PART I

EXAMPLES OF THE CONDUCT OF TALK

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Whenever we talk with others we do it on-line, in real time. This is what makes the practice of talk different from many other kinds of communication, particularly the reading of written text. When we read silently we can skip chunks of text. If we choose to, we can read the end of the chapter first, or the index of the book, or the references list. We can flip back and forth through the illustrations. In other words, while as readers we do our work in real time, paying attention in particular moments just as talkers do, as readers we can engage a written text in non-linear ways. But the construction of oral texts in talk, as well as the ''readings'' of those texts, are fundamentally linear processes. Through our hearing, and also through seeing, chunks of information are presented to us one moment at a time in a succession of adjacent moments that are centered in a continually experienced, forward-moving ''now.'' The current ''now'' moment has an immediate antecedent in the moment just past and it has an immediate consequent in the moment that is about to come.

Given the limits on human information processing, what is there informationally in that triad – the now moment, the immediate past moment, and the immediate future moment – takes up most of our attention capacity. We can have a general sense of where the talk might be going next because of our experience in similar events in the past. (The more customary and familiar the event is in our experience, the more confident we can be in our expectations of a trajectory or story-line that will be confirmed as the event proceeds.) But in face-to-face interaction, unless we are engaged in a

highly formalized event such as a religious ritual, a song, a dance, or certain kinds of repetitive games we can never be absolutely sure where the interaction will turn or where the conversation might take us in the immediate next moment. We can get hints of this, and give them to others verbally and nonverbally, but the hints are sketchy and ambiguous. They point backwards in time to certain things as salient in the immediate past or point forward in time to something we might expect immediately next or a bit after that. Even though these hints are not explicit they provide important orienting information to individuals and to the group. Thus ''now'' and ''next'' – next moment back in time and next forward, in relation to the ''now'' – provide a set of fundamental building blocks for the construction of interaction.

Another set of construction resources lies in the information that is available about what others are doing at the same moment in time that we are doing what we are doing. To ''now'' and ''next'' we can add ''while'' as another fundamental term. We can see and hear what others are doing with us in interaction, from one ''now'' moment to the next. This may seem obvious as we think about doing the work of listening – of course we pay attention to what others are doing while we are listening. But the ''while'' relation is also important as we are doing the work of speaking. As we utter each word in a phrase we can see and hear the immediate reactions of others to what we are saying – or we can see evidence that they are continuing on a prior trajectory and are ignoring us. As a speaker we may continue along the trajectory we have established or we may undertake mid-course correction, reacting to the reactions of our listeners in the present moment and in the immediately past moment.

Especially when we are one of the focal speakers of the moment, as we react in our speaking to the reactions of our listeners they are also reacting to us. Thus speaking and listening are reflexively related in an ecology of mutual influence. In the ''now'' of the immediately present moment, all the parties engaged in interaction are adjusting their actions to one other in the light of what they perceive the others to be doing at that moment as well as in the light of what others were perceived to be doing in the moment just past.

The continuing process of mutual checking and mid-course correction is what makes interaction social, i.e. it enables the actions of various parties to fit together as reciprocal and complementary. People in interaction constitute environments for each other

(McDermott 1976b: 36) and the social ecology of mutual adaptation within the interactional environment is a process that not only takes place within the real-time conduct of the interaction but underlies or enables it. In the absence of mutual adaptation (i.e. in the absence of a social ecology) the participants in interaction would be continually interfering with one another's actions rather than complementing and reciprocating them. It is this articulation and mutual adaptation that constitutes the ''inter'' of interaction in conversation (rather than conversation being simply the sum total of separate actions by discrete individuals). The work of interaction gets done in and through a division of interactional labor. And it is through the real-time coordination of the various actions of participants that concerted communicative action as a division of labor becomes possible.

Mutual adaptation and mid-course correction are necessary for another reason beyond the basic need for articulation among the actions of participants in accomplishing the simplest kinds of interaction together. The capacity to adapt, and to do so collectively, is necessary because everyday life is conducted in circumstances of contingency. Interruptions happen unexpectedly, attention by one of the participants fails momentarily, as conversation is taking place in a work group a tool breaks at an awkward moment. Happenings such as these can be generally expected but their particular occurrence cannot be predicted. The interacting group must have ways of recovering from the momentary rough patches that occur because of immediately local contingency. As we will see later, one of the ways in which this happens is that speakers will self-correct, repairing what they have just said. But there are also nonverbal ways in which those engaged in interaction repair or redirect the ongoing course of their actions together.

