting research with children.

The substantive part of my analysis is found in the final five chapters of this thesis and reflects the themes mentioned above. Out of these, Chapter Four is the most exploratory and serves to introduce the reader to the role of the nonhuman in children's interactions.

It draws upon the early empirical observations of this work and functions to illustrate further how the analysis presented here began to materialise. The notion of children as heterogeneous engineers is the substantive theme in Chapter Five. I illustrate here that children in their attempts to achieve desired effects and establish themselves as agents with powers, attempt to build a network of alliances by constituting, mobilising and juxtapositioning a set of materially heterogeneous elements, obliging them to enact particular roles and fitting them together to form a working whole. It is, therefore, a story of translation. This account is presented through a combination of descriptive and analytical narratives. In this respect, it is also intended to serve as an illustration of the application of actor-network theory as an interpretive framework.

Chapter Six shares similarities with Chapter Five in so far as there remains a focus on heterogeneous engineering and the process of translation. It is however, an account of how one child engineers an actor-network to overcome interpersonal difficulties with other children. Here, the nonhuman is widened to consider more than just material objects, for example, I describe the relationship between children and animals.

Whilst a focus on agency and power are retained, the next two chapters see a change in emphasis to a consideration of the wider role of the nonhuman in children's relations. Both of these chapters draw on data collected during fieldwork conducted within the primary school. Chapter Seven concentrates on the 'binding' function of the nonhuman within children's interactions. Here, I discuss 'quasi-objects' and the circulation of these objects with the playground. Chapter Eight reinforces the points made and arguments

advanced in Chapter Seven when I consider the effects upon children's abilities to act and social relations more generally when the nonhuman is removed from the interactional scene. These discussions draw attention to and reiterate the argument which is interwoven throughout the pages of this thesis and brought to its final conclusion in the last chapter of this thesis: that children's agency, power and social relations take their form and are a function of the heterogeneous networks created in the associations made between people and things.

Chapter Two

Actor-Network Theory:
An Analytic Framework for the Study of Children's Agency, Power and Social Relations

Introduction

In Chapter One I highlighted that the adoption of actor-network theory as the analytical approach taken in this thesis was not a preliminary choice but rather the outcome of 'a messy interaction between the conceptual and empirical world' (Bechhofer 1974:73). However, as an analytical approach, actor-network theory is particularly suited to ethnographic enquiry because, and as Tatnall and Gilding (1999:959) state, 'like ethnography, actor-network theory is useful in handling complexity without filtering it out'. Indeed, ethnography (alongside case studies) has been described as actor-network theory's 'favoured method' (Kavanagh 1997:9), with many actor-network theorists drawing on ethnographic principles in their approach to research (Tatnall and Gilding 1999). Analytically and methodologically, however, the application of actor-network theory and thought which is closely associated with the approach is considerably varied. McLean and Hassard (2004:496) make this point when they state that we should note that, 'the research produced often differs markedly in terms of methodological approach and style of analyses. Thus, there is no generic way to 'apply' actor-network theory. This is further complicated by the disparate emphases of actor-network theory's proponents (Michael 1996). There are, however, some key elements to the approach that remain relatively stable (Walsham 1997), upon which the analytical thinking that has

informed this work has been founded.

These key elements can be summarised thus:

Table 1. Summary of Key Concepts of Actor-network Theory[10].

Actor / actant	Any material, i.e. human beings or nonhuman actors / actants.
Actor-network	Related actors in a heterogeneous network of aligned interests.
General symmetry	The symmetrical treatment of humans and nonhumans as *a priori* equal.
Translation	How actors generate ordering effects by negotiating or manoeuvring others' interests to one's own with the aim of mobilising support.
Inscription	Embodied translations into a medium or material.
Enrolment	Mobilise support by creating a body of allies through translation.
Black box and punctualisation	A temporary simplification in a network that acts as a single unit so that the network effaces into one actor.
Quasi-object	A nonhuman that is necessary for the collective to exist; An object that passes through a social group which in doing so forms relations between members of that group.
Hybridity	The idea that neither a human nor a nonhuman is pure, that is, either human or nonhuman in an absolute sense but rather entities produced in associations between the former and the latter. Thus, humans are considered as quasi-subjects and nonhumans as quasi-objects.

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[10]This table is adapted in part from Walsham (1997). Here it has been modified and extended.

My own approach to 'applying' actor-network theory has drawn upon these key elements to examine the associations that take place between children and the nonhuman in order to reveal that what we sometimes understand children's agency, power and social relations to be are effects generated in the associations that take place between children and nonhumans. Therefore, it would not be inaccurate to state that I have used actor-network theory as an 'interpretive regime' to follow children and the nonhuman around, interpreting what they do, in order to produce these effects (Verran 1999:143).

Whilst actor-network theory is well developed within social studies of science and technology, and as Law (1999:10) pronounces, 'has spread', the use of actor-network theory to study children's lives remains [as yet] a peripheral move within sociological research and thought on childhood. This is despite prominent voices within the field who have suggested (and illustrated) the possibilities that such an approach may lend to this area of study. In particular, Prout (2000) The Body, Childhood and Society, and Lee (2001) Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty, in their respective volumes have attempted both explicitly and implicitly to demonstrate how actor-network theory and thought akin to it could assist childhood sociologists to, for example, move beyond 'being-based sociologies of childhood' (Lee 2001:141), that is, the essentialised treatment of agency that has characterised the social actor approach to childhood. In addition to agency, Prout (2000) has further argued via a critique of social constructionist thought on childhood, and here the body, for a consideration of not only the discursive practices that shape childhood bodies but also the material practices. Prout (2000:2) argues for a comprehension of childhood bodies as 'hybrid entities' and as

'translations...produced in and through patterned networks of heterogeneous materials' (2000:14). In taking actor-network theory out of its traditional domain of application [11] (Gomart and Hennion 1999), statements such as these have opened the door to the application of actor-network theory within the sub-discipline of the sociology of childhood. In doing so, they provide a valuable heuristic which marks out the possible directions that such an application might take.

The aim of this chapter then is two fold: first, it introduces to the reader those aspects of actor-network theory (and work of this kind) that I have actively applied in the analyses presented in this thesis; and second, it considers actor-network theory in relation to the sociological study of children and childhood. In attending to this, I draw out of these discussions the analytical approach to agency, power and social relations taken in this thesis. However, in order to situate the discussion, I will begin with an introduction to the key tenets of actor-network theory that have informed my analytical thinking before moving on to a more critical discussion.

Actor-Network Theory: Key Elements of the Analytical Framework

As a paradigm that has emerged over the last two decades or so, actor-network theory has its roots in the work of Callon (1986a and 1991) and Latour (1987, 1992 and 1993) and their studies of 'science in action'. Latour (1987) demonstrated that the capacity of scientists to generate knowledge or truths was dependent and rested upon their abilities to align an array of discordant or heterogeneous elements or allies inside and outside of their laboratories. Michael (1996:52) describes the various forms that these allies might take:

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[11] For example, science and technology

51

'These allies might belong to what we would normally count as 'the world of science' – for example, experimental materials and equipment. Alternatively (or complimentarily), they might reside beyond its borders – for example, consumers, funders, public supporters and the like.'

This reveals a picture of the agency of scientists as dependent upon associations with other heterogeneous elements, rather than independent and located within the self. Lee (2001:129) considers Latour's (1988a) exposé of Louis Pasteur to be the most distinct example of an actor-network approach to agency. In discussing this, Lee (2001) draws out that, Latour (1988a) in re-writing the history of one of France's greatest scientists illustrates how Pasteur's achievement and his work was not the sole result of Pasteur's cognitive capacities as a genius nor the exclusive product of social cognition. Rather, Latour (1988a) demonstrates, that it was the result of a series of relations between heterogeneous elements – both human and nonhuman. Thus, he exposes, through careful analysis, how it was that Pasteur's work was dependent upon the 'Pasteur network' which consisted of 'laboratories, domesticated strains of bacteria, notebooks, statistics...the journalists who witnessed Pasteur's spectacular experiment...the French electors Pasteur sought to convince' (Callon and Law 1997:169) and so on.

In The Pasteurisation of France, Latour wished to illustrate and understand the networks of associations and forces among actors. His explanatory method was to make no *a*

priori distinctions among the various allies involved in these networks of association. In this approach, Latour dissolved the methodological distinction between humans and nonhumans, in so far, as only the former are usually considered to be actors. Invoking the neologism 'actant' in order to emphasise the 'indeterminacy of the actor', (Callon 1999:181) to Latour (1997), an actor [actant] is:

> '...something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no motivation of human individual actors nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action'.

Thus, actors are simply considered as any entity that *does* things. In the 'Pasteur network', for instance, microbes are not inert, they cause unsterilised material to ferment whilst leaving sterilised material untouched. If they had acted otherwise, that is, if they did not collaborate with Pasteur – if they did not act (at least in the way Pasteur intended) – then the story of Pasteur might have been somewhat different. It is in this sense that Latour can speak of the microbes as actors.

The Pasteur story serves to introduce some of the key (interrelated) elements of actor-network theory used here. First, in revealing Pasteur's agency as dependent upon the network of associations created between humans and nonhumans, it provides a method of opening up agency to empirical enquiry (Lee, 2001:130-131). Second, it introduces the idea of 'heterogeneous networks', that is, the 'patterned networks of diverse (not simply

human) materials' (Law 1992) and the notion that effects such as agency are collectively generated in these networks. Third, and relatedly, in Latour's treatment of the human and nonhuman as *a priori* equal, the principle of 'general symmetry' is given voice and allows for the scope of analysis to be extended to include the role that nonhuman actors or actants play in the creation of heterogeneous networks and the effects these networks produce.

However, as Law (1992) has suggested:

'...the task of sociology is to characterise these networks in their heterogeneity, and explore how it is that they come to generate effects...'

How then are sociologists / actor-network theorists to go about this process of characterising networks and understanding how it is, for example, that an individual such as Pasteur can appear as a single point actor? One methodological strategy is what Callon (1986a) and Latour (1987) refer to as *translation* which serves, as I understand it (and as I have used it in my analyses), as a heuristic device to conceptualise the process of how networks are assembled and therefore how effects come to be generated. This strategy is exemplified in Callon's (1986a) case study Some Elements in a Sociology of Translation: Domestification of the Scallops and Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay, in which Callon gives an account of the attempts of three marine biologists to convince a group of fishermen (and also scallops) of the advantages to be gained in the use of scientific

knowledge to increase scallop numbers. Here, Callon explores through what he calls

the *process of translation,* the complex endeavours of these scientists to construct a

'scientific network' by persuading, in exactly the same manner, both humans and

importantly, nonhumans to comply with them (Edwards 2000; Murdoch 1997).

The *process of translation* as described by Callon (1986a) in the aforementioned case

study involves a number of overlapping stages or dimensions: *problematisation,*

interessement, enrolment and mobilisation. Drawing **directly** on Callon (1986a:196-

224), these 'four moments of translation' (1986a:196) are described below in conjunction

with a more anecdotal description of the translation attempts of the marine biologists at

St. Brieuc Bay.

**Table 2. Stages of the Process of Translation in the Domestification of the Scallops
and Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay.**

Stage	Definition of Stage	Description of Stage or What Happens
Problematisation	The researchers sought to become indispensable to other actors in the drama by defining the nature and the problems of the latter and then suggesting that these would be resolved if the actors negotiated the 'obligatory passage point' of the researchers' programme of investigation.	Fishermen: You are fishermen and we are marine biologists. You need to ensure adequate stocks of scallops and we have the solution to this. Scientific colleagues: You are interested in advancing knowledge about scallops. Scallops: You are being dredged from the sea. We can give you a shelter that will enable you to multiply and survive.

Interessement	A series of processes by which the researchers sought to lock the other actors into the roles that had been proposed for them in that programme.	Fishermen: Here is a towline. It protects scallops from predators, from dangerous currents and from dredges that injure them. They will be able to proliferate without any threat. Scallops: Here are collectors. You can anchor and grow without any threat. Scientific colleagues: There is a lack of knowledge about scallops. Their population is declining. Here is our evidence. It is important that we ensure their survival as a matter of economic necessity.
Enrolment	A set of strategies in which the researchers sought to define and interrelate the various roles they had allocated to others.	Fishermen: No strategies needed they are content to accept the role envisioned for them by the researchers. Scallops: Strategies to convince scallops to anchor – physical violence against predators; alterations to interessement devices; consent without discussion. Scientific colleagues: Discussion of results and acceptance of previous evidence about scallop anchorage.
Mobilisation	A set of methods used by the researchers to ensure that supposed spokesmen for various relevant collectivities were properly able to represent those collectivities and not betrayed by the latter.	Fishermen: A few fishermen speak for all fishermen. Scallops: A few anchored scallops speak for all unanchored scallops. Scientific colleagues: a few specialists speak for all specialists. Researchers: Displace scallops and fishermen from their home to a conference room, although the scallops have been transformed into a series of equations and diagrams. Enrolment is transformed into active support from fishermen and scientific colleagues – the former who want scallop numbers to increase and colleagues who consider the results valid and presumably scallops too considering that some have anchored and offered their support. At the end of the process the marine biologists speak for all.

In his analysis of the events that surrounded St. Brieuc Bay, Callon (1986a) illustrates the process of translation, that is, the building of an actor-network from human and nonhuman entities. In addition to this, he concurrently demonstrates how a particular agent (like Pasteur) or a group of agents (like the marine biologists) come to speak for all the other actors (both human and nonhuman) in the network. However, Callon (1986a) also demonstrates that the durability of the actor-network is dependent upon the robustness of its weakest links. For example, if one of the actors refuses to remain fixed in place then the network can break down (Akrich 1992; Latour 1987). This is more or less what followed in the 'scientific network' of the marine biologists at St. Brieuc Bay in Callon's (1986a:219-224) discussion of *dissidence*. When the experiment was repeated the scallops refused to anchor and the fishermen committed mutiny by harvesting the protected scallops of the first anchorage. In doing so, the scallops of the first anchorage were betrayed by all the other scallops they were supposed to represent and the representatives of the fishermen (who agreed not to fish the protected scallops) were betrayed by the fishermen they were representing (Michael 1996). Here Callon (1986a:220) asks if anchorage was in fact the obligatory passage point all along and not, as was previously assumed, the marine biologists. Moreover, the support of the scientific colleagues of the marine biologists began to waver. In sum, the actor-network collapsed.

The process of translation gives an explanation as to how potential or would be actors (like the marine biologists) attempt to establish themselves as actors by building an actor-network from various entities – a process which John Law (1987) has called 'heterogeneous engineering'. Put simply, translation:

'...builds an actor-world from entities. It attaches characteristics to them and establishes more or less stable relationships between them. Translation is a definition of roles, a distribution of roles and the delineation of a scenario. It speaks for others but in its own language. It is an initial definition' (Callon 1986b:25-26).

However, Callon (1986b) reminds us that this process of defining and distributing roles is subject to resistance:

'But...no translation can be taken for granted for it does not occur without resistance...Successful translation depends upon the capacity of the actor-world to define and enrol entities which might challenge these definitions and enrolments' (Callon 1986b:25-26).

That is to say, the roles that are defined and distributed to the various entities within the actor-network may be challenged, resisted, undermined or destroyed. The heterogeneous nature of actor-networks means that any entity can refuse their role within the network or betray the role assigned. When this happens a general process of retranslation can occur or the actor-network may disintegrate (Michael 1996). Callon (1986a:224) points out that being able to describe the ways in which actors come (or do not come) to accept particular roles and identities in actor-networks is a method through which an understanding of 'what sociologists generally call power relationships' can be

understood. In discussing this Michael (1996:53) states, for example, that:

'...enrolment is not a unilateral process of imposition: it entails both the 'capturing' of the other and the others 'yielding'. It is a multilateral process'.

The argument is that the operation of power can be followed by analysing the methods and stratagems used and deployed by enrolling actors to secure the conformity of target actors and the negotiations that may take place between these actors during this process (Law and Callon 1992). For example, in order to enrol the fishermen at St. Brieuc Bay, the marine biologists had to present their question about scallop anchorage in terms of the fishermen's need to have access to adequate levels of scallop stocks. This involved having to suppress the short-term interests of fishermen (harvesting as many scallops of possible) and persuading them instead to consider their long-term interests (durable scallop stocks). Therefore, the conformity of the fishermen was ensured through the manipulation and control of their interests, thoughts and desires. However, as Michael (1996:57) points out, the 'power' of the marine biologists was dependent upon the continuing consent of the fishermen and their adherence to this point of view. When the fishermen unashamedly harvested the protected scallop beds of the experiment, the 'power' of the marine biologists or rather as he highlights 'their relation of power to the fishermen' was broken. Furthermore, a similar scenario developed when the scallops refused to anchor. Therefore, the relations of power between the marine biologists, the fishermen and the scallops were desecrated.

In this case study the marine biologists fell from their position of power. However, whilst translation allows for the microsociological study of the mechanics involved in the ways that particular agents may gain (or lose) and extend (or fail to extend) influence, the view of power that is emphasised is one in which power is considered to be *relational* in so far, as actors gain their powers through the sets of relations they construct with other actors and therefore are an *effect* or *outcome* of these sets of relations (Law 1991). Thus, rather than subscribing to, for example, a traditional view in which power is considered as being the possession of agent, that is, as something that is located within the self (Edwards 2000; Fox 2000), power (like agency) is viewed as something that is distributed between the actors in a network and which arises a result of the collective action of the actor-network. Akin to agency then, an actor-network approach to power excavates what actors are dependent upon for their powers. In doing so, it is argued that the somewhat deceptive impression that power resides within a single actor is displaced:

'Power is always the illusion people get when they are obeyed... [they] discover what their power is really made of when they start to lose it...it was made of the wills of all the others...power [is] a consequence and not a cause of collective action' (Latour 1986:268-9).

Thus, for the marine biologists of St. Brieuc Bay, their dependence upon, for example, the wills of fishermen and scallops for their powers may have become apparent only when their respective betrayals dissipated these powers.

Here, actor-network theory is close to Foucault in so far as there is a shared concern with the constructed nature of power (and agency) (Michael 1996), for example, as Foucault (1986:234 cited in Michael 1996) states:

> 'The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires come to be identified and constituted as individuals.'

This far, my discussion has progressed from a concern with agency into a concern with power and back again. This is because, as Michael (1986:63) suggests, these are issues which are interrelated and as has been illustrated here, 'agency is like power – a product and an effect' of networks of heterogeneous relations. However, the concept of heterogeneous networks is considered by actor-network theorists to be applicable to 'all of social life' (Law 1992). Therefore, as Law (1992) suggests:

> '...the family, the organisation, computing systems, the economy and technologies...all of these are ordered networks of heterogeneous materials whose resistance has been overcome.'

According to Law (1992), what is radical about this is the claim that nonhumans are crucial participants in these heterogeneous networks and, therefore, in our social relations. Discussing the materiality of the social world, Law's (1992) claim is 'that almost all of our interactions with other people are mediated through objects of one kind or another'(cf. Dant 1999 for a similar non actor-network argument). Similarly, Latour (1986) has suggested that the social is held together by things, or more precisely, in relations between heterogeneous actors. The argument is, that human interaction alone cannot hold social relations in place.

In order to demonstrate this Latour (1994a, 1994b cited in Murdoch 1997) has provided a genealogy of the development of human society which emphasises the increasingly complex nature of configurations between humans and nonhumans. According to Murdoch (1997), Latour's (1994a, 1994b) suggestion is that as human society has developed, so too have associations between the human and the material. Latour begins with a vision of humans akin to simians and moves through a discussion of primordial society, agrarian society, industrialisation and concludes with a debate about contemporary environmental crises.

In the beginning, he argues that humans are essentially like baboons living in a society which is solely dependent upon interactions between humans. He suggests that humans are constantly involved in negotiating and renegotiating their social order because nothing can last longer than the interactions themselves. In this stage, social order is never stable nor enduring but in a constant state of flux. However, humans progress and

in so doing, they begin to associate with material allies. To begin with these material allies are the simple tools of primordial man but in moving towards an agrarian society wherein farming techniques bring in a range of natural (animals and plants) others associations become increasingly more prolific, diverse and complex. This continues with the advent of industrialisation where another layer of material associations is added (machines and so on) and terminates with the nonhuman actors of the natural world which enter into society 'as active participants, reconfiguring societies' (Murdoch 1997:328).

Latour's thesis is that the development of increasing associations between humans and nonhumans results in removing humans further and further away from pure interaction (human only interaction). In increasing associations with nonhumans he argues, that a stable and enduring social order is built up in which relations are held in place by material objects.

Latour (1994a, 1994b) takes this argument much further in order to demonstrate how it can be applied to overcoming sociology's dualisms, for example, macro/micro, agency/structure and so on, however, here the point of analytical interest lies with the proposition that material objects participate in and hold relations in place. Bending this point somewhat (although not completely), I wish to draw into the discussion Michel Serres' (1982) concept of the quasi-object. Simply stated, and reiterating the definition previously given above, a quasi-object may be defined as: a nonhuman that is necessary for the collective to exist; or 'an object that passes through a social group which in doing

so forms relations between members of that group' (Carr and Downs 2004:357). These are 'special' objects, in so far, as human relations are considered to emerge from their circulation within social groups, that is, they are 'weavers of collectivities' (Brown and Lightfoot 1999).

In <u>Angels: A Modern Myth</u> (1995:47-48) the concept of the quasi-object as a weaver of collectives is given when Serres' character Pia states:

> 'Look at these children out there, playing ball. The clumsy ones are
>
> playing with the ball as if it were an object, while the more skilful ones
>
> handle it as if it were playing with them: they move and change position
>
> according to how the ball moves and bounces. As we see it, the ball is
>
> being manipulated by human subjects; this is a mistake – the ball is
>
> creating the relationships between them. It is in following its trajectory
>
> that their team is created, knows itself and represents itself. Yes the
>
> ball is active. It is the ball that is playing.'

Serres' (1982) argument is that it is the ball – the quasi-object - that creates relations as it circulates and moves within the collective. Moreover, the subject, for example, the ball player, is defined by their relationship to the ball:

> 'The subject is decentred because relations among subjects arise with
>
> the quasi-object and not, for example, by means of the Cartesian 'I''

(Carr and Downs 2004:357).

Thus, for Serres quasi-objects are the source of relations within collectives and creators of subjects.

Serres, suggests that objects, in particular those which circulate amongst groups of people, are implicated in and structure human relations. Although, never using the term 'quasi-object' or referring to Serres at any point, Valentine (2002) in an actor-network account of food in the workplace illustrates how food and drink as nonhuman entities construct, maintain and stabilise relations between humans. Whilst she talks of assemblages between people and food, for example, in her account food and drink stuffs emerge at times as quasi-objects that circulate within the workplace binding groups together, ordering and producing their relations. At a more general level Valentine's argument is that there are no workplace relations without participation between humans and nonhumans. The point of argumentation is that social relations are held in place by objects (such as food or drink) that circulate and bind. Thus, it is argued that social scientists need to recognise that humans are not necessarily the 'prime movers' in relations (Valentine 2002:2; Akrich 1992).

Serres' thought on quasi-objects (amongst other things) has been influential in the development of actor-network theory. Most crucially, it has paved the way for the description of humans and nonhumans in terms of assemblages and allowed for a consideration of nonhumans as active participants in social life, which has been

developed empirically in the works of Callon and Latour (as in the exemplars given above). Speaking of this and of quasi-objects in particular, Stuart Lee (2002:65) in an exposé of thought on 'hybridity' discusses how, for example, Latour is often considered to be the 'primary champion' of quasi-objects', with Serres' influence often being overlooked. However, Latour's sense of the quasi-object is bound up with the notion (and it is a related notion) of permeable boundaries between humans and nonhumans. Prout (2000:14-15) phrases this well in discussing the associations between humans and nonhumans that constitute heterogeneous networks:

'...so abiquitous are associations between humans and the rest of the material world that all entities are to be seen as hybrids – what Latour (1993) has termed 'quasi-objects' and 'quasi-subjects' – where the boundary between the human and the nonhuman is shifting, negotiated and empirical'.

Thus, Latour's notion of the quasi-object (and quasi-subject) represents, in much the same way as Serres', another analytical tool that facilitates an articulation of the mutually co-constructive relationship between the human and the nonhuman (Lee 2002), although the empirical task is to examine the processes endemic to this co-construction.

The empirical task here is intimately bound up with this examination of the mutually co-constructive relationship between the human and the nonhuman or more specifically between children and the nonhuman. This task is focused however on how this co-

construction produces outcomes like agency and / or power and also how children's

relations can, at times, be seen to be held in place by these co-constructions. The

discussion above serves to illustrate those aspects of actor-network theory and associated

thought that has guided this task. However, before considering the foundations of an

actor-network approach to children and childhood that have been already laid by theorists

of childhood, I would first like to offer a consideration of issues, problems and criticisms

that are relevant to my use of this approach.

Critical Issues with Actor-Network Theory

Actor-network theory has not been without its critics and there exists many critical

commentaries on the approach. However, for the most part, the criticisms levied towards

the approach that are relevant here, tend to oscillate around how actor-network theory

treats the human and the nonhuman and who or what is included and excluded in actor-

network accounts. Additionally, and somewhat relatedly, is the issue about who and

what actor-network theorists can legitimately claim to represent in their works. Below,

each of these issues is discussed in turn.

Humans and Nonhumans

Of all the debates that surround actor-network theory and its analytical repertoire, the

symmetrical treatment of humans and nonhumans is possibly the most well known and

contentious of these. As Hassard *et al.* (1999 cited in McLean and Hassard 2004) point

out, it is because of the way that actor-network theory brings together humans and

nonhumans in the same analytical view that it has gained so much notoriety. However,

as McLean and Hassard (2004:502) do well to point out, it should be noted that:

'...this is not a 'concern' for proponents of actor-network theory, only
for those who would call the approach into question'.

However, whilst actor-network theorists may be 'unconcerned' over the issue of the
symmetrical treatment of people and things – indeed Doolin and Lowe (2002) consider
actor-network theory's explanatory power to arise from exactly this stance - given that it
occupies a major point of critique, at least among the protagonists, it would be somewhat
of a misnomer to gloss over the issue.

For the most part, there are two interrelated points of contention. First, actor-network
theory's insistence that humans and nonhumans should be treated as analytically equal
and second, that nonhumans should be considered alongside their human counterparts as
potential actors. In proposing this, actor-network theory treads upon a set of ontological
toes (Law 1992). It does so because it problematises traditional / modernist conceptions
that maintain rigid divisions and distinctions between humans and nonhumans (Pels *et al.*
2002).

This breaking of the conventional boundaries and differences that are considered to exist
between humans and nonhumans represents a major point of contention in the debates
that surround actor-network theory. Star (1991) draws attention to this point of
contention when she highlights that attempts to subvert the moral divisions between

humans and nonhumans are considered to be dehumanising ones. Vandenberghe (2002:53) in a [humanist] critique of actor-network theory, for example, offers the following statement on the differential capacities of humans and nonhumans in respect to action:

> 'Do cubes, bricks, slabs, beams, columns and bottles of beer act? Do they co-ordinate their actions through a common definition of the situation? Are they kept together or driven apart from each other through agreements and disagreements? Obviously not. Bottles, beams and slabs do not act. Only humans (and animals) act; not endowed with intentionality, artefacts do not act.

This statement is close to the sceptical Collins and Yearly (1992:312-316) who in discussing the possibility of Callon's (1986a) scallops possessing the ability to act ask: How is it possible to think of a scallop as deciding to attach itself to a collecting net? As far as Vandenberghe (2002:53) is concerned humans and nonhumans 'belong to different ontological regions' and constitute quite 'different and incomparable ways of being'. In passing over different ways of being, he continues to argue that actor-network theorists reduce the analysis of human action, meaning and humans to an approach which essentially views humans as:

> '...rational action theorists who behave like 'centres of calculation', strategically associating and dissociating humans and nonhumans alike,

pursing their own political ends by economic means...meaningful

action disappears and all we are left with is a pasteurised and

desymbolised world of strategically acting dehumanised humans, or

humants' (Vandenberghe 2002:55).

On the other hand, some authors have raised concerns over how actor-network appears, at

times, to grant a higher status to nonhumans vis-à-vis humans (McLean and Hassard,

2004). Collins and Yearly (1992), for example, have argued that actor-network theorists

have assigned too much strength and importance to nonhumans and that in doing so they

have returned us to technological determinism (McLean and Hassard 2004). Collins and

Yearly (1992:310) object to what they consider to be a misconceived extension of

symmetry arguing that 'symmetry between all kinds of actants once more removes

humans from the pivotal role'. In discussing Collins and Yearly in their refusal to be

drawn into what he refers to as a 'Latourian ontological symmetry', Pels (1996:297) has

suggested dropping the symmetry principle and replacing it with a notion of 'weak

asymmetry, or a weaker notion about the permeable boundary running between humans

and nonhumans'. However, as Doolin and Lowe (2002) point out diminishing the status

of humans is not the task of actor-network theory. Rather, it wishes to consider the role

of what Latour (1992) refers to as the 'missing masses' (nonhumans) in the

heterogeneous networks that characterise the social.

As Law (1999:4) states, 'much ink indeed has been spilled over the importance or

otherwise of the distinction between human and nonhuman'. However, for Law (1992)

criticisms levied towards actor-network theory of the sort mentioned above are somewhat misguided. Actor-network theory has never implied an equality of essence between humans and non humans nor has it proposed that nonhumans act with the intentionality that is imbued in human actors or equally that human actors have no intentionality or capacity for intentional action (cf. Pickering 1993). Rather, its 'theory' of the actor is ambiguous:

> '...ANT is based on no stable theory of the actor; rather it assumes the
>
> *radical indeterminacy* of the actor. For example, the actor's size, its
>
> psychological make-up, and the motivations behind its actions – none
>
> of these are predetermined' (Callon 1999:181-182).

Thus, no *a priori* essential characteristics are attributed to actors. Law (1992) draws attention to the need to clarify that the symmetry principle is an 'analytical stance, not an ethical position', and that advocates of actor-network theory are not suggesting that humans should be treated like nonhumans or vice versa, but rather that the divisions between them are negotiable, fluid and changing (cf. Woolgar 1992; Turkle 1984). Therefore, he argues that it is not that divisions or distinctions are not considered to exist but rather:

> '...such divisions or distinctions are understood as effects or outcomes.
>
> They are not given in the order of things' (Law 1999:3).

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It follows then that the symmetrical treatment of humans and nonhumans is, to adapt the point Star (1991:30) makes in relation to technology, a kind of 'heuristic flattening of the differences between humans and non-humans in order to understand the way things work together'. On differences, divisions, distinctions and states of being, the analyst's job is to explore how such things come to exist via a sort of 'radical relationality' (Law 2000). Therefore, what an actor is or is not and what its attributes might be is very much an empirical matter (Doolin and Lowe 2002). However, the actor-network position is to always start out with an even playing field in which the human and the nonhuman are initially (and only initially) considered as equal and indeterminate entities (Law 2000). It is argued that this process of *a priori* levelling of differences allows analysis to overcome the boundaries that have precluded analysis from examining the ways in which the human and the nonhuman is interwoven (McLean and Hassard 2004).

Who or What is Included / Excluded in Actor-Network Accounts

Once one has yielded to the analytical principle of symmetry, moved towards a consideration of all entities as actants and begun the tracing of heterogeneous networks, another issue with the application of actor-network theory raises its head. Speaking of her discovery of actor-network theory during the process of writing her ethnographic experience, Janet Rachel (1994:810) states:

> 'I found myself constantly overwhelmed by the number of actants that
>
> could be construed at work around me and within me, and I was outrun
>
> by the speed at which these seemed to be moving through their

networks. In short, I was paralysed by the choice of actants to follow –
humiliated by their agility – confounded by their constantly changing
forms. Turning everything into an actor was stimulating to say the
least. I found that if I took ANT literally and tried to render the
networks visible, I lost the power of the theory altogether.'

Despite these statements, Rachel (1994) continues to write of the productiveness of actor-
network theory in terms of being able to look between dichotomies and examine how
things come to be constructed. However, her written statement expresses an issue
associated with actor-network accounting – who to follow, who not to follow, who to
include and who to exclude (Mclean and Hassard 2004).

In theory, actor-networks are infinitely extendable. They can contain an infinite number
of actants and an infinite number of connections. For example, if I sit here and think
about the actor-network of this thesis and try to expose it in its entirety, then I am apt like
Janet Rachel (1994) to become rapidly overwhelmed and my actor-network is likely to
explode. In attempting to do so, however, I could start with identifying some quite
obvious and ready-to-hand actants, such as my computer and perhaps the texts upon my
table. I could also identify some not so obvious but present-before-me actants, such as
coffee and chocolate that have sustained me through the whole writing process. For that
matter I could add my husband who is charged with the task of making the coffee and
endures endless trips to the local retail outlet to acquire the chocolate. Thinking of
humans, I could probably add those from the academic community that have advised me

throughout the process and friends who have sustained lengthy telephone conversations in which they have to endure endless talk about matters that make sense to no one else but me. Then, I suppose I would have to include the telephone which makes all of that possible. I could continue and begin to think about including things further removed, such as funders, selection committees, academic advisers and so on and I could travel back in time and think about others long past who have taught me and envision a future of the obligatory points of passage in the guise of my examiners that this thesis will have to pass through and so on and so on.

The actor-network so far seems quite simple but already I am not sure where it really begins and how far back I need to go in order to identify a 'start point', if indeed there is one. Equally, I am not sure where the 'end point' is likely to be because for the moment it is an actor-network in progress. This being the case, I have to constantly worry about the actor-network collapsing and I have to work endlessly to maintain it which I do by trying to strengthen it with the addition of new actants, for example, more texts and proof readers who I have convinced share my interest in flossing out my grammatical errors.

On top of this, I have to adopt contingencies in case my computer betrays me and breaks down or a computer virus comes and sweeps it away. Anxious about all of this, I enrol storage devices in the multiple in case one of them betrays me and because I am still paranoid, I enrol another two computers and transfer all my text into their memory banks. I worry about unpredictable and threatening actants, such as fire and because my house is built on a flood plain and the nearby river has twice claimed my possessions, I worry

about the water that may turn up at any time and sweep through my house and carry the thesis away (I am sure it must be near impossible to claim for thesis loss through the buildings and contents insurance). To this end, I also need to worry about melting snow and torrential rain that I know from experience antagonises the river to burst its banks. Luckily, there are flood defences which I may be able to rely on and if I am really worried, when the rain comes I can get in my car and visit the device that monitors the flood potential of the water level. It has, however, betrayed me before and I had to leave my house in a rowing boat. Now in a state of hyper-paranoia I duplicate everything and transport it elsewhere. This is all very tiring and feeling that there is little else I can to do to ward off other entities that may come along and destroy my actor-network, I find the only other entity I can enrol is that 'mystical' entity (Michael 1996:155) otherwise referred to as God, that Nietzsche's madman tells me no longer exists, whom I silently ask to protect my actor-network and whom I try to convince to send me an entity called inspiration to enrol into the 'thesis-network' as I think it would be useful. As this god never seems convinced enough to send me this entity, I am pretty cheesed off and wonder if a pact with the devil would be more productive.

The 'thesis-network' I am attempting to expose is fast exploding so I will stop. However, when I stop, I have to think about what is behind all these entities identified thus far. Now the actor-network becomes increasingly more complex because I am now trying to account for the fact that each one of the actants, in addition to being a actor-network itself, (Law 1991) is also at the same time embedded in multiple other actor-networks (Star 1991). I am not going to attempt to expose all of this because after endeavouring to

do so with the actant called 'texts', which is in itself a collective and each member of this collective is a collective and each member of this collective a collective and so on *ad infinitum*, I am worn out and have decided, that not only do I lack the time to properly attend to this, it is probably empirically impossible. So instead, I shall enrol the actant called 'texts' and ignore the multiple others implicated in its composition (protagonists will of course consider this evidence that my account of the 'thesis-network' will be eternally unsatisfactory) and try to render this discussion academically acceptable.

There is a problem in philosophy that it is referred to as *infinite regress* which can loosely be defined as an explanatory procedure that necessitates its own re-application without limit. However, because such an explanatory procedure can potentially generate an infinite number or 'series of conditions or variables',it is considered unreasonable (Audi 1995: 371). Van Hemert (2001) contends that because of the potential infinity of actor-networks, any analysis is susceptible to the problem of infinite regress. This being the case, he argues, that it is possible that actor-network theory cannot render anything useful. However, the issue of the extensibility of actor-networks, or to put it another way – that networks are 'multiplicitous and multidimensional' (Michael 1996:65; Star 1991) – is recognised amongst its proponents. Furthermore, actor-network theorists do not, as a rule, attempt to expose their actor-networks in their entirety or consider this necessary. In the case of actor-networks within actor-networks (Michael 1996) the complex task of accounting for the actor-networks that compose each actant is considered a problem that can be avoided or made easier to deal with through a process of *punctualisation* (Law 1992).

Law (1992) considers that it is possible to 'punctualise' an actor-network and consider it as a 'single block', that is, as a single actor. In doing so, the associations of heterogeneous elements from which that actor-network is composed are rendered invisible. However, Callon (1987) warns that when this is done it must be remembered that behind these punctualised actors there are a mass of invisible others. Each actor then can be considered as a *black-box*. If we wish, or if it is necessary, we can choose to open the lid of the black-box and look inside to see what constitutes the whole actor-network of the black-box or the sets of complex associations of heterogeneous elements within (Callon 1986b). This strategy can be applied in blanket fashion. For example, the actor-network which is the focus of analysis can, in itself, be considered as an actor and 'can be compared to a black-box that contains a network of black-boxes that depend on one another both for their proper functioning and for the proper functioning of the network' (Callon 1987:95). However, punctualising an actor-network in this fashion has to treated with caution. Law (1992) warns that punctualisation is precarious. Seemingly stable actors may desert the actor-network they belong to or may be become unstable if new actors enter the actor-network (Callon 1986a; 1986b).

In part, the issue being discussed is the problem of where to 'cut the network' (Strathern 1996). If it is not possible to consider *everything* then the actor-network theorist is faced with decisions about which actors to follow and the related issue of determining where the actor-network starts and where it stops (McLean and Hassard 2004). The end of the actor-network is perhaps the point when the network appears durable and the need to

open up black-boxes and examine their contents disappears (Law 1987). However, the issue of where to start and what to follow is more difficult.

The general rule of thumb seems to be to contained within the slogan 'follow the actors' (Latour 1987). As a rule of thumb, it seems a bit vague and implies that one should wait around (or follow around) and assume that what should be followed will emerge (see Law 1991). Miller's (1996 cited in McLean and Hassard 2004) advice is more pragmatic and more strategic than this, as he suggests, it is simply a case of picking out what you wish to follow and ignoring what you do not according to which actor-network you wish to examine. In speaking of Miller's advice, McLean and Hassard (2004) suggest that in practice things are more uncertain than this.

McLean and Hassard (2004) indicate that this is not a problem confined to actor-network theorists in the field because no researcher can possible follow all actors everywhere (Jessica Mesman tried following just one all of the time and found the process exhausting because the actor walked at such a speed[12]). Thus, they suggest, that in reality all researchers engage in a process of selecting and sorting which ones to follow and presumably, as a consequence, which ones to represent. It appears that somehow the researcher has to make an analytic decision as to where the network should be cut and in the process of doing so, remain open to the charge of neglecting those that have been excluded and criticised and for the inclusion of those that have not.

Representation

If inclusion and exclusion is the hands of the analyst, then the issue of who is represented in actor-network accounting can be considered equally so. This issue of who actor-network theorists can legitimately claim to represent is closely tied to the debates on symmetry and is discussed in relation to how symmetrical (or otherwise) the treatment of nonhumans vis-à-vis humans is in practice. Here, the sceptical Collins and Yearly (1992) have been the most vocal critics on issues of representation arguing that in order to be truly symmetrical, actor-network theorists would need to include the voices of the nonhumans they claim to represent in their accounts.

These issues are raised by Collins and Yearly (1992) in their now infamous paper Epistemological Chicken. The crux of their argument is that the symmetry principle is, more or less, invalidated because actor-network accounts can only ever be human-centred. They can only ever be so, they argue, because the points of view of nonhumans such as scallops can never be represented. Thus, they ask:

> 'Would not complete symmetry require an account from the point of
>
> view of the scallops?' (Collins and Yearly 1992:313).

