CAN THERE BE AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHILDREN?

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I

My initial concern with this question arose from browsing through *The Lan-
guage and Lore of Schoolchildren* (1959), and *Children's Games in Street
and Playground* (1969) by Iona and Peter Opie. My interest increased as I
read that it can be useful to know that the reply to 'a pinch and a punch for
the first of the month' is 'a pinch and a kick for being so quick', or that say-
ing the Lord's prayer backwards raises the devil, that crossing fingers and
saying 'barley' or 'cree, screws, screase, crogs, blobs, or fainites' signifies
immunity in a game, in fact that 'the schoolchild . . . conducts his business
with his fellows by ritual declaration . . . sealed by the utterance of ancient
words which are recognised and considered binding by the rest of the com-
munity' (Opie and Opie, 1959: 1, 121, 146). This was all intriguing: the
Opies' style was reminiscent of an early ethnography, covering for example,
'occasional customs', 'half belief', 'partisanship', 'curiosities', 'oral legisla-
tion', 'friendship' and 'fortune'.

But why should this be of anthropological concern? Why not leave the
books as amusing and interesting collections? The Opie introduction was
however provocative and their commentary tantalising: too disappointing to
abandon. The introduction reveals that these child traditions 'circulate from
child to child, beyond the influence of the family circle', that 'part of 'heir
fun is the thought, usually correct, that adults know nothing about them' and
though 'scarcely altering from generation to generation, this thriving unself-
conscious culture remains unnoticed by the sophisticated world and quite as
little affected by it' (op. cit.: 1). The Opies' commentary, however, became
increasingly unsatisfactory. Are the oral rhymes, tongue-twisters, improper

verses, jingles and parodies merely 'expressions of exuberance'? Was there nothing more to be said about this material than the type of reductionist interpretation given, such as 'language is still new to them, and they find difficulty in expressing themselves. When on their own they burst into rhyme, of no recognisable relevancy, as a cover in unexpected situations, to pass off an awkward meeting, to fill a silence, to hide a deeply felt emotion, or in a gasp of excitement' (ibid.: 18)? This could be Radcliffe-Brown in Chapter VI of *The Andaman Islanders*, explaining that 'all the legends . . . are simply the expression in concrete form of the feelings and ideas aroused by things of all kinds as a result of the way in which these things affect the moral and social life of the Andaman Islanders' (1964: 376). The Opie introduction raised the point that perhaps children could be studied in their own right. The commentary suggested the lack of any recent anthropological perspective.

What approach could be taken? How can we interpret children's games and their oral tradition? How could children be thought of, and how do they classify or think about the world? What difference does age make? What have other people said about children?

With such questions in mind, I then turned to other material. First, Edwin Ardener's article 'Belief and the Problem of Women' (1972) encouraged me to think that children *were* valid as a group to be studied. Both women and children might perhaps be called 'muted groups' i.e. unperceived or elusive groups (in terms of anyone studying a society). Then, since children are no novelty to anthropologists, I hoped to gain some answer to problems from writers who had thought about them, such as the nineteenth-century evolutionists. Though primarily concerned with establishing stages of development, these writers saw a consideration of the behaviour, minds and beliefs of children as necessary support for their theories about the primitive. Thus just as the child, according to Spencer, is ignorant of the course of things and therefore believes in fiction as readily as fact, so the savage, similarly without classified knowledge, feels no incongruity between absurd falsehood and established truth. Another school of relevance is the psycho-analytic anthropologists who see the genesis of individual personality or a whole culture's personality embodied in childhood. The idea that basic character structures of a society can be found in the child led to unsuccessful searches, for example, for the Oedipus Complex amongst the Trobrianders and the Hopi Indians. Culture and Personality writers, heavily influenced by psycho-analysis, concentrated on child-rearing practices to explain cultural personality and beliefs. Thus Leighton and Kluckhohn (1947) explain witch and ghost tales current in Navaho society in terms of relieving the shocks and emotional wounds that occur during the training of the Navaho child. Slight variants of this psychological approach appear in those writers on the child who see themselves concerned with the process of socialisation, whether concentrating on the home, school or general environment, as the

influencing factor. They are concerned with the process by which someone learns the ways of a given society or social group so that he can function within it. One of the few recent cross-cultural books on this subject is *From Child to Adult* by John Middleton, which illustrates the contexts in which children grow up and become adults, and the kind of pressures, sanctions, peer group organization, initiation rituals and religious and economic pressures which are used to steer the young towards acceptable adult conformity. Cognitive and linguistic development – two enormous fields of research on the child – also need to be looked into, but I shall only mention some of their work in this paper.

