Gestures as a resource for the organization of mutual orientation*

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During face-to-face conversation participants are present to each other as living physical bodies in a particular situation. This has a number of consequences. First, with their bodies those present are able to provide and glean a great deal of nonvocal information about the substance of the talk in progress and the alignment of those present to it (see, for example, Goodwin 1980). However these same bodies have a range of needs and capacities — for example breathing, relieving itches, ingesting food, drinking, smoking, in short a wide variety of body cares — that fall outside the scope of the talk in progress. Thus, if participants are to use each other's bodies as sources of information about their talk they are faced with the task of distinguishing relevant body behavior from that which is not. Indeed, as will be seen in more detail later in this paper, such classification is not simply a hidden cognitive process, but one that has visible consequences for the actions of the party doing that analysis. For example while talk-relevant behavior may be a focus for visual attention, body cares not related to the talk may call for systematic disattention. In short, while access to each other's bodies provides a resource for the display of meaning, it also imposes constraints on behavior making use of that access. The effect is that the organization of a relevant and appropriate framework of mutual visual orientation becomes a practical problem for participants, a problem that they must work out together in the course of their interaction. The present paper will investigate some ways in which gesture might be used in this process. Data for this analysis consists of videotapes of actual conversations recorded in a range of natural settings.[1]

Before turning to empirical data it must be noted that the study of how gesture operates within conversation is beset with a number of methodological problems. Perhaps the most central is the fact that very often recipients to a gesture do not make a subsequent move to it that deals with the gesture as a distinct event in its own right. It is therefore difficult to establish what consequences the gesture has for the organization of

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their action.[2] It is, of course, quite possible, indeed probable, that many movements which appear to be gestures contribute significantly to a recipient's understanding of the talk (or other events) in progress, but that for a variety of reasons they do not lead to a distinct display of understanding on his part. However the easy acceptance of such a possibility in particular cases must be tempered by other observations. For example it is not unusual to find that a speaker produces something which is clearly recognizable as a gesture but that recipients do not direct their gaze to it, and yet these same recipients produce an appropriate subsequent move to the talk that accompanied the gesture. In yet other cases recipients seem to note the presence of a gesture by starting to look toward it, but the gesture is brought to completion before their gaze arrives. In brief, it is possible to find data where recipients do not look at the gestural components of an utterance, but this is not treated as problematic for their understanding of the talk. In view of this it would seem premature for an analyst to argue that a gesture is in some particular way consequential for recipients if responses to it are not present.

The lack of clear recipient response also adds to the intransigency of some other methodological and analytical difficulties. First, while it is frequently possible to locate clear examples of gestures, in other cases it is not always certain whether some particular body movement is in fact a gesture. Perhaps the best demonstration of this is the fact that some video examples may be presented as gestures by one analyst while another will argue the opposite. Second, only the most stereotypic gestures can be translated into print. The reasons for the difficulties in transcription are many, including the fact that gestures are not static but emerge and change through time (both this and the importance of recipient response are reasons for using data records that maintain not only the spatial but also the sequential structure, the movement through time, of the events being studied), but one central problem would seem to be that we have not yet uncovered precisely what properties of a gesture are attended to by recipients as criterial for the action in progress.

In view of problems such as these it seems important to try to establish at least some of the ways in which gestures are attended to interactively by participants within conversation, as evidenced by responses to the gestures as events in themselves.

Establishing a point of visual focus with gesture

One possible interactive feature of gesture might be that parts of the body engaged in gesture provide a specific place where recipients may, and

Figure 1. *'Ma::n she's this wi:de.' The speaker is the man in back. Note that his recipient is not positioned to see the hand gesture being pointed to with 'this'.*

sometimes should, direct their gaze. If valid, such a property constitutes a resource not only for analysts attempting to discover what body movements participants in fact attend as gesture, but also for the participants themselves who might make use of such a feature in the organization of their ongoing action. Some data fragments in which this appears to occur will now be examined.

In lines 1–11 of Example 1 *A* goes to considerable trouble to get *B* to look away from him and toward someone in the scene in front of them both. Then in line 12, *A* produces a strip of talk[3] accompanied by a gesture. A drawing of the participants during this utterance is provided in Figure 1.

Example 1. (G.76:145)[1]

1. *A:* Hey James.
2. *B:* Huh.
3. *A:* There's one — There's one right straight down there.
4. (0.6)
5. *A:* In the purple.
6. (1.5)

7. *B:* Where. Down here?
8. *A:* No. Right straight down. Down by the horseshoes.
9. Way down there.
[[
10. *B:* Oh yeah.
11. *B:* Yeah?