As Callon cannot claim to be able to give voice to scallops, Collins and Yearly (1992) suggest that the account of scallops Callon gives is prosaic, despite it being a good exposé of the relationships between humans and nonhumans. This is because it represents an essentially human-centred asymmetrical story. It does so because it

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[12] Mol and Messman (1996)

presents an account in terms of the complicity of scallops which depends entirely on a human-centred interpretation of scallop complicity. Collins and Yearly (1992:313) offer tantalising suggestions on how the point of view of scallops may have been different:

'Would it be sensible to think of the scallops enrolling the scallop researchers so as to give themselves a home and to protect their species from the ravages of the fishermen?'

Michael (1996) following Collins and Yearly's arguments suggests that this is a highly problematic issue for actor-network theory, in so far, as actor-network theorists claims to give a voice to 'things', conceals the fact that the voices of things are, in reality, highly dependent upon human mediation. That is, things 'never speak directly – they must always be 'articulated' or rather constructed through human categories' (Michael 1996:75). This, it is argued, results in reinstating the social as the true site for sociological investigation. However, as he continues to point out, for actor-network theorists the primary concerns are the associations that take place between humans and nonhumans. The response of Callon and Latour (1992) to the criticisms of representation and symmetry is that nonhumans are woven into the fabric of the social and social relations. Therefore, it is the interactions between humans and nonhumans and the properties exchanged between the two that is the object of study (Michael 1996).

Hassard and McLean (2004) consider that issue of how objects are represented in actor-network accounts is an important methodological concern and that there is a need to

consider how actors are represented and how our conceptual tools and understandings influence this representation. As they point out, 'for Callon, this relies on the observer being agnostic to ensure that no point of view is privileged and no interpretation censored'. However, the issue of how symmetrical representation can really be still remains (McLean and Hassard 2004:503).

Problems with the Actor-network Approach

In the discussion above I have highlighted some of the problems with the actor-network approach that are relevant in the context of thesis. Briefly stated, the approach has been criticised for apparently granting agency to things and in the process reducing people to the status of things. For the most part, these criticisms are interwoven within ontological debates. However, for actor-network theorists this flattening of ontological differences between the human and the nonhuman is an analytical strategy. It is not, as Law (1992) reminds us, 'an ethical position'. Thus, and as McLean and Hassard (2004) have pointed out, for actor-network theorists, analytical symmetry is not an issue of concern.

However, there are methodological problems that are of concern to actor-network theorists. Problems with where to 'cut the network' (Strathern 1996), what actors should be followed and which ones should be included remain. Additionally, there are methodological problems with the fact that actor-networks are apt to explode and may be potentially infinite. Advice on the former (cutting the network) is that in following actors things will 'emerge' and what should be followed and included will arise from the act of following itself (Miller 1996 cited in McLean and Hassard 2004). The advice here puts

the selection of what actor-networks are traced by the researcher firmly in their own hands. However, according to McLean and Hassard (2004) that this should be the case is not a situation that is unique to actor-network accounting. The solution to the latter set of problems (exploding networks) is considered to lie in the analytical strategy of *punctualisation* (Law 1992) as long as the analyst punctualises with caution (Callon 1986b; Law 1992). The advice here is much more prescriptive than that offered on network cutting, although Callon (1986a; 1986b) reminds us that the analyst must remember there are invisible others.

The issue of representation remains highly problematic. Things do not speak. This much is fact and I find Collin and Yearly's arguments in respect to how symmetrical actor-network can claim to be quite legitimate on these grounds (although I have not found an actor-network theorist who has claimed to have been able to authentically represent the voices of nonhumans). However, whilst this issue of representation should be acknowledged in accounting, it does not necessarily imply that the 'first instance' analysis of the associations between humans and nonhumans is not a project worth pursuing, given that the nonhuman is implicated in the social.

This has not been an extensive or all encompassing review of actor-network theory. However, this was not the intention. Rather, the intention has been to introduce those aspects of actor-network theory that have informed this work and to highlight what I see as being the major problems with the approach in respect to this. However, before moving to consider the approach and its associated problems in respect to the account

given here, I would like first to consider the possibilities of an actor-network approach in relation to sociological thought on children and childhood.

Actor-Network Theory and the Sociology of Childhood

As noted in the introduction to this chapter; the application of actor-network theory to the sociological study of children and childhood remains a peripheral move despite the presence of prominent voices within the field who have advocated its use and mapped out the possible directions that an actor-network approach to childhood could take. Therefore, in the present climate of the sub-discipline actor-network theory is not a developed approach. Consequently, there is not a substantive volume of either conceptual or empirical work that can be directly drawn upon here. As it currently stands, there are only a very few authors that have either considered the theoretical possibilities or who have engaged in an empirical application of actor-network theory. However, between them they provided a valuable heuristic. In doing so, they have mapped out a starting point for a programme that, for the sociology of childhood, has the potential to move the debates on from their current foci. It is with this programme that this thesis primarily wishes to connect.

At present the potential contribution of an actor-network approach to the sociology of childhood is intimately connected to a project of opening up children's agency to empirical analysis. Given that the case for considering children as 'social actors' (James and Prout 1995; Prout and James 1990) has long since reached critical mass and the granting of agency to children now appears as theoretical orthodoxy within sociological

studies of childhood, a 'moving on' of the debates is perhaps timely. At present, the orthodox treatment of children's agency is founded upon a view of agency as the property of persons. Whilst an essentialising of children's agency in this manner has been considered strategically necessary in order to both let children pass into sociological discourse and develop the sub-discipline (Lee 1998), Prout (2000:16) in <u>The Body,</u> <u>Childhood and Society</u>, suggests that, 'the agency' in children's agency remains inadequately theorised', he states:

> 'Whilst instances of children's agency are readily found and the limits
> on it beginning to be specified (cf. Mayall 1996) there is a tendency to
> leave matters at the level of discovery and description. Whilst the
> excitement of registering and mapping the hitherto unnoticed is
> understandable, it is open to the criticism that it treats children's agency
> in an essentialist way. It is valorised, but treated as a given but
> previously overlooked attribute of children. Instead, I suggest, we need
> to decentre agency, asking how it is that children sometimes exercise,
> that is bring about some effect in the relationships in which they are
> embedded, whilst on other occasions they do not. The observation that
> children can exercise agency should be a point of analytical
> embarkation not a terminus' (2000:16).

Prout (2000) considers that the sociology of translation offers a theoretical starting point for examining how children's agency is produced. Whilst his primary project in the cited

volume is concerned with the body and not with agency *per se* (although it is a salient theme), he illustrates quite convincingly through his discussions of childhood bodies as *translations* how the approach could be used to open up children's agency to analysis.

Doing so, would move the issue of children's agency from a 'being-based' approach to one of 'becoming'. The theoretical ground for doing so, is also picked up by Lee (1998). In an article entitled Towards an Immature Sociology, Lee (1998) revisits the debates surrounding the sociological granting of agency to children and the notions of completeness, independence, self-possession and maturity that are implicated in the essentialised treatment of agency. Here Lee considers, the reasons behind and the implications of, the decision to 'mature' children to grant their entry into sociology. By this, Lee means that children, hitherto considered as incomplete, dependent and lacking in self-possession and maturity, had to be granted (by sociologists of childhood) the same agentic status that 'make adult 'beings' so sociologically significant' (Lee 1998:461). Lee stresses the 'either / or' nature of this decision by childhood sociologists when he summaries the decisions being made as, more or less, being reduced to having to:

> 'Treat children as 'becomings' and risk complicity with age-based hierarchies (Oldman 1994) and systematic distortion of one's research. Treat children as 'beings' and avoid complicity with age-based hierarchies while also ensuring that one's research allowed for a full and undistorted reflection of children's activities, cultures and voices' (1998:462).

As Lee (1998) argues, because children had been considered to have been marginalised within sociological thought and research due to dominant understandings of them as 'becomings' the need to make a decision to push for a view of children as beings was considered necessary (cf. James and Prout 1990; Jenks 1996). Whilst a paradigm shift ensued that has widespread implications for sociological research on childhood (Christensen and James 2000) and a mushrooming research literature has appeared, Lee (1998) highlights what this need for a paradigm shift reveals about current sociological theory. In particular, he highlights sociology's preference for the mature, finished and self-possessed over the immature, unfinished and dependent. Although, this, he considers, overlooks the dependencies of the seeminingly independent mature.

However, what Lee (1998) proposes for the problem of children's ontological status is quite provocative. Drawing on the work of Jenks (1982) which presents children's ontological status as ambiguous, in support of his case for the thoroughly constructed nature of childhood, Lee outlines a case for what he refers to as an 'immature sociology':

> 'Childhood can open the door on an unfinished world because childhood cannot be finished. It is neither a state of 'being' nor a state of 'becoming'. Instead it continually poses the question of being and becoming as it moves through the social, disturbing social ordering practices and calling for temporary resolutions as it goes' (1998:465).

Thus, if children's ontological status is ambiguous then, as I understand Lee's argument, children's agency can be posed as a question. This theme of ambiguity is continued *inter alia* by Lee (2001) in <u>Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty</u>. However, here, the notion of childhood ambiguity and its implications for 'being' and 'becoming' are drawn out in relation not only to children but also to the increasingly unstable state of 'being' that characterises contemporary adulthood. Lee (2001:106) provides us with 'sensitising concepts' that allow us to forge a middle path between the categories of 'being' and 'becoming' and deal with ontological ambiguity and treat agency as question.

Drawing particularly on the works of Derrida, Delueuze and Guattari and also Latour, Lee (2001) presents a convincing portrayal of both adults and children as dependent upon supplementation, mediation and extension in order to 'become'. Lee (2001) discusses how humans enter into assemblages with other humans and with endless other things such as animals, nature and the material in order to extend themselves, their powers and their capabilities. However, these assemblages are seen to be constantly changing and evolving into new and different assemblages.

In his account of children's performance as witnesses in court, Lee (1998, 2000, 2001) demonstrates how in order to 'become' a witness, children's self-reporting is dependent upon external mediations. He draws attention to how children enter into assemblage with, for example, technical devices such as video-recorders, in the course of becoming a witness. In such ways, children as witnesses, are revealed as dependent upon various

extensions which increase their capacities as witness:

> 'The child witness becomes more agentic and can pass as more self-present as more 'actors' are added to their 'network'. Video-cameras, videotape, television screens, and the police and social workers who help children to produce their testimony all contribute to redistributing the burden of childhood ambiguity so that it does not all come to rest on child witnesses' shoulders' (Lee 2000:130).

In this example, Lee is explicitly illustrating the relevance of an actor-network approach to childhood. Whilst noting that actor-networks are similar to Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of 'assemblages', upon which he draws in discussions of how people extend themselves through collaborations with endless others, Lee (2001:130-131) goes on to suggest that:

> 'The principal advantage of this approach is that, since it does not assume agency is a simple possession, it opens agency up to empirical study and analysis. We can ask what a given person, whether adult or child, depends upon for their agency. So with this approach to agency, instead of asking whether children, like adults, possess agency or not, we can ask how agency is built or may be built for them by examining the extensions and supplements that are available to them.'

This connects with the arguments and points advanced by Prout (2000) suggestion that children's agency should be opened up for analysis and his advocation of an actor-network / sociology of translation approach to the question of children's agency. Given the now widespread currency of the social actor approach, moving towards a notion of the 'becoming child' may be seen as a 'retrograde step' (Lee 2001:134) by sociologists of childhood – even if the objective is to consider what children's agency consists of or what they depend on to extend their capacities. However, Christensen and James (2000:3) have pointed out that (and this is possibly testament to its success), 'for some this move to recognising children as social actors is implict and taken-for-granted'. Without wishing to flex the sentiments expressed in this statement too far, I believe that the words contained within it, point to a problem of theoretical stagnation within the sociology of childhood insofar as the social actor paradigm has appeared to me to be now so taken-for-granted that it is presented, all too frequently, in research accounts as the informing theoretical framework, without any seeming need to warrant it explanation or consideration. That this should be the case (in some instances), indicates that it is perhaps an opportune to time to begin questioning – as Lee (1998:463) puts it – the 'conditions of possibility'. However, Lee (1998) also reminds us that it is only because of the steps previously taken to develop a sociology of childhood in the 'being' mould that taking such a path now is conceivable.

Bringing it Together: Issues in the Current Work

In the discussion above I have outlined the key elements of actor-network theory that have informed this work; points of analytical and methodological critique and problems

associated with the use of the approach that are relevant here; and outlined how theorists of childhood have envisioned the use of actor-network theory / sociology of translation (and thought of this kind) as a possible device for the analysis of children's agency. By way of conclusion, I wish here to connect these three streams more explicitly to the account presented here.

Broadly stated, my project here primarily connects with the related programmes of Prout and Lee (above). Drawing heuristically upon the analytical repertoire of actor-network theory introduced in this chapter, my objective is to examine *inter alia* how children create effects such as agency and power. The emphasis is upon the processes involved in the generation of these effects and in exposing the heterogeneous networks that children as heterogeneous engineers assemble in order to extend their capacities as actors. Additionally, I have tentatively extended the programme towards examining the role that nonhumans play in holding together children's social relations.

However, as I discussed in Chapter One: this work adopted *prima facie* the 'social actor' paradigm. Therefore, whilst actor-network theory was subsequently adopted as an analytical framework for the thesis, I cannot claim that the account presented here is entirely analytically symmetrical. The symmetry principle is used, however, it is used in conjunction with an appreciation of children's understandings. It should be noted however, that the tendency towards a human-centred account is more salient in some parts of the discussion than others. Here, it is not considered that this undermines the use of the symmetry principle, rather it is considered that gaining an understanding of

children's reasons and rationales in respect to, for example, the entities they enrol, facilitates a greater depth of analysis. Inevitably, this implies a weaker version of symmetry.

Following this point, I have not disengaged from the thought that has emerged from research conducted from the social actor perspective. My analysis draws on sociological work on childhood throughout the text. It is my view that the account presented here should not radically depart from this body of work but rather supplement it, albeit through a somewhat different theoretical lens. However, in acknowledging my 'impure' use of actor-network theory perhaps I can propose my analytical approach as a sort of 'hybrid' to those who may view this as blasphemous.

The chapters that contain my analysis reflect both themes that have 'emerged' during the fieldwork period and those actors and networks that I have chosen to follow. In part, I have discovered the 'truism' that analysis – in terms of what is followed and represented – is indeed in the hands of the analyst. To say that a great deal of ordering and selecting did not occur in the process of deciding which actors to follow, which networks to trace and which of these are represented here would be inaccurate. Related to these issues of selection and representation are the methodological strategies of cutting and punctuating networks and actors. No actor-network can be considered to have been fully exposed in its entirety (and its possible infinity) and no actor has been thoroughly un-black-boxed. At times black-boxes have been opened and at others they have not. My approach to 'cutting the network' has been to represent only those actors that I have been able to

empirically trace and only those that are local and contingent to the specific ethnographic sites of this study and the interactions that characterise these sites.

As I have mentioned above, I have not disengaged entirely from the paradigm of the social actor. My research practice has been heavily informed by the prescriptions, perspectives, insights and advice it offers into research with children that is scattered throughout its collective literature. My task now is to turn to these issues and inform the reader of both the approach I have taken to research with children and the techniques and practices that have been used.

Chapter Three

Practice, Process and Method

Introduction

The non-linearity of the research process that has characterised this thesis was brought to the reader's attention in Chapter One of this account. The main thrust of this discussion was to draw attention to the development of the 'research problem' and how it was produced rather than to address issues of practice, process and method. However, these two points of foci are intimately connected in so far as there was considerable overlap between the development of the research problem and the research practice. Thus, part of my project here has already been completed. The informing objective in my 'accounting for the means of production' in Chapter One was to render visible how this thesis 'became' and to do so explicitly. This reflects my deep belief in documenting (as far as it is possible to do so) the realities of doctoral research in particular and research in general and as a consequence, my deep distrust of those accounts that do not or perhaps do so by invoking a standard notion of reflexivity and paying passing lip service to the iterative nature of the research process. Research can be, as Pearson (1993:vii) states, 'a messy business' as any good book on ethnography communicates.

In relation to this, the obligatory methods section (Mol and Messman 1996), I have given considerable thought about whether or not to give the standard text book portrayal that appears to characterise discussions of practice, process and method in theses in order to

'satisfy some fetish of documentation or legitimation' (Van Maanen 1988:23) that may or may not convince the reader of the candidate's competency in the sociological crafts. Whilst this appears as the safest route, it implies a whole-scale cleansing of what I consider to be the reality of my research practice. To my mind, this undermines the very essence of reflexivity and reminds me of Gouldner's (1970) argument that a reflexive sociology is characterised by the relationship between the sociologist and his or her own work. Thus, it strikes me as antithetical to subvert or conceal this relationship in order to perhaps appear more competent. Competence in doctoral research, whatever this may be, must surely also imply a concurrent development of competencies based on experiential learning 'in the field' and a demonstration of the same (the reader may recall my argument that 'doing a doctorate is an experience in learning' (Hanrahan *et al.* (1999:401)).

I have chosen, most deliberately therefore, not to portray a text book account in the discussions that follow. The research process was, as I have pointed out – messy; my research practice was not (as I consider it) without fault; and my methods like my theoretical framework were very much an *in situ* development during the preliminary stages of my doctoral programme and my early exploratory phase, rather than the result of the well thought out executive plan rigidly established in the original research proposal and executed forthwith. In part, this of course reflects the nature of the moving target that is the research process. However, here my points of self-critique are more pertinent to issues related to research with children and in particular, the interweaving of this with

my parent-as-researcher (PAR) approach and the decision to study the community of children to which my own children belonged.

In their use of the PAR approach Adler and Adler (2001), whilst thoroughly considering the advantages and disadvantages, come out their discussion advising only that potential PARs find some sort of balance within their role-fused position. My own stance is much more critical than the Adler's and here I wish to draw attention in particular to the complex ethical difficulties with the PAR approach – the navigation of which I consider too arduous and too tenuous for me to recommend the approach to novice researchers who may be unfamiliar and inexperienced in negotiating ethical issues appertaining to research with children. These issues of ethics are intimately related to the tensions and conflicts that arose between the parental role and the researcher role and the difficulties in maintaining equilibrium between these two status positions. Whilst my discussions of the PAR approach are given a relatively large proportion of space and are interwoven throughout much of this chapter, this does not overshadow the need to discuss more formal issues of method that require statutory attention.

As I indicated towards the end of Chapter Two, on a broader level, the approach I have taken to my research has been influenced by the methodological thought associated with the social actor paradigm. Therefore, my approach to research with children and my research practice has been informed by insights derived from contemporary debates about research with children in particular and theoretical debates about children and childhood more generally. Although, and in relation to the previous points above, maintaining this

methodological stance where the research participants and the ethnographic site forms part of your personally and practically lived daily life can be tenuous.

Whilst a salient theme in this thesis is to decentre children's agency and ask how children, as would-be-actors, go about the task of becoming actors with powers, I have not, as a consequence, disconnected entirely with the social actor paradigm. Indeed, a project which aims to ask what children rely upon for their agency necessarily carries with it an underlying assumption that children are capable of exercising agency. Of course this is implicit in Prout's (2000:14) call to decentre children's agency when he states (and I am reiterating these statements here):

> 'The observation that children can exercise agency should be a point of
> analytical embarkation not a terminus'.

It follows then that the argument is not over whether children can or cannot exercise agency – the empirical case for this has already been made as Christensen and O'Brien (2003:2) point out, 'studies of children's lives, circumstances and welfare in contemporary societies have provided empirical evidence for agency' (cf. Prout 2000). Rather here, what is asked is what children depend upon for their agency. Thus, recognising that children can be agentic is therefore crucial to the central task of this thesis although the need to essentialise children's agency is not.

However, the most salient methodological insights of the social actor approach are retained here – although not altogether unproblematically. For example, whilst I take on board the recognition stemming from the social actor approach that, 'children can actively participate and communicate their ideas in research' (Harden *et al.* 2000:4) in the same way as adults, I also take on board related arguments surrounding which research techniques are considered to facilitate children's communication in research and the assumptions that underlie the adoption of various techniques. For example, James *et al. 's* (1998) suggestion that researchers should consider that children possess different not lesser competencies than adults has led some researchers to develop and adopt more 'task-centred' (James *et al.* 1998:190) techniques for data collection (Harden *et al.* 2000) and the use or development of so called 'innovative methods' has been particularly *en vogue*. However, there are no 'innovative methods' here. Instead, I have used the traditional methods of participant observation and unstructured interviewing. This reflects my concurrence with Christensen and James' (2000:2) argument that carrying out 'research with children does not *necessarily* entail adopting different or particular methods', and that:

> '...like adults, children can and do participate in structured and unstructured interviews; they fill in questionnaires; and on their own terms, they allow the participant observer to join with them in their daily lives. Thus, although some research techniques might sometimes by thought to be more appropriate for use with children, with regard to particular research contexts or the framing of particular research

questions, there is, we would argue, nothing particular or indeed peculiar to children that makes the use of any technique imperative' (2000:2).

However, the ways in which the exploratory pilot phase affected my choice of methods is also of relevance here. In addition to a consideration of the rationale behind the use of these methods and the methods themselves, I also attend to detailing the characteristics of those children who participated in this study and the analytical procedures used to record and make sense of the data. However, before doing so, I wish first to present a discussion of the ethnographic locations used, which for the reader incorporates a consideration of how those sites were identified and accessed.

Sociology on the Doorstep: Locating the Ethnographic Other

In discussing the differences between the fieldwork locations of anthropologists and sociologists, Van Maanen (1988:21) makes the following statement:

'The most fundamental distinction is that anthropologists go elsewhere to practice their trade while sociologists stay at home...sociologists, by and large, focus their work on urban contexts that are literally close to home.'

For Van Maanen (1988:22) this 'close to home' involves, at the very least, a commute on the part of the sociologist in his or her Volkswagen. However, the fieldwork locations

used in the present study were quite literally close to home. No Volkswagen was needed – just a step off the doorstep or a hundred yard walk in order to observe the life worlds of the community of children that lived beside me playing and interacting in the outdoor spaces of the housing estate in which they and I lived or in the playground of the local primary school which the majority of the children attended.

As Chapter One may have indicated, it had not been my intention to conduct a community based study within my own neighbourhood. Neither had it been my intention to study children's interactions and activities within what could loosely be described as a suburban housing estate and contrast them with those interactions and activities that take place within the setting of the school playground. Although, I had originally intended to secure access to a primary school in order to generate a sample of participants for interview, my sole objective in doing so was motivated by the opportunity schools give researchers to access a naturally occurring cluster sample of participants. However, the identification of the fieldwork locations (like the research objectives themselves) was very much an *in situ* development of the research process arising partly through incidence and partly through opportunity. The result of which was a study which compared children's interactions with their local neighbourhood and within the school playground.

Whilst studies of children's peer cultures have traditionally used formal play settings such as the school (Corsaro 1997:118) and more recent geographically orientated work has began to widen understandings of children's peer cultures in wider variety of contexts, including their own neighbourhoods (cf. Christensen and O'Brien 2003; and

Holloway and Valentine 2000), far fewer are the number of studies which have concurrently studied and followed children's daily lives within both their local neighbourhood and at school. Indeed, few studies have sought to concurrently examine children's lives in different spheres[13]. Therefore, the combination of, and the contrast between, these different sites has possibly yielded a more diverse set of empirical materials than is perhaps usually the case.

Most crucially, carrying out fieldwork in different locations allowed for a comparison of these children's daily lives, activities and interactions with each other in these different sites. In particular here, this comparison allowed for an analysis of how the heterogeneous associations between children and the nonhuman differ and are affected by the different play spaces that children occupy (this is illustrated in Chapters Seven and Eight). What was revealed through this was that the school represented a site in which the heterogeneously available was very much subject to adult control and restriction whereas within their local neighbourhood children could draw on a more diverse pool of heterogeneous elements that, by and large (although subject to local contingencies), was under their own control (again, see Chapters Seven and Eight).

Had only one fieldwork location been used, it is doubtful that observations such as this would have been made. Therefore, gathering data from two different sites has enriched the understandings that have been presented in this thesis and has allowed for a comparison between how, for example, children's translations are structurally effected by

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[13] A very good exception to this is Mayall's (1994) study of children's health negotiations at home and at school.

the extent of adult control that operates in different childhood spaces. As Ely and Anzul (1991:178) state, 'the main intellectual tool is comparision' – here, analysis has benefited enormously from the comparison of the data generated between the different sites explored.

Below I wish to outline how the two fieldwork sites were identified rather than, as would perhaps normally be the case, simply giving a descriptive account of the features of these sites (although description is attended to). My rationale for doing so is informed by my belief that the development of this research into a study of a group of children within the community in which I live warrants discussion primarily in order to adequately portray the research process as it actually was rather than cleansing it of reality details but also because of my relationship to the location and the research participants.

Identifying 'Greenspace' as a Ethnographic Site

In Chapter One, I discussed how my casting of a 'sociological eye' over the daily goings on of the community of children to which my own children belonged resulted in the identification of the interactional space adjacent to my home as an ethnographic location for exploratory fieldwork. Referred to from now on as *Greenspace* because of its uniqueness as a relatively large grassed site within a housing estate that can otherwise be more or less described as the proverbial 'concrete jungle' – this particular space was used by the children that lived in the houses adjacent to and nearby as play area. Whilst other children from further afield in the housing state did and do occasionally frequent Greenspace in the 12 years that I had lived beside this site I had watched the children (including my own) who lived around me enter the site as toddlers under the gaze of their

parents and continue to use and retain social ownership of the site (until adolescence arrives and generally carries them off to further away places).

Of course and as McKendrick, *et al.* (2000) point out, neighbourhood sites such as this represent common play spaces for children. However, and as McKendrick *et al.* (2000) also implicitly draw out; the use of such spaces by children is subject to local contingencies such as age, gender and co-presence of peers. When, I first took up occupation of my home in this neighbourhood very few children lived either adjacent to or near the site and children rarely played in this space. Over the years as more young couples and families moved into the area the number of children living in close proximity to Greenspace increased. This proximity of children to each other appears to have led to the site developing as space for children's play. Many of these children are close in terms of age. At the time of the study the majority of the children were in the latter stages of primary school – mostly between the ages of nine and twelve. However, there were also children who were younger and older than this (some of whom were siblings) who played together regularly. In respect to this, proximity rather than age seems to have been the determining factor in the development of Greenspace as a play space. Interestingly though, the majority of these children were boys and boy's play activities dominated the use of Greenspace. Only four girls lived adjacent or close to the site. However, three of those girls usually chose to interact within the peripheral areas of the site or to confine their usually, domestic fantasy play (mother / baby routines and so on) closer to the private domestic sphere of the home (doorsteps, front gardens and back gardens). One of the girls infrequently played with other girls preferring to be involved

instead in the boy's activities. To all extents and purposes the boys treated her as a 'token boy' because of her prowess at sport, particularly football. In respect to this, and with the exception of 'Terry' who in lay terms would be labelled as a 'tomboy' these patterns of gendered space use and play activities reflect those that have been previously observed and reported in studies of children's peer cultures (cf. Corrigan 1979; Thorne 1993; Voss 1997). Thus, Greenspace was first and foremost a 'boy's place' (cf. Matthews 2003). That is was so may have simply been because of the disparity in numbers between boys and girls who lived close to the site. However, reflecting back on McKendrick *et al.,* (2000) above, it is possible that gender – that is, the relatively large number of boys living in close proximity to each other – was perhaps a contingent factor influencing the development of Greenspace as a site for children's play.

As a site for play activities the almost panoptic spatial organisation of the houses that surround the site affords parents a constant gaze if they so wish (see Appendix One). The opportunity for parents to exert a constant gaze and Greenspace's perceived freedom from the dangers of, for example, traffic has meant that as a public space used for play parents are neither concerned nor fearful for their children's safety. Therefore, many of the parental anxieties revealed in the research literature in respect to children's use of such spaces (cf. Valentine and McKendrick 1997) are of little relevance here. Many of the surrounding gardens of the houses adjacent to the site (including the garden of my own house) 'back on' to Greenspace, thus its local reference as 'out the back'. This being the case, over the years Greenspace has become a peculiar sort of communal garden – an area of public space which is considered by those who surround it (children

and adults alike) as an extension of their own private space. For those who live on its boundaries who do not have children the use of Greenspace by children has been a continual source of conflict between them and those adults who have children and between these non-parents and the children themselves. For these non-parents the daily use of Greenspace by noisy, sometimes squabbling children, was a source of constant frustration and annoyance. These non-parents held a different and conflicting set of beliefs about the children's use of this public space in this way. Their presence in Greenspace was seen as problematic, disruptive and undesirable. Moreover, their use of Greenspace appeared almost to be regarded as invasion of these adult's own private space. These negative views of children's presence in public space has usually been suggested in research accounts to be directed towards older children whose use of public space is often considered problematic by adults and their presence within it threatening (Matthews *et al.* 2003; Matthews *et al.* 1999; Sibley 1995). However, these children who were, for the most part, of primary school age were considered and regularly treated as troublesome by non-parents.

As a public space used for children's play Greenspace became the target of my 'sociological eye'. My gazing upon the unsuspecting children who utilised the space perhaps carries with it a connotation of voyeurism in so far as my observation of the children in this manner was not altogether that of an impartial or innocent onlooker. Additionally, there is perhaps an inkling of an ethical issue in so far as there was no consent gained for my enquiring gaze.

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However, this sort of 'gazing' prior to formal entry into a particular ethnographic location is not entirely uncommon. Ensign (2002), for example, discusses informal preliminary observation of this sort in her account of qualitative research with homeless youths. Although Ensign's (2002) engagement in carrying out preliminary observational work was quite deliberate, her primary purpose was to identify areas where homeless adolescents 'hung out' and to assess what forms their street-based activities took. Unless she was directly asked what she was doing she did not inform anyone as to the reasons behind her presence. In her account, Ensign (2002) appears to consider her informal preliminary observation to be relatively unproblematic (ethically speaking) because it did not form part of her research and because she did not engage in collecting or recording information on the activities and persons she observed. However, she does not address how her informal observations perhaps fed into future project developments.

I do not consider that my own – and I hesitate to even call it this – preliminary observational work was intense enough to warrant a full blown ethical discussion on issues of consent. It did not constitute part of an official project to 'check out' ethnographic possibilities in the same way as Ensign's (2002) observational work most obviously did. Here, it would be more accurate to state that I was making casual observations about aspects of these children's interactions with each other that prior to my engagement with the sociology of childhood had been of no previous particular interest. If anything, I was caught up in a fascination with how a sociological lens was altering my view of these children's activities and interactions as I went about my daily life. Moreover, this is not a unique experience amongst researchers of childhood. Jeni

Harden (2000) for example discusses how after beginning as a research fellow on a project investigating the impact of risk and parental anxiety on the everday worlds of children, her growing awareness of children around her:

'Other than the children of one close friend, I had little contact with children in my daily life. Yet when this project began I started to see and hear children everywhere. I became much more aware and, I suppose, interested in their presence in my adult world' (Harden *et al.* 2000).

Whilst I did disclose these casual observations informally with others within the university setting, I did not engage in recording my observations or thoughts. It did not occur to me to do so because I was not purposely investigating the potential of the site or even considering it as a possible location for fieldwork. Thus, I do not believe there is ethical argument to be had. However, in my discussions with significant academic others about this site, my continuing interest in it and the pressing need to conduct an exploratory pilot phase to focus the direction of the research, it developed as a location which was considered suitable for the purposes of a small exploratory phase. There were, of course, other reasons influencing this choice of site. Primarily these were: the low costs involved; the proximity of the site; and the possibility of establishing formal access relatively quickly and with less difficulty and bureaucracy than would normally be the case in negotiations for access to a more formal setting such as a school. However,

the latter of these assumed advantages, that is, access - proved ethically problematic in terms of 'putting the 'informed' into 'consent' (discussed later).

Putting these ethical issues temporarily aside for the moment: subsequent to informed consent being obtained from both parents and children I began carrying out some preliminary observation of the children's interactions with each other at Greenspace. As intimated in Chapter One: At this time the need to focus the direction of the research was the primary reason for the identification of a suitable site and a suitable sample of participants for a short period of exploratory fieldwork. However, during this short exploratory phase, Greenspace emerged as a rich sociological site for studying children's relationships as they *naturalistically* occurred with each other in the context of their everyday mundane play activities. Having an already established role in the lives of these children[14] appeared at the time to indicate that the major advantage of retaining Greenspace as a fieldwork site for the main study would be my ability to conduct prolonged periods of observation without the children necessarily paying me any more attention than would normally be the case and without my presence in their scene being anything out of the ordinary. I had felt that what observations I had already undertaken and the data collected as part of the exploratory phase were free from the possible influence upon behaviour that an unfamiliar adult research presence might bring. In respect to this I believed that the children would continue, as I then thought they had, to

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[14] Adler and Adler (2001) consider PAR's to have a 'complete membership role'. I would question the use of the term 'complete' here as I have an adult / parental membership role within this community of children but remain as an adult / parent excluded from their 'child world'. I discuss this more fully in the section on fieldwork roles below.

go about their activities without being constantly aware that someone was gathering information on their daily goings on.

In addition to this, the site offered the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in a non-educational site. Considering that the majority of studies that explore childhood are conducted within educational settings (James *et al.* 1998), it seemed that it would be a bit of a misnomer not to continue with the research in this non-educational or non-formal setting, particularly as access had already been negotiated[15]. Therefore, the decision was taken to capitalise on the ethnographic possibilities that Greenspace offered and retain this site as a fieldwork location for the main study.

Identifying Hillend as Fieldwork Site

As the original intention of my research was to investigate primary school children's perspectives on bullying, in the very first instance I had begun negotiations with the local authority for access to primary schools within the local authority in which I lived[16] [17]. Following standard protocols, permission was initially sought through the director of education by a letter accompanied by a short synopsis of the then intended programme of research. Following this, I was granted permission to conduct a research study within a

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[15] Perhaps it should also be noted that as a novice researcher I had not considered that anything other than a 'formal' setting such as, for example, a school or after-school club would be acceptable as a fieldwork site. However, it was pointed out to me that this did not necessarily have to be the case and there was no reason why I should not conduct fieldwork with a neighbourhood setting. Suffice to say, had I been engaging more thoroughly at the time with the literature within social geography appertaining to childhood I would have been perfectly aware that there are now a growing number of studies wherein researchers have conducted fieldwork in such settings – although participant observation is rarer.

[16] This local authority was selected in order to keep down fieldwork expenses – particularly travel costs.

[17] It should perhaps also be noted that at this time I was considering conducting a comparative study of different types of schools, for example, comprehensive and public schools. Therefore, at this time I also sought, was granted but later politely declined access to two public schools.

local authority primary school with the proviso that I underwent an enhanced disclosure[18] [19].

Given the twists and turns that led to the identification of Greenspace as a fieldwork site and the changes made to the focus of the research as a consequence of engagements with the literature and observations made during the exploratory research phase at Greenspace, I considered that it would be beneficial to the study to be able to observe Greenspace's children within their local primary school as opposed to utilising the permission granted by the director of education to negotiate access with another primary school within the local authority. My rationale for this, was that access to this school would allow me to study the children's interactions with each other (and with other children) and their play activities in school. This I considered might facilitate a productive comparison between these children's activities in different spatial locations. In particular, I was interested in how the school playground as an institutional space in which 'adults attempt to control children' (Holloway and Valentine 2000:14) may possibly act to structure these children's play activities in various ways. Although, Greenspace was subject to a certain amount of adult control and influence, by and large, children experienced a relative amount of autonomy and adults rarely intervened, interrupted or co-ordinated their activities. When adults did intervene in the children's activities in Greenspace it was

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[18] It should perhaps be noted that as a former employee of the education department the director of education (although they did not occupy this post during my time of employment with the education department) was a former work acquaintance and that it is probable that this perhaps had a direct bearing on my being granted access.

[19] Although, I had previously been through disclosure with this local authority because of the lapse of time it was necessary to be re-vetted.

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usually due to concerns over safety (for example, climbing a tree too high or playing games on the roofs of garages).

I therefore approached the head teacher of 'Hillend' by letter with a view to negotiating access. At the head teacher's request I later met to discuss my requirements. As it transpired the head teacher was quite relaxed about the possibility of my conducting observation within the school. However, many of the other teachers were not. It was explained to me that because many of the teaching staff were relatively near the beginning of their teaching careers, there was a great deal of anxiety about any possible classroom based observation that may be conducted. Additionally, and from what I could gather from this conversation, there was some concern about the likelihood of a constant research presence within the school. As I did not consider it vital for my project to spend time within the formal classroom setting I agreed to confine my observations to the school playground. In respect to what appeared to be concern over the possible constancy of my presence, I accepted the headteacher's suggestion that I limit the time spent within the school each week by rotating which recreational periods I would observe and the days they would be observed on. Necessarily, this meant that I was not able to conduct continuous fieldwork within the school. However, because I considered this particular primary school to be of greater value to my research than any other within the local authority, I considered these concessions reasonable and worthwhile in order to secure access to the site. Since the playground (and children's interactions and playground activities) and not the classroom was my primary site of interest within the

school, exclusion from the teaching areas of the school was not be considered to be either problematic or necessarily detrimental.

Greenspace and Hillend then became the primary ethnographic locations for this research. Despite the issues associated with the PAR approach (discussed below), the ability to follow the majority of my participants in both their neighbourhood and their school was most definitely beneficial to the analysis. Many analytical observations and themes were refined or modified due to the ways in which the data collected from one site contrasted with the data collected in the other during comparative processes. It also gave me a fuller picture of the daily lives of the participants as opposed to the very limited snapshot that may have been the result of a solo site study.

There were, however, disparities between the quantity and depth of data collected between the two sites and the time that was spent observing and talking with children was unevenly spread over the fieldwork locations. As time restrictions were placed upon my access to Hillend, fieldwork was limited to two or three periods of observations per week that lasted between fifteen minutes and one hour depending upon which recreational break I was observing (mid-morning, lunch time or mid-afternoon). My time at Hillend was stretched over the school terms between November 2001 and May 2002 inclusively. By contrast fieldwork at Greenspace was stretched over a much longer period of time. Just how long is difficult to estimate because even now I feel that because I live in the site, I have never been able to fully leave the site. However, I formally began (and I include the exploratory phase here) fieldwork at Greenspace in July 2001 and stopped in

August 2002, although, the time that I spent officially conducting fieldwork was mostly limited to the times that children were not in school (weekends and holidays). I also spent periods of time engaged in just 'watching' rather than 'recording'. However, because I could not stop my 'sociological eye' from roaming back to Greenspace, I am unsure how accurate this may be given the frequency of these 'revisits'. Additionally, and as my participants were part of my own and my children's daily lives they have been present throughout the analysis and writing up of this thesis. Despite 'leaving the field', I remained within it and these children continued to inform my work. For example, the writing of this thesis about them was a source of constant curiosity. When these children would come into my house they would ask if I was still writing the 'book about them' and ask what in particular I was currently writing about and if they were included in that part. Sometimes they would stand behind me as I sat at my computer and read from the monitor bits of the narrative. In particular, my own children have engaged in doing quite a bit of this over the shoulder reading. Although, towards the end they became quite bored of it all and of my continual questioning of them about certain aspects.

Denscombe (1995:178) of course argues that the success of an ethnography is dependent upon: the researcher maintaining their involvement with their participants; remaining close to those who are being studied; and perhaps returning to the field many times. This is thought to require a prolonged period of fieldwork (Rist 1980). However, Walford (1991) raises the issue of how prolonged is prolonged as well as questioning what prolonged means in relation to ethnography. Spindler and Spindler (1992:65) consider

that the issue of time spent in the field should not be considered in terms of numbers but rather by the degree of understanding a researcher requires:

'The validity of ethnographic observation is based on observation in situ that lasts long enough to permit the ethnographer to see things happen not once but repeatedly. [...] We must observe these happenings often enough so that finally we learn nothing significant by their reoccurrence. A researcher knows when that point has been reached. Then one should observe still longer, to be sure that one's sense of that point in time is not premature nor the result of fatigue.'