None of the main approaches mentioned, however, some of which I shall make more explicit, revealed the beginnings of an anthropology of children, concerned with beliefs, values, or interpretation of their viewpoint, their meaning of the world. The germ of the possible use of children in the field can be seen in Margaret Mead's work in 1929, when she attempted to study the thought of children in Samoa. Was it characterised by the type of animistic premise, anthropomorphic interpretation and faulty logic, which had been reported for civilised children, or was this type of thought a product of the social environment? Unfortunately she based this hypothesis on oversimplified Piaget-type terminology and applied Western oriented experiments, such as the analysis of 3200 drawings of children who had never used pencil or paper before. She did, however, recognise them as informants and saw child thinking as interesting in its own right.

By 1938 the position of children in anthropology still looked pretty meagre. Newbury, concerned with games summed it up saying, 'Many educationalists and anthropologists have raised the opinion that too often it is the case that the study of a tribe or people is confined almost entirely to adult life from puberty onwards, that only occasionally is a detailed account of children's games given in what are in other respects comprehensive accounts' (1938: 85). The lack of studies is noticed again by Mary Goodman, 'children can serve as anthropological-style informants being qualified like their elders by membership in a society and a command of a limited part of that society's culture. Children not only can but should be solicited to act as informants since their very naivete offers advantages. They can tell us first-hand and without retrospection what their society and culture looks like through their eyes, or what childhood is like with respect to its perception of society and culture' (1959: 979). But though Goodman tries to stick to her approach of a child's eye-view of society in her book (1970), unfortunately she relies on statistical results using formal experiments which hardly fit the culture she is dealing with.

How could an anthropological approach to children be developed? How would it differ from the theoretical approaches mentioned, which are concerned with children in terms of what they reflect about adult behaviour or thinking? What analytical terms could be used? Would it be a functional

anthropology? The main difference between my proposed perspective and that of the culture and personality writers, psychologists, functionalists etc. is that instead of stressing the diachronic, I want to stress the synchronic. It may be asked 'how can you study something that *isn't* yet, except in terms of its development?' I answer this in the following way: those anthropological fields concerned with children, which I have mentioned, view them to a greater or lesser extent, as passive objects, as helpless spectators in a pressing environment which affects and produces their every behaviour. They see the child as continually assimilating, learning and responding to the adult, having little autonomy, contributing nothing to social values or behaviour except the latent outpourings of earlier acquired experiences. The adult plays the role of either frustrating the child in its toilet training, feeding or other activities, or compelling the child to fit to a cultural pattern. My proposed approach regards children as people to be studied in their own right, and not just as receptacles of adult teaching. My search is to discover whether there is in childhood a self-regulating, autonomous world which does not necessarily reflect early development of adult culture. If we conceive of society as a group of intertwining, overlapping circles, which as a whole, form a stock of beliefs, values, social interaction, then children, for example from the age of four to eleven or children before initiation ceremonies (depending on the society) may be said to constitute one conceptual area, one segment of this stock. The children will move in and out of this segment into another, but others take their place. The segment still remains. The segment may overlap with others, may reflect on others, but there is a basic order of beliefs, values and ideas of one group which bounds them off from any other group. Thus I propose that instead of just looking at one or two segments, usually men and sometimes women, we can add other dimensions, children or the aged for example (see Ardener, 1972). Let me emphasise that whatever the society there will inevitably be overlaps (children are for example continually trying to imitate and include certain adult viewpoints), yet at the level of behaviour, values, symbols, games, beliefs and oral traditions, there may be a dimension exclusive to the child.

The Opies are important for they reveal the inadequacies of the usual approach. Children, they claim, have a tradition of their own, verses and lores which are not intended for adult ears. Then is the child so passive? English children may learn at school, one, two, three, four, five, while uninitiated Nuer boys may learn from the women how to milk, but less is known about Iggy Oggy, Black Froggy, Iggy Oggy out, or about the ox names which Nuer boys may take 'in play but only in imitation of their elders' (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 250). If we look at the rest of this short passage it raises a relevant question about ox-names amongst the Nuer, 'Likewise maidens may take ox-names from bull calves of the cows they milk, but they are mainly used only between girls themselves and in the nature of a game, copying their brothers: the names are short lived. Married women use cow-

names among themselves, but here again, this is similitude and it has none of the significance of the ox-names of men' (op. cit.: 250). Since there is a distinction between the copy-names of boys, girls and women and those names used by men, I wonder whether these may not be interpreted with the proposed approach in mind. May there not be a symbolic difference in oxen or their names for boys, girls and women? From whom did Evans-Pritchard get his information? Since such symbolic importance is attached to the name of the ox in the men's conceptual sphere, it would not be surprising if Nuer men should denigrate the ox-names of women and children, as mere imitation, with no importance attached. The tone of pride captured in the passage, with concern for male supremacy and the dismissal of any significance of cattle for women, leads me to think that there may be other aspects of ox-values to be found in the belief worlds of uninitiated children and women. After all Evans-Pritchard himself says that 'for all Nuer-men, women, and children, cattle are their greatest treasure' (1956: 248).

