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Getting to know the self and others: babies' interactions with other babies

Cathy Urwin

Any attempt to come to grips with what infants know of other persons must approach the question of what it means to know a person, or indeed to know oneself. In this paper I am less concerned with *what* infants know than with life long processes of getting to know another person as distinct from the self, and the processes which promote and impede this process of discovery. Using examples of interactions between pairs of same-aged babies I hope to illustrate the relevance of psychoanalytic concepts, focusing particularly on defences against anxiety, primitive phantasy and the account of the depressive position put forward by Melanie Klein (1935). This refers to a phase rather than a stage development, or a reorientation in mental life through which the infant deals with the painful consequences of loving and hating impulses directed towards the same person or love object.

The study involved six pairs of same-aged babies followed longitudinally. The babies in each pair knew each other before the study began and saw each other regularly outside it. There were two girl-girl, two boy-boy and two boy-girl pairs. Three pairs were followed for one year, from 6 and 8 months. Two pairs were between 10 and 12 months at the start of the study and were also followed from one year. A further pair were followed from 18 to 24 months. With the exception of one of the children in the latter pair, all the children were first born and only children throughout the study period. Thus the study covered the development period from 6 to 24 months.

Each infant pair came with their mothers to an observation room in the university once a fortnight in the first instance, visits being dropped to once a month in the second year, and/or once the infants were used to the proceedings. The infants were also observed at home. The playroom was set up the same way each time, many of the toys being provided in duplicate. The video camera was positioned in the room and managed by me. Broadly speaking, the procedure followed a standard format in which each mother was first recorded playing with her baby for a standard period of twenty minutes. The babies were then recorded together on their own for a further twenty minutes, the mothers watching through a one way mirror.

This procedure worked well for many of the pairs though sometimes sessions were shortened if the babies found the length of time involved too tiring. More significantly, at some point in the study, all the babies protested at being left by their mothers, either because the separation was too distressing and/or because the presence of the other baby or observer had become threatening in her absence.

Under these circumstances I would, firstly, intervene by providing some other distraction, returning the camera. If this failed, the mothers were asked back in. Once the babies were calm, I recorded the babies' interactions with their mothers present.

There were considerable differences, over time and between pairs, in how much intervention was necessary. Generally speaking, within each pair the vicissitudes in the babies' reactions to their mothers' absence are an index of a change in the meaning of separation from the mother, and the kind of anxiety which this generated. As I will show, it also had implications for the infants' interactions with each other.

At 6 months, however, in the context of this study, separation from the mother apparently posed few problems. The infants were clearly interested in each other and, from the mothers' report, had been for several months. Put down together on the floor the infants would watch, smile at, vocalise at, pat and sometimes crawl over each other. At this age the infants appeared strikingly accepting of these potential violations. Equally striking was the number of episodes involving one baby imitating or replicating behaviour produced by the other baby.

Imitation was defined as occurring when one baby repeated an act or part of an act previously performed by the other child, when attention and/or timing suggested that the first child's action was the source of the second child's action by providing the impetus to it. Unsurprisingly, prolonged sequences were more prevalent in the second year, though simple replication did not disappear. Complex sequences were also

evident in the youngest group, for whom imitations included imitations of vocalisation, non-standard sounds, and sounds associated with particular mood states, notably fussing and laughing.

Katy and Marta 6 months

Katy and Marta are sitting facing each other. Marta vocalises 'Ah ha' and smiles. Katy vocalises 'Ah ha' and kicks her legs out.

Later in the same session:

Marta (who is beginning to crawl) begins to move off, vocalising. 'Ah-ah-uh'. Katy imitates the vocalisation, 'Ah-ah-uh'. Marta stops, turns back and smiles.

Secondly there were imitations of mouth movements, body actions, or changes of body position, imitations which were highly specific.

Katy and Marta 6 months 14 days

Katy and Marta are sitting opposite each other. Marta kicks her foot up and down. Katy looks at Marta's foot and kicks her foot up and down.