Additionally Spindler and Spindler (1992) argue that, if for example, a researcher intends to conduct three months of observation in a classroom (a length of time they consider to be adequate) which consists of spending a portion of each day engaged in observation, then it is better that they spread this three months over the period of the whole school year rather than compressing it into a three month period. Their reasoning for this argument is that the need for arriving at some form of completeness in ethnography is better able to be achieved if the researcher observes the culture under study in different places and at different times.

My own approach to length and time more or less corresponds to Spindler and Spindler's (1992) recommendations. Therefore, I would re-emphasise that my fieldwork was not continuous but spread across the time periods outlined. However, a major advantage of

following the same group of children (with a few exceptions) within their local neighbourhood and within their school was that I was able to discuss school based issues with them outside of the school setting. Therefore, it was possible to compensate in some small ways for the disparity of time invested in each of these locations.

Characteristics of the Sample

There were twenty-two *core* participants in this study. I have used the term *core* here because although I conducted observation within the local primary school, I did not sample (for the purposes of, for example, interview) any of the children within the primary school[20], although aspects of the 'research converstations' I had with some of these children appear in this text. The *core* participants were exclusively those children who regularly used Greenspace as a site for play *and* who lived adjacent to or near this fieldwork location. Therefore, to use the technical jargon – this was a purposive sample selected entirely because of the member's attachment to a particular spatial location. Of these twenty-two *core* participants, seventeen also attended the local primary school. Three of the other children attended a different primary school and two were in the early stages of secondary school.

At the time the research began these children were aged between five and thirteen years old. Therefore, quite a wide range of ages are represented here. However, as I pointed out earlier, the majority of these children were between the ages of nine and twelve; with the breakdown of age given in table 3 below. I did not collect data on these children's

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[20] It should be noted, however, that there is an occasional use of oral material from children who were not in the core sample.

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socio-economic backgrounds or family formations and so forth. However, in drawing upon my local knowledge of these children I can confidently state that these are, without exception, children from traditional working class backgrounds (as discussed previously).

Table 3. Age and Gender of the Participants

	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
Male	1	2	1	1	3	4	3	2	1	18
Female			1		2		1			4
Total	1	2	2	1	5	4	4	2	1	22

As evident from the table above and highlighted previously; there was a very uneven spread between the genders with approximately 82% of the sample being boys. Unfortunately, this was not able to be compensated for because of the relatively exclusive concern to study and follow the life worlds of the children that used Greenspace as a site for play coupled with the retained social ownership of this space by the children (and parents) who lived adjacent to or immediately near the site. Therefore, the gender spread of the participants was locally contingent. However, this has important consequences in respect to the analysis presented in the proceeding chapters. Most crucially, there is a bias towards the activities, interactions and social relations of boys and this is salient throughout the thesis. It is, however, an unfortunate outcome of the local geographical dispersion of gender in the primary fieldwork location. It is considered that it was out

with the remit of this study to attempt to compensate for this. Considering the spread of ages and the discrepancies noted in respect to gender, and given that this research focused primarily on a very particularised community of children there are no claims made as to the representativeness of the sample.

Ethical Issues

Fieldwork within both Greenspace and Hillend, presented multiple and sometimes frequent ethical dilemmas and difficulties. Many of these stemmed from my PAR role which I felt, at times, arose because of the conflict between the obligations and responsibilities attached to each of the fused but separate roles and identities of parent and researcher. Others, I believe arose as part of the process of doing research. Davis (1998) for example, highlights that in ethnographic research with children ethical issues confront the researcher on a daily basis. However, other ethical problems arose during the process of, for example, negotiating access and obtaining informed consent – I would also add there were particular problems in ensuring that the children were aware of when I was wearing my 'parent hat' and when I was wearing my 'researcher hat' – although the difficulty here was that, at times, I was at odds to identify which hat I was wearing myself. Throughout many of the ethical difficulties I encountered I found that there was sometimes little guidance to be found because many of the problems that occurred were contextually specific this study. Of course, official guidelines can only ever be exactly this – guidelines - they can never provide a comprehensive 'fits-all-situations' set of prescriptions for ensuring research is conducted ethically. Thus, and as Roberts (2000:229) highlights, 'although ethical guidelines do not give us all the answers, they

can lead us to ask the right kinds of questions'. However, official guidelines that are specific to research with children are thin on the ground. One oft cited exception to this is Alderson's (1995) guidelines which provide some useful rules of thumb.

Too much can be made of ethical issues where the research participants are children. Alderson and Goodey (1996) for instance suggest that there is a danger in further exacerbating the notion that children need to be treated differently than adults in academic research practice. Harden *et al.* (2000) suggest that as there is little reason to consider that research with children will necessarily carry a 'greater ethical burden' than that with adults:

> 'The main ethical issues should not revolve around children's innate difference but relate to children's social location as subordinate to adults.'

In relation to this the primary areas of ethical concern are considered to be centred around issues of informed consent, unequal power relations between children and adults and issues of protection (Morrow and Richards 1996). Thankfully, I did not encounter problems related to the latter of these in so far as I understand this latter category to refer to children disclosing information that they are at 'risk'. However, there were particular problems associated with issues of informed consent and unequal power relations. Whilst these are drawn out below, I wish first to discuss the problems I encountered with

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the children's adult gatekeepers in ensuring that the 'informed' in consent was indeed *informed.*

Putting the 'Informed' into 'Consent' with Greenspace Parents

On the latter of these points I considered I would be able to capitalise on my friendships and acquaintances with the parents of the children who used the site in respect to parental consent. As a corollary to this I believed that because these parents knew me relatively well (some better than others) then there would perhaps be less hesitancy about their children's participation in research.

As it turned out, the process of negotiating consent with parents was considerably more difficult than I had anticipated. However, this was not because parents were reluctant to agree to their children's participation – quite the reverse was true and paradoxically this presented me with immediate difficulties in obtaining informed consent from parents that satisfied what I considered could reasonably be viewed as the 'informed' in 'consent'. All of the parents of the children who frequented the site were happy for me to officially observe their children at play and to speak with their children about their relationships and play experiences with each other. Thus, consent was not the issue. The problem I had was that most of the parents were not particularly interested in being *informed.* My attempts to communicate the nature of my research, my interest in the site and the children and the aims and objectives (as all of this then stood) were met with a lack of interest. Primarily, (and I intend no disrespect to these parents here) this appeared to be interwoven with these parent's misconceptions about my university study and a lack of

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understanding about what a PhD is. These parents generally perceived me as a college student and interpreted my request as assistance with a college project. As I tried to explain what a research degree was and the 'type' of project I was doing, I was often met with looks of confusion or facial expressions that conveyed they were not familiar with what I was talking about. I became aware that for many of these parents, all of whom were of working class or lower working class backgrounds (in so far as they were generally employed in manual work or in some instances in receipt of state assistance) that the requirements for higher degrees by research in particular or higher education in general was not something they were familiar with or necessarily understood. In addition and relatedly, it was obvious that academic research was an entirely alien phenomenon to these adults. Therefore, I found myself trying dismally to explain much of the 'ins' and 'outs' of all of this to these parents.

My perception of reactions to these discussions was that some of these parents felt awkward and embarrassed as I tried to explain that I needed them to thoroughly understand the nature of what I was doing and as corollary to this what I was asking of them. I tried to handle this without causing offence and felt as I was doing so that I was exacerbating their embarrassment at their own lack of understanding about such things. I felt that some parents were handling their felt uneasiness in my attempts to 'inform' them by waiving what I saw as their need to be informed, that is, by gesticulating and verbalising that what I saw as something I needed to communicate to them was not really something they felt they needed to know or harboured any concerns about.

It had not occurred to me beforehand that I would need to explain my research in this way or that the communication of my purposes would be so enormously difficult a task to negotiate. However, I did feel it was necessary in order to ensure that the consent I was given was indeed informed. I had anticipated that I would need to address the 'informed' in consent with children but not with adults in their capacity as proxy decision makers or gatekeepers in relation to their children's participation in research. Although discussing these issues primarily in relation to children and informed consent David *et al.* (2001:348) draw attention to the issue that the presentation of information and facts about research objectives for the purposes of fulfilling the ethical obligations of informed consent is often assumed to be unproblematic arguing that:

'The concept of 'informed consent' and especially the notion of the information on which that consent may be based has rarely been interrogated.'

Coming from a medical research ethics perspective, Green *et al.* (2003) discuss the need to consider how to prepare information whether oral or written that sufficiently addresses the researcher's obligations to properly inform research participants and also the parents of child participants. In particular, they highlight the problems that may be encountered in communicating research objectives in a manner that the target audience understands. Green *et al.* (2003) draw attention to the fact that many researchers do not have any difficultly communicating this in the technical jargon of academia but are less experienced and equipped in translating this into a plain language that satisfies the

information needs of, for example, parents. They argue that 'true consent implies complete understanding' and that consequently researchers have an obligation to 'ensure that the information provided is both comprehensive and lucid' (Green *et al.* 2003: 701).

In addition to this I had to communicate to parents the reasons for obtaining informed consent from the children themselves. Generally speaking, the parents did not understand why, if they had consented, I would need to seek consent from their children. Here I found it necessary to explain, as best I could in lay terms, ethical issues appertaining to research with children. Interestingly, and even more surprisingly, I had a similar problem once the 'in-principle' access to the local primary school was finalised. When I had intimated that I required to disseminate information about my research and consent forms to adults caretakers *and* also to children, the head teacher did not understand why this was necessary. Whilst it was easier to communicate research objectives to educational professionals, I was alarmed that I had to also communicate contemporary ethical practice. However, this particular head teacher was due to retire (in fact he did so during the fieldwork period) and perhaps he had become out of touch with such issues[21].

Having, first approached parents verbally regarding issues of access and consent, I was able to take on board the issues raised in these verbal exchanges and use them to inform the written information leaflets that I produced. Retrospectively, I considered that the whole uncomfortable verbal exercise allowed me to more fully address the information needs of these parents and also how this information needed to be presented in, for example, terms of language and the level of complexity of language that was necessary.

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Lessons learnt about the use of academic jargon to communicate research objectives and so on to lay audiences assisted in the production of this material and forced me to address my own competencies at communicating such things to non-academic audiences.

Children and Informed Consent

In contrast to the problems that arose with adult gatekeepers, I found that the communication of research objectives to children was much easier[22]. However, because I had fell foul of my own belief that it would be children's information needs that I would have to address and not adults, I had prepared much more thoroughly for this and invested a lot more time and thought into the ways in which I would inform children. Additionally, I was able to draw on the experience of others who were able and kind enough to provide me with exemplars of explanatory leaflets they had produced and assist me in producing my own and issue advice on how to talk about such issues to children. Given the age range of the participants, it was necessary to verbally inform some of the younger children who lacked literacy skills. Likewise, I spoke to the children who were in the early year groups (primaries one and two) at Hillend to explain the research and my presence in the school. Previous work experience had also equipped me with more developed skills at communicating with children and young people of different ages about a broad range of subjects – more so, I had found, than any skills I thought I might have had in respect to communicating with adults. However, and as I

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[21] I am not making a judgement that educators should necessarily be 'in touch'.

[22] Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest that academic research is no less free from western notions of the child as incompetent. In issues of informed consent it is clear to me that I made assumptions about the respective competencies of adults and children. That is, I assumed adult competence and children's relative incompetence. This is evident in the fact that I considered that it was necessary to prepare for addressing children's information needs but not adults.

note below, I was not skilled at interviewing children for research purposes and had to develop this skill *in situ*.

Maintaining the 'Informed' in Consent During Fieldwork at Greenspace

The problem I had with the principle of informed consent with children was in maintaining an understanding with children, particularly in Greenspace, that I was in fact observing them and recording details about their daily goings on. I had not considered that my parental identity would generate ethical problems for the maintenance of informed consent. To put it more directly – the children tended to forget too easily my researcher role. Whilst this may sound advantageous in terms of presumably being able to access *naturalistic* behaviours, I began to feel that there was an uneasy, almost covert, element to the research. I became quite concerned about the fact that it did not always appear that the children remembered the meaning of my temporarily changed role in their life world. In fact, at times, some of the children were blatantly confused about this and confused about at which times I was 'watching' and at which times I was not. However, it should be noted that at times I was confused about this myself. In the PAR role where there is no clear demarcation of your identity and role as a researcher (because the parental identity continues to supersede it) this becomes problematic both for the participants and for the researcher.

In consultation with the children, we agreed that when I was watching I would wear a red jumper to clearly signify that at that particular time I would be watching and recording what they were doing. For the most part, this worked quite well, although sometimes

when I talked to these children, as I would normally do as a parent and adult in their life worlds, they did ask (red jumper or not) whether I was asking as a researcher and whether I was writing it down or going to write it down or not. Thus, the problem was never fully overcome. Likewise the wearing of the red jumper did not mean that they automatically stopped considering me in my natural role rather than my superficially constructed researcher role. They still approached me and interacted with me primarily as a parent but as a parent who also wrote things down about them. Whilst the situation in respect to all of this was somewhat lessened within Hillend, news of who I was in Greenspace spread rapidly and I remained (despite the fact that my own children did not attend this school) somebody's mum. I never really managed to fully dilute the parental identity.

Parent-as-Researcher and Relations in the Field

Necessarily, and given that it was only possible at times to weaken the parental identity, there are issues here about power relations between children and researchers that are perhaps more potent than is usually the case. A great deal is said in the pertinent literature about the need to dissolve as far as it is possible the power differences that exist between children and adults in the context of research practice an idea that has been widely discussed in feminist debates about relationships between researchers and participants (cf. Oakley 1982; Ribbens 1989). However, Harden *et al.* (2001) note that, 'one of the features of child research is that inequalities of power between children and adults are duplicated in the research process'. This is considered to have implications in terms of influencing what children are willing or feel able to say to researchers in, for example, interviews (Hill *et al.* 1996).

Some researchers have argued for the adoption of particular field roles in order to minimise the structural differences that exist between researchers and children. For instance, Mandell (1991) proposes the notion of the 'least adult role'. With the exception of physical size, this involves the researcher attempting to suspend their adult traits. Previously, Pollard (1987) argued for a similar role that involved the researcher attempting to ensure they were not seen as a 'proper adult'. Some authors have argued that such roles are difficult to maintain in practice because of the asymmetrical nature of child-relations (James *et al.* 1998). Moreover, whilst James *et al.* (1998) suggest that the researcher could attempt to develop a friendship relationship with the children participating in their projects, for much the same reasons they argue that this may prove difficult.

In my attempts to construct a lesser adult identity, I found that the parental identity with its associations of authority were very difficult to erode. At times, I was concerned that when I spoke to children they were doing so because they felt they had to. I also considered and often got a sense that some children found my attempts to dilute my parental identity were strange – perhaps because I was trying too hard to shift my naturally occurring identity, which in spite of its more negative associations with issues of asymmetries of power and so on, was, after all, how many of the children related to me prior to my entering the field.

I found that trying to become less than adult / parent was very difficult in these circumstances. Given this, I opted for a while in trying out the 'detached observer' role which is more common in psychological research (Mayall 2000:121). In doing so, I tried to refrain entirely from becoming involved in the children. Whilst useful at times when I needed to just watch the children at play and listen to their talk with each other (and I intermittently did just this), this too was impossible to maintain because the children had a tendency to 'draw me in'. For example, when disputes occurred they would frequently approach me to settle these disputes which in turn led to other problems with field roles and also, at times, resulted in ethical dilemmas (see Chapter Six).

Eventually, I opted for and tried to maintain (as far as it was possible to do so whilst carrying a parental identity) a sort of midway point between the 'least adult' and 'detached observer' roles that endeavoured to integrate Butler and Williamson's (1994) suggestions about how to 'bridge the gap' between the adult researcher and the child participant. This, 'bridging of the gap' they argue is about more than just attempting to construct an acceptable identity. They suggest four key factors need to be considered by adult researchers if this gap is to be narrowed in research practice. First, they suggest that researchers should engage their participants in a role which exhibits 'naïve curiosity'. In doing so. they should be empathetic, honest and open in a way that is neither condescending nor patronising. Second, they should attempt to be non-judgemental. Third, researchers should provide opportunities for their participants to express and explore their own views within the context of the issues being considered and their own (the participants) agendas. Finally, they should remain flexible and take into

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consideration the differences that exist between children when they engage them in the research endeavour.

I found this a much more useful approach than relentlessly trying to find an acceptable field role that diluted power differentials and so forth. Of course this involved shifting aspects of my parental identity and changing some of the ways I would have normally interacted with these children but I believe this did so in a less 'forced' way. Also, because I considered Butler and Williamson's (1994) suggestions to be represent, more fundamentally, some prescriptive advice on how to communicate and treat children (as people) that is applicable in any context (not just research) I believe that this stance facilitated a more fluid movement between the two identities / roles of parent and researcher and assisted their fusion.

Adler and Adler (2001) consider that as the PAR approach has much in common with other role fused approaches such as counsellor-as-researcher or teacher-as-researcher, the above sorts of issues are not unique (nor more potent) to the PAR method. However, they highlight that the methodological problems and issues with these others sorts of role-fused approaches are little discussed in research accounts. In their discussions of the teacher-as-researcher, Jones and Tannock (2000) highlight similar problems in relation to issues such as power asymmetries and the difficulties in balancing the dual roles of teacher and researcher simultaneously. Jones and Tannock (2000) also draw attention to the fact that it is difficult to divorce the teacher role from that of researcher role and vice versa. Additionally, they too highlight that, at times, their participants were also

confused, citing an example of a message a children wrote in a Christmas card to one of them which stated, 'to Mrs Jones, sometimes teacher, sometimes helper' (2000:93).

However, in these accounts of role-fused research approaches the focus of the debates presented primarily oscillate around issues of bias, validity and reliability and consider the influences that role-fusion has upon influencing findings or conclusions in terms of the construction, analysis and interpretation of data. Lewis (1992) suggests that such researchers need to consider the extent to which data can be distorted as a consequence of role-fusion. In relation to teacher-researchers some authors have argued that such problems can only be overcome by the use of quantitative methods (Elliot 1991 cited in Jones and Tannock) whilst others have argued that bias can enter here too (Yin 1994). Jones and Tannock (2000) suggest that although it is important that role-fused researchers consider the pitfalls of their roles, ultimately these issues depend upon the skills of the individual researcher. However, they also note that, 'children behave and respond differently to different people' (Jones and Tannock 2000:93). Thus, there is no reason to consider that the use of a different sort of researcher would necessarily minimise such issues.

My own conclusions are that the issue of the researcher role and how that role is performed in the field and the minimising of its effects is an *active* process. By this I mean that it is not possible to superficially adopt and rigidly adhere to any one particular field role. Field realities do not allow for this. However, they do allow for a negotiation between and movement amongst different role positions.

Watching and Asking

Although never intended, the approach to this research has been broadly ethnographic. By this I mean most specifically that I have employed participant observation as my main data collection tool[23]. Having used participant observation in the exploratory phase I considered that the major advantage it offered was the opportunity to observe a community of children *in situ* (cf. Denscombe 1995) within a naturalistic non-formal setting. Whilst I would not go as far to suggest that I entered the field with a *tabula rasa* (Wilcox 1982) I considered that because the direction of my research lacked clarity (see Chapter One) that participant observation allowed for a more flexible approach that facilitated the development and refinement of the focus of the research in tandem with emergent themes.

A distinguishing feature of ethnography is that it allows for the development of theory as a *process* wherein theory can be developed and refined in tandem with data collection and the collection of new data (Gold 1997). In addition to the above I also lacked a theoretical framework for the research (although aspects of this were beginning to be developed as a result of the exploratory phrase). Therefore, I considered that the approach would offer the scope to allow for a theoretical framework to develop out of the process of data collection (Gold 1997).

Certain arguments surround the issue of theory and research with children. In particular, it is suggested that the development of theory 'should not be the driving the force...rather

it should emerge' (France, *et al.* 2000:151; cf. Mayall 1996). France, *et al.* (2000) point out that there are parallels between this argument and the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) which argues theory should evolve from the analysis of empirical data thus, theoretical or analytical models should not be imposed.

What is implied in these statements is that theoretical models should not be adopted *a priori* but rather be allowed to emerge from the data[24]. However, others have challenged this type of approach to theory building because it can be difficult to do in practice (Mason 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson 1984). Whilst in this research the application of actor-network theory and thought associated with it was not systematically applied until the data collection phase was complete, the conceptual thought associated with it progressively influenced the focus of my observations in the field and as a consequence the data I was collecting. Wilcox (1982:462) suggests that one of the goals of ethnographic work is to synthesise the empirical with the theoretical in the hope that the end 'story' is:

'...deeper and fuller than that of the ordinary outsider, and broader and less culture-bound than that of the ordinary insider.'

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[23] The reader may have noticed that up until now I have declined use of the term participant in 'participant observation'. This is because I do not feel that I could in any real sense of the term 'participate' in the life worlds of these children. I therefore find the use of the term misleading.

[24] Personally, I do not endorse an atheoretical approach to research (Layder 1998). Rather, I consider that research should be characterised by an ongoing process of interaction between the theoretical world or writings of one's discipline and the empirical world in which one is engaged in order to go beyond simple story telling (Hughes 1994). Additionally, I think there are issues with the notion that researchers can suspend or bracket in some way their theoretical engagements with their discipline when they enter the field and somehow prevent these from invading their thought processes altogether.

The exploratory phase had also convinced me of the accrued benefits that the practice of combining 'looking' with 'asking' could produce. In particular, I found that being able to 'ask' children about the things they did and said when they did and said them or soon afterwards was advantageous. Additionally, if I was following a particular theme that was emerging from observations I could subsequently explore the theme in conversations with children. I found this to be a more useful approach than attempting to construct interview schedules however loosely structured and applying them in blanket fashion. Therefore, I had found that letting the 'research conversations' (Mayall 2000) flow from my participant observation was beneficial.

In adopting this approach to collecting verbal data I felt it lessened some of the awkwardness the children felt when I attempted to conduct more formal interviews. As I have mentioned the children knew me and related to me first and foremost as a parent, therefore, when I had tried to interview children more formally they seemed ill at ease with the unnaturalness of the situation. By contrast the Adler's (2001) consider that their PAR role facilitated a closer relationship and identification with some of their participants. Therefore, their impression is that many of their participants discussed issues with them they considered they would probably not have discussed with either parents or researchers[25]. However, I found that if I took a more conversational approach (which maintained a suitable distance whilst facilitating a better rapport within a more

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[25] I get a certain sense of uneasiness when I read about such claims in the Adler's work. For example, the disclose information about how they became the 'cool parents' ; offered food and rest room facilties; helped children do their homework; functioned and confidantes, friends and mentors; bailed children out of trouble; and discuss 'priding themselves on having the best snacks (which they appear to consider results in children visiting them as a 'way station'. Personally, I find this more than a little problematic perhaps even coercive. Although the Adler's appear to be attempting to 'prove' their closeness to their participants.

natural kind of interaction) and integrated these conversations with the periods of time I was formally conducting participant observation the children appeared more relaxed.

To begin with I had found it difficult to talk to children for research purposes and perhaps this came through in my formal interview attempts. That this should have been the case surprised me because I had assumed that my previous experience in youth work would have prepared me for this. However, I found out that there was a vast difference between the skills needed to conduct a research interview with children and those I had used in practice based work where principally children were asking me for information.

As things developed my verbal skills with children improved and I became more able to focus these research conversations on issues I wanted to find out more about whilst at the same time allowing room for the children to manoeuvre the conversation. However, I retained the emphasis on conducting these conversations in tandem with participant observation. Having developed the 'red jumper code' eventually some of the children began to approach me with things they wanted to tell me. Sometimes, some children asked if I would put the 'red jumper on' so they could tell me things. Although a very simple method of distinguishing between times when I was 'researching' and times when I was not, it proved relatively effective. It also gave me a sense that I was attending to what I felt was an ethically difficult matter – that of my role being explicit to the children. I believed this was important. In their PAR role the Adler's (2001:21) discuss taking a 'more explicit parent-as-researcher role'; however, they do so only in relation to the audio-taped interviews they conducted. A great deal of the Adler's work seems to have

been conducted without clearly identifying when they were collecting data on children's lives and when they were not. Whilst I am not claiming that I magically managed to stop myself from 'gazing' when I was not wearing the 'red jumper', considering the issues outlined above I did endeavour as far as it was possible to find a way for the children to identify when I was doing so.

I dispensed with the wearing of the 'red jumper' whilst conducting observational work at Hillend. With the exception of the *core* participants, the majority of the children at Hillend did not identify with my parental status. However, news (as they say) travels fast and it did not take long for me to be identified as 'so' and 'so's' mum (even although my own children did not attend this school). Even here then, there were problems with shifting the parental identity.

For the most part fieldwork at Hillend was free from many of the problems that the PAR role brought although it brought new ones in terms of attempting to build relationships with members of staff some of whom held reservations about my presence even though this presence was confined to the non-teaching areas of the school. As my presence became mundane it appeared to become much less of a concern to staff who had been generally guarded in their interactions with me. However, a change in headship during the fieldwork period brought with it a person who gave me the impression that she was less than enthusiastic about my activities within the school. To this day I remain

confused as to what the reasons were for this or if indeed my impression was inaccurate[26].

Data Collection in the Field

Whilst each ethnography differs in emphasis, ethnographers generally rely upon a mixture of data collection methods or sources of data in their attempts to achieve 'intimate familiarity' with the lives and meaning making practices of their participants (Emerson 2001). As previously highlighted; the present study used three methods of data collection – observation, participant observation and interviewing. Using these methods of data collection on a more or less simultaneous basis is generally considered to allow the researcher to develop a more holistic understanding of their participants and their daily lifeworlds. For the most part, there is also a great deal of consensus about the enhanced quality of ethnographic data (in respect to amount and depth) given that it is acquired through researchers investing a significant amount of time observing and to varying degrees, participating in these settings (Prus 1996).

In their accounts, it is common for researchers to draw out the advantages of field methods through reference to the above sorts of benefits and through their arguments that these allow for the development of a fuller, more complete understanding of their participants and the lifeworlds they inhabit. Similarly it is common for accounts to pay some attention to the practice of analysing the yields these methods produce, that is, the 'processing' of fieldnotes (Emerson *et al.* 1995). However, notwithstanding discussions

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[26] I discuss field relations with this person in chapter eight. Therefore, for the sake of expediency I shall not replicate this discussion here.

of such things as gaining access, fieldwork roles and so forth, it is less usual for researchers to acknowledge or discuss the actual practice of using these methods 'in the field' (Corsaro and Molinari 2000). Generally speaking, the tendency in ethnographic writing has been to abstract these process from the act of doing ethnographic research (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Hammersley 1992). However, by definition, an ethnographic approach communicates that the researcher is intimately involved in an ongoing process of collecting rich, detailed and invariably voluminous data. Considering this, it is useful to consider some rudimentary features of the practice of data collection during fieldwork.

Data collection in fieldwork is routinely reported in terms of describing the systematic and careful recording of the routines of the fieldwork setting in terms of the actions and interactions observed in the field, snippets of conversation and so on through the construction of fieldnotes. However, as a novice researcher I found that the majority of accounts which discuss these aspects of fieldwork tend to advance little explanation beyond summary statements that make claims to this process being rigorous. Consequently, it seemed that little existed in terms of procedural guidelines for data collection practices during fieldwork. Therefore, in the first instance my approach to data collection and in particular the business of data construction (the taking of fieldnotes) proceeded haphazardly, in a somewhat frenzied attempt to manually record 'everything'.

Although common sense informed the recording of mundane but nonetheless important details such as the date, place of observation, actors present in the scene and so forth,

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attempts to write down, in detail, everything the eyes see and the ears hear soon exposed itself as impossible and impractical (if not outright foolish). Moreover, the written products of this presented an unmanageable transcription task for a lone researcher in terms of the constraints on time presented by the realities of daily life outside the field. That is not to say that I was not aware of existing experiential advice that highlights the necessity of putting aside blocks of time for transcription of field data (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein 1997) but rather that I had misunderstood what is practically possible in terms of the construction of such data *in situ.*

Here two points emerged relatively early on: firstly, that it is not possible to record 'everything' in extended detail in situ and secondly, that my attempts to do so were premised on a misconception about what constitutes good procedural practice in respect to data recording. Apart from the fact that this lead to a situation in which I 'overfed' myself with information, it also highlighted a point often made about the impossibility of being able to capture the essence or reality (the use of this term alone being hotly contested) of ethnographic settings completely (Van Maanen 1988).

Retrospectively, my procedural folly I put down to a lack of experience but also my lack of rigor in familiarising myself more fully with ethnographic methods prior to my entry to the field. Latterly discovering that the construction of fully fledged notes should be a task which is undertaken after a particular period of observation / participant observation was somewhat of a relief in so far as my sense of competence was restored but also a lesson about acquainting oneself more fully in regard to method.

Following Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's (1997) advice that *in situ* data recording should aim at the construction of what they term 'jottings' (short summarised notes of events) from which more detailed field notes are latterly constructed, I shifted my practice accordingly. However, as Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) note, the process of recording and producing fieldnotes is highly personal and individual researchers differ in respect to how much or indeed how little detail they record first hand and construct at some later time. As field work progressed and the study became more focused in terms of what I wished to find out (see Chapter One and below in the present Chapter) I became more flexible and also more confident about when to change from 'jotting' to more detailed recording. Additionally, I began (as previously mentioned) to appreciate the value of suspending in situ note taking altogether in favour of just watching which was invaluable when 'testing' an analytical idea.

I also attempted to adopt a more rigourous approach to the data collection process throughout the main fieldwork phase. This incorporated messages from experienced ethnographers regarding sensitivity to sensory impressions, my own personal response to events in the field, recording in analytic memos the development of analytical thought, questions that events in the field stirred and the much reinforced point of writing up fieldnotes as soon as possible after leaving the setting (if not immediately) (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein 1997; Emerson *et al.* 1995).

At its core, however, ethnographic fieldwork and the process of data recording is messy and rigor in method quickly materialises as a rhetoric which is difficult to consistently maintain in reality. This is because researchers rarely find themselves in ideal situations for writing in the field (Emerson *et al.* 1995). As mentioned earlier, there are tensions in respect to fieldwork roles and relationships, and in the practical problems of attempting to participate and simultaneously record events. For example, in the school site the gaze of teachers often made me reluctant to be seen to be recording. In what were at times quite tense relationships with staff, fear of offending staff through being seen to record teacher-pupil interaction (particularly where disciplinary issues were present) were ever present. Children would on occasion require attention for bumps and bruises, request assistance, wish to chat or sometimes invite me to join in games. Inevitably, such occurrences caused interruptions to the recording of observations. These realities inevitably have an impact upon the artifacts of fieldwork (Sanjek 1990; Emerson *et al.* 1995).

Van Maanen (1988) reminds us that the result of these sorts of practical issues is an understanding that is always incomplete and represents the fieldworker's recorded memories of a setting and its inhabitants. He argues that the data collected in fieldwork is 'not data per se but rather primitive approximations of the writer's later knowledge and perspectives of those studied' (1988:118).

Recording and Analysis of Data

The most extensive part of my analysis is drawn from the written field notes taken *in stiu* or constructed as soon as possible after the events. However, as the reader moves

through this thesis they will find that I have occasionally used what I refer to later on as analytical memos, which have been drawn from personal writing I occasionally used as an attempt to order my thoughts. A great deal of material was generated from fieldwork notes. However, a proportion of this material was also lost. During transcription I found that the notes I had written were sometimes disjointed or so random that I could not make sense of what their meaning was. Whilst, I endeavoured to transcribe written notes as soon as possible after periods of observation, it was not always practical to do so. Therefore, I found myself frequently having to engage in blocks of transcription work that given the delay between the 'field and the computer' sometimes suffered from recall problems when I was at a loss to makes sense of these notes or remember the events to which they related[27].

The 'research conversations' I had with children (and very occassionally with adults) were not always audio-recorded. I audio-recorded where I thought it was appropriate to do so, when the child(ren) was comfortable with the conversation being audio-recorded (I gave them the option to decline my use of a dictaphone), and when I was following a particular theme or topic that I felt would benefit from as full as verbal record as possible. In sum, I collected eighty-six recorded 'research conversations'. However, some of these were relatively short – some no longer than a few minutes[28]. Although, earlier formal

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[27] Van Maanen (1988:118) argues that the 'glop of materials we refer to as fieldnotes' are invariably incomple and insufficient. He considers that they only ever are a recorded memory or a small part of the memory of the researcher from the fieldwork period. He argues that field notes are data per se but approximations.

[28] I do not think that because some of these taped 'research conversations' were short in respect to the length of the conversation that this necessarily implies that there is less quality or depth in the verbal data. This assumes that there is a relationship between the quantity of data and the quality of data or as Harden et al. (2001) quoting Brownlie (1999) put it: 'the more talk the better data'. Here they argue that length does not necessarily imply depth or mean that the data gathered is useful or better.

interviews held during the exploratory phase were recorded and transcribed only three of these have been used as data in the final analysis. This is primarily because the focus of the research changed. However, this is true for much of the data collected. Once the themes were worked through during analytical processes a great deal of selection went into those parts of the data that have been represented in the material presented in this thesis and those aspects of these children's lifeworlds that have been included here. Therefore, in so far as I have framed this thesis as ethnographic, the inherent partiality of the 'story' means that it is not a full ethnography. This of course is an outcome of the 'slicing' and 'dicing' of the data during analysis (Van Maanen, 1988).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) consider that analysis is pervasive throughout the research process and is not a separate phase towards the end of the research that is followed by an equally distinct phase of 'writing the findings'. However, I did not subject the data to what could be considered to represent a formal and substantive analysis until I 'left the field'. Some authors suggest that analytical processes should be divorced entirely from the other phases of the research process and left until all the data has been transferred from its raw state and made amenable to analysis. Bryman (1988) for example considers than any concurrent analysis may impose theoretical constructs on the data that do not correspond to the reality experienced by the participants of the study. Despite formal analysis not being conducted until the data was transferred from its raw; as a process analysis was pervasive throughout the research. Where it started I cannot answer definitively but I would venture that it began when I was working through the literature prior to 'entering the field' and refining my ideas in relation to the reading I was doing.

Certainly, I would argue given the continued interaction and exchange between my empirical observations within the field and my disciplinary engagements out with the field that the analytical processes were potent throughout (see Chapter One). For instance, my increasing interest in actor-network theory progressively invaded my analytical focus within the field to the extent that its various elements were shaping the focus of my observations which were increasingly being recorded and framed in my notes using the analytical repertoire of actor-network theory.

I do not see this interaction between theory / observation / analysis and so on as problematic as Van Maanen (1998:117) states:

'The working out of understandings may be symbolised by fieldnotes, but the intellectual activities that support such understandings are unlikely to be found in the daily records'.

Moreover, in so far as this is perhaps antithetical to those who advocate that these supporting intellectual activities should not be pursued until after the researcher has disengaged from the field, there is as Dey (1993:63-4) puts it:

'...a difference between an open mind and empty head. To analyse data, we need to use accumulated knowledge, not dispense with it.'

As will be evident to the reader from the discussions presented in Chapter One; by the time I left the field to begin the substantive analysis, there was a clearly developed analytical approach. Additionally, the themes that I wanted to reflect in the thesis had emerged through the interactions that characterised the concurrent processes of fieldwork and engagements with the theoretical and empirical literature – one informing the other and vice versa. As this and the analytical framework used (see Chapter Two) have already been discussed, I shall not reiterate these discussions here.

Raw data, however, have to be made amenable to analysis in a manner which facilitates the building of explanations and arguments (Mason 1996). There are no hard and fast rules for this (Strauss 1987) and ultimately the method for making sense of the data is the remit of the individual researcher (Ely and Anzul. 1991). However, it does require that researchers organise data both practically and analytically (Denscombe 1998). Thus, the differences between the practical organisation of data and the analytic organisation of data are often indistinct and frequently there is an underlying logic to the way in which researchers store data (Mason 1996).

A common approach to generating categories for analysis amongst qualitative researchers is to search through the data for themes (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1984; Strauss 1987). However, this is often simultaneously influenced by the aims of the research and prior theoretical interests (May 1997). As a starting point my own approach utilised the themes developed in the fieldwork phase as a starting point to 'focus down' the data. This was easier to do with fieldwork material that had been analytically

annotated in the field. As I mentioned previously, the focus of observations in the field had become progressively influenced by actor-network and thought akin to this. Therefore, in parts where *in situ* annotation had occurred or where I had added analytical annotations during the editing process that characterised transcription this task was less difficult. Thus, if I had signposted the theme of, for example, quasi-object or human / nonhuman interaction then this eased the identification of themes in the text.

Much harder to identify or 'trace' were the actor-networks in which effects like agency and / or power and so on were generated. A great deal of re-reading of the material was necessary here as the tracing of actor-networks were not foremost in my analytical thinking during parts of the data collection. Retrospectively, analysing field material for actor-networks is painstaking when the data gathered was not collected with this specific purpose in mind. Here, the orientating concept has to be outcome or effect. Therefore, it becomes necessary to manually search the material for effects that children have generated. For instance, Chapter Six which illustrates a child putting together an actor-network to retaliate against other 'bigger' children who have harassed him was identified in the data through its outcome which was 'the bigger children go away'. The actor-network was relatively easy to trace in this instance because the fieldwork notes for the events which began with the harassment episode were detailed. There was also additional verbal and background material that supplemented the analysis through which the identification of what Mills (1940) would refer to as vocabularies of motive [29] (cited in May 1997) could be discerned. Once identified, translation becomes the analytical

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[29] These may be identified in, for example, verbal data as the reasons individuals give for performing various actions in various situations (May 1997).

method for unpicking the process through which effects are generated or 'engineered' (Chapters Five and Six serve as exemplars of the bringing of the analysis to the fieldwork material).

The analysis of the data, in as structured a framework as this, opens up some analytic possibilities whilst closing off others (Mason 1996). I am quite sure that this has happened. I am even more certain, to use the words of Van Maanen (1988:117) that:

'...no-where in my fieldnotes does this story [or the 'stories' I have told here] appear in a form even remotely comparable to the shape, tone, concern for detail, background information or personal posturing that I've given it here'.

- and further echoing Van Maanen (1988:120); I am also quite certain that my analysis is not finished, just over.

Conclusions

It has not been possible to cover everything I would have liked to have discussed in this section. Therefore, I have drawn out what I have considered to be the most important issues and those that are necessary to communicate. As I intimated at the beginning of this chapter; the research process which has characterised this thesis has not proceeded in text book fashion. The communication of this is all the more complicated because of the

manner in which this thesis has shifted and developed. Adding to this complexity has been the non-conventional (although not unprecedented) use of the parent-as-researcher approach. Therefore, more room has been given to discussing the dynamics of field roles and the interweaving of field roles with ethical problems, practical problems and data collection and so forth. The continual search for what was perhaps personally felt to be an acceptable field role is a fundamental difficulty with the PAR approach and it has the tendency to tread on the fine line between what is ethical practice and what is not (although this is perhaps a subjective issue). If it is part of the remit of doing research to ask at the end of it all if you would *do* it the same way – then I would advise this approach only for the experienced and not for the novice. However, its major advantage is the depth of acquired knowledge that living within a fieldwork setting and having a history of shared interaction with your participants has. I considered that I knew these children well before the research and in many ways I discovered I did and this helped me work with their particular personalities and peculiarities. In many ways I discovered I knew them not at all.

In moving now to present the analysis to the reader, the proceeding discussions begin with introducing the early observations of the exploratory phase to the reader. The focus here is upon the emergence of children's interactions, associations or assemblages with the nonhuman as a fundamental theme in the development of this thesis. As a starting point, this provides an introductory gateway through which the reader can pass before moving to explore the rest of the text.

Chapter Four

Exploring Associations between Children and Nonhumans

Introduction

In Chapter One I highlighted that a consideration of the associations that took place between children and nonhumans first emerged as an analytical theme during the exploratory study that was conducted prior to the main fieldwork phase. As the reader will recall, this exploratory phase was carried out in order to collect preliminary data and focus the direction of the research. The use of pilot methods for these purposes is not uncommon. Indeed, some authors positively recommend that a pilot phase is carried out. Frankland and Bloor (1999:154) for instance, suggest that for qualitative researchers a major advantage of a pilot phase is that it offers a way to narrow the focus of the research. Additionally, and more relevantly here, they consider that it is a useful exercise where the researcher is inexperienced or a novice.

Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) highlight that it is common for the data collected in qualitative pilot studies to be incorporated either in whole or in part into the main study. This is seen as relatively unproblematic because qualitative data collection (as opposed to quantitative) is seen to be a progressive process because the focus of the research is constantly being refined in light of data that has already been collected and also as new

lines of exploration emerge. Despite the extensive use of pilot studies, Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) also point out that the findings or processes of pilot studies are rarely reported. Whilst they attribute this underreporting to publisher bias they also consider the numerous disadvantages that this results in. One of the disadvantages they list is the lack of opportunity this presents to learn about the theoretical thinking of others. In the present study the *foundations* of the theoretical thought that has characterised this work were an outcome of the exploratory work that was conducted. In this respect, this work was critical to the overall development of this thesis. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) consider that researchers should communicate about these (and also other) aspects of pilot work.

In part, this chapter does this as it draws primarily upon the data collected during the exploratory phase. However, the discussion below should not be considered as a separate account of the themes that emerged from the exploratory phase. These are to be considered as part of the major findings of this thesis. As mentioned above, it is common for qualitative researchers to incorporate such data into the main study. Here, I am making the place of this data much more obvious to the reader than is perhaps usually the case. In doing so, however, this chapter serves an additional function: it introduces to the reader children's associations with the nonhuman. Thus, it provides a contextual background to the rest of the thesis.

The Presence of Nonhumans in Children's Play: Glimpses of a Countervailing View

The observation that children's play often involves the use of material objects such as toys is so unremarkable that it hardly warrants any attention. Within the research literature the use of such objects often invades descriptions of children's play activities. However, references made to these objects usually serve as mere background (Dugdale 1999). They are treated as 'mere things' (Mol and Messman 1996:428) and granted a small, unimportant walk on part. Their presence in these descriptive accounts appears as inconsequential to the social relations being described - the description and analysis of which takes precedence. Their presence is there none-the-less. A very good illustration of this is contained within Corsaro's (1997:172-173) re-description of Evaldsson's (1993) discussion of children playing marbles:

> 'Marbles involves skills in playing the game – that is, aiming and shooting marbles at a hole or at another players marbles, quickly anticipating the flow of play, and shouting various restrictions regarding shooting. Evaluating the value of marbles from a competition and trading standpoint is also important. Although the children in the study played marbles in dyads, there was always an audience of nonplayers who observed and often participated in arranging matches, evaluating the play, and negotiating marble trading...The games and trades had natural histories in that the occurred over the school term, and during this period of time the children came

to assess each other in terms of these various skills...Evaldsson found

that the children's selves were intimately related to status, which was

linked to the possession and negotiated value of marbles as things.'

Nonhumans, (here marbles) invade this description. Moreover, an explicit connection is

made between these nonhumans and the development of the children's selves and

identities within this particular dyad. However, as fast as this connection is made it

disappears into a subsequent statement that fails to acknowledge the connection existed:

'Thus we see the notion of identity or self embedded in the collectively

produced peer culture' (Corsaro 1997:173).

In this statement the nonhumans become inconsequential to the perceived outcome of

these interactions and their role is dismissed

According to Dant (1999) this is a result of a disciplinary bias that privileges human

actors and the relations that take place between human actors. Sociology, he argues, has

tended to overlook the important role of material objects within the social world, the

interactions between objects and people, and the manner in which objects contribute to

the construction of relations within the everyday world. Thus, it is hardly surprising that

the nonhumans in the extract above are merely considered as instruments of the

children's play.

A countervailing approach could extend the glimpse of recognition these nonhumans were briefly given. The marbles could be seen as a supportive ingredient in this activity that makes it possible for the children to play together and construct these identities and selves. Therefore, the marbles could possibly be viewed as mediating these relationships between the marble players allowing them to construct a complex collective.

Part of the process of documenting the children at play in Greenspace was to detail the sorts of activities the children engaged in and the many and varied kinds of objects they played with. Initially, these objects were considered as instruments of children's play rather than, for instance, a vital element in the activities that took place. Therefore, as mere background, nonhumans were present throughout my descriptions of children's activities but to begin with they were ignored. A similar description to that of Evaldsson's marbles is found in this extract summarising my observations of children's use of beyblades:

They [the children] frequently play beyblades. Some of them have vast collections of different play beyblades and a lot of the activity is taken up in the exchange and discussion of the range of different beyblades and the qualities of the different sorts of beyblades for play. The type of beyblade that is played with seems to be considered to have an effect on the ability of a player to win. Therefore a lot of this trading is bound up with acquiring better beyblades. Likewise, the rip cords are also heavily traded because some types of rip cords are considered to give the beyblade a better spin. The collecting and trading of beyblades seems to be as important a part of the game as the game itself.

Sometimes it appears more important as frequently there is more time spent engaged in exchanging and discussing beyblades than game play. For some children involved in beyblading this seems to be the most enjoyable part of the activity. Not all of the children are skilled traders and often some of the younger children are frequently coaxed out of the beyblades they possess in unfair trading deals. For example, because some types of beyblades have a higher status or desire value than others older players target these forms of beyblades in younger players collections. Here the younger players are 'tricked' into thinking that being given three lesser status beyblades in exchange for one higher status beyblade is a good bargain. The older players are wiser and do not fall foul of the misconception that quantity is better than quality. Players with vast collections of these high status beyblades are admired. A considerable amount of loaning of these high status beyblades goes on because of many of the players reluctance to exchange these. Directly linked to all of this and the gaming aspect is the fact that this activity is based on an animated television programme. The players set up complex scenarios that mimic the latest episodes and attempt to recreate the dramatised television beyblade battles. On other occasions they set up round-robin style tournaments, frequently gambling their beyblades in the process. Players who are skilled in the game and the selecting of beyblades that win are given a high kudos within the group. When two highly skilled players do battle there is much excitement and many others gather around to watch them engage in battle.

In many ways the complexity of the interactions that surround the practice of beyblading is similar to the marbles example above. Therefore, a similar countervailing argument to

that applied to marbles could easily be applied here. As nonhumans, beyblades in their multiple numbers could be considered as a key element in the interactions taking place. Indeed, all activity revolves around these nonhumans and the children take up their positions within the activity group in relation to them.

This view brings the analysis close to a conceptualisation of these nonhumans as being 'quasi-objects' – objects that are necessary for the collective to exist, which in passing through the members of the beyblading group forges relations between them (Carr and Downs 2004:357). Whilst this line of analytical thinking is more fully developed much later on in Chapter Seven and the importance of these types of nonhumans for holding relations together is drawn out in Chapter Eight, at the exploratory phase a related but much more diluted analytical theme was emerging from similar observations noted about children's associations with their nonhuman instruments of play.

Working at the time with the theme of 'power' I had been interested in trying to identify the ways that children became powerful – how they *did* power. However, rather than focusing on the concept of power *per se* which I considered too abstract to work with empirically, I had drawn upon related concepts from the literature that I considered were more suited to the enquiry as it stood at that time. Fundamentally, I was focusing on identifying the ways in which children acquired positions of control, domination, influence, status and so on (cf. Prus 1999) within the peer group. Although dominated by social psychological approaches to group dynamics (cf. Hogg and Abrams 1998; Tajifel

and Turner 1986) there is a large and extensive literature on these aspects of children's peer relations[30] which was heuristically useful for this task.

Acquiring Status Within the Peer Group: The Use of Nonhumans

Both the marbles example drawn from Evaldsson's (1993) study and the example of beyblades above, consider that children can acquire positions of status within the group through their skills at playing the game. A different approach which considers these nonhumans as quasi-objects for example, would see these status positions as deriving from their relation with or to the quasi-object. However, a similar but slightly different theme to this began emerging directly from exploratory observations, although, most peculiarly in relation to a child who was regularly excluded and rejected from the other children's activities and occupied a low status position within the peer group. Rather than, as perhaps would be expected, a popular child. Although I was previously aware that this child was not popular amongst the other children; in my observations of the children's activities he tended to stand out on a daily basis. However, Merton (1986a) observes that rather than their presence being obscured by virtue of their marginalisation from peer groups, these children do tend to stand out. Therefore, the very fact that this child spent the vast majority of his outdoor play time apart from the crowd perhaps resulted in making his presence more visible to me.

This particular child, Richard, closely represented what Eder (1995) refers to as a 'social isolate'. Drawing upon discussions with children asked about why these children were rejected and excluded by the peer group(s) Adler and Adler (2001) report that the primary

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[30] Adler and Adler (2001:220-225) provide a lengthy annotated list of this work.

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reason expressed was *difference*. Evans and Eder (1993) suggest that the three main types of difference that characterise children distinguished as social isolates are: appearance; deficient mental capacity; and inappropriate gender behaviour. Most of the children at Greenspace considered that Richard exhibited all three of these differences. This was evident in both the manner in which the other children spoke to him and also how they spoke about him.

Although there was nothing dramatically different about Richard's appearance, the fact that he sported old fashioned 'home haircuts', wore glasses and did not dress in the popular sporty trends the other children did, resulted in him being ridiculed. However, ridicule episodes of this sort were infrequent and tended to be contained to times when, for example, he had been given a fresh 'home haircut'. The largest part of the other children's derision of him stemmed from their perception of him as 'stupid' and his effeminate physical demeanour.

Locally this boy was referred to by children *and* parents as 'daft Richard'. However, the belief that he was less mentally competent that his 10 years suggested he should be was entirely based on his social competencies. Academically, Richard was an exceptionally intelligent boy particularly mathematically. However, he lacked interpersonal skills and socially his behaviour appeared considerably immature for his age. This lack of what is considered to be appropriate social competencies has been a previously recognised characteristic of children who are rejected by other children (Dodge, Coie and Brakke 1982).

Richard's effeminacy resulted in his exclusion from the dominant sport activities at Greenspace in particular football. However, in common with the observations of others about social isolates Richard, would hang about the edges of the activities of the other children and as a result would occasionally be permitted temporary access to the peer group (Merton 1996). Usually, this would be to make up the numbers rather than because the other children wanted to play with him. During his participation in these games Richard was often subjected to continued taunts about his effeminacy. His lack of skill at sports games would result in the other children calling him derogatory and vulgar names such as 'woose' and 'gay boy' which directly vocalised their condemnation at his effeminacy. More typically, during these games, they called him names such as 'doss' and 'mong' that verbalised their perceptions of Richard as mentally deficient.

Despite the level of ridicule he had to contend with Richard rarely reacted to these insults. He appeared to accept them and he continued to hang around the margins of these children's activities. Although, there were periods of time that Richard appeared to withdraw entirely from the interactional scene and stay indoors. I occasionally asked him why he had not been out for so long but he always gave the same answer and told me it was because he did not want to come out[31].

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[31] I should note that Richard was not at all open to discussing the way in which the other children treated him. On the infrequent occasions that I did try to speak with him about this he was defensive to the point of almost denying that it went on. However, he did once venture the opinion that it was he that chose not to play with these other children. This contradicted the occasional pleading with the other children that he did to convince them to let him join in. I thought it was better not to push for his views on this because it was obvious that he did not want to discuss these issues.

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Contrary to his marginalised position within this group of children, Richard frequently managed to considerably elevate his status within this peer group. His method of doing so was almost always the same and was generally very successful. The fact that Richard was materially advantaged in comparison to the other children was at the root of his ability to raise his status within the peer group. In lay terms, Richard could have been considered as a 'spoiled child'. His parents lavished him with gifts and he was always bought the latest (and frequently expensive) toys that came on the market[32]. This being the case, Richard had a wide range of things that the other children did not have but desired possession of or access to. The most desired of these objects were the technologically advanced computer games devices such as the Nintendo Game Boy. Even when other children eventually acquired such objects Richard seemed to be able to keep one step ahead by always having the latest model or design on the market. He also had a collection of robotic, electronic and remotely controlled toys that were beyond the economic means of most of Greenspace's parents.

Richard capitalised upon the fact that many of the play items he possessed were desired goods that many of the other children did not have and he repeatedly used his possession of these objects to entice the children away from whatever activity they were engaged in that he was currently excluded from. His method was almost always the same. He would disappear through his garden gate and into his house to re-emerge soon afterward with one of these desired objects. If his and the object's presence went unnoticed by the other children he would verbalise his and the object's attendance within the setting by shouting

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[32] Feeding into this are issues to do with the marketing and dissemination of children's toys within the mass media (Kline 1993). However, I am not going to digress into a discussion of this here.

to the other children that he had the object. Thus, he would declare 'come and see my Game boy' or 'I've got a new robot'. If his object received no immediate interest he would repeat this exercise or perhaps add a further enticement such as 'who wants a shot'. If necessary, Richard would go back indoors and return with another object and repeat the same scenario.

More often than not, the other children's interest would be immediately aroused by Richard's object. Sometimes the interest was such that the current activity or activities that were holding the attention of the other children were entirely abandoned in favour of Richard's object. If the offer of access to the object was not forthcoming from Richard himself it was commonplace for the other children to plead with him to let them play with the object. Sometimes Richard did not acquiesce to these requests preferring instead to show his object off. In such instances he seemed to enjoy the prolonged pleading of the other children to use the object. Moreover, it appeared that he enjoyed even more telling the others that they were not getting to use it.

More commonly, however, Richard would engage the other children in a 'turn taking' process. He would organise the children into a queue with each child's position in the queue decided by Richard. It was usual for Richard to order this queue hierarchically according to his 'favourites' in the cohort. These favourites, who would be prioritised to the front of the queue, were the younger children who unlike the older children were more predisposed to play with Richard. This playing with others of lower status within the peer group by social isolates has been previously commented upon. Adler and Adler

(2001) suggest that rejected children often form friendships with younger children because this allows them to leave their stigmatised low status identities behind and take up a relatively high status position based on their advanced age. However, those children who chastised and excluded Richard the most found themselves placed at the back of these queue formations. Therefore, in placing these children in low status positions in the queuing order, Richard reversed their usually high status positions within the cohort as a whole. At times he varied the queuing system and opted instead to, for example, insist that everyone sat cross-legged on the grass and await their turn with the object. Here Richard was mimicking school based disciplinary practices that target the body as a site of control and compliance (cf. Simpson 2001). Moreover, he appeared to enact the authoritative role of teacher in these organising rituals, often speaking to the other children in teacher tones, ordering them to sit or stand still and so forth. Therefore, Richard was clearly appropriating information from the adult world and incorporating it into these rituals. This was evident in the ways in which he based such modes of control upon those seen in the teacher-pupil relationship (cf. Corsaro 1992). However, it should be noted that the use of queuing rituals by children in order to control the access of others to their toys and so on were common within Greenspace (see Chapter Five). What was particular to Richard was this occasional use of the cross-legged method.

When it came to actually giving anyone a turn at playing with whatever the current particular object of desire was Richard tended to delay access to the object. Sometimes he made the others observe lengthy demonstrations of the object's capacities or how it

was to be used. For instance, if the object was a remotely controlled car[33] then the children would have to watch what were often lengthy displays of the car's abilities and instructional sessions on how the car and its controls should be operated.

These observational and instructional sessions frustrated the other children. Some children's patience would wear out which would result in these children disengaging from the events to go and do something else. When it became apparent to Richard that he was losing his audience he would quickly halt and announce that people could now get their turns. Sometimes this would successfully retain the impatient children for a further length of time. However, the older children were more likely to remove themselves from the interaction.

Richard's orchestration of the turn taking process seldom resulted in all children gaining temporary access to the desired object. He also tended to make changes to the order of the queue which caused a great deal of frustration and objections over the fairness or otherwise of these changes. Additionally, the length of time any particular child got to spend playing with the object was variable. Some children were allowed to play with the object longer than others and again this resulted in more frustration and more objections about the fairness of these arrangements. Richard would interrupt the turn taking process by intermittingly playing with the object himself which meant that the other children had to watch him instead.

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[33] This was not an uncommon object. Many other children also possessed remotely controlled cars. However, Richard's fleet of remotely controlled vehicles were expensive, top of the range models, more

After receiving a turn, children would leave Richard's assembled group. Eventually, children waiting for their turn would get fed up and drift off into other activities with other children although, their desire to temporarily access the object could result in them waiting for quite lengthy periods of time. Once the interests of other children could no longer be held and he was again left alone, Richard would sometimes attempt to disrupt whatever activities the other children had become involved in by approaching individuals and offering direct access to the object. Sometimes these individual children would take up the offer but sometimes they did not.

In these sequences Richard could temporarily raise his status within the group. He would take charge of the other children, organise them into queues and control (and restrict) their access to the object before once again coming to occupy his marginalised and stigmatised status and identity within the cohort. On the one hand, this illustrates that status hierarchies are not fixed within children's groups but are as Goodwin (1990) has pointed out, likely to be constantly changing. Likewise, Corsaro (1997:154) has highlighted that children frequently attempt to gain control over one and other and use a wide variety of strategies to do so noting that, status hierarchies can be 'highly fluid' and open to constant negotiation. Additionally, this also draws attention to Corsaro's (1997:167) argument that rejected children despite their peripheral status to core groups sometimes still remain 'active participants in the peer culture'. However, the ability of very low status and marginalised children to substantively raise their social position within these groups (even if only for a very short time) does not appear to be a commented upon feature of children's peer relations within the pertinent literature.

usually bought by adult collectors.

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Although, it does correspond with Evans and Eder's (1993) suggestion that although it is almost impossible for socially isolated children to change their excluded status, there are exceptions to this.

Richard's attempts to raise his status appeared to be egotistically driven (cf. Martini 1994). His actions and methods seemed to indicate that at times he was enjoying controlling those who marginalised and stigmatised him the most. This was evident by the fact that it was these children whom he would most frequently place last in his queues, give very short periods of access to the desired object, or deny access altogether. Alternatively, this could also be considered as a strategy for inclusion within the cohort which was frequently successful albeit for a temporary period of time.

Agency and Power: Moving Towards a Consideration of the Role of Nonhumans

All of the children used objects to raise or change their status position within the group. However, these status changing episodes from other children appeared less frequently to be as blatantly egotistical as Richard's. Within Greenspace Richard was by far the most successful at using material objects to change his status. The more frequently Richard employed this method the more obvious it became that the key ingredients that facilitated his ability to elevate his position were the desirable objects he possessed that others did not. Thus his relative success vis-à-vis the other children was intimately related to the fact that his objects were, with few exceptions, 'better objects'. Thus, Richard's objects had a potency that other children's objects did not. Therefore, Richard had 'cultural capital' (Wells 2001:305). This however, reinforces a point made by Corsaro (1992)

where he highlights that the contribution that children's consumer objects make to the status hierarchies that operate within children's peer cultures are in some ways directly related to the economic resources of parents.

Extending this a little further in relation to the objects Richard possessed; the role that the economic resources of his parents played in his and other children's acquisition of material goods was something that Richard himself demonstrated an acute awareness of. He often discussed his own parent's relatively advantaged economic status and reinforced to other children that their parents could not afford to buy them the toys that he had. He would often talk about how his father was rich and earned lots of money and how other children's fathers were poor and did not. However, Richard's concept of what rich was, in financial terms, was based upon his understanding that his father was in a slightly (but only slightly) higher occupational category than other children's fathers[34] [35].

The more potent these sorts of observations became during the exploratory phase (and afterwards) the more I began moving towards thinking that it was the object itself which permitted a child such as Richard to elevate his status within the group. In the first instance I considered this to be an instrumental use of objects as resources. As an emergent theme, the various forms of effects that children created through the use of objects as resources became salient. Whilst status elevation continued to be a common

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[34] Richard's father worked in management. Richard understood that this implied that his father had more money than other fathers who tended to be in manual occupations (street sweepers, factory workers and so on).

[35] Lunt (1995) comments that Leiser et al. (1990) consider that young children do not understand the link between the exchange of money for goods and the exchange of money for work. Clearly, Richard's explicit understanding of this association contradicts this point.

theme others too became visible. For instance, children's use of objects to increase or extend their verbal capacities in processes of negotiation, persuasion and influence began to surface.

These observations produced the first glimpse of an analytical move towards considering associations between children and nonhumans. However, as I began to more thoroughly consider that the use of nonhumans increased children's positions of status and influence and enhanced their agentic capacities in ways that allowed them to be more effective as agents, I began firstly to move towards a more materially orientated conception of agency based on the instrumental use of objects by children. Most specifically, this early consideration of the use of objects and its relation to agency and power (or its associated dimensions of status, control, influence and so on) rested on children's appropriation of objects which placed emphasis on agency as being a purely human capacity. Therefore, whilst 'associationalist thinking' (Murdoch 1997:321) was beginning to creep into the analysis of children's use of nonhumans it did not fully develop until much later on in the main fieldwork phase (see Chapter Eight). However, interaction between children and the nonhuman remained a salient theme throughout as a consequence of these early observations.

Nonhuman Diversity

The examples given highlight some fairly obvious nonhumans - primarily toys - that children engage in play and also in the sorts of scenarios and interactions that have been described above. However, children do not just use toys they also creatively use all sorts

of other materials in their play activities (Factor 2004). What Michael (1996) refers to as 'natural nonhumans' were also incorporated into children's interactions. The documentation of children's use of natural nonhumans also invades research accounts in the same way as more noticeable nonhumans such as toys as the following extract from Russell (1994:98) illustrates:

'The girls used physical and natural features of their chosen playsite to represent their home and other far-away lands they travelled to...[One girl's] bed was a low pine fence, her shop was a pile of stones, and the kitchen a clump of bushes with a strategically located sawn-off branch that served as the controls for the oven.'

At Greenspace children's associations with natural nonhumans of the sort described by Russell (1994) was as common as their associations with commodified nonhumans such as toys. For example, the branches of the trees were often appropriated and transformed into swords (see Chapter Eight) and their trunks often served as goalposts. This incorporation of forms of nature into the cultural lives of urban children has been commented upon by Wells (2002). Wells argues, that in freely associating with forms of nature within urban contexts, children disrupt, through their practices, the pure boundaries that are considered to exist between, for example, the natural and the urban world. However, she also draws attention to the fact these forms of nonhumans enter into the cultural repertoire of urban children.

Wells (2002) also draws attention to other forms of natural nonhumans that urban children appropriate that Michael (1996) also mentions – animals. In Greenspace children also frequently associated with animals as pets. These too could be used to elevate a child's status within the group. During the exploratory phase the use of pets in such ways was a much less frequent stratagem used, however, it did occur from time to time particularly if the pet involved was infantile, for example a puppy, or held some other added novelty value. For instance, one very young child, Toby, enjoyed a few weeks of status elevation within the peer group because he had a new pet baby rabbit. Toby would bring the baby rabbit into Greenspace, attached to its 'bunny harness', and exercise it in much the same way as one would a dog. The combination of the rabbit's infancy and the novelty of the rabbit being walked in a similar fashion to a dog always attracted the other children to gather around Toby and his rabbit, wherein a lot of cooing and stroking of the rabbit commenced followed by the commonly invoked turn taking ritual (see Chapter Six for a further example of pet enrolment into an actor-network).

In discussing these various forms of natural nonhumans Michael (1996:154) asks the question: How heterogeneous is heterogeneous? Whilst he offers a few speculations, he never fully begins to answer this question. Once it was recognised that children did draw nonhumans into their interactions and used them to achieve various effects within their relationships, this opened up the way for a consideration of the diversity of forms that these nonhumans took and there was much diversity indeed and the forms that these nonhumans could take were potentially limitless.

Conclusion

Whilst the nonhuman in its varied forms entered into the research as a substantive theme during the exploratory phase and continued to invade the main phase, the adoption of actor-network theory as an analytical framework, to more fully consider the associations that took place between children and nonhumans, was not applied until much later on in the lifespan of the thesis (see Chapter One and Chapter Nine). The rest of this thesis is concerned with the analysis and extension of the themes that have been introduced here. However, it is hoped that through the incorporation of this discussion, which has highlighted the ways in which the children's associations with the nonhuman first entered this analysis, that this has provided the reader with a grasp of the background against which this thesis has developed and the elementary but crucial observations that first informed the theoretical thinking that has gone on to characterise this work. The next chapter moves directly to illustrate the application of actor-network theory to children's interactions and to draw out much more explicitly how children create effects such as agency and power through drawing together diverse heterogeneous elements into an actor-network.

Building a Bicycle Ramp: An Illustrated Example of the Process of Translation in Children's Everyday Play Activities

Introduction

Actor-network theorists are fond of description and of telling descriptive stories based on ethnographic observations and case studies about the minute and the particular. Unfortunately, the fact that they do so is treated by some as point of critique and here actor-network theory stands accused of providing endless description (or stories) that produce weak explanations (cf. Laurier and Philo 1999). Others still have asked if what actor-network theory does is simply re-description. As Mike Michael (1996:56) suggests – 'well possibly'. However, actor-network theory if it is anything (and also, if it is not a theory (cf. Latour 1999)) is a method for (re)description. As for explanation – it was never intended to produce explanations *per se*. Rather explanations, if they exist, are considered to emerge from descriptions but only if the descriptions themselves are good enough (cf. Latour 1991). Thus, my prior definition of actor-network theory as an analytical or theoretical framework may make some proponents baulk. Perhaps, I should have called it my method.

Here, I would like to tell a story in which description and (re)description is presented

simultaneously. I have intentionally chosen not to clutter the story with the borrowed observations and explanations of others that are traditionally brought to bear in order to strengthen, compliment or contrast points made and arguments advanced. This short detour from writing conventions is not, however, supposed to be experimental. Rather, it is a 'one off' attempt within this thesis to let the description / (re)description stand alone and perform the explanation. However, the analytical repertoire of actor-network theory has 'contaminated' (Latour 1999:20) those parts of the story that may be defined as (re)description. The narrative structure of this story alternates between description on the one hand and (re)description of the other. This method of presentation then doubles as exemplar of the application of the descriptive method of actor-network theory. The methodological device used for (re)description here is *translation*. The story told therefore, is a story of translation. Thus, part of its purpose is to analytically extend the observations and speculations presented and made in the previous chapter about children's heterogeneous associations and reveal the particularities of the processes in which these associations are drawn together to create actor-networks.

This story does not describe a very grand, extraordinary or particularly exciting event. In fact the event the story captures is quite mundane but this is the point and the choice (for there were a plethora of events to choose from) was quite deliberate. So this deliberately mundane choice is intended to highlight that the mundane events and goings on of the children's everyday activities and interactions are not very mundane at all. They are interwoven and shot through with strategic attempts to construct the self as powerful, as agentic and as an actor in charge of others.

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A major point of argument in this thesis is that children are continuously involved in the labour intensive and often complex task of heterogeneous engineering. This story is an illustration or a case study of one episode of heterogeneous engineering by one child in Greenspace. There is not much that is unique about this episode except its particularities. By this I mean that the events described are specific to this particular episode. Of course, it is argued that this is all that actor-network theory can do – describe events that provide explanations that are 'local, contingent, practical and reflect the character of the specific network under study' (Michael 1996:56).

Drawn from empirical data, this story is about one child's attempts to build a bicycle ramp. It is also however, a story about the 'ramp-network' and how it was engineered. By way of situating the story I begin with a summary version – a short paragraph which tells the events well enough but glosses over the intricacies and complexities. Following this, the text moves to tell the story again although alternating between description and (re)description. For ease of comprehension those parts that can be defined as description appear in plain text and those which can be defined as (re)description are italicised. Here, the story is told in the present tense to allow the reader to enter into the ethnographic present (as far as this is possible through textual description) and try to visualise the events as they unfold.

Story Summary

Aaron got a new bike and he wanted to build a ramp to ride his new bike over. He built his ramp on the edge of the grass area where the other children were playing football. Some of these other children helped him build this ramp – they located the bricks and bits and pieces of wood from which the ramp was constructed. After it was built, Aaron rode his bike repeatedly over the ramp. Some of the other children took turns in using Aaron's new bike to ride over the ramp. However, the ramp broke and ramp riding stopped.

Describing and (Re)describing the Building of a Bicycle Ramp

Aaron has been playing football with Marc, James, Thomas, Lewis, Terry, Stephen, Alec and Jordan. Aaron's dad has just called to Aaron to come to the garden. Aaron leaves the game of football but soon returns with a new bike. Aaron rides his bike around the perimeter pavement shouting to other children to look at what his dad has bought him. A few glances are cast, Aaron keeps riding, and the rest of the children keep playing football. So Aaron continues with riding his bike around the perimeter pavement but now he is riding faster. Now Aaron is telling or rather shouting that his bike can go fast and imploring the others to look at how fast his bike can go. Marc tells Aaron – 'so what all bikes can go fast'. Football continues and Aaron keeps riding.

Now intensely engaged in getting others to look Aaron continues riding fast but this time

he performs skids on the approach to each corner of the perimeter pavement. Aaron has now 'upped the anti' so to speak – he is riding, he is riding fast and he is skidding and now we have yet another vocal implorement to look. Another few glances are cast in his direction but again football continues regardless.

Not giving up on acquiring the other children's attention and interest, Aaron continues riding, riding fast and skidding round the corners but this time he adds sound effects. He now mimics the sound of screeching tyres. This time no appeals to look follow, because this time Aaron has noticed that Liam has just ventured onto the scene and Liam is looking. Moreover, Liam is asking questions. He is asking if this is a new bike. Now interest is aroused albeit by the arrival of Liam, Aaron performs his riding, riding fast, skidding round the corners and sound effects. However, this time it appears to be for the benefit of the one person audience that consists of Liam. Aaron is asking Liam to look at what his bike can do – it can go fast and it can skid on corners. So Aaron is now riding, riding fast, skidding on corners and producing sound effects and Liam is looking.

Now it seems here that Aaron's goal is to get people to look at his bike and it appears that, in part, he has been successful because someone (Liam) is looking. So how has this been achieved? Well to begin with there is Aaron and there is his bike. Then there is the pavement and the text. Now Aaron has managed to quickly reach the stage of enrolment as far as the bike, the pavement and the text are concerned – they are all allies, they are all entities involved in attempting to get the footballing children to look and so far none

of these entities are resisting. However, it is not enough he needs more allies and so he enrols other entities – here speed (going fast) and sound (screeching) – and there seems no reason why these elements should not be counted as important aspects of Aaron's heterogeneous engineering. So we have a combination of actants all acting together, performing their various roles – the bike, the pavement, the text, speed and sound. Aaron is using this assemblage of entities to attempt to enrol the footballing children into looking. The fact that Liam becomes enrolled into looking is quite accidental because this assemblage of actants has not been directed towards enrolling Liam, but this has happened none-the-less. This could be because at this point Liam was not enrolled into some other network such as football. He was a sort of floating entity without a role. Equally so, it could be that Liam is attempting to enrol Aaron and build his own network. Now this is a point to hang onto and consider because problematisation, (the attempted enrolment of others to an agent's agency) is not necessary unidirectional. Network building can be a process of mutual enrolment, wherein two or more heterogeneous engineers are attempting to enrol each other within a network (Bloomfield and Best 1992:541).

However, Aaron knows something about Liam that is not immediately obvious: Aaron (despite the fact that Liam's enrolment has been contingent) knows that Liam does not own a bike. From Aaron's point of view this is useful knowledge and makes enrolment easier because he now has the potential to define his interests in terms of Liam's interests (which could be considered to be accessing a bike. Therefore, Aaron can establish himself as indispensable, that is, an obligatory passage point through which Liam must

pass in order to access the bike (if indeed this is what Liam wishes). In this respect enrolment might just suit Liam fine and he may not need much convincing. However, so far all that can be really be determined is that Liam has accepted the role of observer Aaron wished to oblige the other children to enter into and has been enrolled into looking, albeit accidentally.

Aaron now has Liam's attention and Liam is asking for a shot of this bike that ride fast and skid round corners. Aaron however, poses a different scenario. He suggests that together the two of them should build a ramp to ride the bike over. In doing so, he is offering Aaron a shot of his bike if he helps with this ramping building exercise. Liam now appearing very keen to ride this bike agrees. So Aaron is now issuing Liam with instructions to locate the necessary materials needed to build a ramp. He is telling Liam that they need bricks and they need big pieces of wood and that they need to find these. Liam quickly sets about the task of finding bricks and pieces of wood. Aaron continues riding his bike, riding fast, skidding round corners and making screeching noises. However, now he is shouting to the other children that he is going to be building a ramp. None of the other children demonstrate any interest in either the bike or the possible bicycle ramp and football continues uninterrupted.

It can now be deduced that Liam is perfectly happy to be enrolled into Aaron's network and for exactly the reason we thought – he would like a shot of Aaron's bike. Aaron has however now changed his objectives slightly because now he wants to build a ramp.

Recognising that Liam desires a shot of his bike he has posed the idea of ramp building in the terms of Liam's interests. In doing so, he has positioned himself as an obligatory passage point through which Liam must now pass in order to gain access to the bike. However, access to the bike is conditional and offered in futuristic terms. Moreover, Aaron has changed Liam's role in the network in order to suit his new interest. Liam is no longer an observer he is now a potential mutual enroller of other actants and has been successfully convinced into this 'gofer' role. He has after gone to seek out those nonhumans (bricks and pieces of wood) considered necessary for the construction of the 'ramp-network'.

Whilst Liam is seeking out bricks and pieces of wood, Aaron continues with riding his bike, riding fast, skidding round corners and making screeching noises. This goes on for about five minutes until Liam returns. However, Liam has not brought any bricks and he does not have pieces of wood. He tells Aaron that he cannot find any bricks or any pieces of wood. However, Aaron remembers that James' father happens to have bricks and pieces of wood. The topic under discussion now is how best to procure these bricks and pieces of wood from James' father. After a little debate and tactical discussion on strategies to acquire these bricks and pieces of wood, Aaron decides that they should get James to ask his dad.

Aaron shouts to James (who is engaged in playing football) to come over to him. However, James tells Aaron he is playing football and refuses to go over. Aaron persists

and has another attempt to gain James' attention, although this time, he rides his bike across the grass to James. In doing so, he disrupts the game of football and now there are several unhappy children shouting at Aaron to get out of the way. Aaron tells them he is speaking to James. He is asking James to get bricks and pieces of wood from the stock of bricks and pieces of wood that Aaron knows James' father has in his garden.

At first James refuses telling Aaron his father will not let them take the bricks and pieces of wood from the garden and anyway he is playing football. So Aaron explains to James that he is building a ramp with Liam and that they can not find any bricks and pieces of wood and again asks if James will go and get these from his garden. Now James does not dismiss the request entirely he offers to do it later as he is playing football. Aaron, however does not stop and he suggests it will not take long. Moreover, he tells James that he wants to build a big ramp and that the ramp will be cool and James can use it and borrow his bike. This must seem a little more attractive to James because he tells Aaron to wait there and tells the children he has been playing football with that he will back shortly.

Now James's house like many of the other children's is just beside the area where the children are all playing so he opens his garden gate and hollers for his father. James' dad appears at the gate shortly afterwards and asks James what he wants. James asks if he can have some bricks and some pieces of wood to build a ramp. His father agrees but insists that they are returned. He also insists that the ramp is to be built on the grass not on the

perimeter pavement because James might get hurt if he falls on the concrete and he might damage someone else's garden fence should he crash his bike into one. Additionally, the ramp says James father must not be built on or near the car park either in case any cars come about. James agrees and sets about selecting bricks and pieces of wood.

Aaron, who has been lurking about James' garden gate and has realised that bricks and pieces of wood are imminent, is now in the garden with James and has started to command the activity of selecting bricks and pieces of wood, telling James what bricks seem best and what pieces of wood look likely to make the best ramp. Liam, who has also been hanging about the gate, is told to take the bricks and pieces of wood over to the grass. Now there is a 'to and fro-ing' of bricks and pieces of wood. These bricks and pieces of wood are, however, being stock piled in the middle of the grass and therefore in the middle of the football playing area.

Aaron's enrolment attempts in respect to the footballing children are still proving to be unsuccessful. Likewise, Liam has been unsuccessful in his enroller / 'gofer' role as he has been unable to either identify or obtain potential entities for enrolment. However, Aaron has remembered where such entities can be found but has recognised that this will necessarily involve the successful enrolment of another entity (James) who so far has resisted along with the other footballing children to become enrolled into Aaron's network. James' enrolment into the network depends upon Aaron's ability to manipulate him into the role of an enroller that will enrol another entity (James's Dad) who, as

owner as the desired entities (bricks and pieces of wood), has the potential to become an obligatory passage point through which James would have to pass to access the (bricks and pieces of wood). However, Aaron successfully enrols James into his 'ramp-network' by offering him the use of any ramp that is built and his new bike. Here, Aaron again poses his own interests in terms of another's consequently gaining James' compliance.

Already it is becoming apparent that this relatively mundane activity involves complex interactional processes. Aaron knew that the entity 'James' may have been more difficult to enrol. Bike riding is not a novelty to James in the same way as it to Liam because he has his own bike and Aaron has seen James build ramps and bike over ramps many times. Additionally, James was already an intermediary in another child's (Jordan's) 'football- network' which was successfully constructed prior to Aaron's current network in progress. Therefore, Aaron needs to both entice James to break from the network he is currently involved in and develop strategies for doing so. The solution as Aaron sees it is to disrupt (at lease temporarily) this other network. This he achieves by riding his bicycle over the playing area which disturbs the collective action of the 'football-network'. Biking across the grass (a natural actant) stops the grass acting as a football pitch (at least temporarily) in the same way as snow or flooding or some other phenomena might (although these too can be classified as entities / actants).

As play stops, Aaron manages to temporarily disrupt the functioning of this other network. In doing so he has created an opportunity to procure one of its entities and

carry it away should he be successful in convincing it to enter into the role he has

envisioned. Aaron's strategy to lure this entity away comes again in the shape of his

bike. As mentioned previously, however, James already has a bike but as luck would

have it (for Aaron at least) Aaron knows that James's bike happens to have a snapped

brake cable. Additionally, Aaron knows that James has been prohibited from using his

bike until this cable is fixed. This is useful local knowledge upon which Aaron

strategically draws in order to solicit James to enter the 'ramp-network'. For now,

however, it seems James' participation within the 'ramp-network' may only be temporary

as James has indicated that he will return to football playing.

In entering the 'ramp-network' James has desisted from the 'football-network' he was

previously part of. However, the loss of James as an intermediary in this other network

does not result in the disintegration of this network. It readjusts and re-continues (I will

not digress into the particularities of this other network here). James quickly enters the

role that Aaron has conceived for him and he sets about the task of brick and wood

enrolment. However, this task entails taking on the challenge of attempting to enrol his

father, who also has the potential to become an obligatory passage point through which

he must pass in order to secure these nonhumans.

James' father is not known to object too much to the use of articles from his stockpile of

materials in his garden and his garden shed by children. James, Aaron and countless

other children know this. However, he is known from time to time to object if he happens

to be caught in a bad mood and again the other children know this. So the potential for James' father to refuse is a possibility and the challenge is therefore somewhat precarious. As chance would have it, on this occasion James' father does not refuse but whilst the option to enrol bricks and pieces of wood is now present the question of whether James' dad was enrolled into the 'ramp-network' or instead became an obligatory passage point is difficult to deter. James' father never really appears to join the network except in the most transient sense, although the role he plays is no less crucial to its construction. However, the option to successfully enrol bricks and pieces of wood is issued in terms of the future return of these entities to the possession of James' father and this therefore implies the loss of these entities from the network at some future time. This being the case, the temporariness of the 'ramp-network' is relatively predetermined (unless alternative entities are found) before the enrolment of bricks and pieces of wood even commences. So perhaps James's father should be seen as an obligatory passage point after all as access to these entities and any role they might play is ultimately under his control.

Having passed through this possible obligatory passage point, Aaron has begun to redefine the roles of both James and Liam. Liam is currently a floating entity whose role has been left undefined since his lack of success at his 'gofer' role. Now Aaron has decided that the enrolment of bricks and pieces of wood should be under his direction and redefines Liam and James as transporters of the entities newly selected for enrolment. As transporters Liam and James, mindful of the terms of the possible obligatory passage point (who has placed conditions on the use of these entities via his

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instructions as to where the ramp should be built), have taken these potential network allies and deposited them in the middle of the grass where the 'football-network' has resumed action. Thus, the grass as a node in the chain of the 'football-network' has again had its role as a football pitch interrupted.