A begins
gesture
↓
12. *A:* Ma::n she's <u>this</u> wi:de.

In Figure 1, the speaker is producing a gesture for a recipient who is not positioned to observe it. Moreover, the speaker not only knows this but has just gone to considerable trouble to get the recipient to look away from him and toward the scene being talked about. On the face of it, the speaker's action appears incongruous.

Let us consider more carefully what is happening here. The gaze of the participants has just been directed to something in the scene around them. However insofar as gaze toward other participants is not only usual in conversation, but also a systematic part of many processes implicated in the organization of talk, one issue that might be posed for someone who is looking away is finding where it is relevant to return the gaze to the conversational cluster. Looking at the talk in line 12, it can be noted that the term 'this' explicitly tells the recipient that he will have to find something beyond the talk itself if he is to understand the talk in the way in which the speaker indicates that it should be understood; simply listening to it will be inadequate. The recipient is thus confronted with the task of finding the phenomena the speaker's talk indicates as being relevant. There is no indication that these phenomena are to be found in the direction in which the recipient is now gazing (and note that when gaze toward the scene is relevant, the speaker goes to considerable trouble to show the recipient where to look). Rather, the term 'this' suggests proximity to the speaker. Thus the talk tells its recipient that if he is to accomplish successfully the task set before him, he may well have to move his gaze back to the speaker. This is in fact what he does. Before *A*'s utterance even reaches completion, *B* starts to move back to him; he then produces the next utterance which is tied to the hand gesture (Example 1a: ll. 12–14). The

B
A begins starts to return
gesture gaze to *A*
↓ ↓
12. *A:* Ma::n she's <u>this</u> wi::de.
13. (0.8)
14. *B:* And <u>that</u> high.

gesture performed here thus provides the speaker with the ability to indicate to the recipient that it is now relevant for him to return his gaze. In essence with the gesture, the speaker manages to move the gaze of a recipient who is looking elsewhere, back to speaker's own body.

What happens here is consistent with the possibility that particular items of talk might be produced, not on the assumption that their recipient is positioned to understand them (in the present case, by observing the pointed-to item), but rather to induce action on the part of the recipient to bring about a state of affairs where understanding becomes possible; such action is also relevant to other tasks posed in the interaction. From such a perspective — though the present speaker produces a gesture when his recipient is not able to observe it — this talk is nevertheless designed in detail not only for the particularities of its recipient, such as his information horizon, but more relevantly, for the tasks facing him in the collaborative work of constructing the turn at talk. Through uses of gesture in this fashion, the speaker is able to make the shift in visual focus an intrinsic part of the work of understanding the talk in progress.

A similar process occurs in Example 2 (l. 1), only here the speaker is faced with the task of regaining the gaze of a recipient who has begun to disattend him. *A* is telling *B* and *C* about an experience he had while making a parachute jump during his army service, but *B* has just looked away from him. As line 1 begins *A* starts to accompany his talk with gesture. Before the word 'this' has been brought to completion — 'this' signals that something beyond the talk must be attended — *B* starts to return his gaze to *A*.

Example 2. (G.79:19.4)

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1. A: You got a strap on this side, then a strap here ⎫
                         ↑                            ⎪
               B starts to return gaze                ⎪ A's hand-gestures
                     to speaker                       ⎬ show positioning
                                                      ⎪ of straps
2.    in the middle, and one on this side and one on  ⎪
3.    that side so you have four sticks.              ⎭
4.              (0.8)

                                       D reaches
        A starts to enact               empty    D starts to lower
        seating position                 chair   herself into chair
               ↓                           ↓            ↓
5. A: And boy they cramp you in there so you have to sit like this.
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(1.2 second pause during which *D* seats herself while *A* elaborates and intensifies the enactment he has just pointed to.
At the end of the pause *A* brings his gaze to *B*)

Lowers head back
into enacted position
↓

7. *A:* Really if — if — (0.2) °you — Just like this.
8. Put your hand over your reserve and that's
9. about all the room you have. And they crop
10. your buddy right up to you here and right
11. up to you there and man that's all you got.

