

Seeing and acting within a state of situated co-presence

Charles Goodwin
UCLA

I first met Christian at the 1975 Boston University Symposium on Ethnomethodology. At that time he was I believe the only person (other than Candy and me) who was using video rather than audio to try to investigate the phenomena that had just been opened up by the work of Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff on the organisation of conversation. Though I did not know it then Adam Kendon was also doing most relevant work, though his point of departure had initially been social psychology transformed through years of work with Albert Scheflen. Later, of course, others, such as Jürgen Streeck, would also pioneer powerful and original ways of using video to investigate hitherto unknown facets of the organisation of human interaction.

In Boston in 1975 Christian impressed us with not only the richness and resonance of his presentation, but also with his stamina, his incredible ability to think and socialize all night long. Christian has been an intellectually important, stimulating, lively and joyful presence in my life throughout my entire research career. I feel a very close kinship to his work in many different ways. Both Candy and I have benefited immensely from not only the broad range of research he has initiated into hitherto unexplored areas, but also through our visits with him and his colleagues over the years.

“Video analysis” is sometimes treated as a peripheral methodology that need not be taken into account for the basic analysis of “talk-in-interaction.” Here I want to briefly note some of the ways in which rich records of the activities that participants are pursuing in concert with each other in order to accomplish the events that make up their mundane lives offer us a unique, rich and most important perspective on the distinctive organisation of human action. Three phenomena will be noted: 1) the simultaneous co-operative organisation of action; 2) the part played by the way in which actors take into account the distinctive phenomena made available through each other’s bodies; and 3) how visible, historically sedimented cultural and material structure in the setting is integrated into the core structure of the actions occurring within it. The close investigation of how such phenomena organise action has been central to the work of Christian (for example, his early analysis of talk, bodies, gestures and pain in

medical settings, his studies of work in quite specific settings such as the London Underground, the analysis of auctions, etc.) and my own work. I will begin by briefly examining how Alfred Schutz conceptualised human co-presence.

Alfred Schutz: The Living Experience of Another

Building from the phenomenology of Husserl, Alfred Schutz, (1967:163) drew attention to a range of central human social and cognitive phenomena (e.g., grasping the thoughts of another) that emerge within a state of co-presence:

The Face-to-Face Situation and the We-Relationship

I SPEAK OF ANOTHER PERSON as within reach of my direct experience when he shares with me a community of space and a community of time. He shares a community of space with me when he is present in person and I am aware of him as such, and, moreover, when I am aware of him as this person *himself*, this *particular* individual, and of his body as the field upon which play the symptoms of his inner consciousness. He shares a community of time with me when his experience is flowing side by side with mine, when I can at any moment look over and grasp his thoughts as they come into being, in other words, when we are growing older together. Persons thus in reach of each other's direct experience I speak of as being in the "face-to-face" situation. The face-to-face situation presupposes, then, an actual simultaneity with each other of two separate streams of consciousness. ... We are now adding to it the corollary of the spatial immediacy of the Other, in virtue of which his body is present to me as a field of expression for his subjective experiences.

(italics in original).

Many of the ideas proposed here were of course central to the subsequent work of both Garfinkel (1967) and Goffman (1963). Indeed the term "face-to-face" interaction has become a shorthand description for the domain of research initiated by Goffman. However, I do not think that all of what Schutz drew our attention to has yet been given the analytic focus these phenomena merit. Here I want to use the embodied, temporally unfolding phenomena made accessible by video recordings of people interacting with each other to look concretely at how participants treat as consequential their ability to "any moment look over and grasp [another's] thoughts as they come into being" and how the "actual simultaneity with each other of two separate streams of consciousness" is central to the distinctive organisation of uniquely human forms of co-operative action.

Seeing an Actor Trying to Remember

Schutz uses language, such as referring to another's "thoughts", "subjective experiences", and "symptoms of his inner consciousness" that might seem to invoke inaccessible, and perhaps inappropriate, psychological phenomena for an analyst interested in describing the public organisation of action within human interaction. I would, however, like to argue that what Schutz describes here is in fact something that participants not only recognise, but treat as most consequential for the unfolding organisation of the actions they are pursuing in concert with each other.

