10 Analytic Hermeneutics and the Study of Morality in Action

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes an approach to the study of social interaction, of the moral concerns that are at work in that interaction, and the moral issues that arise from it. Analytic hermeneutics involves the interpretive investigation of human activity as an ongoing situated accomplishment. Informed by an existential analysis of human being — of the character of the enterprise of research as well as of the human phenomena being studied — it calls for changes in our study of young children’s social relations. These changes include the renunciation of a stance of distance and detachment; entry into the everyday settings where children’s activity occurs; the need to fix action before it can be studied; attention to the forestructure of interpretation; the avoidance of coding systems; and a focus on individual cases.

The psychological study of morality began in the heyday of behaviorism, and so it took the form of experimental investigations of moral and immoral acts, as though these were purely descriptive categories (Hartshorne & May, 1928). It moved next, gaining much more territory and profit, to the structuralist, cognitive-developmental reconstruction of stages of moral competence, tied empirically to performance data of people’s judgments concerning the moral course of action when presented with vignettes of hypothetical moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1958). Most recently, as psychology in general, and developmental psychology in particular, moves beyond behaviorism and cognitivism, beyond objectivism and relativism (Bernstein, 1983), to an interest in approaches that place emphasis on everyday activity in concrete settings, moral development...
research has been moving towards study of the moral aspects of social interaction in real settings. This chapter describes an approach to the study of interaction that can be called analytic hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is, simply put, the business of interpretation, and the work of Dilthey (1900/1976) and Heidegger (1927/62) introduced the notion of the interpretive analysis of human activity; the interpretive study of people's action. Such an application of hermeneutics to action implies that one has reason to think that action requires interpretation if it is to be properly understood. Why might action require interpretation? One answer is that it shares certain characteristics with texts; with written narrative accounts. One can view, as Ricoeur (1979) does, the similarity between action and text as a consequence of the fact that actions must be fixed to be studied, as a written text fixes spoken language, or one can view it, with MacIntyre (1984), as a consequence of the fact that life, and the activity that makes it up, has a certain dramatic quality, one we have all recognized at one time or another.

Both these are correct analyses, but Heidegger's position, at least that reflected in his early work Being and Time (1927/62), is a little different. And it is in the main Heidegger's account of human activity, and of the reasons why and the manner in which it requires a hermeneutic analysis—a hermeneutic phenomenology—to be properly understood, which guides the narrative in this chapter. Our aim here is to lay out some guidelines for the conduct of one kind of hermeneutic or interpretive analysis. One kind because there will be other interpretations of what makes an analysis hermeneutic; one kind because the topic of investigation around which we shall organize our account is a specific one: the social relations of young children.

Our subject is analytic hermeneutics, as distinct from the ontological hermeneutics that can be found in Being and Time. Ontological hermeneutics is an effort to uncover and articulate fundamental structures of human existence; analytic hermeneutics attempts the more modest task of examining the way activity is organized in a particular kind of local setting. As such, it rests on and presupposes the results of the former analysis, albeit considering them, as Heidegger would repeatedly insist, 'provisional and incomplete.' What then, in brief, are the results of Heidegger's analysis, his fundamental ontology?1 Heidegger described how care is the essential structure of human being: We are the kind of beings whose being is an issue for us, and entities in the world show up because they matter to us. Care is not some simple association of personal value with an external object, event, or person, it is an existential structure that organizes all of our ways of being in the world. The structure of care shows itself in our concern with entities in the world and our solicitude towards other people.

1It may seem surprising that Heidegger was seeking to uncover general existential structures. Although these structures are general they are not abstract or decontextualized. As structures of being-in-the-world, these ontological structures are never abstracted from the setting of concrete activity. In Heidegger's terms they are formal, existential, concrete structures, while the onical structures an investigation such as ours aims to uncover are actual, existentielle, and concrete.

Human being also has a structure that Heidegger called "thrown projection": we are thrown into the world with specific, concrete possibilities for acting and being, and we project ourselves onto these possibilities, understanding ourselves in terms of them, albeit generally in a prereflective manner. Heidegger maintained that understanding is part of our way of being, and that knowing the world is, in contrast, a special derivative case of being-in-the-world. Interpretation is a working out of the possibilities projected in understanding. As such it is never a disinterested matter, but is always guided and organized by the interests and concerns of practical involvement. Interpretation of a phenomenon is oriented by the preliminary understanding of that phenomenon that comes from practical dealings with it. In Being and Time Heidegger both described and demonstrated an approach to understanding human being that avoids the epistemological foundationalism characteristic of modern cognitive and behaviorist psychologies (cf. Bauman, 1981; Bernstein, 1983; Bleicher, 1980; Caputo, 1987; Palmer, 1969).

