Order and Contingencies:

Children's Play in Australian Child Care Centres

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Play is formidable precisely because it is loose in the world, planting its mediations everywhere, shattering the illusion of the immediacy of the real.

(Ricoeur in Kearney, 1984:24)

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"Touva" / "Big Girl" / "Lady"
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Chapter 1

Theoretical and methodological approaches

In this thesis I explore children's play as a form of social interaction, communication, and resource that allows children to organise and reflect upon their everyday lives. The analysis in this thesis is based upon information gathered from two child care centres in Queensland, Australia, between January and June 2009. The child care centre setting has, and is a part of, a comprehensive social structure, which ranges from how teachers' organise time and space in everyday institutional settings to national debates and policies about child care. These aspects are important in order to understand the setting in which children are situated. However, the primary focus of this thesis is what happens within this structure. More specifically, I aim to show some of the ways in which the children interpret and negotiate what they are taught, and how their relationships with each other are established, maintained and redefined through the imaginary worlds of play.

Children and childhood

Ariès (1962) has argued that the idea of childhood as a distinct phase of life is a modern notion in Western societies. Whereas in pre-modern time, artists depicted children as small adults, the family increasingly became centred around the child in the nineteenth century (Ariès, 1962:10). Despite such socio-cultural and historical differences, common for every child is that they are born into a world in the making (Toren, 2009). All cultures have a notion of children as not yet adults, even though the process of becoming an adult is worked out differently. While children have long been included in anthropological studies of initiation rituals for example, several researchers point to a lack of interest in children within anthropology and argue that children have been marginalised (e.g. Goldman, 1998, Hirschfeld, 2002, Schwartzman, 1978). There has also been a tendency to assume that "children simply become – with perhaps some minor variations – what their elders already are" and so "the endpoint of socialization is known" (Toren, 1993:461).

In terms of research on children and childhood, there has been some movement away from the early focus on development, skills and knowledge, where children were approached as adults-in-making. During the 1980s, there was a shift to a new paradigm that viewed children as competent social actors. With this shift, children were also included as informants in research on children and childhood (Lidén, 2005). While both paradigms have pitfalls, they can be seen as complementary approaches to the problem of including in any analysis both children's dependence on adults and their autonomy as social actors. A focus on development and learning, where children are viewed as adults-in-making and recipients of knowledge, excludes how children comment upon, negotiate and reinterpret their social surroundings. However, an exclusive focus on the child as an autonomous social actor runs the risk of downgrading the influence that adults have on children's lives. The approach employed in this thesis includes aspects of both paradigms. What is presented here is an analysis of the children's experiences and the ways in which they constitute their knowledge of the world, as well as the adults' messages and rules that the children are receiving. I will argue that though in the institutional context of the child care centre, time and space are disciplined, children nevertheless find ways to negotiate adult rules and routines in their everyday lives.

Children are not passive recipients of knowledge and culture, though they might sometimes trade on giving that kind of pretence. They are, just as humans in general, "at once products and producers of history" (Toren, 1993:461). Following the change of paradigm in the 1980's, researchers aimed to "give voice to children's voices" (James, 2007) and to gain access to "the child's perspective" (Åm, 1989), emphasising children's otherness to adults. However, by drawing attention to children as a particular social group, they appear as "Others" who are essentially different from adults, and so this discourse also runs the risk of reproducing the very disempowerment one seeks to remedy (Alldred and Burman, 2005:192). It is therefore important to recognise the great similarities between adults and children, and to avoid over-emphasising their otherness. However, shared forms of intersubjectivity make it possible to recognise the differences between children and adults, and this is important in order to explore how children understand and make sense of the world in distinctive ways that simultaneously copy yet differ from adult perspectives.

My role in the field: neither teacher nor child

The general organising categories at work in a child care centre are that of "teacher" and "child" and their relationship is characterised by care as well as discipline.[1] Like the categories of childhood and adulthood, they "depend on each other for their meaning" (Jenkins, 2004:59), and they work to sustain the pedagogic and nurturing practices of the child care centre. In such a fieldwork context the anthropologist is both participant and analyst, and can be said to occupy an ambiguous space in between being an insider and an outsider. I was also in between these general categories and this was my ambiguous space in the child care centre; for I was neither teacher nor child.

Following other researchers who have used children as informants in their research (e.g. Corsaro, 1985, Åm, 1989) I sought to play down my status as an adult in order to gain access to the peer group and behaviour that the children often hid from teachers. I employed a "reactive method of entering the field" (Corsaro, 1985:28), which meant that I waited for the children to initiate contact with me rather than the other way around. The goal was that my interactions with the children would be on their terms and guided by their interests. However, I realized on the first day I entered the child care centre that my physical presence and where I chose to place myself in the room affected the establishment of relationships with the children. Because of my adult size, whether I chose to stand up or sit on the floor was essential. Placing myself on the floor made me more accessible. By doing nothing special, except sitting and watching, and having no apparent reason for doing so, in addition to being a newcomer, made me stand out from the other familiar adults who walked about doing recognisable "teacher" tasks. Some children gave me a few curious looks, some stared and one boy asked me whether I was someone's mum. To play down my status as an adult also involved trying to avoid not only any disciplining of the children but also caring for the children. I mostly refrained from explicitly judging their behaviour, although there were times I considered it necessary to do so. If there was a conflict I would ask them to sort it out or I might suggest they talk to a teacher. In this way I avoided the children ascribing me the status and role of a teacher. Many times I proved to be unhelpful for the children because I was not aware of the detailed rules in the child care centre. Other times I acted as if I did not know the rules, because I found not knowing the rules to be a way to legitimise not interfering in conflicts.

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[1] In addition to work that involves interacting with the children, the teachers have other tasks such as mopping the floor, cleaning tables, bringing in and putting out the beds, filling out paper work, planning tasks, and preparing the children to be picked up by their parents.

By size and age I could easily have passed as an employee as some of the assistants were my age. By actions, however, I differed. The child care centre was occasionally visited by students whose educational course included work experience. I could have been identified as a student, as I did not fit the categories of "teacher" or "child". However, the students often came as a group, they organised activities and they were only there for a short period of time. I did not organise activities, I was alone and I was there at different times of the day, several times a day, every day for a long period of time. Some children noticed this difference and commented on my arrival or departure. Where did I come from? Had I been to the gym? Did I drive a car? Why did I have to go? Where was I going? I could come and go as I wanted to, unlike the teachers who had specific working hours, and I did not have to wait for someone to come and get me, like the children had to.

Although generalising about the children's impressions of me is difficult, their interactions with me differed from their interactions with the other adults in several ways. To some extent, I wilfully assumed the social incompetence of a child and sometimes the children would care for me or they would occasionally assume authority in relation to me. For example, when it was time to tidy up, they would check on me and ask "Are *you* tidying up?" Or more frequently; they would offer to help me. They would remind me to put on sun lotion and mosquito spray, or show me where and how to wash my hands. I never saw the children do similar things or behave in this way towards other adults. They sometimes treated me a smaller child in need of care and, in fact, this was also dominant aspect of their forms of play with each other. They were concerned that I did not get into trouble and they pointed out certain rules to me. Yet at other times they would try to get me to assist them in breaking the rules. Because what children also learn in a child care centre, and which some were keen for me to learn, is how to negotiate institutional rules. In Chapter 2, I argue that the rules and routines create and merge a sense of individuality with collective belonging, and when the children made sure I participated and adapted to these rules, this was also a way of showing how to become a part of the group.

A crucial turning point in my incorporation occurred one day in February, when the oldest girl, Tanya approached me and told me that I could go home. She said it in a happy, matter-of-factly way, as if meaning to be helpful. At this point my focus was to establish good relationships with the children and being told to go home was not exactly what I aimed for.

When I asked her why she was telling me to go home, she started counting the teachers out loud. There were four teachers, she said, so I could go home. Apparently she was aware of and kept track of how many adults were present. In her opinion, four teachers was one too many to what was normally the case, as there were usually just three. I explained to her that I wasn't a teacher and that I was just there to play with them. I also told her that I was going to write a book about them, about what they said and did when they played together. After this incident Tanya advocated my role and presence in the child care centre. On several occasions she repeated to the other children what I had told her; that I wasn't a teacher and that I was just there to play.

These aspects of my role in the child care centre setting show some of the ways in which I was and came to be what Corsaro and Nelson call an "atypical adult" (Corsaro and Nelson, 2003:212). In his fieldwork in a North American preschool William Corsaro came to be regarded by the children as a friend and a "big kid" (Corsaro, 1985, Corsaro and Nelson, 2003). In similar ways, the children in the child care centre setting in Queensland would sometimes explicitly negotiate my status. After this incident which I have argued was a turning point, Tanya would tell other children that I was "just a kid". Some children also included me in their daily negotiations of the categories "friend" and "not friend". The children's knowledge about and management of friendships is analysed in Chapter 3.

Methodological and ethical considerations

The children's world of autonomous play is central to this research and this requires particular kinds of analyses, whilst also raising its own methodological issues. Both of these points involve questions about representation and perspective. Studying children in the context of formal child care means studying children in a setting where time and space are delimited and managed by adults as part of their organisation of everyday life. Nevertheless, Bae (1996:199) argues that within the frame of play, children have temporarily the power to define the situation, and for an adult to participate in children's play she or he has to step partly out of her or his traditional role as an adult and adapt to the players' perspective. In fact, in the child care centre setting, the children's otherness to adults was mediated and defined in relation to play; for playing was something *they* did, and that adults seldom participated in. Further, play was a realm in which the children could exercise some authority over worlds of meaning and identity. In these imaginary worlds they could explore the possibilities of recreating

themselves and their relationships along all kinds of lines that explored both the freedom and constraints of human relatedness. Among the dominant relations that engaged the children were often the ones they had intimate knowledge of, such as older sibling, a parent or a teacher.

It is right to point out that, for example in these inversions of identity, play may help to reduce the disempowering impact of power relationships between an adult researcher and the children of study in the child care centre (Atkinson, 2006). However, one should also note that children play with these inversions of identity when the adult researcher is not around as part of the reducing the disempowering impact of the power relationships they encounter in the everyday world. Further, the imagination and its transformations should not be just reduced to power. For then what does one do with the transformations in identity where children seek to become a monster, a dinosaur, a ninja turtle, a car and all the hybrid possibilities children create through merging and amalgamating objects and identities?

Children's play with the power to create their own identities, their experiments in becoming part-machine or part-animal, for example have to be related to a context where adults have primary authority in many ways – for adults make the major decisions on the children's behalf and over which children have little influence. Within the research situation, the politics of representation becomes somewhat acute, for as children cannot do research autonomously they depend on adults to represent them (Lidén, 2005:34). This produces a situation where children primarily depend on adults to protect their interests because they cannot make an informed decision to participate in research themselves. In my study, the process of informing and asking parents to sign consent forms for their child's participation in my research did not solve everything, as the parents' wish and the child's wish did not always correspond. For example, in one of the child care centres there were two children whose parents did not wish for any participation in my project. One of these children often initiated contact with me, wanted my attention and occasionally followed me around. I found myself often in no position to direct him to other places if he approached me while I played with the other kids and he wished to join in. Sometimes the need to avoid interacting with him kept me from interacting with the other children whose play I could make notes on. I was uncertain as to what was the most ethical way to deal with this situation and along with several other reasons I thus chose to spend most of my time in another centre, where all parents had given their consent.

The children's interest in why I was there and what I was doing varied, but some children interpreted this information in surprising ways. For example, I was asked about anonymity. Names are central identity marker for children. In my research I am formally required by the research ethics committee to render the children anonymous in any written document. One day at lunchtime, a girl asked me about this. Previously I had explained to her that I made notes to remember because I was going to write a book about them. At lunchtime when I took out my paper and pen to make some notes, she noticed and asked me whether I would tell my teacher and class about them and if I was going to mention the children's names. I replied: "*Well, actually I'm not allowed to. It's a rule. I have to make up names*". Intrigued, she asked "*Oh, what are you going to call me?*" I answered; "*Well, I think I'm going to call you Irene.*" Outraged by my unimaginative use of language and names, she commented, "*Oh! Yak! ...You can call me eye bells!*" "*Eye bells?*", I asked. "*Or, you can call me Lily! Lily. And if you forget, you go Lil –Lily! ...My real name is _____, but you can call me Lily!*" I smiled and tried to jot down what she had just said. Then she continued; "*But what are you gonna call Maggie?*" And she started giving names to the children sitting next to us at the table. At first the other children looked a bit puzzled, but Lily explained to them that "*It's only a make-up name, okay? We're just gonna pretend, all right?*" –and suddenly there was one girl called "Lily", one "Donna" and another girl named "Water bottle-Diane".

My explanation of university research ethics was obviously inadequate, at best. But Lily didn't find it difficult to understand at all. What surprised me was how she incorporated research anonymity into the world of children's play, where assuming multiple imaginary identities is a normal part of everyday life. The children usually deploy great imaginative care when selecting names during play interaction. According, some the children were concerned that I recorded their characters in an interesting and thoughtful way. Even if children's imaginary identities might give the appearance of frivolity, they are in fact not chosen completely at random. While I thought I knew about the ethics of care about names, the children had their own lessons to teach me about making-up names that re-identified them. My point is that there are different ethical requirements here; the ethics of what the children ask of me, the ethics of what parents and staff ask of me, and also what the university asks of me. I found that sometimes these requirements and wishes were conflicting. What is interesting about some of the names suggested "Eye bells" or "Water bottle-Diane" is how they subvert the very naming process, the very process of fixing identity to a single thing or a

single person. Children often take up hybrid identities (partly eyes and partly bells, partly water bottle and partly Diane) as playful opposition to the sense making world of adult identifications. The children had their own established worlds of transfigured identities and they sought to teach me how to play with names, how to substitute identities within identities.

The ethnographic examples upon which the analysis is based were not initiated or organised by the researcher, however, I was often a participant. Some researchers (e.g. Goldman, 1998:104-106) choose to make a distinction between "fabricated" and "natural" play depending on the researcher's presence. This is possible by employing a method of audio recordings. As will be elaborated on in Chapter 2, the child care centre setting offered few possibilities for the children to be on their own, away from the gaze of adults. While this distinction and method have advantages for analyses focusing on linguistics such as Goldman's (1998), one of the drawbacks is the difficulty of maintaining visual contact. Because I wanted to include the prominent visual aspects of children's communication and how play is performed, this method was not really an option. The main part of the information upon which this thesis is based was gathered in the form of written fieldnotes. However, I also made use of videotaping for the purpose of detailed analysis of the children's actions, body language and speech during play interaction. If research on children is a sensitive issue, what is even more sensitive is the issue of images of children. Many parents hesitated to sign when I did a second round of information and consent forms specifically to get permission for audio-visual recording. There were two common concerns; uncontrolled distribution of images on the internet, and the fear of paedophilia. Most, but not all parents gave consent to have their child videotaped. The play interactions that I was allowed to record were specified as involving a limited number of particular children. Further, I also undertook not to expose the recordings I have in any forum – they serve the purpose of detailed transcription only.

In May, when I introduced the video camera into one of the child care centres, it caused some initial curiosity, but the children quickly became used to my camera and it was only occasionally that anyone commented upon it. For children, being photographed and filmed has become an everyday event, for example at birthdays, family gatherings, holidays and other outings. But also, in these child care centres, the teachers photographed children during the day as part of documentation of their pedagogic work and these photos were shown to parents. One of the reasons for doing so was to provide a basis for the parents' conversation with their child about his or her day. The camera did however have a significant impact upon

me, limiting my participation, which was one of the reasons why I chose to spend only two weeks filming and relied more heavily on taking fieldnotes. Still, the video recordings have been important in the analytic process in that they allowed me to re-play and re-experience the minute details of children's play.

Conceptualising play

Dating back to Plato and Aristotle, the human imagination has been analysed and debated within different philosophical traditions for millenniums. The "concerns with humans as actors in, and authors of, their own fictions are profoundly anthropological in nature" (Goldman, 1998:xvi). Such concerns speak to the nature of the human sociality as grounded in the imagination (Castoriadis, 1987). While play constitutes a dominant form of social interaction among all human beings, it is especially pronounced or dominant in the social interactions of children. I start off the thesis by approaching play as communication, but later combine this with a phenomenological approach which is concerned with how experience is organised (Goffman, 1974, Ricoeur, 1991). In Chapter 4, I focus on children's communication through the imaginary and their manipulation of frames. Play is approached as an attitude rather than a unified activity. Following Bateson (2000), I treat play as involving metacommunication; communication not simply of content but about the status of the content. It involves meanings about how to interpret meanings. During play, actions are *framed* by the often tacit message "this is play". However, this metacommunicative message generates a paradox because what is communicated through this message is that one's actions do not mean what they usually would have meant, as when animals fight playfully. "The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson, 2000:180). The nip, then, can be said to simultaneously be a bite and a not-bite. Bateson says this is the distinctive feature of play. First, that the signals one exchanges in play can be claimed as untrue or not meant. Second, that the meaning of these signals is non-existing (Bateson, 2000:183). Goffman (1974) further elaborates Bateson's concept of frame and argues that, in the above example, real fighting is a model or pattern which is well known and has its own meaning, and that when the fighting behaviour is transformed into play, it is rendered meaningful by the *contrast* to this original model. What Goffman is arguing is that play is patterned on 'originals'. The originals do not have to be real for they can in the case of children involve: a film, cartoon or fairy tale. Moreover, Goffman argues, play is not just a *copy*, for play also involves a *transformation* of what is copied. It involves more a

transfiguration of the original or the "real". Here, the "real" operates as a contrast, as an original reality that set up a relationship that allows play to be conceptualised or framed as "unreal". As Goffman (Goffman, 1974:560-561) notes:

> When we decide that something is unreal, the real it isn't need not itself be very real, indeed, can just as well be a dramatization of events as the events themselves – or a rehearsal of the dramatization, or a painting of the rehearsal or a reproduction of the painting. Any of these latter can serve as the original of which something is a mere mock-up, leading one to think that which is sovereign is relationship, not substance.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I use a phenomenological approach to analyse the relationship between "reality" as a world of original dominant meanings and the children's imaginary worlds and narratives.

Phenomenology began as a critique of the philosophical doctrine which claims that reality can be described only in the terms of natural science (cf. Skirbekk and Gilje, 2000:579, Sokolowski, 2000). However, phenomenology is not a rejection or an alternative to natural science. Instead it seeks to grasp the life-world as it appears to those who live in it. In this way, phenomenology can be seen as "neither subjectivist nor objectivist, but inter-relational, with a model of human as intelligent organism in relation to an environing life-world, which is both historical, cultural and natural" (Ihde, 2009). One of the terms employed here in relation to the children's play is the term 'narrative', suggested by Ricoeur (1991). He argues that to "distance narrative from lived experience and to confine it to the region of fiction" is an oversimplification of the relationship between history and life (1991:20). 'Narrative' offers the possibility of thinking of "examined life as a narrated life, characterized by a struggle between concordance and discordance, the aim of which is to discover, not to impose on oneself, a narrative identity" (Wood, 1991:11). This, I suggest, is also part of children's play; what is analysed in Chapter 5 is the ways in which the children incorporate aspects of their everyday life into their imaginary narratives. I argue that the imaginary narratives that children create during play become not just vehicles for reflections on reality, they are also ways of instituting and exploring alternative versions of reality, for these imaginary realities also mediate and establish the everyday relations between children.

In his analysis of the function of fiction in shaping reality, Ricoeur (1979:127) argues that "the paradox of fiction [is that] because it has no previous referent, it may refer in a productive way to reality, and even *increase* reality". It is important to note that Ricoeur distinguishes between image as fiction and image as copy as two different "modes of givenness". As both Bateson and Goffman points out, although play behaviour has a model, through play this model is transformed, not copied. This is similar to Ricoeur's argument. In his terms, play would be in the category of image as fiction. What is overlooked and which constitutes the distinction between the image as fiction and the image as replica, is the change in referential status (Ricoeur, 1979:125). The replica refers to something which exists and it refers to it *in absentia*, while fiction refers to a non-existing object. The copy refers to an original, and the fiction, on the other hand, is made of components derived from previous experience, but fiction can not be said to refer to a previous original because of the new combination of these components (Ricoeur, 1979:125-127). In other words, the children's play worlds have a regularity in that they are related to the real world, but when the children play there is also a distance to reality, which what allows for reflection.

Building on Bateson's theory on metacommunication in play, Stewart (1979:37) elaborates on this distance to reality and says that "all play involves a detachability of messages from their context of origin, the creation of a new play-specific space/time with its own rules of procedure". Further, Stewart (1979:29) argues, because play involves manipulation of contexts and not just the message itself, the play-specific time/space is not just "shift within the domain of everyday lifeworld; rather, it is a shift to another domain of reality". While referring to Stewart's (1979) work, in which she chooses to use the term 'domain', I prefer to call these play-specific time/spaces 'imaginary worlds' because I believe the connotations of the term 'world' has some advantages. This term has the sense that they are encompassing; the children create these worlds through shared effort, they inhabit the imaginary worlds and they are positioned in these worlds, therefore the worlds also create them. These worlds are tenuous and need to be continuously worked at, but 'world' captures how children's play-specific time/spaces become larger than each participant's individual imagination – for they are shared. They are intersubjective, encompassing worlds that, as we shall see later, can constrain as much as they free their participants.

Chapter outline

Before moving into the phenomenology of play, in the next chapter, Chapter 2, I will contextualise the children's interactions by discussing the institutional structure that makes up the child care centre. This will involve a discussion that ranges from national child care politics to the teachers' detailed organisation of everyday life in the child care centre. The latter includes teachers' management of time and space so that they become disciplinary technologies which incorporate children into an ordered sense of self and world. For much of its time, the child care centre amounts to being almost a "total institution" (Goffman, 1991). The centre encloses the sleeping, eating and relaxation activities of children into a common protective space that has as its goal the project of educating the children along certain lines.

In Chapter 3, my focus shifts to children's interpretations and negotiations of their social relations within this setting. Their knowledge about friendship relations comes from the teachers' messages, but also from their own experience of friendships with other children in everyday life. I argue that the concepts of "friends" and "play" are closely tied, and that being "friends" or "not friends" was relevant for inclusion and exclusion of social interaction among the children. I further show how gifts can be used as a negotiation strategy, although these gifts are somewhat different from what we ordinarily think of as gifts. They are not material gifts but gifts of friendship and of play time; they are imaginary gifts or, more accurately, gifts of the imagination. These gifts involve shared respect, participation, but also contestation over the elaboration of collective narratives. I analyse the children's understanding of friendships in relationship to the teachers' messages about friendships and how these relate to Western ideals and conceptions of the self. There are discrepancies between these different kinds of messages, and these often come to the fore in children's experiences of play which involve relations of trust, debt and conflict over who can be a friend.

In Chapter 4, I analyse the children's communication of different forms of make-believe by discussing play in relation to other similar social practices; deception and jokes. I focus on how children negotiate and manipulate frames in their communication and interaction with other children. I argue that even in highly organised adult pedagogic activities, opportunities exist for the children to escape the control of adults and to renegotiate adults' authority over them and over the meanings that govern children's lives. In these subversive acts, which are often dismissed as foolishness and nonsense, it is the boundaries between different categories

of social practices that are blurred by children who often delight in these disruptive tricks that disturb the categories and routines of everyday life in the child care centre.