To do this I will focus on the participation in conversation of Chil, a man left with a three word vocabulary — *Yes*, *No* and *And* — after a blood vessel ruptured in the left side of his brain. Despite this Chil was a powerful speaker in conversation. I have described how he used his limited semiotic resources to build action and meaning with others more extensively in a number of other publications (for example Goodwin 2003a; 2007b).

In Figure 1 Chil is finishing a meal with his wife Helen, his son Chuck and daughter-in-law Candy (Chil was my father). The news has just reported that an earthquake just occurred in California¹. When Chil and Helen began their marriage they lived in California during World War II. In line 1 Candy asks Chil (her gaze is directed to him not Helen) if he has ever been “in a big earthquake.” Chil gazes at Candy for one a half seconds and then turns his head away from her while looking at no one.

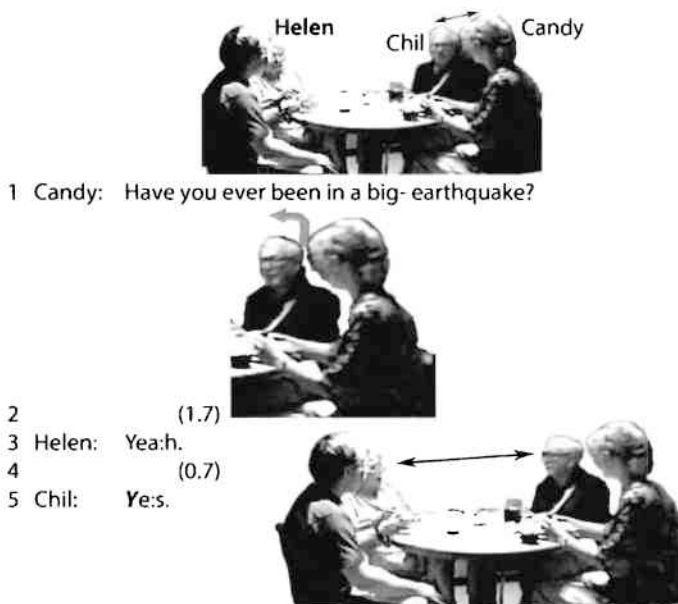


Figure 1: An Actor Thinking

Despite the length of Chil's silence Candy does not in any renew her request or treat Chil as disattending her (for example by trying to regain his gaze). Instead she positions herself as someone who is waiting for his answer by continuing to gaze intently toward him.

In essence, Candy is treating the visible displays of Chil's body as demonstrating that he is in the process of doing whatever work is required to produce the appropriate answer to the question she just asked him. She has asked something within a territory of knowledge

¹ See Goodwin (2004) for extended analysis Chil's storytelling that occurs in this sequence.

(Heritage 2012) shared by Helen and Chil that she does not have access to. His failure to respond with either *Yes* or *No*, but to use his body to display continuing involvement in the task set him, could be vernacularly glossed as showing Candy that he is “trying to remember” so that he can provide a truthful and accurate answer to her question. As argued by discursive psychologists (Edwards and Middleton 1986; Edwards and Potter 1992) the visible process of attempting to remember is a public consequential event within interaction, not an inaccessible process to be investigated by probing the hidden mental life of an isolated individual.

In the quotation produced above Schutz (1967:163) described the body of another within the field of my direct experience (e.g., Candy’s focused awareness of Chil sitting in front of her) as “the field upon which play the symptoms of his inner consciousness.” Despite some problems I have with the transparent acceptance of a division between inner and outer as an appropriate metaphor for human psychology (Hoffmeyer 2008) the phrasing Schutz uses here is particularly apt. Chil is working with aspects of his prior experience that he has access to but Candy doesn’t. This complementary distribution of knowledge between an unknowing questioner and knowing addressee is built into the structural organisation of the question he has been asked (Goodwin 1981; Goodwin 1987). It is by virtue of the interpretative framework created by that question that the subsequent movements of his body can be, and are, analysed by others as manifesting his engagement in the task he has been set. They are in Schutz’s phrase *symptoms* of consequential events that are implicated in the work and activities of the other, but that the observer does not have direct access to. Like a doctor’s use of embodied symptoms to perform diagnosis they require active interpreters rather than passive decoders, and, moreover, they do not provide direct, unequivocal access to the events being probed. The inferences made can be wrong. Helen in line 3 displays recognition of what Chil is searching for, and Chil agrees in line 5. However, the subsequent unfolding of their talk reveals that the earthquake story Helen tells is not the one that Chil wants to tell, and he uses his body to mobilize others to provide the resources he requires to give his answer to Candy’s question (Goodwin 2004).

