

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS:

A SUMMARY

HONORS THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

In fulfillment of the requirements of the Honors Degree, I have undertaken an independent study in my major field, Psychology. The following is a summary of the theory of Transactional Analysis. The purpose of this is, on the one hand, an effort to inform myself of this theory and on the other to convey a clear and concise analysis of the theory for the reader.

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: A SUMMARY

Transactional Analysis is a theory of personality and social interaction developed by Eric Berne. Berne bases his theory on the observation that behavior changes result from varying environmental and situational conditions. Berne organizes behavior using a terminology peculiar to Transactional Analysis which consists of words common to everyday rather than psychoanalytic language. The basic unit of behavior is the transaction. A transaction occurs when one person acknowledges another through words or actions and that person responds. The transaction consists of the transaction stimulus message, a form of acknowledgement, and the transaction response message which results.¹

Structural analysis is the dividing of the personality into its three ego states, the Child, Parent, and Adult. An ego state is denoted by a particular state of mind and its related behavior. The Child is self-centered, spontaneous, and creative, reacting at the affective level; the Parent is the authoritative, judgmental, and nurturing part of the personality; the Adult is the rational, fact-finding and unemotional part of the personality.²

Transactional analysis proper is the analysis of transactions and their categorization into specific types. The three basic types of transactions are complementary, crossed, and ulterior. Complementary transactions are those in which the stimulus message receives the expected response. Crossed transactions are those in which the stimulus message receives an unexpected response. In an ulterior transaction, a complemen-

tary, socially plausible transaction exists on the surface while a real, psychological transaction exists below the surface. This psychological transaction ususally has a specific purpose.³

Early in life, an individual makes important decisions concerning his worth and the worth of other individuals. This decisions results in one of four psychological postions: I'm OK-You're OK, I'm OK - You're Not-OK, I'm Not-OK - You're OK, and I'm Not-OK - You're Not-OK. In the I'm OK - You're OK position, the individual believes that life is worthwhile; in the I'm OK - You're Not-OK position, the individual believes others are not worth much; in the I'm Not-OK - You're OK position, the individual believes that he is not worth much; in the I'm Not-OK - You're Not-OK position, the individual believes that life is not worthwhile. In all but the I'm OK - You're OK position, a script results. A script is repetitive, maladaptive behavior characteristic of an individual which is based on an illusion resulting from the individual's difficulty in bringing his expectations into line with reality.⁴

Stroking is any contact between two individuals. Stroking may be physical as in a handshake or slap or stroking may be psychological as in a smile, frown, or "hello". There are four types of strokes: 1) unconditional positive strokes which are unearned and indicate something inherently good about the individual; 2) conditional positive strokes which are a reward for something the recipient has done; 3) conditional negative strokes which are given as punishment for something the recipient has done; and 4) unconditional negative strokes which are unearned and indicate something inherently bad about the individual. Stroking is necessary for psychological well-being and the maintenance of the three ego states. If positive strokes are unavailable, negative

strokes will be accepted. These strokes, as a part of early experiences are functional in determining which psychological position an individual will take.⁵

Influenced by one's psychological position and the absence or presence of a script, each individual is faced with the task of structuring time in such a way as to obtain strokes in a comfortable manner. Time may be structured in one of six ways: withdrawal, rituals, pastimes, activities, games, or intimacy. Withdrawal is a way of structuring time in which no strokes are received from others and the individual is psychologically, if not physically, alone. Rituals are a way of structuring time in which transactions are very predictable and stroking from others is minimal. Pastimes involve somewhat less predictable transactions than rituals, with an emphasis on quantity rather than quality of strokes. In activities, transactions are centered around external reality. Activities may consist of many strokes from others in the form of cooperation on a common task, or a lack of strokes from others as an individual busies himself with tasks. Games are an alternative to intimacy. Games are a way of structuring time in which there is an ulterior motive or purpose other than that which is on the surface of the transaction and a "payoff" which is an emotional reaction which results. Games, which are a complicated way of structuring time, will be discussed more clearly later. Intimacy is a way of structuring time in which there is a maximum number and quality of strokes. Transactions are characterized by honesty and openness.⁶