Having discussed and analysed the children's social relations and their communication of different forms of make-believe, in Chapter 5, I turn more fully to the detailed content of children's play. This final chapter shows how many aspects of everyday life that were described and analysed in previous chapters are incorporated into children's imaginary narratives. The focus of analysis is what the children choose to incorporate and how they do this, rather than their reasons for doing so. I argue that the imaginary can be seen as a resource that the children engage in, and this often involves children playing with the different boundaries between fiction and reality.

Chapter 2

Organisation of time and space

In the child care centre, adults have authority in relation to skills and knowledge, and they organise everyday life in detail; when and where children eat, sleep, and play. However, the staff are also governed by a comprehensive body of child care policies and regulations which they must incorporate in their planning and organisation. While the main focus of this thesis is what happens within this institutional setting, child care centres are also part of a larger social order that has certain understandings of childhood, care and pedagogy. The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the teachers' organisation of time and space. First, I discuss the increasing bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of child care in Australia from the 1970s onwards. I then move on to a more detailed description of the organisation of everyday life in the two centres where I did fieldwork. I spent most of my time in one child care centre and about one month in another child care centre. Whilst there are also nation-wide, private, for-profit child care corporations in Australia, the centres in my research were both non-profit centres where children could be left for the whole working day. In both centres, children were sorted by age in different rooms, and the children in this study were the oldest children in the child care centres, ranging from 3 to 5 years old. When writing about the different centres, unless specified otherwise, I refer to this particular group of children and the staff who supervised their particular rooms and the adjoining outside areas. This thesis focuses on children's play in these designated rooms and their outside areas, more than on the child care centre as a whole. The emphasis in this thesis will be on the first child care centre. I have called it the "Koala Centre", and it had the "Pebbles Room". For comparative purposes, I will also include empirical details from the second child care centre, the **"Billabong Centre"**, and the "Wallabies Room".[2]

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[2] Like the identities of my research informants, these names are also made up to disguise the location and identity of these centres.

Child care politics in Australia

The Koala Centre had a reputation for being a "high quality centre". On several occasions I was told to ask the director about the length of her list of waiting applicants and how it was common to fill out an application for a place by parents who just found out that they were expecting a new child. For the people I talked to both inside and outside of the child care centre, what "good quality" meant seemed to be obvious. No details were given when they talked about "good quality care", as if what this was apparent and unanimously recognised. I soon learned that measuring quality has been a pivotal part of child care politics in Australia for the last two decades, and that a national system, the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* (QIAS), has been installed for evaluating every centre on a regular basis.

Since the 1970s, child care has become a major political issue in Australia (Brennan, 2007a:125). In 1972, the Commonwealth Government became a key player in early childhood education and care when the *Child Care Act* was introduced and funding was directed at non-profit, or community based, child care operators (OECD, 2001:18). However, child care politics within Australia can not be seen as isolated from the international political sphere or other domains such as academic research, but is, rather, operating "within a complex web of domestic and international policy contexts" (Brennan, 2007c:69). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, there was a change of paradigm within research on children and childhood in the 1980s, which involved a move from a focus on development and children as adults-in-the-making, to a focus on children as autonomous social actors. James (2007) argues that it can hardly be seen as accidental that this change happened around the same time as the *United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CROC) was established, in 1989. The rhetoric of "giving voice to children" has been powerful both with policy makers and activists, and has become, James argues, "a symbol of the modern welfare state's commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, and care" (James, 2007:261).

Australia has participated in this transformation, whose international character is beyond the scope of this thesis. In her comparative overview, Brennan argues that an "emerging trend in European child care policy is to see the child (rather than the parent) as the focus of policy", but that the major concerns in Australia have recently been the "quality and affordability and widespread anxiety about the hundreds of millions of dollars now being directed to corporate child care chains" (Brennan, 2007c:70). This underpins the concerns that are voiced, both

inside and outside the child care centre setting, when making comments on "high quality centres" and waiting lists. Nonie Harris (2008) recently did a study of women's reflections on choosing long day care in a regional community in Queensland. She also noticed that quality, affordability, and corporate child care chains were common concerns. This is similar to how people I was in contact with also expressed concerns about declining quality with the commercialisation of child care, which in turn had produced long waiting lists for the community based centres. Indeed, in Harris' (2008:53) study one of the women interviewed equated the length of a waiting list with the quality of a child care centre :

> I could not for love or money get her into (a community-based centre). A huge waiting list – renowned for its excellence – just can't get them in. And another thing – you know when a centre is good or not – if you can get your child straight in there it's not good … and if it's got a waiting list you know it's a good centre.

The woman interviewed here voices a concern for quality rather than the size or cost of the centre. She is not worried about not getting a place in a child care institution, but rather about getting a place in a child care centre which is *good*. In 1991 the Australian government extended the provision of subsidies to users of private, for-profit child care centres, which included both small independent businesses and publicly listed corporate chains. Highlighting the need for consumer choice, the government sought to establish "a responsive market-driven sector that is encouraged by parent demand to establish centres where parents need them and quality care at a price they can afford" (Harris, 2008:54). Changes in funding regulations produced a vast expansion of private, for-profit care centres, which now dominate the provision of care for children below school age (Brennan, 2007a:125-126). Although most are operated as small businesses, which often own and run only one centre, huge corporate child care chains have also emerged. The largest was the ABC Learning Centres which in 2006 operated 905 care centres nation-wide (Harris, 2008:45). However, it experienced severe financial problems in 2008 and many of this corporate chain's centres have recently been sold.[3] Referring to all of these changes, the director of the Koala Centre talked about how non-profit centres had to re-organise to compete with the private operators:

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[3] For more details and recent news see the Australian Government website: http://www.mychild.gov.au/abc.htm. The webpage was last accessed on the 1st of October 2010.

> They gave child care benefit to private operators – then child care just exploded. […] So then of course it was a local playing field so we had to compete with the private sector and we had to become a little business, a small business, and change. You really couldn't do what you want with the staff, you had to think about how much the staff cost and…cause that's where most of your costs are…I think our staff cost about 80% of our budget, in some commercial centres it can be as low as 40. It means that 40% go to shareholders, 40% back for staff and 20% for everything else. You use juniors, and…you often don't meet regulations. And you get terrible quality. It's called herding.

Along with the expansion of services and increase in competition, the transition to a child care market also led to the privatisation of child care centres which had previously been community based. A staff member in the Pebbles Room, Ann, explained to me that she had been working there for about three weeks when I arrived. Previously, she had worked in another child care centre. She had worked there for many years but then ABC took over three years ago and one by one the original staff quit. There were many changes with regards to rules, routines and paper work, but also the environment changed. The swings were removed, the grass was replaced with artificial grass, and no playground equipment was to be over a certain height – all to avoid law suits, Ann explained. The additional paper work included written reports to parents for every scratch the children might get during the day. She told me that all the new tasks led to the staff having less time with the children, and that some parents were annoyed by all the injury reports because they had to remember to sign them and return them. In the end, Ann was the only one left from the original staff, and then she finally quit the job as well to start working in a community based centre. In Ann's account the transition from a community based centre to a for-profit, corporate chain centre involved many changes. The story highlights some of the major child care issues which are debated in Australia today. In general, many people are ambivalent and indeed have major reservations about the idea of making money from caring for children.

Measuring quality

One major political concern is the cost of child care, and the Australian Government provides *Child Care Benefit* (CCB) to reduce the cost to parents. The amount paid depends upon various factors including family income, the ages of children in care and the number of hours

of care (Brennan, 2007a:127). For parents to be eligible for child care assistance, the service they use has to be open for a certain number of hours per day and weeks per year, licensed by the relevant state or territory authority and registered with the *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* (QIAS) (Brennan, 2007b:214-215). The accreditation system has been gradually developed since it was first introduced in 1993, its fundamental role being "to define the parameters by which the standards of quality care may be defined and applied to children's services in Australia" (NCAC, 2006a:4). The implementation of the revised QIAS in 2002 brought two significant changes; an expansion of the structure of overarching quality areas and principles, and the introduction of a standard 2.5 year period of accreditation (NCAC, 2006a:6-7). In other words, after a child care centre has been accredited for the first time, this decision is reconsidered every 2.5 years. The QIAS Handbook describes the quality improvement process as "5 steps to quality care": registration, self-study and continuing improvement, validation, moderation, and accreditation decision (NCAC, 2006b:9). This is the process as a whole, from the time of establishment to the first accreditation. When a centre comes up for review, it must provide reports on its quality and it is then subject to a spot check visit by validators within a given time frame of six weeks.

When asked about the financial assistance to parents offered by the government, the directors of the two child care centres both replied that it would be impossible to run a child care centre without offering the parents the CCB. This makes it crucial for the centres to get good reviews in the validators' reports and it places much responsibility upon the staff. In May one of the child care centres received a letter saying they were up for review. The director of the centre talked about the accreditation process and said "It's driving us all bonkers at the moment!" The group leader of a room in this child care centre also expressed concern about the validation visits. This is a centre well known as a high quality centre and the group leader of the room had been through the review process several times before. She was still worried about the visits and spent the evenings at home outside working hours going over the QIAS papers. She showed me some of the papers from QIAS with different principles and guidelines by which they would be reviewed. The papers made a high pile and included among other things a detailed description of how social interaction and relationships between staff and children should be. As a group leader, every aspect of what went on in her room is her responsibility. Not only was she responsible for her own relationships with the children, parents and staff, but also their relationships with each other. Aside from social relationships, the QIAS also consider areas such as health, safety, planning and evaluation. In an interview,

the director talked about changes within child care politics in her time and she explained: "That's the thing with the accreditation; it's so hard to remember all the principles and understand what they want." The group leader claimed it was so stressful to have validators come and spend two full days in the centre reviewing everything and quietly making notes in their papers. She gave this as a reason why fewer people now wanted to become group leader. In her opinion the accreditation system was "good for keeping the dodgy centres clean", but it also "puts a lot of stress on the good ones".

In 2004, long day care centres were the most frequently used formal child care service in Australia (Harris, 2008:44). However, there are different options for parents wanting child care and this type of service is one of many. Others include pre prep/kindergarten centres, occasional care centres, school age care services and home based child care. All the above have to be licensed and monitored. In addition to these alternatives there are several non licensed child care services, as for example vacation care or babysitters. What separates the long day care centres from the other options is first of all the hours of care. These centres are generally open Monday to Friday between 6 am and 6 pm for at least 48 weeks of the year. For parents with children below school-age and full-time jobs, this is the most likely option. In Australia there has been much debate about the form and content of child care services. For example, should child care be educational and part-time? Should full day services be available so that parents can have full-time wage-work? As women increasingly participated in the labour market from the 1960s and onwards, demand for child care services increased. Recent statistics show that women now represent 48% of the total work force in Australia according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2009), and 51 % of children who are in formal child care are attending long day child care centres (Harris, 2008:44).

The Koala child care Centre

The Koala child care Centre had a very good reputation. It was built in 1995; a few years after the government changed the funding regulations to include private for-profit centres. A small company was established, but it was still run as a non-profit centre. The centre was open from 7.30 am to 6.00 pm, but few of the children stayed in the centre for the maximum number of hours each day. The centre was a colourful concrete building with natural surroundings. You entered through a gate with a coil spring mechanism which prevented children from opening it. When you went in there was a bright, air-conditioned reception with posters, pamphlets and

an information board for the parents, all carrying different messages. The information changed from time to time, but included messages about activities such as local swimming courses and the importance of teaching your child to swim, instructions on sun protection, or messages and pamphlets from government departments and councils on "Choosing Quality Child Care" or information about dengue fever. The front desk was to your left and the director's office was to your right. The middle of the centre had two green beds with plants and trees and a concrete pathway all the way around it, and entrances to all the rooms were lined up on either side of a central corridor. Along the path there was also a visitor's toilet, a kitchen and storage rooms. The interior of the centre was, like the outside, bright and colourful. Half-way doors with locks on the outside marked the entrance to the different rooms. The centre had 6 different rooms with 3 rooms and a playground on each side of the centre. There were a total of 75 licensed places for children between the ages of 2 months to 5 years. When you went through the reception and entered the centre there were three "baby rooms" on your right, with children from 2 months to 2.5 years, and on the other side there were children from 2.5 years to 5 years. There was one room with "toddlers" who were children from 2.5 to 3 years, and there were two rooms with children from 3 to 5 years. These groups of children were called "kindy kids" or "pre preps" interchangeably. The Pebbles Room where I spent time was on the left side with the older children.

There were around 30 different children who attended the Pebbles Room, with about half of those children being there full-time. Every day there were on average 20-24 children in each room, 24 being the maximum number of children per day. This number was regulated by the maximum number of children allowed per adult and these ratios depend on the children's age. Given these factors, the composition of the group of children changed from day to day as well as during the day. The staff profile was generally steadier, with three women of different ages being there nearly every day. On a wall outside the door to the Pebbles Room there was a board with information about the staff's different positions: the group leader was listed as Judy, the first assistant was, Ann, who has had many years of experience working in child care centres. The second assistant was initially Linda but later Gemma, who were both younger women with less experience. The director, who participated in the process of building the centre in 1995, had remained the director ever since. Occasionally, the centre used "relief staff" to fill in, for example in case of illness or vacation. Despite some variation, the group leader and the assistants were there on a regular basis. Judy grew up in this region and had been working in the centre for a number of years. Some of the children in Pebbles

had been going there since they were younger and had attended other rooms for their age, so Judy had known some of the children for a long time. The other staff members who worked regularly in the Pebbles Room had started working in this room more recently.

The organisation of time and space in the Pebbles Room

There were four main activities during the day: being inside, being outside, eating and resting. These four activities took place in three main areas; the room inside, the outside playground shared with two other rooms, and the concrete area which was in between the room and the common playground. The concrete area was shared with these two other rooms but each room had its designated space. There was also a fourth area, the bathroom, which could be accessed from both the concrete and the inside areas. The bathroom was the only area the children used which I did not enter. The map of the Pebbles Room (Figure 1) gives an idea of approximately how the four different areas are distributed.

Figure 1 – The Pebbles Room[4]

Outside area / Playground

Concrete area / Veranda

Outside mat

Tables and chairs

Fridge | Lockers | Inside mat | Other room

Bathroom area

Other room

Arts and crafts area | Home corner | Blocks and buliding area

Inside area / Pebbles room

Closet and storage room

Group leader's desk

Place for parents to sign their child in and out & message board

Inside hallway

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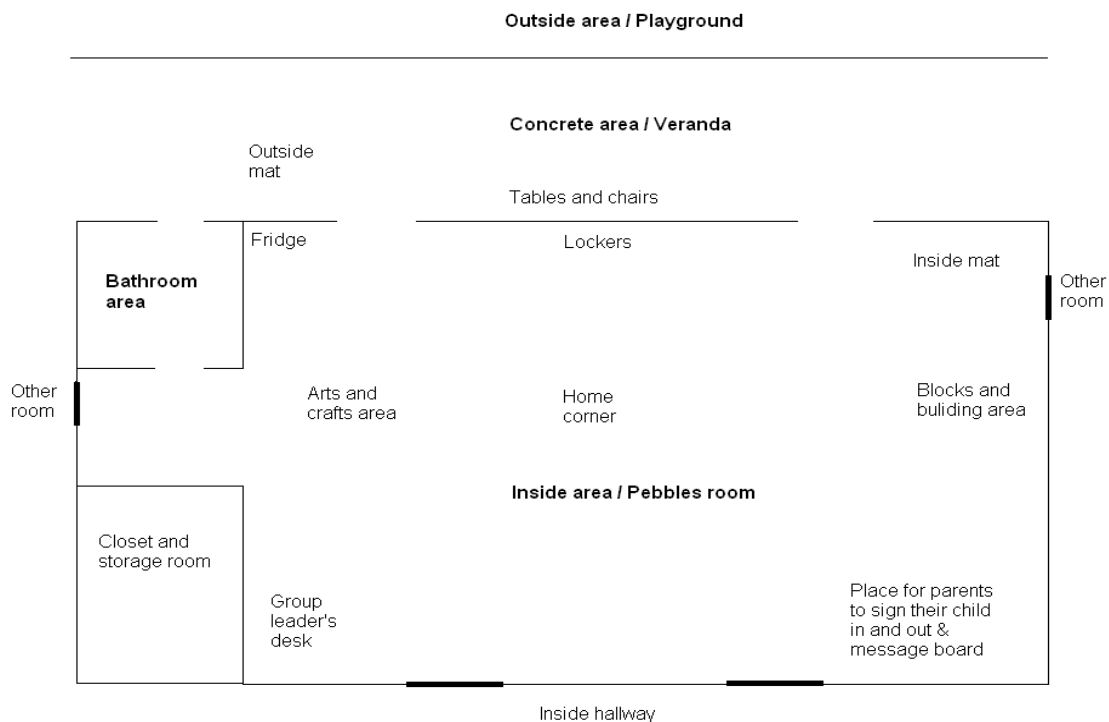
[4] Openings in the lines represent passages which are open, while the broader lines represent doors which are locked.

When the parents dropped off their children in the morning they entered the Pebbles Room from the inside hallway, put the child's things in his or her locker, their food in the fridge and then they signed the child in over by the message board. Children were delivered and picked up at different hours of the day. Some children came early in the morning and others sometimes came in time for lunch. Most children were picked up between three and four o'clock in the afternoon while some children did not get picked up until the centre was about to close at 6 pm. Some parents worked and others studied whilst some were at home as housewives or various forms of work leave. This meant the degree to which parents were flexible in relation to delivering and picking up their child varied. During the day the children in the three rooms shared the left side playground but generally did not mix when inside. In the outside playground, there were often children from more than one room. Also, by the end of the day when most of the children had been picked up and most of the staff had gone home, the ones who were left from the three rooms usually came together in the Pebbles Room.

During the day the staff followed a schedule made by the group leader which instructed what to do when and where, and this schedule was posted on the wall beside the place where parents signed their child in and out. The daily schedule on the next page (Figure 2) gives an overview of how daily life was organised.

Figure 2 – The daily schedule

7.30 – 8.30 am	Open
8.30 – 9.00	Morning outdoor time
9.00 – 9.30	Morning settling in
9.30 – 9.40	Morning group time
9.40 – 9.45	Transition to morning time
9.45 – 10.15	Morning tea time
10.15 – 11.00	Free play and activities
11.00 – 11.30	Tidy up time and transition to outdoor time
11.30 – 12.00	Group time
12.00 – 12.30	Lunch time
12.30 – 2.30 pm	Rest time
2.30 – 3.00	Veranda time
3.00 – 3.20	Afternoon tea
3.20 – 3.50	Inside activities, free play and sunscreen application
3.50 – 4.00	Tidy up and pack away
4.00 – 5.00/5.30	Outdoor play
5.30 – 6.00	Indoor

When asked about the daily schedule the staff told me it was very flexible and that they did not always follow it. But in general, it was followed, for staff would occasionally comment on how they were behind schedule. The staff members seemed to have memorised the schedule, and the division of tasks seemed well established as the staff seldom spent time discussing who should do what jobs when. They had routines which made it easier to get everything done. A good example of how the staff organised themselves as well as the children according to the schedule was the organisation around group time. Usually only one staff member, the group leader or the first assistant, arranged group time while the others spent this time doing other tasks. As a way to finish off group time and to make the transition to lunch, the teachers would often organise games with the children. They would use rhymes that were combined with movements, and this included for example "Five cheeky monkeys swinging in a tree" or "Five currant buns in a baker shop". Learning numbers and counting was a central part of

these two rhymes, but in addition the different games also seemed to ease the transition from group time to meals, because most of the games included sending off a limited number of children to go wash their hands in the bathroom. This was meant to avoid an overcrowded bathroom and organised the children to wait for their turn. Through these games the children acquired detailed instructions on what to do, how to do it and when to do it. They acquired a memory of institutional routines mediated by song, rhymes and games, which served to transform discipline into pleasurable forms of anticipation. The children knew that they were to move calmly and quietly from the inside mat to the bathroom, wash their hands, dry their hands with a paper towel, put the towel in the bin, get their lunch box and water bottle from the fridge, and go find a place to sit by one of the tables outside on the veranda. By this time, one or more of the staff had already put out the tables and chairs while the children were on the mat having group time.

The daily schedule shows how time is disciplined in the child care centre and how forms of discipline are merged with pleasures so that discipline becomes pleasurable. The sharing of common routines between the children also creates a common world of meaning between them, it creates relations of solidarity, for they share and are subject to the same time-space regimes. Here children are introduced at a very early age to the everyday time-tables and forms of discipline which will organise their lives in schools and later in the workplace (cf. Foucault, 1999). In his classic study of the making of the English working class, Thompson (1967) writes about time-discipline and looks at conceptions of time in relation to work from a historical perspective. More specifically, Thompson (1967) compares the rural farmer, the wife and the industrial worker in a Western European, capitalistic context, and describes the transition to employed labour and how this created a notion of time as currency, measured by the clock, as opposed to the task-oriented work of the farmer who followed the annual cycle of weather and seasons. In the rural economy, he argues, the labourer's wife in the rural economy did the most task-oriented work of all; "the mother of young children has an imperfect sense of time and attends to other human tides" (Thompson, 1967:79). In the modern child care centre setting, there is a combination of task-oriented care and the notion of time as currency. The staff were paid by the hours but their work was caring for and educating young children whose needs were not organised by the clock. The staff said the time schedule was flexible, but they also commented on being behind schedule. The children learn that time is managed, that different times have different spaces and different activities which are controlled by different people. Writing about the expansion and incorporation of the working

class into schools in the late 18th century, Thompson (1967:84-85) describes, "Once in the school gates, the child entered the new universe of disciplined time. […] Once in attendance, they were under military rule". Schools have obviously changed since then but Thompson's point is about a new way of organising and experiencing time, which is bound up with a new kind of social order where modern urban industry begins to replace rural agriculture. This social order is bound up also with the establishing of total institutions and the use of disciplined forms of time to produce new disciplined subjects who can follow the rhythms of industry and capitalism. Though there are major differences between 18th century educational institutions versus contemporary schools and child care centres, the point here is that through all such pedagogic institutions children learn that time which belongs to them always follows forms of time that belong to and are organised by others. Time schedules are not neutral but can in this way be seen as embodiments of the logic of a social order. Indeed, we might say that a primary fundamental pedagogic exercise for being socialised is the acceptance and internalisation of the logic of disciplinary forms of time.

Child care centres have certain similarities to what Goffman in his analysis of asylums names calls "total institutions". Their defining characteristic is a breakdown of the barriers which ordinarily, in modern societies, separate three spheres of life; sleep, play and work (1991:17). One example of the breakdown which is found in the child care centres is collective sleeping arrangements (Goffman, 1991:32). I do not wish to argue that the concept of total institution is a perfect fit for the child care centre, but I want to note the similarities as a reminder of the comprehensive structure of the institutional world within which the children were situated. When in the child care centre, children sleep, play and work all in the very same room. Songs, music, public announcements, physical exercises and visible objects or signs helped to create this transition into other activities. The teachers would announce "Five more minutes before pack up time!" in order to prepare the children for what was happening next. Five minutes later it was "pack up time". When everything was packed up, they might be told to go and sit down on the mat for "group time" or "mat time", or they would be told to get their hats and line up at the door for "outside time". During lunch, one or two of the staff brought out beds from storage and spread them out in the inside room while the children were eating outside on the concrete area. When the children had finished eating they went to pack away their lunch boxes, wash their hands and lay down. The children lay just a few centimetres off the floor because the beds were low and this made the beds safe and easy to stack away. For their sleep, the centre provided linen which were changed and washed on a regular basis. Every bed had a

laminated sign bearing one of the children's names, which gave a space of belonging to each child for a certain time. Like time, the movement between spaces acquired a routinised form that created and merged a sense of individuality with collective belonging. Away from the safety of their parents, children discover an alternative world of belonging in the symbolic organisation of space, time and objects by the institution and its carers. All of the children had to lie on their beds, which were separated by other inventory in the room, like shelves for blocks or books. The children were allowed to choose a book before they lie down. However, once they lied down, they were told to stay on their beds and be quiet. Some children went to sleep and the staff monitored this by making notes of who slept and for how long. This creates for parents a sense that their children are being properly monitored and cared for. The records objectify the caring gaze of child care staff. This is also way of communicating to parents that they are not homogenising and merging the children into a manageable mass, but are attentive to every child's individual needs.