If one starts from such a view of what it is to be a person (and the reasons for accepting this view are both compelling and complex) then an account of human action follows that is significantly different from that underlying much of the research on moral development. Action is a primary mode of our being and, as such, it has a special ontological status, one that renders it distinct from mechanical and biological processes; one that necessitates a special form of inquiry. It has a semantic organization: Acts have effectiveness by virtue of their meaning (though what this means precisely requires some spelling out). Action is a primary mode of engagement in the world: Everyday practical activity has a characteristic organization, one of concerned engagement in a social world of involved entities: tools like a calculator or a cup; institutions like marriage, school, and prime time TV; and people like friends and colleagues. This organization is both social and personal. Action is "thrown": Possibilities for action are provided by social practices, by one's own history and one's society. And action is "projected": Within these socially and historically given practices, different possibilities can be taken up and they can be taken up in different ways. We can pursue the ends that are internal to a practice, or seek—and settle for—external rewards like money and fame.

As thrown and projected, action has a characteristic temporal organization: Its possibilities are handed down from the past and projected into the future, while in the present it is both ongoing and fleeting, leaving only traces behind it (Ricoeur, 1979). Ongoing action is intrinsically linked to its setting or context; it embodies a way of understanding this setting, as well as a self-interpretation on the part of the person acting (Garfinkel, 1967). The importance of context introduces a causal complexity into the events of every social activity. Actions derive their causal efficacy not from material causation but from the significance they have in their setting. Everyday activity is also characteristically tricky: it is absorbing and misleading. We lose sight of the totality of involvements within which we inevitably act; we misunderstand ourselves as being like the entities we
have concerned dealings with, and we misunderstand them as being detached independent objects with fixed, objective properties. Interesting methodological consequences follow from adopting this interpretation of human being and human action. Most significant, of course, is the consequence that we must employ an interpretive approach when we study action. The circularity here—that we have interpreted human being and human action in a particular way, then to conclude that human action and being must be interpreted—is a conscious and deliberate one. Heidegger’s plan was to establish the need for a hermeneutic approach by demonstrating what the use of this approach uncovered, including uncovering the approach’s justification. A hermeneutic approach is required because we are self-interpreting beings; because we are the kind of being whose being is an issue for it. And a hermeneutic approach is necessary because primarily, in our everyday activity—including that activity that makes up the conduct of research, including research on moral development—we misunderstand ourselves and the character of our own being, together with the being of the people we have dealings with. The human condition is, one might say, self-concealing.

In addition to this broad methodological consequence, and following from it, are more specific consequences concerning the best way to study moral phenomena in young children’s social interactions. Some of these consequences shall be our concern for the remainder of this chapter. We first lay them out as bald assertions and then attempt to explain and illustrate each in turn.²

- Understanding comes through participation
- Research should be conducted in everyday settings
- Action must be fixed before it can be studied
- Interpretive analysis is guided by the ‘fore-structure’ of understanding
- Coding schemes misrepresent action
- Interpretive analysis builds an account of a specific case
- Going beyond the individual case is a matter of comparison, not aggregation

UNDERSTANDING COMES THROUGH PARTICIPATION

If understanding has its source in everyday involved engagement in the world then it follows that only through some kind of involved engagement with the phenomenon under investigation will the researcher obtain a genuine understand-

²Other accounts of interpretive methods can be found in Sarbin (1985), Mischel (1986), Polking- horne (1983), and cf. Riceur (1976), Kvale (1986), Giddens (1976), Geertz (1973). Examples of interpretive inquiry can be found in Packer and Addison (1989). It should be noted that the kind of inquiry we shall be describing is not restricted only to the study of moral phenomena in social interaction, or to the interactions of young children. For several reasons it is well suited to this kind of study, however.
course of the year, so that children became either regular play-companions or friends. Conversely, we tried to understand those occasions when a child became unpopular or socially marginal. We worked to acquire an understanding of the children's social activities, of the motivations at work in their choices of playmate, of the concerns and issues in their lives, and of the kinds of incidents that occurred as they played and interacted together. In the course of this we developed a great respect for the range and depth of issues that these young children had to deal with, an appreciation of their sensitivity when faced with some of these issues and, more rarely, their cruelty.³

**ACTION MUST BE FIXED BEFORE IT CAN BE STUDIED**

It has been recognized for some time that a transcription of a conversation is not a simple objective record; it reflects and embodies assumptions and preconceptions about the events being examined. Ochs (1979) has emphasized how the layout and format employed to document material from tape-recorded interaction reflect both explicit and tacit theoretical assumptions about the relationship between the interactants; about who, for instance, has the initiating role. Once these assumptions are rendered concrete in a chosen format they are hard to alter. But things are more complex than this. Action is fleeting and evanescent; an act has no sooner occurred than it is gone, a thing of the past. Action must be fixed before it can be studied, and transcribing is one way of accomplishing this fixing. Paul Ricoeur (1979) has described the changes that take place as action is fixed in a written narrative (cf. Freeman, 1985; Hekman, 1984; Honey, 1987). Central is a change in the act's temporality: A fixed action can be re-viewed; the text can be read again and again. Fixing also changes the relationships between an act and the agent, between the act and the recipient it is directed towards, and between the act and its setting. These changes—especially changes in temporality—facilitate the systematic analysis of action that we wish to undertake, indeed such an analysis would be impossible without them, but we should be aware of the differences between the original event and the fixed action we study. There is a danger of reading characteristics of the latter back into the former; in particular, of reifying action as a process with a determinate outcome.