These data also provide the opportunity to investigate another way in which the ability of gesture to establish a point of visual focus provides participants with a resource for the organization of their interaction. *A*, *B*, and *C* are seated next to each other behind a counter. As *A* continues with his description a fourth party, *D*, walks to the front of the counter and joins the conversational cluster by seating herself there. This action does not, however, disrupt the talk in progress. Looking more carefully at what happens, it can be seen that one of the resources used to maintain focus on *A*'s talk is gesture. As *D* starts to seat herself in line 5, *A*, with the words 'like this', explicitly directs the attention of his recipients to some event beyond the talk itself, and indeed at that point *A* is enacting the cramped seating position he has begun to describe. He has moved his knees together, lowered his head and brought his upraised arms tightly to the front of his chest. Though *D* is at this moment seating herself in front of them, both *B* and *C* gaze steadfastly at the gestures *A* is performing and announcing in his talk. Then, immediately after the explicit instruction to look at the gesture, *A* stops talking so that at the point where *D* is actually lowering herself into her chair, the entire substance of what *A* is telling his recipients is carried in his gesture, something that makes gaze toward him especially relevant at that particular moment. Moreover, not only does this gesture focus the recipient's gaze on the speaker, it also accounts for the lowering of the speaker's gaze at the point where *D* approaches him. Thus, through use of gesture, the speaker organizes both his own gaze and that of his recipients, in a way that is relevant to the talk, with the effect that the arrival of *D* is not explicitly marked or attended to, and the talk in progress is not disrupted.

It does, however, appear that *D*'s arrival was not only perceived, but in fact treated as potentially intrusive, despite the way in which it was disattended. For example, after *D* is seated, the speaker recycles as a clarification both the talk produced as she was sitting down, and the animation done there. Thus, the talk and gesture occurring at the place where *D*'s activities were most noticeable are provided again once that activity is stopped. The speaker deals with the potential intrusiveness of *D*'s arrival by first using gesture with talk, pointing to the gesture to focus orientation on himself and his talk at the point of arrival, and then repeating the talk that was in progress at that point at a later time when such potentially distracting events are not occurring. Recipients cooperate with the speaker by holding their gaze on him as he performs these gestures despite the very visible activity that *D* is performing directly in front of them. It would appear that the noneventfulness of *D*'s arrival is achieved through active interactive work by the participants, and that one of the resources used in this process is the ability of gesture to provide a specific place for the focus of gaze.

The data examined so far strongly suggest that gesture as an activity has two distinct properties which participants not only attend to but actively use as a resource for the organization of their talk. First, gesture provides a specific place where gaze can, and sometimes should, be directed. On the face of it this appears quite unremarkable. However, as has been seen, speakers might make use of this feature in rather subtle ways, for example, to deflect gaze from some other spatial region where events which might disrupt the talk in progress are occurring. Second, unlike some spatial phenomena in conversations which endure for comparatively long periods of time, for example the F formation described by Kendon (1977: Ch. 5), gestures are not only tied to events in the talk of limited duration, but they emerge, change, and disappear as the talk itself changes. As part of the developing talk in progress, they partake of its moment-by-moment sequential organization. Gestures are thus localized not only in space but also in time, and once again, this specificity provides participants with a useful interactive resource. Consider again our first example. There, by using a gesture, the speaker was suddenly able to make it relevant for the recipient to move his gaze back to him, even though a moment before he was telling him to look away. Gesture thus provides participants with the ability to change spatial organization at specific moments in time in a way that is relevant to the developing course of activities within the conversation. In essence, gestures are one place where the temporal and sequential organization of conversation intersects with its spatial organization.

For clarity, analysis has so far focused on examples in which the relevance of a gesture was signalled by an explicit term in the talk. However it should be noted that this is not a necessity and that gesture might function to secure gaze even in the absence of such a term. In Example 3 the occurrence of the gesture alone is sufficient to inform the recipient that return of gaze to the speaker is relevant. Here, the participants have turned from each other to look toward a painting on the wall that is being talked about. *B* then returns her gaze to the speaker but *C* does not. At that point *A*, the speaker, not only produces further talk but begins to enact some of the events he is describing. The first gesture in the enactment is done while *B* is laughing and *before A* produces the talk that the gesture enacts.[4] Immediately after the gesture *C* moves his gaze to the speaker and Example 3 begins.

Example 3. (AS:355)

B returns gaze
to speaker

A: I almost ruined my studio=

C starts to move
gaze to speaker

Hand
gesture

A: =in New Yo rk City. Cause I was just dumping buckets of water
[
B: Eh ha ha ha ha

In so far as *C* moves where he does, by the time the speaker begins to produce the strip of talk with the enactment he has the gaze of both of his recipients. Once again gesture is used to make the speaker's body a seeable locus for talk-relevant activity and thus a place where gaze might be relocated.

However the fact that speaker does not note the gesture in his talk invites speculation about a number of issues. First, it may well be that recipients who have turned from the speaker to some talk-relevant event in the scene around them are actively monitoring for cues about when a return of gaze is relevant. Second, it appears that speakers have the ability to vary the degree to which gesture is essential to the talk it accompanies. In Examples 1 and 2 the talk itself announced that attending to gesture was a task recipients faced in dealing with that talk. In Example 3, however, the talk does not explicitly note the gesture, and can stand on its own without it. Such variability in the way in which gesture might be attended is consistent with what is observed about the treatment gesture gets in conversation. Quite clearly not every gesture a speaker makes is explicitly looked at by every recipient, but this does not seem to cause problems for the talk in progress.