Structural Analysis

Structural analysis is the process of determining which ego state of the personality is active in a particular behavior or transaction. The ego states are developed through transactions which take place during childhood, particularly between the child and his parents or other authority figures. Significant in understanding the three ego states and their development is the work of Dr. Wilder Penfield of McGill University in Montreal. While performing experiments on the brains of patients suffering from focal epilepsy, Penfield stimulated parts of the temporal cortex of the brain with a weak electric current from a galvanic probe. During these experiments, the patients were under local anesthetic and were fully conscious. These stimulations caused the recollection of specific memories by the patient. These memories which were not static but were connected by time, were interlocked with the feelings which had accompanied them. It was as though these events and their accompanying feelings had been recorded in the brain for future reference. Just as an electric current stimulated memories of these particular situations, so also can circumstances during one's lifetime activate these memories. This is particularly important since the experience may be relived, with all of the sensations which accompanied the event, but not remembered. These past sensations may influence present circumstances as they are categorized and develop into the structure of the Child, Parent, and Adult.⁷

Of the three ego states, the Child is the first to develop. It is developed as the infant records experiences of infancy. These experiences are recorded during a time when the individual's thoughts are centered around his own needs and comforts. Responses at this stage of life are at a feeling level. Next to develop is the Parent ego state. The Parent

is developed as the child records his experiences of parents and other emotionally significant individuals. The last state to develop is the Adult. The Adult ego state develops as the child attempts to make sense out of his world. Experiences of parents and authority figures usually combine to form the adult.⁸

The Child

As mentioned above, the Child ego state develops as the child records experiences of childhood. These experiences combine to form a Child unique to each individual. Expression of the Child is not related to chronological age but is active throughout life. The Child ego state may be further divided into the Natural Child, Little Professor, and the Adapted Child.

The Natural Child is the expression of the natural responses of an infant. These include curiosity, wonder, excitement, affection, and sensuousness, among others. The Natural Child responds impulsively to feelings and seeks pleasure over pain. Other emotions which also find expression in the Natural Child are self-indulgence, fearfulness, aggression, and rebelliousness. The Natural Child may be active as one is disrespectful of other's feelings and asserts his own will.

The Little Professor is the intuitive child, sensitive to the approval and disapproval of others. Somewhat of an authority of human nature, the Little Professor may be manipulative due to his ability to know the weaknesses of others. The Little Professor is also the source of creative thoughts and is often the source of fantasies later made into reality.

The Adapted Child adapts to the demands of outside authority in order to insure survival. The Adapted Child may comply in an attempt to avoid

rejection, withdraw to avoid anxiety, or procrastinate to avoid a problem. The Adapted Child often knows how to maintain the approval of others while rebelling within.⁹

The Parent

The second section of the personality to form, the Parent develops as the child records his experiences of his parents and other emotionally significant people. The Parent can be further divided into the Nurturing Parent and the Prejudicial Parent.

The Nurturing Parent is that aspect of the Parent which develops as a result of the recording of the nurturing behavior of the child's parents. The Nurturing Parent finds expression in sympathetic, protective, and caring behavior.

The Prejudicial Parent is the aspect of the Parent developed through recordings of the attitudes and behavior of the parents of the individual. The Prejudicial Parent is the internalization of opinions about numerous social and political issues. These opinions, oftentimes unjustified, are not arrived at in a rational way. Behavior from the Prejudicial Parent is reflexive and is often critical, judgmental, punitive, and authoritative. The Prejudicial Parent is the reflection of decisions and values which will change throughout life through different experiences.¹⁰

The Adult

The Adult is the last ego state to develop. The Adult is cool, detached, and void of emotions. The Adult must separate facts from opinions and traditions and must store information for future reference. Responsible for any decision making, the Adult must function like a computer and collect and organize data obtained from current reality. The Adult's functioning is limited by the information available in the Child and

Parent. The behavior of the Adult is purely factual. The ability of the Adult to make the best decisions for the individual is dependent upon its ability to process information accurately.¹¹

The functioning of the ego states may be impaired in one of two ways, contamination and exclusion. Contamination is a condition in which the Adult holds as factual information an incorrect idea from the Parent or Child, such as a prejudice from the Parent or a fear from the Child. Exclusion is a condition in which an individual does not acknowledge the existence of one of the ego states. This is harmful in that each ego state has a function in aiding the individual's adaptation to reality.¹²

Each ego state may be the source of the stimulus message or response message of a transaction. When two individuals interact, six ego states are involved. The combinations of these ego states determine the character of the transaction. Transactional analysis proper is the analysis of these transactions and the categorizing of them into different types.¹³