One of the sources of surprise during the on-line conduct of interaction is the discovery of something new about one or more of the participants with whom we are interacting. This is especially the case when we are interacting with strangers but it can also happen in interaction among those who know one another well. All of us have lives that extend beyond the particular situation of the moment. We have had prior experiences in other scenes of everyday life and we may come to hold opinions on the basis of those experiences, aspects of our overall identity which others may not be aware of. We also have new experiences (and these are not precisely predictable) so that our opinion and identity may

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have changed somewhat since the last time we were engaged with a particular set of interactional partners. This is an aspect of the contingency that all of the parties engaged in interaction must face.

If, during the course of interaction, a new aspect of our life and identity is revealed, that moment of revelation can become a collective turning point; downstream from that moment the social ecology of our relationship with our interactional partners can change. They can feel more affiliated with us than before, particularly if they discover that our experience or opinion matches theirs in some way. Or they may feel more distanced from us after the new revelation about us. These changes in solidarity among participants in interaction are another of the circumstances that make it necessary for interactional participants to have a capacity for mid-course correction within the real-time conduct of interaction. From one moment to the next in interaction we cannot be sure that the person we were talking to the moment before will be quite the same person, in our eyes and in those of our interactional partners. In this sense, Heraclitus seems to have been right: everything is constantly changing and so we can't step in the same river twice.

The change within interaction as we are doing it is occurring as a flow in time, and two different aspects of time are relevant to our understanding of the combination of fluidity and stability that is inherent in the conduct of interaction. The Greeks had two words for time. One, *kronos*, refers to the quantitative aspect of time; to time as continuous and thus as measurable. That is the aspect of time with which we are most familiar – in our contemporary world we think of time as clock time and calendar time. History (at least according to the modernist world-view) unfolds in *kronos* time.

The other word for time, *kairos*, refers to time's discontinuous, qualitative aspect; to time as differing in kind from one moment to the next. In *kairos* time there are kinds of time that are apples and others that are oranges. There is a time when the rain will fall from a cloud, a time to attack the enemy in a battle, a time to negotiate a truce, a point in time that is qualitatively different from the time in *kronos* just before. (In modern Greek *kairos* is translated as ''opportunity.'') When the book of Ecclesiastes was translated into Greek from the Hebrew Bible, *kairos* was the word used for time in the passage that became the text of a popular song in the 1960s: ''A time to plant, a time to reap, a time to laugh, a time to cry . . .'' (adapted from Ecclesiastes 3: 1–8).

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Kairos is the time of tactical appropriateness, of shifting priorities and objects of attention from one qualitatively differing moment to the next. This is time as humanly experienced; ''in the fulness of time,'' the emergent ''not quite yet,'' the ''now'' that once arrived feels right. It is a brief strip of *right time*, marked at its beginning and end by turning points. It is not simply a particular duration in clock time. Yet every *kairos* strip of time has a location in *kronos* time.

Traffic Management in Interaction: Timing

Timing appears to be what holds the whole social ecology of interaction together in its performance. The relative temporal location of the various actions of interlocutors is an important aspect of the ordering of the collective activity of conversation in both its sequential (now and next) and its simultaneous (while) aspects. We can speak of timing as one aspect of a dialectical process in interaction that has been called *contextualization* by Gumperz (1982, 1992; see also Erickson 1992 and Duranti and Goodwin 1992), entailing a system of signals he calls contextualization cues. The notion of contextualization follows from that of Bateson (1956, 1972), who observed that because of an inherent ambiguity in systems of communicative signs, those engaged in interaction need to regulate it by signals that point to the relevant context of interpretation in which other signs are intended to be ''read.'' Thus sets of communicative displays contain, within the surface structure of their performance, certain behavioral features that function as cues that point to their proper interpretation. In other words, the enactment of communication creates reflexively its contextual framing at the same time as it is being framed by its context.