Governing everyday life

The everyday life in the child care centre has been increasingly re-organised and regulated by federal and state government guidelines and regulations. The directors of both centres, who had 28 and 14 years of experience in child care, both commented on changes during their careers. The director of the second child care centre explained to me:

> Some of the regulations…they're fairly wordy documents, but it's interesting
> to read because you know what the set standards are, so I like that. When I first
> started in child care there were minimal directions from the government. As
> time has gotten on and as people and governments that are, you know, in power,
> have different beliefs on children and they value children differently, so it has
> changed. […] And obviously as our knowledge base has started and increased
> we've had more regulations. It's to protect the staff, protect the families, the
> children – everyone.

The increasing bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of child care centres is partly embraced as a form of protective care that embodies increased knowledge and more humanitarian concern with children. However, as Ann's account earlier in this chapter indicates, the increase in paper work is not totally welcomed for it adds to already high

workloads.[5] Today, everyday life in each room is programmed and monitored in detail. This includes recording the daily schedule, sleeping times for each child, injury reports, and the signing in and out of children.

As an aspect of institutional life, Goffman (1991:51) notes how the inmate of the mental hospital "begins to receive formal and informal instruction in what will here be called the privilege system", with the three basic elements of this system being rules, rewards and punishments. A privilege system was also present in the child care centres and some children were skilful navigators within this system. I, on the other hand, was not, especially in the beginning. In this sense I was less socially competent than most of the children, and this did not go unnoticed. One reaction was that the children would sometimes help me with instructions to do what they were doing. For example they would tell me to put on a hat, put on mosquito-spray, stand in line, or wash my hands. I never witnessed any of the children giving such helpful instructions to the other adults. This shows that to some extent the children form a self-policing and self-monitoring community. They take on the responsibility of teaching new children the rules and this is part of how they care for each other. In addition to rules there were also punishments, like for example a child who was disturbing group time might be asked to go some other place, and hence be excluded from group time. Rewards included things like getting a stamp on the back the hand for tidying up well, getting positive feedback from the teacher in front of everyone else at group time, or being allowed to use a special toy that was treasured by other children. When looking at rules, punishments and rewards, which can be said to represent elements of what Goffman calls a privilege system, I consider these features first and foremost as something which was controlled by the staff. Reference to and negotiation of the rules, however, was not uncommon in social interactions among children. In fact, my presence and incompetence occasionally proved to be an opportunity for the children to negotiate the rules, as in the following example.

In the Pebbles Room, the children brought their own food and they put it in the fridge. During meal times, they sometimes needed help to open their yoghurt, peel an apple or open a packet of biscuits. Like the staff I joined the children at the tables and sometimes I also brought something to eat for myself. There were usually three or four different tables on the veranda, and given that many staff often had other tasks, I was often the only adult at my table. In

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[5] See page 22 for Ann's account of the changes that occurred when the child care centre she worked at previously was bought by a private company.

general, I enjoyed mealtimes because it was a good opportunity for conversations. But, on some occasions, the situation proved to be quite challenging because some children saw this as an opportunity to test my knowledge of the rules and my authority as an adult. The table that I was at would sometimes become the loudest or the one where good manners were not upheld and where naughty words might be uttered. I believe the children were testing the boundaries of my ambiguous state to see if I would assume the role of a disciplining supervising adult, or if I would conspire in allowing their transgressions to go unnoticed. Others who have studied children have noted the issue of "telling" as a focal point of attention when establishing relationships of trust and confidence with them (see for example Helgesen, 2008). In a similar way as Goffman (1991) notes for inmates in total institutions, there was a solidarity among the children in their knowledge and acts of transgressions of institutional rules.

There was one way of breaking the rules which I facilitated more than once. Given that the children brought their own food, many children brought something sweet to eat for afternoon tea. Often the children need help to open the protective wrappers of their sweets. Before I became aware of all the rules and routines, I would not hesitate to open a pack of chocolate biscuits at morning tea, and was only too happy to be approached by the children. Eleanor frequently seized this opportunity during the first period of time and having quite a sweet tooth, she continued to try even after I had become familiar with the rule. One day by the end of March, there were three tables out at morning tea. She was sitting by the table on one end of the row and I was sitting by the table on the other end. She stood up and came carrying a packet of biscuits all the way to the other end of the veranda, passing other adults on the way. Eleanor reached my place and held out her packet of biscuits, grinning.

Eleanor:	*Can you open this?*
Me:	*I think you're supposed to save this for afternoon tea?*
Eleanor:	*Can you open this?*
Me:	*No, I think you're supposed to save it for afternoon tea.*
Eleanor:	*Can you open this?*
Me:	*No, I can't. Then you have to ask one of the teachers.*

Eleanor was quite persistent but after her third try she looked at me for a long time, and then she turned and walked over to a relief staff. The staff told Eleanor that she had to save her

biscuits and that she should eat her fruits first. Eleanor returned to her table with the packet of biscuits intact.

This was something children would occasionally try on regular staff members, but more frequently on new staff or relief staff who were not familiar with the rules. Resourcefully, some children would try it if regular staff were busy with something and had more chance of forgetting or ignoring the rule. Getting someone to open a sweet, which was supposed to be saved for afternoon tea, was usually something that happened successfully only a few times before the staff member learnt or remembered the rules. In other words this opportunity was severely limited, but children nevertheless tested the consistency of the social order that encompassed them. There were some other situations in which rules could be subverted in various ways. The group time-routine included many rules, like sitting on your bottom on the mat with your hands in you lap, being quiet and listening when other people talked, raising your hand if you want to say something, and waiting for your turn. However, some of these rules could be skilfully bent instead of broken – they could be subtly challenged without doing something explicitly "bad" which might result in an explicit reprimand. Goffman writes about how some inmates of the asylums could "work the system" through the "exploitation of a whole routine of official activity for private ends" (1991:189). In order to be able to do this, however, "one must have intimate knowledge of it" (Goffman, 1991:191). Group time was an activity where many rules applied at once and the transition from group time to lunch serve to illustrate what Goffman calls "working the system".

The oldest girl in the Pebbles Room, Tanya, had been in the centre for many years and she seemed to keep track on nearly everything and everyone. During transition to lunch, Ann finished off group time with what I will call "the colour-game". This game was a way to teach the children the name of the different colours, which was one of the pedagogic focuses at the time. In the colour-game, the teacher leading group time would say: "Everyone who has red – go wash your hands and get your lunch boxes". The teacher would then wait a short time before sending off those with a different colour. Some of the younger children did not know all the colours and sometimes mistakes were made. However, instead of insisting that the children had to get it right every time, the teacher would often let it pass if there were not too many children going at the same time. I usually participated in group time, sitting down on the mat like the rest of the children. The teacher leading group time would sit either on a couch or chair in front of the children. I had been playing with Tanya for quite some time

outside before group time and she sat next to me on the mat. Ann said that everyone who had white could go, and Tanya had a white t-shirt. I was wearing a black t-shirt and grey shorts, but Tanya insisted that I should sneak out and come with her. I told her that I did not have white, but she pulled my arm and whispered "Come on! You won't get caught!" Ann heard everything and laughingly said "All right, those who have a black t-shirt can go." I was the only one, and so I went with Tanya, who paid close attention to me and made sure I knew how to wash my hands and where the bin for the paper towel was. She wanted to make sure that we were able to sit next to each other during lunch.

Tanya knew all the colours and was very well aware of that I was not supposed to go as I did not have white. It could be argued that she insisted that I would not get caught because of my status as an adult. However, what is important here is that she showed me a way to "work the system". After this incident I became aware of how often children who were eager to go would quickly point at their clothes and say something like "Yeah, I have that colour!", and then without showing the colour to anyone they would hurry away. Children would magnify very small amounts of colour, see colours that were not there, and wilfully acting at not knowing colours so they could go together with their playmates. However, the possibility for this sort of manipulation did not exist in other organised games involving rhymes of which counting and numbers were a central part. In such games, everyone had to wait for their turn. For example, they had to wait to be either one of the five monkeys swinging in the tree or one of the five buns or bun-buyers in the baker shop. The colour-game was particular in that it provided what some children recognised as an opportunity to 'work the system' (Goffman, 1991:189), and it did so in a way that could be repeated. What this shows is also how children exploit the ambiguity of their status of what they know and do not know. Adults can never be fully sure what the child knows and this is what the child also learns to know, namely how the adult knows them as a knowing subject. In their play and covering up of what they know so as preserve their relationships with each other, children perhaps learn the most indispensable rule about the social and that is how it is constituted in learning what not to know (Taussig, 1999, see also Lattas, 2010).

The Billabong Centre and the Wallabies Room

This centre was a non-profit centre located in a different area of the city. The centre used to be owned by the city council, but in 2001 the council was strongly advised by the state

government to sell off their child care centres, because they were in competition with private centres. The city council still owned the building, which meant the centre paid rent, but the centre had a sponsoring body, which held the licence for the centre. Like the Koala Centre, this was also a long day care centre in a colourful concrete building. It also took in children between the ages of 0 to 5 years. Its opening hours were Monday to Friday from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm. It was smaller than the Koala Centre, with only three rooms made up of one "baby room", one "toddler room" and one "kindy room". Some of the children in the baby room were younger than in the Koala Centre, with some babies being only six weeks old. In this centre, I spent most time in the kindy room, which I will call the Wallabies Room. It has children from approximately 3 to 5 years of age with a mixture of part-time and full-day children. The children in the Wallabies Room changed more often than in the Pebbles Room, both across days and during the day. The staff in the Wallabies Room also changed to a greater extent than in the Pebbles Room, and the employees were generally younger. In addition, the centre had students come in more often. This meant that there were a greater number of different adults frequenting the room and the outside playground. Though the Billabong Centre had a mix of new and long-time employees, its long-time staff were generally assistants and not leaders, whilst in the Koala Centre it was the other way around.

The Wallabies Room did not have a formalised, written daily schedule, but the main activities were generally the same as in the Pebbles Room. They also had the same main areas where activities could take place: the inside room, the outside playground, the concrete area and the bathroom. The baby room had a separate outdoor space, but the toddler and the kindy rooms shared a common playground, and there was a concrete area on which the different rooms had their designated space. The children rested for a few hours in the middle of the day inside the Wallabies Room, but in this centre they brought linen from home. Mealtimes were approximately at the same time, but in contrast to the Koala Centre, the Billabong Centre provided food for the children. This meant that the children generally ate the same food, and the staff had more control over what a child ate. There were no rules about saving this and that for a later meal, the staff just had to make sure everyone had something to eat. As mentioned earlier, in Wallabies there was not a daily schedule on the wall or an overview of the group leader's plan for teaching, however, there were posters with other messages. Unlike in the Pebbles Room, there were several posters around on the walls dictating the "five rules of the Wallabies Room"; the children should not run inside, they should have listening ears, have gentle hands, not yell, smile and be happy. There was also a poster highlighting the

different skills a child learns when playing with blocks – the message being that play is part of pedagogy.

Interaction in different spaces: inside and outside

The two child care centres had very similar patterns in regard to the organisation of time and space. The same distinction was made between being outside and being inside. Different rules applied to these spaces; for example running and yelling were not allowed inside, and this affected the behaviour and interactions of both staff and children. When they were inside, the staff had to remind children of the rules quite often. Also, when inside, the teachers more often arranged for and engage in activities with the children, such as painting, drawing and play dough. Such activities would occasionally happen outside on the concrete, but in general such organised pedagogic activities were done inside. When outside the children had more autonomy and could to a greater extent choose what to do. The teachers' main task outside was to supervise with an eye to avoid dangers or conflicts. Inside, teachers more actively engaged in organising the details of specific activities and would sometimes call on a particular child to come and do something, such as to paint a picture. When outside, the teachers usually took on a more detached, overseeing role in regard to the interactions and behaviour of the children. The teachers often organised themselves so that while some would watch the children others could do other jobs elsewhere. On a few occasions, the staff also organised games in the outside playground such as "What's the time, Mr. Wolf?" or "Duck, duck, goose". In general, however, apart from walking about once in a while and checking to see if the children were all right, the staff who were outside waited for the children to approach them rather than the other way around.

This difference in behaviour by adults, as well as the different qualities of the outside areas and the inside rooms, had an impact on social interaction between children. For example, although bending and breaking of rules also happened inside and still escaped the teachers' detection, the outside area provided more hiding places and opportunities to escape the control of adults. When outside the children were more dependent on one child "telling" on another for the teacher to intervene and help resolve a conflict or correct someone's behaviour if they were breaking the rules. In the Koala Centre, the playground was far bigger than the playground in the Billabong Centre. It also had more trees, bushes, and playhouses, which offered the children in the Pebbles Room more opportunities to hide from adults when outside

than the children in the Wallabies Room. The main focus in this thesis is the children's interaction and their autonomous play, and therefore many of the empirical examples analysed in the following chapters took place in the outside areas without the teachers' involvement.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the child care centres are part of a wider social structure. The rules and regulations of federal and state governments affect the organisation of everyday life in child care centres. In defining the features of this structure, adults are the controlling part and children have little authority. Focused on measurement of quality and cost, the increase in federal and state regulation means the establishment and development of a standard to which all centres must adhere. If a centre is reported to provide a service below the set minimum standard, this centre will in the end not get a licence. Concerns with quality and pedagogy seem to be producing an increasingly bureaucratisation of conditions in child care centres. My aim was also to show the social life of rules that engage and incorporate children into disciplinary routines. I have argued that the organisation of time and space is not neutral; rather, the acceptance and internalisation of time-discipline can be seen as part of the socialisation of children into a particular kind of modern social order that requires particular kinds of ordered subjects. I was also interested in documenting how despite adults' detailed organisation of everyday life in the child care centre, there still exist scope for subversive practices. Interestingly, some of these do not deny the subordinate status of being a child but exploit it by creating ways of appearing not to know. This is also something that teachers learn to recognise, namely the befooling practices of children who strategically play dumb, who learn what not to know (Taussig, 1999, Lattas, 2010). Some children also find their own creative ways, not so much to challenge overtly adult authority, but to more quietly or secretly subvert and bend the rules that adults enforce. There are ways in which children, who often have little authority in the child care centre setting, can "work the system" Goffman (1991). In the next chapter, I analyse how children reworked messages about friendship communicated by teachers, and how children created their own distinctive understandings of the moral order of friendship. It was Western ideals of personhood and relatedness which were being reinterpreted and negotiated among the children.

Chapter 3

Knowledge about and management of friendship relations

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which children's knowledge about friendship is generated as well as the management and negotiation of their friendships. The previous chapter emphasised the adults' organisation of time and space in child care centres. The aim here is to show some of the ways in which the children organise themselves within this setting. The focus on friendship is a point of departure to discuss both the children's social relationships and some of the central aspects of their interactions. However, one must also take into account the adults' authority in relation to knowledge about friendship.

Among the children, negotiations and confirmations of friendship relations appeared as small daily rituals that were often explicitly linked to play. Within the everyday life of the child care centre, play was a realm in which the children could exercise some authority over worlds of meaning. Furthermore, play was one of the primary modalities for their sociality. Their relationships were constituted out of play and this to some extent reveals the imaginary aspect of all human social relationships. Part of their negotiations of play was their negotiation of the different levels of inclusiveness which the term "friends" could imply in different contexts. It was a term that was more ambiguous than other categories of everyday relatedness, such as mother, father, brother, sister or grandparent. Friends were chosen, and friendship had to be worked at to become and remain real. I argue that there was a discrepancy between some of the messages of friendship communicated by teachers in the child care centres, and the children's everyday experiences of their friendship relations as precarious, needing reaffirmation, and as a valuable possession to be guarded. While the children's relations were characterised by frequent negotiations about boundaries and belonging, the teachers' messages about friendship, and their judgement of the children's relations, were related to contemporary Western notions of ideal social relationships. The teachers emphasised reciprocal relationships of equality and sharing, which seemed to be modelled on the ideal of the altruistic gift, but the children often demonstrated a desire to control their play interactions and friendships.

Ethics, rules and adult authority

Every day in the two child care centres, both adults and children frequently used the term "friends". The children were taught that they were friends – that was the name for their relation with each other. What the children did together, the name for their interaction, was play. In general, this was what adults communicated to the children. However, the children also learnt that there was "good" and "bad" friendship behaviour. The staff in the child care centres do not only care for, but also educate the children. Play was part of pedagogy in this setting, and what the children learnt through play was emphasised. Among other things, the staff focused on the ethics and "social skills" of the children. They were taught how to play "nicely" and be "a nice friend". They were taught what acceptable behaviour was and what not acceptable behaviour was. This was communicated to the children in many different ways and situations, for example through reading books at group time:

> During group time in the Wallabies Room the group leader, Cindy, reads a book about Thomas from the book series "Thomas and friends". Thomas the tank engine is an anthropomorphic locomotive, well-known internationally. The title of this particular book is "Thomas, Bertie and the bumpy line" and Cindy reads the story about how Bertie the bus helps Thomas out by taking his passengers when there is a bumpy line hindering the train going further. When the line is fixed, they end up cooperating: Thomas carries the passengers between train stations and Bertie the bus takes them home. When Cindy finishes the story, she closes the book and then she says to the children "*So you see? That's what good friends do. They help each other out.*" Holly has been listening carefully. She raises her eyebrows and her eyes widen with enthusiasm. She loudly responds "*Yeah! …And…Walking inside!*"

The group leader, Cindy, used the story about Thomas the tank engine to communicate a message of how to be a good friend; good friends help each other out. In Holly's response she referred to one of the five rules of the Wallabies Room: walking inside, no running. Bateson (2000:177-178) argues that "verbal communication can operate and always does operate at many contrasting levels of abstraction". Cindy's message was normative. Ideally, good friends should help each other. However, Holly seemed to interpret the message at a more denotative level, as a rule: "good friends help each other out" and she referred to another the rule that she knew and remembered, namely "walking inside". The example above illustrates adults' assumed authority in knowledge about friendship. In practice, the teachers exercised

their authority in trying to straighten and establish relationships between the children. Among the children there seemed to be two possible options regarding friendship relations: being "friends" and being "not friends". When a child was told by another child "I'm not your friend", this would often cause distress. Often a teacher would attempt to make amends by overruling the child's definition of their relation as "not friends" and re-ascribe back to the children a friendship status. In the example below, the second assistant of the Pebbles Room, Ann, tries to solve the conflict between Hailey and Marilyn:

> Marilyn is crying by the tables outside on the concrete area after rest time. She comes over and whispers in my ear: "*Hailey's not my friend...*" Ann is close by. She stops what she is doing and she asks Marilyn what's wrong. Marilyn repeats out loud to Ann what she just said to me. Ann tells Marilyn in a resigned manner that "*Look, you and Hailey are always friends.*" Hailey is there too, but hasn't said anything. The two girls look at each other. Ann continues to work. Then Hailey raises her eyebrows and puts on a look of surprise. She says to Marilyn "*Look! Look at my shoes! Dora!*" Marilyn looks at Hailey, but does not say anything. Hailey walks away with a content look. Marilyn stands there watching her go. She still has tears in her eyes, but she has stopped crying. I ask if Marilyn is all right. She hesitates, but then she says "*I got an itch*".

Hailey and Marilyn's relationship seemed to be among the more long-term friendship relations in the Pebbles group because they often played together just the two of them. However, they frequently negotiated their friendship and the status of their relation could change from being "friends" to "not friends" and back again many times during the same day. In the incident above, Ann seemed tired of their endless negotiations and tried to help and resolve the matter by informing Marilyn: "You and Hailey are always friends". James (1993:202-203) agues that adults' judgements of children's friendships is somewhat paradoxical. The apparent frailty of children's social relationships with peers, marked by their frequent negotiations and disagreements, often seem tiresome to adults. And so, drawing on the ideal of 'real' friendship, adults pose the question that "if their relations were truly those of friendship, should they not weather differences in opinion and changing moods?" (James, 1993:202). As the example above also shows, the rupture of children's friendship relations is often discounted and trivialised, because adults know it is likely that the relationship will be restored soon after. Yet this same instability which is often discounted may also create anxiety about the children's well-being (James, 1993:202). However, neither Marilyn nor Hailey

seemed immediately convinced about Ann's judgement. They looked at each other, but neither of them said anything. Then Hailey wanted Marilyn to look at her shoes, which had a print of the feminine cartoon figure "Dora the explorer". Dora was quite popular among the children in the Pebbles Room and they would occasionally watch the show on DVD in the afternoon. Especially among the girls, having an item or a piece of clothing related to this show would often result in attention and admiring looks from other children. Hailey was perhaps trying to make amends with Marilyn when she said "Look! Dora!", but Marilyn was not exactly excited. Hailey had denounced their friendship and Marilyn was upset. Hailey neither agreed nor disagreed with Ann's ascription, which left the status of the relation uncertain. In pointing to her shoes, Hailey found an aspect of herself that could form the basis of imaginary play with Marilyn. Pointing to an inanimate part of herself was not a full apology and this might underpin Marilyn's reluctance to accept the invitation. Instead of accepting, Marilyn said she had an itch, which may be interpreted as a way of saying that she wants help and care, and that she was annoyed. Marilyn often had eczema and was used to being cared for because of this. This particular itch may be interpreted as a displacement and re-embodiment of the conflict. An itch is both present but with care can be scratched away. The children's social relations are full of such creative metaphorical negotiations, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Children have their own language for constituting sociality and for re-negotiating its reality. These negotiations of friendship are often built around taking up or not taking up the possibility for playfully elaborating seemingly minute contingent and irrelevant details, such as one's shoes in the above example. In the apparent minute nonsense of everyday life, children build schemes of significance with each other. Here, Ann ascribed friendship status and discounted the rupture of the children's relation. In other situations, teachers used their authority to create friendship relations without there having been any previous negotiations between the children. Sometimes during group time, a teacher would try to establish friendships between children as a part of transition from one time and space to another. For example at the end of group time in the Wallabies Room a teacher would say "Holly, choose a friend to go wash your hands with". The teacher would then proceed to call out names of children, asking them to choose a friend. Two conflict scenarios would often occur: the child asked to choose a friend might refuse to make a choice because they were not happy with the range of potential friends, or the child chosen might refuse to go with him or her and denounce their friendship. The teacher would insist the child chose someone to go with, that

there were lots of friends there to choose from. She would warn the child that he or she would miss out on whatever was next, or she would proceed with the allocation of friends until he or she was the only one left and to be friendless was posited as the ultimate form of loneliness. Then, despite warnings that the child would miss out, he or she would be told to go. It seemed like teachers had few options if a child opposed their authority in this matter by refusing to accept an ascribed friendship. In such situations, children were being taught that friendships are something that you have to create and work at, that you are not always free to choose your friends. As you leave one realm and enter another, you need to create new friendships. This sense that friendships are not always free contradicts the social norm of friendship as a freely chosen form of relatedness that defines individuality and the individual's ability to create his or her own world and ties.