Schutz’s use of the term “inner consciousness” is not in any way proposing direct access to the hidden mental life of another, but is instead describing an intentional (in the sense of consciousness being directed toward something), interpretive stance toward how what can be seen in the changing field provided by the body of the other can be relevant to my own actions. This was a deeply consequential, practical issue for Chil. The day after his stroke one of the doctors treating him had a young intern insert a catheter into his urinary track. As they did this Chil used sounds and hand movements to vigorously object. The doctors, aware that he just suffered a massive stroke, ignored him as someone who lacked the capacity to participate as an intelligent actor in a course of action in which he occupied a distinctive epistemic position: the only one who could feel the catheter as it moved through his body. Rather than being responded to as relevant signs of what was occurring within his body, his sounds and actions were completely dismissed. Three days later the doctors discovered that the catheter has been inserted incorrectly, a situation that had left Chil in pain the entire time. In brief, attending to the displays and sounds made by a damaged body with limited language as manifestations of the actions of an intelligent, competent actor is not automatic (as what happens to many patients in nursing homes amply demonstrates), but a consequential moral

and interpretative stance that recognizes the humanity of the other by being open to what Schutz called the *We-Relationship* as the embodied ground for the constitution of co-operative action.

My own interest in investigating the rich, constantly changing displays provided by the living bodies we encounter in the midst of our co-operative actions with others (phenomena such as gaze, which shaped some of my earliest work, do not in any way capture the richness of relevant phenomena) was stimulated by my own vivid awareness of Chil's presence, power, and continuously changing, sensitive engagement in rapidly unfolding events within interaction. However, such processes have far more general relevance for an adequate understanding of human interaction. The work of Heath (in press) on auctions offers a particularly clear and powerful example. In their classic form auctions for fine arts and antiques occur in situations of co-presence in which the auctioneer and those doing the bidding can not only hear, but also see each other's bodies. However the development of the telephone during the twentieth century made it possible for absent parties to phone in bids. Since what ultimately counts for the bidding process is an explicit bid, which can be easily done by talk over the phone, the absence of co-presence might seem a trivial change. In fact, those who only had access to the auction by phone found that they encountered significant limitations and problems. Heath uses this to highlight the crucial role the ability to observe each other's bodies plays in the organisation of the sequences of action through which runs of competitive bidding are accomplished. The auctioneer uses not only gaze, but the changing orientation of his entire body to locate who will be the next bidder. The hammer raised and held dramatically in the air in a position that is ready to strike, vividly displays the incipient closing of further possibilities for bidding, etc. Embodiment, which encompasses not only my experience of my own body, but ongoing analysis of the changing displays visible in the bodies of my co-participants, is central to the organisation of co-operative action within face-to-face human interaction. As Schutz and Goffman (1963) emphasise this gives states of full, embodied co-presence distinctive and important characteristics which have not yet been fully investigated.

Simultaneous Distributed Action

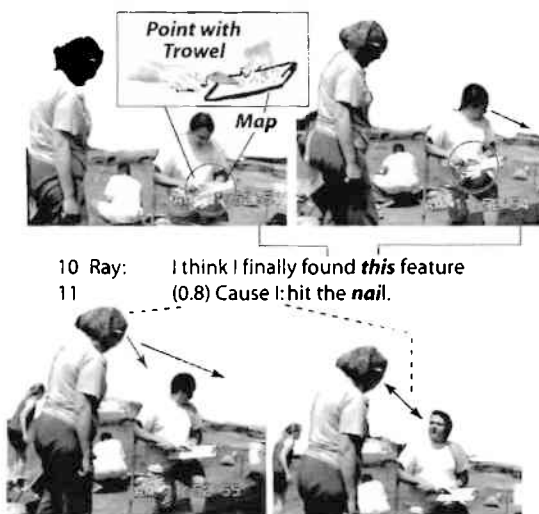
To explore both something noted by Schutz — the simultaneous organisation of changing action and experience — and something that he didn't — the part played by materials that extend beyond talk and the body — I will now look briefly at the events depicted in Figure 2. A more extended, though slightly different, examination of this sequence can be found in Goodwin (2003b).