In the timing of immediate social interaction, such as in conversation face to face, an especially important contextualizing function appears to be performed by the temporal placement of points of emphasis in speech prosody (volume and pitch shifts) and in body motion (postural shifts, gaze, changes of direction of motion in gesture). The points of emphasis appear to function as contextualization cues that signal expectations at various levels. Not only do individual cues of verbal or nonverbal emphasis enable one to anticipate immediate next moments, but because they tend to cluster together in regular intervals of occurrence, the clusters of points

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of emphasis in speech and body motion often can be perceived as a cadence. This cadence is a rhythmic underpinning that enables the various participants in a conversational interchange to anticipate the projected courses of action of individual interlocutors, and of the conversational group as a whole.

The presence within communicative behavior of contextualization cues for the regulation of interactional timing enables interlocutors to ''read'' the ongoing course of the conversational roller coaster as they are riding along in it. This makes it possible for interlocutors to act on their anticipations by ''going for'' crucial functional places that are turning points in the sequential order that will occur as oncoming moments ahead in the interaction's ongoing course. (This is akin to the way in which a pianist ''goes for'' the next chord in a harmonic sequence, temporally in terms of the flow of the music as well as kinesically and spatially by reaching for the keys on the piano keyboard. See Sudnow 1978 for discussion, and this matter will also be treated at greater length in chapter 7.)

In terms of the organization of discourse in conversation, the cadence stress pulses tend usually to occur at points of mid-course correction, points of turn completion and of turn exchange, and points at which are introduced crucial information and/or a change in ''keying'' (e.g. a shift from playful irony to serious sincerity). In terms of nonverbal activity, cadence emphasis often occurs at points of exchange of objects (such as one person handing another a hammer) or of one person opening to a page in a book as another person is calling out the page number. Somewhat as traffic lights signal the timing of the flow of cars across intersections (the regular timing of the light change enabling drivers to take strategic account of what the next light on the road ahead is doing) so the contextual cues of what can be called *verbal and nonverbal prosody* seem to signal the timing of crucial functional moments in sequences of individual actions in a conversation in order so that they can be done in a jointly articulated fashion rather than haphazardly.

Thus as we are engaged in the moment-by-moment unfolding of an actual conversation it is not only necessary to have an abstract capacity to understand a speech sound or comprehend a grammatical string. It is also important to be able to hear *just this* strip of speech and/or see *just this* strip of gesture *in the right time*. Given the limits on human information processing and the huge number of verbally and nonverbally communicated information bits in the air at any one moment in a conversation, for an interlocutor to

receive intelligible information or to produce it requires the capacity to ''go for'' crucial moments in the discourse, attentionally and in uttering, and to disattend and not utter in other moments that are non-crucial. Otherwise we would be continually overwhelmed by data we could not even handle perceptually let alone process cognitively.

In human social interaction, *kairos* timing results from the mutual activity of the interactional partners. It is not absolutely regular chronometrically – there is an ebb and flow of speeding up and slowing down that in music is called *rubato*. Yet conversational partners share a mutually enacted timing that is remarkably predictable. At some moments it is almost chronometric but not quite. At other times, rhythmic stress in speech and in body motion (i.e. posture, gesture, and gaze) is virtually metronomic in its chronometric regularity. At this point the significance of *kairos* timing for the organization of interaction is only beginning to be realized (see the discussion in Erickson and Shultz 1982: 72–4; Scollon 1982; Erickson 1982a; Fiksdal 1990; Auer 1992; Couper-Kuhlen 1993; Erickson 1991; Erickson 1996; Auer, Couper-Kuhlen, and Müller 1999; Erickson 2003; and Sawyer 2001).

In sum, we can say that timing enables nothing less than the social organization of attention and action in conversation. Moreover, we can say that the timing of interactional performance is accomplished by multiple behavior cues, verbal and nonverbal. Hence when we say that cognition and action are ''situated'' and ''tactical'' we mean, among other things, that they are situated in real time and done tactically in real time – not in an ideal ''time out'' condition for reflection and deliberation but in an actual ongoing development of sequences of interaction moment by moment, within which real-time process of development one is never completely sure of where the interaction is going next and during which the time clock never stops.