There are now several unhappy children shouting that Aaron, Liam and James cannot build their ramp in the middle of the grass because they are playing football. James is now explaining to these other children that his father has told them to build their ramp there. Terry, who has been playing football walks over to the pile of bricks and pieces of wood that are piling up and starts throwing these bricks and pieces of wood onto the perimeter pavement. The other footballing children join in with the brick and wood throwing. James who now seems to have abandoned his intention to return to playing football in favour of ramp building is again trying to explain that they have to build their ramp there because his father has said so. Terry is telling James that they (the footballers) do not care what James's father has said because they are playing football and they were there first.

The situations is now this: Aaron, Liam and James are throwing the bricks and pieces of wood back onto the grass and as fast as they are throwing these the footballing children are throwing them back upon the perimeter pavement. This has turned into a somewhat dangerous situation with two groups of children throwing bricks and pieces of wood to and fro. As expected, it does not take long before one of the children is accidentally

struck by a brick and unfortunately, Liam has been hit on the knee by a brick. The sound of Liam's screams which rapidly follow alerts Liam's mother who immediately enters the scene to attend to Liam. In her presence the brick and wood throwing stops. She demands to know which one of these children has struck Liam with a brick.

Aaron is now telling Liam's mother that himself, Liam and James were building a ramp and that James's father had said they were to build it on the grass but the others had started throwing the bricks and pieces of wood off the grass and were not letting them play there. The footballing children are now issuing protests to this version of events stating that they were there first and that Aaron, Liam and James are ruining their game. Terry is trying to emphasis that Aaron, Liam and James were also throwing bricks and pieces of wood. Now Aaron, Liam and James (although mostly Aaron) are claiming that they were not throwing the bricks and pieces of wood but rather that they were putting them back where they had been. So these various issues are being hotly argued.

Aaron switches from disputing the facts of the brick and wood throwing to asking Liam's mother to tell the footballing children that it is not only their grass and they can play there too. Terry begins protesting telling Liam's mother that they need the whole of the grass for football and they can build their ramp on the pavement. Aaron is now informing Liam's mother that James's father has said they have to build it on the grass. James is confirming these facts and explaining his father's reasons for this (getting hurt, crashing into fences, danger from cars and so on). So Liam's mother proposes this: she suggests

to all the children that they share the grass and indicates to the children what area the ramp can built on and what area football can be played in. This seems to dissolve the arguments and the two groups of children engage in discussing these boundaries and agree not to intrude into each other's designated space.

What emerges next is a battle for the ownership of the grass as an entity in a network. One group (the footballers) is declaring ownership in terms of their prior enrolment of the grass in their network and the other the ramp builders) is claiming ownership in terms of the conditions of use set down by the possible obligatory passage point a.k.a. James's father. Now this is a hazardous situation for both the construction of the new network and the stability and possible destruction of the other. Both of course are now keen to protect their network interests and this requires either the enrolment or retainment of this particular entity respectively. Thus, the throwing to and fro of the bricks and pieces of wood. In this respect the roles of many network entities have now changed. For example, the various human actants in the 'football-network' are now heavily engaged in retaining one actant - the grass – which is now an obligatory passage point through, which all must now pass. James has now removed himself from the 'football-network' altogether and transferred his membership to the 'ramp-network'. For a while the bricks and pieces of wood have become enrolled by each network (unstable as they are) as missiles and not future ramp elements. Now there is little doubt as to the effectiveness of bricks and pieces of wood as missiles as soon there is an injured child. The sounds of screaming children who are in close proximity to their homes is usually enough to alert mothers and prompt their arrival at scenes of possible carnage.

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Here, the arrival of Liam's mother to attend to her injured child inserts a precarious new entity into the soup pot of heterogeneity that now characterises the scene.

As entities parents are sometimes unpredictable to these children who often find their behaviours bizarre, confusing, contradictory and sometimes downright unfair. However, these children can all tell you how Liam's mother's involvement in their disputes and her resolution of these disputes often favours her own child which, in many respects is not all that surprising. However, these children know that their own parents are good potential allies whose adult status coupled with their legitimate authority makes them particularly valuable when they are successfully enrolled into children's actor-networks.

However, parents have a tendency to define their own roles in networks and this parent seems to position herself somewhere in the middle of both networks, assimilating herself with both and yet neither (for Liam's mother this is a somewhat contrary response). Instead she has become a negotiating entity between both networks. An entity which redefines the role of the grass and gives it a new dual identity. In doing so, it becomes an actant with membership in both networks. Yet again however, the difference between a simple intermediary and an obligatory passage point is somewhat confused. The grass has become somewhat indispensable to both networks for without the grass neither ramp building or football playing can occur. Putting this aside the spatial division of the grass presents a solution to this problem which is accepted by both groups, both being aware of the consequences that the violations of parents' decisions can bring. For now the

children consider this fair and agree to share the grass.

So far so good – football playing resumes and ramp building commences, each group keeping within their designated area. Now to the ramp building: Aaron is now overseeing the construction of the ramp and issuing out instructions to Liam and James on exactly how to build the ramp, whilst sitting upon his new bike. However, balls are balls - they roll and bounce and they are kicked. Moreover, footballs do not always stay where they are intended or ought to. This particular football seems to be straying were it ought not slightly too often. For ramp building this is problematic because stray footballs have a tendency to knock over ramps. The situation is now this: each time the ramp seems almost finished and the pieces of wood are put in place ready for ramp riding the football manages to knock over the pieces of wood. Of course the football is not exhibiting a will of its own but is being kicked towards the ramp. Now the two groups of children are arguing about footballs and ramps. The footballing children are claiming that the knocking over of the pieces of wood is accidental but the ramp building children are not convinced by these statements. So Aaron is now telling the footballing children that if their ball hits the ramp again he will throw the football in Alfie's garden – Alfie being a dog who likes to eat children's footballs. Convinced that Aaron will indeed feed the football to Alfie, the footballing children stop aiming footballs at the ramp in progess.

Now sharing an entity – one group goes back to the process of network building and the other has reconstituted itself. Aaron is now orchestrating the enrolment of the new entities by directing Liam and James in their new ramp building role. However, the

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sharing of an actant with another network is proving problematic for ramp-network that

Aaron is still engineering as it appears that an actant – a football - from the footballing

network is being continuously recast as a missile that keeps repeatedly hitting the bricks

and pieces of wood that Aaron and his ramp builders are attempting to manipulate into

the role of a ramp. From the point of view of footballers it seems that this recasting of

the actant into the missile role is an attempt to halt the construction of the ramp building

network in order to re-enrol the shared entity (grass) into its previous non-dualistic role

as a football pitch. The loss of the 'whole entity' is now being considered problematic

for the football network who are not happy with its new multiple membership status.

Aaron and his ramp builders are not devoid of the ability to see this attempted re-

enrolment for what is and so Aaron has a strategy to preserve the construction of his

network and further threaten the stability of the other. He informs the football network of

his intention to enrol a potentially destructive entity into his network in order to deal with

the destructive actant of the football-come-missile. Now the entity in question – Alfie the

dog – is known by all the children to be particularly fond of savaging entities that are

also known as footballs to me and you. Moreover, the children are all perfectly aware

that Alfie the dog is positively encouraged by his owner (who happens to strongly object

to the presence of footballs in her garden) to partake in the act of football savaging and

no football has ever survived or been retrieved from this particular garden for these

reasons. Now the sound of Alfie's presence in this garden has been rumbling away in the

background for most of this particular day and all children are well aware that if carried

out the enrolment of Alfie will be most effective. So this it seems may be a successful

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strategy as footballs-come-missiles no longer strike the bricks and pieces of wood. Alfie is not used but still remains a silent actant in the 'ramp-network'.

This threat seems to continue to work because ramp building is now going on unhindered, football playing has resumed and no stray footballs are toppling the ramp. So the ramp is now finished and the ramp builders are admiring their work and Aaron is directing Liam and James in minor adjustments. With the minor adjustments completed Aaron prepares to test the ramp. Now ramp testing appears to be a serious matter. Aaron is testing the strength of the pieces of wood by jumping up and down on them, walking over them and jumping off them. However, the ramp seems satisfactory and Aaron mounts his bike for the final test. Test riding a ramp must indeed be a daring thing to do as a sense of endangered excitement mixed with anticipation is hanging in the air. Now Aaron is sitting on his bike some twenty yards in front of the ramp, and engaging in some altering of the starting position. Liam and James are beginning to get impatient as they are shouting to Aaron to hurry up. Aaron though tells them of the relative merits of lining up the bike properly and the demerits of not.

Suddenly however, Aaron springs into action. The act of ramp riding though is not executed quietly. First Aaron mimics a revving motorbike engine, then he shouts 'on your marks, get set go', then he approaches the ramp, revving en route. As the bike makes contact with the ramp he declares 'and he's off'. Indeed he is off. As he hits the ground at the other side he is whooping triumphantly. The ramp has now been successfully tested and declared by Aaron to be 'cool'. Aaron has now ridden around and

is preparing for another ramp ride. The testing ritual is repeated and the ramp is approached in the same fashion as before.

Liam and James are now both simultaneously engaged in asking Aaron for a shot of his bike so they too can ride the ramp, reminding Aaron of his previous promises. Aaron does not seem particularly concerned with fulfilling his previous promises and reiterates repeatedly that they will both get a shot in a minute – all the while continuing with his ramp riding. Liam and James are not entirely happy with this situation and are appearing increasingly frustrated as their requests for a shot keep being rebuffed by Aaron who is simultaneously feeding their frustrations with his performance of how exciting and enjoyable ramp riding is. More than that, he is also telling them it is his bike and his ramp and it is up to him if they get a shot.

Now that the ramp is complete it would be logical to think that network building would be complete and the mobilisation of the allies would commence. However, Aaron has other ideas and before this can happen he needs to engage in ensuring that the ramp has been locked into place. Now this locking into place of the ramp is performative to say the least and it seems that once the performance has taken place Aaron is happy that the bricks and pieces of wood have indeed been properly enrolled, that is, manipulated into the roles that have been envisioned for them and are behaving consistently as a ramp.

However, James and Liam are now becoming concerned that their vested interests in

ramp building / network construction are being overlooked by the heterogeneous engineer who after preventing the achievement of their goals (to use his bike and ride the ramp) through a stalling tactic is now making it explicitly clear that this ramp belongs to him and its use like the use of his bike is under his control. In doing so he has set himself up as both an indispensable entity within the network and is now re-establishing himself as an obligatory passage point through which James and Aaron who are now dispensable intermediaries in the network must pass in order to meet their own interests.

These declarations of ramp ownership do not go down too well because both Liam and James mount their own challenges to this. In the first instance they are both reminding Aaron of his previous promises but again these are rebuffed. Now what happens next could result in Aaron's loss of the ramp. James is now challenging this claim to ownership of the ramp by telling Aaron that it is actually his ramp (by default) because the bricks and pieces of wood from which it has been made belong to his father. However, Aaron still declares the ramp to be his because it was his idea. So an argument is now underway about the ownership status of the ramp. James is now seeking clarification and support of true identity as ramp owner from Liam who is now agreeing that it is indeed James' ramp. Aaron continues with his insistence that the ramp belongs to him until James announces that he is going to get his father.

Instead of locking his actants into place Aaron's allies are threatening mutiny and James is now voicing his threat to betray his network leader if his interests are not met. Now

Aaron has previously attempted to lock his allies into place by setting himself up as an obligatory passage point through which James and Liam must pass through to access the ramp. In declaring himself as the rightful obligatory passage point – as the entity that controls the ramp, James (who we could agree has a valid enough point) now seems to have the potential to take over as leader of the network. He has also enrolled Liam as an ally in his claims as the rightful obligatory passage point. Aaron however is reluctant to relinquish his status as both network leader and obligatory passage point until James threatens to attempt to enrol another potential ally – his father.

Aaron responds to these challenges by succumbing to honour his previous promises and offers to give James and Liam a shot of his bike and a shot of his ramp. Shot giving is not however a simple process but seems to require a degree of complex organisation and orchestration. Aaron is now engaging in defining the rules and processes involved in getting and having a shot. More or less, he tells is it like this: First off there is going to be a start line and Liam is issued with the task of finding a stick to mark this start line with. This does not seem to be a task that should present any challenges because there is a tree to hand from which sticks can be procured. So Liam breaks a stick from the tree and brings it over to Aaron. However, the stick is considered defective – it does not lie flat upon the ground. Liam is now sent by Aaron to get a stick which will lie flat. Liam breaks off another stick but this stick also refuses to lie flat. Aaron decides that the solution to sticks that do not lie flat is the replacement of a stick with a plank of wood. As they know that pieces of wood are plentiful in James' father's garden James is sent as before to ask his father for a plank of wood.

The plank of wood is collected from James' father and because it lies flat it is considered by Aaron to be a suitable starting marker and is placed upon the ground by James under his direction. So now there is a starting position. Starting positions are fine and well but it seems that starting positions are not enough when organising the process of shot giving. Aaron has also decided there must also be a finishing position. Aaron is suggesting the procurement of another plank of wood but James is telling Aaron that his father has told him they are getting no more pieces of wood from his stockpile. No more planks of wood therefore mean the identification of an alternative marker and Aaron suggests a stick will do for this because unlike the starting marker a finishing marker is not to be ridden over as shots are to finish before the marker is reached. Liam then, is now being told to put one of the previously discarded sticks in the place indicated by Aaron.

Aaron is now providing the instructions for shots. He is explaining that Liam and James have to start at the starting marker, positioning their bikes behind the plank of wood. After Aaron has shouted 'on your marks, get set, go' they can then ride the ramp. After dismounting the ramp, bikes have to be ridden along a designated route and brought to a halt before the bike reaches the finishing marker where the next person will stand and queue for their shot. Just for good measure Aaron is now demonstrating to Liam and James how this should all be done.

In order to retain his status as network leader and obligatory passage point Aaron has realised that some concessions need to be made and he needs to allow these intermediaries to achieve their interests. To retain this status he promises the intermediaries will have their interests met and get a shot of his bike and his ramp. The intermediaries (Liam and James) accept his terms without challenge. Consequently, Aaron has managed to remain an obligatory passage point.

Before Aaron allows this shot taking / ramp riding to commence he instigates a complex organisation of the shot taking / ramp riding process. However, this is more than the development of a method to organise this activity. For Aaron the enrolment of actants (the plank of wood and sticks) to assist in the control of the shot taking / ramp riding process is an enrolment of allies that further stabilise his position as network leader and obligatory passage point. These are actants that he will use to further control Liam and James and the activity of shot taking / ramp riding. However, despite the previous challenge to Aaron's status, the fact that he has successfully induced both Liam and James into the enrolment of these actants suggests that Aaron's status has remained in tact regardless. Although, it is also worth remembering that just as Aaron knows these children need access to a bike they know this too. Therefore, their deference to Aaron is still motivated by this factor.

The identification of entities with the required attributes to become competent actants in the ramp-network is a complex process. The original entity, here a stick, selected as a

starting marker refuses to perform its role to the required standard and the second

selected entity fails to perform for much the same reason. Both of these entities refuse to

lie flat against the ground and therefore are considered to lack the necessary attributes of

a starting marker. Mindful of the resources in James' father's garden the process of

enrolling a plank of wood for its ability to lie flat follows much the same pattern as the

enrolment procedure implicated in the bricks and pieces of wood scenario recounted

earlier. The plank of wood is enrolled (via the possible obligatory passage point that is

James' father) and successfully enters into and performs the role Aaron has identified for

it.

For a finishing marker a stick is eventually enrolled for two reasons: James' father has

indicated his refusal to co-operate in any more enrolment attempts and as Aaron decides

the marker does not need to lie flat the role it has to perform is easier and therefore

achievable for the bent stick selected from the previously discarded potential entities.

Now Aaron inscribes his status as network leader and obligatory passage point further

by issuing instructions and performing how the process of ramp riding should commence

for the intermediaries who have now been cast in the shot taker role.

With the instruction and demonstration process now over Aaron decides that James can

have the first shot. Taking a shot it seems is instructional because Aaron is guiding James

through the process and telling him what to do. Once he has decided that James has

positioned the bike properly he tells him he can go after he has shouted 'on your marks,

get set, go'. After following Aaron's commands to his satisfaction James eventually gets to ride the ramp. As James dismounts the ramp Aaron is shouting at him to stop before the finishing marker otherwise he will not get another shot. So James stops before the marker and is told to get off the bike by Aaron. However, instead of giving the next shot to Liam, Aaron is taking the next shot himself, telling Liam he can go after him. Now the rules Aaron has constructed for the others regarding how to take a shot seem not to apply to him. James and Liam issue protests that he has gone past the finishing marker. However, not only has he gone past the finishing marker he is in the process of riding the ramp again. Although, according to Aaron, he does not need to follow the rules and stop at the finishing marker because it is his bike and it is his ramp. Still he does not give Liam a turn but he does promise he will do so in a minute and will tell him when it is his turn.

After completing several ramp runs Aaron stops and tells Liam he can now have a shot. In much the same way as before Liam's shot is also instructional and Aaron provides the directions for Liam's actions throughout the ramp riding process. Shot giving proceeds like this for a short while: Aaron issues instructions to ramp riders throughout their turns and decides who has a shot and when.

Now mobilisation has taken place. Aaron has locked the allies into their roles, convinced them that their interests are the same as his and gained their compliance to meet his demands. He has become the leader in a network which is now an organisation

consisting of a chain of links composed of various heterogeneous elements that act as intermediaries. But the continued stability of the network still needs to be controlled by the network leader and Aaron achieves this by regulating the network and co-ordinating the intermediaries in their actions, whilst continuously asserting his status as network leader.

However, things are about to change. James is getting ready to ride the ramp under the instructional gaze of Aaron. He positions the bike in the designated manner and Aaron has just issued the starting command. James is now hurtling along the approach to the ramp. He mounts the ramp. But as he bikes over the ramp one of the pieces of wood splits in the middle causing James to lose control of the bike and be catapulted from it. So the situation is now this. The ramp is broken and James is shouting that he has hurt his leg. James now worried about his sore leg which he is kicking up quite a bit of a fuss about is lying on the ground yelling for his father at the top of his voice. Whilst James is yelling, Aaron is shouting that his bike had better be okay. Happy enough that bike has managed to survive unscathed, Aaron's attention is now directed towards the ramp and he is telling Liam that they need to sort it.

Now while Aaron and Liam are attempting to reconstruct the ramp out of the broken pieces of wood, James' father has appeared to see what James is shouting about. However, James' father appears to be lacking in sympathy and tells James to stop his shouting and screaming and demands to know what the fuss is all about. James explains

to his dad that the ramp has broken has he has hurt his leg and so on. James' father now decides that children, bikes, bricks and pieces of wood are a dangerous combination. James is now being told to get all the bricks and pieces of wood back into the garden before anyone else gets hurt and to go inside.

The ramp has not only broken it is now gone. James has gone inside. Liam has taken up an offer to join in football. Aaron is left alone with no ramp, no ramp builders and no ramp riders – he is back to the start – it is just him and his bike.

An interrelated chain of events have resulted in the destruction of the ramp- network and as a consequence Aaron's status as both leader and obligatory passage point. His actants have dissented, betrayed him or been carried way by another actant and / or have become enrolled in some other network. Now the dissention of the ramp was perhaps the catalyst for this chain of events leading to the destruction of the network. A piece of wood gave up its role in the network (or failed to perform) and in doing so highlighted its own importance as a nonhuman element in the network. Perhaps the necessity of this nonhuman actor was underestimated all along. The upshot is without this network of heterogeneous materials Aaron is no longer a leader of a network. His powers were derived from and dependent upon the actants within the network performing their roles together and remaining locked in place. Consequently, he is no longer powerful.

Overview and Conclusion

The description above is a story about children building a ramp. However, the (re)description is a story of translation which illustrates the performance of heterogeneous engineering by one child. This (re)description allows for a more thorough analytical account of the processes involved without necessarily requiring that the basic description is supplemented by the application of explanations from elsewhere. Thus, explanation independently emerges from the (re)description albeit in through the vocabulary of actor-network theory.

The processes and strategies used in the production of the 'ramp-network' are highlighted. The various ways in which Aaron convinced and enrolled other actants into the actor-network that produced the ramp is given a more direct voice. In the process, Aaron's position of power vis à vis the other children is revealed to be dependent upon his own ability to keep his allies locked in place and their continued compliance with the roles he has envisioned for them and their successful performance of these roles. That is, to closely paraphrase Michael (1996:57) discussing Callon's (1986) marine biologists: Aaron's power could only endure as long each of the actors in the 'ramp-network' played their allotted parts' and when eventually his actants dissented his 'relation of power' to those other actants was destroyed.

Additionally, treating these human and nonhuman actants as analytically symmetrical

draws attention to the importance of nonhumans in Aaron's 'ramp-network'. For instance, the importance of successfully enrolling the grass into the network and of course the absolute necessity of this entity for the construction of the network was revealed. Indeed its pivotal role for the network perhaps positioned it (in the same way as James' father) as an obligatory passage point through which all the others had to pass. Relatedly, the fact that this actant came to participate in two actor-networks simultaneously demonstrates that actors or actants (whether human or nonhuman) are all members of more than one actor-world at the same time (cf. Star 1991). Of course, this also draws attention to how nonhumans are implicated and present in human encounters, which working within another frame of reference would most probably be overlooked. In the case of the 'ramp-network' the role of nonhumans transpires as being so critical that the dissention of one piece of wood sets into motion a course of events that leads to the eventual demise of the actor-network and as a consequence the powers of its heterogeneous engineer - as Akrich (1992) and Latour (1987) have already noted, if one of the non-human elements in an actor-network dissents, then the network breaks down in much the same way as if the dissenting element had been a human

Amongst other things, another issue drawn out about the role of nonhumans is the ways in which nonhumans can be used to impose physical constraints. For example, the nonhumans used for the starting and finishing positions were used by Aaron to shape the behaviours of Liam and James. The ability of nonhumans to control the actions of humans is something that Latour (1992) draws attention to in his discussion of the function of a door-closer. Here he considers that nonhumans can be used as a more

effective way of disciplining humans into desired actions. Therefore, Aaron's use of

nonhumans as starting and finishing markers could perhaps be considered as his method

to discipline Liam and James into a particular way of ramp riding he designed. That is,

he delegated the task of structuring the ramp riding behaviours of Liam and James to

these nonhumans.

In sum then, the (re)description offered by actor-network theory through the language of

translation allows the intricacies of these processes to emerge. What is a relatively

mundane activity that children engage in emerges as something that depends upon a

series of complex processes in which the orchestration of various heterogeneous elements

into a collective is played out. In the spaces in which I observed children at play and

talked to them about their activities, the construction and of course the destruction of

actor-networks to create various effects was in constant motion – children were

continuously engaged in heterogeneous engineering. Their heterogeneous engineering

was not always related to positioning themselves as powerful as Aaron did or to create

something like a bicycle ramp. For instance, in the next chapter, this theme of

heterogeneous engineering / translation continues, however, the focus is upon how one

child in collaboration with others overcomes the difficulties he encounters when he is

victimised by other, older children. Here, however, I return to writing conventions and

bring in the explanations of other sociologists of childhood.

Chapter Six

Heterogeneous Engineering and Children's Interpersonal Relations: Conflict and Retaliation

Introduction

The previous chapter took, as an illustration of heterogeneous engineering by children, a case study that demonstrated how children build actor-networks out of various human and nonhuman elements in the accomplishment of their every day play activities (such as ramp building). In the fieldwork locations used a great deal of the children's heterogeneous engineering was activity centred, that is, it was engaged in the creation of various games and so on. However, the children also assembled actor-networks as a method for dealing with their interpersonal and interactive entanglements with each other. These heterogeneous engineering attempts were particularly visible during children's interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group conflicts and disputes where children would (although not always), for example, draw on the resources of heterogeneous others in their attempts to resolve disputes or win arguments. Aspects of this were apparent in the example given in the previous chapter when the authority of the parent was utilised to settle a spatial dispute.

As its exemplar, this chapter takes one such episode where a child engineered a heterogeneous network in order to retaliate against a group of other, older children who

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had harassed him. Being extraordinarily small for his age, this child experienced daily ridicule, social exclusion and stigma from other children (cf. James 2000:29). Having a 'different body' made him a vulnerable target for peer harassment in its various forms. His body was read by many of the other children as weak or lacking in strength and this manifested in the language they used to talk about, and to him, and also in the reasons they gave for excluding him from sporting activities that were seen to require these supposedly masculine body traits. However, this reading of his body as weak and passive was confused by some of the children as an indication of an essential or inner weak and passive disposition. Although discussing illness, Christensen (2000:52-53) observes that adults read the exterior body of the child in order to assess the ill-health or otherwise of the interior body. Thus the invisible internal body is associated with the visible exterior body. In much the same way, many of these children associated this child's exterior body with his interior body therefore viewing one as weak and passive meant viewing both as weak and passive. Whilst this child often viewed himself self-deprecatingly, in exactly this way, his actions often betrayed this view that he and others held that he was weak and passive. For instance, on many of the occasions that he was subjected to peer harassment he was most definitely not weak and /or passive – quite the opposite in fact. He often actively refused to fully accept the role of victim that his perpetrators carved out for him by developing and deploying methods to, for example, seek revenge against those who had transgressed him.

That he did so was not always immediately obvious. His methods were subversive and rarely did he respond to his aggressors by reciprocating their aggression either physically

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or verbally. Rather, he engaged others in carrying out such acts of revenge on his behalf. In this he was particularly skilled and could manoeuvre and incorporate other children and / or adults into, if necessary, a collective entity – an alliance or gang that would generate the effect he wished to achieve.

The discussion below is concerned with exactly how this child incorporated others into a collectivity for this sort of purpose. Akin to the previous example the discussion moves through description and (re)description. However, here the (re)description does not stand alone but is supplemented in the traditional style by the explanations of others. Before beginning the account of the event used to illustrate how this child creates an actor-network the discussion begins by contextualising these events by considering this child's everyday life in his 'different body'.

Living in and as a 'Different Body'

I am sitting with Lewis watching a game of football underway in Greenspace. I have frequently noticed that he does not join in football with the other children very often. I am aware from observing the children's activities and interactions that he is regularly excluded from such sports based activities. I am also aware from listening to children's verbal exchanges what the likely reasons for this exclusion are. However, I am very eager to find out what Lewis' considers the reasons to be:

Sharon: How come you aren't playing football?

Lewis: They don't let me play cos I'm rubbish only if I'm in goal if there's no goalie and I don't like being goalie.

Sharon: I'm sure you aren't rubbish.

Lewis: I am rubbish.

Sharon: Why do think that?

Lewis: Cos the ball hurts me.

Sharon: What do you mean the ball hurts you?

Lewis: They don't let me play cos I'm a greeter. They call me greeter cos they kick the ball hard to hit me and everything.

Sharon: Why do they do that?

Lewis: To hit me with it like on the head and everything so I'm wee and can't get the ball cos they kick it hard at my head and everything so they don't let me play cos I can't get it and I can't tackle like I get, like I can't win tackles cos everyone's bigger so cos I can't get the ball then and everything. They never let me play.

Sharon: You play sometimes though in goal right?

Lewis: Yeah but I can't do it cos they wellie it (the ball) and I don't get the ball then they go mental and everything cos we lost then don't let me play anything cos I'm too wee and they get beat so no one picks me only if you can't get eekies.

Sharon: What do you mean eekies?

Lewis: Eekies like three on their side and three on their side if there's no eekies I get to be the goalie for the crap team cos the best team is already there cos like say like if Aaron is like the captain and he goes first he has all the best players so I go with the crappy team cos I'm wee in the goal. They are all big and the goalie is big like look there (shows height with hand gesture).

This is an extract of one of many conversations with Lewis in which he expressed his

own and others negative perceptions of his small body as a deficient body. He clearly

articulates his own understanding of the reasons for other children's treatment of him as being directly related to his body. Additionally, he communicates his own assention to their interpretations of his body. Moreover, he engages in empirically confirming his body to be small by drawing comparisons with other bigger bodies.

James (2000) suggests that children develop their sense of their bodies and themselves as their bodies through their everyday relations with other children, wherein they engage in constantly comparing theirs and others' bodies. In so doing, she argues that children learn to differentiate between different and normal bodies and develop a self-awareness of the place of their own body amongst others (James 1995 cited in James 2000). Thus she states:

> '...children whose bodies are smaller than those of their contemporaries
>
> may gradually become self-conscious of their difference through a
>
> dawning recognition of their own body's failure to conform' (1995:70).

Small bodies, as James (2000) draws out, have the potential to be stigmatising and to result in other social consequences such as exclusion.

Lewis' sense of being-in-the-world was intimately bound up with his sense of smallness-

in-the-world. He experienced himself as his body (cf. Lyon and Barbalet 1994 cited in James 2000). His participation in (or more frequently his exclusion from) mundane activities (such as football) with other children routinely reinforced his own sense of smallness-in-the-world and the social consequences that having a small body brought.

Here, there are some links with how Lewis experiences himself with Mead's (1934:154) concept of the 'generalised other' in so far as Lewis' sense of himself is derived from the attitudes that others hold and exhibit towards him:

'The individual experiences himself as such, [an object unto itself] not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoint of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalised standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs' (Mead 1934:138).

Building upon this; Prus (1996:152) in his discussion of 'identity work' argues that the treatment people receive from others forms part of the self's ongoing assessment to work out self definitions. The treatment that Lewis received was pivotal to how he experienced himself from the 'viewpoint of others' (Prus, 1996:56). The viewpoint of others is expressed below by James:

Sharon: Who do you play football with?

James: Everyone roond here plays footie.

Sharon: Can you tell me who everyone is?

James: Well, Marc, Liam, Terry, Jordan, Thomas, sometimes Stephen, sometimes Stuart and Aaron and everyone.

Sharon: Why do you play with them?

James: Cos I dunno know…em…like they're gid at footie and stuff.

Sharon: What about Lewis do you play footie with him?

James: Sometimes but he's crap.

Sharon: What do you mean he's crap?

James: I dunno know like well like he cannae play he's a midget.

Sharon: Tell me about that then.

James: Well its like he's a midget ken cos he so he cannae play right cos right he's crap at footie so we dinnae want him to play cos then the game is crap cos he cries if the ba hits him and his kicks are crap so all he does is moan about no gettin the ba cos everyone, like no one passes the ba cos he cannae get it and no one wants him on their side an aw thing cos he's a wee crap midget and he runs off an tells we're no letting him play.

Sharon: What do you mean he tells you aren't letting him play?

James: He goes and tells his mum we're picking on him an calling him crap and no letting him play.

Sharon: Why don't you let him play?

James: Cos he's crap he's a wee crap midget and we get into trouble from his mum cos he goes in greetin when he gets hit wi the ba cos everytime the ba hits him he goes in greetin cos like we cannae cos its no fair its no our fault he cannae handle it when the ba hits him he's a wee skinny sap he's a stick he cannae take it.

In this account I was most deliberately seeking the perspective of another child on Lewis' treatment where football was concerned. However, what this extract draws out is the exceptionally close similarities between this and Lewis' own narrative. This perhaps reveals how potent Lewis' internalisation of the viewpoint of others. Alternatively (or perhaps additionally), and given that other children echoed this narrative, this is perhaps indicative that Lewis and other children held a shared social schemata[36] (Erasmus *et al.* 2002) about Lewis.

However, subtly interwoven within these two accounts is a shared recognition that there is also an issue about the protection of the dynamics of the game that goes beyond simply deriding Lewis' body and its perceived capacities (or lack thereof) in respect to football; put simply Lewis is seen as detrimental to the game because he is considered to lack the required skills. Moreover, Lewis recognises this himself. Exclusion on the basis of skill deficiency was common across all of the children's activities, which suggests that children's exclusion by others from activities is not always a simple matter of 'nastiness' for nastiness sake. Although, (and this was also a common phenomena across other activities) Lewis was sometimes given access to the activity if the dynamics of the game were seen to be at risk because of the considered unfairness of one team having more or less players than the other. However, his positioning as goalkeeper in football emerged because within the hierarchy of valued player positions, the role of goalkeeper occupied

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[36] Social Schemata are cognitive structures that are categorised into four groups: *Self Schemata* that contain information about one's personality, appearance and behaviour; *Person Schemata* that focus on traits and behaviours common to certain types of people; *Role Schemata / Person in Situation Schemata* that include information about people and their typical behaviour in specific social situations; *Event Schemata* that include knowledge about the expected sequence of events in a given situation (Erasmus et al. 2002:3).

the lowest status position. No child wanted to occupy this position – all children wanted to be strikers.

Adding to the complexity of the reasons for Lewis' exclusion (although again this is related to his body) Lewis' presence in football games was also considered to bring wider consequences. For instance, James discussed how Lewis' would get them into trouble because he cried when the ball struck him. Interestingly, James does not express that there was any deliberate intentions to hit Lewis with the ball. Rather conversely, Lewis understands this to be quite deliberate. My own observations suggested that these strikes were sometimes deliberate.

Football is just one example of how Lewis' 'different body' affected his experiences within this community of children. For Lewis his 'different body' led to a plethora of negative social consequences. His assumed physical defencelessness and passivity positioned him as a perceived easy target for other children's ridicule. He was often pushed around and physically assaulted by other children. In discussing children with 'different bodies' James (2000:29) discusses how children with small bodies sometimes adopt strategies to influence how 'their body is read by others to be able to gain salvation from the potential social stigma or exclusion which having a small body threatens to bring'. Lewis, however, did not engage in manipulating how others viewed his body or him as a consequence. He accepted the view that his body was weak and passive. However, he did not always accept the treatment from others that this brought.

The above discussion has been intended to situate the example which follows by providing the reader with a contextual background of Lewis' daily life as a 'different body', against which the following example is set. Below the discussion moves to present an illustration of a particular episode in which Lewis reacts to the ill-treatment he receives from others.

Getting Your Own Back: Engineering Retaliation

Lewis is outside looking for something to do and someone to play with. At the moment there is no one else is around. He picks up a stick which was lying on the ground and begins to poke around with it in the dirt. He does this for a while, singing and humming to himself as he prods the ground. After a while some older, 'bigger boys' come along. Using a string of profanities, they tell Lewis to leave the spot he is occupying. At first Lewis refuses to leave and so they tell him again. Whilst doing so, one of them grabs his stick and throws it into the distance instructing him to play where it has landed.

Lewis runs over to where the stick has landed, retrieves it and runs back to where he had been playing with it. He looks at the bigger boys defiantly. One of them grabs the stick from Lewis' hands and snaps it into two separate pieces. As they throw it away they tell him to get lost (although this is putting it politely). Lewis' starts crying and declares he is 'telling'. The bigger boys seem unperturbed by this and laugh it off. One of them

shouts, 'go on then you clyping midget, I'm totally shaking'. This verbal taunt has upset Lewis and he declares again that he is telling on them but this time he is going to tell that they are also calling him midget. This is an abusive nickname that many of the children call Lewis. He is quite used to being called this, usually puts up with it, but finds it upsetting.

Lewis moves away from the bigger boys and sits on the ground sniffling. It seems that Lewis has accepted the taunts, the stick throwing, the stick breaking and all the rest. He has noticed that I am watching him and I have noticed that he is throwing me a few glances in between sniffles. He sits moping for a short time alternating between casting furtive looks at the 'bigger boys' and myself.

Eventually, Lewis gets up and approaches me. I try to say hello but before I manage to speak Lewis is recounting his exchange with the bigger boys. I recognise this as an enrolment attempt and I recognise myself as Lewis' target entity. He has not said so but I know Lewis wants me to do or say something to these bigger boys. I have come to recognise that children do not always fully verbalise or express a request for assistance. Rather they state the facts with an added tone of expectancy. I respond by telling Lewis that he can get another stick, play somewhere else and that he should ignore their name-calling. He responds with: 'but they won't let me play'. I tell Lewis he could play over there, pointing to another area as I do so. Lewis tells me they swore at him. I say I heard them. Lewis looks at me as if I am a traitor and walks off. I feel like a traitor.

In sum, the 'bigger boys' have effectively ejected Lewis from the space in which he was playing. There is no apparent reason why they have done this. It could be because they wanted to occupy the spot themselves or it could just be because they could. However, Lewis did not instantly comply with their demands. He began by refusing to leave and after retrieving his stick he returned and attempted to retain possession of the space he was using for play. Even when he began to cry he still attempted to do something about the situation by threatening to tell. Already intimidated by the breaking of the stick, the verbal and profane chastisement coupled with the mockery the bigger boys issue in response to his threat to tell result in his retreat from the space.

After moping for a bit Lewis approached me and recounted the proceeding events. I realised without him having to say so that he is implicitly attempting to enrol me. He attempts several times to enrol by highlighting various aspects of the episodes (that the bigger boys have broken his stick and swore at him). I recognise that firstly he wants me to tell these other children to let him continue playing where he was and verbally sanction them for breaking his stick and swearing at him. Although I recognise this, I do not do anything. Latterly, my response perturbed me. It perturbed me because I could see in Lewis' facial expression that he thought I should have done something. Moreover, as I reflected on my response afterwards I became concerned and slightly confused about the ethical and methodological implications of this.

Ethically, I considered whether or not I had acted inappropriately. As a researcher should I have intervened? As a parent (and in keeping with unwritten but never-the-less open to interpretation rule of the neighbourhood), under normal circumstances, I would have most probably responded the same way; but then again, perhaps not – perhaps I would have intervened earlier. Yet, 'in the field' I was neither parent nor researcher but a hybrid of the two and this hybridity complicated things further. It did so because on the one hand, as a researcher, I had ethical responsibilities towards my participants. However, on the other hand, and because I was a parental figure in their life worlds, I had, through my personal associations with these children and their parents, an assumed duty of care.

From the PAR perspective, Adler and Adler (2001) draw attention to the fact that conflicts arise between the parental identity and the researcher identity and the obligations and responsibilities each of these separately carry. As a parent my normal response to such a situation is variable and I am unable to state with certainty what it would have been – I may or may not have intervened. As a researcher, I remain confused about how far one should intervene and at what point a lack of intervention becomes ethically problematic. Adler and Adler (2001:35) suggest that a good rule of thumb is the 'guideline of endangerment'. Here they state that if researchers are party to behaviour that presents dangers to the safety of children or which could be harmful then they should disengage from their neutral researcher stance. However, as they also note, this is matter of personal judgment on the part of the researcher. Moreover, they consider that these matters cannot be regulated through bureaucratic rules because 'children's behaviours are

understood and given meaning within the context of their situations' (2001:35).

However, the Adlers' advice regarding the disengagement of researchers from their neutral stance is equally problematic. When children draw you into their disputes 'in the field', it is very difficult to remain neutral in this dual role. Here how much detachment and value neutrality one can realistically achieve is a moot point. I had began my fieldwork by attempting to assume a field role that lay somewhere between that of the 'detached observer' (Mayall 2000) and 'least adult role' (Mandell 1991; Thorne 1993). However, I had increasingly found that the PAR dimension complicated the achievement of either, never mind anything in between. When I tried to be detached, my role as a parent would frequently encroach into this stance. Equally so, when I tried to be less than adult in some way I found that the parental identity loaded as it is with associations of authority was difficult to dilute. Complicating this, I was occasionally concerned that I was shirking my parentally derived moral obligations to these children because of my vested interest in data gathering (I was never quite sure whether I was or not). Here, I wondered if my response to Lewis was influenced by a subconscious desire to see what else would occur.

Added to this is the issue that both Lewis and these other children are all participants in my research. I did not want to alienate any of these children by issuing sanctions or being seen to 'side' with one over another (although, in not issuing a sanction I may have been alienating Lewis). Mayall (2000:121) describes one of the requirements of the

'least adult role' to be 'not siding with adults', however, there is little mention in the methodological material about 'siding' or 'not siding' with children. Whilst, there are the complications of the PAR role in this instance it suggests that at times the adoption of field roles such as the 'detached observer' or 'least adult' can be unsustainable or at least more difficult than methodological texts suggest.

Most crucially, however, Lewis had approached me as an adult and a parental figure in his life world. He did not approach me as researcher. His expectations of me as an adult and a parent are that I should act in his interests. He did not view me as a 'detached observer' or a 'least adult' or even as a PAR; he most definitely considered me as an adult-parent. He had approached me because he expected me to do something to help (this becomes more obvious later on). I did feel like I had let him down. However, analytically speaking, I had refused to become enrolled by Lewis. At this point in time I had not been convinced that his interests were mine.