A third observation is that speakers have the ability to make some gestures particularly salient. In Examples 1 and 2 this was done by organizing the talk so that the gesture had to be taken into account. However, this same effect might be achieved in other ways as well. For example, in the following, spatial rather than vocal resources are used to heighten the prominence of a gesture being made. As the speaker says 'There are fi:ve houses' she holds her left hand at the same height as her head and then, with palm toward the recipient and fingers spread apart, she thrusts it forward into the recipient's line of view. By performing this gesture in the vicinity of her face, the place where the recipient is directing her gaze, the speaker makes it especially visible.

Example 4. (G.26:7:15)

Speaker's hand pushed toward recipient
with five fingers extended

A: There are fi:ve houses.

recipient
nods

In Example 4, the speaker's hand movement performs an action that can be seen as relevant to the talk, i.e., providing a visual version of 'five', and before the speaker's talk even reaches completion, right after the word 'five', the recipient produces a visual response to the speaker, a sequence of noticeable head nods. In brief, speakers not only have the ability to make a wide range of gestures but are also able to make those gestures differentially available to the recipient, making some stand out by using both vocal and nonvocal resources to systematically heighten their prominence in a variety of ways.

Finally, it might be wrong to treat gesture as a purely visual phenomenon. In the following, acoustic as well as visual properties of a gesture are used to secure the gaze of a nongazing recipient.[5] In these data *A* tells her daughter Debbie that a boyfriend has called her. However, she tells her this in the presence of Paul, another of Debbie's boyfriends. This talk is accompanied by a range of vocal action and gesture that comments on the talk and shows the speaker's alignment to it. Thus, not only the message in line 4 but also the talk preceeding it is punctuated with laugh tokens, while at the same time, the speaker, with both her face and posture, shows that she is engaged in some type of appreciation for the talk to come. One of the actions she uses is a handclap. Looking more closely at the data it can be noted that it occurs at a particular place (Example 5). When *A*'s gaze reaches Debbie she finds that instead of gazing toward her Debbie is looking toward her plate and fork. It is at this point that *A* does the handclap. Right after it Debbie brings her gaze to *A* who then produces the message in line 4.

Example 5. (G.126:P295)

1. *A:* Would you like to sorta plug your ears a minute Paul. = I have

hand
clap

A's eyes
reach Debbie

2. another me(h)ssa(h)ge for De(h)bb(h)ie eh He heh ha ha

Debbie gazes
toward her plate

Debbie
brings her gaze
to the speaker

3. (0.5)
4. *A:* Pete ca(h)ll(h)ed today. Deitrich.

Other research (Goodwin 1981: Ch. 2) has demonstrated that speakers not only attend to the absence of gaze from their recipients but actively make use of a range of phenomena (for example, phrasal breaks in their talk of various types) to request such gaze. The sequence of actions that occurs here — speaker's production of the handclap just after seeing that recipient is not gazing, and recipient's movement just after that — is consistent with the possibility that the very noticeable handclap is being used to attract the recipient's gaze before telling her the message.

However, the handclap is also a visible part of the comments the speaker is making about her talk. It would thus appear that the handclap operates within two systems of action simultaneously: on the one hand, it functions to attract the recipient's gaze, and on the other it acts as a display of appreciation about the talk in progress. The embeddedness of the handclap within these displays of appreciation has meaningful consequences. First, a reason for its occurrence is made visible: the handclap is observed as one of the talk-relevant gestures the speaker is making. Second, it takes a period of time for the recipient to actually move her gaze to the speaker. However, this does not come across as empty time while the speaker is waiting for the recipient. Rather the continuation of the appreciation activities within which the handclap is embedded, show that speaker herself is not yet ready to move to the message. Thus by use of this gesture, and the activities surrounding it, the speaker manages to have the gaze of the recipient from the very beginning of her talk in line 4 without disrupting that talk while waiting for the recipient.