II

At this point it may be helpful to indicate some of the ideas on children put forward by the writers mentioned earlier. Surprisingly, the concept of childhood itself is mainly left ignored. Yet we have only to follow the history of our own idea of childhood as shown by Ariès (1973) to see that the concept varies widely according to the particular time or place revealing a different awareness of 'that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult' (Ariès, 1973: 125). Puberty may for example seem an obvious end to childhood but in some societies the psychological aspect may be unimportant compared to the cultural aspect which defines adulthood, marked often by a 'rite de passage' at anywhere from age eight to twenty or more.

I turn first to the anthropological literature and the nineteenth-century evolutionists, whose observations on child behaviour and thought have contributed a popular but misleading view of primitive thought. The characteristic of children which writers such as Spencer and Tylor considered most revealing about primitive thought, was their supposed irrationality, their inability to reason in an abstract way. Children, some argued, derive their associations from direct human experience and then extend them to phenomena. They class together in a simple and vague way objects or actions of conspicuous likeness. For a child, they thought, each object was not only what it seemed but was potentially something else. Thus children attributed life to a straw that moved or thought of a shadow as an entity. Others were less convinced that the child confused living with non-living. Spencer, for example, saw the child endowing its playthings with personalities, speaking and fondling them as though they were living, as not actually believing this, but as using deliberate fiction. Though pretending that the things are alive the child does not really think so. Were its doll to bite, it would be no less

astounded than an adult would be (1882: 145). For Spencer the child is not exactly confused but is rather a playful dramatiser who 'lacking the required living objects', accepts as 'representing them non-living objects' (1882: 145). Tylor is equally unconvinced about a child's confusion. For him, the child does not believe a doll is anything more than it is, but its imagination allows it to treat it as something more. Thus wooden toy soldiers can be seen as living soldiers who are walking of themselves when they are pushed about. The shape of the toy is of little importance. The toy for Tylor is mainly an assistance to the child in enabling it to arrange and develop its ideas by working the objects and actions it is acquainted with into a series of dramatic pictures (1870: 108).

As we shall see such discussions of the child are not wholly unrelated to more recent ideas on their thought. On the other hand, the direct comparison, or so-called comparison, of child thought with primitive thought was hardly more than the same type of vague classing together of similar items, of which the child was accused. The idea which gave credence to their writings was the recapitulation theory which viewed the development of the individual as an epitome of the evolution of the race. The influence of this idea has spread widely in the literature on children by educationalists, psychoanalysts, psychologists, and anthropologists, amongst such writers as Freud, Blondel, and the early Piaget. Some modern writers on children have obviously read this nineteenth-century literature, seen some superficial similarity between the described savage and the behaviour of the children they have observed, and to complete the circle some have concluded that there must be some truth in the recapitulation theory. Kay, for example, writing in 1968 writes 'an infant school child is not just a miniature adult. He is really a modern version of primitive man . . . the junior school child is passing through all the mental experiences of mankind as he approaches the logical age' (75). Or Stephen Ullmann talking about the primitiveness of language says 'one wonders whether there is not a grain of truth in the old (recapitulation) theory. Certain facts in child psychology and in the history of our own language seem to suggest there is' (1966: 73). The theory is accepted by Schumaker. He supports an argument about the development of the senses with the fact that 'there is an apparent tendency of young children to recapitulate primitive stages of consciousness' (1960: 30), and as secondary support he quotes von Holzschuher, 'Feelings and wishes flow, in the child, without sharp boundaries into sensations and perceptions of reality. The child lives in his own magical world' and 'remains in the primitive consciousness' and 'we conclude that in the small child the primitive person rules exclusively'. Worseley also makes use of the theory, appealing to Vygotsky's 'congeries' or 'complex thinking' stage to understand 'Groote Eylandt Totemism' (1968: 151).