Despite my resistance to enrolment Lewis does not give up. He goes to the foot of the block of flats in which he lives and shouts for his mother. A window opens and Lewis' mother appears asking what he wants. He repeats the events of the stick throwing, stick breaking, swearing, and name-calling and so on to his mother. His mother tells him to play somewhere else.

The response Lewis gets to his attempted enrolment of her is pretty much the same response he got from me. She tells him to play elsewhere and refuses to become enrolled by Lewis. That she did respond in this way made me feel a little less like a traitor and a little more comfortable about my own response. However, I am not sure whether this necessarily gives me any sort of absolution. More to the point; Lewis' problem remains (as yet) unresolved.

With two failed enrolment attempts behind him it now appears that Lewis has given up attempting to enrol someone to deal with the bigger boys. He sits at the entrance to the block of flats watching the bigger boys lark around. He looks a little dejected and defeated. He begins to tinker with his mobile phone that he has produced from his trouser pocket. Nothing about this mobile phone tinkering surprises me. I have noticed that children spend quite a bit of time fiddling with their mobile phones so I do not see anything unusual about this. I am sure Lewis has given up on getting something done about the way these bigger boys have treated him and is now content to play with some gaming facility on this phone.

After a while Lewis puts the mobile phone down on the step and begins jumping on and off the step. This continues until Lewis misses the step and in doing so manages to fall down, hurting one of his knees in the process. At first Lewis gets up without making much noise and inspects his knee. He then suddenly starts screaming for his mother at the top of his voice. However, the screaming appears to be a reaction to the blood that

has begun to seep out of his knee rather than the knock to the knee itself. Lewis' mother appears to inspect the damage to the knee and after realising that there is not really much blood to speak of other than a little leakage seeping from the graze, she tells Lewis to calm down as there is just a little bit and offers him a sweet.

I had noticed during the fieldwork that younger children often react like this to injuries. That is, screaming and crying often occurs after the injury has been inspected and blood has been detected. Often, if there is no blood found children dismiss their injuries and continue with whatever activity they had been involved in. Christensen (2000:50-51; 1993) has previously commented on children's inspection of injuries, the investigation of the presence and amount of blood and both children and adults reactions to such injuries. Christensen (2000) highlights the different reactions that children and adults give to injuries and to blood, observing that adults react immediately, particularly where there is blood, to establish the seriousness of the injury, children are more interested in investigating the wound and establishing the amount of blood involved for often quite different reasons. Whilst sometimes children react to blood without displaying any of the alarm of adults, they can also react dramatically in a similar vein to how Lewis reacted above by exaggerating what is often a miniscule amount of blood. Christensen (2000) suggests that what injured children want is to engage others in 'looking' at rather than attending to their injuries.

Christensen (2000:51) also suggests that adults act to 'minimise' the importance of injuries in for example, suggestions that there is 'little or no blood'. She also highlights that adults tend to disapprove of children's dramatic reactions to bodily injuries. In this instance, the response of Lewis' mother directly corresponds with Christensen's observations as she tells Lewis that there is 'just a little bit' and suggests that he calms down. Backett-Milburn (2000:83) suggests that from the adult point of view, childhood injuries of this kind are regarded, more or less, as so routine and commonplace that they are not worthy of any serious consideration. The attention adults give to such injuries is minimal, often superficial, and children, because their bodies are viewed as 'quickly healing' and 'resilient', are expected to 'put up with bodily discomfort' (Backett-Millburn 2000:83).

Reassured that he is unlikely to bleed to death and armed with the promised chocolate, Lewis resumes his step jumping game. He has also resumed glaring intermittently at the 'bigger boys'. About ten minutes later I see and hear Lewis making a phone call on his mobile phone. He becomes dramatic and what I hear is Lewis relaying the previous events to the person he has called. However, as he does so, he is giving the story 'arms and legs' and is claiming to have been hit and pushed. Moreover, he cites his grazed knee as evidence of a physical attack.

Lewis it seems has not, as has been assumed, fully dispensed with seeking some sort of

recompense for the previous fracas with the bigger boys. Here, he has begun to initiate another attempt at enrolment. Before discussing this however, I would like to digress to speculate about the role of mobile phone.

Bell (2001) in a thought provoking article which discussed the role of communication technologies in (amongst other things) providing or maintaining contact between children and non-resident fathers after marital separation and / or divorce, suggests that the telephone becomes a crucial node in the dispersed heterogeneous network of contemporary familial forms. Bell (2001) argues that lines of communication involve – indeed are dependent upon – such forms of communication technologies that maintain contact and facilitate proximity between a child(ren) and their non-resident father despite distance. However, Bell (2001) also suggests that the familial network can be cut (cf. Strathern 1996) when, for example, mothers halt the use of the telephone as a node in the network. Additionally, Bell (2001) suggests that the telephone may come to represent the non-resident father, and that for the non-resident father, the ability to *become* father is, at times, dependent upon the assemblage between the non-resident father and the telephone.

In respect to the current illustration; it could therefore be suggested that Lewis has enrolled the mobile phone as a node in his network – a node which brings into proximity another entity which he wishes to enrol. Equally, it could be suggested that without the mobile phone perhaps this entity may not have been contactable. In Bell's (2001) article

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she gives an example of two children using the telephone in exactly the same way as Lewis and describes a scenario wherein the two children telephone the non-resident father and attempt to enrol him to use his authority as parent to sanction their step-father who has upset them. Their attempt was unsuccessful however, whether or not Lewis' is remains to be seen.

In the meantime, it can be suggested that in enrolling the mobile phone, Lewis is able to carry out another enrolment attempt. This time his target entity is distant to him. However, the account of events that Lewis gives to the target entity is partly false. Therefore, in this enrolment attempt he has altered the representation of his problem. It is possible that he embellished this account of his problem because his previously truthful representations were not sufficient enough to convince his two previous enrolment targets. Indeed, as it transpired in a later conversation with Lewis, he expressed his fabrications as necessary because the actual account of events did not result in the adults he approached (myself included) taking his problem seriously:

> 'Well I told you and I told my mum and you didn't bother did you and you saw it - *you didn't listen*'' (emphasis added)

My interpretation of this is that Lewis was trying to communicate that he embellished the events to be *heard* not just to be listened to and also to get something done. As Roberts (2000:238) points out, 'listening to children, hearing children, and acting on what they

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say are three very different activities'. Retrospectively, Lewis taught me a lesson, not only about research practice but also about the 'powerful social and cultural tendencies' (Llyod-Smith and Tarr 2000:62) that lead to adults to neglect and dismiss what children say and also what they feel.

It transpires that Lewis had called Aaron who bringing with him couple of friends has now arrived and is listening, this time in person, to Lewis' version of events. He tells Lewis not to worry that he will 'sort it'. Aaron looks over at the group of bigger boys and instructs Marc to go round to Dudes' house and see if he is in and if so, to tell him what is going on. Marc asks Aaron why he has to go to Dudes' house and so on, to which Aaron has replied that he is not going to be fighting with them. The tone of Aaron's voice implies that he considers Marc's questions to be rather stupid.

Another child then has responded to Lewis' problem and it appears that this child (Aaron) has been successfully enrolled by Lewis. However, Aaron is Lewis' older brother and therefore Lewis has not randomly targeted him for enrolment. As an older sibling Aaron has a vested interest in his brother's welfare - as Aaron puts it - 'you have to stick up for your wee brother don't you'. Aaron often responds to Lewis' requests for assistance and this is something Lewis is fully aware of. Of course, the relationship between Aaron and his younger brother is not always this convivial. Like most siblings within Greenspace, Aaron is often Lewis' adversary. They frequently fought and squabbled and they frequently plotted against each other.

However, Aaron does not consider himself as able to 'sort out' the bigger boys on his own; he may be bigger than Lewis but the bigger boys are bigger than he. Moreover, despite the fact that he brought with him two friends who he thought might have been of some assistance, he felt that the bigger boys outnumbered his group and were too strong and too big for them:

> 'Frankenstein and that are dead tough and that. They're like huge and they could batter you like anything'.

Aaron knew exactly what Frankenstein and his friends were capable of and he also considered that attempting to enter into a potentially aggressive altercation with them was nothing short of folly. Thus, Aaron takes responsibility for identifying and enrolling others into Lewis' actor-network and immediately enrols Marc to seek out and enrol Dudes.

Soon, Marc returns with Dudes. Now it is easy to see why Dudes has been selected as a potential entity for enrolment in this particular situation. Not only is Dudes bigger, in the physical sense of the word, he is also older at sixteen years of age than any of the other children now at the scene. Dudes spends a little bit of time listening to Aaron telling the story of events or rather the embellished version of the story as told by Lewis

to Aaron and there is much ado made about the inspection of the injured knee. Lewis is quite delighted about the inspection of his knee which is now being presented to Dudes as excruciatingly painful. Moreover, I have noticed that Lewis is giving the injury the odd squeeze as if to try to encourage further bleeding. It seems as if the injury to the knee, prefabricated by Lewis to have been caused by the bigger boys, has become the major vehicle for enrolment to Lewis' cause. After listening to the tale and looking intently at the injured knee he tells Aaron he will be back soon and tells Lewis, who he affectionately calls 'wee man', not to worry he will 'sort it out' when he gets back. Aaron seems quite perturbed by Dudes' announcement that he going off somewhere and has suggested to Dudes he just 'squares up' to them now. However, Dudes has told Aaron he will be back and he will sort things out then but he has to go and get someone to help him first.

Aaron has also been strategic in his enrolment choice and he has used the same logic applied in all other attempts – he gets someone bigger and someone he knows has a track record of helping out. When Dudes arrives, Lewis' injured knee becomes the primary device through which Dude's becomes convinced that he should 'sort things out'. When the group gathered around the knee they became highly involved in the act of 'looking' that Christensen (1993; 2000) discusses. Additionally, Lewis became highly involved in *performing* the knee injury by attempting to get it to emit more blood and in acting as if it was more painful that perhaps it was. However, it appeared, somewhat confusingly given his age and size, that Dudes also considered (like Aaron did) that he required assistance in dealing with the bigger boys.

There is now an air of excitement between the children as they look at the 'bigger boys' who are still larking about and speculate about what Dudes has gone to do, when he will get back and what is likely to happen upon his return. Lewis now appears thrilled to bits that he has managed to attract so much attention and he is doing little to hide his delight. Notably, the pain to the injured knee seems to have been forgotten about amidst all the excitement.

Feeling a little braver, Aaron is now shouting to the bigger boys that they are 'in for it'. The bigger boys appear unperturbed by this responding with all kinds of profane insults and mocking laughter. Quite a bit of verbal abuse begins to be thrown backwards and forwards between the two groups. However, the bigger boys maintain an air of indifference and ridicule, sneering at the futuristic threat of Dudes that the others are now voicing.

Events take an unexpected turn when Dudes returns to the scene. As promised, Dudes has brought a friend with him – Bones. However, Bones is not another child, neither is Bones an adult. In fact Bones is not human at all – Bones is a dog – a white Alsatian to be exact and a particularly ferocious looking white Alsatian at that.

This was curious because I had expected Dudes to return with perhaps a couple of friends

but not with his dog. Up until this point it had not occurred to me that a view that considered the social world as heterogeneous could be extend to encompass the animal nor did it occur to me that animals could in the same way as any other human or non-human thing become enrolled into actor-networks. Yet dogs, according to Dudes are very useful very effective allies, particularly in circumstances such as these:

'I dinnae get any bother if I hae Bones wi me naebody gies you hassle wi a dug like bones cos he is a vicious looking thing isn't he and he's no really he widnae hurt anyone but he'll bark if ye tell him tae bark and all.'

This of course is one of the strengths of an actor-network analysis – it opens the door to allow for a consideration of the role of all sorts of other things previously obscured from view. Of course, Callon (1986a) discussed the role of scallops in the actor-network of marine biologists of St. Brieuc Bay, so there seems no reason why a dog cannot be extended the same analytical treatment. In debating, from an actor-network perspective, Michael (1996:144) discusses what he refers to as an 'animal-human dyad' when he considers the forms of associations that take place between humans and animals. He suggests that in entering into associations with animal companions humans can achieve an expansion of their identity. Certainly, Dudes expresses that he considers his assemblage or his 'being with' the dog strengthens his ability to deter possible trouble.

The dog-Dudes dyad marches over to the bigger boys. This march (and it is a march) is more than a little performative. Whilst marching Dudes also acts as if he is having to calm Bones down. He is instructing the dog to take it easy and to remain steady and so on. The dog is, however, a little frisky, as it is being encouraged by Lewis, Aaron and his friends to perform tough; they are shouting to the dog, 'get them' bones'. The bigger children are now looking rather uncomfortable (although it appears that this because of the performance that Bones is giving rather than the sight of Dudes). As he is approaching, Dudes is asking them why they have, as he puts it, 'hurt the wee man's knee'. The bigger boys seem ill at ease as they protest their innocence to the knee incident (which of course they are innocent of). I have been expecting Dudes to be verbally aggressive but this does not occur. Ignoring their protests and claims of innocence he just tells them that perhaps they had better leave. The bigger boys mumble a few 'see you laters' and Dudes coolly replies 'nae bother lads'. They do not argue they just turn around and start walking away.

I was amazed at the calmness of these proceedings. I had expected Dudes to threaten to set the dog on them. Dudes believed that without the dog there would have been trouble. He said he thought 'they would have had a go'. However, he also said that he did not want to be seen to be picking on them in any way:

> 'Look I don't like folk picking on little kids. So they're no exactly really little but they're wee'r than me ken an it doesnae dae. Yi just need tae look a bit scarey and hae a wee word ken cos they're a right crew they're always picking on the bairns roon here but yi cannae go ganging up on them an rubbin them up the wrong way or they'll gie yi

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hassle somewhere doon the line.'

It seems that a dog-human dyad can be a very effective assemblage indeed.

Conclusion

Lewis eventually achieved the effect he wished to generate, although not without difficulty and not without persistence. In attempting to enrol others to sanction the bigger boys he failed to convince two adults who were well placed to have given him immediate and speedy assistance. However, this did not result in his giving up and accepting that he should enter the victim role the bigger boys had placed him in. He actively resisted this role by persisting in his (successful) attempts to identify and enrol others to sanction the children that had harassed him. In this respect Lewis obviously did not believe that these children should have been allowed to 'get away' with their victimisation of him. Thus in as far as this was an act of retaliation it appeared that it was guided by Lewis' sense that he had been unfairly treated.

However, his enrolment of other children involved him fabricating aspects of the events in his presentation of his problem. This, as Lewis tried to explain, was because the adults he attempted to enrol did not *listen* and did not do anything. Therefore, his false presentation of his problem was a strategic attempt to get others not only to *listen* but also to *hear* and to *act*. The actor-network he engineered consisted not only of humans but

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also technological and natural / animal nonhumans – although the dog was not directly enrolled by Lewis himself. However, that these forms of nonhumans (technological and animal) appeared in his actor-network highlights the variety of nonhumans that can be drawn into and considered in an actor-network analysis. Both of these nonhumans played crucial roles in the actor-network that generated the effect – the presence of the dog, for instance, appeared pivotal in the outcome that followed. Additionally, the somewhat separate point of the assemblage between Dudes and the dog highlighted the ways in which the self can be extended or expanded through an animal companion.

Returning full circle to the issue of Lewis and his 'different body': it can be seen from this exemplar that having an external self which can be read by others as weak and passive because of its small physical size is not necessarily indicative of an essential inner weakness and passivity that results in an inability to counteract the treatment received from others because one is considered physically defenceless. Lewis actively put together an actor-network in order to seek some form of recompense for the treatment he received from the other children who had harassed him and successfully dealt, through his enrolment of others, with his perpetrators – after all, 'the capacities of the body can be modified in various ways by importing the resources of other humans or nonhumans, technological or natural' (Michael 1996:56).

This theme of extending the capacities of the body continues, in part, in the next chapter. However, the focus of the discussion changes direction to consider more fully the role of

the nonhuman (primarily objects) in children's social relations. In doing so, the thesis now turns to considering the children's interactions with the school playground at Hillend.

Chapter Seven

Extending the Self and Weaving the Collective

First Impressions of Hillend Playground

The playground is quite unremarkable as playgrounds go. It is quite small and entirely covered in concrete. There is no grass. There are no permanent play structures. Iron railings surround it and a few trees. The school buildings are quite imposing when viewed from the playground and are as equally bland and gloomy as the playground itself. On the whole the playground can be described as busy, despite the blandness of its landscape. When the children come out to play it comes alive - it becomes colourful and vibrant. A lot of activity goes on it the playground and it is very noisy. Maybe more boisterous than noisy – plenty of hustle and bustle. It looked like a bit of rabble at first with children running this way and that and the noisiness of it all. It is a lot more organised than it first appears. The activities are organised. They are even routine. The same children engage in more or less the same activities everyday and interact with the same clique (I have noticed that on the whole, the children engage in the same activities in school as they do out of school, and usually with the same children). There even appears to be an informal partitioning of the space of the playground - each activity and each group inhabiting the same space each day with little changes being made.

The boys mostly play football. They bring quite a lot of football gear in with them. Apart from balls and things they also bring in their football tops and wear them on top of their uniforms at break time. Some boys hold tournaments with wrestling figures at playtimes. Others are engrossed in comparing and swapping football stickers. Beyblade battles seem to be as popular here as on the streets and there are a group of boys who gather round a beyblade stadium each break time. This game is based on a children's animated television programme which airs on a satellite channel. The girls mostly seem to chat either in the shelter shed or at the entrances to the school buildings. Sometimes they are allowed coloured chalks to draw pictures on the concrete and spend break times drawing colourful murals on the floor of the shelter shed and occasionally on the walls. They work quite collaboratively at this.

Older girls tend to hang around the boys activities and although they do not normally join in they are involved in some of the banter that surrounds these activities. There is one girl who spends her break times playing football with the boys. As yet I have not seen her play or chat with any of the other girls. She does not seem to engage much with the girls at other times either (for example, when queuing up at bell time).

Skateboarding and inline roller skating is common. Mostly it is boys who use skateboards in the playground and girls who use inline skates. Skateboarding is apparently banned in the playground because of accidents but it goes on nonetheless. Skateboards themselves are not banned as there is an authority wide project aimed at getting kids to choose 'active' travel options to school and skateboarding or roller skating to school is

encouraged. The children are therefore allowed to bring these items to school.

Some boys bring their hand held computer games consoles with them and play them at break time. They spend time watching each other play and swapping games and consoles. I have noticed Richard usually brings in his various computer games things. Sometimes he brings in a Robot. It seems to be mostly boys who bring various things to school to play with at breaktimes. Some children remain almost entirely absent from the playground at lunch times. A few boys, but no girls, go to chess club on a daily basis. Some girls go to the sewing club on a daily basis. One boy also goes to this. He has told me he is making a frog. He has also told me he thinks the sewing club is great. He is making a boat next. He comes to school everyday with his own sewing kit.

This extract is taken from a descriptive summary of my initial impressions of playground activity at Hillend. At the time it was written merely as a way of recording my thoughts – a sort of memo to myself. Thus, it was never intended to be used for analytical purposes and was never formally transferred from its 'raw state' (at least initially). However, this description is rich in material heterogeneity. It contains within it a whole host of materials. For the most part these materials are recognizable objects and artefacts of contemporary childhood culture but there is also reference to buildings and architecture - materials that Anni Dugdale (1999:118) reminds us we are prone to treating as background, as 'mere things' (Mol and Messman 1996:428) and as a consequence of little importance in the analytical task.

Conformity to the 'analytical repertoire' (Pels 1996:.278) of actor-network theory brings these materials out of the background and into analytical focus. The picture that emerges from this recasting of the analytical gaze is considerably different to that which is usually portrayed in school based studies of peer relations. What emerges, I suggest, is a picture in which these material objects emerge as pivotal in the social organisation of playground life. In this chapter, I would like to explore, more fully, the role that some of these objects play in holding social relations together. Here then, the focus of my analysis changes direction slightly. However, a salient consideration of agency is retained, although here, the discussion is focused on how this is achieved in the playground. It is with this this the discussion below begins.

Extending Agency in the Playground

For the most part, sociological analyses of children's football games have been characterised by their central focus on gender. Considered alongside other competitive sports and games as part of the wider repertoire of 'boys' culture' (Adler and Adler 2001:208) the study of football is marked in general by the study of masculinity. In this respect, a considerable amount of research in this area has been aimed at elucidating upon how boys perform and construct masculinity through sports and games such as football (cf. Connell 1996; Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Kessler et al., 1985; Skelton 1997, 2000).

In discussing boys and football, Epstein *et al.* (2001:159) echo the sentiments of many others when they suggest that success in football is a primary 'signifier of masculinity'

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wherein physical prowess, skill and social and technical knowledge about the game, becomes a marker of status, admiration and success. However, relative failure (being a bad player) or disinterest leads to stigmatisation, ridicule, marginalisation and may be seen as indicative of effeminacy.

However, these studies contain within them an analysis founded upon an uncritical acceptance of notions of embodied agency. Those that are able to construct successful masculinities through sports such as football, are often considered as 'bodies that act' (Swain 2002:105) full of embodied power and agency (Crossley 1996 cited in Swain 2002). Here, the implication is that access to the resources of the body, that is, physical attributes such as strength, skill, speed and co-ordination, as well as a particular kind of *savoire-faire* (Adler and Adler 2001:42) not only empowers (some) to perform as 'good footballers' but also empowers them as agents in the sense that the scope of their agency is increased. In contrast, those who are not successful, whose bodies are deficient of the stellar abilities required, are presumably considered to be disempowered and thus lacking in (embodied) power and agency.

These stellar abilities can be acquired, by some, through certain material practices. Bodies can be trained to become footballers and bodies can be subjected to exercise regimes that can alter the corporeal resources of the body (Prout 2000). At the point of data collection many of the boys at Hillend were engaged (some of them heavily engaged) in material practices of this sort *and* in the quest to shed notions of weakness and vulnerability associated with the embodiment of femininity so too were a small

number of girls (cf. De Welde 2003). My point however, is not to criticise this approach *per se* (indeed I have drawn on notions of embodiment elsewhere here) but to press the argument in a somewhat different, perhaps extended, direction.

Whilst there is little doubt that being good at football has something to do with the capacities of the corporeal body, the body itself is not operationally sealed. To some extent it is permeable (Bruun and Langlais 2003) and to some extent it relies upon what Clark (1997) refers to as 'external scaffolding'. For example, he argues that in performing complex actions such as difficult arithmetic operations human agents depend upon sets of external instruments such as calculators, papers and pens. External instruments such as these are considered by Clark (1997) to be constitutive in the task or action.

Whilst primarily centred upon neurological processes, Clark's vision is similar in emphasis to Deleuze and Guattari's (1988 cited in Lee 2001) thinking on 'assemblages'. Most directly, his argument is that external resources are intrinsic to, and part of, human agency (Bruun and Langlais 2003). The problem with external scaffolding is that for the most part it remains hidden from view. In actor-network terms Law (1992) makes the argument thus:

> 'All phenomena are the effect or the product of heterogeneous networks. But in practice we do not cope with endless network ramification. Indeed, much of the time we are not even in a position to

detect network complexities. So what is happening? The answer is that if a network acts a single block, then it disappears, to be replaced by the action itself and the seemingly simple author of that action. At the same time, the way in which the effect is generated is also effaced: for the time being it is neither visible, nor relevant. So it is that something much simpler – a working television, a well-managed bank or a healthy body – comes, for a time, to mask the networks that produced it.'

What Law is discussing is what ANT theorists refer to as 'punctualisation', the process whereby the network which produces a particular action is rendered invisible or deleted from view (Law 1992). Thus in children's football games what we see is children *playing* football, children *kicking* footballs, children *scoring* goals, children *taking* free kicks and so forth. However, what we focus on - what we see - is children as authors of these actions. It may be that we consider that is all there is. Consequently, the networks which generate these actions remain out of focus and their composite entities marginal (Star 1991) or silent. They also remain more or less out of focus to the authors of these actions who themselves (at times) believe that their agency is an attribute of the self:

> Mitchell: I'm brilliant at football. Everyone says I'm a great footballer and I'll play for saints...[...]... Did you see me score that goal yesterday Sharon? Did you see me score that goal from halfway?
>
> Sharon: I think so. Just before bell time?
>
> Mitchell: Aye. Greg says it was an awesome shot just like Gary Neville cos I can really score loads of goals you know, I can really kick the ball.'

Here, Mitchell considers himself the author of his own actions. His understanding of his own agency is a version which, as Rachel (1994:809) puts it, 'is concerned with lithe active human bodies, demonstrating their agency in movement and talk.' *He* scored the goal; *he* scored it from the halfway line; *he* can score loads of goals; and *he* can really kick the ball. What he depends upon for his actions (scoring and kicking) receives no recognition here. Mitchell's condition is reminiscent of Bateson's (1972:318) lumberjack in his following parable:

> 'Consider a man felling a tree with an axe. Each stroke of the axe is modified or corrected, according to the shape of the cut face of the tree left by the previous stroke. This self-corrective (i.e., mental) process is brought about by a total system, trees-eyes-brain-muscles-axe-stroke-tree; and it is this total system that has the characteristics of immanent mind...But this is not how the average Occidental sees the event sequence of tree felling. He says, "I cut down the tree" and he even believes that there is a delimited agent, the 'self', which performed a delimited 'purposive' action upon a delimited object.'

Mitchell considers himself as much a delimited agent as Bateson's (1972) lumberjack. Yet, he is as much of a 'total system' (or here, network) as the man yielding the axe. He has told me as much himself. On many occasions his own words have betrayed his narrative representations of himself as a 'delimited agent'. He, as have many other children, has depicted in considerable detail those entities which he relies on to generate

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his actions on the football pitch. The importance of footwear, for example, has arisen often:

Mtichell: Predators (a brand of football boots) are the best.

Sharon: Why? What difference does it make what boots you wear?

Mitchell: Well you see the laces?

Sharon: Yep.

Mtichell: Well they lace up like this way (demonstrates diagonal layout of laces) you see.

Sharon: Why is that important?

Mtichell: Cos its not the same as other laces.

Sharon: What do you mean?

Mitchell: They go like this (demonstrates vertical layout of laces).

Sharon: I don't get it.

Mitchell: It's like well it means that there is more space on the boots for kicking the ball so and the laces don't get in the way of the ball when you kick it so you can kick it better see?

Sharon: Ok I see. Does it work?

Mitchell: Aye and you can swerve the ball better and stuff.

Sharon: What else?

Mitchell: It's cos of what its made of.

Sharon: What?

Mitchell: The boots.

Sharon: What are they made of?

Mitchell: Rubber and stuff and they are made so that you can control the ball better and move your feet better and stuff.

Sharon: So are they better than other boots then?

Mitchell: Aye and they stop your feet getting injured like other boots.

Sharon: What boots are worse then?

Mitchell: All sorts of boots are worse.

Sharon: Why are they worse?

Mitchell: Cos they don't do what preds do. They slow you down and stuff and hurt your feet lots sometimes and you can't kick the ball right you know.

Apart from informing me of the technical merits of predator football boots (I remain forever astonished at the depth of knowledge children have about such things), Mitchell is also telling me about the way in which football boots can 'act' upon the capacities of body, or more properly feet. Akrich and Latour (1992) refer to this issue of how 'things' can act in such ways as prescription, that is:

'What a device allows or forbids from actors – human and nonhuman'

(Akrich and Latour 1992:262 cited in Michael 1996).

Mitchell makes this clear in relation to boots – some can help you play better football, others can prohibit performance and impose physical constraints. However, the problem with school is that football boots cannot act on concrete (at least not very successfully). Concrete can offer up its own resistances which serve to constrain action in many

different, albeit contingent, ways. Although, this is only part of the story of concrete or any other environmental (either natural, built or technological) entity for that matter and I shall digress a little to mention this here and draw upon Michael's (1996) thought on natural nonhumans and local nature where he asserts there is a danger in missing from such storylines 'a vision of the expanded or collective physical individual', an expansion which can incorporate both humans and nonhumans (1996:98).

For children, the 'affordances' (cf. Gibson 1979 cited in Michael 1996) offered by the concreted landscape of the school playground can multiply in the company of other humans such as friends but decrease in the company of teachers. In a similar manner, affordances can be expanded with the assistance of various nonhumans (for example, footballs are a case in point) and reduced by the presence of others (for example, iron railings, locked gates, walls, technologies and so on). All of this is, of course, highly variable. In school the presence of other children is not always experienced positively. Likewise teachers can enable as well constrain. Footballs may expand affordances but only for some. For instance, at Hillend the presence of these particular nonhumans was good news for some children but perhaps not for those others excluded from either the activity of football itself or subjected to the restraints of its spatial dominance within the playground (discussed later). The iron railings and locked gates (not to mention the telecom entry system and CCTV which constantly monitored the school grounds) could have been viewed as containing, restraining and / or disciplining children. However, this containment was as much about protecting the children from the hazards of that which was perceived to lie beyond the school yard (traffic, stranger danger and so on). Thus, the

presence of others within the playground, whether human or nonhuman can function as either restrictions or possibilities for social interaction.

Back to boots: concrete then, can offer up resistances of its own. Here, the issue of footwear for footballing children at Hillend oscillated around which forms enhanced the capacities of the body without yielding to the resistances of concrete. Unsurprisingly perhaps, training shoes were favoured over school shoes or boots by the children. Whilst many other children at Hillend wore trainers, the children who played football wore trainers specifically because they could play football *better* in trainers (some trainers, like football boots, were considered better for play than others) than in shoes or boots, which were considered too heavy and clumsy. However, whilst there was no issue with the wearing of trainers at Hillend (at least while Mr. Murphy occupied the headship), many of these children were prohibited from wearing trainers to school by their parents.

Sneaking trainers into school was the order of the day for most of these children. A few of the footballing children were regularly seen producing training shoes from their school bags and changing into them shortly after arriving at school or during the mid morning break. For these children, getting their trainers into school was considerably important to them. Indeed, it was important enough to run the risk of being found out and incurring the anger of a parent:

> Dale: My mum goes mental when she finds out I've been wearing my trainees.
>
> Sharon: Why?

Dale: Ach cos she moans on about how my trainees make me look like a mink and how everyone will think she can't afford to put shoes on me and stuff and that they cost her loads so I've to wear them. But I can't play footie right without my trainees and she says that I'm not here to play footie I'm here to learn to do reading and stuff and that I can play footie in my school shoes then when I get hee haw for scrapping them and getting them ruined and she starts on about like having to buy new ones but I'm no caring about it cos I need my trainees for footie.

Sharon: So you bring them in your bag right?

Dale: Yeah cos I need to have them.

Sharon: Are you not worried about getting into trouble then?

Dale: Sometimes. Not really. She goes mental and makes me empty my bag on the way.

When Dale had been recently caught for wearing trainers it became obvious as he would play football wearing his school shoes. The shoes would then be held accountable for any bad passes or shots. Understanding his dilemma, his fellow team mates would, more often than not, empathise with his predicament rather than berate his performance.

Sneaking trainers into school could perhaps be considered as a sign of children's resistance to adult authority. Indeed Swain (2002:95) advances exactly this point in relation to the 'sneaking in' of trainers to school. However, here what I would like to suggest is that in their discussions of such issues (whether it be football boots, trainers or any other thing) children have an implicit recognition of their agency as collective in some sense. At times they recognise that they can extend their agency through assemblages with some actants but that likewise some assemblages – some actants - may act to impair their agentic powers. Therefore, they recognise that their agency is

dispersed amongst those actants they enter into associations with.

Weaving the Collective: Quasi-Objects

Leaving the nonhuman aside for a moment; at the most fundamental level there are no delimited agents in a game of football. Each individual operates as part of a team - as part of a collective. One player alone is not very effective. He / she is nothing without those others who together form the team. For example, the act of scoring depends upon the act of passing – on the 'setting up' of the ball by others and this itself is dependent upon the effects collectively generated to 'keep the ball in play' (Day 1997).

This is where things get interesting. The ball is seen by the players as an object within the game. It is given the ontological status of a 'mere thing'. It is seen by the children and by those who look on but it is not noticed. It is something which can be manipulated in play – kicked, thrown, passed – it is a piece of equipment or an instrument of play. As such the ball's main characteristic is that it can be used for something. What the ball does 'in play' has little to do with the ball. The ball is not seen to act, it is acted upon. Under the modern constitution we are told that if objects, such as balls, hold any meaning beyond 'thing-like-ness' it is because humans endow them with such meaning. In short, this is the view that considers the properties and values of objects as resulting from social interests and needs (Day 1997).

A somewhat different, almost contrary argument can be advanced regarding the role of the ball if Serres' (1982, 1987 cited in Middleton and Brown 2001) notion of the quasi-

object is drawn into analysis here. Serres argues that in complex series of actions objects serve as a sort of 'third party' in the exchanges that take place between persons. Objects, artefacts or any other nonhuman thing for that matter occupy a space between actors – a space in which and through which interaction and / or communication is made possible.

In order to exemplify this, I shall turn to Serres' (1982, 1987) best known example of 'thirdness' here (and for reasons of relevance) expressed in relation to the role of the ball in a game of rugby:

> 'A ball is not an ordinary object, for it is what it is only if a subject holds it. Over there, on the ground, it is nothing; it is stupid; it has no meaning, no function and no value. Ball isn't played alone. Let us consider the one who holds it. If he makes it move around him, he is awkward, a bad player. The ball isn't there for the body; the exact contrary is true: the body is the object of the ball; the subject moves around this sun. Skill with the ball is recognised in the player who follows the ball and serves it instead of making it follow him and using it. It is the subject of the body, subject of bodies, and like a subject of subjects. Playing is nothing else but making oneself the attribute of the ball as substance' (Serres 1982:225-26 cited in Middleton and Brown 2001).

According to Middleton and Brown (2001), Serres' point is this: The object (here the ball) weaves the relations between the players – it 'weaves the collective' It does so

because through its circulation from one player to another it binds humans to each other. The participants in the game gain their relation to one and other in terms of their relation to the ball. To become a member of this collective a player has to make themselves an attribute of the ball and whether one is defined as a good or bad player is dependent not upon the ability to 'master the ball' but upon how, as Brown and Lightfoot (1999) put it, one takes 'up a position in relation to the field of play which the ball defines' and:

> '...at the same time, the players are modes of activity which the ball
>
> can open up. One is before or after, passing away from or toward the
>
> ball. The body of the player is a material link between two phases of
>
> the ball's passage, much a preposition in a sentence. Neither subject
>
> nor object, but the means of passage. A mediator.

Thus, the ball becomes the subject of circulation and the players merely stations in its passages. As means of passage, the player is neither a subject nor object but a mediator – a 'participal act' (Fisher 1978:140 cited in Brown and Lightfoot 1999) occasioned by an object (Brown and Lightfoot 1999; Middleton and Brown 2001).

It is therefore argued that in sets of interactions between persons it is the nonhumans that pull humans together. However, when they enter into circulation in such ways objects leave their objective features behind – they become quasi-objects (Brown 2000). After all, the ball in circulation is much more than just a ball. It is not as Serres (above) puts it 'an ordinary object' because it is what makes the realisation of a collective possible and it provides the means through which the adoption of subjectivity can emerge:

'This quasi-object [here the ball] is not an object, but it is one

nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; since it

is in the world it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks and designates

a subject who, without it, would not be a subject' (Serres 1982:225).

What I take these arguments to mean, is that objects are capable of weaving together and

structuring social relations.   These arguments can be equally applied to and seen in

relation to the football in the playground. It wove together a collective and structured the

social relations played out on the makeshift concrete pitch - itself defined by pullovers,

bags and other 'to-hand' objects that defined the parameters of play and the movement of

bodies. Indeed, in so far as these others are concerned perhaps it would be unwise only to

give them passing reference here. Day (1997) quite rightly points out that, materially

speaking, it is objects such as these that 'collect the players and allow the game to be

played.' So things are perhaps not quite so simple or reducible only to the powers of

quasi-objects. Then again perhaps these are also quasi-objects. Although, perhaps not,

because if Day's (1997) arguments are followed through they would be considered to

provide context rather than structure or even a means through which a quasi-object such

as ball is given it's 'ballness'.

The playground at Hillend was infested with quasi-objects and the collectivities they

weaved. They were embedded into the fabric of everyday playground activities. It is of

course this embeddedness that lends quasi-objects their power:

'They are powerful, certainly, but they gain this power through their ability to lodge themselves in everyday interaction' (Middleton and Brown 2001).

Objects, Middleton and Brown (2001) consider, are vitally important for everyday social interaction. Yet, and as Dant (1999) has argued, sociology as a discipline has tended to overlook the importance of objects for social relations, primarily because of its focus upon relations between people. The ways in which objects interact with people and the manner in which material things help constitute relations in everyday social settings has been largely ignored (Dant 1999). However, once invoked, a non modern symmetrical analysis brings into focus a different view of social relations.

In the micro setting of Hillend playground it becomes more than apparent that the majority of social relations are held together in the interactions between humans and nonhumans. A cursory glance sees that the landscape of the playground is characterised by small groups of children, each group bound together by an object or objects of sorts. The types of objects are diverse indeed – footballs, beyblades, beyblade stadiums, skateboards, inline skates, wrestling figures and wrestling rings, Barbie dolls, gameboys and so on - but the functions they serve are almost always the same.

In each of these many groups children, through their relationship to the quasi-object, and of course (and as a consequence) each other, carve out subjectivities – sometimes moment to moment – sometimes over time. Interactions oscillate around these quasi-

objects as does much of the talk that occurs. Even for those children not in a direct relationship with the quasi-object their effects can be seen. The gathering of children around these groups as observers or 'wannabes' (those wishing to gain membership) was a regular feature within the playground. Epstein *et al.* (2001) call this framing and I would agree with their analysis, however, I would also suggest that this speaks of the powers of quasi-objects to influence subject positions beyond their immediate interactional scene.

Conclusion

The above discussion has highlighted *inter alia* how children in the school playground attempt to extend the capacities of their bodies through entering into assemblages with nonhumans, and also how nonhumans weave together the collective. Whilst the discussions were primarily contained within the examples of football boots and footballs respectively, the use of and function of the nonhuman in these ways was an insidious phenomenon within Hillend playground. Quasi-objects were present in the multiple. At the beginning of this chapter in the analytical memo I presented I drew attention to the fact that the playground was highly organised and that the children appeared to conduct their activities in little groups. More latterly, I returned to this theme to briefly highlight that these groups were held together by the presence of quasi-objects. In this respect, quasi-objects played an important part in the organisation of social relations in the playground.

Crucially, the importance of the nonhuman in holding children's relations in place within

Hillend playground did not emerge until these artefacts became all but absent in its totality. The next chapter addresses the consequences that occur when a new head teacher embarked on a project that removed the vast majority of these artefactual participants that were present within the playground at Hillend. Banished and excluded, their absence speaks of the pivotal role that nonhumans occupy in holding together children's social relations.

Chapter 8

"There is (No)thing to Play With"
When The 'Missing Masses' Go Missing

Introduction

In Chapter Seven, I drew out the role that nonhuman artefacts played in 'weaving together the collective'. Additionally, I discussed the ways that children in entering into assemblages with material objects were able to extend their agentic capacities within the playground and within their respective peer groups. However, the vital function that the nonhuman plays in the extension of children's agentic capacities and the binding together of their relations with each other only became apparent in the absence of the nonhuman. Here, I argued that within the school playground children's relations were held in place by the nonhumans that participated in the interactional scene.

The appointment of a new head teacher had resulted in a residualisation of 'the field of heterogeneous possibilities' at Hillend. This was characterised by an incremental and ultimately, almost complete removal of material artefacts from the playground. This removal seriously impaired children's abilities to act, interact and hold their social relations in place. This chapter describes the changes that took place at Hillend and the resulting effect that these changes had upon the children. In discussing how the children acclimatised to this situation I draw attention to the ways in which children sought re-

inscription into the material through both resistance to the rules that banished the material and through the introduction of new forms of materiality.

The School as a Restricted Field of Heterogeneous Possibilities

The informal spaces of the local community constituted for the children a '(semi)autonomous' (Matthews *et al.* 2000:76) realm where they experienced a potentially limitless field of heterogeneous possibilities wherein an unending array of the human and the non-human could be put into (and out of) circulation and drawn into networks of mediation. Here, children could, subject to certain contingencies, availabilities and environmental opportunities, draw upon the field of heterogeneous possibilities to become more agentic and also, sometimes, to make others less so.

