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Analysis of a Sample of Family Interaction

by
Bruce Albert

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About the Videotape:

The tape has been on loan to me from Dr. Starkey Duncan, Jr., who was kind enough to provide it out of his personal library of research materials for use in the present class project. His understanding with the family who are the subjects in the tape was that the material be regarded as confidential, to be used for research purposes only; I have respected Dr. Duncan's commitment, and will erase my copy when course requirements are completed (the original tape having been returned to Dr. Duncan).

The twenty-three minute scene recorded occurred in the family dining area as they ate supper together and then lingered to interact afterward. The date was October, 1973. They had been filmed as a family group on two previous occasions, and I selected this particular tape because it is technically superior to the other two.

As Dr. Duncan expressed to me, the taping mechanics are less than ideal even on this, the best of the three tapes. No way could be devised of capturing the complete scene without greatly disrupting the existing spatial arrangements in the rather small apartment or using more equipment than was available. Dr. Duncan pointed out the best arrangement with a single camera would have, in effect, taped the scene through the window, like this:
Instead, the most feasible shot, and the one actually done, is this:

We therefore have recorded the back of one subject's head, and the other two from the chest up.

For my purposes in this project this arbitrary limitation on the data was not objectionable. I did not plan to do any kind of exhaustive transcription, and this scene comes with limits built into it, but also with plenty of material to work with.

Another mechanical limitation of the recording has to do with the quality of the sound. A transmitting microphone was used, which occasionally picks up interference from electrical sources not related to the interaction, and which does not render the man's voice well.

The problem of incomplete data is real, but one could always wish for more; if the camera had caught all three figures in full we would still be lacking a 360° view, and
visceral taps would add still more information, and so on.

This videotape is of the half-inch type common to portable machines, and is black-and-white. Taping is done at the equivalent of thirty frames per second of film, though of course frames are not present, either as a limiting factor or a unitizing device.

I am not aware that any other research work has been done with this material.
Conventions Adopted in the Transcript:

A. Format

Transcript pages are numbered 1 through 9 in pairs; i.e. there are eighteen pages, with 1 and 1.a., 2 and 2.a., etc.

The first page of each pair is the transcript of the little girl's behavior, while the second page--the "a." page--is the transcript of both adults, mother at the top half, father at the bottom.

Each page has the following information:

- **character code letter (circle)**
- **unit number (box)**
- **12.3 sec.**
- **cumulative time noted at unit borders**
- **notes on unit borders written in on line**

Lines from the Activity Chart are used selectively for each character in the scene. Only those features observable on the tape are transcribed. In addition to activities omitted because of camera angle, furniture, and so on, the transcript is limited in that I was choosing a few of the features that lend themselves to self-teaching to try my hand at; thus there is no phonetic or phonemic transcription, etc. More activity lines are used for the little girl because she moved more than the others, and I was interested in trying out, for example, some hand and arm transcription without getting overwhelmed by a scene in which others were also moving upper extremities a lot. In the section trans-
scribed, mother's hands move very little and are omitted; father's hand movements are only fleetingly seen and are noted on his line 144.

B. Problems with Right and Left

Although notation of "right" and "left" was discussed more than once in class, I encountered problems. I decided to use "right" to mean "observer's right" at all times in order to avoid having to switch to the perspective of the subject every time a distinction needed to be made. I had to get used to calling mother's left hand her "right hand," while father's right is also observer's right. I made some errors early in the transcript, and there may be some left uncaught.

This convention also means that for line 104 of the Activity Chart, "Right Arm" always means observer's right in this transcript, the same applying to every other place on the Chart where right-left distinctions are made. It was not clear to me in class if the convention was followed in this way, but that is how I did it here.

Especially difficult was the "clocking" of head and trunk turns, since the notion of clock and degrees or minutes strongly suggests the kind of image diagrammed by Margaret Zabor in her "Symbology," used as a reference in class. For movements in the horizontal plane, she requires the observer to picture himself looking down from a vantage point straight above the subject, estimating points relative to divergence from a neutral center line. I wanted to avoid leaving my observer position for any imaginary place, and so I recorded, say, "1° right" for the subject's head where it diverges by an estimated thirty degrees from a line between my eyes and subject's center line.

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\[\text{observer's line of vision} \rightarrow \text{plane through midline} \rightarrow \text{subject's midline}\]
Unfortunately, this somewhat Euclidean approach works only when the subject is facing more or less directly toward or away from the observer. When the subject is sideways to the observer and the plane through his midline is at right angle to observer's line of vision, the angle system becomes more tortuous; furthermore, there is no longer any right or left with respect to the observer, but only "nearer" and "farther."