Why should there be such persistence in a schema which has had to face much adverse evidence? One explanation – that advocated by Lévi-

Strauss (1949: ch. 6) – brings out the idea of the universal child, the child of nature. For Lévi-Strauss, infant thought provides the resource of 'mental structures and schemes of sociability for all cultures, each of which draws on certain elements for its own particular model'. Since the child's experience has been less influenced than an adult's by the particular culture to which he belongs, he presents a more convenient point of comparison with foreign customs and attitudes than one's own. Not only may primitive thought or behaviour seem childish to the Westerner, but the primitive will be inclined also to compare us with his children. This argument, though at first appealing is less convincing if one doubts the premise and the evidence on which it is based. The characterisation implicit in Lévi-Strauss' view, that human beings at birth already possess an inborn ability to control actions according to genetic rules cannot yet be proved. It suggests that particular abilities should not be thought of as the consequences of social interaction but as potentially underlying it. A slightly altered version of this view sees particular abilities as acquired after birth but derived from an inborn capacity to construct or create in collaboration with other people, or as Shotter puts it 'human beings . . . possess a natural power to construct or create in interaction with other human beings a personal power to control their performances in accordance with rules' (1972: 1). Thus the abilities acquired will be performed according to cultural patterns but their acquisition cannot be achieved in independence: the help is required of some other person already possessing such skills.

In accordance with his premise, Lévi-Strauss supports his point with the example of language prattling. The variety of sounds which can at first be articulated is almost unlimited, yet each culture retains only a few. Once the selection has been made, the unlimited possibilities on the phonetic plane are irremediably lost. Lévi-Strauss applies this argument directly to the social plane and using observations made by Susan Isaacs shows how the notion of reciprocity derive from a universal need, the need for security: the need underlies the behaviour which is culturally expressed. But Lévi-Strauss ignores the possibility that needs themselves are interpreted culturally, a suitable interpretation if one accepts the second characterisation of human beings. In this view some needs, feelings, moods, intentions etc. may be 'fictitious' but become meaningful in the course of exchanges between the young child and others 'in which one individual responds in an immediate and unconscious manner as a result of the way he perceives or apprehends the immediate and unconsidered reaction of the other individual to him' (Shotter, 1972: 4). So-called universal feelings, needs etc. may be culturally rather than naturally derived. If such were the case the child could hardly then be called a 'polymorphous socialite' giving access to all mental structures and institutional schemas.

A more convincing reason for some people's acceptance of a similarity between child thought and primitive thought is that given by Leach (1966).

It is almost summed up by Gide's phrase 'The less intelligent the white man is, the more stupid he thinks the black'. Native thought is seen as childish ignorance when the actions or ideas concerned are misinterpreted by the anthropologist. They seem irrational, because not explained by any cultural criteria, and therefore similar to child behaviour, which I might add is likewise often misinterpreted.

The literature on child thought in the field of anthropology is sparse. If we look at writers in other disciplines (apart from psychology), most interest seems to lie in the problem of whether the child confuses the living with the non-living, following the interest shown by the nineteenth-century writers. Durkheim, for example, follows Spencer and sees the child's need to play 'as so forceful that to play properly he imagines a live person'. Gombrich the art theoretician converts the problem to a hobby horse. If the child calls a stick a hobby horse it obviously means nothing of the kind. He sees the child's functional needs and the dangers of over-image-making creating the minimum and maximum limits which hold on the child's creative play in achieving the idea of horseness. The main idea is that the hobby horse or stick is a substitute for a horse. The stick is neither a sign signifying the concept of a horse nor is it a portrait of an individual horse. By its capacity to act as a substitute, the stick becomes a horse in its own right. The first hobby horse was probably, says Gombrich, 'just a stick which qualified as a horse, because one could ride it', or more precisely 'the stick was that formal aspect which fulfilled the minimum requirement for the performance of the function' (1963: 4). Thus so long as riding mattered any rideable object could serve as a horse. The greater the wish to ride, the fewer the features needed that will do for a horse. But the attempt to exploit the minimum leads to dangers, for if the hobby horse becomes too lifelike, it might gallop away on its own. In Gombrich we see the functional explanation of the child's behaviour with a stick or doll.

Vygotsky gives us a psychological explanation. In 1933 in a lecture on play he talks about the relation between meanings and objects. At pre-school age there first begins a divergence between the fields of meaning and vision. 'Thought is separated from objects – a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse . . . but it is terribly difficult for the child to sever thought (the meaning of a word) from object' (1966: 12). Perhaps the best way to illustrate the importance of what Vygotsky is saying is to give an example of how he may help interpret some specific material. Children have numerous names for different parts of the body. At St Barnabas School, where I am doing field work, my own plaits on first appearance became within five minutes 'ears', 'lugs', 'hose-pipe', 'loos'. The latter I suppose because they looked like chains. Other common names children apply are nob, nut, loaf, bonce, and block for head; mug, dial, phiz for face, while some people according to children have ferret noses, pignoses, jelly noses, Peggy Parrot noses, cheese cutters, Rudolphs (i.e. Red noses). How can we interpret these? We now return to Vygotsky who writes, 'in play a child deals with things as having meaning. Word meanings replace objects, and thus an emancipation of word from object occurs'. He suggests a formulated fraction for the structure of human perception which is expressed as