As I have illustrated previously, what this has exposed is that children's agentic capacities are not located within the self or some other sovereign centre. Rather, agency 'emerges from associations with a heterogeneity of other actors' (Michael 1996:156). To put it another way - the analysis of these associations has revealed that children's agency and its construction, is dependent upon various 'extensions and supplements that are available to them' (Lee 2001:131) and the abilities of children to translate or enter into assemblage with these extensions and supplements.

That children are dependent upon extensions and supplements of various kinds to become successful actors becomes all the more transparent when children enter a circumscribed field of heterogeneous possibilities. That is, when access to a potentially endless array of

heterogeneous materials is removed. The school is one such field. Here, what is heterogeneously possible is linked to what assemblages are considered appropriate for the child / pupil subject (and the success of the child / pupil subject) and what assemblages are not. The extensions and supplements available to children within the school are carefully prescribed. The child / pupil is expected to enter into assemblage with the materials and material practices of learning and to do so successfully. The teacher has his or her own set of extensions and supplementations to ensure that the child / pupil enters into appropriate 'learning assemblages'. Compliance to preferred assemblages is exacted through reward and non-compliance through punishment. Surveillance technologies (standardised tests and so on) further assist teachers in monitoring the outputs of 'learning assemblages' and identifying problematic or failed assemblages.

School based fieldwork brought to light that adults can control, regulate, change and restrict heterogeneity, in particular (although not exclusively) material heterogeneity, in the process profoundly limiting the capacities of children to become agentic. Here, analysis is focused upon the playground and how strategies of 'heterogeneous control' by adults acted to configure (and reconfigure) the space of the playground and the social relations therein.

Extensions, Supplements and Deconstructive Fairies

By default rather than by design the question I am asking (and hopefully answering) here is: what happens when the supplements and extensions children rely upon for their

agency do not exist or are taken away? John Law (1997) in The Manager and His Powers, has, in part, already asked and answered this question. He has deconstructed his manager – his 'deconstructive fairy' having worked her magic - removed his extensions and supplements and exposed him to have been a network of social and technical relations. He asked what his manager is without this network - 'what he is by himself'. What he is, Law (1997) tells us, is a 'naked ape - with all the powers of a naked ape':

'Yes! He can beat his chest. He can shout. He can hit us too, if he's big and strong. The powers of the body. To extract compliance. Important of course. Sometimes personal violence works well enough. But it isn't, shall we say, very reliable. Or very long range. Even thugs like to carry weapons, and leave their calling-cards. For the powers of the body - or of the mind - are the least part of it. The least part of the power of the powerful.'

The moral of Law's story is that without supplements and extensions we are nothing. We are one of Strum and Latour's baboons (see Chapter Two). By his own admission Law's story is quasi-fictional - it is partly drawn from real events but it is also an imaginary experiment. However, for children, Law's imaginary experiment is more of an empirical reality than he himself may have assumed. In the social worlds of children, 'deconstructive fairies' (Law 1997) exist. Fairies that work tirelessly to remove their extensions and supplements, or at least to prohibit access to them, and in the process also

their potential for agency. Sometimes this removal work is successful, sometimes it is not. Sometimes children outsmart deconstructive fairies, sometimes they do not.

The changes to the field of heterogeneous possibilities at Hillend were a result of the project of one particular deconstructive fairy. Below I would like to introduce this deconstructive fairy to the reader. However, the aim is not to cast this fairy in the role of villain - as the 'taker away' of children's agency, although my narrative, at times, may appear to be doing just that. Rather, the aim is to highlight how this fairy's disciplinary project resulted in the removal of the nonhuman from Hillend playground and the consequences that this had upon children and their relations with each other.

Introducing the Deconstructive Fairy

I would like to introduce this deconstructive fairy in the same way as she was introduced to me. My reason for doing so is that in my own introduction to her the first 'seeds' of her 'deconstructive project' were given voice. Here, I am drawing upon the only audio-recorded conversation she permitted me to conduct, although even here, in this first formal encounter, I was asked rather quickly to cease recording the conversation.

Interwoven within this conversation are some important issues that relate more generally to relations within the field. In particular, it became obvious to me that Ms. Witherspoon was not at ease with my presence within the school. As much as this was intended as a formal introductory meeting, in so far, as this is how it was presented to me, it also appeared as an opportunity for Ms. Witherspoon to subject me to a status reduction

exercise in which I was firmly positioned as a non-expert on all things educational. Of course, I cannot speak for Ms. Witherspoon and I am aware that this is my own interpretation of the purposes of this meeting, as Moje (2000:29) suggests, 'it is a complicated endeavour to reflect on one's role in a relationship without othering, through re-representation of someone else's voice and experience'. Therefore, I am reflecting on my interaction with Ms. Witherspoon only in terms of what this interaction meant to me.

However, I am unable here to replicate the authoritative tone and superiority of her voice and the intimidating impact this had. Nor am I able to adequately convey the psychological effect of my spatial positioning on a small, child-size chair at the opposite side of the desk from her. Given my small stature I was barely able to see over the desk between us let alone meet her gaze. I felt reduced to the status of a pupil and immediately subordinate to her before we even began our conversation.

Here I am then, on my small chair:

> W: I had heard that I was inheriting a student doing research. So you'll be it then?
> S: Yes, for my sins yes.
> W: Hmm, uh huh, right then. So you have the relevant permissions and so on I see. You know I'm not that sure that I would have agreed to this but well then there it is you're here now anyway. How long are you intending staying? Are you an education student?
> S: No I'm not an education student. Sociology. I was planning another couple of months.
> W: So you're not a trained teacher then are you?
> S: No I'm not my degree is in sociology and social policy. I'm studying for a PhD.
> W: A PhD in what?
> S: Sociology.
> W: You said. Not education then?

S: No not education, sociology.

W: Oh well then you won't know anything about schools or education then will you? You're not one of those liberal left winger progressive types then are you? I could do without one of those hanging around the place. No you don't look like likely to be like that now do you. So you're not a teacher, I mean you haven't studied education then? You won't have informed views then.

S: No I'm not a teacher. I'm not sure I follow.

W: You're a sociology student.

S: Yes.

W: So neither are you a qualified researcher then this is a college project?

S: I've had training in research methods but I...you could say I'm still training.

W: So you're not qualified or anything.

S: Not exactly. You could say this is sort of part of my training...this project.

W: I thought you said you were doing sociology?

S: I am yes...I mean I'm doing a research degree in sociology. It could be viewed as training.

W: Uh huh. Training, you said.

I would like to pause and take a momentary digression to consider this conversation thus far. Shkedi (1998) discusses the difficulties and challenges that face qualitative researchers when the attitudes that teachers hold towards research and researchers is less than favourable. Based on empirical research Shkedi (1998), whilst suggesting other reasons why teachers hold negative views about research, reports that some teachers see little value in research that seems to hold no relevance for them in the field. Shkedi further reports on the comments of some teachers that suggest that their reactions to research would be more favourable if the study was perceived to provide a solution to problems they faced or were experiencing. Others, report that they simply feel professionally threatened.

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I have thought that some of these reasons might have explained Ms. Witherspoon's negative attitude towards my presence. I have also thought that perhaps this was also a failing on my part to communicate or demonstrate adequately any direct relevance to practice in my work. However, being married to a high school teacher and having mixed with many educational professionals on a social basis, I had been told prior to access negotiations about how teachers, feeling that they were being increasingly scrutinised, were becoming more negative about research (practitioner research aside). Additionally, I was informed that many teachers within the local authority were apathetic towards both research and researchers because of the saturation of researchers 'they had to put up with' due to their relatively close proximity to a university that provided teacher education and engaged in educational research. Perhaps, what I was dealing with was simply a lack of interest. Retrospectively, however, I have wondered if Ms. Witherspoon had viewed me as a challenge to her authority and whether this status reduction exercise had been an intentional strategy to offset any challenge that I may have presented.

Simpson (2000:61) has discussed the ways in which teachers use status reduction techniques to offset the possibility that pupils may challenge their authority. Drawing on Neill and Caswell (1993) she discusses amongst other things, the use of facial expression and tone of voice by teachers as well as other techniques which target pupils' bodies as a site of discipline and control. Simpson highlights that strategies of this sort are considered to facilitate the maintenance of authority. I very much felt that these were the sorts of strategies Ms. Witherspoon, either intentionally or unintentionally, used upon

myself. Whilst this continued the conversation orientated itself towards a discussion of

the children's behaviour and Ms. Witherspoon's opinions of their behaviour:

W: So you have been watching how the pupils behave in the playground then?

S: I wouldn't say I have been watching their behaviour exactly, more observing their interpersonal relationships with each other.

W: Their behaviour then. And what have you found out?

S: I haven't really subjected my material to any sort of thorough analysis as yet.

W: So what do you think of their behaviour then?

S: I'm not really studying their behaviour as such. Do you mean conduct?

W: Yes conduct then. What do you think of it?

S: It's not really conduct I'm looking at. I'm more interested in their interactions with each other.

W: What do you mean exactly by that...interactions?

S: Um their relations with each other.

W: Their relations? Why would you want to look at that?

S: Well I'm interested in how children interact with each other.

W: Mmm. Well there is a lack of civility that is one thing that is certain.

S: Sorry?

W: I don't suppose you have been in many schools have you.

S: No not really.

W: Well believe you me there is a lack of civility. They behave like wildcats in that playground wouldn't you say. Well you will have seen that for yourself. Apparently there has been no supervision out there. You can not let over a hundred pupils run around a playground without proper supervision doing whatever it is they wish. Have you ever seen any supervision out there?

S: Well no.

W: There it is. No supervision. So tell me what happens.

S: Emm I'm not sure..emm... to be honest I... I don't think it's that bad really.

W: Huh well you have nothing to compare it to do you if you haven't been in any other schools for any length of time and you won't have had any experience with children.

S: I do have some experience.

W: You won't necessarily understand that schools need a certain level of civility in order to run efficiently.

S: No I understand that. I can see that.

W: Well then you will appreciate what it is I am trying to say then won't you. What experience?

S: I worked for the education department as a youth worker for several years.

W: Did you oh. Well schools are different. I thought you said you weren't qualified in education.

S: No I'm not.

W: Well how could you have worked for the education department then wouldn't you have needed to be qualified.

S: No...yes but not in education I did vocational qualifications in youth work on the job.

W: Yes but that is youths isn't it its not children is it?

S: No I worked with children too. I worked with children and young people from toddlers to young adults up to around age 26.

W: Doing what exactly.

S: Well it was quite wide ranging. Like for example, sometimes I would be helping to run crèches so women could attend adult literacy classes, sometimes it was youth clubs other times I was involved in drugs education in schools and stuff like that, sometimes it was young adults groups where we would help them with things like finding jobs, filling in application forms and so on. All sorts of things really.

W: Thought you said you hadn't been in schools.

S: I haven't really only really on that sort of basis and it was usually out of school hours.

W: Mmm well you might have some understanding then of the need for rules then.

S: We let the children and young people draw up the rules.

W: What.

S: Well in consultation with us.

W: I thought you said you weren't one of those lefties.

S: I didn't say that. It was policy at the time. I'm not sure what the policy is now but at the time it was thought, particularly with older children that if they were active in making the rules then it was more likely they would stick by them or others would with them being consensual within the group and we tried to treat them on as equal a footing as possible.

W: Well its different in schools when you are dealing with large numbers of children you can not just let them decide what is best and let them do what they like or else they run wild. Given the chance they will do exactly what they like and before long they are out of control and we are not dealing with older children here we are dealing with children that come off that estate. Half the parents are living off the state where there are parents to speak of and they are probably let loose to roam the streets day and night doing exactly what they like. That is why they are all running amock. These children are not all used to abiding by rules and doing what they are told you see. If you let them

do what they like then the school can not function properly and they do not learn wouldn't you say so. Do you know how many pupils are at this school that have behavioural problems? Who are on conduct sheets? Is it absolutely necessary to record this?

S: No I can turn it off.

Whilst this is quite a lengthy extract, it reveals Ms. Witherspoon's belief that children in general needed adult constraint and control, and that Hillend's children in particular were lacking in this. Her perception seemed to be that these children were out of control and needed to be civilised. The imputation being that the school playground, or more correctly those who inhabited its space, were unruly and in need of transformation into something more civilised or more 'tamed' (Simpson 2000:65). I did not necessarily agree with Ms. Witherspoon's opinion. When I ventured the contrary opinion that I did not think that the situation was quite as bad as Ms. Witherspoon thought I was reminded of my non-expert status and my lack of knowledge on the running of schools.

There also seemed to be an aspect of resocialisation in Ms. Witherspoon's comments. This is something that Davis *et al.* (2000:208-209) discuss in their account of research with disabled children:

'One of our aims, on entering the school, was to discuss issues of informed consent, confidentiality and so forth with the staff and children (Alderson 1995: Morrow and Richards 1996). John explained these issues to the staff. However, they appeared to reject the premise that the children would know what was going on. The adults whom

John met seemed concerned that he understood that the children's impairments made them 'not like us'. The staff appeared to challenge John's idea that he should explain the research to the children, we as a team were reminded of Wax's (1971) comments that people will often try to resocialise the researcher. It was clear that the staff were attempting to influence John's views and have him believe that these children were incapable of thinking for themselves.'

Although the issues involved are different, it appears that Ms. Witherspoon attempted if not to resocialise me then to re-educate me about appropriate standards of pupil behaviour in school and the reasons why 'civility' was necessary. Perhaps, Ms. Witherspoon was quite right to do so. After all I did not have either the experience or legitimacy of a teacher, nor could I claim to have any professional insight into the administrative task of 'running a school'. I was merely a student and former youth worker, neither of which gave me any expert status on schools or any insight into the 'realities of the field' from an educational point of view. Perhaps, if I had been experienced and expert my views might have been different. From here on in I decided that the offering of opinions 'onsite' were best avoided unless absolutely necessary, in which case I would attempt to be vague and non-committal. In part, this decision was influenced by my perception that Ms. Witherspoon was not fully supportive of my presence in the school and my related anxiety that should I offend her then I might be asked to leave. In any case, her attitude towards me continued to appear less than

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favourable and the conversations we did have remained uneasy although we were polite on the surface.

It would be far too easy to portray a wholly negative picture of Ms. Witherspoon. It would also be very misleading. Whilst, she did embark in crusade like fashion on her project to impose adult constraints and 'civilise' the children, many of the changes she made were informed by concerns she had about the well-being and safety of the children or principles she held about fairness and equality. However, it would be equally true to say that many of the changes she initiated appeared to have been driven by her personal preferences and beliefs.

Reconfiguring the Field of Heterogeneous Possibilities

Changes that are made within the formal culture in schools usually produce, as a consequence, changes within the informal pupil culture (Swain 2002; Pollard 1985; Woods 1990). Whilst Ms. Witherspoon made a series of rapid and considerable changes to the formal school rules governing pupil behaviour and the sanctions for the transgression of these rules, I wish only to reiterate those that directly related to playground activities and were therefore directly related to my research site within the school.

The new rules that were developed in relation to playground activities can be classified in two categories that aid the discussion in terms of my analysis. First, there were a series of rules directed towards changing the social (human) composition of the interactional

spaces of the playground. Second, there was the series of rules that changed and eroded the circulation and participation of nonhuman artefacts in the playground. The combination of both types of rules eventually resulted in an almost total and unforeseen destruction of the existing social order of the playground. Before moving to consider the cumulative effects of these rules for the children, I will outline below those that had the most impact and the changes that they produced.

Changes to Social Heterogeneity

The former of these were primarily aimed at addressing the use of space by children. In particular, they were aimed at controlling boy's domination of the physical space of the playground and the marginalisation of younger pupils within this space. The solution to the problem of younger children's marginalisation was considered to be the creation of a separate playground. This consisted of a physical division of the space of the playground (symbolised by the erection of a fence) into two separate asymmetrical spaces. The smaller of these was designated for the exclusive use of the children in classes one, two and three (ages 5-8) and the larger for the children in classes four and upwards (ages 8-12).

This strategy of spatial division was also applied to address the issue of male domination of the playground. As the male children's spatial domination of the playground was seen to be directly connected to their monopolising use of the playground space for football games, a small football pitch was marked out in white paint in a corner of the playground.

In both cases the motivations that informed these changes were interwoven with notions of fairness in relation to both the gendered and 'aged' distribution of space and also concerns over the safety of younger children amongst the rough and tumble of older boys' physical contact sports. In particular, the frequency with which younger children incurred relatively minor injuries as a result of, for example, collisions with footballs or footballers was considered problematic.

In an article on gendered relations in school playgrounds, Epstein *et al.* (2001:165) discuss under the sub heading 'caging the beast' a school playground that already had a separate football playing area referred to by the children in their study as 'the cage'. As it became apparent that Ms. Witherspoon disapproved of competitive sports (in particular football which she considered distasteful for its associations with what she considered to be the 'sport of hooligans'; the aggressiveness that she perceived it gave rise to; and the culture of profanity it promoted) I have wondered if Ms. Witherspoon herself had been attempting to 'cage the beast', so to speak. In any case it is worth noting that changes made to these sorts of sporting activities within the school did appear to be subject to Ms. Witherspoon's preferences.

In discussing similar sorts of preferences by teachers in a school where all competitive sports and games that involved physical contact were banned, Swain (2002) considers that, since there are positive values to be learned through sport, the school should have spent more time considering and promoting these rather than negatively focusing upon its

less desirable virtues. As discussed later, the negative focus on these sorts of activities, particularly football, continued at Hillend.

Both of these spatial divisions had, however, despite positive outcomes for many children, separate but also interrelated and hitherto unanticipated consequences for the social order of the playground. The rules governing the uses of these spaces were, as would be expected, that each of the two playgrounds were for the exclusive use of the designated class groups (the smaller playground for classes one through to three and the larger for classes four and upwards) and that football was banned from all areas other than the newly introduced 'pitch area'.

Unsurprisingly, many children considered the new regime unfair. The footballing children were particularly vocal about the new spatial arrangements. However, their opinions were based on the unsuitable size of the pitch for the game rather than the fact that the game was only to played within this area:

> Mitchell: Its totsie we cannae play right you can hardly play.
>
> Dale: See the goals are too wee so you can't score cos you can't get
> past the goalie.

Therefore, the dissatisfaction with the pitch was not the creation of the pitch itself but with the consequences that its small size had for the game. Had the pitch been bigger and less constricting of the game then the footballing children would have been quite happy with this arrangement:

Scott: It's good to have a pitch for the rules cos it's marked out like a
real pitch but even fives dinnae get played on a titchy pitch. Even fives
have a proper pitch.

The new pitch was therefore received unfavourably by the children. However, the

division of the space into two playgrounds had other consequences for not only football

but other playground activities.

The act of dividing the space and therefore dividing the children into two large cohorts

overlooked the fact that not all of the 'activity groups' in the playground were stringently

formed according to either age or class strata. It was common within the playground for

there to be a mix of ages within these activity groups and also, although less frequently,

gender. This observation does not coincide with the findings of others on the composition

of children's friendship groups. A large number of studies have made observations about

the tendency of children's friendship groups to comprise children who share similar

attributes or characteristics, for example, age and gender (cf. Hartup 1970; Schofield

1989; Thorne 1986). Amplifying this view, Adler and Adler (2001:116) state that the

close friendships they observed within school, 'tended to be age and gender

homogenous'. The cause of this they attribute to both structural and cultural conditions.

They argue that because schools organise children and their activities through age-

grading and children experience school in age-segregated groups, they are not given

much opportunity to interact with children of other ages (cf. James *et al.* 1998). In

addition to this, they argue that children prefer to interact with others of the same age

(and gender).

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Whilst this may correspond more directly to a general picture of age related interactions, despite age stratification at the structural level within the school, within Hillend playground inter-class relations were much more fluid. The 'bey-blading' group, for example, consisted of children from all class groups. What mattered was not the age of the participant but their skill at bey-blading. Additionally, more experienced, and usually older bey-bladers seemed to derive a sense of satisfaction from the passing on of skills to younger children and the act of encouraging younger players as they participated. What held this and other activity groups like them together was a shared interest rather than a shared attribute such as age or gender. Therefore, gender segregation during autonomous play outside of the classroom setting was not as rare as authors such as Thorne (1993) have previously suggested, although, cross-gender interaction was much less prevalent than mixed age interaction.

The division of the playground into two segregated playgrounds therefore disrupted the structure of many activity groups. Many of the younger children who had been involved in activity groups with older children attempted to 'reform' through continuing their activities in their new playground. However, for those younger children involved in the footballing group, the fact that they were excluded from the area in which the 'pitch' was located resulted in their being unable to reform under the new regime.

Attempts to 'sneak' into the playground containing the pitch were commonplace and sometimes actively encouraged by the remaining footballers who frequently suggested

that these younger children scaled the dividing fence. Attempts at sneaking into the football area were, however, usually quickly thwarted by whichever teacher was on supervisory duty. Being caught usually led to much pleading from the children to be allowed to take part in the football and just as much subsequent complaining about the fact that they were not given permission to do so. Supervisors often couched their reasons for refusing access by recourse to either rules or by telling the children 'it was for their own good' and that 'they would get hurt playing with the bigger boys'.

Some of these younger children, however, had to deal with more personally experienced repercussions because of the division of the playground into two parts. For some, the division of the playground eroded their social support networks within the school. In particular younger children found themselves parted from siblings who had previously played an on-going 'care-giving' or 'protective' role in their school lives. One such child was Lewis whom I introduced to the reader in Chapter Six. Lewis, who was frequently chastised for his small physical size in relation to others of his own age group, had been moderately dependent upon his older brother Aaron to intervene in chastising episodes within the playground. However, succeeding the physical division of the younger and older children in playground Lewis was unable to rely upon Aaron's support. As a consequence, Lewis began and continued to experience a rising level of chastisement which was occasionally called to a halt by the playground supervisor.

As Downey and Condron (2004) point out, the vast majority of research on sibling relationships assess and report on the negative aspects and consequences of these

relationships. In relation to what is here, consensually considered to be a form of bullying, it is overwhelmingly the case that sibling involvement in bullying is considered in the context of the sibling-perpetrator role (cf. Wolke and Samara 2004). Therefore, the positive benefits that siblings can gain from each other have had a tendency to be overlooked. Corsaro (1997) for example, draws attention to the varied and positive roles that siblings occupy in relation to each other. Amongst these Corsaro (1997) highlights that siblings often act as caretakers and protectors for each other. Additionally, he highlights that siblings can play an important role in integrating their often younger siblings into the peer culture. These positive roles were evident in the relationship between Aaron and Lewis. For instance, in addition to the protection that Aaron gave Lewis he also included Lewis in his activities with his own friends which had the effect of minimising the opportunity for other children to call him names.

Another example of the negative effects of losing access to a sibling within the school was Alannah, a wheelchair using pupil. Alannah's older sister Helen had usually assisted her with lavatory visits during recreational breaks, although, not because Alannah could not negotiate the use of the lavatory but because of the time it took her to perform the task. These 'care-giving' roles by siblings have been commonly recognised and researched (cf. Burke and Montgomery 2000) however, because it was officially considered unnecessary for Alannah's sister to assist her in this activity, Alannah's own complaint about not being near her sister anymore was dismissed. Alannah herself was angry about this because it meant that if she needed to use the lavatory during break times

then she would inevitably spend more or less the whole of the break time engaged in this task.

In order to subvert the loss of recreational time with friends, Alannah had begun to schedule in lavatory visits during class time instead. However, because her parents eventually complained about the situation Alannah's sister was given permission to enter the smaller playground in order to assist Alannah in any necessary lavatory visits. For both girls this meant a complicated chain of communication arose through the use of 'third party' children who acted as messengers between Alannah and her sister. This infuriated Alannah's sister who had been enjoying the freedom of being able to engage with her own friends without having to assist her younger sister:

> Helen: well it's really annoying because I'm doing things and then someone tells me your sister wants you and I have to go. If I don't go then she tells my mum and dad at home time and I get into a lot of trouble and they tell me that I'm being selfish and have to help her and I wouldn't like to spend all my playtime in the toilet and everything but then if I have to go then I do a lot of playtime in the toilet. Sometimes she takes ages and doesn't even do it.

Therefore, Helen had been enjoying the new freedom she had been experiencing because of the new playgrounds, which draws attention to the fact that for some children there were positive benefits to be gained in the arrangements.

As I mentioned previously, the negative focus on football continued. Ms. Witherspoon constructed a new rule about the use of the football pitch. This rule was created because

of complaints received from pupils about exclusion from the pitch. In order to overcome these issues of inequality in access a rota system was devised to stagger access to the pitch. Briefly stated each class group could only use the pitch if it was their designated day. Thus, class four could use the pitch on a Monday, class five on a Tuesday, class six on a Wednesday and class seven on a Thursday. On a Friday no one was to use the pitch.

Although seemingly enacted for the best of reasons, this caused considerable anger amongst the core footballing group. However, the reason for this anger was not primarily to do with the new rota but with how this disrupted the composition of the 'teams' and the effects it had upon their 'league' system. The fact that footballing children did not play in age dependent teams and that they did not necessarily (indeed they rarely did) play intra-class matches had been completely overlooked:

> Pigeon (Craig): Its totally crap by the way like because the teams right. We have teams and we have a league and now we can't play the league and our team was at the top and guess what right 'ticket booth' (Scott) was our best player right and now he's off the team cos he's in P6. There isnae even enough in our class for a game.

Apart from the disruption to the footballer's teams, their league and their opportunities to play football there were playground wide ramifications caused almost entirely because there was now a playground full of displaced footballers unable to regularly or constructively engage in playing football. Pitch invasions where the footballers tried to resurrect their normal teams and league system were stopped by the supervisor on duty.

As football was banned from other areas of the playground attempts to start up games elsewhere within the playground were also stopped relatively quickly.

The class based rota system that was in place failed dismally. The primary reason for this was that each class on its own did not have enough footballers within it for 'good games' to get underway. In mimicking professional football, the footballers considered that games should be played properly with eleven members on each team, each playing their own position. No alternative team system was considered as good. The football playing that did occur were 'kick abouts' rather than games.

It seemed however, that where there was a will there was a way. It transpired that in order to subvert the football rules the footballers had been congregating in the school playground to play their matches and continue their league in the early morning period before school and before teachers arrived for the day. The official match meeting time was eight-fifteen a.m. The janitor apparently being sympathetic had colluded with these children, opening the gates before the usual eight-thirty a.m. to let the children into the school grounds. However, the situation did eventually come to the attention of the teachers and Ms. Witherspoon who took the rather contrary decision to ignore the situation on account of it being out of official school hours.

During the school day however, a relatively large number of boys without recourse to football became problematic for the rest of the activity groups. The displaced footballers' began to engage in the systematic disruption of the activities of other groups. With the

exception of a few of the now previous footballing children, this sort of behaviour was uncharacteristic. A favourite new game that a cohort of the previous footballers began to indulge in was 'wrestler raiding'. This involved launching a rapid charge upon the group of children who played wrestling matches with action figures, running past them, and stopping momentarily to steal the action figures before running on and throwing them onto the shelter shed roof. This led to frequent outbreaks of squabbling and fights much to the frustration of whatever teacher was on supervision duty.

However, it was not only the footballing children who were displaced because of the changes made to the playing of football at Hillend. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, many non-footballing children, particularly girls, had spent their break times on the side lines of the games of football that had taken place. These children were highly involved in the game as 'spectators' and much of their talk oscillated around the game and the players. This positioning of the spectators around the fringes of football games was, I felt, misconstrued as marginalisation. That is not to say that there was not a problem of spatial marginalisation for some children but rather that it is was not as much of a problem as Ms. Witherspoon had perhaps thought. That this was indeed a 'framing' behaviour became all the more apparent when the new pitch area was first introduced. When football moved to the new pitch, the 'framers' moved also. These 'framers' moved from framing football to hanging about the fringes of the displaced cohort and soliciting the new destructive activities such as 'wrestler raiding'.

The movement of footballers and their spectators had created a larger playing space for other children and other activity groups there was little movement into the open space that was left from the removal of football from the main area of the playground. There was a small and discernable encroachment of activity groups and children but for the most part they continued to conduct their activities in clusters around the margins of the space. Again, here there seemed to be a misperception about spatial marginalisation. However, there had been an ordered and stable use of the spaces of the playground by children which, was perhaps, given the lack of movement into the new 'free' space, was much more engrained into the social order than it appeared.

In an article on the invisible play-lines of a primary school playground, Factor (2004:143) has argued that children develop:

'...a map of the school grounds which designates functions and attributes values to every major feature: open space, treed space, benches, shelter-shed, toilets, grass, asphalt, tree roots, scheduled corners, verandahs, rubbish bins....'

Factor's argument is that children in their relationship with the material aspects of their playground environment develop meanings about the various uses of its particular features, for example, where particular games are played. She argues that this sort of map develops over time, sometimes over generations but remains invisible to 'outsiders'.

Factor (2004:142) compares children's playground maps to the supposed *terra nullius* (empty land) of traditional Australian Aboriginal Societies:

> '...tribal territory is inscribed in the memory of its community through song and story-lines: invisible tracks that trace the history, meaning and use of every significant feature of the environment. Each place has its own story, its own melody and often is own special importance for a particular family. To an outsider, it is just a landscape of trees, rocks, water...without close, patient and attentive listening and learning from the traditional owners of this land, the song and story-lines that mark every inch of their earth are unknown and unknowable to the non-initiated. Outsiders cannot read the invisible tracks that hold the land and its people in such close embrace.'

Thus, Factor (2004:143) argues that there are similarities between the Aboriginal *terra nullius* and children's playgrounds, in so far, as neither are empty lands but lands infused with meaning, each space or feature with its own particular importance.

Factor's arguments, I believe hold some relevance for Hillend playground. In particular, they draw attention to what could be considered the 'invisible playlines of Hillend'. The children at Hillend had a well developed 'map' of the meanings of particular spaces and features of the playground and the uses of these spaces and features. What could appear to the outsider as a random and disorganised use of the playground space was in fact not

random at all. Rather, the converse was true. It appeared that it was more the case that the children had a very fixed and stable set of (unspoken) story lines about the spaces and features of the playground and their uses for particular activities. This was revealed in their repeated uses of the same spaces and features for their particular activities and the relative non-movement of these activities from these spaces and features following the spatial changes made at Hillend in the interests of 'freeing up' space for marginalised children. In making these spatial changes to the playground, it was quite obvious that there was little understanding of children's uses of the spaces of the playground and the meanings children invested in these sites.

Whilst I have given considerable space to discussing the various changes to social heterogeneity within the playground and the events that followed these changes, I have been doing so in order to (re)emphasise that heterogeneous networks also consist of human actants that children enrol into their networks. The disruption of human elements within the 'field of heterogeneous possibilities' at Hillend was as important at the disruption of material heterogeneity. Although not always negative, for many children the consequences of removing or restricting the possible roles that their regular human allies could play had quite disastrous effects. Below, I move to consider the changes to material heterogeneity that occurred.

Changes to Material Heterogeneity

In part, changes to the materially heterogeneous were already occurring as a by-product of the changes made to the social heterogeneity of the playground. The footballers, who have figured largely here because of the knock-on effects of their displacements for the majority of children, were, for example, without the binding function and ordering effects of the football as quasi-object. Without this object and lacking an immediate other, they had already began resorting to the 'powers of the body' (Law 1997). The framers who also had an indirect relationship to this quasi-object and now lacking their once-removed relationship to it, had in following the displaced and unbound footballers, nothing else to do than develop an indirect relationship with these unmediated bodies. However, the more explicit changes to the material field of heterogeneous possibilities began in relation to the subversive early morning pre-school football matches that had been taking place.

As previously discussed, the staff and Ms. Witherspoon had chosen to tolerate these early morning indiscretions. Believing that they had been successfully accomplishing a small triumph over their head teacher the children were quite vocal about what they considered to be a very clever move on their part and one which was aided by their adult accomplice and now hero, the Janitor[37]:

> Jordan: We dinnae even use the pitch and they haven't even noticed
> and Bill the jannie lets us in and he doesnae even tell them.
> Stephen: Ken right they haven't even noticed the dosses.

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[37] In relation to the arguments advanced above about the relationship that children forged with their playground environment and the meanings that they attach to particular features and spaces, I believe that it is very 'telling' that these footballing children were using their 'traditional' football space in these early

Of course the head teacher did know. However, the children's triumph was short lived. Several weeks into the early morning fixture routine the second of two broken windows, firmly established as the result of unruly footballs used in these games, led to the total ban of these early morning games, games of football altogether and the presence of footballs in the playground. Any one who was caught with a football would forfeit their privilege to 'golden time'[38].

This naturally went down like a lead balloon, so to speak. It also outraged some parents who were sympathetic to their children's complaints that they were no longer allowed to play football at school. One parent remarked how they thought it was 'ridiculous' and how, for the children who, like his child, was less academically gifted but excelled athletically this and the news that sports day would no longer consist of competitive games was giving the message to sporty children that their abilities were of no value. Moreover, this parent remarked that for some of the children, particularly boys, football was one of the few aspects of school that they looked forward to each day.

The entire ban on footballs, however, signified the beginning of the process of removing the material from Hillend playground and the concurrent and incremental erosion of the social order of the playground that resulted as a consequence of this. It is apparent

morning games. This suggests the strong sense of attachment that these children had with this space for their activity and their reluctance to let this space go.

[38] This formed part of the school's policy on discipline. Golden time referred to a set time on a Friday afternoon when the children were allowed to engage in 'free play' as a reward for good behaviour. This often involved trips out of school to the local park or some other venue. As such the time was highly valued by children and exclusion from it was a source of much anguish as transgressions resulted in this time being withheld.

however, that there was a peculiar gender bias in this removal in so far as this removal seemed to primarily concentrate on the objects that boys brought into the playground. Whilst never couched in these terms it seemed that Ms. Witherspoon held objections to anything that symbolised aggressive forms of masculinity.

Soon after the removal of footballs the children were complaining that they were no longer allowed to bring in their action figures. This included (amongst other forms) the wrestling figures of the large wrestling activity group. The reasons advanced for this by the teaching staff were related to the arguments and fights that were continuously following the 'wrestling raids' of the displaced footballers. The wrestling activity was considered to be the source of the problem, although, the problem was transferred to the presence of the action figures themselves. The connection between displaced, bored footballers and wrestling raids went unrecognised.

Other material objects were withdrawn because of issues of intra-activity group disputes. Ms. Witherspoon considered that the bringing of personal possessions into school was one of the primary reasons for conflict in the playground. Other teachers within the school appeared to support this view because, amongst other things, they considered that resolving issues between children about breakages to their possessions, non-return of borrowed or exchanged objects between children, accusations of theft of objects between children and the whole general business of the quarrels that took place over toys, took up not only class time but also their own coffee breaks.

The gradual removal of the material ultimately reached its climax when a letter was sent out to parents of children informing them that personal possessions were no longer permitted to be brought into school by children and that children found with personal possessions would have them confiscated for the duration of the school day. This new policy had the singular effect of bringing about an *en masse* removal of material artefacts from the playground. In doing so, it brought about profound changes in the material field of heterogeneous possibilities that had a direct and almost immediate impact on children's capacities to act and the social relations within the playground.

Unmediated Bodies, The Moment of Purification and Confusion in the Field

Following this *en masse* removal only bodies remained in Hillend playground. I have come to refer to this period in the biography of Hillend as 'the moment of purification'. I have done so because the absence of objects implied that within this interactional setting, stripped as it was of objects, the possibility of an impure quasi-subject (Latour 1993) became remote (although, and as I discuss latterly, this purified moment was a temporary state). In doing so, however, I speak only to the fact that the mundane artefacts and objects of childhood were no longer visible nor present in the immediate interactional scene. To imply that the absence of these nonhuman participants rendered Hillend a 'pure society' would necessarily imply that Hillend playground and its human inhabitants were in some way free from other networks of association. Indeed this is not the case. ANT speaks quite clearly of its view that the task of purifying anything is somewhat impossible, as Prout (2000:15) states:

'In this view social life cannot, therefore, be reduced to the 'purely'

human (adult or child) or to the 'purely' anything'.

Invoking the notion of purification here, as an analytical strategy, was conceptually

useful when applied to the immediate interactional setting wherein a separation of

humans from things had occurred. However, the humans that remained were, for the

most part, characterised by their passive and inactive bodies – bodies that did not appear

to be able to act or interact.

Connecting this inactive state with the removal of the material and, therefore, changes

within the field of heterogeneous possibilities was not immediate. As I discussed in

Chapter One, my own interaction with actor-network theory was sporadic and somewhat

tense and I had not been wholly convinced that it had any inherent value. Thus, my

interest in the nonhuman had progressed somewhat tentatively. However, and as I also

discussed in Chapter One, it was at this point in the field that I became converted to

actor-network theory. Therefore, there has been an element of 'tracing back' in my

analysis. However, before considering the 'moment of purification' more thoroughly, I

would like first to present to the reader a short narrative that communicates the state of

my thinking at the time of inaction. In doing so, I am in part asking the reader to try to

see these events through my eyes.

Picture if you can a school playground full of children, nothing but children - nothing but
bodies. Can you picture such a playground? Maybe you can because this is what you usually
see. Perhaps you do not look further than the swirling mass of bodies contained there. You do
not look because bodies, what they do and what they say is, we have been told, our raison

d'etre. I - like you, believe(ed) in this. Yet, I have just read an article by Annemarie Mol and Jessica Mesman (1996). It has nothing to do with school playgrounds but everything to do with what it is we see or more properly look at or listen to. They have reminded me (albeit in a round-of-about sort of way) that my watching of and listening to bodies (and only this) does not take into account what lies beyond the somatic - beyond and between those bodies that I see and hear in / on the school playground. They have reminded me that in rendering holy the ethnograpahic injunction to 'follow the actor' I have deleted from view those other actors that inhabit the social - Latour's (1992) 'missing masses' and his call to 'follow the things themselves'.

Now it is not so much that I am deleting them as ignoring them. I have been happy to reduce the 'missing masses' to the category of 'other' - the category of the non-social. To do otherwise seems to be a perversion of my constructionist /constructivist roots in which I have been thoroughly immersed throughout my sociological training. Now Annemarie Mol and Jessica Mesman are reminding me that if I keep this up:

'...before long Bruno Latour will point his finger..[and ask]...'are you aware of your discriminatory biases?' You are discriminating between the human and the inhuman'.

However, I have chosen to discriminate none-the-less and find it is easily done. I am perfectly aware of the existence of these, 'missing masses' (I can see them in their many forms in the school playground - balls, skateboards, beyblades, action figures and all the rest) and I am happy to discriminate (I am sure the balls et al will not kick up a fuss). I have drawn the boundaries of my analysis around that which I consider to be human. Now and again, I have reasoned I can allow these 'missing masses' - these mere things - a walk on part, so to speak. I can, as others have done before me, confine them to the margins in discussions of material culture (cf. Mergen 1992; Sutton-Smith 1986). No one will criticise me in following the orthodoxy. If they do I can call on those others who defend the orthodoxy. Harre (2002) for example defends it very well, although he too is calling on others. Of course ANT has something to say about this calling on others in such ways but I am trying to forget that for now.

So it has gone quite well this plan to ignore the missing masses. I have two favourite methodological texts that I am quite sure have told me everything I need to know in order to properly attend to the business of ethnographic fieldwork without any attempt to undermine humanism. However, my favourite texts betray me. They dissent (!) and take their voices with them. The school playground is suddenly different. The swirling mass of bodies is suddenly different. They behave differently. At first they are apathetic; subdued. There is talk but no movement. Words but little sound. I am at odds trying to figure out where all the action has gone. My favourite texts have no advice for me. I consult others (texts) but they refuse my offer of enrolment (!). I can not even reason that I am somehow missing the action - that it is, as they say, happening elsewhere - given the small size of the playground and the fact I can, if I strategically position myself so, pretty much see it all.

Then chaos...

Many of the bodies have become anarchistic, violent, destructive, angry...frustrated. Others have become more withdrawn. There is no order to speak of. At least none that I can see. I have no answer to this. I am puzzled by it. Much worse, the school staff (who are equally puzzled) have approached me for answers I do not have:

'You must know you've been watching them. What's going on then?'