Then at 7 months and 21 days:

Brian and Julian have been eating biscuits. Brian looks at his sticky fingers and opens and closes his hands. Julian watches, looks at Brian's hands, at his own fingers and moves them likewise.

Finally an example of complex imitation later in the same session followed

Brian's reaching forward and pulling Julian's foot. Julian reaches forward and pulls Brian's foot. He sits up. They look at each other, smiling and vocalising. Julian reaches for Brian's foot again. Brian reaches for Julian's hair. Julian lets go of the foot and reaches for Brian's hair.

As previously mentioned, the infants were remarkably tolerant of these kinds of explorations. Where distress or protest was recorded, it was not always in the expected direction and not always clear who or what was being violated.

A representative example of this ambiguity occurred between Katy and Marta at 6 months.

Marta approaches Katy smiling and vocalising. She pushes at her face and head. Then Marta fusses and moves away. Katy smiles, then, shortly after, she imitates Marta's whiney vocalisation.

Thirdly there were also imitations of movements of objects, and of the other child's actions on objects. Also observable here was what I have called 'object cuing', in which one baby breaks off what he or she is doing, to reach for an object that the other baby holds or has just dropped. Thus, the interest in the object lies in the fact that the other child has it, or has just had it, rather than in any property intrinsic to the object itself.

Brian and Julian 7 months 21 days

Brian and Julian both have biscuits. Julian has finished his biscuit. Brian, watching him, drops his. Julian reaches for it, picks it up, and begins eating it. Brian watches, and now picks up a piece of broken biscuit which has fallen on the floor. Julian watches Brian begin eating again. He reaches for a cloth brick. Brian reaches forward and takes it away from him and bites it. Julian does not protest.

Finally after a complex follow-my-leader shift from one object to another, Katy and Marta momentarily take advantage of the availability of two objects of the same sort.

Katy and Marta 7 months and 21 days

Katy picks up a cage rattle, shakes it and laughs. Marta picks up a cage rattle of the same sort, and investigates it. Katy watches her then goes back to chewing a brick.

Thus the babies' interest in each other is at least in part due to the similarities between them. Despite the extent to which they were drawn to or into what each other were doing, few imitative episodes appeared 'contagious', in the sense that the infant's attention involved an active engagement with reproducing the other's behaviour. Imitations of laughs, for instance, appeared to have a signal function, the effect being to mark or communicate about affect, as in the following example of Linette and Paula, who have been watching a doll jerk on a string.

Linette and Paula 8 months

Linette crawls towards the doll. Paula watches her and vocalises. She repeats the vocalisation sharply and laughs pointedly. Linette turns and laughs too, looking at her.

Nevertheless, despite the clear communicative functions, it was often difficult to determine which baby was having what emotional experience, or who was imitating whom, suggesting a lack of clear differentiation between self and other. This emphasis is, of course, consistent with Piaget's account, which places the distinction of self and other as a culminating achievement of the sensory-motor period. But Piaget's account gives little weight to the differing developmental implications which follow from interacting with persons as opposed to things, including the question of how the infant learns about internal properties, the psychic qualities of others.

That young babies imitate each other is not itself surprising. Infants of six months are often highly amused by their own images in a mirror and it has commonly been observed that adults frequently reproduce infants' behaviour in their interactions. As Pawlby (1977) suggests, doing the same thing can be a way of marking mutual attention, and as Stern (1985) has added, it draws attention to the event as experienced by two people as opposed to one.

However, this still raises questions about the infant's experience, and what it is that accounts for the engagement in imitation with another child. A third explanation is encompassed in Melanie Klein's (1946) account of 'projective identification', a concept originally put forward as a primitive defence mechanism which enables the very vulnerable tiny baby to keep some hold of reality while being potentially overwhelmed by experiences associated with being cold, wet, hungry or falling apart inside. In Klein's account, these experiences stir up anxiety which the infant struggles to get rid of by projecting it into an external object, a person or part of a person, with which the infant subsequently identifies. This may be to control the object, or to attempt to keep hold of something life giving, comforting, and loved, or perhaps most frequently to avoid the pain of being separate, exposed and vulnerable, through producing a confusion which is *secondary* to a primary differentiation which for Klein is present from birth.