In Examples 1–3 and 5, gesture has the effect of securing the gaze of a nongazing recipient. If return of gaze to the speaker is in fact one of the issues being dealt with, the question arises as to why it is not done directly, for example, by telling the recipient to now look back at the speaker. Consider what would happen if an explicit request for gaze were used, for example if the speaker were to say 'Now look at me'. The subject matter under discussion would shift from the topic in progress, for example the message for Debbie, to something else, the current actions of those present. The participants would now be talking about Debbie's lack of gaze, and indeed this might engender a sequence of its own, with Debbie defending herself by claiming that she had been listening, etc. Thus, though an explicit request for gaze might secure it, it would shift focus away from the talk currently in progress.[6] If the speaker wanted the recipient's gaze in order to pursue his current talk, an explicit request would be a poor way to get it. However, by using gestures tied to the talk to show the recipient that a return of gaze is relevant, or even more strikingly, by embedding the return of gaze in tasks posed for the understanding of the talk (see Example 1), the speaker, instead of shifting focus from his talk, draws attention to it. The fact that gestures used to realign orientation can be seen as elements of the talk is thus functional. In essence, such gestures operate within two domains of action simultaneously, as substantive contributions to the talk and as a resource for organizing orientation to the speaker. Moreover these domains are not unrelated to each other; it is precisely because such body movements can be seen as gestures tied to the talk that they are able to function effectively to organize mutual orientation. The separate systems of action are thus ordered relative to one another with one providing an account for why something is happening, and the other making use of that account to do its work nonintrusively.

It may also be noted that with a gesture, though the recipient's gaze is being directed toward the speaker, it is not being focused on the speaker himself, but rather on an element of talk that happens to be situated at the speaker. For example, while looking at the gesture pointed to in 'Ma::n she's this wi:de' the recipient is not gazing at the speaker's hands as recognizable phenomena in their own right, but rather at a unit of measurement that happens to be demonstrated with the speaker's hands. Thus, by animating activities in his talk, the speaker makes his body a locus for recipient attention, a thing that can be legitimately seen, while maintaining the orientation of the participants not on himself, but on his talk.

Recipient response to nongesture

The data just examined provide some demonstration that a specific property of gesture — the fact that it can provide a point of visual focus relevant to the talk in progress — is not only attended to by particpants, but provides a resource for the organization of their interaction. One issue such findings can raise is whether actions that contrast with gesture on this feature exist, and if so, whether they might provide participants with the ability to organize frameworks for interaction different from those provided by gesture. The existence of such actions would help to locate gesture as a distinctive type of visible behavior, one with interactive properties not shared by all visible movement. At the same time, gesture would be related to other types of body movement since gestural and nongestural movements together would comprise a set of relevant alternatives for participants. Once again ways in which such classifications are consequential for the actions of recipients might provide a way to uncover such organization.

In both Examples 6 and 7, while talking, speakers bring their hands to their faces and begin to rub their faces. Neither of these movements has any visible relevance to the substance of what is being said. Thus these movements appear not to be gestures, but body cares.[7]

Example 6. (G.26:6:55)

A: Did they do a lot with it though or did they buy it kind of intact.

speaker brings hand to face
and rubs it

B: They bought it intact. Really.

Example 7. (G.50:00:15)

A: They all had fifty five pairs of shoe:s and they were

speaker brings hand to face
and rubs it

all- (0.5) black, (0.2) sue:de loafers or something'n,

Let us now look at what recipients do when these actions are performed. In both cases recipients are gazing toward the speaker before the hand movement occurs. However just after the movement they withdraw their gaze from the speaker (Examples 6a and 7a). When movements such as these are performed, recipients look away from them.[8]

Example 6a.

A: Did they do a lot with it though or did they buy it kind of intact.

speaker's hand covers face — rubs face

B: They bought it intact. Really.

recipient withdraws gaze

Example 7a.

A: They all had fifty five pairs of shoe:s and they were

hand that will gesture starts to move — hand reaches eye

all- (0.5) black, (0.2) sue:de loafers or something'n

recipient starts to withdraw gaze

What happens here is relevant to a number of issues implicated in the interactive organization of body movement within interaction. First, the treatment that these self-grooms get contrasts with the given gesture, which, while not always looked at, certainly can be made. Insofar as the interactive effect of these actions is not to attract the recipient's gaze, but to drive it away, they constitute a type of body movement that stands in clear alternation to gesture. For its part, gesture, with its ability to establish a point of visual focus, emerges as a type of body movement with distinct interactive properties not shared by all body movement. However when viewed within a broader framework, gestures used to attract gaze, and self-grooms used to repel it, partake of a common interactive organization in that both can be used to realign orientation. Indeed the different types of action made visible by speech-related movement and body-focused movement provide participants with a set of relevant alternatives for the organization of their interaction. When used in this way, self-grooms, though unrelated to the substance of the talk in progress, are nonetheless capable of functioning as communicative acts to be responded to by a recipient.