Narrative accounts are not the only way to fix action; when an interaction is

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³We've also supplemented these naturalistic observations with more traditional methods, including a sociometric technique to identify playmate preferences, asking the children to pick who they do and do not like to play with, from photos of their classmates (Hallinan, 1981; McCandless & Marshall, 1957). We've set up analogue entry tasks (Asher & Hyme, 1981), asked the children to draw their family (Kaplan & Main, in press; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), and had parents and teachers complete instruments: attachment Q sorts by the parents (Waters & Deane, 1982), and the Behar and Stringfield (1974) behavior questionnaire and the Abelson, Naylor, and Provence (1980) inventory of emotional and behavioral development, by the teachers.

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**TABLE 10.1.**

Changes Introduced by Fixing Action in Writing, and in a Video-recording

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech/Action</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Video-recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The original event</td>
<td>Fixes what is said, but not the event</td>
<td>Fixes both the event and what is said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to Agent (Speaker)</td>
<td>Act's meaning and agent's intention coincide</td>
<td>Meaning and intention are now separate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to Recipient (Hearer)</td>
<td>Act is directed to specific other</td>
<td>The text is now addressed to anyone who can read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to World</td>
<td>Act is situated in a particular setting, which it points to</td>
<td>The text creates its own world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>Fleeting. Participants are absorbed in the action's flow</td>
<td>The text can be reread, in a nonlinear manner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
programs are crude, providing only the ability to attach short code words to segments of text so that they can be retrieved and collated. We needed to distinguish interaction episodes of different kinds, to maintain the sequencing of episodes, and to attach information about the children who were involved. And we needed to do this for video-recordings of almost 50 children, made on three different occasions. These considerations led us to decide that we needed the power and flexibility of a text-oriented relational database, and we selected one which allowed fields of unlimited length, with which we could easily design screens for transcription, and which would link our transcripts directly with other kinds of data. Figure 10.1 shows a screen from the database, one of several into which we can transcribe directly while viewing a videotape, or into which we can import transcripts from a world-processor file. This screen records a single episode of playground interaction. This will usually be an episode that begins with a child's approach to another child or a group and a bid for entry, but we also transcribe episodes of rejection and of conflict, and we can add further kinds of episode as they come to seem significant. As text is transcribed into the screen the database fields expand dynamically, so that a single screen can efficiently hold almost unlimited text.

This screen is linked to others, and this means that not all the information on the screen has to be input anew for each episode. Once an item such as the child's name has been entered this screen can refer to other files in order to look up that child's date of birth, and it can calculate her age on the day this tape was made. The sociometric status of the children involved can be assessed, too. This ability to link files containing different kinds of data is what makes the database relational. What we have here is a computerized version of ethnographic datacards, with all the advantages that the computer brings.

As we have noted, this structure embodies theoretical decisions about the material. For example, we discovered that for our purposes episodes of interaction could be distinguished fairly readily, so a screen deals with a single episode; each record in the underlying data file retains the information on one episode. But at the same time we've left ourselves a lot of flexibility. For instance, new fields can be added at any time, as we spot new things to attend to. This reflects our view that analysis of social interaction is progressive; that new categories will emerge as analysis proceeds. And the screens of a sequence of episodes can be viewed successively, so that we retain the sequence of the original interaction.

**INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS IS GUIDED BY THE FORE-STRUCTURE OF UNDERSTANDING**

Once action has been fixed the business of interpretation can begin. We have seen that the structure that Heidegger calls "projection" characterizes both being and understanding. Action is the projection of existential possibilities that have become available. The understanding that accompanies action is also characterized by the structure of projection, and interpretation, as the working out and articulation of the possibilities projected in understanding, has a projective structure too. In particular, interpretation is grounded in a three-fold "fore-structure" of preliminary conceptions that guide its course: the "fore-having," "fore-sight," and "fore-grasp." Central to hermeneutics is the recognition that presupposition-free knowledge is unobtainable. Understanding this, it is important to make an effort to enter the circle of interpretation in an appropriate way (see Packer, 1989, for a more detailed account). Our interpretation builds on the understanding that has been achieved through a practical familiarity with the children and the setting of their activity. This understanding has already been drawn upon, to be sure, in transcribing, but we are now in a position to apply our understanding of the children's world in a detailed and systematic way in order to interpret the interactions we have fixed. But what should we look for, and how should we look at it? These questions obtain their first answers in the fore-structure. Each of its three components may require revision as our analysis proceeds, but their role must be recognized from the outset.

The first element of the fore-structure (the fore-having) is an understanding of the totality of involvements in which the children live: an understanding of their world. The fore-having is an access to the totality of relations that constitutes the...
phenomenon being studied. It is important to get the appropriate kind of access to this world. We talked earlier of the importance of entering the world of the kindergarten children so as to become familiar and accepted adults. We will have already understood this totality if we have gained appropriate access to the children’s world, even though we will never be able to articulate it fully in a thematic interpretation. Just as it provides the background to the children’s own actions and understanding, the totality of involvements in the kindergarten playground provides a background to our understanding and interpretation of their actions.