Negotiation of social relations among the children

Through friendships, the children established their own forms of mutual recognition and regard for each other. They struggled for their own ways of conferring value upon each other, but this was often in reference to the wider encompassing institution which also drew them together into a collective world of imaginary belonging. The encompassing space of the child care centre provided a common space for the children, and teachers often called children to recognise their collective belonging and solidarity with each other. An example from the Koala Centre serves to illustrate how the children would refer to friendship as a moral commitment and community among everyone who belonged to the room and to the centre:

> Peter, Malcom and Theodor are out on the concrete after rest time, waiting for everyone to get up. The three boys are busy with Lego at one of the tables, and they are discussing friendships. Peter says to Theodor "*You're* my *friend, hey? You're* my *friend Theodor.*" Malcom, who is sitting by Peter on the other side, says "*We're* all *friends at [The Koala Centre], hey?*" Theodor, who has not replied to Peter's request, goes on "*I'm* everyone's *friend. I'm everyone's friend in the pre-prep room.*" Peter ignores the claim of everyone being friends and says "*I'm* your *friend, Theodor.*"

In both child care centres, friendship relations among children were negotiated on a daily basis. It seemed that their relationships continuously needed to be reaffirmed. The example above shows how children talk about their relationships at different levels: the centre, the room and

the individual. Peter asked Theodor to be *his* friend. Malcom said *everyone* in the child care centre was friends, but he phrased it as a question, asking the others to confirm. Theodor first agreed with Malcom, he was everyone's friend, he said, but then he added that he was everyone's friend *in the pre-prep room*. When Peter asked Theodor to be his friend he was excluding Malcom. Before Theodor answered Peter's request, Malcom said everyone was friends and in doing so affirmed the encompassing, morally inclusive order of the institution that teachers' encourage. Theodor then chose to agree with Malcom's statement; he was everyone's friend. At least he was everyone's friend in that room. Peter, on the other hand, kept insisting on getting a confirmation of an individual friendship with Theodor. In this example Peter, Malcom and Theodor discussed friendship in a manner which shows that there are different levels of inclusion. This allowed friendship to be continuously re-interpreted. It could encompass individuals in some contexts and exclude them in others. These different levels of inclusion made the term friend ambiguous and contested – its boundaries continuously needed to be defined and reaffirmed depending on the context and who was present.

Children learn that being friends is both something everyone should be with each other, they are part of a community of friends, but it is also the name for their specific individual relations within the group. In both child care centres teachers commonly said "We are *all* friends here and we *all* play together", emphasising "all". In the previous chapter, I argued that children learn that time and space are managed in the child care centre and that the routinised forms of movement between different spaces and times created and merged a sense of individuality with collective belonging. Similarly, what was communicated about friendship in the child care centre is both collective belonging and individuality. The adults ascribed friendship in a way that makes friendship a marker of, and a name for, belonging to both the centre in general and the particular room. From this perspective friendship was not voluntary for the children; it was a social obligation and a social quality that comes from belonging to the institution. However, friendship could also be particularised so as, for example, to gain access to peer interaction.

> Maggie and Nina are over by the wooden car in the playground. Eleanor comes over and says to them "*I'm your friend*". Nina replies "*Hi Eleanor! You're the baby. She's the big sister* [Nina points at Maggie] *and I'm the mum and you're the baby. Okay?*" Eleanor replies "*Yeah. I'm the baby*". Then she turns and runs away.

Instead of asking the girls "Do you want to play with me?" Eleanor made a statement of being their friend. Nina interpreted this as a request to be included, and she responded by giving her a role in their imaginary narrative. Being the baby was one of Eleanor's favourite play roles, and here she accepted Nina's identification of her. But Eleanor then proceeded to run away. It seems her only goal was to gain access to their play, to have a confirmation of the status of her relationship and that she was worthy of inclusion in their play narrative. When a child agreed to be a friend, the children had a shared opinion that this meant they would proceed to play together. Things could also be swapped around; the children would agree that since they were playing together, they were friends. They would use play as evidence of their friendship; for the children, *being friends* and *playing together* were closely tied, they appeared to be indexical of each other. Solitary play seldom occurred in the child care centres. If alone, a child would seek interaction with others. Anna was among the children who were there full-time, and she played with many different children. For example, Anna enjoyed playing with some of the boys, most frequently Malcom and Toby, but sometimes she seemed to have a hard time gaining access to their play. She tried to have their relationship confirmed as "best friends", but the boys occasionally denied her this status. One day when I was talking to Eleanor, I saw Anna partly hiding behind some bushes and crying.

[Eleanor is sitting on the ground a few meters away, talking to me (R, researcher) about the video camera. Then Anna comes by, crying. As I turn to talk to her, Eleanor walks up to the camera. Eleanor does not seem to give Anna's crying any attention.]

1. E: *You can see me on that.*
2. R: *Yeah.*
3. E: *La-la-la*
4. R: *Are you all right Anna?*
5. A: *Malcom and Toby and...*
6. E: *Ou-ou*

[Eleanor interrupts and makes noises into the camera while watching her legs on the screen. I turn the camera away from Eleanor and talk to Anna.]

7. R: *Huh? What are you saying?*
8. A: *Malcom and Toby and Lenny aren't...my best friend...*

[Anna is sobbing]

9. R: *Why's that?*
10. A: *Because...they're just...not.*
11. R: *What's a best friend?*

12. A: *Like Malcom and Toby and Lenny but they're not my best friend.*

13. R: *What do you do then? Do you play with someone else?*

14. A: *No... Cause I've got no friends to play with.*

15. R: *Oh, you don't?*

16. A: *No...*

17. E: *Hum-hum-hum-hum-hum...*

[Eleanor has been standing beside us the whole time and at this point she starts to hum again. Anna walks away from us and hides behind some bushes close by.]

What this example shows is how loneliness was defined as not being incorporated into play interactions. Not having any friends was not having anyone to play with. Being denied friendship meant exclusion from play interaction, it meant to be alone. Anna's reply to my question "What is a best friend?" was specific; "Like Malcom and Toby and Lenny." She did not refer for example to the general qualities that a friend should have or what a friend should do, rather, Anna referred to specific children. Reference to friendship was not only a way to gain access to play but was also a way of protecting play interactions from the contingencies and narrative developments that a new person could introduce. Sometimes the new possibilities and innovations brought by a new participant were welcomed but at other times they were a threat to the imaginary grounding of particular kinds of relationships within certain kinds of narrative structures. Similar to what Corsaro (1985:165) found in his study, the children sometimes used references to friendship as a means of social control, as this example from the Pebbles Room shows:

It is lunch time and Peter is by the table eating his pasta. Malcom, who is sitting next to him has finished his lunch and packed his things. He gets up and gathers his lunch box and water bottle. Then Peter says "*Hey! I'm not your best friend if you're going away!*" Malcom stops and looks at Peter. Then he says "*I'm just gonna... Ehm... I'm just gonna put it in the fridge, and then I'm gonna come back, and wait. Okay?*" Peter does not reply. Malcom hurries over to the fridge and returns to sit by Peter at the table. A few moments later Peter, Malcom, and a third boy, are giggling and laughing while exchanging "naughty words".

Peter threatened to change the status of their relationship if Malcom did not keep him company by the table. Malcom had finished eating his lunch and was ready to pack away his things. This was a period of transition to a new activity and Peter was apprehensive that Malcom would

leave him to go and play with someone else. Malcom hesitated to leave when the consequence would be so dramatic but he went after he reassured Peter than he was not leaving him for someone else but simply for a practical reason. Malcom went and he hurried back. Peter seemed to accept Malcom's actions as proof of his commitment to their relationship, and he did not comment further upon him leaving. The withdrawal of friendship was one of the few forms of control that the children had over each other and it was used as a punishment to police children who might possibly move into other play relationships. It was also used to punish unacceptable behaviour that was sometimes just summed as being rude.

> Hailey is sitting on the couch by the inside mat. I'm on the floor close by, watching some other children playing with blocks in the block area. Hailey turns around and puts her chin on the back of the couch. She gives me a serious look. Then she explains how she and Marilyn had been best friends, but now they're not. I ask her why not. No, she says, because Marilyn had been naughty to her. So now they aren't best friends. Hailey was obviously not happy with the situation. "*Does that mean you don't play together anymore?*" I ask her. "*Now I don't wanna play with her*", Hailey says. Then Tanya comes along and takes a seat on the couch next to Hailey. Hailey allows Tanya to borrow her pink play-phone. Tanya sits next to Hailey having a conversation over the phone, but Hailey and Tanya don't talk very much. Hailey seems more interested in talking to me. A moment later, Marilyn comes along together with Hennie. Marilyn looks at us and starts to explain to me how Hailey had said they weren't friends anymore. "*She was rude*", Marilyn says to me. I try to ask what happened, but Marilyn just repeats that Hailey was rude to her. Both girls are looking at me. Then the teacher announces it is pack up time.

Here we deal with a breakdown in social relationships. Marilyn had been naughty and Hailey had been rude, therefore they were not friends and they are not playing together anymore. But, as in Corsaro's (1985:165) study, the children's comments were related to preceding actions and not enduring characteristics. The terms "friend" and "play" were commonly used among children in the child care centres when they were negotiating the boundaries of their interactions: who was to be included and who was to be left out. The moral obligation to be friend and the consequent moral right to participate in play could be appealed to by the children repeating the authoritative message of adults that "We're all friends here and we all play together". Yet children, as we have seen, also referred to friendship to exclude other children. James (1993:204) has explored friendships among children of different ages and argues that for younger children, as in my study, around four years old, friendship involved "a

direct trading of favours". Essentially, James argues, it is an exchange relationship in which emotional investment is at a minimum (1993:204). My ethnography indicates the opposite, namely that there was often a high degree of emotional investment in the negotiations between children. These situations could often lead to a sense of betrayal and hurt, especially when close friends desert to go and play with someone else. The teachers often worked at creating more inclusive forms of friendship and games to counteract the emotional turmoil caused from such situations. Despite my reservations about her one-sided view of exchange in children's relationships, James does touch on an important point, but this needs to be contextualised in terms of the importance of imaginary worlds. When a friend left, it was also the shared imaginary world that friends had jointly created which was being denied or disassembled. I have argued that there seems to be a discrepancy between adults' and children's communication about friendship in the child care centre settings. Whereas adults communicate messages about friendship on a more general level as a moral obligation, both the children's interpretation of these messages and their communication with peers about friendship seem to be on a more concrete, denotative level. I have illustrated this for example through Holly's interpretation of the teacher's message of friendship as a rule, and also in how children referred to their relationships with particular children when I asked questions such as "What is a friend?" As mentioned earlier, following James (1993), adult judgement of children's friendships is related to a Western notion of the ideal friendship relation. In fact, I believe the adults' messages of reciprocal relationships and the value of sharing is related, in a similar manner, to the ideal of altruistic gifts.

Social exchange and gifts as negotiation strategy

At the beginning of my time in the Pebbles Room, I asked Anna "What's a friend?" Anna immediately replied "Chloe". Chloe was one of the other girls in the Pebbles Room. However, Chloe had just got a baby sister and didn't spend as much time in the child care centre as she used to, but when she was there Anna and Chloe usually played together. Chloe would also favour Anna in different ways. For example, one time in group time during what was called "Show and Tell", it was Chloe's turn to sit by the teacher on the couch and talk about what she had brought. She had brought a Barbie doll to show the others, and she was careful to specify to everyone that only Anna and Nadia could touch it, no one else. She proclaimed the limited access to her prop in front of the whole group. In the child care centres, teachers tell the children to share with their friends (i.e. the other children in the room or the centre), but as

the example shows, what the children learnt about sharing could also be used to exclude, similar to the practice of denying friendship.

In his analysis of total institutions in the 1950s, Goffman (1991:247) comments on the inmates' social exchanges in the asylums, which were "characterised by the meagre resources the patients had for expressing mutual regard and extending mutual aid", and the goods exchanged served "not only for personal supplies and a means of effecting economic exchange but also as something to give to friends". Analysing children's interaction in a San Francisco kindergarten, Helgesen (2008:27) makes use of Goffman's terms. In Helgesen's study, the children broke the rule that prohibited giving food away and exchanged food snacks during lunch time when the "lunch ladies" weren't watching. Both Goffman and Helgesen call attention to the aspect of limited resources in these institutional settings. Based on the institutional similarities, one could argue that there seems to be limited resources also in the child care centre settings in my study. In the example above, Chloe announced the limited access to her Barbie doll during Show and Tell in group time, and by doing so she ran the risk of being told she had to share by the teacher. However, this was usually the only time the children were allowed to bring out personal props from home. In the Pebbles Room, they were to put what they had brought for Show and Tell on the group leader's desk when they came in the morning, and it was supposed to stay there during the day. They could also keep it in their lockers, but the point was that the prop was only to be brought out for Show and Tell so that it did not become a source of contention and rivalry. However, there were some exceptions to this rule. Michael, for example, brought a ball one day and he was allowed to take it into the playground as long as he was prepared to share it with the others. In the child care centres that I studied, children explicitly referred to sharing and gifts which sometimes happened outside the childcare centre such as at birthday parties, as part of their negotiation of friendship relations inside the child care centre.

> [A group of children are over by the climbing house in the corner of the outside area. Malcom is pulling Anna's shirt and she struggles with him. He lets go and then both of them run over to Toby. Anna tells on Malcom to the other children (there is a rule against pulling someone's clothes), but proceeds to climb the frame before Toby has answered. Everyone follows her up there. Anna has just jumped down from the upper level and shouts to the four boys up there.]
> 1. A: *Yeah, be my friend because, you guys… Toby got this for my birthday.*

[Anna is tugging her t-shirt. Then she lets go, looks down while waiting for the four boys to reply and starts to kick the sand.]

2. T: *Yeah! I gave that for that ...for her birthday!*

[Toby is pointing at Anna below]

3. M: *Yeah! I... gave her... dress for one birthday too.*

4. A: *No you didn't... ahm...actually...*

[Toby interrupts Anna.]

5. T: *I gave you, you a blue shirt!*

[Anna ignores Toby's claim and walks over to the left side of the upper level of the climbing house, where Malcom is swaying, leaning backwards. Anna points at him with both her hands.]

6. A: *Ahm... you gave me my...bag. You gave me my tin bag, hey? –With a pretend pup in it. Yeah, you gave me that bag.*

[While Anna speaks to Malcom in a normal voice, the other three boys are quarrelling about who gets to stand on top of the slide. After speaking to Malcom, Anna moves a bit to the right again, placing herself at the bottom of the slide. She starts to shout and points at Malcom and Toby.]

7. A: *So you two are my best friends cause you guys came to my birthday!*

8. T: *Yeah!*

9. A: *So come on! ...Let's gooo!*

[Anna doesn't wait for the boys to respond, but turns around and starts to run while shouting. Toby is the first one to hop down from the climbing house and follows A while shouting to the other three boys.]

10. T: *Come on guys!*

[The remaining children follow Anna and they run out of the camera frame.]

After this dialogue the children proceeded to play together. This sequence started with a problematic relationship between Anna and Malcom after he pulled her t-shirt and she told on him. Anna insisted on negotiating their friendship relations and when Toby and Malcom agreed on that they were best friends with her, she initiated play interaction. She sought to re-establish relations not just with Malcolm but the other children by pointing out to them that the t-shirt was a gift from Malcolm. This then led to various interchanges where they clarified who had given what gifts to Anna at her birthday party, which points out how even though children do not buy these gifts, they become their bearers. The children come to an agreement that because Malcom and Toby attended Anna's birthday and gave her birthday presents in the past, they are best friends now. This is suggested by Anna, but eagerly confirmed by the

two boys. It is through the ongoing memory of previous gifts at her birthday party, that Anna gains permission to play with Malcom and Toby. In the child care centres, invitations to birthday parties functioned as gifts, and were an expression of regard and friendship. No material gifts are exchanged in the above situation, but the play and friendship offered by Malcom and Toby could be interpreted as a repayment of the previous gift of the birthday invitation. This is despite the material exchange of gifts made by Toby and Malcom to Anna; those material gifts appeared here as evidence of the invitation and thus made them obligated to play with Anna. Among the central points Mauss (1995) makes in his classical work on gifts is that reciprocity, the social exchange of gifts and services, is a total social act, and a cornerstone of society. Although gifts appear to be free and voluntary, they carry with them certain obligations; the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to give a gift in return. In the example above one might consider Anna to be in debt to Malcom and Toby after receiving birthday presents. On the contrary, in this discussion among the children it was not the givers but the receiver, Anna, that referred to these gifts in order to obtain what she sought: a confirmation of their friendship relation and hence the right to be part of play interaction with Toby and Malcom. While noting the apparent difference in this example, what is also shown is how, in accordance with Mauss' theories, there is a shared view among the children of gifts as markers of relationships. In the following example we see a different use of gifts. Here they become imaginary items given to create fictive social relations that operate as allegories for the relations of care and intimacy between the children. This is the significance of the gifts that Marilyn employs so as to negotiate her relation to Hailey:

> [It is mid-day and we are outside. I (researcher, R) am sitting in the sand which surrounds the climbing house, talking to Marilyn about pretending. She has a plastic cup in her hand, absently using the other hand to fill it with sand. When it is full, she pours it out and starts over.]
>
> 1. R: *I've been thinking about something. What's pretend? What do you do when you pretend?*
>
> 2. M: *Ehm... You pretend! ...Aa... You... When you pretend you can do anything!*
>
> [Marilyn goes on talking about her cousins and explains that she has lots of family. I insist on talking about pretend and ask if her cousins pretend. Yes, they do, she replies, and she goes on talking about one time one of them had a birthday. Then suddenly Marilyn turns to the subject of friends.]
>
> 3. M: *Where's Hailey?*

[Marilyn who has been looking down at the cup in her hands now looks up. She looks around until she locates the other girl, Hailey.]

4. M: *Oh, she's on the swing. …Hailey's my friend.*

5. R: *How do you know? How do you know she's your friend?*

[Marilyn pauses while she looks at me. When she doesn't seem to find an answer, I proceed with another question.]

6. R: *Did you talk about it?*

7. M: *We play lots of pretend together. Sometimes we sit down and we don't know what to do. But then we figure it out. We sit and we figure it out.*

[Hailey comes over and stands on a bicycle close to where Marilyn and I are sitting in the sand.]

8. H: *I'm not your friend, Marilyn.*

[A few seconds passes during which the two girls look at each other.]

9. M: *…Because?*

10. H: *I'm not your friend. I'm Eleanor's friend.*

11. M: *I'm making you a milkshake. Hailey, I'm making you a milkshake, Hailey.*

[Marilyn suddenly decides that the cup she has been pouring sand into and out of is a milkshake for Hailey. She reaches out to Hailey and shows her the cup. Hailey does not take it, but looks at it for a few seconds.]

12. H: *Ehm… Bye!*

[Hailey answers Marilyn with an affected voice.]

13. H: *Bye, mommy! Mommy, bye!*

[Hailey waves at Marilyn and runs towards the swings again. Marilyn looks at Hailey running, and then she starts to pour sand again.]

What Marilyn presented to Hailey was not a real milkshake but a pretend one. What was exchanged here was meaning and time. When Hailey denounced their friendship, Marilyn referred to pretend play and exploited the opportunities of imagination. Up until Hailey came over, Marilyn seemed to absent-mindedly pour sand in and out of the cup in her hands while talking to me. When Hailey said to Marilyn she was not her friend, but Eleanor's friend, Marilyn resourcefully and creatively transformed the cup of sand into a milkshake for Hailey. First, Hailey looked puzzled for a moment, then she modified her voice and said "Bye, mommy!" By doing this Hailey developed further the pretend play Marilyn initiated, she assigned Marilyn the play role of being a mother, then she walked away. Marilyn did not

follow her. Hailey did not take the milkshake offered to her, but she did accept the suggestion of framing their interaction as play. Furthermore, the particular role Hailey assigned Marilyn – being Hailey's mother – allowed her, as a child, to wander from her mother so as to go and play with another child. Hailey included Marilyn in the play frame by assigning her a role, which allowed a compromise to be made; she used the opportunities that lie within the play frame to say goodbye and walk away. This example shows that among the children a spontaneous pretend gift can also be valid in the negotiation of social relations. Similar to the usual kind of gifts, a pretend gift also seemed to have the potential of bringing an obligation to the receiver, to reciprocate with another imaginary gift, in this case acknowledging Marilyn as mother. But more than this, the tension which came from Hailey having found a new friend in Eleanor was overcome by being reconstituted and 'narrativised' within the imaginary world of play. Hailey's distance from Marilyn became the distance of a child from its mother, and through the role of mother Marilyn showed that she still cared for Hailey enough to free her and to give her permission to play with friend. The imaginary worlds and their narratives require, as Marilyn noted, a lot of hard work: "We play lots of pretend together. Sometimes we sit down and we don't know what to do. But then we figure it out. We sit and we figure it out." Moments of creativity such as the above show how children work on their relations through imaginary play, which is never far from the real.

Both of these examples could be seen to challenge a view of the children in this setting as having limited resources to express mutual regard. If one can refer to gifts previously given and make-believe gifts are also valid, then the available resources appear more plentiful. What these examples reveal is how these exchanges are about the reciprocal participation in the development of a frame of meaning, and about the valuing of participants as worthy actors to engage in imaginary exchanges with. In exchanging imaginary gifts, what the children negotiate and highlight to each other is their own self-importance and value as creators of meaning, and this is what is acknowledged when another child chooses to play with them. One child singles another child out as a friend, as a valued creator of enjoyable imaginary worlds. It is this mutual regard that they can withdraw, sometimes cruelly, producing tears and emotional distress for it strikes at the very core of identity, challenging their creative ability to relate to others through shared imaginary worlds. The teachers as police and guard against these emotional wounds that are felt when a child dismisses another child's capacity to create worthwhile meanings that can be shared between them. The children learn that there is an ethics of care about being inclusive and respecting each others imaginary creations. This

is what they are being taught in the deceptively simple phrase "we are all friends". The phrase glosses over that what is being cared for in friendships; the value and power of the imaginary. Within these shared forms play world realities the children explore and rework the possibilities of their relatedness.

The free and independent individual

Corsaro (1985:121) studied friendship relations among 3-5 year olds in an American context and he emphasises a distinction between kinship and friendship relations:

> The discovery of friendship is a major step in the children's acquisition of social knowledge. Before children make friends, social bonds are primarily between the child and parents or other adult caretakers. This is not to say that children do not influence caretakers or do not actively construct concepts of social relations within the family by participating in interactive events. However, within the family children have relatively little opportunity for negotiation; they must recognize, accept, and adapt to their relationships with parents and siblings. When children first move outside the family unit, they discover a range of options in the selection of interactive partners.

Friendships are negotiable, and more so than family relations. In social interaction outside the family, children learn that social relations can have a flexible character. However, the voluntariness of friendship that Corsaro points to is problematic. Carrier (1999:23-38) argues that this notion of friendship, as voluntary, is based on a Western ideal. Voluntarism as a defining quality of friendship can be challenged cross-culturally. He points to the relation between this conception of friendship and a conception of the self (Carrier, 1999:22-23):

> [S]peaking of friendship entails thinking of people who respond to their internal, spontaneous sentiments rather than the demands or expectations placed upon them by the ties of kinship, trade, propinquity, interest or the like. In other words, the idea of friendship entails a distinct conception of what people are like, of the self. One important stream in the anthropological consideration of the self emerged out of the study of gift exchange in Melanesian ethnography. [...] [The] conception of the free, spontaneous individual is not just a part of popular thought. It is common in social scientific writing on modern gift giving, a key element of friendship. [...] Seen from this perspective, the

self of friendship is the free and independent actor who is a key feature of Western liberal thought.