The sequence in Figure 2 occurred during the very first days of an archaeological field school. During an earlier excavation season a range of *features*, such as postmolds that mark the remains of the wooden posts that held up the walls and roofs of ancient structures, had been excavated, outlined in the dirt, and mapped. At the close of the previous season the current level being excavated had been covered with sand to protect it. The students at this season's field school are beginning their summer by removing the protective sand, and using

the map made at the end of the earlier season to locate in the dirt the features marked on the map.

In line 1 Ray Jones, a graduate student, calls Dr. Ann Wesley, the senior archaeologist who is directing the field school. When she reaches him he tells her at lines 10-11 that "I think I finally found *this* feature (0.8) Cause I: hit the *nail*."

- 1 Ray: Doctor Wesley?
2 (0.7) ((Ann turns and walks toward Ray))
3 Ann: EHHH HEHH ((Cough))
4 Yes Mister Jones.
5 Ray: I was gonna see:
6 Ann: YEh heh huh huh
7 Yeh heh | huh huh
8 Ray: | Uh::m
9 Ann: Ha huh HHHuh



10 Ray: I think I finally found *this* feature
11 (0.8) Cause I: hit the *nail*.

Figure 2: Simultaneous Action with Different Kinds of Materials

As a strip of talk what Ray says in lines 10-11 seems to be a straightforward report that something sought for in their current work, "*this* feature" has been found. However, that feature has a simultaneous existence in two different spatial fields: as a sharp, clear drawing on the map he is holding, and as a very faint, at times indistinguishable, line that marks a pattern of colour differences in the dirt being examined. Indeed the task Ray has been set is

specifically to link these two instantiations of the feature together, to find what in the dirt corresponds to the marks on his map. Moreover, it is by no means clear to him that he has successfully accomplished this task. Note the “I think” that begins line 10.

The term “feature” is preceded by the deictic term “*this*”, an element of his utterance that instructs his addressee to look beyond the talk itself to identify what is being referred to. Just as Ann reaches him, Ray uses his trowel to point at a specific drawing of a feature on the map he is holding. Immediately after this, while still holding his trowel on the relevant feature on his map, Ray turns his head to point with his eyes and face at the place in the dirt where he proposes that the feature has been found. He is now simultaneously using different parts of his body (his hand with the trowel and his gaze) to point at the two places where the feature is proposed to have its alternative manifestations in different semiotic fields (the map and the dirt being excavated).

When his visible body is taken into account, his action in lines 10-11 is revealed to be not simply a report that “*this* feature” has been found, but a way of *showing* his professor precisely where he thinks the feature is located in the dirt. The preface “I think” in line 10 marks his identification as tentative and uncertain. All of these phenomena together, and the fact that he has asked her to come to him, and waited until she is standing next to him before beginning his action, constitute his action as not simply a report, but a request that she check the work he has done and the identification he has made.

Just after Ray says “*this* feature” Ann gazes down toward where he is pointing on the map. Subsequently they walk together to a place in the dirt he has indicated and she instructs him how to look at it in order to evaluate the feature.

The events that occur here are constituted through the coordinated, simultaneous embodied actions of two separate participants within the production of a single strip of talk. With his trowel Ray shows Ann where to look on the map and she moves her body to accomplish this. The parties coordinate a relevant and changing focus of embodied attention so that the tasks at hand can be successfully accomplished. Moreover there is a precise shaping of what Schutz called a “community of space ... and time.” Ray has Ann move to where she can inspect the map he is holding and uses his body to indicate the precise place she should inspect.

All of this is consistent with Schutz’s focus on the simultaneous coordination of the streams of consciousness of one actor with another who “shares a community of time with me when his experience is flowing side by side with mine” (1967:163), with this sharing of consciousness being accomplished not through talk alone but through the visible arrangement of embodied action. Indeed Ann says nothing at all during lines 10-11.