Transactional Analysis

Important in understanding transactional analysis is an understanding that within the confines of Transactional Analysis, communication exists only when "the response to the previous stimulus message is addressed to the ego state from which the stimulus message originated and is emitted from the ego state to which that source addressed itself."¹⁴ There are three basic types of transactions, complementary, crossed, and ulterior. A complementary transaction is one which fits the definition of communication. As long as complementary transactions continue, transactions can continue indefinitely. A crossed transaction is one in which communication is broken because the response to the previous stimulus message is addressed to an ego state other than that from which it originated and is emitted from an ego state other than that to which the source addressed itself. An ulterior or duplex transaction is one in which communication exists on two levels. The surface or social level is a complementary transaction with a socially plausible purpose while the disguised transaction is the real or psychological complementary transaction which has a motive or purpose. The overt line of communication may confuse the observer while the covert line of communication gives meaning to the accompanying behavior.¹⁴

Complementary Transactions

The complementary transaction is a straightforward transaction involving any two ego states. As long as these continue, communication may go on indefinitely. (Refer to the appendix for a diagram of a complementary transaction.)¹⁵

Crossed Transactions

Communication is interrupted when a crossed transaction occurs. Usually both parties are left confused and will withdraw. There are four common types of crossed transactions. Type I (AA-CP) is the transference reaction in which an Adult-Adult transaction is intended but a Child-Parent transaction results. Type II (AA-PC) is the counter-transference reaction in which an Adult-Adult transaction is intended, but a Parent-Child transaction results. Type III (CP-AA) is the exasperating response in which someone who wants a sympathetic response from another's Parent receives a factual response from that person's Adult instead. Type IV (PC-AA) the impudent response is a transaction in which someone who expects to receive a compliant reaction from the recipient's Child receives a factual, "smart aleck" reaction the recipient's Adult instead. (Refer to the appendix for illustrations of crossed transactions.)¹⁶

Ulterior Transactions

An ulterior transaction involves four ego states. As mentioned above, two totally different transactions are involved, one on the social level and another on the real or psychological level. Ulterior transactions will be dealt with in more detail in their relation to games as this is where they are most significant.

During childhood, the transactions between the child and his parents are crucial in developing that individual's attitude toward himself and others and life in general. As was revealed in Penfield's research, these early transactions are recorded in the brain, complete with their accompanying feelings. These experiences, particularly the feelings, influence attitudes and behaviors throughout life.¹⁷ (Refer to appendix for illustration of ulterior transaction.)

Psychological Positions

During childhood, an individual makes important decisions about his attitudes toward himself, others, and life's value. It is during this time that the Child readjusts his expectations and wishes to fit the situation he experiences. It is in this process that one's expectations are brought into line with reality. Making such a decision eases pressures and increases satisfaction through the changing of expectations. These decisions are crucial in that they influence the individual's identity and life goals. Since the skills of the Little Professor are utilized during this decision, the decision is only as good as the logic, perception, and cognition of the Little Professor. Since the data of the Little Professor is a limited source of information, the earlier in life the decision is made the greater the possibility that this decision will be maladaptive. This often occurs as a result of environmental pressures such as brutal parents or negligent parents may force a premature decision. The later in life this decision is made, the greater the possibilities for the development of a healthy personality. An early decision based on an inaccurate concept of reality results in a script. A script is a repetitive, maladaptive pattern of behavior which reinforces the decision.¹⁸ This decision results in one of the following psychological positions:

- 1) I'm Not-OK - You're OK
- 2) I'm Not-OK - You're Not-OK
- 3) I'm OK - You're Not-OK
- 4) I'm OK - You're OK

According to Thomas A. Harris, author of I'm OK - You're OK, by the end of the third year of life, the child has decided on one of the first three positions. Harris describes the arrival at this position one in which the child does not go back and forth, but maintains one suitable one.

The first three decisions are arrived at on the basis of feelings. The fourth position must be arrived at through facts and must involve a conscious change.¹⁹

I'm Not-OK - You're OK

This is an introjective position. Harris considers this the first psychological position of the infant based on feelings of helplessness and dependency on others for all needs. During this time, the infant receives quite a few strokes as he is picked up and cuddled. For this reason, others are OK.²⁰ In the adult, this position is also characterized by helplessness and powerlessness. This position leads to a life of withdrawal and perhaps eventually suicide.²¹

I'm Not-OK - You're Not-OK

This position is known as the futility position. The child can now walk and is not picked up and held as often. Also, punishments are more frequent, causing others to seem not-OK. The child also incurs injuries as a result of its explorations.²² It is in this position that the individual gives up and has no hope. To this individual, life is not worth living and so he merely goes through life. Suicide and homicide may result in a psychological position such as this.²³

I'm OK - You're Not-OK

This is the projective position in which the individual has perhaps been treated roughly by his parents or other adults. The child feels victimized and persecuted. Comfort, if any, is from within the individual in the form of self-pity. This individual refuses to give up and will blame others for failures and miseries.²⁴