The second element (the fore-sight) is a preliminary sighting of the entity to be studied: an initial sense of the kind of phenomenon we are dealing with; a point of view from which to begin; a first cut. In the case of the study we have been describing our interest was in the ways children established joint activity with their peers, so we decided to focus our attention on entry episodes: those occasions when a child approached another to initiate joint activity. Clearly this is only one phenomenon among many on the playground to examine, and it is itself multiplex. In time we came to look also at episodes of conflict between children and at occasions where a child was apparently working to maintain joint activity in the face of pressures of dissolution. These shifts illustrate how the fore-structure may need revision, but our initial focus on entry provided a basis for comparing our work with other studies of children’s social relations, as we shall see shortly. Our assumption was that children’s approaches to one another were the first and best place to look for an understanding of the success of their social relations. This assumption was modified as we realized that, for instance, some popular children were approached by peers so frequently that they needed to make no entry bids themselves in order to be occupied in play for their entire time in the playground.

The third element of the fore-structure (the fore-grasp) is a way of conceiving of phenomenon: an articulated system of concepts that orient our interpretation. Again, this scheme can be modified and it is important not to force an inappropriate analytic scheme onto what we are studying, but some kind of scheme is essential (and inevitable) from the outset. The scheme stems from an effort to articulate the essential aspects of the phenomenon without becoming formal or abstract. Interpretation is always the articulation of meaningful events in a practical setting. Abstract structures can be derived from a situated interpretation, since one can abstract a phenomenon from its concrete setting, but an abstract description (such as a reconstruction of procedural competence or an operational definition) differs from a situated interpretation and is of lesser merit and character; it is derivative.

This point becomes clearer if we now describe the conceptual scheme we have employed—one of interpersonal movements—and contrast it with the abstract, decontextualizing fore-grasp that can be found in the coding categories typically used in the study of playground interaction. Our attention to interpersonal movements is grounded in and embodies the following assumptions (cf. Packer, 1985). We wanted to employ an analysis that would articulate the way that the actions that make up a social exchange are directed towards specific others, in a shared setting that provides context, to achieve certain effects. We have kept in view our analysis, as we did earlier in our choice of setting and manner of engagement, that practical activity is a distinct mode of engagement. We have also taken for granted that human conduct is structured by emotionality (cf. Guignon, 1984; Hall & Cobey, 1976). And we have assumed that action has a rhetorical character: it influences others not by material causality but by persuasion of various kinds. Each of these characteristics of social action is grasped by considering action as interpersonal movement between people. Accordingly, our analysis attends to interpersonal movements of three kinds: movements that bring about changes in the children’s status, intimacy, and openness. The first kind of movement changes a child’s standing with respect to another: her social significance and importance, her status or rank. The second kind of movement changes the degree and kind of closeness and involvement between children. The third changes the acknowledgment a child gives to another child’s projects and concerns, or the lack of such acknowledgment. We have looked especially at the way a child “presents,” or represents, herself in an approach to a peer; how she tries to “move” the other child. These three kinds of interpersonal movement can be the loci of moral concerns and conflicts (Packer, 1985), and so they can provide us with an access to the moral aspects of young children’s practical social activity.

One source of these three kinds of interpersonal movement has been de Rivera’s (1977) phenomenological analysis of emotions. De Rivera’s insight is to interpret emotions not as mental states, not as individual phenomena, but as intentional and dyadic, as essentially dynamic movements between people, between subject and object. A second source of these movements is provided by the work of Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (Argyris et al., 1987; Brown et al., 1989; Gilligan, 1982) on the moral voices of care and justice. In Gilligan’s view these two voices articulate dimensions of social interaction that correspond to what we’re calling intimacy and status. Figure 10.2 shows the three kinds of movements, along with de Rivera’s and Gilligan’s terms.

Two asides are worth noting here. First, when the terms we use are put side by side with those of de Rivera and those of Gilligan, as in Fig. 10.2, there’s a suggestion that a third moral voice should be discernible, one that articulates interpersonal movements of Openness. This is something we plan to explore in the future. Second, Carol Gilligan has recently forged a conceptual link between use of these two moral perspectives and early childhood attachment relations (Gilligan & Wiggins, in press), and this has inspired us to take steps to assess the kindergarten children’s attachments.
what is appropriate, what is normal and acceptable, on the playground. An act is always pointing out and pointing up what is going on around the children. Herein lies the crux of the distinction between the conceptual scheme employed in the hermeneutic fore-structure and the abstract structure employed in coding-scheme analyses of children’s social interaction. The indexicality of social action means that any description of action, any classification or coding, that attends to the form of the acts but not to their setting will be inadequate. Our initial recognition of an act takes account of the setting in which the act makes sense, and so also must any subsequent coding, naming, labeling or description of the act, if we pay due attention to this indexicality. Properly understood, the description of an act is tied to the circumstances, the identity of the individuals concerned, and the character and aims of the activity they are engaged in. We need familiarity with each of these to have even a preliminary understanding of the act (our understanding may change as investigation proceeds). We must avoid removing (abstracting) the act, or our description, from some record of the context. We must attend to the constellation of context and action that makes up an event when we identify and describe the act, and we must fix both components of this constellation if we wish to be able to improve and correct our interpretation later in the analysis, because if our understanding of one part changes so will our understanding of the rest, and of the whole. Fixing is not an abstraction from context (hence the distinction between “text” and “language” that Ricoeur is at pains to sustain), nor does the conceptual scheme of interpersonal movements force an abstraction. Movements are general structures of human being and human relationships, but the elements of this fore-grasp are not interpretation-free elements, and so they do not constitute an abstract system.