A *kairos* turning point of particular interest in the study of interaction has been the ''transition relevance point'' (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). In the interacting group there is a division of labor between speakers and listeners. As noted earlier, while speakers are doing the work of speaking, listeners are doing the work of listening. Somehow the group must have ways to handle the problem of differential participation in speaking and listening during the course of interaction. Unless some people are to do all the speaking and others all the listening, there must be ways that

those who have been speaking stop doing so and are replaced as speakers by those who have been listening. This problem of organization has been studied (with primary focus on the activity of those who are speaking) as an issue of allocation of speaking turns among the participants in informal conversation. If turn-taking is not to proceed randomly, speakers must have ways of signaling that they are concluding what they have to say and listeners must have ways of signaling that they want to speak next. This signaling is done by speakers by means of pitch variation (often, but not necessarily) completing a grammatical/intonation unit, posture shift, and, gaze shift. Listeners do it primarily by posture and gaze shift, and, occasionally, by starting to speak before the previous speaker has entirely finished.

While a speaker is speaking there are also *kairos* moments in which the speaker signals that some kind of active listening response is appropriate in the next moment. (The response may be verbal and/or nonverbal.) Often these points of ''listening response relevance'' in the speech stream are those at which a turn exchange could also have been signaled, i.e. they are potential transition relevance points at which the current speaker continued to speak rather than handing over the turn to another speaker. (NB It is important to remember that when a ''turn'' at talk is being taken by one speaker, a ''turn'' at listening is being taken by at least one other interactional partner. Both speaking and listening are active processes, each involving mid-course correction at *kairos* turning points in the ongoing conduct of interaction.)

It is one of the wonders of the mundane that in the social organization of informal conversation turn exchange can be managed in orderly ways by conversational partners without anyone reflecting on this deliberately as they are engaged in talk. Conversationalists are able to do much of what they do in talking without thinking about it in the moment of doing. This capacity to conduct talk and listening intuitively is crucial for the accomplishment of local social interaction, since what we are doing in interaction is so complex. More information bits are present than we can perceive at any given moment. Moreover, as time is continually moving on, there are usually no convenient moments within our engagement in interaction in which we can step out of the action and reflect, especially to become consciously aware of *how* we are doing what we are doing. That we have a capacity to conduct oral discourse in the absence of ''discursive awareness'' is essential for our success in

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doing the work of talk. We can and must accomplish the *how* of interaction on automatic pilot.

Another way this has been said is by using the term *practical consciousness* (Giddens 1984). In everyday life we employ practical consciousness, within which we do not question the ends of our efforts nor do we pay much attention to the means we employ. Our use of practical consciousness prevents cognitive overload. We can stop what we are doing and reflect on its purposes and means. But we must step out of the action in order to do this; usually we do not try to reflect while we are engaged in social interaction. During the course of interaction we can have some awareness of what has just happened in the moment immediately past, but with all there is to pay attention to in the present moment – a moment that is constantly ticking on, shifting forward as we act – there are severe limits on how much we can be aware of the ''how'' of our work as we are in the midst of doing it.

Yet we do not accomplish our daily work in a machine-like way, whether it is interactional work we are doing or some other kind of work. We can take adaptive action and make mid-course corrections as we are working, using our practical consciousness to attend to what is going on in our immediate environment. We may repair what we just said. Having started to pick up a book we may put it back on the table because there does not appear to be an appropriate moment for opening it. But we can fix our talk and book handling without deliberately reflecting on the need for repair or on the repair moves.

Practical consciousness is most effective when our activities are fairly routine. Through habits of performance we learn how to focus our attention and efforts in certain ways rather than others. We can react without thinking about it so long as we do not encounter anything so novel that it can't be encompassed by our repertoire of habitual ways of monitoring and taking action.

Habitus (Bourdieu 1977) is another term that encompasses both the subliminal awareness of practical consciousness and the actions taken by the practical actor. Habitus has been defined by analogy as an intuitive *sense of the game* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 120–1). The experienced soccer player or violinist does not think reflectively about the means of play while engaged in it. Yet as new events occur successively during the course of play the player reacts effectively to the (moderately) novel circumstances at hand. Habitus is effective to the extent that it is situated in a ''field,'' that

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is, in a set of relationships with other players who share a similar habitus. If the state of play changes considerably – if new rules or opportunities make for a new ecology of reciprocal and complementary action by the various participants – then the ''field'' has changed and the seemingly automatic workings of the players' habitus are no longer effective for engagement in the collective activity of the game. If the player is to be able to stay in the new game, that player's habitus must change. *If the habitus is to remain stable, so must the field*. (I will revisit this issue in chapters 7 and 8.)