I'm OK - You're OK

This is a positive position and the only scriptless position. The individual has made a conscious and verbal decision, not based on feelings

as the other three decisions were. Based on past experiences and an adequate amount of information, the individual decides that life is worth living. Usually this position is based on information about the future through religion or philosophy. This decision is based on thought and faith.²⁵ An individual with this attitude toward life values others and realizes his own worth as well. He is likely to have valid expectations of life and will solve problems constructively.²⁶

Depending upon the psychological position one takes, he will obtain strokes in a way that is comfortable for him. Involved in the decision of how one will obtain strokes is the fears of the Child and the attitudes and prejudices of the Parent. Since each individual needs strokes in order to maintain a healthy personality, structuring time in such a way that these strokes are available is a major concern.²⁷

Time Structuring

Each individual structures time in a way to fulfill certain needs inherent to him. Among the needs that are common to all individuals, three specifically influence an individual's need to structure time: position hunger, recognition hunger, and structure hunger. Position hunger is the need of each individual to obtain strokes which will reinforce his psychological position. Recognition hunger is the need of each individual to receive strokes, even negative strokes, as a form of acknowledgement of his existence and significance by others. Structure hunger is the need of each individual to seek situations which are programmed in a way to insure that he will obtain strokes.²⁸

Often, as an individual grows older, stroking takes on more sophisticated forms. While the individual may desire physical stroking, the Parent or Child may not accept strokes in this form; therefore, the individual may accept strokes in the form of praise instead. In the same way, mere recognition may be substituted for praise, disapproval may be substituted for recognition, etc.²⁹

Time structuring may take one of six forms: 1) Withdrawal, in which the individual is usually alone. Any stroking in this state is from the individual himself in the form of strokes received during fantasizing or dreaming; 2) Rituals, in which transactions are highly predetermined and carry surface significance only. A minimal amount of strokes is received from others; 3) Pastimes, in which transactions are not as predictable as in rituals. These are transactions designed to pass time in which the emphasis is on quantity rather than quality; 4) Activities, in which transactions are usually focused on an external problem to be solved; 5) Games, which are transactions existing on two levels, one of which

is socially plausible while the other is the real, psychological transaction with an ulterior purpose. There is a payoff at the end of the game which is a form of stroking obtained dishonestly; 6) Intimacy, in which transactions are honest and open. Intimacy involves a maximum number and quality of strokes.³⁰

Withdrawal

With the fewest number and least intensity of strokes, withdrawal is a state in which there is not communication with others. Withdrawal may be the result of a rational decision on the part of the Adult to relax, think, and evaluate oneself or it may be the decision of the Child in an effort to avoid the awkwardness of dealing with people. Withdrawal may have been used during childhood as the individual tried to avoid painful situations. Withdrawal may take one of four forms. The first of these is sleep. In this state, an individual may obtain strokes during dreams. While strokes are not exchanged consciously, they may be unconsciously exchanged as the individual becomes emotionally and personally involved in his dreams and participates in conversations and experiences feelings. Sleep may also be an attempt on the part of the individual to avoid dealing with people. The second state in which withdrawal may exist is when one is awake and alone. This may be a time the individual has chosen to be at peace with himself. It may be spent in fantasies or it may just be a way to avoid dealing with people. An individual may be alone and with others. This is what often happens when one is in a crowd in which he observes stroking but does not participate. The individual may be turning others off or he maybe fantasizing a place where stroking is better. Withdrawal may also be a part of a psychotic state in which the individual is oblivious to the world around him. Other people are not present. This state may be induced by drugs.³¹

A great deal of time is spent in withdrawal for many people. While providing for the avoidance of the discomfort of dealing with people, withdrawal also eliminates opportunities for obtaining strokes. A basic need of the individual is unsatisfied. While both positive and negative strokes may be received in withdrawal, both are self-delivered.³²

Rituals

Rituals are a way of structuring time in which transactions are highly predictable. This predictability makes rituals safe for an individual who is not comfortable dealing with other people. Rituals are a superficial way of structuring time in which one may be comfortable, especially in dealing with strangers. While a minimal amount of stroking is received from others, rituals provide an opportunity for people to gain information about one another without becoming involved or committed. In many rituals, all present are involved in the same thing. Rituals common to our society are those which take place during funeral services, social club meetings, and political parties.³³