Second, insofar as different types of movement get different interactive treatment, participants are faced with the task of classifying the movements they perceive, even those they chose to disattend. From this perspective it is interesting to note that many movements that conversationalists make, including those such as self-grooms which are not meaningful elements of the talk in progress, display clearly what they are and why they are happening. A person's scratching may be random and irrelevant but it remains recognizable and meaningful to those who happen to see it. It appears that even with its most trivial actions the body remains a locus for meaning and maintains an essential rationality; rather than performing irrelevant, inexplicable actions, it provides others with the resources to interpret what it is doing.

Third, access to movements with different interactive consequences provides speakers with a resource for organizing action within the turn that they might actively make use of. Some ways in which gestures might be used to solicit gaze have already been examined. However the ability to drive away gaze might also be useful. For example, in the study of conversational turn-taking, considerable attention has been directed to 'turn-exit devices' such as tag questions, which transfer speakership to some other party (see, for example, Sacks et al. 1974: 718). However, insofar as a turn is constituted through the collaborative interaction of both a speaker and a hearer, its organization includes far more than talk (see, for example, Goodwin 1981). With the self-grooms being examined here we find types of action that serve to rupture the framework of mutual orientation between speaker and hearer that is being sustained *within* a turn. These data thus provide examples of procedures for exiting from, not the turn itself, but an organizational structure that is internal to it. Though distinct from the process of turn-taking, attention to such phenomena can help us to describe more precisely some of the complexity involved when participants move from one strip of talk to another. For example, the turn in Example 7b is brought to conclusion shortly after the speaker's self-groom dislodges the hearer's gaze. However a subsequent turn does not follow immediately but only after seven tenths of a second of silence. When *B* eventually produces a turn of her own, a new framework of mutual orientation between the participants must be established; indeed mutual gaze is not again achieved until *B*'s turn is well underway. Thus, in these data one finds not simply two turns in succession with speakership being transferred, but rather strips of talk with separate participation structures which are dismantled and reassembled as one unit ends and another begins. Actions that have the ability to disrupt a framework of mutual orientation thus provide speakers with resources for dealing with structural issues that are intrinsic to the organization of the turn-at-talk. Attention to such phenomena permits us to describe the social organization of talk more precisely.

Example 7b.

A: They all had fifty five pairs of shoe:s and they were

self-groom dislodges
recipients's gaze
↓
all- (0.5) black, (0.2) sue:de loafers or something'n,
((0.7 second silence))

speaker's gaze
reaches hearer
↓
B: We had this one girl; = she was from Flo:rida. And I swear to Go::d
↑
hearer's gaze
reaches speaker

However not all self-grooms disrupt mutual focus; many are simply disattended while the talk in progress continues. For example, shortly before the self-groom which dislodges the recipient's gaze in Example 7b, the speaker there performs another self-groom, wiping her knee, which does not in any way disrupt the recipient's gaze toward her (Example 7c). Thus, speakers are able to perform self-grooms while talking without losing the gaze of their recipients.

Example 7c.

A: But now uh- the- uh the Texans were the ones
that really were the most interesting you know they were,

speaker wipes top of knee
with hand

Well they all had fifty five pairs of shoe:s and they were
all- (0.5) black, (0.2) sue:de loafers or something'n,

This raises the question of whether speakers might be doing something special with the self-grooms that drive away the gaze in Examples 6 and 7. Looking again at these data it can be noted that the self-grooms in them are performed in a particular place, the front of the speaker's face, the place where the recipient is gazing. They are thus placed so as to actively intrude into the recipient's line of regard. The speakers here seem to be using these particular self-grooms in a somewhat special way, putting them at a place where they can not be disattended without special work by recipient.[9]

This suggests that the place where recipients are gazing, typically the region around a speaker's face, might have special interactive significance.[10] It may be recalled that in Example 4 this same region was used to make a gesture more salient. Further support for the possibility that participants might differentiate the space around them and attend to some regions as having a special status is provided by the following data from a dinner conversation. In the fragment to be examined (Example 8), *A* is telling a story. In the midst of the telling, *B* passes *C* a bowl of mashed potatoes. Analysis will focus on ways in which *C* manages to display continued orientation to *A*'s telling, despite his concurrent involvement in the food pass. A first phenomenon that can be observed is that as *C* takes the bowl he not only continues to act as recipient to *A*, but in fact produces talk of his own relevant to her talk. Thus, though also engaged in the bowl pass, *C* remains a very active participant in the telling.