$$\frac{\text{Object (numerator)}}{\text{Meaning (denominator)}}$$

For the child in play the *idea* is the central point and 'things' are moved from a dominating to a subordinate position . . . The child concentrates on meaning severed from the objects. My plaits, as playful objects to pull, and as 'novelties', food for the imagination, thus invited a separation from themselves as objects and became endowed with several meanings. Faces, noses and heads, usually ordinary objects, in certain contexts, or in certain manifestations merit unusual epithets. But this is not to say that (out of such contexts) children do not know the distinction between plaits and ears. Similarly then, children know the difference between a baby and a doll or a stick and a horse. They have passed the infant stage of intimate fusion between word and object in which 'a divergence between the meaning field and the visible field is impossible' (op. cit: 12). But it is in play, in imaginary situations that children mostly reveal spontaneous meanings dominating over objects. This is important technically and for explanation in the proposed anthropology of children. Young children's play, according to Vygotsky must be interpreted with meanings being more important than the objects, and action arising from ideas rather than things; the establishment of rules develop out of this process, but rules are not integral to it, or formulated in advance. It is in play with others that meaning and things become linked. We shall see later how this can help us understand activity in the playground.

An old anthropological problem is raised for our studies by Vygotsky, Piaget and other child psychologists: the question of different modes of thought. We now assume that primitives have a similar way of thinking to the West; the difference is merely a question of balance. What about child thinking? Recent studies have concentrated on the difference between child and adult mental processes, but (1) is child thought so different from ours that we can only describe their speech and actions, without comprehending them? Or, if it is so different, may we not learn from psychologists and then proceed? Or (2) is their thought like our own but in a different idiom, or (3) should we make a distinction between the thought of children of different ages?

In order to answer these questions, it has been helpful to refer to and evaluate for example Piaget's and Isaacs' work on child development. They each reveal a very different picture of child thought and in turn disagree about the extent to which child thought resembles adult thought. Piaget, to begin with, maintains that child thought has a different structure from the adult's. He sees a child's mental capacities developing in definite stages,

gradually acquiring logical competence in such notions as representation or relationship, to arrive eventually at a regulated system of rational thought. To give some impression of the distinctive world in which Piagetian children appear I have invented a conversation between two piaget-type children aged about six. The outline is created from a real situation at St Barnabas School playground in Oxford. Arthur is burying stones, wrapped in sweet papers, in the sand, and talking to himself, while Peter sits drawing in the sand.

> *Arthur (to himself):* This is my treasure. Oh, it's fallen out. There now I got to bury it again - must wrap it up. My stones is made of marbles. That one's all round.
> *Peter (glancing at Arthur's activity):* What's round?
> *Arthur:* My stones was in the water. My tummy drinks too much water and then it gets round.
> *Peter:* Those aren't stones, they're sweeties. I'm going to tell Miss. I'll tell.
> *Arthur:* That's not fair. Don't tell. Daddy said I can, so you can't tell. They're not sweeties anyway.
> *Peter:* They are.
> *Arthur:* They're not. They're treasures an' they've all got names.
> *Peter:* What if there weren't no names?
> *Arthur:* If there weren't no words it would be hard – you couldn't make nothing . . . (pause) . . . What's that? You've drawed moons?
> *Peter:* No, two suns.
> *Arthur:* Suns aren't like that – With that mouth - they're round. Suns haven't got eyes and a mouth.
> *Peter:* Yes they have. They can see.
> *Arthur:* No they can't – it's only God who can see.
> *Peter:* How d'you know.
> *Arthur:* I've always known.

Arthur and Peter are both in Piaget's pre-operational stage, which is characterised by its particular explanatory procedure – the lack of an integrated system.