Pastimes

Pastimes are a way of structuring time in which quantity and not quality of strokes is important. Pastimes, as the name suggests, are usually means of passing time. Transactions are superficial, straightforward, and predictable. Pastimes provide an opportunity for people to obtain information about one another and perhaps to make a decision about whether or not to continue the relationship. Conclusions are seldom reached, decisions seldom made, and actions seldom taken as a result of transactions which take place during pastimes. There is a sense of general agreement or good-natured disagreement. Pastimes may be designed to pass a short period of time, as in a cocktail party, or they may be designed to pass a lifetime, as in a boring job.³⁴

Activities

Activities are a way of structuring time in which transactions are directed toward external reality. Activities may involve a great deal of cooperation and stroking among individuals as in a team effort directed toward completing a certain task in which decisions must be made and actions taken. In such a situation, there must be communication among the individuals involved. Activities may also be an individual pursuit in which one obtains satisfaction from the activity itself or from the strokes afterward for a job well done. Activities may also be a way of avoiding uncomfortable ritual situations in which an individual attempts to keep busy by helping the hostess during a party. Activities, such as a hobby or job such as that of an executive, may be a way of avoiding people, including one's family.³⁵

Games

Games are a way of structuring time in which there is a complementary transaction with an underlying ulterior transaction with a particular purpose or motive. This ulterior transaction has a predictable outcome called a payoff which is usually a negative stroke. Games are usually unconscious and played by innocent people. In order to be identified as a game, a set of transactions must include the following: 1) a "con", or ulterior motive to the socially plausible transaction which is at the surface. 2) A "gimmick", or complementary weakness which will cause the con to work, such as greed, fear, sentimentality or vanity. 3) This is followed by the "switch" in which the ulterior motive is revealed. 4) Next is the "cross-up" or confusion which follows the revelation of the ulterior motive is revealed. Both players collect their payoff which is mutual although not the same and consists of the feelings which are aroused in both.³⁶

Games are an alternative to intimacy in which one obtains strokes with-

out risking the vulnerability which accompanies an honest and open relationship. A common game is "Why Don't You - Yes But".

White: "My husband always insists on doing our own repairs, and he never builds anything right."

Black: "Why doesn't he take a course in carpentry?"

White: "Yes, but he doesn't have time."

Blue: "Why don't you buy him some good tools?"

White: "Yes, but he doesn't know how to use them."

Red: "Why don't you have your building done by a carpenter?"

White: "Yes, but that would cost too much."

Brown: "Why don't you just accept what he does the way he does it?"

White: "Yes, but the whole thing might fall down."

While the socially plausible transaction is an appeal by the Adult for information and solutions, the ulterior transaction is the Child helplessly inadequate to deal with the situation. The complementary weakness is the need of the other individuals' Parent to be helpful. The switch comes when the problem cannot be solved. The payoff is the ensuing silence in which the Parents can think of no more solutions and the Child is still helpless.³⁷

Intimacy

Intimacy is a way of structuring time in which the other five ways of structuring time do not exist. Intimacy can only be based upon a relationship in which both individuals hold an I'm OK - You're OK position in which there is no need to avoid closeness and no need to manipulate the other. In intimacy, the Adult of each individual allows the Natural Child to emerge with its creativeness, spontaneity, curiosity,

awareness, and lack of fear. Risk and vulnerability are present as is a genuine caring. There is no avoidance of openness and honesty.³⁸

CONCLUSION

Transactional Analysis is a theory of psychology which considers change possible. Because change is always possible, each individual has the opportunity to put past influences behind him and to take on a new attitude toward life. This attitude is not based on the naive character of the Child, but upon the rational decision of the Adult. This decision is a decision to value others and realize that they are a significant part of life. Furthermore, it is a decision to value oneself and to realize one's full potential. An individual is willing to re-examine reality and accept the negative aspects of others. This individual, through the decision to accept others as they are, achieves an autonomy in which he can become instrumental in bringing about needed changes in others and become actively involved in life. Unfettered by unrealistic expectations of others and the need to obtain reassurance from others, this individual is able to risk vulnerability and discover the joy of intimate relationships.⁴⁰

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Eric Berne, Games People Play, p. 29.
- ²Ibid., p. 23-27.
- ³Ibid., p. 29-34.
- ⁴Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward, Born to Win, p. 35-37.
- ⁵Ronald H. T. Owston, Time Structuring, Tape 2, Side 1.
- ⁶Ibid., Tape 2, Side 2.
- ⁷Thomas A. Harris, I'm OK - You're OK, p. 25-33.
- ⁸James, op. cit., p. 23.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 127-140.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 101-111.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 224-226.
- ¹²Claude Steiner, Scripts People Live, p. 31-33.
- ¹³Eric Berne, What Do You Say After You Say Hello?, p. 4.
- ¹⁴Steiner, op. cit., p. 34.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 34.
- ¹⁶Berne, Hello, p. 14-17.
- ¹⁷Steiner, op. cit., p. 34.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 69-71.
- ¹⁹Harris, op. cit., p. 66-67.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 67.
- ²¹James, op. cit., p. 37.
- ²²Harris, op. cit., p. 69-71.
- ²³James, op. cit., p. 31.