Analyses of children’s social interaction based on coding schemes inevitably objectify and reify it, viewing it as made up of atomistic elements and as the causal product of fixed characteristics of the children involved. Coding schemes attend to what David Forbes has called the “morphology” of an act; to what is essentially its static form: whether it is an invitation, a request, an intrusion, a display (Forbes, Katz, Paul, & Rubin, 1982). Coding schemes focus on the bare outlines of an act, the features that are unchanged as the act is removed from the context provided by the people who are acting together, and the character of their relationship to one another.

The majority of naturalistic studies of children’s interaction employ such coding as their means for recording the exchanges they analyze. Child development research has been influenced here by animal ethology. A typical analysis will categorize acts into broad types using what is supposedly a descriptive taxonomy of codes, derived from the observation and recording of what are presumed to be natural occurrences. Agonistic activities typically include aggression (such as attack, threat, submission, retreat) and competition (such as object or position struggle, loss); prosocial activities typically include affiliative acts (such as approach, contact, signal, talk) and sharing acts (such as offer and give.
ments in contrast reflect social contact that can take a variety of forms, and social distance that can occur despite close physical proximity. Openness movements are simply neglected by most ethological coding schemes, in all probability reflecting a general deemphasis, denial and exclusion of interpersonal openness in our society.

Coding inevitably involves interpretation, but it is interpretation that is distorted in two respects. First, because they are intended to be operationally defined, so that an act can be coded on the basis of its evident form in the absence of any familiarity with the children, the codes fail to fix the setting and so they fail to capture the practically engaged character of what the children are doing. Second, the interpretive perspective that runs through coding categories such as these is covered up and operates covertly, and coding is presented as an objective, unproblematic procedure. "Natural" categories express unexamined assumptions.

These points become clearer as we summarize some of the differences between the movement analysis and a morphology coding. First, morphology codes can obscure the different uses of an act. A request or an invitation can accomplish very different social ends depending on the manner in which it is made and the circumstances in which it is used. We see an example of this shortly. Second, there are relationships among different kinds of entry bid that are not represented, at least explicitly, by a morphology coding. Movements of high status can be accomplished in different ways: with certain kinds of request, by a directive, by giving information. Third, movement analysis cannot be carried out on an action in isolation. To identify the movement accomplished in an action requires knowledge of the current setting of activity, and an understanding of the way things are done on the playground. An act can be coded as a request or a command on the basis of its apparent form, its surface features. But the movement that's going on depends on how the act fits or breaks with tacit assumptions, peer group conventions, about what is appropriate, what is normal and acceptable, on the playground.

Sometimes these background assumptions become visible in the event itself, if a child points out a transgression, perhaps by threatening to tell the teacher. More often our awareness of the tacit conventions that develop among peers comes from our familiarity with the individual children and with the ways they work and play together. This means that we cannot even pretend to be able to give operational definitions of movements, so that they can be identified in a straightforward way by naive viewers. With morphology codes people have been able to give definitions that seem to make reference only to "objective" features of an utterance or behavior, that is to say, those features apparent to someone unfamiliar with the children and the setting of their activity. But the appearance of objectivity is purchased at the cost of stripping the activity from its setting, and so losing sight of what it is accomplishing in that setting. Where movements are concerned we could never list all the relevant assumptions about playground
activity that the children might make reference to in their entry bids. What we have to do is develop the ability, simply through familiarity with the children and the setting, to recognize examples of different kinds of movement when they occur.

INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS BUILDS AN ACCOUNT OF A SPECIFIC CASE

Our discussion of coding and interpretive articulation has implications for the handling and analysis of material drawn from social interaction. It will not surprise the reader to learn that our overarching concern has been not to code the data, in the following sense. In most analyses the coding categories replace the material that has been collected. An interaction between two children will be coded as a particular kind of bid, an invitation say, and that code will then move forward into the analysis process: to be counted, along with others of its type; to be sequenced with those preceding and following it; its rate of occurrence calculated, and so on. Instead, we wanted to use terms like “invitation” or “threat” as tags, as handles to the material, not codes to replace it. Once an episode of interaction is tagged as an invitation, the tag becomes a way to retrieve the material for further examination. This is another reason for using a database like the one we have described: the transcribed record of each episode can be retrieved at any time. It is not replaced by the code, but labeled. New, alternative labels can be added, old ones changed if they come to seem incorrect. Different invitations can be retrieved and their transcripts compared, and so finer distinctions can become apparent to us. Finally, tags can also be used to select episodes and collate transcripts for a report. More relevantly, we wanted to attach designations of the kinds of movements in an episode. Figure 10.1 includes a multi-valued field for each kind of movement, signifying that several moves can be entered for each episode.