Carrier moves on to analyse other ways of conceiving of the self, and he draws on Strathern's work on identity in Melanesia (Carrier, 1999:28). Cross-cultural comparison of conceptions of the self is beyond the scope of this thesis, but this thought of friendship as an ideal based on the free and independent individual is interesting and relevant. These notions of friendships and gifts are similar in that they are both conceptualised as free and spontaneous. Taussig (1999:267) is occupied with "public secrets" which is "what is generally known but cannot be stated". The secret of the gift is that it is something both altruistic and indebting, spontaneous and calculated (1999:267-268). Likewise, one could perhaps argue that there is a "secret of friendship". The teachers in the child care centre know that the children frequently negotiate friendship relations and that they are not all friends all the time. The teachers also know that these negotiations can sometimes cause emotional distress. When the teachers say to the children "We all play together and we are all friends here", this includes a message of how to exclude someone is not a nice thing to do. The children learn what is good and what is bad, they learn how interacting with and relating to others should be. Following Giddens (2002:61-63), the notion of "the pure relationship" and what he sees as "a democracy of the emotions" has gained importance, and, according to Giddens, new forms of intimacy are replacing old. Giddens has been criticised for having an ethnocentric point of view when he speaks of these changes as something happening "almost everywhere" (Bell and Coleman, 1999:1). Still, the connection Giddens makes between intimacy and democracy in social relationships is relevant for an understanding of some of the messages about friendship the children in the child care centre settings in Australia receive. The pure relationship is an ideal that depends upon trust and in which "[s]elf-disclosure is the basic condition of intimacy" writes Giddens (2002:61). In other words, sharing is a central part of intimacy. Further, "[a] good relationship is a relationship of equals, where each party have equal rights and obligations" (Giddens, 2002:62). The ideal, good relationship, argues Giddens, is implicitly democratic, and this, then, is what he means by "a democracy of the emotions" (Giddens, 2002:63) There is an aspect of this in children's play where good relationships require playmates to take turns in assuming a privileged role. But it is also true that stable and good relationships were also built on accepted forms of asymmetry, where for example one child would play mother and the other baby or small dependent child. The valued relationship was often not just in performing the role of a mother, but in being loved and cared for by a mother, in being the dependent baby or child. It

would be a naive to assume that play and its dynamics has to follow the logic of modern political theory. In fact, as will be shown in the following chapters, asymmetrical relationships frequently featured in the children's imaginary worlds. The children find pleasure in articulating and playing with aspects of power and domination, and asymmetries in their everyday social relations can be incorporated into and rearticulated through their imaginary worlds. To some extent the children's play will be informed by wider values about what is a person, but we should not also reduce it to some ideal model of politics and power. The children develop their own dynamics of politics and power through play, the imaginary and their narratives.

Conclusion

This chapter shows some of the ways in which the children's knowledge about friendship is generated; from messages communicated by teachers, but also through children's interaction. In the child care centre the children are taught that everyone is equal, they are all friends and they all play together. Play becomes a way of teaching reciprocal and respectful relations, but this is based on an ideal, and the teachers' and the children's perspective on and judgement of friendship can often deviate. While the messages communicated by adults often include notions of ethics at a more general encompassing level, what characterise the children's interpretations and negotiations of friendships in their everyday life is more focused on the immediate inclusion or exclusion of particular children. The term "friends" is continuously interpreted and particularised by the children – a category that can incorporate some individuals and exclude others. The term "friends" is ambiguous, functioning both as a moral obligation and as a description of actual play partners. The teachers' messages were related to the Western notions of the ideal friendship relation as well as the ideal of the altruistic gift, both of which involve the conception of the self as an independent individual. Presenting some of the different ways in which gifts are used in friendship relations, I have argued that these examples show that children's gifts often deviate from the ideal of the altruistic gift, as they are employed as negotiation strategies of children whose interest in doing so is to be included in play. What is being negotiated is problematic, because it is partly imaginary identities and imaginary relationships which are being contested, affirmed and renegotiated. The analytical perspectives of exchange theory impose a strategic calculus on human interaction and the imaginary gifts that children trade with each other. When analysing children's play one needs to examine the complexity of what is being transacted, whose

phenomenological character points to the imaginary constitution of all human reality. This is what children are experimenting with in collectively creating as friends; their own imaginary worlds of meaning that appropriate their terms from the wider society. Before turning to the narratives of children's imaginary worlds in Chapter 5, the next chapter shows how the children's communication of the imaginary blurs the boundaries of many analytical categories that distinguish different kinds of social practices.

Chapter 4

Communicating the imaginary

In this chapter the children's communication of the imaginary is explored through a discussion of play in relation to other related kinds of social practices; namely, deception and joking. I present examples of the children's interpretations and negotiations of adult organised activities as well as their negotiations and interpretations of play with peers. I explore how the children's and the teachers' perspective and goals surrounding play could differ widely. The children's imaginary worlds were partly managed by adults, yet children were still able to maintain some autonomy from adults. The staff in a child care centre are both caretakers and teachers, and the activities they organise are grounded in pedagogy. Play is often regarded as part of pedagogy, and part of subject formation. When the adults organise activities, their control and authority is not easily escaped or negotiated. Even when the children play on their own, the teachers are the one's who know and enforce rules and ethics about how to play nicely. The ethics that adults enforce require for example that the children share their games and imaginary worlds with outside playmates, or it may require the children to renegotiate their status and roles in the play narrative so as to make them less coercive and problematic for less powerful playmates. As will be shown, play is not a unified activity and can perhaps better be described as an attitude or an interpretive frame. The children learn how frames can be negotiated and manipulated, and in these processes the boundaries between different categories of social practices are blurred in everyday life in the child care centre. I argue that also in highly organised adult pedagogic activities, opportunities exist for the children to escape the control of adults and to renegotiate the adults' authority over them.

Adult-organised games and pretend play

During outside time one Monday, the teachers in the Pebbles Room arrange a game called "Duck, duck, goose" where everyone sits in a circle facing each other. One person is the "picker" and he or she walks outside and around the circle. The "picker" taps everyone's head and says either "duck" or "goose". Once someone is "goose" they get up and chase the "picker" around the circle. The first person who gets to the vacant space rejoins the circle, while the other person becomes the "picker". The person who is the "picker" cannot sit down until they manage to take the "goose's" seat. Most of the children seemed to get the rules, and the game worked out quite well according to the teachers' instructions, but there was one person who tried to renegotiate the rules of the game. When Hailey got to be the goose, she did not try to get to the vacant spot in the circle. Rather, she ran far away from the circle. She did a long run around the playground and returned with a grin to a circle of laughing children and teachers. The teachers tried to explain the rules to her, but during her second time as a goose she repeated her previous actions, expecting laughter at her return. This time, however, not everyone seemed to think it was fun to wait for her to return before they could continue with the game, and the teachers tried to call her back in a more serious voice.

One of the early social theories on play was Mead's (1934) theory on the formation of the self, where he argues that play and games are social conditions under which the self arises as an object. He also makes a distinction between *games* and *play*. In games there are predetermined rules governing social interactions and through organised rules the response of the individual is controlled (Mead, 1934:153-154). "Duck, duck, goose" was arranged by the teachers, who also participated. Teachers had authority, and they upheld the formalised rules of the game. The first time Hailey ran away instead of trying to get to the open spot in the circle, it was unpredictable and the cause of much laughter. The second time, while some children laughed out loud, the teachers were more serious and they called her back before she had finished her route around the playground. When she did not listen they were annoyed. Hailey is playing with the rules of the game and is seeking to transform a game into play. For Mead *games* have formal, definable, competitive objectives in terms of strategies, and sometimes also points and ranking. In *games*, actions and reactions are controlled, in contrast to *play* which is characterised by unpredictability, because the rules are negotiated along the way and the rules are not predetermined in the same way. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges the teachers had was to teach children this distinction between games and play, in

a context where children often wanted to play and, what's more, to play with the rules of games. In running around the playground, Hailey was seeking to make other children and the teachers laugh. The children's own play often involves agreements, renegotiations and conflicts over what are legitimate and illegitimate elaborations of the play frame. In running as far as possible form the open spot in the circle, Hailey transgressed the rules of the game. However, it is her repetition that is disturbing rather than the initial transgression which is silly and funny. In repeating her transgression, it seems that the child seeks to make it a new routine. Sensing the tension and annoyance of the teacher, the other children are reluctant to confirm this potential elaboration of the game. Initially, the girl was interpreted as seeking to have fun, rather than to compete and win. When she repeated her innovation, she was showing that she had not yet learnt to fit into playing games. It became a question of educating her that the rules of this game could not be played with indefinitely, certain games are predetermined and being a good child means learning to play other people's games. In games there is a pre-determined order and fun is contained and directed. It is encapsulated in shared rules that unite the common sense world of adults with the imaginary worlds of children.

Play and games are not neutral but part of processes of subject formation processes of normalisation. Play is often more democratic in terms of who owns the rules and authority to modify them. With games, a well adapted child must know how to recognise who owns or enforces the rules of the games. He or she must know when the games belong to children and can be renegotiated amongst themselves, and when games are fixed and belong to adults. The children learn that there are impersonal forms of copyright. When adults organise games they have knowledge and authority to enforce the rules, but often when children play games between themselves they struggle to enforce rules that no-one is suppose to own. Games and play are part of western pedagogic methods and they involve knowledge of the unofficial forms of copyright which confer ownership and control over games such as "Duck, duck, goose". Being a good obedient child means respecting and playing within the imaginary frames that adults establish for one's care and pleasure. It means confirming them as teachers, that they know how to create games that will captivate children, and that will draw them in and engage them in shared worlds of playful competition. While adults play an active role in managing the imaginary life of children, through mechanisms such as games and stories, this formation is never total so as to extinguish spontaneity. It should be noted that the teachers

were not keen to squash the first transgression, the first attempt to extend the boundaries of the game.

A few days later, four boys were playing "Duck, duck, goose" on their own in the playground and without adult supervision. While using the adult-organised game as a model, they reclaimed authority in the production of the imaginary by substituting the goose with several monsters.

> All four boys are running around the playground. Kerim is holding his hands out in front of him, while he is making a scary face and roaring loudly. A few moments later they all return to the same spot and sit down in a row, leaning against the wall of a wooden play house. Ken and Malcom both hurry on their feet, and they argue about whose turn it is. Malcom seems to win the argument, as he waits while Ken sits down next to the others. Malcom proceeds with walking along the row, tapping each boy's head say "*duck*", "*duck*", "*duck*". When he has reached the end of the row he turns and he runs along from the other side. This time he is tapping their heads saying "*monster!*", "*monster!*", "*monster!*" Then everyone gets up and run around the playground. All four boys ran away, but no one was chasing. Some of them stopped running, and walked over to the play house again, but the group dissolved.

The boys took the rule-based game "Duck, duck, goose", which they had learnt a few days earlier as a starting point, but altered the game to fit in with their own imaginary themes and narratives. This example of innovation shows the compromised nature of children's play, how it is, to borrow a term from Lévi-Strauss (1966), a form of 'bricolage' that partly reworks the everyday resources that are available. This innovative reworking of the game reveals the relationship between pedagogic structures that seek to direct the imaginary and the everyday practices that reclaim its production. In their play, the boys made new rules and roles, which they negotiated along the way. They all sat down, except for the "picker", who tapped the others' heads and said "duck". This far, the boys' play interaction was similar to the original rules introduced by the teachers, but then Malcom decided to tap everyone twice, and this time he said "monster, monster, monster", after which everyone ran, not just the "picker" and the "goose". The group of boys and their play dissolved with no one chasing anyone, for everyone ran away. The game was transformed by the boys so that an imaginary monster comes into their circle; there was no race against each other but against an imaginary being. In this new game the children were certainly elaborating on the teacher's game and they

reinterpreted the meaning of this activity. In the previous example, Hailey did not share the teachers' and other children's view of how running fast over the shortest distance to get to the right vacant spot was the goal of the game. In her opinion, it was much more fun to break the rules and to run in an unexpected way. It seemed that for her, the object here was to innovate within ways that simultaneously elaborated and transformed what was already at hand as a symbolic resource. Hailey enjoyed the laughter she caused and she repeated her previous actions because her goal was to have fun, rather than to compete. The boys repeated Hailey's action of transforming what was already at hand, but in a new way by finding another reason to run in a non-competitive way, namely together from a monster that could catch them. It is the ambiguity of running and the fact that it features as a pleasurable activity in so many games that was taken up to explore cultivated forms of fear. The children enjoyed the mutual staging and sharing of a common emotion. The children's imaginary play emerges as a hybrid realm that borrows and remakes the games of teachers but also the heroic narratives of fear and conquest that dominate popular televisions cartoon series, often involving running away from monsters.

Framing actions and messages

In children's creation of shared imaginary worlds they often interpret, negotiate and comment upon the real world. Even if what they make up is "only pretend", it nevertheless feeds off and refers to the real, and in this way the imaginary and the real can not be seen as separate. Indeed some writers like Castoriadis (1987) would argue that social reality is an institutionalised imaginary which has naturalised itself. Whilst such an overall approach has much to offer, it is also necessary to take up the specific interpretative frames that children use and the problems in everyday life that this can generate. The communication processes involved in play can be partly self-reflexive and can generate paradoxes. This has been analysed by Bateson (2000), who see humans as framing their activities and as navigating between different levels of communication from which paradoxes can arise. The metacommunicative message "this is play" frames play-actions. In this frame "the playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson, 2000:180). The nip, then, can be said to simultaneously be a bite and a not-bite. Bateson (2000:289-290) further argues that often in the communication process there occur signals whose function is to classify contexts and he calls these signals "context markers". These markers guide frame interpretations. Framing communication as play and non-play

interchangeably is something children do frequently during their interactions. Even the youngest children in the groups of 3-5 year olds can handle skilfully this movement between metacommunicational frames. The following example occurred in early February, it was afternoon and we were inside the Pebbles Room. Eleanor was in a corner talking to me (researcher, R) about the doll she was carrying around a moment ago, wrapped in a blanket. She has now laid down the doll on a children's couch in the corner and explains to me that the baby is sleeping.

1. R: *Aha… Hey, can I ask you a question? … What do you do when you play?*

[Eleanor looks seriously at me for a few seconds, then smiles.]

2. E: *I'm patting her. Like this.*

[Eleanor has picked up the doll and strokes it.]

3. E: *Can you hold the baby? I'm goin' to work.*

4. R: *You're going to work? Sure, I can hold the baby.*

[Eleanor puts the doll in my lap.]

5. R: *Have a good day!*

[I wave goodbye to Eleanor. Eleanor looks at me with a big grin while tip-toeing behind a screen. A few seconds later she returns with a more serious look and just stands there without saying a word]

6. R: *Did you have a good day?*

7. E: *Yeah... I'm not at work anymore.*

8. R: *I think the baby is hungry. Did you buy any food on your way home from work?*

9. E: *Yes... Bikkies!*

[Eleanor grins as she kneels down, puts her fingers together and leads them to the doll's mouth. Then she walks over behind the small couch nearby, leans over the back of it and gives me a serious look.]

10. E: *I'm not at work anymore. … I'm not at work anymore, I'm at kindy now.*

Eleanor was pretending that the doll was a baby sleeping, but my initial question was outside the play-frame when I asked what she did when she played. She answered me by referring to what she was doing then, namely; pretending to care for a doll as though it was a baby. Her gestures re-established the play-frame, and she called for my participation within it by elaborating it further and portraying a mother needing to go off to work. When she returned from work, however, she was the one who stepped out of the play-frame, only I did not realize this and proceeded to play within the frame. She accepted this temporarily, but then

repeated her previous message to tell me that she was no longer playing, that she was not at work any more but at kindy..

In his symbolic interactionist analysis of the micro-structure of human communications, Goffman (1974), argues that an individual can apply several frameworks at any time. Those frameworks which are taken for granted and are not seen to depend on prior interpretation are called "primary frameworks". The play-frame organises experience, but is not primary because play is modelled on an already meaningful pattern; in the above case of a mother going to work and then returning. Here play is not just a *copy* of the original pattern; rather, play also involves a *transformation*. In Goffman's terms, the adult-dominated common sense world provides models or patterns for much of children's play. Eleanor's actions in the role of a modern mother with work commitments explores the everyday routines, the breaks, departures and reunifications that mothers experience in caring for their babies. When Eleanor goes to work as a mother, however, she does not travel a long way and stay there for many hours –she tip toes behind a screen, out of sight, and then she comes back a moment later. Susan Stewart has argued that all play involves detaching messages from their context of origin, and in play a new, play-specific space/time context of meaning is created for re-contextualising those messages (Stewart, 1979:37). Along the way Eleanor found it necessary to tell me how to interpret her and her actions. Returning from work was not an elaboration of the play narrative; for she explained that it ended this play-specific space/time, she was at kindy again. Eleanor was engaging in what, Bateson (2000:289-290) calls "context markers", which are signals whose function is to classify contexts, they are meanings that frame other meanings. These markers guide interpretations. When I did not understand that she was framing the message as non-play, she repeated her message to signal that she was not playing anymore.

Children did not always agree on the framing of their interaction. An example from the Wallabies Room shows how two boys frame their actions as play and sought to make a girl play the monster in their imaginary world. They refused to acknowledge her right to choose her own imaginary identity. Sometimes the power relations between children and their alliances with each other are created around imposing coercive forms of play. These forms of play can be organised around articulating differences and inequalities. Here we see an example of a coercive form of play which involves a role which is partly empowering, but nevertheless unsatisfying.

[I am on the grass watching a group of girls play. Another girl, Holly, approaches me (researcher, R).]

1. H: *Excuse me, I'm not a monster.*

2. R: *You're not?*

[Holly shakes her head.]

3. R: *Okay.*

[I do not understand what she wants, and I resume watching the group of girls playing. Holly, however, is not satisfied and continues with a complaining tone:]

4. H: *But... I'm not a monster. ...But, they ...run away from me.* [She points at two boys who are hiding behind some palm trees a few meters away. They peek at me and Holly, grinning and giggling.]

5. R: *They did?*

6. H: *They won't talk to me. ... Can you talk to them?*

7. R: *You go talk to them.*

[Holly runs over to the boys hiding behind the palm trees.]

The two boys have included Holly in their play-frame, they have made her a monster. She does not agree with the unsatisfying identity they have imposed on her and which they confirm by continuously running away from her. The boys are using her as a prop in their play narrative, rather than recognising her as a participant who has the right to choose her own imaginary identity or perhaps alternate roles with them. Grinning and giggling behind the palm trees, the boys find the situation, including her distress, highly amusing. The boys reject Holly's attempts to renegotiate her role as a monster in their play-frame and so she tries to get an adult to intervene on her behalf, to talk to them. She resorts to realism that she quite obviously is not a monster, but they deny her the right to have her non-play attitude acknowledged. When she tries to talk to them she tries to enter the metacommunicational level to redefine herself, but they refuse to answer Holly and instead treat her approaches as part of their play, as a monster approaching them. Another aspect which is conspicuous in this example is the gender differences in how the boys make a girl the monster in their narrative. In itself this does not allow for a thorough analysis of gender relationships, but one possible interpretation of this conflict over the terms of the imaginary may be that it contains an element of gender conflict and gender solidarities. The solidarity of the boys against the girl and the pleasure they felt in her distress is perhaps part of emerging structures of gender differences which are explored allegorically in play. In Chapter 5, examples of gender aspects

in the children's play will be discussed further. Here, as an ambiguous adult, I was asked to put a stop to this kind of teasing, to try and get the boys to reflect on the ethics of how they play with the imaginary, and the kinds of distress it can entrap others within.

Within the child care centre, play is part of processes of subject formation and western pedagogic methods for teaching children reciprocal and respectful relations. The children learn that there are moral boundaries to their play worlds, and that the power of play can also wound and harm others. For this reason, the children learn the ethics of how to play, about how to play properly and in a considerate way with each other's feelings and identities. It is the imaginary constitutions of identity as something an individual ought to control that is affirmed by Holly when she affirms her realism and pleads for me to intervene morally in a context where she has lost control of her public identity to others. She appeals to the moral order which ought to underpin play, as something that ought to be freely chosen and entered into by actors. This moral order is informed by the principles of democracy and the values of individualism. The children are taught to acknowledge the internal imaginary of another as having a right to exist and they must learn to care for each other's imaginary identities. The boys are challenging and playing with these ethics. They claim the right to *their* imaginary world and it is a tough world for those who want to play with them. Here the imaginary can not be romanticised as just a world of freedom and pleasurable fantasy. Holly sought partly to renegotiate her role in the play narrative, but also to end it. The play had become too all embracing and did not give her room to move into other pleasurable ways of defining herself. The boys' teasing of her was protected by them defining and framing the situation as play. Overt realism, "I'm not a monster", was her only defence, which she sought to have authoritatively confirmed and deployed to end this play interaction that refused to come to an end. This incident reveals how the imaginary can be problematic for children and teachers. It is source of great delight and freedom, but play also has the potential to become a world of mockery and harassment that threatens to take over one's identity with imprisoning narratives.

Deception, tricks and truth

For most of the time, children enjoy playing with each other, but every now and then they will fight over the material and imaginary resources that make up their games and play worlds. One afternoon Tanya and Lily were outside in the concrete area, and Tanya wanted some blocks which Lily had so as to fill her own board with blocks completely. They began to

argue about whether Lily should share with Tanya or not and very quickly the playing escalated to include other gifts outside the childcare centre that children offer to each other, namely for each other's birthday parties. Tanya tried different "tricks", which she calls them, to get Lily to share. These tricks bear a resemblance to pretend play even though they are a form of bluff that the other child can choose to expose as such.

[Tanya and Lily have been interchangeably doing puzzle blocks and playing together, visiting and calling each other with pretend telephones. They sit next to each other and they each have two boards on which they place their blocks. When Tanya's board is completely filled with blocks she starts picking blocks off one of Lily's boards.]

1. T: *Now I… Now I'll fill in this. So now…that one has to be both of us.*

[Tanya reaches over Lily to get one of Lily's boards.]

2. L: *No.*

3. T: *Yes. I need to fill in this one.*

4. L: *You can take that block!*

[Lily pushes Tanya's hands out of reach of her board and points to one of Tanya's boards.]

5. T: *No, cause I need them both.*

6. L: *No, this is mine!*

7. T: *That's it. Your invitation is going to be ripped.*

8. L: *I don't have invitations.*

9. T: *Yes you do! Cause I made one, and I haven't gave it to you…For my birthday party.*

10. L: *What? … But, Tanya! You* can't *do that. If someone wants... if someone wants to keep this you can still give the party card!*

11. T: *Na'a...*

12. L: *YEAH!*

13. T: *Not if you're being rude.*

14. L: *But you...*

15. T: *And mean.*

[Lily drops a block on the floor again and bends down to get it. Tanya quickly takes one of Lily's blocks without her noticing, and continues the argument.]

16. T: *That's being...mean. So you have to share.*

17. L: *I'm not… NO!*

18. T: *Yes!*

19. L: *Noooo!*

20. T: *I'm telling!*

21. L: *Well, I am telling.*

22. T: *No, that is being rude and mean.*

[Tanya moves from the table towards one of the teachers.]

23. T: *You're gonna be in* big *trouble.*

24. L: *No I won't! These are mine!*

25. T: *You're gonna be in really big trouble.*

26. L: *Why don't you ask her that I was being naughty?*

[Lily points at me.]