There is, however, a different kind of simultaneous organisation that is central to the actions occurring here but not noted by Schutz. Ray builds his action by bringing together a constellation of quite different kinds of materials with diverse semiotic properties. The action at hand is built through the ways in which these different semiotic fields mutually elaborate each other. What is to count as “*this* feature” is made visible by the trowel pointing at the map. Within this environmentally coupled gesture (Goodwin 2007a) action is built, and meaning is specified, through the mutual elaboration of elements in the talk, the pointing hand, and the distinctive semiotic structure of the field being pointed at.

The map Ray is holding was constructed by those who inhabited and worked within this site during an earlier field season. By pointing at the map he is using the sedimented structure created by their earlier work as the point of departure for his current action. The local action that occurs here thus includes the contributions of not only those bringing their bodies into mutual alignment within a contemporary state of co-presence, but also a different kind of actor, those who have gone before us whom Schutz described as predecessors. The work they left behind as tools and structured semiotic fields such as maps is now lodged within the interstices of the emerging action being built by current participants. This dialogue across generations encompasses not only the particular cohort that worked here last season, but an amorphous chain of earlier, sometimes anonymous actors, who for example, developed the graph paper used to build maps, the distinctive practices archaeologists use to excavate (e.g., square holes) and record what they uncover, those who created the trowels, screens and containers that central to excavation, etc. What Ray and Ann are now doing together is the accumulative outcome of the history that produced both archaeology as a profession and the distinctive work practices through which archaeology is sustained and transformed through ongoing endogenous action.

Conclusion

What light does the use of “video” shed on the organisation of human action? I have used the work of Alfred Schutz, and the examination of two sequences of interaction, one with a man with aphasia and the other at an archaeological field school, to try to indicate the central importance of properties of action that have been the sustained focus of analysis by Christian Heath and his colleagues throughout his career. These include 1) the interactive organisation of talk-in-interaction, as so powerfully developed within the field of conversation analysis; 2) the ways in which participants build action by taking into account, and operating on the rich fields of meaning they see in the unfolding visible displays being made by each other’s bodies; and 3) the distinctive features of the historically sedimented settings that not only provide an infrastructure for the distinctive activities that define different professions, communities and cultures, but which become incorporated into the distinctive organisation of emerging local action itself.

Beginning with his studies of bodies’ various forms of presence to each other in medical encounters, through his rich studies of work in an extraordinary range of settings from the London Underground to remote collaboration through different forms of media, to surgery, to museums to fine art auctions, etc Christian Heath has provided extraordinary analysis of how people build action through their interactions with each other.

References

- Edwards, D., and Middleton, D. (1986). Joint Remembering: Constructing and Account of Shared Experience through Conversational Discourse. *Discourse Processes* 9:423-459.
- Edwards, D., and Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. London:Sage.

- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York:Free Press.
- Goodwin, C. (1981). *Conversational Organization: Interaction Between Speakers and Hearers*. New York:Academic Press.
- Goodwin, C. (1987). Forgetfulness as an Interactive Resource. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(2): 115-30.
- Goodwin, C. (2003a) Conversational Frameworks for the Accomplishment of Meaning in Aphasia. In: *Conversation and Brain Damage*. C. Goodwin, (Ed.). Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 90-116.
- Goodwin, C. (2003b) Pointing as Situated Practice. In: S. Kita (Ed.) *Pointing: Where Language, Culture, and Cognition Meet*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 217-41.
- Goodwin, C. (2004) A Competent Speaker Who Can't Speak: The Social Life of Aphasia. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 14(2): 151-70.
- Goodwin, C. (2007a) Environmentally Coupled Gestures. In: S. Duncan, J. Cassell, and E. Levy (Eds.) *Gesture and the Dynamic Dimension of Language*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 195-212.
- Goodwin, C. (2007b) Interactive Footing. In: E. Holt and R. Clift (Eds.) *Reporting Talk: Reported Speech in Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 16-46.
- Heath, C.C. (in press). *The Dynamics of Auction: Social Interaction and the Sale of Art and Antiques*. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.
- Heritage, J. (2012). The Epistemic Engine: Sequence Organization and Territories of Knowledge. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 45(1): 30-52.
- Hoffmeyer, J. (2008) The Semiotic Body. *Biosemiotics* 1: 169-90.
- Schutz, A. (1967) *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston Ill.:Northwestern University Press.