Example 8. (G.126:P500)

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A:  They have this hu:ge court the:re, 'h h a:ll s c r e ened in :
                                       [   [               ]
C:                                     Yeh. I t's screened       in
                                                                  ↑
       C gazes              glance at     gaze toward
       toward A             approach-         A
                            ing bowl
                                                               hands
                                                               reach
                                                               bowl
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Turning now to visual phenomena it may be noted first, that as the bowl reaches *C*'s hands his gaze is directed not to it, but to *A*. Indeed the approaching bowl has received only a very brief glance. With such a distribution of gaze, *C* shows others that his visual involvement in the bowl pass is subordinate to his continuing orientation to the talk. Second, as *C* takes the bowl he not only continues to gaze toward *A*, but in fact intensifies the way in which his face shows alignment to her talk with a series of head nods (Example 8a).

Example 8a.

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A:  'h h a:ll s c r e ened in and every thing l i k e that,
     [  [              ]        .     [
C:  Yeh. I t's screened        in (with) like a
                                ↑
          C nods
                               hands
                               reach
                               bowl
```

In addition to showing heightened orientation to *A*'s talk, these nods locate a specific part of *C*'s body that is performing action officially relevant to the talk in progress. Such action may deflect official attention away from parts of the body that are engaged in activities unrelated to the talk — *C*'s hands, for example. Such an organization of action in space is consistent with that suggested in phenomena examined earlier which seemed to show that the region around the face might constitute a primary locus for talk-relevant activity. Further support for this possibility is provided by what *C* does next. As soon as the bowl is steady, *C* withdraws one of his hands from it, moves the hand from the bowl to the level of his face, and performs a conversationally relevant gesture there. As *C*'s hands raise into the gesture, *A* starts to nod toward him (Example 8b). Though multiple activities are occurring here the participants are able to show that these activities do not have equal status but are ordered relative to one another with talk claiming their primary alignment and the food-pass being subordinate to that. Among the resources used to make this ordering visible, are the partitioning of action within space, and the alternation between actions not relevant to the talk and gesture as a participant's hand moves from one spatial region to another.

Example 8b.