While Klein emphasises the defensive function of projective identification, Wilfred Bion (1962) later extends the concept to emphasise how it functions as a primitive form of communication, as the baby uses projective processes to arouse emotions, feelings, and primitive thoughts which might otherwise be overwhelming in another person. In day to day caretaking, the adult's concern, attention and affection enable her to provide a container for the infant's anxieties, providing a linking function by effectively thinking for the infant. Over time this enables the infant to receive back her own experience in modified form, providing the basis of an experience of being understood.

The active process of projection is demonstrated in studies of preverbal communication which show young infants successfully engaging with their mother's emotionality. Similarly, mothers' baby talk can be interpreted as illustrating the kind of mental work carried out by the mother in attempting to make sense of the infant's experience (Urwin 1989). One can also observe the transformation of anxiety, or the potential modification of distress with humour, in mother-infant teasing.

In both its defensive and communicative aspects, projective identification presupposes both some means of matching self with other, and for actively inducing emotional experiences in others. The extent of imitation between these infant pairs suggests that on the one hand their engagement with each other may have enabled them to hold together in their mothers' absence. But equally, even at six months, the communicative aspect, the pointed use of a stylised vocalisation or a laugh as a signal, for example, suggests an active attempt to induce a shared experience. There were also indications of modifying anxieties as between Katy and Marta.

Katy and Marta 6 months

Katy whines, unhappy but rather peevish. Marta imitates, with a slight variation. 'Oo-oh'. She smiles. Katy looks at her, and smiles too.

The use of behaviour for its signal qualities brings to the fore the relation between experience and its meaning in an interpersonal context. It introduces a distance between a time before and a present event, potentially opening a way through the confusion between yours, mine and ours. But this recognition of separateness cannot be achieved without painful consequences.

As Bateson (1955) pointed out in his 'Theory of Play and Fantasy', the recognition that one's signals are 'only' signals leads one into the paradox on which all human communication is based: the arbitrariness or shifting properties of signalling behaviour raise the problem of what is to be trusted or mistrusted: is the message to be taken as a guide, or as something intended to mislead? The infant is thrown simultaneously into the problem. What is in the other person's mind?

Consistent with other studies of preverbal communication, the last quarter of the first year and the beginning of the second was a time in which gestures, such as requesting or pointing to draw attention to things, became established between these infants and their mothers, along with an increase in clearly observable ambivalence in the infants' relations with their mothers. In the relationships between the babies,

there was a relative increase in conflicts, fights and acts of deliberate beastliness in the three youngest pairs towards the end of the first year, an increase observable in the older group from shortly after the study begins.

One of the most striking aspects of these conflicts was that they occurred in contexts where previously their age mates' violations had provoked few signs of distress or retaliation. Compare, for example, the episodes described as 'object cuing' with Katy's adeptness, at 9 months, at kicking out at Marta to warn her off 'her' property, and with Paula who, at a similar age, finally reduced Linette to tears after seizing toys from her and lashing out at her face, even though I had attempted to intervene by giving them 'equal shares'.

Unsurprisingly, this attacking possessiveness, typical of Paula and Linette's relationship at this time, caused their mothers considerable consternation. Though the relative frequency of conflicts varied, an increase in vehemence and correspondingly distress occurred in all the pairs, where previously their parents had assumed equanimity.

What accounts for this shift?

Similar conflicts have been observed in siblings by Judy Dunn and her colleagues (1988), and in pairs of infants followed into the second year by Dale Hay (1979) and others. Hay has stressed the importance of cognitive shifts in the nine month old which facilitate, for instance, the infant's sustaining some notion of an object enduring when it is taken away. Though this might contribute to the salience of possessing an object, it does not explain the virulent feelings provoked in relation to the other baby, why he or she should have become a threat. Nor indeed would it explain any motivation to put things right.