FOOTNOTES (cont'd)

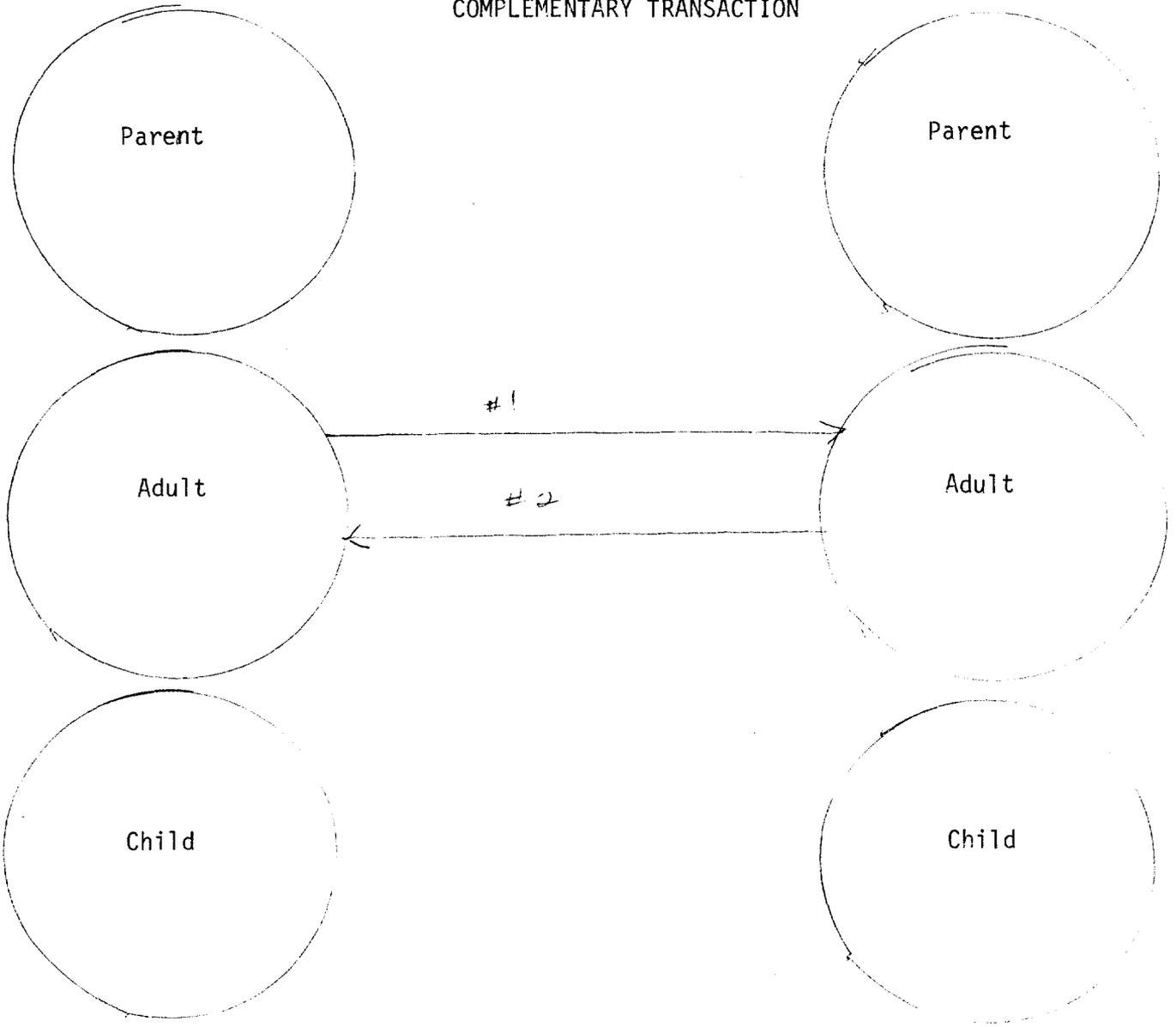
- 24Harris, op. cit., p. 72-73.
- 25Ibid., 74-77.
- 26James, op. cit., p. 36.
- 27Jut Meninger, Success Through Transactional Analysis, p. 60-61.
- 28Steiner, op. cit., p. 36-38.
- 29James, op. cit., p. 46.
- 30Harris, op. cit., p. ;42-153.
- 31Owston, op. cit., Tape 3, Side 1.
- 32Ibid., Tape 3, Side 1.
- 33Harris, op. cit., p. 143.
- 34Ibid., 44.
- 35Ibid., p. 143-4.
- 36Berne, Hello, p. 23-25.
- 37Berne, Games, p. 116-121.
- 38Harris, op. cit.
- 39Steiner, op. cit., p. 35.
- 40James, op. cit., p. 273-274.

