

mother's face and to distinguish her from other adults, a baby may gurgle and burble, but it does not laugh. What happens when it starts to single out its own mother is that it also begins to grow afraid of other, strange adults. At two months any old face will do, all friendly adults are welcome. But now its fears of the world around it are beginning to mature and anyone unfamiliar is liable to upset it and start it crying. (Later on it will soon learn that certain other adults can also be rewarding and will lose its fear of them, but this is then done selectively on the basis of personal recognition.) As a result of this process of becoming imprinted on the mother, the infant may find itself placed in a strange conflict. If the mother does something that startles it, she gives it two sets of opposing signals. One set says, 'I am your mother-your personal protector; there is nothing to fear,' and the other set says, 'Look out, there's something frightening here.' This conflict could not arise before the mother was known as an individual, because if she had then done something startling, she would simply be the source of a frightening stimulus at that moment and nothing more. But now she can give the double signal: 'There's danger but there's no danger.' Or, to put it another way: 'There may appear to be danger, but because it is coming from me, you do not need to take it seriously.' The outcome of this is that the child gives a response that is half a crying reaction and half a parental-recognition gurgle. The magic combination produces a laugh. (Or, rather, it did, way back in evolution. It has since become fixed and firmly developed as a separate, distinct response in its own right.)

So the laugh says, 'I recognise that a danger is not real,' and it conveys this message to the mother. The mother can now play with the baby quite vigorously without making it cry. The earliest causes of laughter in infants are parental games of 'peek-a-boo', handclapping, rhythmical knee-dropping, and lifting high. Later, tickling plays a major role, but not until after the sixth month. These are all shock stimuli, but performed by the 'safe' protector. Children soon learn to provoke them-by play-hiding, for example, so that 103