As is probably obvious from my interventions, the increase in conflict was associated with the emergence of separation anxiety. This is traditionally taken as marking the infant's recognition of her particular mother and her dependence upon her. But separation anxiety is not only about establishing preferences. It also brings to the surface the anxieties which come with the two-edged sword of separateness. If the infant is a separate object, then she may be with someone else, bringing with it the immediate possibility of being displaced. In this study, clinging behaviour, and protests at separation co-occurred with overt displays of jealousy directed at the other baby, whether held by the child's own mother, or approaching the mother, or even when being given attention by someone else.

Of course, the insistence on one particular person is not without other developmental implications. For example, the acceleration in the use of

gestures and 'showing off' ad nauseam to sustain adults' attention, as described by many observers of preverbal communication, can be understood as the child's attempt to hold together predictable resources.

This attempt to monopolise adult attention, as if it could limitless, carries with it the omnipotence captured pertinently in Freud's reference to the painting 'His Majesty the Baby' in his paper which introduces the theory of narcissism. This refers to a developmental phase in which, in the process of separating from the mother, the baby establishes his or her own existence as a separate and enduring object through loving the self, in the way the mother once loved him. In some pairs more than others, the omnipotence associated with this phase entered the infants' interactions with each other. That is, the marked increase in the salience of the mother's attention at the beginning of the second year was matched, not by overt aggression, but by an explosion of imitative or cued performances designed to get their mothers to 'look at me too'.

Both mothers are in the room.

Brian begins to point exuberantly at the animal poster making appropriate noises, receiving excited praise and feedback from his mother. On the far side of the room, Julian looks up, drops what he is doing, dashes over and starts pointing too, looking to his mother for a similar response.

Marta and Katy, who is now mobile, at 13 months, act similarly.

Marta brings teddy to her mother, showing her, smiling and vocalising, to receive the mother's comment. Katy watches, goes off and fetches a mask of a bear face, and takes it across to her own mother, showing her, and looking back at Marta.

In these examples, potential conflictual situations over who is getting attention are transformed to indicate the beginnings of competition and rivalry.

But as a way of dealing with difference and separateness, the 'look at me too' response was limited. Not only were the infants' performances linked to each other but, as the adults' presence suggests, the strategy was associated with more or less acute anxiety in the mothers' absence. In Julian and Brian's case, this pattern was broken through in the final months study, with a brief but extremely vehement period of fights, conflicts, and bitter hatred of the other child.

Here, as elsewhere, the intensity of the conflict drew force from the

extent to which the infants were struggling with similar psychological problems: how to be separate from the mother, and to retain the sense of being loved and held, while at the same time reckoning with the precariousness of a solution which rest on the phantasy 'I am the one and only'.

To sustain a recognition of the existence of the other child with any degree of equanimity would require the infant to work through the helplessness which goes along with discovering dependence. Here, many of the infants used their interactive partners, whether adults or infants, as vehicles for projecting unwanted emotions while they took control. With her mother, for example, the infant who takes the lead in games like 'peek-a-boo' or 'hide and seek', masters anxiety over the mother's disappearance, produces the pleasure associated with her return, but also makes the *mother* feel and think about, the problem of suspense. Much of the infant-parent teasing described by Reddy (1991) can, I think, be a way of containing and transforming anxiety. But with each other, the infants in this study were not averse to actual tormenting, the aim being to get rid of pain by triumphing over its infliction on someone else. Given the similarities in age between the children in each pair, a 'friend' could thus become a prime target for being made to feel, or suffer from, feelings of powerless, jealousy or displacement, as was observable from before the end of the first year.

Katy and Marta 10 months 15 days

Both mothers are present.

Katy is beginning to crawl towards her mother. Marta, who is a faster mover, drops what she is doing and, from across the room, crawls rapidly past Katy and positions herself in front of her own mother, smiling in a way which suggests she is the centre of attention. Katy sits back and bursts into tears.