```
                                         A starts
                                          to nod
                                            ↓
A:   'h h a:ll s c r e ened in and every thing l i k e that,
      [  [               ]              [
C:    Yeh. I t's screened in          (with) like a
                         ↑          ↑
                       hands    talk-relevant
                       reach    gesture starts
                       bowl
```

Conclusion

Anthropologists have long noted that within any society space is organized in intricate but socially meaningful patterns; for example, sacred spaces are contrasted with those that are polluted, and private space is set off from that which is public. The data examined in this paper suggest a similarly complex organization in both space and time of the access participants have to each other's bodies as visible phenomena within moment-to-moment interaction.

First, not all parts of the body are treated as socially equivalent. For example, the region around a person's face appears to act as a locus for visible action that is officially relevant to others. Though gaze can be moved to other parts of the body, for example with gesture, the facial region is the area where talk-relevant looks toward the other are characteristically placed unless specifically directed elsewhere. As has been seen, organizing space in this fashion provides participants with resources for the performance of actions they are engaged in. On the one hand, a variety of actions not relevant to the other, such as self-grooms, can be performed during talk without disrupting it if they are done in some appropriate region. On the other hand, as was seen in Example 4, the area marked by mutual gaze can be used to bring actions relevant to the other, such as gestures, into prominence.

Second, this spatial organization is itself organized in time. At some moments it is inappropriate to gaze toward a coparticipant, while at others it is so strongly expected that, if it is not done, remedial action will be taken (for analysis of such phenomena, see C. Goodwin 1981: Ch. 2). Thus, as has been seen in a limited fashion in the analysis developed in this paper, spatial configurations that provide participants with visual access to each other are dismantled and reassembled throughout the course of a face-to-face encounter.

Third, in attending to such phenomena, participants are also engaged in analysis and classification of the actions they see others performing, for example, distinguishing gestures from self-grooms. The ability to perform actions that call for different types of recipient response provides participants with a resource for modifying their visual availability to each other. The type of action that is occurring and the spatial placement of that action thus have a dynamic interdependence. While moving a gesture to a focal space can heighten its prominence, performing a self-groom in the same region can redefine that space as one where gaze is no longer appropriate. Thus the space can be used to help establish the character of the action while a talk-irrelevant action can be used to redefine the character of the space in which it occurs. Finally, the type of visual orientation participants give each other is relevant to the talk they are producing. For example, gaze toward a speaker is one way in which hearership is displayed and mutual visual withdrawal is one way in which participants prepare for temporary disengagement from talk (see C. Goodwin [1981: Ch. 3] for a more detailed analysis of this process). In essence, the visual alignment of the participants can be informative about the status of the talk in progress. This may in fact be one of the major reasons why patterns of visual alignment are systematically modified through a collaborative process of interaction throughout the course of conversation.

Much analysis of gestures has focused on what they mean, how they function as signs (see, for example, Morris et al. 1979) or what they can tell us about otherwise unobservable phenomena, such as cognitive processes implicated in speech production (see, for example, Beattie 1980). However gestures are not simply symbols, entities for carrying meaning about something else, but physical actions with their own distinct properties — for example, they occur at specific moments in time and at particular points in space. As a type of action gesture can tie together the behavior of separate individuals, a speaker and a hearer for example, and make relevant a form of recipient response that is quite different socially from that which is given some other types of body movement such as self-grooms. Moreover gestures emerge within recognizable interactive activities, such as conversation, and partially because of this, they become socially organized. Indeed, gesture provides a resource for negotiating features of the moment-by-moment organization of the interactive processes within which it emerges. In brief, gesture is not simply a way to display meaning but an activity with distinctive temporal, spatial, and social properties that participants not only recognize but actively use in the organization of their interaction.

Notes

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1981 Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America, Nashville, Tennessee. I wish to thank both the other participants in the session on gesture, and Dick Holmes for a helpful discussion of the analysis.

1. For a more complete description of the data and the methods used see Goodwin (1981: 33–46). Citations at the beginning of each example identify the location of the data fragment on a particular tape.
2. Indeed, Beattie (1980: 90) states that, except in very restricted cases, 'no demonstrable benefit from nonverbal "signals" has been found to accrue to the listener'. In view of findings such as this, attempting to uncover specific ways in which gestures are consequential for recipients emerges as a key task that an analysis of gesture must face.
3. A simplified version of the Jefferson transcription system (Sacks et al. 1974: 731–733) is used to transcribe talk. Numbers within parentheses mark periods of silence in seconds and tenths of seconds, brackets joining the talk of separate speakers show where simultaneous speech begins, and colons indicate that the sound before the colon is noticeably lengthened.
4. A number of different investigators (for example, Butterworth and Beattie 1978; Kendon 1972, 1980; Schegloff 1984) have noted that gestures frequently precede the words they are tied to, and they have examined ways in which such phenomena shed light on individual and interactive processes implicated in speech production.
5. For some analysis of how the tactile properties of a gesture might function in a similar way, see Heath (1982).
6. For some analysis of how orientation to what is being said with a strip of talk might be disrupted if explicit attention is drawn to issues involved in producing that talk (for

example, ways in which a newscaster's efforts to repair the talk he is producing might draw attention away from the news being reported to the job of reporting it) see Goffman (1981: Ch. 5; 1961), which provides a more general treatment of some of the issues involved in staying absorbed in an activity such as talk. For an examination of ways in which repairs might function in much the same way that gestures do to secure recipient orientation while maintaining focus on talk, see Goodwin (1981: 142–144).

7. The importance of distinguishing movement tied to talk from that which is not — in Beattie's (1980: 89–90) terms, between body-focused movements and speech-focused movements — has long been recognized (see, for example, Beattie 1980; Ekman and Friesen 1969; and Freedman and Hoffman 1967). In general, however, researchers have not investigated how such distinctions might either pose interpretive issues for participants (rather than just analysts of their behavior) or be used interactively. Indeed, almost no attention whatsoever has been paid to the actions of recipients in relation to such movements.
8. Such behavior is consistent with the observation of Ekman and Friesen (1974: 277): 'there is a taboo about being caught looking at hand acts when they involve contact with the body, particularly if hands contact a body orifice or genital area. It is not that people are polite and constrained and don't do these things their parents would scold about; but people are polite observers. When the rules of Emily Post are broken and people rub, pick, or massage their noses, ears, anus, or crotch, they believe that others won't look, and this is generally true. Rudeness seems to reside as much in watching such behavior as in emitting it.'
9. Participants are, of course, able to coordinate their actions with each other so that some relevant tasks can be done in the area around the face, placing food in one's mouth for example, without disrupting the talk. Continued orientation to the talk may be displayed in other ways so that the talk-irrelevant activity does not come off as a display of diminished affiliation to the talk in progress.
10. Participants can, of course, through gesture and other means, make some area other than the face a locus for gaze (note, for example, the speaker's hands in Example 1). Nonetheless, the region around the face appears to possess a somewhat special status. For example, when recipients move their gaze to a speaker, as after a phrasal break, they generally bring it to the speaker's face. The gaze seems to get directed elsewhere only if something special is happening — for example, when the speaker provides explicit instructions to look somewhere else, or is performing a very noticeable gesture, and indeed not all gestures are looked at. Finally, it must be remembered that what is at issue here is the face as a locus for the gaze of others. If recipients are gazing somewhere else, the speaker might move his actions into that region (see Heath 1982, for an example) — a process entirely consistent with the analysis being developed here,

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