So what I actually did in the transcription was to estimate the proportion of the possible range of motion was used in a movement; e.g., if the chin appears to be one third of the way toward the left shoulder (which would be $\frac{1}{3}$ if turned the full ninety degrees) I would note the position, $\frac{1}{3}$.

In other words, I found it impossible to make all notations consistently relative to the observer's viewpoint, and ended up making estimates as though I were in a position from which I would not have to make allowances for perspective.

C. Notation for Eyes and Lids

I had difficulty with both Birdwhistell's and Zabor's notations for eyes. Zabor's pictographs are clearer to me than Birdwhistell's, but I still found it hard to tell where the pupils are in their orbits. So I substituted dots for her lines, trying to place the dots in my eye-circles just as the pupils are positioned in the subject's eyes.

I drew the position of the lids in the same way rather than use a round circle as the baseline eye, even if the baseline includes lowered lids. This seemed to be little more work and the resulting notation appears intuitively close to the image on the screen. This follows Zabor, though I used Birdwhistell's blink: ○ ○ .
D. Notation for Arms

Because shoulder and elbow are charted on different lines I find it a little difficult to visualize the configuration of the whole arm. I believe I have employed Zabor's system accurately, however.

E. Units

Videotape equipment is available (though not for half-inch tape) which puts a time scale on one track in 1/100ths of a second; I am told that these machines still are rated at thirty frames per second, however, so I am not sure what is gained by having such a fine time scale.

At any rate, unitizing was definately a problem on the tape examined in this project. Since there is relatively little overlap in the speech of the subjects—that is, they observed the turn conventions pretty well—I broke the piece down into sentences, roughly, or "manageable chunks" which generally have some intuitive coherence at the level of speech.

Each of these units is bounded at both ends by some fairly easily detectable action which one can see coming and yet which is quick, if not instantaneous. Examples are blinks, and the reversal point of a fast arm thrust-withdraw. I was not always able to find ideal borders, but they are good enough so that I was able to time the units with a digital electronic stopwatch with reliability within one tenth of a second or better. Of course, tenths of a second are still pretty gross pieces, but they may serve here to give some idea of the relative time spans of the different units.

Please note that the distances marked off by the graph paper have nothing to do with time units; the graph paper serves only to keep everything square. The vertical lines do indicate approximate simultaneity, but that is all.

It did seem to me that most of the borders I arbitrarily
established were also approximately at "natural" points of transition in the interaction, such as at changes in the turn, but they were set up mainly to help in finding my way around the tape.

The Cast of Characters

The following people (and animals) figure in the interaction on the tape:

B., the code for the father in this little family. He is a graduate student.

M., the mother, whose name is never, to my knowledge, mentioned in the course of the tape. During the course of the recorded conversation it becomes apparent that she holds a job and that B. cares for their daughter some of the time she is at work.

L., the little girl, who apparently goes to school part of the day (pre-school?).

A., the cameraman, he appears briefly on camera, is addressed occasionally by M., and manipulates camera focus and aperture as well as a movie light.

Max, the pet cat who appears briefly, is discussed as spoken to.

Cindy, the pet dog, who is heard and "spoken to."

There is no more information available on personal history or other variables, other than what one would care to infer from material on the tape. This is another arbitrary limitation of the data, one which might be unacceptable for some kinds of research.

Relevant Observer Information

It was not possible for me to be an objective, dispassionate observer of this taped interaction. The subjects have a
great many similarities to me, or at least I saw many parallels and frequently felt uncomfortable as a result.

Like B., I am a white male graduate student, have been married. I have no children, but I have strong feelings about them, consisting of mixed attraction and fear of what would happen to my life if I had one. The little girl here is very cute, and I watched with some fascination how the little group interacts with a lively child as an integral member. W.C. Fields is supposed to have said, "A woman is like an elephant; they're nice to look at, but I'd hate to own one," which is approximately how I feel about children.

A case could be made that because I am a native of the same culture as the characters in the tape I qualify as an expert informant, and can make judgements as to the typicality and appropriateness of things that go on. In this case, however, I am acutely aware of the handicaps of being a native looking at his own society, and my interpretations of the events may say as much about me as they do about the interactions, though I hope it is not as bad as that.

Another important filter through which I perceive the interaction is my training as a psychotherapist and my years of practice. The only overt ways of conceptualizing behavior, either individual or group, I have learned have to do with diagnosis and treatment of "problems." This "professional" perspective—a system which incorporates ways of perhaps partially neutralizing the personal biases mentioned above—stresses pathology, and leaves normality largely undefined. I am constantly diagnosing, seeing "hostility" here, "grief" there, and so on.