The result of this will be a sequence of transcribed episodes, each identified as entry, conflict, or maintenance (etc.), and as involving a particular kind of movement. They are now available for more detailed examination, for comparison, even to be counted. At any time the tagging of episode type and of movement can be modified as our interpretation changes. The tagging of an episode—the identification of its movements—provides the basis for a narrative account of the episode. From the interpretation of a single episode we can proceed to examine other episodes, both similar and different. In this way we can develop an account of a particular child’s manner of relating to peers.

Let’s consider, as an example, episodes from the videotaped sessions of a girl named Ann.\(^4\) When we interacted with her Ann seemed a competent, bright, cheerful child. But watching her on the playground it became clear that she was alone for much of the time, despite making frequent approaches to other children. Ann provides an illustration of the differential power of morphology coding and movement analysis. Her bids varied in their morphology: Ann on some occasions used requests, on others she gave invitations, she offered information, appealed for help, issued directives, suggested play roles. But throughout this variation Ann was generally consistent in the kind of interpersonal movement with which she approached others. On the majority of occasions she presented herself as having a higher status than the child she was approaching. Consider the following exchange between Ann and Rebecca: (See transcript 1 on p. 352.)

Ann begins here by commenting on Rebecca’s call to the teacher, in a judgmental tone, and then she proposes a new joint activity. She says, “Want to make something really neat with me?” Now in terms of its morphology this is an “invitation,” but that designation captures only the surface form, the syntax, and not what Ann is doing with her invitation. The implication is that she’s giving Rebecca a chance to do something special. Her tone of voice and gestures contribute to a sense that Rebecca should feel honored to be given such an opportunity.

Ann did this quite consistently: presenting herself as more important, as doing something more special, than the children she approached. She often invited a child to help her; to be her assistant. Not surprisingly such bids for entry were not effective; many children ignored her or moved quickly away. But Ann usually didn’t alter her approach when it didn’t work. In this case, when the invitation doesn’t work, Ann doesn’t modify it; she repeats it, first to Rebecca then, when she leaves, to a teacher. And even on the few occasions when she did vary her approach the status dimension continued to dominate her movements. For instance the next episode occurred when she approached a boy who was one of the most popular children in the class: John. (See Transcript 2 from p. 353.)

At first Ann told John what to do, but then, once he had withdrawn, she inverted her approach and flattered him: presenting herself as lower in status. Even this proved unsuccessful. Here she was using a low status movement instead of the usual high status approach, but despite this modification status remains the salient dimension to her bid.

In all these bids Ann seemed genuinely trying to get involved with others, so we found it particularly interesting that when another child approached her in an effort to initiate joint activity Ann usually responded with ambivalence. She would first back off, sometimes angrily, sometimes defensively, and only then make a move of approach herself. Often it was already too late; the approaching child had left. The movement of closer intimacy initiated by another child’s approach seemed to disturb and threaten her, and she would try to regain the initiative by rejecting the overture so she could make a bid of her own. Several times she seemed almost to struggle to undo the effects of her initial negative reaction. (See Transcript 3 from p. 354.)

\(^4\)All names are pseudonyms.
John: John, let's go back to that again. She

needs directions. Again, this scene plays out multiple times for John.

That doesn't work, and the switch to self-control is

needed. Various choices are available, and John needs to choose.

The decision is an important one, but John is not sure which path to take.

He considers his options carefully, weighing the pros and cons of each.

Finally, he makes a decision and takes action, hoping for the best.

The scene concludes with John feeling a sense of accomplishment, knowing that he has done his best to

navigate the situation. 

[No script]
Transcript 3

Rebecca: Can I help you?
Ann: I've already done it. You can build another one right here. (More insistently, as Rebecca moves away.)

Rebecca follows Ann across the playground.

Transcript 4

Ann is on the grass. She has taken her shoes off after watching a group of girls playing on the grass.

Andrea approaches Ann and suggests a joint activity in a friendly, open manner.

Angry at others. Her 'I want' are others 'ought'. She is closed to their views.

Ann: What if my shoe right there?
Andrea: I want my shoe like this. Let's put them all like this.
Even when one of her bids for entry was accepted things didn't go smoothly for Ann. The next sequence of episodes shows what happened when she did manage to join the play of a group of girls. She insisted on telling everyone else what to do, she changed the rules of the game unilaterally, and she complained when her turn was skipped. Things ended disastrously for her: her peers became furious at her, and they finally stalked off, leaving her alone, angry and upset. (See Transcript 4 pp. 355 to 365.)

A rather different successful entry bid uncovered another facet of Ann's view of the world. This was an episode with Julius, whose aid Ann enlisted after her sandcastle was kicked down by a boy running by. They turned out to share the view that this was a "meano" thing to do. (See Transcript 5 on p. 366.)