At twelve months, in the following example, Michael deals with his jealousy not with an outright battle but by making sure that Nancy has to experience the loss of an object, rather than himself. The mothers are out of the room. Nancy has become distressed and I have attempted to comfort her by offering her the baby walker which has a teddy in it.

Michael watches from the far side of the room, drops what he is doing, does not attempt to take the baby walker, but whips out the teddy bear. Nancy cries and lunges after him. But by this time he's across the other

side of the room. The teddy bear soon gets dropped. Since Michael was walking and Nancy was not, the bear was now beyond her reach.

Nancy's frustration and upset in this example and others like it may be less to do with the removal of the object *per se* than the sense in which she knows he knows only too well what it is she wants. This knowing your enemy from the inside has some advantages, as in the following example where, at the same age, the smaller, physically less powerful Nancy brings down remonstrances on Michael's head, as the two infants sit side by side in their baby buggies, their mothers chatting.

Nancy torments Michael by tweaking the buttons of his coat, then letting them go. Michael tries to push her away and eventually lashes out at her. Nancy cries in peevish, babyish way, Michael receives a ticking off.

Playing on being a helpless baby and exaggerating hurt is a transformation of powerlessness so that the helplessness and frustration is to be borne by the other child. This example also reflects how Nancy was learning to make use of differences between herself and Michael, by seducing her physically more powerful competitor. Nevertheless he was equally vulnerable.

Once Nancy was walking herself, in the following month, a new strategy was to cultivate a scary face, which she would put on as he approached, baring her teeth. Within two weeks she had discovered that when she was captivated by whatever Michael was playing with, she could back off, busy herself with some interesting toy, and as Michael was drawn to come and look, she could nip back to the first object to take it over.

Using her knowledge of Michael's response tendencies to deceive him increased Nancy's power over him. But this does not amount to achieving separateness and tolerance of the other's needs or requirements. Here, fortunately, just as the other child could be part of the problem, so could he or she be part of the solution, as the babies made further discoveries of similarities in their behaviour, experience and predicaments as well as differences.

Even in the last quarter of the first year there were occasional instances of attempted sharing, giving or showing concern for the other baby, though these attempts were yet to be executed completely. For example, when the babies were beginning to point to, request or offer objects to their mothers, the same behaviour appeared in interaction

with each other in their mothers' absence. But it was much less frequent, and if intended to draw attention to some object outside themselves, it can only be described as ineffective. Objects offered were drawn away again, either as one child teased the other, or as the other child, in mid exchange became a source of threat.

By the end of the first year, some of the children had begun to internalise parental warnings of the sort, 'No Katy', in restraining themselves from removing the other child's possession, looking round for an adult response, and occasionally producing 'No' themselves. They could also sometimes give up an object on promptings of the sort 'Be nice, that's a good girl'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many such overtures were not taken up by the potentially benefiting other child.

However, while co-operation based on handing things over appeared to develop more slowly in the infant pairs than in the mother-infant pairs, imitation persisted as a means of relating and communicating, sequences becoming longer as they acquired a game like quality. Successive acts were repeated with laughter, looking and smiling, and waiting for the other's response. 'You bang on the radiator, I bang on the radiator', 'You bang on the radiator' can be extremely funny at thirteen months.

As interesting as possibilities which follow similarity in behaviour is the possibility of communicating at the level of phantasy, and for recognising comparable emotional experiences.

Katy and Marta 11 months

Katy and Marta's mothers have been out of the room, which reduced Marta to tears. But they have returned. Now contained Marta reworks the impact of this experience by (for the first time) getting into the corner beside the radiator, hiding her face, and leaping out surprising her mother, who says 'boo'. She repeats this two or three times. On the floor with a truck of bricks, Katy watches. She picks up bricks one by one, smiles at the camera, 'offers' the brick, then chucks it over her head behind her, out of sight, 'ooh'. Like Marta she repeats the performance two or three times, and like Marta she plays on disappearance, and with it, the anxiety provoked by her mother's absence, and her own fear of 'disappearing'.