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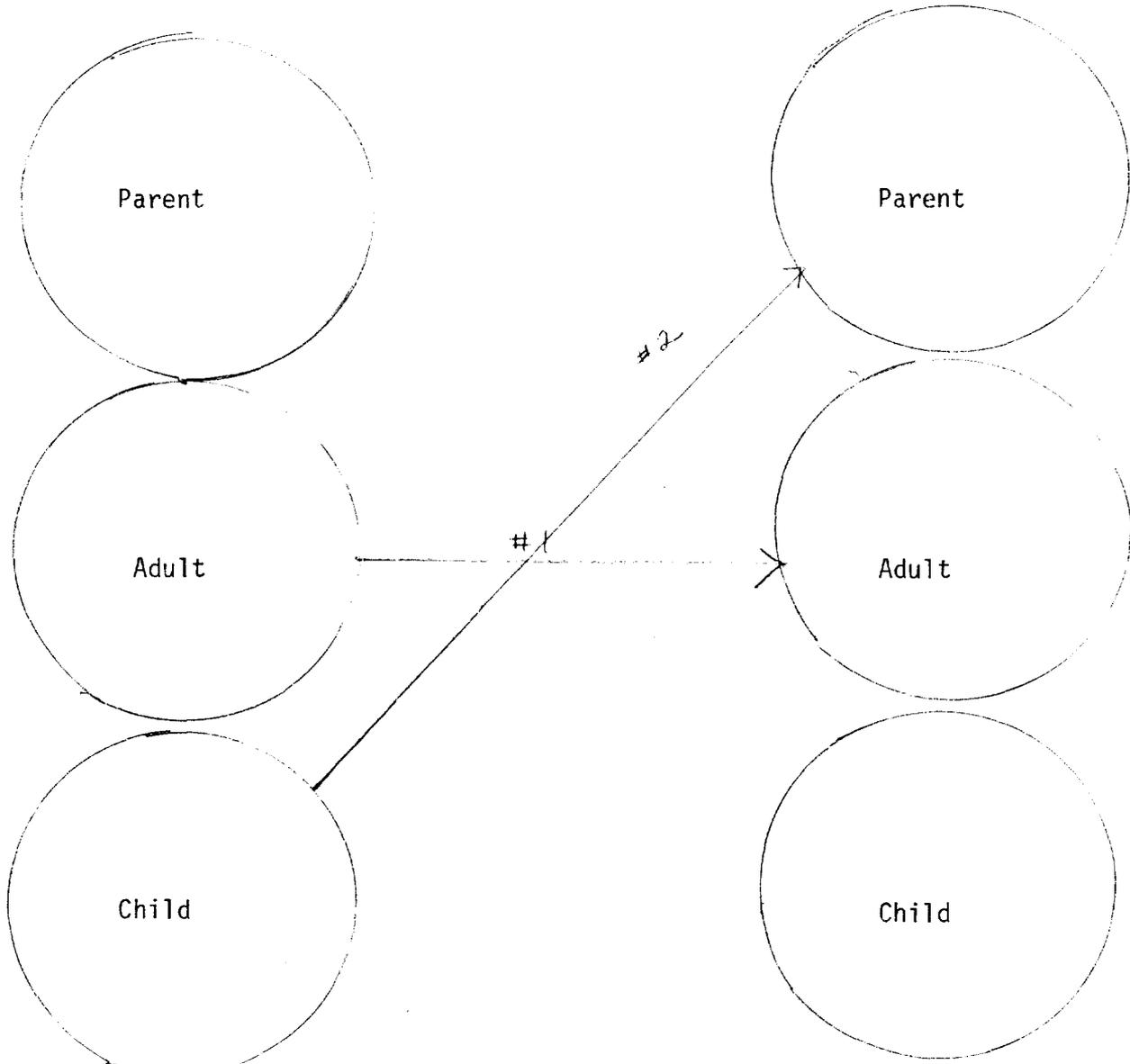
APPENDIX

COMPLEMENTARY TRANSACTION



A: "How much longer will you be here?"
B: "Until tomorrow."