27. T: *No, she's not… She's a kid that's plays with us.*

[Lily continues doing her puzzle. Tanya is standing behind Lily's back, watching her. Tanya has said she will tell the teacher and has walked in the right direction, but she has stopped and doesn't walk over. Tanya shouts to Lily that when she tells the teacher, the teacher will make a phone call to Lily's mother. Lily first stops doing the letter block puzzle and turns to Tanya with a terrified look.]

28: L: *NOOO! But...*

[Lily starts to cry out loud and hits the letter blocks in front of her. Then she puts her head down, pulls her feet up onto the chair, folds her arms around, and cries. Moments later, Tanya comes back to the table where Lily is sitting.]

29: T: *Well, she did.*

[Tanya reaches over and takes some of Lily's letter blocks which she has placed on the board. Lily is crying loudly. One of the teachers calls Lily over. When Lily comes back, Tanya smilingly explains to her:]

30: T: *When I told you she was gonna talk to your mum... It was a trick!*

[Tanya tries to make amends and says she does not need many blocks. A few moments later Tanya calls Lily.]

31: T: *Ding, Ding. RING, RING! … Lily I'm ringing you!*

[Lily answers the phone.]

32: L: *WHAT? What is it? I'm working!*

[Lily slaps her phone down on the table.]

As the oldest girl in the Pebbles Room, Tanya was a clever navigator in terms of the rules and routines of the child care centre. She often voiced her opinion during play interaction and her suggestions were usually accepted by other children. Tanya was experienced in managing play worlds and usually did so in a way which was fun and secured ongoing interest and continuation of different narratives. During the first part of the above interaction with Lily, she had been the one to decide what happened next and had been instructing Lily on how to

proceed with directions like "No! You come in to tell me what it is", "There's a door here. Now can you grab my phone for me?" and "No. Just yell." Lily agreed to follow all of Tanya's instructions, up until Tanya tried to get hold of her share of the blocks. First, Tanya tried to negotiate and said to Lily that the blocks on the board between them have to be shared. Then she withdrew an invitation that was not real, but a real possibility for Tanya's birthday was two months away. Tanya said to Lily that her invitation was going to be ripped if she did not share the blocks, but Lily protested. In Lily's opinion, this was not the way things were done; if someone did not share their play blocks it was still not appropriate to deny them an invitation to a birthday party. Tanya said it is rude and mean not to share, and that she was going to tell on Lily. Tanya tricked Lily into thinking she went to tell the teacher, who supposedly was going to make a phone call to Lily's mother, when in fact Tanya did not even talk to the teacher, she just waited a while behind Lily's back where she could not see her. Lily started to cry out loud and was called over to one of the teachers, who wanted to know what was going on. Tanya realized that she might get caught not telling the truth and when Lily came back from talking to the teacher Tanya explained to Lily that it was only a trick. She proceeded with being generous with the blocks that they moments before were arguing about. What the children comment upon and negotiate is the ethics of play; the ethics of their relationships with each other are mediated by the ethics of how they take seriously each others right to imaginary resources, identities and narratives.

There are two aspects to Tanya's actions which might be called "tricks"; the imaginary birthday invitation, and Tanya's made up conversation with the teacher about the phone call to Lily's mother. There are central similarities between "tricks" or deceptions, and play. To communicate a message in which the signals exchanged are "untrue or not meant", which is one of Bateson's defining characteristics of play behaviour (2000:183). But Tanya does not seem to frame her actions as play because she explicitly says to Lily that it was a trick. In Goffman's theories on framing, he separates between "keying" and "fabrication" and he says that "whereas a keying intendedly leads all participants to have the same view of what it is that is going on, a fabrication requires differences" (Goffman, 1974:84). Interestingly, a trick can sometimes mediate between play and deception. It can have aspects of both.

Given that Lily and Tanya had earlier been playing at talking over the phone, it was possible for Tanya to integrate her threat of the teacher calling Lily's mother to their play narrative and to couch it as not serious, as an elaboration of the play narrative about phones which had

gone too far. When Lily came back from talking to the teacher, Tanya immediately confessed her deceptive actions in a happy manner, trying to make fun of it and trying to recode it as play that was not meant as real hurt. Lily, on the other hand, did not seem to think it was humorous, and continued with her blocks. Tanya gave in and tried to make amends by letting Lily keep some of the blocks they had been arguing about. Lily did not say much to Tanya, but when Tanya called her on the pretend telephones which Lily was particularly interested in playing with earlier on, Lily was the one to hang up on Tanya: "WHAT? What is it? I'm working!" This gesture is ambiguous; it marks Lily being cross with Tanya, yet it is also a continuation of their previous play and friendship, albeit in a strained form. Lily did answer the imaginary telephone, so she confirmed the imaginary world she shared with Tanya, which was partly copying adult narratives and interactions. Lily said in an irritated voice that she was busy working and used this imaginary elaboration of the play to mark her distance from Tanya and that all had not yet been forgiven. Another aspect of this interaction was that Lily used the dichotomy of the real, the adult empowered world of work and pedagogy in contrast to play, to put Tanya back in a subordinate place as an annoying child. In contrast to her eagerness towards talking on the phone before, Lily then closed down a play of imaginary telephones which had been distressful and which Tanya could manipulate in ways that transgressed agreed ethical rules for how to play with each other.

Goffman (1974) analyses how in a trick there is not the same agreed participation in establishing a frame for meaning as in play. He notes that: "[f]or those in on a deception, what is going on *is* fabrication; for those contained, what is going on is *what* is being fabricated. The rim of the frame is a construction, but only the fabricators see it" (Goffman, 1974:84). In other words, what appears as meaningful for those in on a deception is different from what appears as meaningful to those contained and acting within the deception. Tricks and deceptions have an asymmetry, a fundamental inequality in power, for they privilege the person who is organising the frames for others to inhabit. To some extent this was what made it easy for Tanya to redefine her threats to Lily as a trick. She was someone who was always organising play narratives for others, controlling their development and elaboration. Part of the potential structure of play is to creatively incorporate the real world into an unfolding imaginary narrative. This can include material props, but also people and events that happen outside the play-frame can be internalised as a resource for objectifying and continuing the imaginary narrative. Children are aware that sometimes play narratives can elaborate in unsatisfying ways and they negotiate and even argue over the direction that a play narrative

should take, with some being unhappy with the role or imaginary identity that they are asked to perform. Tanya was able to couch her manipulations as being playful. Here the children play on the boundaries of mistaking as real what is imaginary and mistaking as imaginary what is real. But there is even here a sense of ethical behaviour about what are legitimate tricks, which regulate this use of playful deception. Tanya had gone too far when she withdrew a birthday invitation and brought in the authority of teachers and Lily's mother in order to capture Lily's play-blocks.

There was another episode, in the Wallabies Room one day, in which the boundaries between play, deception and reality seemed just as entangled as with Tanya's tricks.

[Three girls are by the couch inside playing "group time". Leanne is the teacher and finds a book. She sits on the couch while two other girls, Cara and Eliza, are on the floor in front of her. Leanne has chosen a Disney-book called "The Rescue". "*Listen to the* story", she says admonishingly to the other two, impersonating the teachers. She opens the book and discovers that the binding of the book is torn. It is barely held together. She tears the rest of the binding while the other two are watching her, and then she lets out a gasp and says "*Who ripped it? Look!*" She holds the book in front of her to show the others. The book is in two pieces. "*Who ripped it?*" repeats Cara. Eliza looks unconvinced at Leanne, but does not say anything. Then Leanne says "*I didn't do it!*" She walks over to one of the teachers.]

1. L: *Excuse me. Excuse me, Beth? Look!*
2. B: *Oh! Who did that?*
3. L: *I didn't do it! It...It was Randy!*
4. B: *Randy? ...Randy did it?*
5. E: *No! No. Beth! Excuse me it was* her.

[Eliza points at Leanne. The teacher turns to Leanne.]

6. B: *What are your parents gonna say now? I'm going to see if I can fix it.*

[The teacher walks off with the book. Leanne turns to Cara and Eliza.]

7. L: *See? It wasn't me. It wasn't me that ripped it.*

Playing group time was popular among the children in both centres, and it was highly amusing when the children cleverly imitated the teacher's speech and intonation. Above, Leanne took a seat in the couch and assumed the posture and demeanour of a teacher. Her two playmates sat on the floor and ironically pretended to be children, namely like those sitting during group time. Leanne found a book and said "Listen to the *story*" in a pedagogic

authoritative manner that emphasised the word "story", just like teachers commonly did. What happened next, however, was that she ripped off the binding of the book she was holding, and then proceeded with letting out a gasp and asking the others "Who ripped it?". There seems to be several aspects of Leanne's behaviour which can be interpreted as untrue; that she does not know who ripped the book, her claim of knowing that Randy did it, and that she did not do it. Initially, Leanne acted in the role of a teacher, sitting on the couch and reading a book to the children, but her action of ripping the book does not fit the teacher's role and might therefore be interpreted as a non-play action. Alternatively it can be interpreted as Leanne playing many roles, and having quickly switched to the role of a disobedient child so she can switch back quickly to pursue her main role of outraged teacher. When she asked the question "Who ripped it?" just after ripping the book her signals were untrue or not meant; she pretended not to know. More importantly, she sought to incorporate the other children into this 'knowing of what not to know', into editing out her brief switch to the role of a naughty child.

The teachers in both centres would often used the occasion of group time to talk to the children when something was broken, asking who did it, and telling the children that they should be careful not to break things. What Leanne said immediately after having ripped the book fits a model of teacher authority and group time procedures, and was framed as a continuation of the play narrative that the girls had already established. Cara confirmed Leanne's new elaboration of their play-frame when she repeated "Who ripped it?" But Eliza was not so sure about how to navigate within the stream of all these quickly occurring multiple identities. She remained silent and did not put on a shocked look like the others who pretended that they did not know who ripped the book. Cara affirmed Leanne's framing of her actions: it was Leanne temporarily playing an unknown disobedient child who ripped the book, so as to create and stage the context of angry teacher. Eliza seemed to frame the situation differently. Leanne said that she did not do it and she went to tell the teacher. These were actions she did not perform as herself, but in the role of transgressive child, and not in the role of a teacher. When the real teacher asked who did it, Leanne claimed it was Randy. Here the children got tapped in identity-realist logic that calls for a real transgressor to be brought forward, whereas the transgressor had always so far been an imaginary character. Randy was in the room, but had not been near the girls. The teacher seemed unconvinced by Leanne's claim and asked her to confirm that it was him. Eliza had quietly been watching all of this, but clearly did not wish to go along with it, and she told on Leanne. When the teacher

walked off with the book to fix it, Leanne turned to the others and said yet again that it was not her that ripped the book.

In the first example, it is difficult to know if Tanya's trick happened outside the play-frame, if the actions were performed were *as her*. Initially her trick relied on the other person not knowing it was an elaborate deception, but later it was dependent on Lily accepting it as a playful trick. In the second example, Leanne's tricky performance required a rapid movement between roles. Her initial actions were performed *as teacher*, and at first all the girls pretended that she was a teacher. But whereas both Cara and Leanne maintained the position that this was play even when faced with later challenges to the playful frame, Eliza came to frame Leanne's ripped book no longer as playful prop but as a real torn book.

Part of the complexity of children's play resides in a continual movement between different identities that require their own staging of themselves so as to be objectified to others. Employing Goffman's (1974:84) terminology, Leanne's actions and messages might be interpreted as "keyings" rather than "fabrications". She ripped the book in front of her playmates and she knew they saw this. As opposed to keying, the intention of a fabrication is to lead participants to have different views on what is going on. In contrast to Tanya's situation, the point of departure for Leanne in this situation was that all participants shared an experience of what has happened; they saw her rip the book, but had to conspire to deny this, or alternatively to affirm that it was not she-as-herself who ripped it. Leanne seemed to be trying to key the situation in a way which lead them all to share a common public view of what was going on; they were playing group time and they did not know who ripped the book. In this way children create tacit forms of solidarity against teachers that involves them all knowing what not to know. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Taussig (1999) has recently argued that perhaps it is not so much truth that underpins social life but ways of knowing what not to know and how not to know what one knows. In Chapter 2, I argued that children exploit the ambiguity of their status of what they know and do not know in that adults can never be fully sure what the child knows and this is what the child also learns to know – namely how the adult knows them as knowing subjects[6]. Leanne tried to exploit this by going to the teacher. This action which is ambiguous in that it is both outside of the frame but can also strangely enough be interpreted as a continuation of the play frame, with a real teacher now coming in

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[6] See Chapter 2, pages 34-35 for further details.

to take Leanne's place as the real teacher inquiring her ripped the book. This is an example of how the real world can be incorporated into the imaginary as a prop to continue the play narratives. Leanne gave up her position as a teacher and went back to being a child so that the play narratives could continue despite the realism that threatened to overtake the imaginary world, as it did when Eliza refused to continue the deception.

Children often play out significant events, narratives and persona in their lives. Some have to do with their home situation and their parents; others have to do with the child care centre. Group time is a time of the day when many rules are imposed on the children, and the gaze of teachers, the powerful Other, cannot easily be escaped when they are sitting on the mat in front of a teacher on the couch. During group time, breaking of rules and inappropriate behaviour will be discussed in front of everyone, and the children learn to exploit the ambiguity of their status as knowing subjects as one way of avoiding this. They often play dumb, to be ignorant and not knowing, and this often works, though not always. When the children conspire in not knowing, issues of adult power and knowledge in relationship to children come to the fore.

Joking behaviour

Another important form of communication related to play, trickery and lying was joking. In all these communication forms there are different ways of conveying messages that are untrue or not meant, this is their common characteristic. Though we might want to distinguish analytically between these categories and we should, in their everyday practices children used the overlap between them to create ambiguous and strategic forms of make-believe.

> It is lunch time and I am at a table with Shane, Peter and Malcom. Peter and Malcom are talking about jokes, and I ask them "*What's a joke?*" Peter rolls his eyes and says "*You know what a joke is!*" But Malcom explains to me "*Ehm... You're Hennie* [points at me]*, you're Malcom* [points at Peter]*, and I'm Peter! – That's a joke!*"

The children learn that there are different frames for different forms of make-believe behaviour. As the above example shows, some forms of joking were equated by the children with the way they develop and perform other roles and identities during play interaction. The children play for the sake of playing, to have fun, but also to experience other emotions like

fear or forms authority. For them what partly defined a joke is that it is made with the intent of being humorous. Everyone laughed at Malcom's joke, which strictly speaking was not a joke. However, for many children transformations in identity and reality are pleasurable activities. Jokes about identity were not the only form of joking among the children. During "Show and Tell" in group time Theodore often enjoyed telling jokes instead of showing and talking about an object brought from home. He was encouraged by the teachers, and if there was spare time he would get a chance to tell jokes even if it was not his turn to show and tell, or even if they were not doing Show and Tell and it was just regular group time. His jokes explored the absurd possibilities of language and of the imaginary, and were a source of great delight to the children who in their everyday jokes also played with similar forms of humour.

It is group time and today Theodore has brought a book from home which they had read earlier the same day. He wants to show his book one more time during Show and Tell, but the teacher tells him that if he wants to say something he has to tell a joke, and so he does. "*What's up in the sky?*", he says. The children shout answers at Theodore and it is difficult to hear what anyone says, but someone shouts "*Stars and moons!*" The teacher repeats that answer, and looks curiously at Theodore. He replies; "*There's a sun in a truck up there!*" The children laugh and the teacher smilingly shakes her head. Then Theodore continues with a series of jokes, only interrupted by roars of laughter from his peers:

- *Do your ears go on your ears?*

- *Does a picture go in your eyes or in your face?*

- *Does your ears go in your ears?*

- *Does your head go on your head?*

- *Does your eyes go on your eyes?*

- *Does a toilet go on your head?*

- *Feel on your heads – there's a toilet on your head!*

The teacher says it is enough and finishes off group time.

One possible reading of the above performance is that the children follow a routine where particular forms of communication and messages were explicitly framed as joking by the teachers and the children who laugh together when they are supposed to. They learn that jokes, for example in the form of absurd paradoxical questions like Theodor's jokes, are made with the intent of being humorous. Through being nonsensical, they explored the absurdities in language, the incongruity of how something that language allows in its ordered composition is impossible to imagine or experience through the senses in the "real" world. It was the

ordering possibilities of language and grammar that are being laughed at. Often the children would often look at each other not only to share the amusement, but also to make sure they were laughing at the right place and time. Whereas the children found this kind of nonsense and absurdity amusing, the teachers would commonly smile and shake their head. This in turn only served to make the jokes even funnier as disturbances to the adult-dominated common sense world, which is ordered, rational and sensible. It is significant that the teacher brought the jokes to a stop when Theodore started touching on the theme of toilets which are invariably part of everyday children's humour. An interesting aspect of Theodore's humour is that it plays with the self-referential structure of language; that words can refer to words in ways that are impossible in the real world. Bateson made the self-referential nature of language a central part of his analysis of the communications of schizophrenics. In Theodore's case, it is not so much logical paradoxes that are being played with as the physical impossibility and absurdity of putting eyes on your eyes and ears on your ears. Much of children's humour plays with language's ability to generate meanings that are nonsensical and absurd if the things referred to were manipulated as such in the real world.

I discuss the relationship between common sense and nonsense in relation to children's imaginary worlds further in Chapter 5. The point I would like to make here is that when the teachers teach the children about joking behaviour – they learn how to behave both as teller and as audience. The performance of this routine also seemed to create and maintain a sense of collective belonging and community among the children as opposed to the adult teachers who shook their heads. This served to confirm the dichotomy of adults and children. Group time was a time and space in which the teachers' authority in relation to the children was commonly experienced and it was this authority of ordered common sense worlds of meaning that children enjoyed subverting. In their shared laughter they discover and assert collective worlds of solidarity that partly gain their meaning as a subversion of regimes for being sensible[7]. It is the possibilities and powers of make-believe as well as the compositional powers of language which are played with to create possibilities for meaning that escape the control of adults, even though adults control their stage performances.

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[7] Group time could in this way sometimes function as what Gluckman (1954) calls a "ritual of rebellion", the similarity being how institutionalised subversions of the dominant social order serve to reproduce it. In the child care centre, teachers do not squash these subversions by children but provide occasions within which these "rituals of rebellion" can take place.

In the everyday time-space regimes of the child care centre, the children were perhaps most controlled by adults during group time. The rules and routines during meal time and other times are also controlled, but the teachers would also commonly be doing other tasks during these times, and therefore the opportunities for hiding and concealment were usually greater. During group time, every child had to sit quietly on a mat with their hands in their laps. They were to listen, and they were to raise their hands if they wanted to say something and not speak unless granted permission. These rules were not followed strictly at all times. Some of the rules were usually broken by children and most teachers would refrain from commenting upon it if it did not disturb the activity too much. But, during group time, there was one teacher who was fully devoted to keep the children disciplined. Though the teachers commonly would refrain from publicly criticising all breaking of rules in group time, they would notice and make a point of letting the children know that they had noticed. The critical gaze of the powerful other could not easily be escaped. Teachers would keep track of who was disturbing and who behaved well, and if someone stood out in either way they would criticise the disturber and praise the well-behaved.

When the children played "group time" they played with the power relationships between teachers and children. The children then had the opportunity to be pedagogic, to teach others about something that they knew. In effect, children would get to play out the authority of adults. The joking routine during group time served to re-affirm the differences between the adults' and the children's worlds of meaning, when the children laughed and the teachers did not. While the adults were teaching the children the joking routine and were the ones who had knowledge about jokes, the children were the ones who decided what was humorous and what was not. They affirmed another view of language as containing not just ordered forms of ambiguity, but as containing the pleasure to use language to create unthinkable worlds of make-believe. It was a way for the children to affirm their identity against adults, and when the adults did not laugh it was they who did not understand and who appeared unknowing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the children's communication of the imaginary and what this shows is how different forms of make-believe can be analytically distinguished, but also how the boundaries between them is blurred in everyday life. The children actively negotiate and manipulate the framing of their own and others' actions in both adult-organised activities and

in their interaction with peers. Games are made into play, tricks and deception are denied as such and framed as play, and make-believe identities are framed as joking. The children are not just playing with content, but the categories or the definitions so that these become ambiguous. The children's social reality often requires them redefining their activities in relation to each other, and what allows for this blurring of boundaries is that they are all forms make-believe. There is joy and pleasure, but also domination and power, and therefore one should be careful of romanticising children's everyday life and the imaginary play worlds that children create together. Make-believe can be seen as a resource that children engage in, which allows for transformation and transgression of patterns and aspects of their everyday life. As this chapter shows, play can be seen as part of the definition of childhood between children in juxtaposition to the adult world of sense making. The ways in which the children play becomes a vehicle for reflection on reality is further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The imaginary as a resource

What is analysed in this chapter is the ways in which children incorporate and play with various aspects of their ordinary everyday lives. The children's imaginary narratives become not just a vehicle for reflections on everyday reality, but also ways of instituting and exploring alternative versions of reality as the basis of their social relations with each other. The aim of this chapter is not primarily to explore why children incorporate certain aspects of everyday life into their play – what is emphasised here is what they choose to incorporate and comment on, and the ways in which they do so. These processes are not totally random and haphazard, even if they are often highly creative or innovative. As argued earlier, play is a realm within everyday life in the child care centre in which children have some authority over worlds of meaning. Although these worlds are dependent upon adults in many ways, they also have a degree of autonomy from adults and can therefore provide a metacommentary on the adult-dominated, common sense world that children witness and participate within. While also including an example of adult participation in play, the main focus of this chapter is the play narratives and imaginary worlds that the children create when playing on their own. I argue that what at first might appear as frivolous and absurd in children's play is, in fact, not completely random and often makes sense. Although not always in simple and obvious ways, play narratives have a consistency to them – they have a regularity that relates them to the real world. The children's play is modelled on patterns from everyday life; messages from the original pattern are detached from their original context of origin and incorporated into the play-specific space/time (Stewart, 1979). It is in this process, through transformation, that children's play becomes a vehicle for reflections on reality. And it is the distance from reality which allows for these reflections (Ricoeur, 1979:127).

Asymmetrical relationships and disciplined time/space

> It is morning and we are outside. One of the teachers, Ann, and Tanya is inside the timber hut located in the middle of the outside area. Ann leans out one of the windows with a big smile. She tells me that Tanya is the teacher and she is the naughty child. Then she resumes playing with Tanya. They pretend that they are in a classroom at school, and Tanya tells Ann to sit down. Tanya has a stick in her hand and is pointing at the floor. Ann sits down. They argue about whether or not Ann is naughty. Ann imitates the children in the child care centre, how they speak when they are in similar situations in everyday life when they defend themselves against accusations of having been naughty. Ann claims to be innocent, but Tanya does not accept her excuses. "*If you do that again I will put you in a bubble!*", Tanya says to Ann in a sharp voice. She is facing Ann, who is sitting on the floor of the hut, and she draws a circle in the air with her stick. Ann hesitates as if undecided as to how to proceed, but eventually asks Tanya in her normal voice "*Do teachers do that at school?*" Now Tanya hesitates and before she can answer Ann, another girl, Laura, enters the hut. Tanya tells her to sit down next to Ann. She sits down. Ann then exclaims in her child-like voice, pointing her finger at the new girl, "*She did it! Laura did it!*" Tanya resumes executing the bubble-punishment, putting Ann in a bubble for being naughty. The playing dissolves soon after.