These, then, are some of the factors built into this observer which condition my functioning as a research instrument. What I see happening on tape, what is "salient," "same," or "different" is my artifact here. At a later time in my research experience I might feel more confident in
characterizing what is "out there," but for now I take responsibility for the product as having extra-big parts of my own personality in the data and analysis. One reason I have for putting it this way is that I want to proceed to express myself unambiguously, having once qualified the product in this way.

"Clinical Impressions" of the Interaction

These "impressions" are "clinical" in that they are abstractions and patterns rather than specific cases, though cases are cited in the data as illustrative. They lack the specifiaability Fromm-Reichmann sought for clinical materials, but they are certainly more data-based than is clinical judgement in general.

These abstractions are based on a half-dozen viewings of the entire twenty-three minute tape. My viewing time was thus less (by at least half) than what Birdwhistell suggested is sufficient for the trained behavior analyst.

In citing cases I will give counter numbers which should give the approximate location of examples on the tape. I used three different tape decks in the course of my work, each giving different counter readings, but I think most of the references are accurate to about ten turns of the reel. "Zero" is set as soon as the supper scene appears, immediately after the words, "Does anybody need anything before I sit down?" The tape runs twenty-three minutes and a few seconds, which on the best machine I had access to was five hundred counter units.

A. Structural Aspects of the Interaction

It seemed to me that there are clearly a few repeating structures in the turn patterns. The most salient sequence can be diagrammed:
In "1," M. and B. are in conversation, a situation that seldom lasts more than a few seconds without L. attempting to "cut in" on B. and interact exclusively with M. (000, 340, 447)

Sooner or later L. succeeds, transitioning to the state diagrammed in "2." This situation seldom lasts very long without B. attempting to cut back in. (085, 380, 452)

Sooner or later, B. succeeds, bringing about a transition to state 1. (440, 480)

This process repeats regularly throughout the length of the tape.

Other possible interactions occur much less frequently.
B. seldom speaks to L., and when he does it is not to enter into conversation. He gives instruction (153); rubs her head (351); teases her (455); these are all brief. L. only speaks to B. one time that I know of (456), a single word.

Intermediate situations occur in which M. seems to hold two conversations at once for a brief span (440, 256); this quickly resolves into 1. or 2.

Other infrequent occurrences are M. in conversation with the cameraman (059), or pretending to talk with Max or Cindy (388).

M. thus seems to be the center of interaction, since everyone enters into conversation with her, while conversations between any of the other characters is rare or nonexistent. M. makes everything and everyone her business (376, she checks on video equipment; 325, she keeps track of a neighbor heard passing through the hall outside), and she is everyone's business: she is the communicational switchboard and emotional hub of the group. Her position in the room is such that she can view the entire scene, a panorama which appears to correspond to the extent of her responsibilities.

The economics of the situation are that M.'s attention is a scarce commodity, and B. and L. seem to compete for it. Their tactics for cutting in are often similar, as when L. whispers (220, 452), and B. speaks softly (440).
B. "Clinical Impressions of the Characters as Individuals

Salient aspects of M.'s behavior include anger (000--"...doesn't make me mad at all;" 048--"I was so mad;" 483--"Do you want me to get angry?"; 490--"I was rude to him").

She has difficulties and frustrations (037--seldom have roast; 043--shopping difficult; 332--coffee at work bad and expensive; 337--gets no break; 446--wishes for own house).

At the time of the taping she has a headache (272).

She interacts intimately and warmly (with L., 445; with B., 447).

I see her as very competent, intelligent, and tough, the emotional center of the family; also as overburdened, and having strong negative as well as positive feelings about her current life as mother, homemaker, wife. I will try to tie these impressions more closely to the data in the piece given finer analysis later.

B. appears to me to be more restrained than his wife, less assertive. It is out front that he wants her approval, more covert that she needs his. He seems to be a little outside of the close tie between M. and L. The two females frequently touch, seeming to have a cozy relationship; M. remarks jokingly, "Oh boy, you're the outcast, Dad" (425). He probably is rather even-tempered and mild, which is another way of saying that he has difficulty expressing strong feelings.

L. is obviously a very bright child who holds her own very well in getting her needs met during the course of the interaction. I am struck by the absence of pseudo-adult behavior, even in the presence of "company," which one might well expect of an only child of educated parents. She is allowed to be a kid.
The "Fake Cough" Scene

This little episode, which takes place toward the end of the tape (450-456) was selected for closer inspection because it seems to illustrate clearly many of the salient features of the characters and their interaction patterns. It is one of the emotional peaks of the interaction, and it contains the moment when B. and L. come closest to engaging in direct verbal interaction.