Given the similarities in developmental dilemmas and possible solutions, there was also the possibility of collusion, in particular, an omnipotent collusion in the dispensability of adults. In the second half of the second year, there were several episodes in which wild 'naughtiness' and a heap of laughing children vied with one child being cast as the desperate

figure of parental authority. 'No Michael – don't. Get down!' pleaded Nancy as Michael piled chairs on top of the table and attempted to reach the ceiling. At 18 months, Carol attempted to bring order to John's wilful misfiring as he poured juice, not only into the toy cups on the play table, but across the floor and on to the chairs, the places for other children.

At 18 months John could not tolerate with equanimity the possibility of places for 'other children'. But within some pairs this possibility was in sight in the second half of the second year, as the wish to cheer the other baby up, to put things right, was actually carried through. These reparative moves depended on the child's being able both to identify with the other child's distress, and also to recognise that it belonged to someone other than the self. Where previously the other child's distress produced staring, helpless looking on, an oblivious performance, or a further outburst of tears, from 16 months onwards, some of the infants showed genuine reparative moves which were unprompted by myself, which were only recorded in the mother's absence, and which the mothers had never observed at home. This suggested that, on some occasions, the separation was actually enabling the infants to make contact with internal resources, rather than disabling them.

By this time, battles in the playroom were less frequently provoked by possession of objects or person attention *per se*, but were more likely to be about control over the distribution of available resources. The infants were now able to use rules of convention to support the need for sharing, having to wait, or taking turns. At 16 months, Nancy and Michael could play together with the till, until one of them would insist that he or she could press the button to make the money come out. Both could play with putting balls in the hammer and ball toy, until one insisted that he or she must have the hammer. By twenty months, through the development of pretence, to some extent this kind of problem was transcended through an unspoken agreement about the need for the allocation of roles: until competition broke out over who was in the role of the adult, and hence, who was to be left out. At twenty months, Richard and Mark would play with the toy teaset at the table in a delightful and affectionate manner, but the play collapsed into a violent struggle over who was going to have the teapot to pour tea. At a comparable age between Nancy and Michael conflict broke out as Michael kept moving the chairs which Nancy had carefully arranged at the table. The almost obsessional control that children sometimes show in their play (see Ratner and Bruner, 1978) is an insistence on sameness in the face of a psychic reality in which, as Michael shows, everything is constantly moving about, changing, or coming unstuck. This may be contrasted with getting in

touch with some internal containment in which a powerful figure emerges less as a figure of rigid authority than as a support, a caregiver, or a source of protection or guidance, sufficiently flexible to make room for the possibility of making reparation.

Roger and Mark 16 months

Roger and Mark have fought vehemently and violently over who is to have the teddy bear in the tip up truck, Mark crashing Roger against the door to produce terrified tears. I intervened, gave them a biscuit each and returned to the camera. After some smiling, comparing biscuits, Mark is still somewhat at a loss, walking backwards and forwards. 'Mummy, Mummy', as if trying to gather himself. Roger smiles and says 'Mummy', and shows him his biscuit again. Mark chews his and smiles at Roger. He then stands close to Roger, side by side, and tries to coax him into playing a game of chase which he usually plays with his father. This game is totally new to Roger. Mark demonstrates, lining himself up at the door, and running into the room. He then turns to watch Roger, trying to prompt him into following him. Roger, still curious and not fully comprehending, obediently lines himself up at the door. Mark gives him a gentle push. 'Boy' do it, he says, then as Dad, he runs in to the room, turning to Roger. This time Roger copies, and runs into the centre of the room and smiles at Mark.

Where Mark cheered Roger up by introducing a father, in the following, Nancy makes a space for Michael, containing his frustration, by seeing a mummy who shares things out. This was in spite of the fact that, at this age, when their mothers were present, sharing was conceded to only with reluctance or suspicion.