I have thought about hiding my ignorance by recourse to ethics (argue my data is confidential) but admit I do not know.

'I thought you knew about those things.'

Suddenly I am expected to have 'expert status' after spending the whole fieldwork period so far being denied any. My ignorance is announced in my apparent absence:

'that student doesn't know'.
'doesn't she'
'no she says she doesn't'
'what use is she then'

Total humiliation then. Marvellous.

At the time that these unexplained changes occurred they remained just that - unexplained. I had searched in the usual places for a comparative case hoping to find answers to this puzzle. However, the answer (if I can call it that) was always in front of me in the writings of Callon, Akrich, Latour, Law and those others in the 'CALL-collective' (Vandenberghe 2002:.51), in their incitements to consider the 'missing masses', enrolment to which I had resisted. Had I broken with tradition at the time and treated these 'missing masses' as actants and not 'mere things' then I would have recognised their role in the configuration and reconfiguration of the space of the playground and the social relations therein. In addition I would also have recognised that these children had embodied their social relations not only in each other but also in sets of extra- somatic materials and objects of various kinds, in the process producing something stable and ordered and relatively durable. More importantly, I would have recognised that the changes that I could only describe but not explain were changes brought about by the removal of these materials and objects - by the 'missing masses' going missing.

Most crucially, the moment of purification was not characterised by social interaction but rather by the relative absence of it. It was marked by stillness and quiet and by passive not active children who behaved as if struck by an inability to act. A setting, which during early fieldwork had been alive with the noise and movement of children at play,

had become almost stagnant. However, at first I struggled to understand the situation –
why it was so still and more importantly why it had become so:

Fieldnote:

> *No one seems to be doing anything. No one is playing. No one is even*
> *talking much. Kids look bored, lost, fed-up, dejected. Everything is*
> *quiet. Why are they so quiet? It's eerie – strange, unsettling - not what*
> *a children's playground should be, not the way it usually is.*

Children's play spaces whether formal or informal, structured or unstructured are usually

characterised by activity and interaction. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that play

spaces of various sorts are so alluring for ethnographers. Given the setting therefore, I

considered the children's behaviour as somewhat aberrant. However, whilst I considered

the abnormality (at least in my own opinion) of a playground full of children but more or

less absent of action / interaction, it rapidly began to emerge that the meaning of this state

of quietness and inactivity amongst the children held an entirely different meaning for the

school staff.

Rather than perceiving the situation as perhaps abnormal in the same manner as I had

done, for the most part, the staff considered the situation as ideal. The children's

behaviour seemed to have concurred with widely held beliefs amongst the staff about

orderliness, civility and comportment within the school environment. For example,

previously, Ms. Witherspoon had considered the noise level of the school playground as

evidence of disorderly pupil conduct and the hustle and bustle of the activities the

children engaged in as further proof of the same. Thus, to the staff, hushed children in an

almost silent and motionless playground were collectively considered to be 'good' children and thus good pupils in the sense that their behaviours conformed with embodied notions of what constituted ideal pupil conduct: being quiet (not shouting), walking properly (not running), standing or sitting still (not moving around) and so on (cf. Simpson 2000; Gilborn 1990).

Many comments were made amongst the staff regarding how peaceful the break times had become. In particular, the staff seemed pleased about the reduction in the numbers of children who presented themselves at the staffroom door during these times. The staff had often complained about their own break times being constantly interrupted by children who presented complaints of various sorts. The decline in the frequency and volume of this was welcomed largely because the staff had been experiencing the unusual phenomena of uninterrupted coffee breaks. One teacher had commented upon how this had been the first time in several years service she had been able to look forward to a relaxing break during school hours safe in the knowledge that it would not consist of having to attend to 'crying and whinging pupils'. Moreover, she had added that the staff no longer had to contend with 'the bloody din' that resonated throughout the school during break times.

It had occurred to me that throughout my time at Hillend that the behaviour of pupils was constantly interpreted by staff in terms of whether pupil behaviour did or did not benefit their adult concerns. Here, the fact that the staff could enjoy uninterrupted and peaceful breaks was considered as evidence that the children's behaviour had improved. Thus,

while I had considered the children's behaviour as unnatural, the staff had considered the same behaviour as ideal[39]. Furthermore, peaceful break times – as the result of the metamorphosis of 'unruly bodies' into 'docile bodies'- were transformed, amongst other things, into evidence of the success of Ms.Witherspoon's wider project to bring order to Hillend school.

Yet, I still struggled to understand where all the action had gone. Retrospectively, that this should have been the case is unsettling to say the least. When these events were unfolding at Hillend, my focus was very much upon understanding generic social processes. Thus, I had been concentrating upon *social* processes and therefore upon *human* action. However, when faced with a situation where only *social* processes could occur and where *human* action was the only possible action that could unfold, I found that this approach was wholly unsatisfactory in its explanatory power. That it should have been so was interminably puzzling at the time.

Let me pose this another way through drawing on the thought of Latour and Strum. In the purified moment, social (or human) actors were the only actors within Hillend playground. This having been the case, it stands to reason then, that what I should have found was perhaps something akin to the society of *pure* social interaction (interaction unmediated by the material). that Latour and Strum (1986, 1987) have proposed exists,

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[39] Of course I have never had to deal with the noise level of over one hundred children at play on any sort of regular basis. More to the point at this stage I was also interminably worried about the ethnographic implications of there being 'no action'. Thus, break times that were characterised by quiet and inactive children did not, at the time, seem all that ideal to me.

not in human societies but in simian ones. This proposition forms part of the answer to a question posed by Latour (1996) that has relevance here.

Effectively, Latour asked what would a society look like if it consisted only of *social* interaction? In so doing, he argued that such a society cannot exist in the human world given that, the human world is saturated with nonhumans – technology, artefacts, texts and so on – and bodies everywhere are inscribed. However, Strum and Latour (1987) have argued that societies consisting only of social elements do exist but in simian not human societies.

Drawing upon research that has demonstrated that it is social skills and social bonds rather than aggression based dominance and sexual bonds that hold groups of baboons together (Murdoch 1997); Strum and Latour (1987: 789 cited in Murdoch 1997) have argued that as it is now recognised that baboons utilise a range of social skills to interact with each other, in a variety of complex ways, baboons are now considered to be 'social players actively negotiating and renegotiating what their society is and what it will be'. Latour (1996:229) has taken this point, rather mischievously in Murdoch's (1997) view, to argue that:

> 'Since the effects of the composition of the social depend on work by individual actors which is continually being started over, one could draw the conclusion that the social life of monkeys is apparently an ethnomethodological paradise. Social constructionism literally depends

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solely on the work of the actors themselves to hold things together, and depends crucially on their categories alone' (cited in Murdoch 1997).

Whilst it may offend some to liken children to baboons, it is both analytically useful and illustrative here to invoke a comparison between baboon society à la Latour and Strum and the children of Hillend.

In the moment of purification the children of Hillend, like Latour's baboons, essentially comprised a society that consisted only of *social* elements and in which only *social* interactions could occur. Bearing this and the rest of Latour's postulations in mind, I have considered that perhaps what I should have observed at Hillend was a society of pure interaction. That is, one which was solely composed of and solely dependent upon human participants and their interactions – thus the phrase 'the moment of purification'.

So it seemed that in this micro-setting at least I could have relied, quite legitimately (and without any accusations of anthropocentrism) upon making one category of entities – humans – do all the explaining. Although, as Prout (2000:15) reminds us:

'Sociological approaches that try to make one kind of entity do all the explanatory work result in some form of reductionism'.

At this point in time actor-network theory had failed thus far to seduce me. Therefore, I had been actively attempting to make one sort of entity (humans) do all the explaining.

However, in these ideal typical circumstances this failed to provide satisfactory explanations beyond the connection between Ms. Witherspoon's reforms and this new situation within the playground. The consequent changes to the existing social order of the playground seemed the most probable explanation for the sea of docile bodies that had come to occupy the spaces of Hillend playground.

Yet, this explanatory schema did not provide any obvious reason or reasons as to exactly why, regardless of the extent or effects of these reforms, these children lost the capacity to act in any but the most rudimentary of ways. More pressingly and perhaps naively, I had been becoming concerned about what this meant for my data collection or more accurately what it meant for my thesis if there were no data. My perception was that I was heavily dependent upon these children 'doing something'. Therefore, I reasoned that as it appeared to be the case that they were 'not doing anything', I believed I was in trouble. As I highlighted in Chapter One, my eventual understanding of this situation was coupled with the words spoken to me by a child and the subsequent bringing of actor-network theory to the field that these words prompted. For reasons of relevancy and for the sake of the argument I wish to reiterate these remarks here.

As I pointed out much earlier on in the thesis, puzzled by the situation I had asked a child, Stephen, who was looking bored and miserable what the matter was. He replied:

'There is nothing to play with'

The reply was common enough and was a phrase I associated with children and had heard often but usually dismissed due to its mundaneity. However, in this particular instance it quite literally 'stopped me in my tracks'. As I thought about the meaning in these words and in particular the connotations associated with the word *nothing* a different perspective began to form in my head:

no-thing; not anything; not any thing – absence; absence of things

And:

It is the masses; the missing masses; the things themselves; the things have gone missing; there are no things.

This was a, if not *the*, critical moment in my fieldwork – the elusive moment when it all apparently comes together. As I looked around the playground I realised what this child implied in these words and the poignancy of these words as they related to the then current conditions of these children's interactional setting. There was indeed **(no)thing** to play with – no footballs, no beyblades, no stickers to swap, no action figures to wrestle with, no children huddled around gameboys, no micro-machines, no micro-babies, no bratz....and so the list could have gone on.

Banished and excluded by our deconstructive fairy those nonhuman participants that were once woven into the fabric of the micro setting of Hillend playground were gone. Quasi-objects that had previously woven together the collective and brought order where

it seemed none had existed were now absent. Those distributed selves once the accomplishments of complex socio-technical ensembles had vanished, leaving in their stead confused bodies that sought pathways to reconstitution without the assistance of their familiar material allies, and in some cases, their social partners.

As I gave an extensive discussion in the previous chapter of the various roles and functions that objects served within the playground and the various ways in which they extended (or restricted) children's agentic capacities and held together social relations, I will not repeat these arguments here. However, I wish to infer that what these events at Hillend illustrated was children's dependence upon these objects for their abilities to act and hold together their relations. This gives a rather different perspective on agency and social relations because it exposes these things as being dependent upon extensions of various kinds. Lee (2001:130) has made this point in relation to an actor-network approach to agency and here Pasteur:

> 'ANT gives an account of agency that does not rely on the independence and self-possession of the standard adult. Instead it emphasises incompleteness and dependency. Without his network of extensions and supplements, for example, Pasteur would not have been the agent for change we see him as today. But we have grown used to thinking of agency as independence because it is so easy to forget dependencies, extensions and supplements. Simply stated the story of

Pasteur as independent genius is easier to tell than the story of all his dependencies'.

The story of Hillend then, can perhaps be viewed as a story of dependencies and the exposure of these dependencies. It is also a story about the fragility of these dependencies, and in particular about how children's capacity for agency is interwoven with what can be accomplished and with what is available within the various fields of heterogeneous possibilities that they move in and out of. What transpired at Hillend was that the networks of extensions that are available to children are forever limited by and subject to the influences of adults. Extensions and supplements can be taken away and in the process children's agentic capacities and their abilities to hold together something enduring and stable can be irretrievably altered. However, the story does not stop here with some final words about how the removal of children's supplements and extensions at Hillend. Many researchers have commented on how children are able to use whatever material and spaces are available to them for play in school playgrounds (cf. Armitage 2001). At Hillend the children slowly began to utilise other sorts of materials that inhabited the playground and in doing so began to create new forms of associations. However, this did not occur until after they had spent a short period of time as 'naked apes'.

When Naked Apes Roamed

The moment of purification was characterised not only by this period of inactivity but also by a second period in which the powers of the body ruled. Many of the children

changed from being quiet and subdued to being excessively loud, more chaotic and in many cases aggressive than they had ever been during my time at Hillend. In contrast to this, others began to withdraw into themselves.

Playground activity began to transform into body-centred activities. For example, stripped of their wrestlers, the members of the action figure wrestling group replaced their action figure wrestling with contact wrestling. Here, mimicking televised American wrestling programmes they adopted various personas derived from this form of entertainment wrestling and began spending their break times re-enacting wrestling moves and scenes they watched on television. Previously they had re-enacted these through the use of their figurines.

This activity drew crowds and new members from other, by now dissolved, activity groups. In common with televised wrestling, a certain amount of this wrestling was acted or choreographed, however, frequently these wrestling episodes either turned into serious fights or ended with tearful, injured children.

The shelter shed became the venue for 'belly-bashing', which seemed to be a version of sumo wrestling. Here two opponents would stand on benches at the opposite ends of the shelter shed and to the spectators resounding chorus of 'on your marks, get set, go', would proceed to leap from the benches and run full thrust towards each other. The aim of the game was for each child to bash the other child with their stomach, which they puffed out, and attempt to knock their opponent to the ground. Whoever was successful

at this won and reclaimed their position on their bench to face a new opponent. If no-one fell to the ground then both children would return to their benches and repeat the action until one of them was defeated.

In discussing how boys construct and perform their masculinity in the school playground in the absence of competitive games and / or sport Swain (2002: 91-93) has highlighted how boys are inclined to engage in other forms of activities that emphasise 'embodied physicality and athleticism'. Here, it is possible that these games were providing some of the boys at Hillend with alternative methods to construct and perform their masculinities.

Games with more sexual elements also began to be played within the playground. Large numbers of boys and girls became highly involved in the game 'kiss, cuddle and torture'. Briefly stated, this game involved one set of children giving chase to another set of children from the opposite sex. If a child caught a member of the opposite sex they had to choose whether to be kissed, cuddled or tortured. It was common for boys to opt for torture and girls to ask to be kissed or cuddled, although, it was frequently the case that boys ignored requests for kissing or cuddling, seemly preferring to torture girls instead. This, in common with wrestling, and also 'belly-bashing', frequently resulted in the over-tortured children's tears and a corresponding increase in the frequency of injured children (usually girls).

The main participants in these games of 'kiss, cuddle and torture' were boys who had previously been involved in playing football and the girls who had 'framed' the football

games. As a lot of girls had spent their time at the side lines of the football games discussing the players and their romantic interests in them, in part, it seemed that this game may have provided an outlet for girls to continue expressing the romantic interests they had in these boys. However, boys in their tendencies to opt out of romantic gestures seemed more reluctant than the girls were to openly express any interest in the opposite sex. For girls the kissing and cuddling aspects of these games appeared to be the most exciting. Whereas boys tended to gesticulate disgust at the thought of kissing or cuddling, preferring instead to demonstrate their strength to the girls through excessive physical torture, although on occasion they would acquiesce to a kiss or cuddle. However, in doing so, it was common for boys to lie on top of girls or straddle them whilst administering torture. 'Therefore, perhaps they were just as invested in these more sexualised aspects of this game (cf. Merten 1996b; Rubin 1980).

At a general level then, various forms of aggressive and often dangerous play activities were increasing. That this was the case was becoming a cause for both concern and frustration amongst the staff. Despite attempts to halt these activities in the playground, the children tended to either ignore the repeated instructions to cease playing these games, disengaged from them temporarily or they attempted to avoid detection by the playground supervisor by posting 'lookouts'.

A playscape full of bodies, running violently towards each other, pinning each other down and engaging in bodily conflicts (amongst other things) appeared as an anarchistic playscape. Certainly, in comparison to the previous serene landscape and even the one

previous to that which was full of hustle and bustle, this one was, by contrast, more chaotic. Moreover, given the prior serenity of the playground the staff were somewhat bewildered about why the children had become 'bad'.

It had, as I have illustrated, became obvious to me that the moment of purification could be explained through the removal of materiality within the playground. However, to begin with I struggled to find an explanation within actor-network theory that accounted for this 'embodied moment'. In the moment of purification, I had become anxious about the issue of non-action. This embodied moment seemed to invalidate my earlier analysis that children's activities were dependent upon the material and therefore on something other than the somatic. Here, I momentarily lost faith in the explanations I had been developing.

In my account of the 'deconstructive fairy', I drew quite explicitly on John Law's (1997) quasi-fictional deconstructive fairy. In discussing what his manager became after the fairy had worked her magic, Law (1997) describes him as a 'naked ape with all the powers of a naked ape'. Law (1997), suggests that all that this naked ape could rely upon for his powers was his body. However, even this is not enough because the powers of the body are unreliable *and* because as he states, 'even thugs like to carry weapons'.

This is a particularly astute observation by Law, in the context of what followed the embodied moment at Hillend 'when naked apes roamed'. It is so, because at Hillend, the naked apes gradually began to seek out material allies through the creative use of

whatever materials were available in the environment of the playground. The materials they began to associate with were, however, of a different sort to those objects of mass production that had previously participated in the interactional scene.

Sticks, Stones, Empty Cans and Plastic Bottles....Reinstating the Material

The introduction of new forms of material objects began to occur as I was concluding (as a matter of need) my time at Hillend. Therefore, I did not witness exactly how far this reinstatement went. From those children who were also part of my community based fieldwork I did learn that there was a subsequent introduction of what was called 'soft play' within the playground and this had involved the school supplying the children with various sorts of play objects such as sponge-balls, bean bags and hula-hoops – the sort of traditional school play equipment that I recall having used myself in primary school. It seemed therefore that the children at Hillend continued to experience adjustments to the field of heterogeneous possibilities. However, I would like to discuss a few of the new forms of materiality that I saw the children introduce and offer some analytical thoughts on this.

Sticks were the first these new forms of material extensions to the body that I noted at Hillend. They appeared, or so it seemed, as quite literally a way of extending the physical limitations of the powers of the body in one of the more aggressive activities that had developed within the playground – sword games. As is probably obvious, the children who began this form of what Dunn and Hughes (2001:500) refer to as 'violent pretend play' (play which contains themes of inflicting pain upon or killing another)

utilised the branches of the trees that grew in the peripheral verges of the playground to make swords and other sword-like weapons. These sword games were interwoven with fantasy and the playing of roles from contemporary fantasy horror films and science fiction films, for example, star wars. Interestingly, these were games that the children also played in their local community and therefore this activity was already an established routine within their out-of-school play which suggests an active transference of story-lines between sites or a drawing upon reliable allies from elsewhere.

In common with the out of school features of this activity, close attention was paid to the selection of swords and a great deal of comparison and discussion about the qualities of particular swords went on. These discussions about swords contained many similarities to the discussions on football boots presented in Chapter Seven, in so far as, swords were often assessed in terms of how they made them better 'fighters' or how various attributes such as length, thickness and weight made them better or worse swords. Again, these children were making explicit statements about how materials extended the powers of their bodies and also how these materials failed to extend their somatic resources. For example, bad losers would often blame their 'deaths' on their swords, either by declaring their own sword to be 'rubbish' or their opponents sword to be 'better'.

What is interesting in swords is the way in which these children were associating with the natural materials of their environment in order to find nonhumans to extend their agentic capacities. This had been a hitherto relatively infrequent occurrence at Hillend as the children had been previously free to bring and use manufactured toys to school. This

reinforces the point made by Factor (2004) about how children creatively use whatever materials are at hand in their play.

Another good example of these associations with the natural materials of the playground was the use of stones that the children were combining with empty juice bottles and cans in a form of skittles that they began playing. Juice bottles and cans bought from the school tuck-shop were specifically being collected and stored in the narrow gap between the shelter shed and the wall it backed onto. Stones were used to knock down the skittle arrangements that children built with the empty cans and plastic juice bottles.

What I think these and other similar forms of associations that were being produced suggests is that these children had a need to extend themselves through the nonhuman and preserve their relations in various forms of material objects. Perhaps, I am overstating the case and I recognise the speculation in this statement. However, Latour (1994:793) suggests (although discussing society and social relations more generally) a need for such inscription into artefacts. His argument is that the social cannot hold itself together by human interaction alone. Rather, it is held together in the sets of interactions between the human and the nonhuman (Latour, 1986). Perhaps, children understand and recognise this or perhaps the need to inscribe, to associate and to extend the self is more intrinsic and more insidious than we ourselves may recognise.

Conclusion

The events at Hillend draw out an important point about the powerful and perhaps unintended effect that adults can have upon children's agentic capacities. Fielding (2003) makes a similar point when he argues that the extent to which children can realise their agency within school is dependent upon the practices of adults and the structures they put in place. At Hillend, the project of one adult, although seemingly well intentioned, had many consequences for the children's interactions and social relations. Atlhough, it should be noted, that these consequences were not always negatively experienced by the children.

Most crucially however, the story of Hillend emphasises how children's agentic capacities are dependent upon extensions and supplements. The dependence of Hillend's children upon various extensions and supplements for their agency became evident when the field of heterogeneous possibilities from which they drew underwent a process of residualisation. Moreover, the removal of those artefacts which had held their relations in place diminished their existing social order to the point that relations within the playground became unstable. Here, the important role that these artefacts had played in holding the children's social relations in place became particularly visible. As the assemblages the children had regularly entered into during their daily interactions and routines were no longer possible, the children had to readjust and create new forms of assemblage with different sorts of heterogeneous others. That they actively did so was indicative of the children's apparent need to extend themselves in such ways and inscribe their relations into material 'things'.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Bringing it all Together

Introduction

Focusing upon the every day play activities of children, this thesis has explored *inter alia* children's agency, power and social relations. Drawing heuristically upon actor-network theory and thought of this kind it has extended the analytical lens to consider the role of nonhumans in the mundane interactions of children. In doing so, nonhumans have emerged alongside children as crucial participants in social interaction that are implicated in the heterogeneous networks of dependencies that children, as heterogeneous engineers, actively create to achieve their particular goals and desires. As a corollary to this, an analytical incorporation of nonhumans has drawn attention to the wider role that nonhumans play in the life worlds of children. Most specifically, the argument advanced is that nonhumans, in their diverse forms, are functionally important in holding children's social relations in place.

Crucially, this thesis is intended to contribute towards the development of theoretical and empirical debates on children's agency as well as social studies of childhood more generally. Here, it engages directly with the (as yet) peripheral move to pose children's agency as a question. The theoretical arguments for asking this question and the possibilities this may yield have already been advanced quite conclusively by Prout (2000, 2004 *in press*) and Lee (1998, 2000). Given that both the theoretical and

empirical case for children's agency has been firmly established and has long since passed critical mass, both authors have argued that the issue of children's agency should now be opened up to empirical analysis.

Directly connected to this argument is a dissatisfaction with the essentialised treatment of children's agency (Prout 2000) upon which the current orthodoxy to treat children as social actors (James and Prout 1995; Prout and James 1990) rests. Whilst this has been considered strategically necessary in order to develop the sub-discipline of the 'sociology of childhood' and permit children entry into sociological discourse (Lee 1998), Prout (2000:16) argues that, 'the *agency* in children's agency remains inadequately theorised'. Therefore, he suggests that there is a need to 'decentre agency' and to ask 'how it is that children sometimes exercise it' (2000:16), or to put it another way – what children depend upon for their agency (Lee 2000).

Tracing the networks of dependencies through which children realise their agency is a central theme in this work. Given that the social actor paradigm has now become so entrenched as to be represented in many research accounts as 'implicit and taken-for-granted' (Christensen and James 2003:3) and given that this, in itself, may be seen as indicative of a wider problem of theoretical stagnation (see Chapter Two) a project such as the one contained here is perhaps timely. However, considering the widespread currency of the social actor paradigm a project which seeks to move the (current) established standpoint from a 'being-based' sociology towards a 'becoming-based'

sociology may be considered by some sociologists of childhood as a 'retrograde step' (Lee 2001:134). Such a view, I believe, would be misplaced.

In Chapter Two I argued, that the approach taken in this thesis does not disconnect with the social actor paradigm nor with the theoretical arguments or empirical observations that have supported the case for children's agency. A study which intends to ask what children rely upon for their agency necessarily implies an acceptance of the argument that children are capable of exercising agency. Therefore, recognising that children can be agentic has been crucial to the central task of this thesis. However, the need to essentialise children's agency has not.

In concluding this work, the discussions below aim to bring together the various strands within this thesis and tease out more comprehensibly the arguments that have been drawn from the analysis of the empirical materials generated and presented in the preceding narrative. For the sake of expediency, these discussions are presented thematically and reflect the substantive arguments contained within the thesis. However, before moving on to do so, I wish first to briefly revisit the field.

Revisiting the Field

Ethically and practically, the parent-as-researcher approach presented many difficulties 'in the field'. In particular, the strain caused by attempting to find and sustain an acceptable stance in the field that lessened the asymmetrical power relations invested in both the parental role and the researcher role was salient throughout the fieldwork period.

Whilst it is recognised that power imbalances are pronounced when researchers enter the lives of children (Corsaro 1981) and most childhood researchers have to find methods to circumvent these sorts of difficulties, they appear intensified in this approach. Ethical practice in this approach has to be an adaptive and active process that is characterised by continued reflection and if necessary, adjustment and refinement of fieldwork practice. Although not an unprecedented approach, it is one, that I suggest, is best left to practised researchers of childhood who are perhaps more experienced in the act of ethical 'tight-rope balancing' (Alder and Adler 2001:37).

The adoption of the parent-as-researcher approach was a contingent outcome of *in situ* developments within the research process. That is, it emerged through the combination of a perceived need to conduct an exploratory phase to focus down the research and through a local identification of a play space and sample considered suitable for these purposes. Therefore, this 'approach which resulted in the development of this ethnographic study was not an *a priori* decision.

No less *a priori* has been the development of the analytical framework used in this study. Therefore, whilst the analysis of the empirical materials has been informed by actor-network theory and associated thought of this kind, this thesis did not set out to present an actor-network analysis. That it has developed into an actor-network analysis has been a direct result of 'a process of interaction between the conceptual and empirical world' (Bechhofer 1974:73). A direct consequence of this has been a broadening of the analytical lens to include the nonhuman. Therefore, in attending to the nonhuman, the

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'more direct voice' (Prout and James 1992:8) that ethnography is considered to permit children has been somewhat diluted in this account.

However, this analysis has been mindful of children's understandings, particularly as they relate to children's 'vocabularies of motive' (see Chapter Three). For an actor-network analysis this has been crucial to understand, as far as it is possible, children's own rationales for the actor-networks they constructed and most particularly those humans and nonhumans they enrolled and their strategies for doing so. Additionally, and as the reader will no doubt have picked up, the interpretation of children's meanings was pivotal in the analytical development of this thesis (see Chapters One and Eight).

The communication of the complex and interwoven processes that have resulted in the development of this thesis has been inherently difficult and it is my hope that I have yielded this comprehensible to the reader throughout and that I have adequately accounted for the 'means of production' (Stanley 1990), in spite of the formal restrictions bureaucracy places upon the doctoral thesis. As I move to conclude the substantive findings of this work, it is hoped that the reader can draw their own conclusions whilst being as fully informed as possible about the conditions under which this thesis *became*.

The Roles Nonhumans Play

Recognising that the life worlds of children are populated by a diversity of nonhumans in obvious forms such as toys or in less obvious forms such as animals, is perhaps an

unsurprising observation. The accounts of many childhood researchers are, after all, littered with descriptions that bring these nonhumans into the ethnographic dramas they recreate in their texts. However, for the most part, these nonhumans, whilst present, are excluded from the sociologist's analytical endeavours. An analysis which invoked an *a priori* symmetrical treatment brought these nonhumans out of the background and revealed them to be as implicated in the social interactions that took place as their human counterparts. Consequently, toys and other miscellaneous materials and artefacts emerged as more than simply the instruments of children's play. Likewise, the roles of other diverse nonhumans such as environmental elements, items of clothing and footwear, bricks, bottles, planks of wood and so forth became increasing visible when they were recast in the shape of entities or actants and absorbed into analysis.

Just as diverse as the nonhumans themselves are the multiple ways in which these nonhumans contributed to social interaction. As extenders of children's capacities and co-participants in the creation of effects, nonhumans enabled children to achieve desired goals and aims or to perform certain functions. For example, something as mundane as a pair of football boots was seen to extend the capacities of the body and act to enhance the abilities of children who played football. In so doing, football boots - as actants - empowered children to become a better players through facilitating better interactions with other players and also other nonhumans (a football for example, or the grass pitch upon which some of the game were played). Therefore, this revealed that a non-symmetrical analysis distorts the roles that these mundane nonhumans play and conceals them behind a notion of a single point actor (Law 1992) which may only permit a limited

view of the footballer as the author of a particular action – a somatically bound entity who aims, shoots and scores.

In their descriptions of themselves as good footballers, or goal scorers children also considered themselves as authors of their own actions. However, their narratives also offered, sometimes concurrently, a contrary view in which they described and revealed a complex understanding of their own 'networked-ness'. For instance, in discussing football boots, children were particular and detailed in their accounts of the ways that football boots extended the capacities of their bodies and enhanced their performances as players. In their discussions they also 'unblack-boxed' these entities, describing their various elements and components and how these act together to produce a good football boot. Here, children would depict in meticulous and knowledgeable detail the various technical components of football boots; from the devices that kept the laces from entering into contact with the ball to the material that allowed better ball control and so on.

Implicit within these discussions was children's acute awareness of how some nonhumans could extend their capacities as actors or, conversely, how other nonhumans (or indeed the same nonhuman in a different context) could limit their potential to act. In the stream of talk about football and the interactions that characterised and surrounded football games, children were forever conscious of how, for example, the concrete surface of the school playground resisted football boots and school shoes. The latter of these items of footwear were recognised as inhibitors of their capacities as footballers that limited, rather than enhanced, their somatic resources.

This capacity to *think heterogeneously* was also implicit in children's discussions of the rationales that informed their selection of the actants they enrolled into their networks. For instance, in enrolling a natural nonhuman – a dog (see Chapter Six) – one young person in describing the effectiveness of his dog as an ally, discussed how the dog's physical appearance as 'vicious' meant that when he entered into assemblage with his dog nobody bothered or harassed him. Therefore, the animal-human dyad (Michael 1996) was explained in terms of its ability to expand his own capacities to prevent unprovoked trouble from others. Instances such as these communicated that the children thought reflexively about those they enrolled into their networks and how they strengthened or did not strengthen their corporeal resources and therefore their capacities as social actors.

Nonhumans that had not been enrolled by children but by adults in their attempts to control the children's activities and interactions, also acted to enable or constrain the children. A particularly poignant example of this was the erection of a fence to segregate the younger children from the older children in the school playground. The fence served as a barrier which excluded some children from a particular spatial area, whilst at the same time, containing others within a separate designated space. The fence itself acted to physically separate a disabled girl from her older female sibling who assisted her in visiting the lavatory during break times. This separation from her older sibling impaired her ability to use the lavatory efficiently enough during play time to allow her enough free time to spend with friends. However, whilst the fence acted to impair her ability to use the lavatory quickly and spend time with friends, her sister experienced the fence as

an enabler. The physical barrier it put between her and her disabled sister acted to release her (for a short time) from caring responsibilities. This illustrated an important point about adult's use of nonhumans to control children and also nonhumans in general. For some, they may act to constrain action but for others they may enable it. In this instance the older sibling enjoyed an autonomy that she was previously denied – time for herself.

Many of the nonhumans that circulated in Greenspace and Hillend occupied a dual constraining / enabling role – allowing some but forbidding others. This drew out of the analysis that the ways in which a particular nonhuman may 'act' upon the capacities of children was never fixed nor given. However, whether enablers or prohibitors some nonhumans appeared more potent than others. Moreover, what was heterogeneously available was not the same for everyone.

Heterogeneous Possibilities and Limitations

Lee (2000) makes the point that people inhabit different sets of extensions and supplements. For these children the pool of heterogeneous others upon which they could draw was different for each child. For instance, one child's 'cultural capital' gave him access to a range of potent nonhumans desired by other children but exclusively his. His assemblages with these nonhumans tended to be more effective in achieving his desired goals because of the exclusivity, desirability and thus strength of his nonhuman co-participants. In assembling with these nonhumans he could, at times, temporarily and relatively easily, raise his status within the group more successfully than others whose assemblages with less potent nonhumans were often less effective. A child-robot

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assemblage for example, was more likely to raise the status of any particular child than a child-football assemblage.

This use of potent nonhumans for status elevation was a common feature of the children's interactions. However, the success of these potent nonhuman-child assemblages was directly related to the attractiveness of the object itself. These objects tended to be the 'desired objects' of mass production. Therefore, children were attracted to these assemblages because of their longing to access such an object. However, access could only be acquired through the obligatory passage point in such an assemblage – that is, the child who owned the object. It was in becoming an obligatory passage point that a particular child would become powerful. In order to access the 'desired object' other children had to pass through the child-as-obligatory passage point. The child-as-obligatory passage point could then control the flow of access to, and use of, the object. This was illustrated in the 'turn-taking' rituals discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, where for a short time the child with the 'desired object' controlled the interactions of some of the other children.

Here there was a related point about children's assemblages with adults and in particular their access to the economic resources of their parents (although never posed in these terms in the analysis). For instance, the main parental wage-earner in the family of the child in the example given in Chapter Four was economically advantaged in comparison with the parents of the other children. This had a direct impact on the potency of those nonhumans or toys that this child possessed.

Adults could, therefore, expand or limit children's heterogeneous resources. Adults could also, however, become obligatory passage points. For example, in the illustration of the 'ramp-network' in Chapter Five, one adult emerged as an obligatory passage point through which one child had to pass in order to enrol the nonhuman entities that were considered necessary for the construction of the ramp-network. In allowing the child passage the 'ramp-network' was able to be constructed.

Adults could limit children's agentic capacties by resisting enrolment into children's actor-networks. The attempted enrolment of adults as a help seeking strategy illustrated this. Frequently, adults refused to be enrolled by children in such ways. In the discussions in Chapter Six there were two such episodes of adult resistance to children's enrolment attempts. In this example, a child poignantly expressed his feelings about those adults who did not help him because they did not take his concerns seriously – because they did not *listen*. A much more subtle point drawn out here was that children appeared to invest adults with a duty of care towards them that they considered should include taking their concerns seriously because they are serious to them.

Within the school, adults as teachers can severely restrict children's agentic capacities. The shift from the playground at Hillend from being a relatively autonomous field of heterogeneous possibilities to a very restrictive one, served to emphasise the very powerful effect that adult control of social and material heterogeneity can have. In particular, the cleansing of artefacts that had routinely participated in children's

interactions seriously impaired the children's capacities to act. Fielding (2000:234) in his geographical analysis of the primary school makes a similar point when he argues that:

'In UK primary schools, the extent to which this [children's] agency is realised is largely dependent upon the structuring of the teaching, learning and management within the school, which is in turn constructed through the moral beliefs and practices of the governors, headteacher, teachers, learning support assistants.....'

In the case of Hillend playground, this particular residualisation of the heterogeneous field of possibilities was intimately connected to the head teacher's disciplinary programme, which in turn appeared to be connected, in part, to her own system of values, morals and beliefs. However, and as Factor (2004) has also noted, children are resourceful and imaginative in their appropriation of materials for play. The children at Hillend began to forge new assemblages with different nonhumans through creatively drawing upon materials such as drinks cans, stones, tree branches and other to-hand objects. This was indicative of the children's need to inscribe their relations in material objects.

These events at Hillend drew out the pragmmatic value of the application of actor network theory to the study of children's interactions with each other. For example, in Chapter Eight attention was drawn to how a lack of understanding or insight about the roles that nonhumans played in social interaction in regard to holding social relations in

place and so forth led to the mass removal of material heterogeneity within the playground. Whilst various and often quite logical rationales informed the removal of many necessary nonhumans (e.g. quasi-objects) from the site the consequences for the stability of the social order of the playground were far reaching. Additionally, actor network theory in its attentiveness to the variety of assemblages that children enter into in their daily routines drew out the problems that some children faced when changes were made to social heterogeneity. Therefore when the spatial changes were made to the playground the consequences to some children were highlighted (e.g. being separated from other children who had been integral to their ability to perform competently at a certain task such as going to the lavatory). What this approach allowed therefore was an attentive examination of how children's social orders operate and how they are held together. In doing so, it drew out the importance of recognising the vast number of different types of actors (or actants) that are involved and the roles that they play in producing a stable and relatively enduring social order.

Holding Social Relations in Place

The events that arose as a consequence of the cleansing of material nonhumans from the field of heterogeneous possibilities at Hillend were pivotal to the analytical development of this thesis. The final substantive theme in this thesis about the crucial role that the nonhuman played in holding the children's social relations in place, arose as a result of the social disorder that occurred when the 'missing masses went missing'. Without their *regular* nonhuman co-participants to enter into assemblages with and particularly without

the 'quasi-objects' that had previously infested the playground at Hillend, the children struggled to hold their existing relations in place.

These 'quasi-objects' in the form of footballs, beyblades, wrestling figures and so on had acted to bind children together in their activity groups. Illustrated in the football example in Chapter Seven, these objects in their circulation between and among the children, is what made the realisation of their collectivities possible. These nonhumans held together and structured the relations that were played out within Hillend playground.

The presence of these objects in the multiple, had served to create a social order within the playground that was stable and relatively enduring. Their removal broke down this social order and transformed the children into 'naked apes' who, dependent upon the powers of the body, struggled to forge anything that could endure beyond the moment or become stable. In their struggle to extend themselves and to hold their social relations in place, the children of Hillend sought out new nonhumans with which to associate. In doing so, they exposed themselves and their social relations to be dependent upon the heterogeneous associations and mediations that take place between humans and 'things'.

Conclusion

Most crucially, this thesis has posed children's agency as question and it has offered some empirical answers to this question. In doing so, it has advanced a view that has argued that children's agency, power and social relations take their form and are an outcome of the heterogeneous associations that take place between children and

nonhumans. I could draw out this conclusion here and attempt, through the use of complex vocabulary, to reinforce, one last time the substantive argument contained within and throughout this thesis. I have chosen not to do this. Instead I wish to end this thesis with the words of a child spoken to me at the very beginning of my exploration:

'He is powerful because he has the big table and the photocopier'

~ Joseph, aged seven, responding to being asked why his head teacher is powerful

It has taken me four years to piece together this argument and a near eighty thousand words to make a point that a seven year old child communicated to me without taking any time to think about it and using only twelve words. I failed at the outset to give his words any attention. I now stand humbled by these words that communicate in their marvellous simplicity the crux of my argument.

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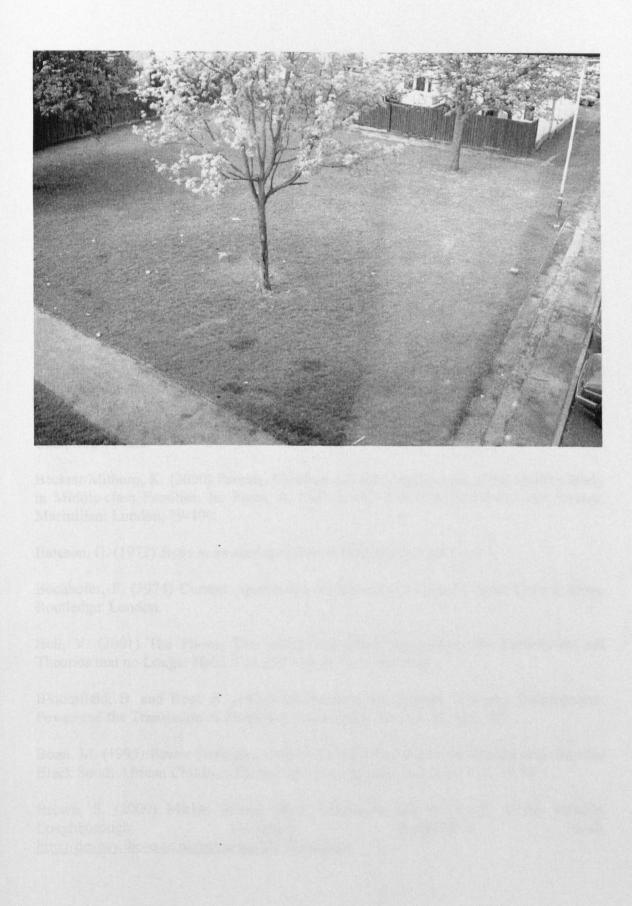Bloomfield, B. and Day, ... Surveillance Revisit: the Translation of Enquiry ....

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