The immediate context of this little scene—which is actually truncated as I have lifted it out here, and would not make a coherent "scene" in the literary sense—is that M. and B. have been in conversation, beginning at a point around 440 where they discuss a natural childbirth that was shown on t.v. State number 1. from the sequence described earlier was in effect, with L. trying to cut in. M. resolves the situation in this case—temporarily at least—by entering into a kinesic dialog with L. while maintaining her verbal conversation with B. As a series of topics are talked about, L. caresses M.'s hair, and M. adjusts her posture to make this easier; both mother and daughter appear to enjoy this interaction greatly, M.'s face taking on an expression reminiscent of a purring cat. The conversation with B. meanwhile builds in emotional "warmth," and "closeness," culminating in a hearty laugh together. B.'s laughter turns into a cough, and he coughs five times, followed by a slight pause in the conversation, at which point L. takes the turn, beginning the "Fake Cough" scene.

Immediately following the portion transcribed, the context is a brief argument between L. and M. over whether L. will sit in her chair; compliance with M.'s order to "sit in your chair" would destroy the proxemic configuration prevailing before and during the scene, in which L. stands close to,
and in physical contact with (actually or potentially) M., the two of them forming an intimate group, with B. separated from them by the table. Sitting in her chair, L. is in a neutral position, equally distant from her parents, and out of touching distance from M; it was o.k. while it suited M.

Thus the basic turn sequence, in which states 1. and 2. alternate, is repeated in the scene and its immediate context.

A. Salient Aspects of the Scene

B. has been coughing after laughing, and the scene begins with L.'s mime of his cough or chortle at it; her initial vocalization (unit 1) is ambiguous. Turning to M., she says, "That's a fake one," the end of the phrase pronounced indistinctly. The referent of "one" is also ambiguous: does it point to B.'s cough or to B. himself as the "fake one?" The ambiguity is great enough that M. asks for clarification, L. nodding assent to her speculation that the cough is the referent.

Having asked this question, M. adopts an interesting convention of continuing in the interrogatory "mode" and puts a couple of leading questions to L., which clearly incorporate pointed messages to B. regarding smoking.

This way of using something or someone as a prop to convey a message to someone else is used elsewhere by these people. I., in fact has just done so by commenting to L. on B.'s cough, which has the effect of teasing B. Each of these communicative acts certainly functions multiple, complex ways, having perhaps more than one possible referent at more than one level of understanding, and more than one function in the strategies employed by these intimately related people in their interactions. Elsewhere M. talks to L. about eating her peas by commenting favorably on Max's interest in the vegetable (350, 401).

L. seems a little confused by M.'s questions, although she nods slightly to each one, since the right answer is
clearly "yes." In this part of the scene, M. and L., who are spatially "together" in relation to B. across the table, also converge kinesically; the midlines of their trunks and heads meet not far in front of them, and they frequently break their looking at B.—who is covertly the conversant with M. in her ostensible conversation with L.—to check on each other.

In asking her leading questions, M. manages a silky, cozy, extra-relaxed manner with respect to her daughter, which heightens the contrast between their tight kinesic, proxemic, and conversational alliance and B.'s ostracism. Those who do not smoke demonstrate their solidarity (even though the solidarity is manipulated by M. from a partially-comprehending L.) against those who do. Smokers cannot expect to claim support if they experience distress due to smoking, or maybe more accurately while smoking (I suspect that any misfortune that may have befallen the hapless B. would have been used by M. in some kind of negative comment on his smoking). Is she concerned for his health? Her own health, and L.'s? Is she merely annoyed by the smoke? I suspect that her chiding is motivated by genuine concern for him, and that her concern is expressed in accordance with an overt or covert contract they have as a couple, which could be stated, "I do not approve of your smoking, and if you do so I will feel free to withdraw my support emotionally." In this instance M. could add, "Anyway, I don't absolutely need you; L. and I can be pretty cozy, as you can see."

How long M. could keep this deliberately fabricated social illusion going is not known, since B. is soon goaded into responding rather forcefully. His assertion that the coughing resulted from laughing invokes the situation that prevailed just prior to unit 1., in which he and his wife enjoyed intimate conversation on adult topics like childbirth and gossip about mutual friends, and which culminated in their
laughing together at his joke. Having reminded everyone of the fact that state 1. had indeed preceded state 2., B. pays L. back in kind for her remark about the "fake one," by arbitrarily shifting the referent of the laugh from his joke to herself. This is a fabrication, and I think L. is not fooled; the ploy is intended to have pragmatic value, the surface semantic meaning consisting of a throwaway pretense.

This is one of the very few times in the twenty-three minutes of the tape that father addresses directly, and the only time I know of when she obviously is going to talk to him: a conversation between the two is imminent. Its gross form, mutual teasing, has been proposed by L. and followed up --seconded?--by B.'s replying in kind. Their impending talk would not, I think, be about any obvious propositional issue, but would be about their relationship. Whatever conditions must be fulfilled, in whatever cause-and-effect constellation for these two to converse, have occurred, for this one moment, in the sample of the interaction available on this tape.

