is it aesthetically pleasing. Its function is to reinforce the greeting smile and to maintain the social togetherness. It is our substitute for social grooming. By providing us with a non-aggressive social preoccupation, it enables us to expose ourselves communally to one another over comparatively long periods, in this way enabling valuable group bonds and friendships to grow and become strengthened.

Viewed in this way, it is an amusing game to plot the course of grooming talk during a social encounter. It plays its most dominant role immediately after the initial greeting ritual. It then slowly loses ground, but has another peak of expression as the group breaks up. If the group has come together for purely social reasons, grooming talk may, of course, persist throughout to the complete exclusion of any kind of information, mood or exploratory talk. The cocktail party is a good example of this, and on such occasions `serious' talking may even be actively suppressed by the host or hostess, who repeatedly intervene to break up long conversations and rotate the mutual-groomers to ensure maximum social contact. In this way, each member of the party is repeatedly thrown back into a state of `initial contact', where the stimulus for grooming talk will be strongest. If these non stop social grooming sessions are to be successful, a sufficiently large number of guests must be invited in order to prevent new contacts from running out before the party is over. This explains the mysterious minimum size that is always automaticall recognised as essential for gatherings of this kind. mall, informal dinner parties provide a slightly different situation. Here the grooming talk can be observed to wane as the evening progresses and the verbal exchange of serious information and ideas can be seen to gain in dominance as time passes. Just before the party breaks up, however, there is a brief resurgence of grooming talk prior to the final parting ritual. Smiling also reappears at this
rint, and the social bonding is in this way given a n al farewell boost to help carry it over to the next encounter.

If we switch our observations now to the more formal business encounter, where the prime function

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