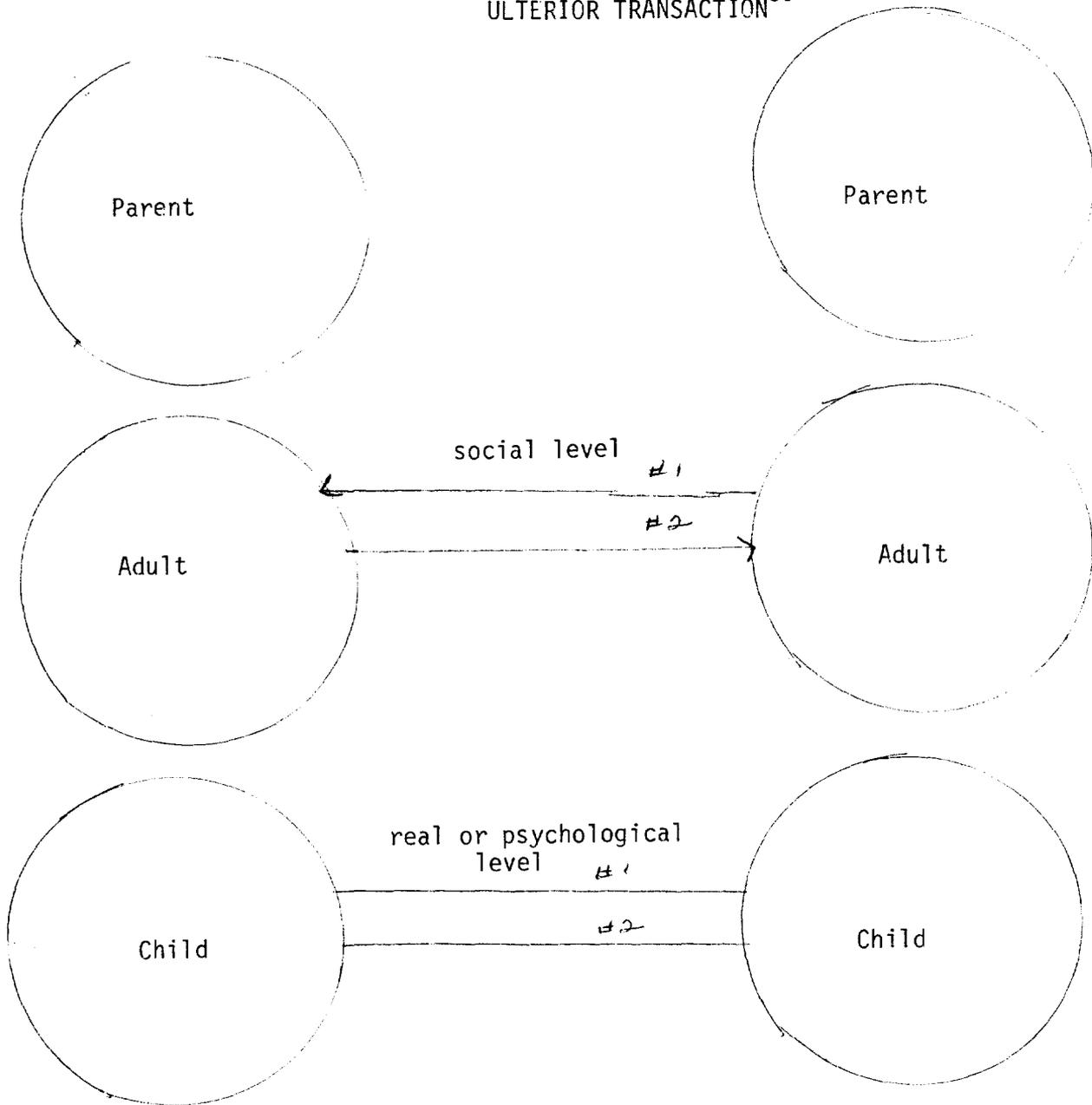
CROSSED TRANSACTION



A: "How much longer will you be here?"
B: "None of your business."

(Transference reaction-Type I)

ULTERIOR TRANSACTION³⁹



social or surface:
A: "Let's work late, Miss Smith."
B: "Yes, let's do that."

real or psychological
A: "Let's have a drink, Sally."
B: "Oh, Bill! I thought you'd never ask."