But at the moment when L. is obviously going to talk to her father (her kinesic signals are almost exaggerated), M. cuts in. Precision timing and changed speech characteristics (compared with the speech characteristics of either her leading questions or her baseline) appear to figure strongly in the phenomenon of L. arresting herself, even though she looks like a coiled spring, kinesically "wound up" and lungs full of air, jaw dropped. The image of this lively child stopped short in mid-action is eloquent witness to the behavior-regulating value of conventions, in this case probably the convention in this family that L. does not proceed when mother is signalling by means of speech characteristics--made obvious on the transcription--that she has the floor.

In this way the potential father-daughter conversation is scuttled by mother's direct, efficient intervention. During the twenty-three minutes M. orders L. to her seat on a number
of occasions, and alternately gives tacit or explicit permission for her to be out of her chair, as it suits M. Why has mother suddenly become aware that L. is in violation of what is probably a formal rule that she remain seated unless dismissed? It did not matter when she was getting her hair stroked, or when she was trying to evoke the sense of alliance with L. Suddenly it matters. In order to determine whether it is a family pattern that mother actively prevents direct conversation between father and daughter, one would have to have more examples from different contexts to examine. Most of the patterns I am proposing here are repeated over and over in the present sample.

L. does deliver her "You!" (full form, "That laughing was at you!" ?). M.'s speech has graded back toward baseline during the course of her reproving comment, and at the end trails off rapidly. Has she tacitly given L. permission to interrupt by turning down the volume of the "Don't interrupt!" signal? Has she concluded that due to L.'s pent-up energy there is no way she will have time to finish? She certainly is not going to relinquish the turn; her reproof is reinstated, in response to which L. turns to her and redirects the "You!" so that the scene ends with the reinstatement of the state 2 condition, after a brief aberration in the structure of group interaction.

B. Alternative Interpretations

The preceding "salient features" are presented embedded in varying levels of subjective interpretation which I propose. The structures and interpretations I see in, or impose on, the data are salient to me in that it is by means of them that I make sense of what is "going on" here. If I did not have my own categories and interpretations I suppose perception would be impossible; I would be bombarded by sense impressions, with-
out having the means to organize them cognitively into images. But I do have my categories, and I of course see them in the data. They determined what got recorded as data. The proper analogy is to hearing the phonemes of one's native language in a language with different sounds. If the level of the data I have recorded is below that at which it is prefabricated into my categories, it should be able to support alternate interpretations, including the ones that are "emic" to the natives. Whether my data, recorded in the transcription, is adequate to this task is a question I will pretend to leave open (as a "first stab" effort I would not stake much on it). My own interpretations have been presented as "salient;" in this section I discuss others, which I call "alternative." Whether any of them is, or are, emic, is something that would have to be determined through repeated observation of a phenomenon in varying contexts, which would allow for the elimination of some or all of them.
Alternative Explanations (continued)

In order to organize the approach to explanation, I have tried to list varieties of explanations that may be typical as supplements or competitors for understanding any specific aspect of interaction. The idea is that with sufficient work a coherent list of possibilities might be devised, so that when thinking about a problem one could refer to the list for inspiration and for the discipline of trying out a variety of hypotheses, regardless of whether or not they have immediate intuitive appeal.

The preliminary listing I came up with is the following:

Alternative Explanations

I. Varieties of Explanations
   A. Socio-cultural
      1. cultural
      2. economic
      3. historical
   B. Developmental
      1. physical/emotional development of individual
      2. physical/emotional development of group (incl. family)
      3. interaction of 1., and 2.
   C. Psychological
      1. personality theory, e.g. psychoanalytic
      2. stimulus-response approaches
      3. existential/phenomenological approaches
   D. Social-psychological
      1. field theory
      2. games theory
      3. balance theory
      4. systems theory

II. Logical Levels of Explanations
   A. Simultaneous layering of logical levels ("convolutions")
   B. Nesting series of contexts, including different series for each participant in a group interaction
Having a list such as is hinted at here could provide a check. The list could have been made by going through the chapter in *The Natural History of an Interview* dealing with this phase of the work and compiling all the hypotheses suggested there, and attempting a classification of them. I have been most persuaded by the approach that "description approaches explanation" as it becomes increasingly adequate and parsimonious. This follows the route of classifying items in the record into categories of sames and differences, and contrasting them in varying contexts.