As you may notice, reasoning about the stone's roundness is carried out by way of linking two preconcepts, the roundness of the stone and the roundness of his tummy, both imagistic and concrete; concepts which have no general class and no individual identity. The concepts are like Vygotsky's unorganised 'congeries', where 'the heap, consisting of disparate objects grouped together without any basis, reveals a diffuse undirected extension of the meaning of the sign to inherently unrelated objects linked by chance in the child's perception' (1962: 59). This is a type of thinking which assimilates reality into undifferentiated schemas. Anything can be joined or combined to anything else in this jumble bag. Thus Arthur links his round stomach full of water with the stone which is round also. It is the superficial view of 'roundness' which forms his classification. For children of this age everything around them is real and concrete, nothing can be abstract. Thus physical objects are made by man, or look like man: the sun has eyes and a

mouth for Peter. They must have since they react in physical ways (the sun can move and see). Piaget sees this explanation of participation between objects in terms of transduction and syncretism. In the children's ideas on names, the sun and God, we can see concrete, static images of reality. 'Names must be "real" or nothing would exist.' Rather than schematize and reorder events as an adult would in an argument, Arthur and Peter merely run on their own reality sequence and state their own point of view. 'They can see', 'no they can't'. Things are what they appear to be to the child, so immaterial things are materialised: words must be entities, suns must be able to see - their own thoughts must have always existed. The whole episode of play must appear as a reality for the children, from a Piagetian standpoint. He is here in agreement with many of those nineteenth-century writers previously mentioned. Piaget would argue that Peter and Arthur would not clearly distinguish play and reality as different cognitive realms possessing distinct and different 'ground rules', 'because in both cases belief is arbitrary and pretty much destitute of logical reasons. Play is a reality which the child is disposed to believe in when by himself, just as reality is a game at which he is willing to play with the adult and anyone else who believes in it' (Piaget, 1924: 93).

How can we evaluate this impression of the child which Piaget gives us? Is there really no distinction for a child of six between play and reality? Vygotsky suggests that there is. He gives an example of 'play with an imaginary situation', that of two sisters (age five and seven) playing at being sisters, that is playing at reality. The difference between play and reality being that in play the child tries to be a sister. They both acquire rules of behaviour which fit 'sisterly' actions. Only actions which fit these rules, which emphasise the relationship as sisters, are acceptable to the play situation. Thus they dress themselves alike, they walk about holding hands, the elder tells the younger about other people and says 'that is theirs, not ours'. What Piaget misses in making no distinction between play and reality for young children is the element of conscious action in play. 'What passes unnoticed by the child in real life becomes a rule of behaviour in play' (Vygotsky, 1966: 10). From the above invented conversation we can also see Piaget's overriding concern with the child's intellectual capacities and the different structure of their thought from that of the adult. In contrast, Susan Isaacs has argued that the difference between child thought and adult thought is merely a matter of experience, degree not kind. She directly criticises Piaget saying that 'the untrained, undisciplined, and ignorant mind is, of course, ego-centric, pre-causal and magical in proportion to its ignorance and lack of discipline' (1930: 94). It is ego-centric because of its ignorance, and not vice versa. Isaacs also says the child can be easily pushed back into the realm of phantasy and ego-centricity when asked certain questions prompted by the adult. With these severe criticisms in mind it is difficult not to accept her view that children's thought is not so different from adult thought, especially when

second strikes the knuckles before the first can avoid the heavy blow: several other boys cheer – but no-one outside the ring shouts for fear of being dragged in as a participant. Physical endurance is the necessary conformity to this game. As one boy explained, 'you mustn't give in – the first to cry is a baby'. The children's values indicate the context in which the boxing is to be understood. Bravery and endurance are here esteemed and these are soon made manifest in the bleeding knuckles. On another day, the benches take on the meaning of the basic structure for a house and the greatest value for the children is the pleasure of actually making the 'house', the gathering of jackets and bits of wood or anything else at hand to make the benches domestic. These same benches may provide the equipment for whatever is valued at that moment, whether horses or hospitals. This same pattern continues – the door between the two play areas in certain relationship to the two platforms on either side is valued as a swing over a dangerous moat, whilst on other days the two platforms alone represent the distance between teacher and pupils; the walls are castles for a king to sit upon, or 'safety' in a game of 'chase'. The hands of several children in a ring represent a decision, whilst several hands joined together can be understood as the making of a bargain. There is much detail which I have left out for the sake of brevity, but what I have been concerned to show is that the environment of the playground may be viewed in terms of a meaningful system, which reveals a structure of great range. The objects of the environment are incorporated into play not for what they are in themselves but for the meaning given them. But as Gombrich points out (See part II of this paper) the objects have to qualify (1963: 4).

The contexts which define the meanings of the environment are the imaginary situations agreed upon by the group. It seems that certain situations are played so often that children know certain rules which the behaviour should adhere to. They all know that in 'warfare' you aim your machine gun at others, but occasionally you must fall down dead for a while and then get up and continue as before. You must know the minimum correct procedure or you are not playing correctly. I found myself rebuked for 'running somebody over'. We were playing army trucks (i.e. sitting on one upturned bench in front of another). Benji was driving while I was one of the passengers. When Benji was shot and fell out of the truck, I said I would drive and took over the wheel. Benji most indignantly cried out that I would run him over if I continued driving. Of course he was right, he was lying in front of the bench. One must know the criteria appropriate for the play, but there is nothing absolute about them. As for the two sisters playing at being sisters, the rules of real life which pass unnoticed in everyday life become overtly emphasised amongst children in the playground.