This was the only occasion during the months I was there that I saw a teacher engage in role play with the children which lasted for more than a brief moment. Interestingly, the imaginary narrative Ann and Tanya created here involves an inversion of their everyday life roles in the child care centre. They played with the power relationship between teacher and child. Ann eagerly acted out the role of being a naughty child trying to avoid being disciplined and blaming someone else, while Tanya enjoyed the empowerment of the teacher role. Their play is modelled on what, following Goffman's (1974) theory on framing, can be called a "pattern" that they both have intimate knowledge of. Ann enjoys giving Tanya the challenge of finding legitimate ways of disciplining the naughty child who claims innocence and Tanya enjoys being in control. But when Tanya resorts to incorporating an imaginary bubble in their play, Ann is puzzled. This does not fit her idea of the pattern which their play is modelled on and it does not make sense to her. It also undermines the humanitarian caring aspect of a teacher by equating her more with a warden with power to imprison inmates in sealed off worlds. Up until now Ann has been imitating some of the children's common ways of speaking, but when she asks Tanya if teachers do that at school she uses her normal voice. In other words, she is

framing the question as non-play. When Tanya does not answer her, but proceeds with putting naughty children in bubbles, Ann is uncertain of how to play her role and the play dissolves. Whilst Ann was willing to go along with a realist inversion and caricature of teacher-pupil pedagogic relations, she was more hesitant about giving Tanya authority and legitimacy as a teacher in a more extreme caricature of that pedagogic relationship. Captivity, even in the form of imaginary bubbles, is here affirmed as not what teachers are enforcing or producing. It seems it cannot be tolerated even as an imaginary possibility. To some extent, the teacher here has a realist conception of play as producing faithful imaginary copies of reality. Whereas for the children, it appears to be in exaggeration, in distortion that aspects of the real become revealed, that the power relation as a custodial relationship is explored.

In Chapter 2, I argued that children in the child care centre learn that time and space are regulated, and that time schedules can be seen as embodying the logic of a wider social order. Children learn that time which belongs to them, in which they can choose more freely what to do, always follow forms of time that belong to and are organised by others. However, adults have authority in regards to skills and knowledge, and as has been shown, even when the children play on their own, adults guard the ethics of proper play behaviour. In this example, whilst Ann professes to be unable to make sense of Tanya's imaginary bubble because it is not what teachers do, one could also argue that this bubble is a metaphor for how adults in the child care centre setting exercise control over space and time, and how they control and discipline the posture and gesture of children's bodies. If a child was disturbing group time, then a teacher would occasionally direct the child to go somewhere and sit alone. The punishment involved being singled out, isolated and excluded – that is, it was similar to being put in a symbolic bubble. There children are alone, isolated from the fellowship of other friends. Tanya chose an apt metaphor that was not totally obscure or completely nonsensical, and this confronted and disturbed her teacher. Tanya's model of power was grounded in solitary confinement within an imaginary enclosure not of one's own making. This example shows how the imprisoning powers of the imaginary and the alienating solitude it can offer can be disturbing. Children's imaginary worlds are full of creative allegories of the nature of modern pedagogic power as grounded not in violence but in non-corporeal forms of punishment. Though Tanya does hold a stick, it is not for hitting. It is for indicating and authorising pedagogic, common sense worlds, and it emphasises her role as an authoritative person. I interpret Tanya's bubble as a metaphor or an allegory for modern regimes of power where punishment takes a symbolic, non-corporeal form. It often takes the form of solitary

confinement or social isolation that is meant to produce self-awareness and self-transformations (cf. , 1999).

In the child care centre, the teachers were the ones who know about common sense, which refers to "the real"; a domain experienced through the senses (Stewart, 1979:13). The teachers would often smilingly comment on children being silly in their playful transformations and transgressions of everyday sense-making. This relationship between the discourse of common sense and nonsense is interesting when analysing children's play because it is relevant for an understanding of the relationship between the imaginary and everyday life. This is a matter of classification in which sense and nonsense depend on each other for their meaning. Furthermore, as Stewart (1979:5) notes, "nonsense becomes appropriate only to the everyday discourse of the socially purposeless, to those on the peripheries of everyday life: the infant, the child, the mad and the senile, the chronically foolish and playful". When the children's transgressions and transformations are called "silly" by the teachers, it involves a classification of these transgressions as not common sense. One might also suggest this is part of why teachers seldom participate in the children's pretend play. Common-sense thinking, says Stewart (1979:12) "must see the lifeworld as a stable and ordered phenomenon in order to get on with the business at hand". Acting "as if" something is other than what it "really is" – meaning how it is experienced through the senses – is not following common sense.

Tanya's bubble may perhaps appear as nonsensical in that teachers do not put children in bubbles; it is a transgression of the everyday life pattern their play is modelled on. But it can also be seen as an exploration the imaginary possibilities of the teacher-child power relationship. It amplifies and exaggerates pedagogic power and provides a comment on the reality of its everyday forms. When messages are detached from their context of origin and re-contextualised in a play-specific time/space, this can be a paradoxical process in which levels of abstractions can be confused. Elaborating on Bateson's (2000) exploration of the paradoxes inherent in children's play, Stewart (1979) argues that a paradox "fractures the universe of discourse". The power of the paradox in play lies in framing the nature of the "not"; "play involves the manipulation of contexts of messages and not simply a manipulation of the message itself. It is not, therefore, a shift within the domain of everyday lifeworld; rather, it is a shift to another domain of reality" (Stewart, 1979:29). The paradox in play is a paradox of reflexivity, of self-contradiction. Play is modelled on an already meaningful pattern and it is precisely the *contrast* to this model which makes play meaningful (Goffman, 1974). Ricoeur

(1979:127) is concerned with the function of fiction in shaping reality and he says that "the paradox of fiction [is that] because it has no previous referent, it may refer in a productive way to reality". It is the distance to reality which the imaginary world provides that, paradoxically, allows it to reflect on reality; it can change reality in that it both invents and rediscovers its inherent structure and possibilities – its order and contingencies.

Similar to how Tanya created a confined, disciplined time/space with her imaginary bubble; in the example below the children play with power relationships and captivity. But whereas Tanya's bubble was created and communicated through language and hand movements, a hula-hoop became the jail in the following examples of boys' play.

[Toby, Kane, Sam and Paul are over by the climbing house. Toby has a hula-hoop. First he catches Kane, and then Paul comes to his rescue, freeing him. Then Toby puts the hula-hoop around Sam, who struggles to get out.]

1. K: *Yeah! He got him! We got him!*

[Toby tries to keep Sam inside the hula-hoop, but Sam gets out.]

2. T: *We're just pretending!*

[Sam walks away, but Toby runs after him and catches him once more.]

3. P: *Got him now.*

4. K: *We got one!*

5. S: *No!*

[Sam shouts in a complaining voice and Toby stops fighting Sam, who gets out and walks off. Toby puts the hoop around Paul. He protests mildly in an unconvincing manner and follows Toby.]

6. K: *Yeah!*

7. P: *No…*

[Kane runs off to play somewhere else. Toby and Paul looks at each other for a few seconds. Then Toby drags Paul off. The hoop is around Paul's knees and he willingly stumbles along.]

8. P: *Help me…*

9. T: *No one can't help you! You're in jail!*

[Toby drags Paul towards the other end of the playground.]

Here the children make use of a hula-hoop as an entrapment device. The hula-hoop is similar to Tanya's imaginary bubble in that it singles someone out, isolates them and entraps them

within a confined space. Based on their similarities the hula-hoop could perhaps be seen as a materialization of the imaginary bubble. The hula-hoop, as a toy in the boys' play, is transformed and conceptualized as something else; a jail. In both narratives the children play with punishment as a disciplining of time and space, but while Tanya used the movement of her hand to signal making a bubble, the boys use a shared prop – a toy which one is supposed to twirl around one's waist – in innovative ways. Although the children play that being caught inside the hoop means being in jail, their emphasis is not on imprisonment but on the social relationship of capture, protest and acquiescence. Toby has the hoop and is the one who entraps people. The others take turns in being caught and they help each other escape. Sam does not want to participate, but his struggling to get out becomes part of the shared play. Toby does not let him out until he explicitly protests in a complaining voice and frames his message as non-play. As I argued in the previous chapter, children frame their communication as play and non-play interchangeably frequently, and they often handle these shifts in metacommunicational frames skillfully.[8] What happens here is that Sam's initial protests and messages of how he does not want to be a prisoner can be interpreted both as part of their play and as non-play. It is not until Sam clearly frames his message as non-play that Toby lets him go. In contrast, when Toby finally chooses to take Paul as prisoner, Paul seems happy to be chosen. He protests, but willingly follows Toby. The protests are a part of their play; they play out the authenticity of a protesting prisoner and the fake truth of their capture.

What is also shown is the dynamic relationship between the children's social relations and their creation of imaginary identities and narratives. As I argued in Chapter 3, there seemed to be a common understanding among the children that *being friends* and *playing together* were closely tied. Reference to friendship was both a way to gain access to play and a way of protecting play interaction from the contingencies and narrative developments that a new person could introduce. Furthermore, loneliness in the child care centre is not being anyone's friends and not having anyone to play with. Even if there is no explicit reference to friendship here, the example is similar to the examples in Chapter 3 in how the children express mutual regard through play. However, this example further contributes to the argument put forth in Chapter 3 by showing how children create and work out their social relationships through their imaginary worlds – in other words, how their relationships can be 'narrativised'. Through imaginary identities and narratives children play with the imaginary possibilities of

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[8] For more details, see example and analysis chapter 4, pages 62-64.

social relations. It is also the imaginary nature of ordinary sociality that allows ordinary sociality to be incorporated into play. At the point of time in which this interaction occurred, Paul had just started going to the Pebbles Room and he was the newest child in the group. When Toby takes him as prisoner and he acts as prisoner, it is a statement of mutual regard, of acceptance within a relationship of power. The punishment in their play – being put in prison and being given the less powerful role – is actually a rewarding role for Paul, who acknowledges in his protesting acquiescence Toby's privileged position in their play. The others refused to stay captive for very long and the alternation between entrapment and liberation seemed to be the exciting part. Paul, on the other hand, does not seem to mind staying entrapped and seems to rather enjoy being Toby's prisoner as he does not try to get out. Staying in Toby's jail meant having the status of playmate and was a way for Paul to secure the continuation of their shared imaginary world in which he had a part. This example shows how children's social relations are worked out in shared imaginary narratives and identities, and how playing with asymmetrical relationships can in fact be a way of expressing mutual regard. Through playing the entrapped prisoner, the less powerful in their imaginary play, Paul gains the recognition as a worthy playmate, as someone who has value as a creator of meaning. There is also the pleasure of the children rescuing each other from the threat of imprisonment The collective solidarity of joint escape from a more powerful other is repeatedly returned to in play, requiring children to have their own relations of care and solidarity.

Managing the imaginary by incorporating adult behaviour, routines and rules

When the children are in the child care centre they are in a confined space with physical boundaries which is controlled by powerful others. Time and space are disciplined[9]. In various ways asymmetrical roles, alliances and domination often figure in the children's play. As in the examples above, the children play with aspects which they experience in their everyday life in the child care centre. Through imaginary roles and narratives they can re-experience, reinterpret, renegotiate and reshape things that they have little control over in their everyday life, and they can do so in joyful ways.

> [Lily, Beatrice, Maggie, and Eleanor are in the same sector of the playground. Lily and
> Beatrice are by the plastic play kitchen. Eleanor is sitting on the ground pouring sand in a

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[9] See chapter 2 for details on the organisation of time and space.

bucket. Maggie explains to me that Lily is thinking about what they are going to play and then she leaves to go play by the swing. Lily has filled a casserole with sand and is using her hands to shape it. She goes to find some more sand, and she explains:]

1. L: *I'm making a chocolate. With coconut!*

2. E: *Here! I got....water.*

3. L: *Beatrice, the cake's all ready!*

4. B: *You need to put it in here.*

[Beatrice points at the plastic fridge, which has a door. There is no plastic oven. Beatrice opens the door and Lily puts the casserole in.]

5. L: *Darling it's gonna be long time, because it's very fat.*

6. B: *And then we can put some leaves on.*

7. M: *Lily! Come with me! I just saw a butterfly.*

[Lily and Beatrice both follow Maggie.]

8. M: *We need be quiet.*

[Eleanor also comes over. Maggie puts her index finger in front of her mouth to signal to the others that they have to be quiet, and she walks lightly. She points at a butterfly a few meters away. When Lily sees the butterfly she runs over and tries to clap her hands.]

9. M: *Don't go near it! Don't go near it!*

[Lily does not listen to Maggie and continues to chase it. It disappears.]

10. L: *There. It's all gone. Let's go Beatrice.*

11. M: *Have you thought about it?*

12. L: *No...*

13. M: *Well, think.*

14. L: *I'll think about it, okay? Beatrice, go look after the cake.*

[Lily goes on the swing while Beatrice runs over to the kitchen. Then she shouts to Lily.]

15. B: *Mum, the cake's ready!*

16. L: *No, darling. Is it forty-five?*

[Beatrice looks at the top of the fridge.]

17. B: *Yes!*

18. L: *Let me see darling. It says seven.*

[Lily takes Beatrice's hand and turns away, but then she changes her mind.]

19. L: *Oh, it* is *forty-five.*

[Lily takes the casserole out of the fridge.]

20. B: *Now can we put some leaves on it mum?*

21. L: *No darling. Some lily pads on it.*

22. B: *Okay.*

[Beatrice goes to get some, but Lily points at some leaves close by.]

23. L: *These are lily pads, come here darling! We have lily pads.*

[Beatrice starts putting leaves on top of the sand in the casserole, but Lily takes Beatrice's hands off and shows her how to do it.]

24. L: *Stick 'em. ...No, we don't need anyone, we don't need 'em.*

25. B: *Yeah, we do.*

26. L: *Darling, don't put them on....Oh! It's a burnt! ...*

27. B: *We'll just play?*

28. L: *No..*

[Beatrice and Lily have their heads together discussing the cake when Eleanor comes over, shouting.]

29. E: *Get out! Get out! Get out Beatrice and...and...and Lily.*

30. L to E: *Can you go get Mags for me? You go get Mags for me?*

31. E: *Huh?*

32. L: *Can you go get Mags for me?*

[Eleanor walks off to find Maggie. Lily follows her.]

33. E: *Mags! Mags!*

34. L: *Ma'ags!*

35. E: *Mags!*

[Beatrice starts putting leaves on the cake. Lily returns with Maggie, and Eleanor is just behind them. Lily has picked up a small branch and she is instructing Maggie. Eleanor also has a branch.]

36. L: *Ahm...and you said "These are for you. I'm your boyfriend".*

37. E: *I got mine! Very happy ching!*

[Eleanor shouts and waves her branch in front of Lily and Maggie's faces.]

38. L to E: *Give them to me.*

39. B to L: *Mum?*

[Lily grabs hold of Eleanor's branch and pulls it. Eleanor lets out a scream and Lily stops pulling. Instead she turns around while still holding the branch.]

40. L to E: *Now you can swirl me around like that.*

41. B: *Mum?*

42. L: *Yes darling? Daddy will be home soon.*

43. B: *I'm decorating the cake.*

44. L: *What are you doing? No! No, no!*

[Lily removes all the leaves Beatrice has put on the cake.]

45. L: *It's burnt. You can't eat it. ...It's lily pets.*

46. M: *I got some things for the cake.*

[Maggie comes over with some sand in her hand, which she sprinkles on the cake.]

47. L: *Thanks. Thank you, that's enough.*

As with the two previous examples, the children play with asymmetrical relationships. Lily often played a pivotal figure in the children's play; telling the others what to do and how to do it. Above, Lily is Beatrice's mother and they are making a cake together. Their relationship involves caring, with Lily often addressing Beatrice as "darling". There is a pleasure in Beatrice's role, in being loved, even if is not as powerful and authoritative as Lily motherhood role. Like the relationship between teacher and student, the relationship between mother and child was continuously revisited in play to be unfolded in new ways. Here, Lily is the one who knows about cakes, baking, numbers and time. When Beatrice claims the cake is ready, Lily says she is wrong. Only seconds later, Lily announces that it is ready. When Beatrice wants to decorate the cake with leaves Lily first instructs her on how to do it, but when Lily is not satisfied with the decorating she tells Beatrice that the cake is burnt. Here she plays the role of an adult who controls the child's access to cake, who controls the definitions and future actions. When Beatrice suggests that they can keep playing with the cake, for it is not burnt, Lily says no. Lily herself had a sweet-tooth and often enjoyed incorporating baking and cake decorating in her imaginary narratives. She took great care when making her imaginary cakes, which were of different sorts and had a wide range of icings and decorations. Here she clarifies that they are making a chocolate cake with coconut. It is her authoritative acquaintance with the role and knowledge of a caring mother's duties, which allows her to be the one who decides about the cake and to correct the mistakes of her "children". When talking to them, she mimes not just the words but the tone, gestures and styles of familiar everyday adult behaviour. She even copies the authoritative contemplative gestures of adults; when Maggie asks her a question and she answers "I will think about it, okay?"

Children's play deals with inclusion and exclusion, often expanding the narrative to include new players or transforming it as previous players leave. Sometimes the narrative is suspended whilst everyone's attention is preoccupied with something else and then resumed soon afterwards. Sometimes players are kept on hold while children think or await a time within which they can be reincorporated. Lily is thinking about how she will play with Maggie while she is elaborating on the imaginary narrative she shares with Beatrice. Maggie accepts this and goes to play by the swings all alone, waiting, but then she comes over to tell Lily she has seen a butterfly. There is a pleasure in being the one who discovered the

butterfly and all the other girls follow Maggie to where the butterfly is. Maggie is the one who knows where it is, and at this point she is the one in charge of the situation instead of Lily. But then contrary to Maggie's messages of how they should be quiet and not go near it – when Lily sees the butterfly she is quick to chase it away. The butterfly has interrupted Lily's play and has succeeded in incorporating everyone into an alternative shared context of meaning discovered by Maggie. Lily proceeds with calling on Beatrice to resume their play, and they start walking off together. Maggie is left behind, but asks Lily if she has thought about what *they* will play. Lily says that she has not, but that she will. In some ways similar to the example with two boys making a girl the monster in their play, Lily uses Maggie as a prop. Maggie is kept out of the imaginary world that Lily shares with Beatrice, but Lily is also keeping her available, as a resource, which she later can decide to include. When Maggie gets an invitation to participate it is through detailed instructions on imaginary identity and actions. Maggie is to be Lily's boyfriend who comes with flowers. A somewhat unsatisfying role for a girl, Maggie is nevertheless keen to show that she can be a team player. She can be relied on to help Lily control and secure the imaginary world she shares with Beatrice. Lily keeps within the ethics of proper play; she does not deny Maggie access, but Maggie has to be patient and wait, and she has to accept perhaps less privileged roles.

As the discussion of the organisation of time and space in Chapter 2 showed, learning to wait for one's turn is a central part of the daily routines in the child care centre. Excluding someone who wishes to join in and participate in play is not proper play behaviour, as communicated by the teachers' moral dictum "we are all friends here and we all play together".[10] Here, Lily's actions of keeping Maggie out of the imaginary world Lily shares with Beatrice seems legitimised by messages referring to this as copying what adult's do in everyday life to children, and that is postpone promises to share an activity with them. Maggie accepts Lily's message that she will "think about it", but later reminds Lily to keep her promise of giving an answer and that she is waiting. In this world of postponed promises between Lily and Maggie, it is difficult to know what is play and what is real, what is Lily copying adult postponements and what is Lily moving out of the play-frame to tell Maggie to wait. The ambiguous empirical reality of play involves metacommunicational messages being reincorporated as content within the play frame. It is this paradoxical state of affairs that blurs the boundaries and that makes the real imaginary and the imaginary real.

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[10] See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of friendship and play ethics in the child care centres.

Lily's interaction with Eleanor is also interesting here. Though she has no part in Lily and Beatrice's play, she does approach and shouts loudly to get their attention. I believe she is referring to the burning of the cake when she approaches them the first time and shouts "Get out!", signalling danger. Lily disregards Eleanor's elaboration of the play narrative and calmly asks her to go and get Maggie. The second time Eleanor approaches Lily and the others, she has a branch similar to the one Lily has and she waves it in front of Lily and Maggie's faces while shouting "Very happy ching!" Lily grabs hold of Eleanor's branch and pulls it. However, when Eleanor starts to scream, Lily is no longer holding Eleanor's branch in order to take it from her, but so that Eleanor can swirl Lily around with it. While having disregarded Eleanor's elaborations of the play narrative before, Lily now re-frames her actions to include Eleanor in a shared imaginary world. Eleanor's scream raises the danger of attracting the teachers' attention, for taking other children's things is not proper play. Quickly and ingeniously, Lily re-frames her actions of holding and pulling Eleanor's branch into a form of enjoyable twirling and in doing so she avoids a potential conflict. Underpinning this creativity is the shared knowledge that taking someone's prop without permission is not proper play behaviour, and it is best to find an imaginary enjoyable compromise rather than bringing in the teachers, whose reprimand may further harm the chance of playing together.

This example shows the encompassing possibilities of the imaginary – how the generosity of the play-frame allows for incorporation of all actions as play – and how this allows children to re-define and renegotiate tensions and potential conflicts in their own social relations. The imaginary provides a resource that the children can draw upon to re-establish forms of collective belonging and solidarity with each other. The relationship between the real and the imaginary appears as dynamic and fluid rather than fixed. Lily uses the possibilities of the imaginary to negotiate away real dangers. In her play narratives Lily can refer to the real (to authoritative motherhood) to legitimise her control and authority in the imaginary world. This is something all children learn; how to convert and re-frame real conflicts, hurt feelings and struggles between themselves into amusing enjoyable play interactions where making the world not serious is a joint pleasure.

In another example, the children incorporated specific rules from one game that the teachers organised to ease transition from group time to meal time. In Chapter 2, I discussed different

games organised by the teachers in this situation, and I argued that the colour-game offered more opportunities for the children to bend the rules compared to other games which included numbers and counting. In this game the teachers used colours to control time/space; to control which children were to go and wash their hands when and by doing so they avoided an overcrowded bathroom.[11] The example below shows how two boys incorporate the rules of this game to control access to their imaginary world and protect it from outsiders.

[Peter and Toby have been over by the climbing house for a while. They are elaborating on a play narrative in which they are ninja turtles.]

1. T: *We, we are good. We can...We...*

2. P: *And we can jump, hey?*

3. T: *Yeah, what, I can jump.*

[Toby jumps. Then Peter jumps. Toby climbs up to the upper deck and Peter follows.]

4. T: *We're good hey?*

5. P: *Yeah. And we are fo... And we are good...Ninja Turtles. Eating all the...all to... all the...way to school.*

[While Peter is talking he slowly climbs down from the upper deck of the climbing house and bends down to pick up a short stick he finds in the sand below. Toby is on the slide and when Peter has finished talking he slides down.]

6. T: *Yeah. There are...there are bad girls out there.*

[Peter digs randomly in the sand with his stick. They exchange looks and then Toby climbs up the slide and Peter takes a few steps away. Peter spins around quickly, holding his stick out in the air as if fencing with a sword. Then Peter climbs the slide behind Toby. Toby reaches the upper deck where another boy, Michael, comes over. Peter yells at him.]

7. P: *No! You're not a ninja turtle Michael.*

[Toby has turned around and sat down on the top of the slide. Peter is climbing up and is blocking his way to go down.]

8. T to P: *Wait! I can...someone's...I might kill you.*

[Peter slides down to the sand and gets off the slide. He walks over to where Michael is standing on the upper deck and points at him.]