''Division of labor'' and ''work'' have appeared already in the discussion, and it is now time to treat the notion of work in somewhat more detail. By work I mean effort expended toward intended ends, whether those intentions are tactical and intuitive, directed toward the immediate next moment, or are strategic and deliberate, directed toward a more distal temporal horizon. A worker acts on some materials to transform them. In the process of working, contingencies are encountered in the materials – there are unanticipated characteristics that make for greater or less ease in accomplishing the work along the lines that were intended. These rough places or smoothnesses must be accommodated and, as they are encountered, the course of the work changes somewhat. Midcourse correction is thus inherent in the process of working. Thus the *working* changes somewhat within the course of its doing. And slowly over time the processes of working come to change the worker. This happens physiologically, as in the changes in musculature and bone growth that come with differing kinds of manual labor. It also happens with the mind and with the habits of the heart. As we engage in a particular kind of work we acquire specialized knowledge and a particular horizon, a characteristic world-view. Through our experience in work we come to acquire ideology.

Work is usually accomplished through the use of tools. Tools in their use present the worker with a range of affordances and contingencies. (''Affordance'' is an engineering term, referring to the capacity of structural features to provide distinct opportunities for action. For every particular limit provided in a specific feature of structure that limit also provides a particular opportunity.) The structure of each tool is designed to enable certain kinds of effects. The screwdriver can be used as a chisel to cut into a piece of wood, but a chisel will do the work of cutting better. A particular screw-

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driver works best at turning screw heads within a certain range of diameters. If the available screws are slightly too large or too small for the screwdriver, it cannot be used as efficiently as it could if the screws were the right size. Occasionally the tip of a screwdriver will break as it is being used. Such contingencies in the use of tools (screws aren't the right size, the screwdriver breaks) affect the course of working as it is being done. Again, the worker's capacity for mid-course correction is essential if unanticipated contingencies are not to prevent the completion of the work. And again, during the ongoing course of working a tool is transformed to some extent. A cutting edge is dulled and when resharpened it cuts differently from the way it did before. With many resharpenings the shape of the knife blade changes. The surface of the wooden handle of a hammer responds chemically over the years to the oil and sweat from the hand of its user in a way that makes it feel qualitatively different from that of a new hammer.

Work is always local in its production. It is done in a particular place, within a particular span of time. No worker works in general; it is with *this* shovel and *this* patch of soil, *this* screwdriver and *this* screw in *this* piece of wood, from *this* moment to the next that the work is being done (see Harper 1987 and Keller and Keller 1996). But although all production in its point of origin is necessarily local, geographically and temporally, not all of the processes of working make use of production resources that are local in origin. The tools of the worker, for example, were designed and made at a prior point in time to their employment by the worker in the present moment of accomplishing the task at hand. They are production resources that are non-local in provenance – in the case of simple hand tools their prototypes may have originated thousands of years before the present occasion of their use. The worker's previous experience with similar tasks is another production resource that originates in sets of times prior to the locality of the work's doing and in sets of places which may be far removed in space from that locale as well.

''Practice'' has become a key term in contemporary social theory and in the way we think about the conduct of discourse in talk. The term comes to us from one of the Greek words for work, *praxis*. Inherent in work is adaptation in real time; it is the processes of mid-course correction which distinguish practical action from design, tactics from strategy, construction from engineering and architecture.

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The local practice of oral discourse is a matter of local production, but not all the production resources are local in origin. As in the case of production resources in other kinds of work, some of the resources involved in producing talk in social interaction derive in their origins from locations in prior time and across distances in geographic and social space.

One of the most fundamental of these resources that originate far away yet are implemented locally is the knowledge and skill in how to interact with others that is gained through prior learning. When we engage with others in conversation we bring a whole lifetime of communicative and interactional experience to the current moment of conversation. This experience, and our resulting communicative capacity, has multiple aspects or dimensions. One aspect is our knowledge of language, and one aspect of that involves mastery of the sound system, grammar, and vocabulary of the particular language (or languages) being spoken in the encounter at hand. (This kind of mastery has been called *linguistic competence*; see Chomsky 1965.)