The varieties of explanations listed in part I., above, are obviously very general and high level ways of approaching data; the data, at the other end of the end of the spectrum, are quite specific, though even a micro-phonetic transcription is an abstraction. The problem seems to be bridging the wide gap between the two with persuasive concepts. No doubt the job is very difficult, and seldom accomplished; personally, I have found this phase of things the most intimidating. Clinicians become quite facile with detailed, highly abstract accounts of human behavior, based on sparse observation, or at least sparse specification of observations. This is the kind of activity I am hoping to avoid, and which inspired me with the desire to learn about objective research methods.

Having said that much about my feelings about the various things "explanation" can involve, I will try out the little program outlined above on a portion of the text, or transcript. Let us take the first unit, in which L. speaks.

The most salient "sense" of this unit to me is that L. is making a comment on B.'s cough to M., and that her communication is complex in that she strikes a tone that is "playfully scornful." She manages to introduce this complexity of logical layers by doing certain specific behaviors: she lowers the note of her voice, relative to her baseline, and narrows her register. To
me this combination comprises a burlesque of an authoritative adult pronouncement, patronizing and condescending. It signals that "this is play," a message fraught with logical ambiguities, as Bateson has pointed out (in *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*). It says that the surface message of the words is not to be taken at face value; it also sets up a situation in which a bold, perhaps hostile, proposition could be ventured without taking full responsibility for it.

The problem of levels, then, is most interesting and complex here. The first level, or "convolution", would be the naive understanding that L. is actually making a judgement about the sincerity and validity of B.'s cough (if it is the cough she is talking about; the ambiguity in this brief speech extends to the semantics as well as the logical levels involved). And she may be right! Maybe he is not "telling the truth" in his cough, maybe he is making a cheap play for sympathy, or reviving a long-standing argument about his smoking, or in some other way not honestly coughing. What would an "honest cough" be? Purely an attempt to clear the throat? At any rate, a naive understanding of her speech would be that the cough should not be taken at face value, viz. "Don't take his cough at the level of the naive first convolution!"

The second convolution, introduced by the lowered and narrowed voice range as noted above, and assisted by over-precise articulation (except in the initial and final vocalizations in the unit), overvoicing, slowed pace of speech—with a drawl on "fake", entails the idea that, "You understand that I am just kidding."

A third convolution is, "I am just kidding, but by using this convention I can get away with saying something that would be unacceptable or disturbing; doing it this way means that no one can call me on it directly."

What might some possible reactions be to L.'s behavior in this unit, depending on the level one attends to? At the first
level, the child could be called to task for commenting unfavorably on the actions of a parent. At the second level, one would believe that play is the object here, no unfavorable or unacceptable comment is being made. At the third level, the arrow would strike home, but B. would be unable to comment on it directly; this is apparently the level at which the interaction proceeds, because he later gets his revenge, but does so in the same vein L. uses here. A fourth convolution would be to hear the barbed remark, note that it is being framed in the context of jest, recognize that one is not supposed to address the barb directly under such circumstances, but to comment on it directly anyway. I suspect that to act at this fourth level would be to introduce quite a serious note into the interaction, and would involve either losing face due to not being able to take a joke, or pulling rank by justifiably saying that the joke was a bad one. A risky maneuver, but one that B. later flirts with by giving the literal explanation for his cough that it was "caused by laughing." He rather quickly reverts to jest, however. One makes one's self vulnerable by being literal when a convoluted tactic has already been introduced and accepted\textsuperscript{3} or seconded (which M. does in the second unit).

The foregoing discussion is an attempt to specify the issues denoted by Roman numeral II, subpoint A. of my outline, "simultaneous layering of logical levels ("convolutions"). What about the next subpoint, regarding "nesting series of contexts"?

By nesting contexts I mean, for instance, in the present instance, that L.'s comment is made in the immediate context of B.'s cough. It does not refer to anything else that is obvious in the preceding conversation on the tape. Wider contexts, in which the comment nests, like the boxes of a Chinese puzzle, include the relaxed post-dinner conversation as a whole, the cozy adult talk about childbirth, where to live, and the seemingly hilarious "in joke" about a friend's paranoid fantasies,
all of which exclude L. The nesting contexts also include L.'s attempts to get close physically to M. (M. comments, "You're going to mess me up," and "You're hands are cold" (430f.). Wider contexts include the dinner scene as a whole, the presence of the camera and camera man, the preceding day with its individual courses of events for each family member, and so on in wider and wider circles. Most of the contexts listed above were shared in common. The last one, that each character has had different experiences during the day, brings up the difficult fact that no two people can be assumed to have had equivalent life experiences. They cannot even be assumed to have the same experiences of shared events. As Adler pointed out regarding birth order, children in the same family are not really of the same family, because one belongs to a family in which he is the elder, and the other is from a family in which he is the younger. In other words, people who live together experience the same events differently, and therefore do not share identical subjective contexts. They can, however, manage to work together in very close cooperation, as shown in the piece analyzed here.