How has our analysis proceeded here? First, we have drawn upon our familiarity with the accepted and taken for granted practices of the playground: that, for example, children on the swings can call to teachers for a push, though the teachers are not obligated to respond, but children generally do not draw teachers into their play as Ann tries to with Madeline. Or, another example, children are expected to take their shoes off when playing on the grass under the tree. We have then attended to the manner of a child's approach to another: the presentation of self involved in such an approach, the way it is responded to, and its success and failure; that is to say whether the approaching child's bid is accepted or not. We have interpreted this approach in terms of the scheme of interpersonal movements. In our discussion of Ann's actions on the playground, we have progressively broadened the scope of our analysis. Starting with a single episode we moved to other episodes of the same kind (Ann approaching another child) and within these we have distinguished two kinds: the majority of occasions, where Ann presents herself as high status, and a small number of exceptions where she presents herself as low status. Then we moved on to episodes of different kinds (Ann approached by others; conflict with other children). We have begun to elaborate an account of the whole of a video-recorded session: her consistent failure to get others to join her, and her ambivalence when others invite her to join them, or ask to join her. We can go further: to compare the three video-recordings made during the course of a year and note that Ann is no more successful in June than she was the previous September. And we can relate her playground interactions to those of other children, and to other information about her.

We have done all this without withdrawing from the rich material of the transcripts by replacing it with codes, or with an underlying formal structure (a Markov transition matrix; rules of social competence), and we can return easily to our videotapes. We've retained the temporal organization of individual episodes and of the sequence of episodes in a session.
Tape 3, Episode #27 Counter: 2420 [Conflict]

Ann proposes an activity for them all, praising Kathryne. Kathryne immediately rejects this and distances herself.

Kathryne: I've found a new idea. One person holds a hoop and the other person jumps inside. We just have to keep adding in. (She demonstrates)

Ann: Good. Now it's your turn to hold it.

Kathryne: Oh, that's right! So it's your turn to hold it.

Ann: Yes. Now, you have to get to the end of the line.

Kathryne: How about whoever jumps in is their turn to hold the hoop?

Ann: Yeah. It's your turn to hold it.

Kathryne: To Andrea.

Ann: Andrea, you're next.

Kathryne: Cola in, please.

Cola: Kathryne jumps into the hoop.

Kathryne jumps into the hoop. She tells Cola off, and insists on getting her turn. She demands exactly the height that best suits her. She makes up a new rule to suit her own situation. But doesn't apply the turn-taking rule to herself. She has to be called back.
Tape 3, Episode #30 Counter: 2610 [Conflict]

Ann is at the end of the line. Colin seems to agree with her. Now Ann insists that everyone else listen to her rule.

Colin makes up yet another rule, and insists that Colin hear it.


Kathryn: Before you do that we're gonna do what we want. We're not gonna do this and if we leave this game is over.

Ann is deflated.

But Kathryn fiercely stands up to her, speaking out on behalf of the right of each to do what they want.
But Krugyn supports Clet, prepared to disagree with
Krugyn. It's Clet's firm. (All three are RG8 on the
Clet: NO; it's Krugyn's firm; (angry)
Clet: Now it's my turn.

Tape 3, Episode #37 Counter: 2285 (Concluded)

Ann: (caresses) Is my mum where you, okay, Krugyn.
Krugyn: Yes, a reception. Don't touch it, Ann.
Ann: Then, it is my turn after your.
Krugyn: Yes, my mum. (etc.)
Ann: Okay, it is my turn. It's my mum.
Ann: Stop her.
Here, this chair comes around for a second turn.
Krugyn: Can you hold this Reception can you hold
Krugyn: Can you hold this Reception to hold it.
Krugyn flips Reception to hold Clet.
Instead of Ann and Krugyn holding the hoop.
There's squabbling over whose turn is next. Clet goes

Tape 3, Episode #37 Counter: 2280 (Concluded)

Joyce looks her turn.
Ann: Joyce was right in front of you.
Clet: Not much.
Joyce: The Clet, Joyce was right there. (Ann leaks)
so Clet can't jump in.
Ann: Now, Ann (Ann) to hold it. (holding the hoop up
Clet: My turn.
Clet: Can't come up?}

Joyce: Well, you just got it (Clet).
Krugyn: Joyce.
Krugyn: Joyce.
Ann: Joyce, there's nothing right in front of
the hoop for Krugyn, and Joyce thinks she's
Ann was confused the turn tonight. Now Ann holds
By giving Krugyn to hold the hoop when another child

Tape 3, Episode #37 Counter: 2640 (Concluded)
Ann: Well I ASKED FIRST!!! I'm telling you! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)
Laurie: I didn't get a turn. [front]

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: No.
Kathryn: It's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! I'm telling you! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: Well, I ASKED FIRST!!! She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.