In verbal exchanges there is the same combination of mental imagination with certain agreed constraints which may be exercised when interacting with others. For example in certain play, mainly energetic chasing games

or duelling games, the value of bravery and persistence is pre-eminent. For someone who tries to opt out, who lacks the necessary resolution, the recognised solution is the jeer 'cowardy, cowardy, custard, can't eat bread and mustard'. There may be variations (such as 'scaredy, scaredy, scarecrow'), but the meaning is fixed in the tune 🎵

The meaning of persistence and bravery does, however, tolerate an amount of sympathy and reprieve so long as it is performed in the appropriate manner, with the accepted 'truce' term of the area. As the Opies found out, to ask for mercy with the right word is not 'giving in', 'before we ourselves appreciated that children were sensitive to the difference between making a truce and surrendering, we were puzzled by the number of boys who declared stoutly (and correctly) that they had no term for giving in' (Opie and Opie, 1959: 142). The implication in a truce term is temporary relief, whereas to surreptitiously leave the game or to blatantly opt out is to provoke the customary jeer.

Children, however, can rarely explain why they perform certain other prescriptive actions, especially those involving specific beliefs. For example they claim that 'If you say that something nice is going to happen, you must either touch wood or your head'. Such sayings make sense only when they have been taken to pieces and their parts analysed in terms of other sayings or an already familiar piece of knowledge. To understand this particular saying we have to know that:

(1) a fool is categorised by children as a blockhead, that is his head is likened to the denseness of wood.

(2) that as a joke, when saying 'touch wood', children will touch the head of a friend or a notorious dunce or their own head in self-deprecation, and

(3) that we must touch wood. But why must we touch wood? To explain this we must look at other sayings, for example 'If you see an ambulance you must touch wood or you will have bad luck'. Here we see that wood is considered lucky. Perhaps this is because touching something hard concretizes the abstract. Luck is insubstantial, whereas wood is substantial. Touching wood is literally bringing the luck down to earth. But does this meaning of 'wood' fit into other children's sayings? 'Touch wood, no returns.' The meaning seems to fit in this case, for if luck is brought to hand and materialised, it can't get back at anyone in any unlucky form.
'Touch wood, no good,
Touch iron, rely on.'

This denial of the force of wood to negate the abstract nature of luck merely reinforces the concrete category – iron being harder is even more effective in giving substance to luck; wood is just not as good.

seen against the background of her two excellent books (1930 and 1933). Piaget's preoccupation with intellectual capacities and their development is a significant limitation to any contribution he might make to an anthropology of children. This is especially true in terms of the child over about eight, who forms an integrated system, which Piaget sees as a structure with definite logical and mathematical properties. Function and content almost disappear and so too the possibility of much comprehension. Piaget can, thus, be of little help in analysing the Opies as a means of access to children, since the ages of the children are about nine to fourteen, and their rhymes, spontaneous games, and verbal exchanges are outside his range of study; 'these stages of development naturally concern only the child's intellectual activities (drawings, constructive games, arithmetic, etc.). It goes without saying that in outdoor games the problem is a completely different one' (1926: 42). This is not to say that Piaget can be of no use in other approaches used to understand the child. An anthropology of children must however be more concerned with content already formulated within the already existing culture, and Piaget, especially in his early 'content' books, aims 'not at examining ideas but at seeing how their ideas are formed in response to certain questions, and principally in what direction their spontaneous attitude of mind tends to lead them' (1929: 123).

In certain other aspects Piaget is surprisingly anthropological in his approach, or rather he links with anthropology through structuralism. He sees his own theory of cognitive structure as intimately connected with Lévi-Strauss' doctrine of the primacy of structure in social life, and like Lévi-Strauss is seeking that conceptual structure which lurks behind the social structure. 'It is the logic of oppositions and correlations, exclusion and inclusion, compatibilities and incompatibilities' says Piaget, 'which explains the laws of association and not the reverse' (1971: 109). They both believe that through careful examination of groups, which, like children of primitives differ from the contemporary western adult, new interpretations can be made on the whole of human experience.