Michael and Nancy 22 months

Both Michael and Nancy have biscuits. Michael is trying to establish an ordered arrangement in which each child's biscuit is placed on an identical plate on the table. He reaches for Nancy's biscuit. She protests. He gives it back, and reaches for the plate. Nancy quickly intervenes, picking up both plates and her biscuit, saying 'No!'. Michael reaches after the plate, and starts to cry piteously in frustration. Nancy squats on the floor, look at him. She puts her biscuit on the top plate, looking at him again, then separates the two plates. She looks at the arrangement on the floor, one plate empty, one plate with a biscuit. She looks at Michael, who is still crying. 'Michael', she says gently, in a consoling tone, 'Here yah,' she says, giving him a plate for

his biscuit. He stops crying. 'There. Biscuit'. She goes off with her biscuit and plate, sitting on the other side of the table.

In the following month it is Michael who wrestles with his possessiveness and his jealousy through an identification with a father who serves a protective rather than an authoritarian function. No intervention on my part was necessary. To some extent the significance of the objects *per se* was subordinate to the infants' attempts to grapple with their emotion, and find a position through which they could handle the fact that they knew what was the issue for each, and what the other child felt.

Michael and Nancy 23 months

Michael has taken the baby walker from Nancy, who resists, then squeals at him frustratedly from the other side of the room, stamping her feet. 'Mine'. Michael retaliates, 'Mine', looking at her. 'Mine. Mine', he says emphatically, 'Mine', coming close. 'Mine', sticking his finger out as if to ram home the point. Nancy whines, pouts, and slumps on the cushion. As Michael moves the walker he brushes her foot. 'Foot – Foot – Foot', she raises it up. He is apparently unmoved. Nancy goes off to the tool set. Whereupon Michael immediately leaves the walker, going after her. 'Nancy – Mine – Mine.' Then he concedes. 'Nancy's', he says gently backing off – 'Nancy, Nancy', he calls gently but earnestly to convey his sincerity. 'Here yah' he says, looking at her, giving her some nuts and showing her the pieces. 'That's a Daddy's', he says with reverence, picking up the screwdriver. 'Daddies do this.' Nancy accepts Michael's offering and takes interest in his direction.

Examples like these were, of course, comparatively rare, and at the age of 23 months it is still on whole difficult for children to sustain interaction with other children for prolonged periods without adult support. Nevertheless, I hope I have illustrated some changing meanings of separateness, and the complexity of the processes involved in getting to know another person.

Concluding discussion

In her recent book on sibling relationships, *The Development of Social Understanding*, Judy Dunn (1988) has stressed the significance of the family world as the place in which children acquire such understanding. That is, her account stresses 'the significance of the affective dynamics of the relationships that motivate the child to engage in discourse about the social world, rather than solely the cognitive conflict of being faced with

another person's point of view. It is the motivation to express himself within that relationship, to co-operate, to get his way, or to share amusement, that I suggest, in part leads the child to discover the ways of the family world' (Ibid p186).

In the light of this conclusion, the many similarities in events observed between these infant peers and Judy Dunn and her colleagues' observations of siblings are particularly interesting. It is possible that, through the frequency of contact, something like a family dynamic may have been operating for these peers. However, it is also possible that the study illustrates more general developmental tasks of this age: that is the infant's problem may not be to 'get in to someone else's shoes' but to move out again, and that in this process the child has to give up being the baby in order to become a child.

The peer study highlights particularly acutely how early experiences of separateness bring with them both an awareness of a loss and a powerful phantasy of being displaced. Ultimately, the achievement of what Melanie Klein calls the depressive position, or Winnicott the capacity for concern, refers to a psychic necessity that there must be 'another child'. From this view, it is highly significant that all examples of reparative behaviour, a caring seen through to a resolution, involved either identification of an element that was missing and necessary, and hence a capacity for symbol formation, and/or the appearance of a parental figure, a protector, support, or container of distress: 'Daddies do this', 'Boy do that', 'Michael, here yah'. However momentary, the conciliating child has negotiated a place in relation to the Oedipal triangle, in which what is available simultaneously is both an identification with a child in distress, and with a containing or protective parental figure which has been introjected.

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