The point of looking as closely as possible at contexts is that contexts are the conditioning medium for the interaction; the point of context is that context is the point. I can now see with conviction the futility of trying to find "meaning," as conventionally conceived, in interaction.

Having played out to some extent the issue of logical levels in explanation, let us try out one or two varieties of alternative explanations, given the logical structure of the interaction.

What about this business of L.'s making a mock derisive comment on her father's behavior? What might a psychoanalyst say about this? He might state that the stand-offish relationship between father and daughter is the product of an oedipal
complex in the process of being worked out. It could be that tensions set up by the mutual attraction of father and daughter has been quelled by a strategy of ignoring each other as much as possible. Later, in units 6 and following, we see that when the two begin to address each other more directly and overtly, affect rises quickly and M. steps in to divert the focus to herself. It could also be suggested that there is a flirtatious aspect to L.'s behavior, a pseudo-courtship quality to her teasing.

A family-development perspective elaborates the problems inherent in the young family, with tensions caused by the work and school activities of the couple, who then must deal with the addition of a child. The mother is then in the position of enjoying a special relationship with the child, while being burdened with the added need to be a breadwinner. The father no longer enjoys his wife's undivided attention, and is put in the position of competing with his own offspring for the attention of a tired mate. There is a lot of evidence on the tape supporting this kind of interpretation, and in the piece under scrutiny here there is a sibling-like manner to L.'s baiting of B. They seem to be equals, with M. the real parent. L. cannot tease her mother with the same ease of manner, as one can see by noting aspects of her behavior in unit 10: she appears sheepish, drawling a quavery "You," tilting her head as though hesitating, and delaying the pointing movement of the hand, a movement which is vigorous, but less grand than the point she has just concluded at B.

This developmental perspective suggests that as the family life cycle continues the pattern seen here will change. The husband will finish his prolonged, but culturally sanctioned, adolescence and finish school and get a job. At that point M.'s working may be considered optional, which could ease tensions by bringing the role constellation more in line with a cultural ideal whereby the man takes primary responsibility for money.
This may be the rite of passage that will put him in his rightful place as husband and parent.

As his development continues, so will L.'s. She can be expected to become more independent socially, cutting the apron-strings with mother as she cultivates more peer orientation. This would move her to a more neutral position in the interpersonal map of the family group, a position analogous to her "proper" seat at the table in which she has equal closeness to each parent. An important realignment of social space would thus be accomplished.

Family development could allow the mother to "regress" as an individual, becoming less central to all family transactions and taking less responsibility in everything that happens. She is extremely competent and intelligent, and there is no obvious reason, other than social expectations, why she is not the one in school rather than her husband. When things are a little farther along she may have the choice of continuing schooling or other long-range, high-cost personal development projects, or not. As these changes take place, it would be interesting to notice if her anger diminishes with the need the family seems to have for her to be in control (assuming the affect detected in the material is actually present and is not something that is going on just on that particular day).

If the system proves inflexible, e.g. if mother cannot relinquish her control, if father continues in an emotionally and economically dependent role, or if daughter refuses to cut the ties with mother, then a situation might emerge which could be characterized as "arrested development," or "pathological."

A further way of approaching the piece of behavior being looked at here is the systems theory approach. From this perspective, a steady state, or homeostasis could be said to exist in the communications within the family whereby the level and quality of affect experienced by the members is stable as long as,
B. and L. do not interact directly, but speak only to M. By this way of seeing things, L.'s comment on B., although made to M., constitutes positive feedback, or deviation-amplifying feedback in the system. As a self-regulating servo-mechanism, the homeostatic properties of the system are automatically brought into play as M. coopts L.'s speech in a way that changes it and makes it M.'s without taking it away from L. It later becomes apparent that the deviation-amplifying value of L.'s remark has disturbed the steady affective condition of the system, when B. is observed responding to her in a way that shows she has hit her target. When B. addresses L. directly, the deviation started in the opening speech by L. is continued in amplified form, and in response M. institutes more forceful homeostatic measures by invoking the optional formal rule that L. is to be seated at the table. The runaway cycle of a system in a condition of positive feedback is exhibited here in that it takes considerable effort by M. to argue the girl back into a quiet state so that the conversation can proceed as it was before.

Another alternative in looking at this piece would be games theory. Here the mutual tacit recognition of rules and precedents would be emphasized along with something about the expected outcome. Thus, it is most unlikely that the scene played out here about smoking is being improvised in front of the camera for the first time. It is far more likely that L. is cleverly bringing up an old after-dinner game in which M. chides B. for smoking, and B. persists in having his smoke. The goal here is simply the affective discharge, the little thrill of people going through emotional paces. L. may be said to be restarting a little fight that has been refought many times in the history of interaction among these people. The grooves through which they move here are well-worn, the rules of the game and its outcome known in advance. The real
feelings involved give it zest and excitement. The family
counsellor knows that very few fights are really about anything,
and that they are amazingly repetitious. They become troublesome
when the affective stakes are higher than they are in the pre-
sent instance.