Language is a cultural tool for doing the work of speaking and of understanding what others are saying. We develop the capacity for using language in interaction prior to the moment of engagement in that interaction, and the language system that we use – the code patterns of relation between sound (or written marks on a page) and meaning – originated far away in space and time from the immediate situation of use in which we are engaged in the present moment. Languages differ in grammar (syntax) and vocabulary, such that various relations in time between actors and those acted upon are expressed differently, and certain domains of human experience are elaborated more than others in a given language. Thus the grammar and vocabulary of a language can be thought of as a kind of social institution, a tool whose use in the practice of daily life over many generations has led it to evolve so as to have certain formal properties rather than others. The activity of use has *sedimented* as a distinctive set of features of language form, or, to use another metaphor, the formal properties of a language are the result of repeated use which, as in a footpath that develops through the walking activity of many persons in succession, has taken a certain shape and direction. That shape and direction derives from the circumstances of use that speakers faced in doing the daily work of communicating together while doing whatever else they were doing – hunting, herding, weaving, courting, sailing,

designing computer software. In a sense, then, some aspects of language form can be thought of as a sedimented habitus. (There has been much speculation about the relations between these differing patterns of language and patterns of thought, and the conclusions to be drawn about this do not appear to be straightforward. For discussion see Lucy 1992.)

Language is a social institution and a sedimented habitus in yet another sense. The uses of language, in speech and in writing, are themselves patterned. Who says what to whom, for what purposes, in what ways, comes over time within a given community of use to take on the shape, texture, and grade of a footpath which has a particular destination. It goes this way rather than that way. The various destinations, as well as the features of the various pathways, differ across communities of use. This aspect of what we have learned through prior experience in the uses of discourse about the generally expected principles of use – the relations between choices among optional ways of saying things and the social meanings that are connoted by those choices – has been called *communicative competence* (Hymes 1974) or interactional competence.

Should we find ourselves being introduced to the Queen of England we know not to say ''How's it going, your Majesty?'' (addressing a person of much higher rank by using an informal conversational opener that is fitting for use with a person of equal status). And we have learned not to tell off-color jokes in a job interview (unless we know the job interviewer very well). We know not to say ''Well, let me think about it'' having been asked by a bailiff in a court of law if we will swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help us God. ''Well, let me think about it'' is perfectly appropriate in *linguistic form*. Its grammar and syntax are entirely intelligible to a native speaker of English (and indeed to non-native ones). But it is not appropriate in *social form* – in the situation of use of responding to the bailiff's question. The social meaning of an utterance is largely implicit, in contrast to the literal meaning of an utterance, which in the case of simple utterances in simple social situations is fairly obvious (John hit the ball. The ball hit John. Hit the ball, John). It should be noted, however, that implicit connotations attached to stylistic variants can affect the literal meaning of even the simplest of utterances (John! Hit the ball!). No utterance in speech or in writing communicates its meaning entirely through language form, independent from the

situational circumstances of its use. One consequence of this is that in all actual talk denotation is always accompanied by connotation.

Generally, the relations between choice of formal means in qualitatively differing ways of speaking and the consequences of such choices for social meaning and appropriateness are not as tight as those between some aspects of language form and literal meaning or intelligibility (i.e. grammar, or vocabulary). Yet there is a default system of shared expectations for alternative ways of speaking which, like footpaths, make it easy for speakers implicitly to signal differences in intention and in social relationship between themselves and their addressees. (Please, could you get up and close the window? / Close the window. / It's getting chilly in here.) Thus we can say things without doing so ''in so many words'' and those around us can understand our intent without our having to say it ''in so many words.''

A final aspect of language as a social institution is found in the moment-by-moment conduct of talk itself. First, in uttering a word or phrase we say what we are saying to some or all of the persons present in the scene. We are not just rendering in speech an underlying abstract set of words taken from an abstract word list and grammar (as if we had written it out in advance and were now reading it aloud), we are *saying something to someone* and doing so with particular purposes in a particular moment and in particular relationships with those we are talking to then, e.g. ''to hear is to obey, O Queen'' addressed to my wife. The most fundamental of these resources is that of language itself, with its resonances of power relations and ideology.