We might perhaps link the works of Piaget and Lévi-Strauss as a means to understand child thought. There seem to be *some* aspects of mythical thinking which lie close to aspects of child thinking. I stress only some. I am not equating mythical and child thought. Following Lonergan, we might call this a symbolic mentality, which is present in all men, and which has 'its own quasi logic, its own method of explanation, all of which are connatural to the psychic and sensitive level in man' (quoted in Barden, 1966: 38). We might, for example, bear in mind magical thinking, which postulates a complete and all-embracing determinism, when looking at elements of childish thought, such as their need for justification at any price. 'This logical or prelogical law leads them into a certain determinism, since it is probably owing to it that the idea of chance is absent from the mentality of the child' (op. cit: 40). We might also bear in mind the bricoleur who fits together anything at

hand, when trying to understand the young child who assimilates everything into the structure he has already made.

III

In the first sections of this paper I have tried to indicate the lack of anthropological literature on children's values, beliefs and social behaviour, and to suggest a possible model for including them in anthropological viewpoints of society. Then I looked at some particular writers' perspectives on children and discussed the problem of child thought. Now I hope to give some empirical support to two of these notions; that children may have an autonomous world, independent to some extent of the worlds of adults; and secondly that children's thoughts and social behaviour may not be totally incomprehensible to adults, so long as we do not try to interpret them in adult terms.

The material used in this section is drawn mainly from the Opie books (1959 and 1969) and from my own observations in St Barnabas School playground.

In the playground, the children ranging from about five years old to ten, naturally spend most of their time playing. To an adult outsider the first impression is one of screaming chaos, restrained only by brick walls and a door separating the two play areas, though these too seem to exude scrambling children. None of the physical objects of the environment offer their usual protective safety; even the benches which might provide a sedate adult corner are upturned. As an outsider one either stands nakedly in the midst of a volley of gunfire, retires clinging to the walls surrounded by young hands and arms claiming attention or one bravely falls on the ground dead joining into the playful warfare. I was soon made aware that the bio-physical environment constituted the main equipment for the apparent confusion and anarchy; important equipment also for communication, as I later found out. The environment has no idiosyncratic meaning at the level of play; the objects, including their own bodies, are at the mercy of the realm of their imagination. Thus the benches, the main door leading into the ground, the door dividing the two play areas, a pot of sand, some stairs leading down to a shed, two drains in the middle of one play area and the children themselves, especially their hands, arms, fingers and feet all show immense potential for possible play. Each object will acquire meaning or value through its relative position with other objects or the specific context. Thus the two drains have value in races in so far as they present different possible starting places. The little ones use the drain nearest the wall, the older ones use the further one. With this view in mind, St Barnabas playground begins to appear at odds with any values which might be applied by an adult visitor. There are two benches. These are however the boxing-ring. This is made explicit by the two up-turned benches placed at right-angles against one of the brick walls. Inside it one boy is holding up a clenched fist while the

'Touch wood and whistle.' This is used in the context of bargain-making. An explanation for this is then that: touching the wood materialises luck onto one's own side of the bargain, whilst the whistling is perhaps for support, though we should refer to other sayings to find its value for children. By this type of analysis a considerable number of children's values may be drawn up. Concepts which have one meaning in the adult sphere begin to possess a different value for children. 'Mother' is held in respect, almost a symbol of truth, closely connected with a child's idea of honour; the colours white, black and green dominate and act as antidotes or dangers depending on the context; backs of objects are devious and polluting; concepts proliferate in connection with food, animals and parts of the body; touching develops almost magic power in its effect; spitting represents separation; clothing takes on a new significance though I am not sure how this works, why for example is touching collars an antidote to bad luck?

In this last part of the paper I have tried to demonstrate that children do reveal a segment of the society's stock of beliefs, values and social interaction, which is exclusive to them; and that we can begin to understand children by observing and listening to them and then interpreting the material collected with various methods in mind. There is then perhaps here the beginnings of an anthropology of children to be extended by, for example (1) elaborating the idea of a semantic system which depends not only on speech but on the bio-physical environment, (2) by constructing some kind of formal list of analytical notions concerning ways of thinking applicable to the child, such as magical thought, the drive for order, metynomy, compiled from such writers as Lévi-Strauss, Piaget, Vygotsky, or de Saussure, (3) by analysing children's sayings, (4) by examining the oral traditions, their games and their other playground activities and the values underlying them, or (5) by analysing children's drawings, such as those collected by de Bono (1972). I am sure that other means and methods of interpretation will gradually emerge as more observation of children is undertaken. There is nothing more difficult than trying to ask the right questions of a subject about which little is known. But I suggest that children have much to offer. Male models of society alone are not sufficient to represent a society, or to reveal its meaning; we may achieve new insights if other dimensions of society are considered. Should there not then be an anthropology of children?

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