The above discussion represents some idea of the use of
explanation as I understand it. Obviously, no single explanation
known can do justice to the recorded events. A variety of
explanations applied to the various logical levels of the inter-
action can be refined by contrasting similar and dissimilar
items in varying contexts. Competing hypotheses are thereby
rejected, modified, and retested.
Speech and Salient Body Movements

(explicated in Text)

Legend:
- Solid line shows three levels of activity
  (talking; moving; relatively inactive).
- Dotted line shows salient body activity while talking.

For horizontal lines, each side of square is about 1 sec.
Vertical lines coordinate similarity.

Gaze Direction and Shift Points

(explicated in Text)
**Kinesic Baselines for Scene**

M1's baseline: Shoulder and arm/hand movements are not charted. Head turns to L (in) and back to baseline (R) looking at B, but head turned slightly to L (e.g., beginning of unit 1).

L1's baseline: Head turns to M (R) and back (L) toward B (baseline). Trunk turns to M (right) and back (left); leans back (right) and forward (left). Hand on left is stationary holding bread. Hand on right moves up behind head, and fully extends to point at B1 and M1 (e.g., beginning of unit 2).

B3's baseline: Head, viewed from behind, moves to left (Howard L) and back facing M1 (baseline). Hand moves noted in prose (line L4).
hat's a fake one
By reader for Exp. move right. Hand touches cup, unit ends.
His hand sweeps scene as M. speaks.
Unit 3 (cont'd)

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93/94
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97/98
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107
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109
144

Li nods slightly after M's leading question.
do you think it's caused by cigarettes?

M's smile, till at end of unit, looks ambiguous. Unit ends on M's eyes hit B up.

B raises mug, which disappears behind head; head tilts 5.
144. After apparently standing up on toes, drops down a couple inches after "coughing"
Do you think he deserves to cough?
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B moves left hand to point at L.
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<td>point (still holding broom)</td>
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Lis hand appears above table, is pulled back like a baseball pitcher. When M. addresses her she continues the turn toward M., facing M.
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Unit ends as mouth closes on "f." M's voice: "This goes rapidly on the..."
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<td>1. While I pulled on hand, lowers to table, touching at end of unit. Unit begins when right hand, pulled behind head, reaches for the feet. Exact movement to left is reverse direction. Unit ends when M. opens mouth, but before B+ vowels. In Unit 9 begins with voicing.</td>
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Hey get up in that chair.

Unit ends on mouth ready maximum closing.
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<td>Shoot arm out fully extended, post at Mi. Fullest reach marks and O.</td>
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Explication of Charts (Figures 1 and 2.)

In these charts I was playing with graphic representations of some of the salient aspects of the interaction through the ten arbitrary units I abstracted from the twenty-three odd seconds recorded in the transcription. The graph paper is used differently here than in the transcript in that I tried to approximate relative time passage on the horizontal plane. Whereas the sides of the squares in the transcript are not intended to do anything but line up events that happen approximately at the same time, here they are used to try to indicate one second of time per unit of graph paper. This is not really supported by the data as I recorded them, since I had no absolute time frame except the approximation of cumulative time lapse at the borders of my units. The attempt here to put the data on a time scale is done purely by inspection and cannot really be defended. At the same time, I do not think it is too far off, given the clumsy situation of working with videotape to begin with. The assumption that events noted along the same vertical line on the paper are simultaneous still holds here, as in the transcript.

In Figure 1, three activity values are charted for each character, and approximate change points specified. The close coordination of changes in action-states among the family members is made clear, for example in unit 1, where all three make transitions at about the same time, as they do early in 3 and 6. Other details of coordination become apparent by closer inspection.

The dotted lines are supplied to show body motion while speaking, which would otherwise be obscured. It is seen that L. tends to act while she speaks, while M. tends to become relatively still while speaking. In unit 6, B. is observed to do both. L. if necessary, coordinate closely; B. (on 6)

Figure 2. shows some apparent coordination of gaze direction
on the part of L. and M., B.'s eyes being, of course, not observable in this material. Instances of coordination seem to occur at the beginning of unit 1., around the border of 2. and 3., the end of 4., and the end of 7.

I am not sure what to do with this information; I can say that the precision of coordination among the people here was brought home to me forcefully by doing these exercises. In addition, the possibilities of detail that could be specified through use of a good transcription became apparent, indicating the utility of developing these personal research skills.
END
of film
"Please Rewind"

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