9. P to M: *You're not a ninja turtle.*

10. M to P: *Yes I am because I got...*

[Toby has slid down. He and Peter are now standing next to each other in the sand while Michael is on the upper deck. Toby points at Michael, and then he points at his own sweater which has grey and red stripes.]

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[11] For more details on the colour-game see chapter 2, pages 34-35.

11. T: *No… No! No, you have to have red rings. You have to have red.*

12. P: *You have to have red.*

[Peter's clothes are in shades of blue with a print in front of his t-shirt. Peter points at the colourful print.]

Peter and Toby's play narrative was something they had been elaborating on together just the two of them for quite some time that day. They were playing with the alliances which come from struggling against evil. They agree that they are good Ninja Turtles and that there are "bad girls out there". Again as with the two boys who made a girl into a monster[12], this could be seen as emerging forms of male solidarity and that it is a symbolic opposition to femaleness which is being explored and affirmed. In this model of emerging gender relations, whilst girls often play at being caring mothers who bake cakes or informative teachers who teach and exercise discipline, boys often struggle against "badies" that surround them, which in this case are female. Though there are no girls participating in their play, they are incorporated as the imaginary embodied form that evil takes. The difference of masculinity and femininity provide a model for good versus bad and the basis for alliances, for affirming relations of solidarity and inclusiveness versus dangerous outsiders. In both child care centres, boys tended to play with boys and girls tended to play with girls, but this was not a fixed rule. It was not as clear cut a rule as that documented in Berentzen's (1984) study of gender relations among Norwegian children in the late 1960's, where gender functioned as the main criteria for choosing playmates. One possible reading of this difference is that it might encode wider historical changes in gender relations in the last 50 years with there being more emphasis on gender equality and less segregated work and leisure activities. It might also encode differences between Norwegian and Australian society in terms of the informal rules organising gender interactions.

According to the ethics of play enforced by teachers in the child care centre, Peter and Toby should share their play world with Michael and they should also allow him to choose who he wants to be in that play-specific time/space. In the two examples of the girls' and the boys' play, the children's inventiveness lies in keeping within the boundaries of proper play behaviour and finding legitimate ways of controlling access and securing imaginary worlds. They control the imaginary by referring to aspects of adult behaviour and of the everyday life in the child care centre. While Lily mimes the authoritative contemplative manner of adults to

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[12] For details see chapter 4, pages 64-66.

legitimise keeping Maggie 'on hold' and says "I'll think about it", the boys here incorporate rules of a specific game. When Michael comes over, both Peter and Toby deny him the identity of a ninja turtle to protect their dyadic alliance. Setting aside the previous alliances Peter and Toby had formed on the basis of gender, they articulate another differentiating criteria, namely colour, which could protect their imaginary world from outsiders regardless of gender. There is a seeming arbitrariness in choosing colour, except that the world of children is continuously quoting and borrowing on the authority and symbolic structures that adults use to create reality. These borrowed items have an ambiguous state of being both real and yet part of play. This shows the pervasiveness of adults' organising of time and space, but also how the children actively reinterpret their rules and organisation, and make use of what they learn in innovative ways. While the teachers' organisation and rules might sometimes seem restricting, they also provide models for how to authoritatively organise imaginary worlds. What the children learn through the adults' organisation of games and of time and space can be incorporated into play in ways which are not always obvious, and here serve a purpose different from the teachers' intention. It is completely random that when gender differences no longer serve the purpose of protecting their imaginary world and dyadic alliance, Toby and Peter choose the colour of their clothes. Both gender and the colour of the children's clothes were aspects of their identity which the teachers used to sort them out and to organise time- and space routines in ways that were ethically legitimate. To use a person's skin colour, size, or personal features would be unacceptable as form of differentiation because it could be regarded as discriminating and even racist. In the child care centre the children are taught "to do the right thing", and in both of these examples the children incorporate ways of differentiating, excluding and controlling which they have a shared opinion of as legitimate. What they also learn is the arbitrary nature of decisions, which can be authoritatively made. Just as random different colours can be chosen to organise going to the bathroom at different times, different colours can become the basis for the children's own organised collective activities. What allows for this appropriation is the imaginary nature of the social which has been analysed and theorised, for example by Castoriadis (1987). In the child care centre the children learn that social life can be organised around creative choices which rationalise and legitimate activities, such as for example arbitrary colours. As the previous example shows, children copy these adult practices and incorporate them as the basis of their organised social life. The structure of the social world is being studied and reinvented, and it becomes part of the contingencies of play.

Allegories of metamorphosis

In their everyday life, children are aware of, and are continuously made aware of the limits imposed by their age, size, skills and knowledge. For example, children are sorted into different rooms in the child care centre according to age. In both centres, several rooms shared one playground, and when there was group time or inside time or meal time, the teachers would call out for the group of children by names such as toddlers or pre-preps. In other words, the groups of children were continuously addressed according to age and stage in their development. Other examples of how the children's development is made explicit and is experienced in everyday life is how they grow and need new clothes, how they might have older or younger siblings, or have acquired new skills and knowledge; how they can climb, skip or jump, how they draw pictures, or their understanding of language. Children are often attentive to aspects of their own processes of development, and they are often very interested in stories about when they were younger. Through such stories the children's transformation is emphasised, how they have become older, more grown up, more responsible, more capable. One day in the Pebbles Room when the group leader was doing group time she came to mention that she had known some of the children for a long time, from when they were in other rooms together with the younger children in the child care centre. The children showed great interest – suddenly everyone wanted to know whether she had known him or her. Following the children's interest, the group leader dwelled on the subject for a few moments before going back to what she had planned.

In the analysis of the first example presented in this chapter, I argued that Tanya's bubble could be seen as an allegory for disciplined time/space, for self-contained, enclosed worlds. Here I discuss some of the identities and creatures that the children choose to incorporate and play with in their imaginary worlds, and I argue that they can be seen as allegories of metamorphosis. The figures children choose are not completely random or haphazard but, rather to use Lévi-Strauss (1964:89), it can be argued that the imaginary heroes and part animal creatures are chosen because they are "good to think" with. Creatures with hybrid indeterminate identities allow the children to play, relive and re-experience metamorphoses similar to the ones that they have experienced in terms of themselves and their personal processes of becoming. Often certain imaginary heroes will be borrowed from the mass media of film, cartoons and comics, to be remade as part of children's play. The imaginary identity that the boys chose above, the "Ninja Turtles", first appeared in comic books and has

subsequently become a regular children's television program. These anthropomorphic, mutated turtles are ambiguous in their identity and they live in marginal subterranean spaces like the sewers of New York City. They have an anthropomorphic rat leader and are isolated from the rest of society, except for their battles with criminals, evil figures and aliens who are often adults in terms of their size and mannerisms. The Ninja Turtles are more child-like and are half human and half animal, which can be seen as an allegory for processes of metamorphosis, for process of incomplete change, which is interesting given that children's identity is constructed as one of changing from being a child into an adult. It is the repressed heroic possibilities of the child that are explored in narratives of deviant creatures which are hidden and out of sight, and, like children, struggle in subterranean ways against more dominant adults. Like other anthropomorphic cartoon figures, the Ninja Turtles are always constructed as endearing for they often have their own playful mannerism and make silly mistakes alongside their heroic gestures.

The children also had other hybrid and ambiguous creatures which they enjoyed playing. The mermaid offered an image of a beautiful female alterity which also contained its own promise of magic and change. While Nina, for example, would assume the identity of a Ninja Turtle when playing with boys – she would often stress the fact that she was a *girl* Ninja Turtle – mermaids seemed to be a more preferred imaginary identity among the girls. Half-human and half-fish, mermaids offered the image of a hidden submerged beauty entrapped within another body. What both Ninja Turtles and mermaids share is their animality, and it is animality as a possibility of the human which being explored. Similar to Lévi-Strauss'(1964:89) argument for animals in totemism as permitting the embodiment of ideas and relations, the animality of these creatures that children take up in their imaginary narratives provide a distance that allow the children to re-interpret and explore their own processes of becoming human.

> [Marilyn, Hailey, Eleanor and Jenny are over by the climbing house. Marilyn and Hailey have been elaborating on a narrative about going to a party and they decided they were mermaids. Marilyn is Hailey's sister mermaid. Eleanor and Jenny have brought a couple of buckets with sand and some water. They have been alternating between engaging in mixing the sand and the water, and the elaboration of the narrative.]
>
> 1. M: *I found the prettiest thing!*
> 2. E: *Pop it in here!*
> 3. M: *I'm a mermaid. Mermaids have to go down to the...*

4. E: *I'm a mermaid too.*

[Marilyn slides down. Eleanor follows her under the upper deck. Hailey is sitting in the sand. Jenny is alone on the upper deck. She asks the others something and Marilyn answers that they are going to be up in a second. Marilyn runs over to Hailey, who is lying on the ground with her face down and her knees tucked in under her. Marilyn slides down again and Jenny walks over to have a look.]

5. M: *Shhh! Quiet!*

6. J: *Aha-ha! A dinosaur!*

7. M: *Come down to me. ... It's a dinosaur egg. It's a dinos...I'm, I'm your mermaid dinosaur. I'm your mermaid dinosaur.*

[Marilyn is talking to Eleanor who is sitting on the upper deck putting leaves into one of the buckets. Jenny and Hailey are on the other side. Eleanor looks at Marilyn but doesn't say anything. Marilyn ducks down under the upper deck and walks over to Jenny and Hailey. Hailey is still lying on the ground. Jenny sits beside her.]

8. M: *Careful with my egg. My, my dinosaur. My, my dinosaur egg.*

9. E: *I'm a dinosaur!*

10. M to J: *See, my baby.*

[Marilyn pats Hailey's back while talking to Jenny.]

11. J to H: *Hey, wake up!*

12. M to J: *She's, she's in the egg. Come on, we have to... I, I have to...*

13. J: *Does her need a crack...in a minute?*

14. M: *She's gonna crack, yeah, in a minute.*

[Marilyn strokes Hailey's back with the big leaf she's been holding. Jenny climbs up to Eleanor on the upper deck. Marilyn continues to stroke Hailey back and forth a few more times.]

15. M: *There you go!*

[Then Marilyn runs around to the slide and talks to Eleanor and Jenny who are on the upper deck.]

16. M: *Don't come down to my eggie!*

17. J: *What?*

18. M: *You can't come down to my egg...gonna hatch.*

19. E: *And, and…and I am the dinosaur baby too.*

[The teacher is shouting from the veranda area, but none of the children seem to hear it.]

20. Teacher: *Inside pre-preps!*

21. M: *You're my other baby egg. You're my baby egg too.*

22. E: *Yeah. And let's pretend that I'm gonna crack.*

[Eleanor slides down and runs over to where Hailey lies. Eleanor lies down beside her. Marilyn follows and when she reaches the other two, Eleanor cracks.]

23. E: *Cricket-y-crack!*

24. M: *Hello darling. But mama did...Mama was under here.*

25. Teacher: *Inside pre-preps!*

[Marilyn moves underneath the upper deck. Eleanor follows. Now both teacher and children are shouting "Inside pre-preps!" repeatedly. Jenny comes down to the others.]

26. M to E: *I'm your mommy mermaid.*

27. J to M: *I am your other egg.*

28. M: *Yeah. ... All you eggs, get back in your...eggs!*

[Jenny and Eleanor lie down beside Hailey. Marilyn finds a leaf and she strokes all three of their backs. Jenny cracks first and makes baby-sounds. Then Eleanor cracks.]

29. Teacher: *Inside pre-preps!*

30. E: *Cricket-y-crack!*

31. J: *Ga! Ga! Ga!*

32. M: *I'm up here darlings!*

[Marilyn is climbing up to the upper deck. Eleanor and Jenny go the other way, but climb to the lower deck and then crawl towards the upper deck.]

33. H: *No! No! You have to see me crack! Guys! You have to see me crack!*

[Hailey sits up to get the attention of the others and then lies down again. Eleanor and Jenny looks at her from the lower deck.]

34. J: *Say "cricket-y-crack".*

[A few seconds pass, then Hailey sits up.]

35. J: *Cuckoo!*

[Marilyn has been over to the veranda and now she comes back.]

36. M: *Excuse me! It's inside time!*

[Everyone runs towards the concrete area. Jenny and Hailey both make baby-sounds while running.]

The children's above narrative includes mermaids and dinosaurs which are non-existing creatures of the past. As with Ninja Turtles, which first appeared in comic books and later in cartoons, toys, video games and films, the children's knowledge of dinosaurs and mermaids comes from adults and their fantasy worlds about them. Here we deal with mythical creatures from other spaces (the sea) and mythical creatures from the past, they are creatures of marginality. While my intention is not to pin-point the very specific sources of each child's information about these creatures, which would be an impossible task, I can offer some

examples of the abundance of ways in which adults inform children's imaginary life. During my fieldwork the local museum had a dinosaur-display for children, in the Pebbles Room they had separate boxes with plastic toy dinosaurs, and the long time popular television show and musical group "The Wiggles" featured among other figures "Dorothy the Dinosaur". Also, the very popular 1988 cartoon film "Land before Time" and its subsequent films and televisions sequels often featured cracking eggs and anthropomorphic dinosaurs which were modelled on children's personalities. Those different child-dinosaurs are involved in a quest and journey for a better world. As for mermaids, Ariel the little mermaid is one of the Disney princesses, which was basic knowledge among the girls especially – in both child care centres. The stories of Ariel deal with her moving between worlds – the hidden undersea world of her father, and the visible surface human world with a possible boyfriend. As with Ninja Turtles, both Dorothy the Dinosaur and Ariel the Little Mermaid are also characters and narratives dealing with the transformations of the self. In the stories of these creatures, and in particular stories where the main characters are female, themes of birth, baby, and maternal caring are repeatedly revisited. At the same time they are often couched in fantastic images of otherness, and so through these, the children's own personal everyday experiences of child rearing can be continuously revisited. Through the distance of make-believe and of the fantastic, the everyday can be reconsidered, reassembled and re-explored in terms of one's power to create it. It is the fantastic that allows children to re-appropriate the everyday, to make its reality their own – to transform the adult-dominated, common sense world into an imaginary reality where they explore the imaginary possibilities of human sociality.

In the play narrative above from which I have temporarily digressed, the children incorporate hybrid anthropomorphic creatures and merge them with acting out familiar family roles and relations. Central here are processes of metamorphosis – of birth and development, of the human form as in a process of being created. Mermaids are mythological aquatic creatures. Similar to Ninja Turtles which are half human and half turtles, mermaids are half fish and half human; their heads and torso are female, while their lower body is the tail of a fish. As for dinosaurs, they are creatures of the past, they have died out, but in the children's play their eggs are hatching. The children seem especially interested in performing the cracking of the eggshells and the emergence of babies. The concealment and emergence of the human figures in children's play in a wide variety of ways. What is being performed in the above example is the creation of life, as it involves transformation and the birth of new identities – of unique identities that are the children's own, such as dinosaur-mermaids. The possibilities of play

allows for a world of hybrid narratives and hybrid identities, which nevertheless serve to define and explore the real.

The imaginary narrative is performed and elaborated through shared collective effort by children. Marilyn incorporated Hailey's performance of being an egg into their shared narrative by merging the previous narrative of them being mermaids with the new narrative of them being dinosaurs. Marilyn says to Eleanor and Jenny that she is a dinosaur-mermaid mother and Hailey is her dinosaur egg. When Eleanor and Jenny also want to be eggs, they agree all three are Marilyn's eggs, and they are hatching. How to play hatching eggs seems to be something they have a shared opinion on and it is a process which they are eager to perform. Some of them even hatch several times. Hailey has been lying on the ground not saying anything, waiting a long time, and she immediately protests in a loud voice when the others are about to run off without having watched her hatch. The children's imaginary innovations require an audience, and here it is processes of birth, the creation of a new self and a new identity which has to be witnessed and collectively shared. In these hybrid creatures that are half-dinosaurs and half-mermaids the uniqueness of identity is being reinvented. The children learn to care not just for babies but collectively shared imaginary selves, whose fictitiousness has to be embraced as the temporary reality of play. Play requires, in Bloch's (2008) words, "the ability to remain in two registers at the same time". Perhaps this is the profound meaning of play, the temporary suspension of the recognition that it is imaginary, or at least the maintaining of a dual perspective, where you know that it is play but pretend that you do not know. Children move in and out of imaginary worlds and identities, they often oscillate between narratives. When the children refuse to conspire in the imaginary construction of each other's identities this can be a way of punishing and hurting each other. More frequently, they demonstrate their love and care for each by nurturing and caring for their unique identities and imaginary worlds. The power relations and persona who govern and regulate the children's disordering hybrid worlds of becoming is also incorporated into these worlds. When children playfully revisit the everyday relations of power that govern them, they often perform both the controlling power of adults and the problematic role of submissive, obedient children. In the role of a dinosaur-mother, Marilyn scolded her hybrid children and ordered them: "all you eggs get back in your eggs!" Again the image of a sealed off, self-contained space re-emerges. Here eggs can perhaps be interpreted as a reference to children's bedrooms which in everyday households are often ambiguous spaces of sleep, rest and punishment. Children are often ordered by parents back to their room when they have

been disobedient. In their play, however, Marilyn's orders her disobedient babies getting back in their eggs. This also means they will be re-contained back into an image of unborn babies, as eggs which have yet to release their fertile possibilities. This means that the children can re-perform the process of metamorphosis once more, and the other children follow Marilyn's instructions and eagerly play that they are inside their eggs again, ready to emerge as newborns. The creative power of play can repeatedly give birth to new identities.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how children incorporate, interpret and refer to the real world in their imaginary play. It is partly this that accounts for some of the repetition in children's play. In particular, through their play the children repeatedly comment on asymmetrical relationships, discipline, ethical models, roles and identities, though in different ways. In different play contexts these themes and patterns can be explored in different ways. In their everyday creative practices, the children are taking up and repeating the real world in new ways, and they are also repeating their own imaginary worlds and narratives in new ways. The incorporation of aspects of everyday life and the real world in play often does not involve a total reinvention, but involves a process of continual appropriation and re-contextualisation. Both order and contingencies feature prominently in children's play. Children's imaginary worlds are not completely random and haphazard, but have regularity that partly come from how they are related to the real world, and often in ways which are not always obvious or simple. The examples in this chapter show the different ways in which prominent themes such as metamorphosis and hybrid anthropomorphic creatures are used to think about gender and other ways of the social, such as adult-organised routines and rules. In one example we saw how gender provided the basis for an alliance that protected the dyadic relationship of two boys playing Ninja Turtles, but when the social context changed, the colour of clothes was taken up as another way of controlling the boundaries of their imaginary time/space from interruption by another boy. Processes of development and metamorphosis can be explored and re-interpreted through imaginary identities based on ambiguous, hybrid creatures. Performing the hatching of dinosaur eggs can be a way of re-experiencing birth and childhood; it has the aspect of an emergence and liberation from a self-contained, self-enclosed, disciplined time/space, but we should not forget that Marilyn, as mother, orders her hybrid offspring back into their eggs. When children interpret, negotiate and shape their everyday life in the child care centre in and through imaginary play, it comments on the pedagogic,

common sense world of adults which is limiting, controlling and regulating their play-worlds. The imaginary can be seen as a resource that the children engage in, which allows them to comments on reality, but it also institutes and explores alternative versions of the everyday reality.

Concluding remarks

In this thesis I have explored children's play in two child care centres, and I have argued that alternative versions of reality, featuring in the imaginary worlds that children playfully create through shared effort, is a basis for their social relations. What is presented here is an analysis of children's experiences and some of the diverse ways in which children constitute their own ideas and knowledge of the world.

The overarching approach employed in this thesis is based on an aim to include in analysis not only children's dependency on adults and the ways in which the adult, common sense world regulates children's everyday lives, but also children's autonomy as social actors and the ways in which they interpret, negotiate and shape their experiences and routines. A major aspect of this institutional setting is its disciplined or regulated time-space routines. The acceptance and internalisation of the logic of disciplinary forms of time can be seen as a primary fundamental pedagogic exercise for being socialised. In play, however, a play-specific time/space is created, which has its own rules of procedure (Stewart, 1979:37). I have argued that play represents a realm of everyday life in the child care centre in which children can have some authority over worlds of meaning – a setting which is otherwise largely controlled and monitored by teachers. What the ethnography in this thesis shows, however, is that play is also part of pedagogy and part of subject formation. Even when children play on their own away from adults, they are the ones who have authority to decide what proper play behaviour is and how to be good friends.

Rules and routines are enforced by teachers, and while children to some extent form a self-policing community they also find ways to bend and negotiate these rules, even in highly organised pedagogic activities. I have argued that children exploit the ambiguity of their status in how adults can not always be sure of what they know or do not know, and following Taussig (1999), it is perhaps not so much truth that underpins social life but ways of knowing what not to know, and how not to know what one knows. Ethnographic examples show how children "work the system" (Goffman, 1991), for example the system of the colour-game during transition to meal time, in order to sit beside a friend. The children learn the arbitrary

nature of rule governed social life, determining who can be with whom. They learn ways in which rules are invented and used, and so the children start to create their own rules. For example, the rules of the colour-game legitimised differentiation based on the colour of clothes, and so these rules could be incorporated into play in order to limit the number of children who got to be Ninja Turtles. Part of the children's negotiations of inclusion and exclusion in play was their negotiation of the different levels of inclusiveness which the term "friends" could imply in different contexts. The ethnography shows that although the explicit messages the children receive about friendships and gifts are informed by ideals, children's knowledge is also constituted out of their own experiences, which to some extent deviate from these ideals. In the child care centre children experience how friendships can be ascribed, that they need to be continuously worked at, and that gifts can be used as a negotiation strategy. And so the children learn the "public secrets" (Taussig, 1999:267-268) of what not to know about friendships and gifts – that they are both free and indebting, spontaneous and calculated. Repeatedly throughout the thesis, the ethnography shows how there is joy and pleasure, but also domination and power in children's interactions, and therefore one should be careful of romanticising children's social relations and imaginary play worlds.

It would be a mistake to see children as rejecting common sense, for they also embrace the forms of stability and security it offers, and much of their own renegotiations with each other involve a reinvention of the boundaries of common sense in unexpected ways. However, children often find ways of subverting the adult-dominated, common sense world, for example through nonsensical jokes where the children join each other in laughter whereas the teachers shake their heads and appear as the ones who do not understand. Children's play can often seem frivolous and random, but the contingencies of their imaginary worlds do not exclude aspects of order – the regularities of play, which is how the imaginary worlds are related to the 'real' world. The 'real', argues Stewart (1979), is what is experienced through the senses. However, deciding on what is real and what is not real is a matter of relationship, not substance (Goffman, 1974). What we call 'reality' and 'rationality' can be seen as the works of the institutionalised, social imaginary, which has naturalised itself (Castoriadis, 1987:3). Children's imaginary worlds relate to the 'real' world not just by replicating, but through transforming and transgressing the real. Both the messages themselves, as well as the contexts of messages, are manipulated in play (Stewart, 1979). Boundaries of social practices such as deception, tricks and truth, are blurred through children's negotiation and manipulation of frames and messages. Play allows children to continuously reinterpret,

renegotiate and recontextualise relations of power and domination as well as dependency and care. Children's play is often focused on processes of metamorphosis, on the birth and rebirth of new identities or on hybrid ambiguous identities. "Common-sense thinking must see the lifeworld as a stable and ordered phenomenon in order to get on with the business at hand" (Stewart, 1979:12). But, as I believe this thesis has made clear, while children's transgressions of the adult, common sense world are often discarded as nonsensical or 'silly', this should not be taken to imply that they are less important or less meaningful.

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