Laurie: She's slapping her own feet! (laughs)

Kathryn: She's Lauree's turn.
GOING BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL CASE: COMPARISON, NOT AGGREGATION

But if an interpretive analysis focuses on individual episodes how are we to deal with the large amounts of material that we have obtained, from a total of 50 children, each filmed three times? It would be unduly time consuming to give detailed narrative accounts for each of these 150 sessions, and were such accounts written, few would find time to read them. On the other hand, the usual way of handling material from a large number of cases employs aggregation, and in doing so fails to respect many of the key characteristics of social activity. The answer to this question follows from a consideration of what we are trying to produce in this study. The goals sought are twofold. The first is to characterize different kinds of ‘career’ that individual children pursue in their common world: the ways in which they achieve (or have thrust upon them) distinct social outcomes. The second goal is to characterize the world of the playground, a world that is shared and social, and that precedes and grounds individual variation. Let’s examine these in turn.

The first goal, of characterizing children’s careers, involves attention to both proximal and distal outcomes. Proximally, the outcomes of interest are the consequences of social approach: successful or unsuccessful entry. Can we identify any kinds of movements of entry that Ann makes that lead to a successful outcome? We have provisionally identified one kind of movement—self-presentation as high status—that frequently leads to failure; are there any occasions, or settings, when it succeeds? Are there other kinds of entry that fail? To answer these questions we must compare and contrast episodes from Ann’s three sessions. Distally, the outcome of interest is the quality of a child’s integration into the peer group, as indexed in this study by sociometric assessments. Here we must compare and contrast different children’s episodes.

In both cases our aim is not to explain observed variation in outcome among cases by reference to variation in some predicting variable, but rather to identify similarities and differences among cases that share the same outcome, be it proximal or distal. In our study we can group children on the basis of their sociometric status, though this is only one of several outcomes that could be examined. What are the ways in which children can become popular during their year in kindergarten? Perhaps only one way will be uncovered, but it is much more likely that there will be several. And if we find no similarities among the careers of all the popular children then we shall have reason to doubt the wisdom of selecting sociometric standing as an outcome of interest. So, to expand upon the case we have been considering, Ann’s sociometric ratings by her peers showed that by the end of the year she was unpopular. Her high handed manner, amply documented in the excerpts we have examined, seems the likely explanation for this outcome. We can now compare her behavior with that of other children considered unpopular by their peers and see whether they too show
inappropriate use of high status entry movements, or whether their careers took a different path.

Another point. When explanation is considered a matter of identifying general laws by searching for generalized patterns among cases, patterns where variation in outcome in a group is related to collinear variation in other variables, then counterexamples to these general patterns, so far as the latter prove identifiable, are considered occasions of error. But we have seen that, on the contrary, a single episode that runs counter to the typical pattern throws important light on the rest of the episodes. When Ann flatters John, she demonstrates that her regular presentation as high status is not determinate and unchanging, but an elective, preferred way of relating to others. Cases that don’t fit a general pattern are not dismissed as outliers, nor as evidence for refuting a general model. They are understandable illustrations of the inherent unpredictability of human affairs. They require further explanation, but their existence does not harm the credibility of the general model. Rather than refuting an explanatory account, they refine it (cf. Ragin, 1987).

Let’s examine the second goal in more detail: that of describing the playground world. Here we speak of ‘world’ in the sense of totality of involvements that the children have in their everyday activity in the playground. Now, a child will take up particular possibilities within the world of the playground, will project a particular course of activity, because of the various ways in which that activity has been thrown. For instance when Ann acts it is as a member of her family, as a little girl, as a kindergartner, as a Princess Pony, and so on. Each of these different kinds of involvement is at work and it is the intersection of their possibilities that we see in our videotapes. We have to try to disentangle them, and each of them has a distinctive interest to us. The way in which the family influences playground activity has a special developmental interest. Ann’s family background makes particular possibilities, particular activities and events, stand out for her in the playground, and at the same time eliminates or excludes other possibilities. Ann will play some games but not others; she will play in a particular manner and not another; she will notice certain kinds of events around her and not others. Considered this way we can imagine how the family could exert a restrictive or a facilitative influence on a child’s peer relations, depending on whether the possibilities the child can project, given the family’s way of being, are in accord with the everyday possibilities available in the playground. We can also see that from a child’s playground activity we can read back a putative set of family involvements, and we can seek corroboration from such sources as a family drawing and an attachment Q-sort by the parents.

CONCLUSION

We’ve laid out the elements of an interpretive approach to the study of young children’s social relations. An interpretive study, we have suggested, requires that one enter a hermeneutic circle, traverse the circle, and then exit from it.

Entry involves an interpretive fore-structure that has three sides: first, the “forehaving,” a practical familiarity with the totality of involvements that provides context to the children’s actions—a familiarity that requires some kind of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1989); second, the “foresight,” a preliminary decision about which phenomenon, among the many that can be approached, is likely to be the most fruitful in ones inquiry; and third, the “fore-grasp,” a provisional interpretive scheme and perspective from which to look at things. Traversing the hermeneutic circle is a matter of fixing the phenomenon to be studied, and then articulating the material thus obtained so as to identify how episodes stand out as significant, from the point of view that has been adopted. Several episodes of interaction, and several children, can be systematically compared by considering the different conjunctions of features, identified interpretively, associated with an outcome of interest.

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