An Overview of Some Issues in Social Theory

At this point it is necessary to leave the discussion of how local social interaction happens and consider basic issues in how we think society happens to be there in the first place, as an antecedent condition for local social action. In order to do this we will need to increase the grain size of the objects of discussion; shifting, as it were, from a social microscope to a social telescope.

Economy, history, and the distribution of power within society provide what we do in face-to-face interaction with sets of constraints and enablements which we encounter as structures of local affordance. Usually we think of the constraints first. There are

constraints on choice within a situation and there are also con-
straints on recruitment as a participant in the situation of potential
choice. Some constraints on choice are absolute and others are
relative, a matter of cost/benefit ratios we encounter. Marx is
credited with saying ''The rich man and the poor man can both
sleep under the bridges of Paris, but the poor man must.'' There are
analogous constraints on discourse practices. I can't say to anyone
and mean it literally ''I'll pay you six million dollars for that''
because my financial position is such that I don't have access to
that sum of money, either through ownership or through
borrowing. Events prior in time to my present encounter with
another person have resulted in my not having the six million
dollars. But this is not simply a matter of constraint, in the sense
of limitation. All constraints, because they define boundaries, also
provide enablements. My financial means afford me a choice set for
offers to purchase things that ranges from zero to some thousands
of dollars, but not from zero to millions of dollars. There are other
persons I may encounter whose choice set for offers to purchase
goods or services ranges from zero to one thousand dollars, or to
five hundred dollars or less. For each of us the choice sets regarding
purchasing vary as a result of events which have taken place prior
to the moment of our making an offer to purchase.

If I am in a courtroom I cannot rise as the judge is about to
pronounce sentence on a condemned criminal and say with any
effect ''Let me take this person's place – execute the sentence upon
me rather than upon her.'' I cannot vote on a central university
tenure committee – or speak there – unless I am a member. I may
resent the vote total from that committee. I may protest it. But
interaction within that committee, and voting in it, is closed to
me. Conversely, because I am unable to interact within that com-
mittee I can interact in other places, and perhaps speak more freely
on some issues than I might be able to do as a member of the
committee. Thus each particular constraint also entails particular
enablement. Each situation of social interaction provides its partici-
pants with particular sets of affordances (and some of the affor-
dances can change from moment to moment during the course of
the interactional event).

In my daily and weekly rounds I don't usually show up in places
inhabited by people with millions of dollars to spend. (Although
I have met a few people who could spend millions to buy things,
they and I are not well acquainted, and most of the scenes of life

I visit – small-scale scenes where I am well acquainted with the others there – are not inhabited by the wealthy, rather they are populated by people of roughly my own class position.) On a few occasions I have been invited to lunch at elite businessmen's clubs but I am not a member of any of them. I do not attend auctions at Sotheby's nor, when I am buying a house, do I arrange to be taken to view mansions that are for sale. It is physically and legally possible for me to do such things, but I avoid them. Going to those places would be more trouble than it is worth – there is nothing in it for me positively – no obvious benefits – and there is the potential cost of embarrassment in going where I am not familiar. Conversely, I also do not go to crack houses or to pit bull dog fights, nor have I for many years attended night clubs where most of the patrons are under thirty. Unless I am traveling abroad I do not usually find myself in settings where the main language spoken is other than English. I do not frequent women's rest rooms or beauty parlors. As a consequence I am inexperienced in the communicative practices that distinctively take place in those scenes of life outside my own class, racial/ethnic, mother tongue, and gender milieu.

None of this is due to chance. I was born into class, racial, ethnic, and gender positions which set me upon some initial footpaths rather than others, providing certain enablements and certain constraints. The first steps I took along those paths made it likely – not certain, but more likely than not – that later in life I would enter upon certain subsequent footpaths rather than others. During my life span the positions in society I have occupied in the past and present were shaped by societal processes that are broad in scope, involving events and relations that connect across wide reaches of space and time – a political economy, a history, a nation-state. Those processes antedate my own existence and they have shaped not only the contours of prior experience that I bring to a given setting of interaction, but also the artifacts and the built environment of that setting as well as the interactional experience and expectations of all the other persons I might meet in the setting. In other words, we come to any setting of social interaction out of a social world that is prefabricated across successive spans of time and through multiple strands of influence which are even more multidimensional than the concatenations described in the nursery rhyme ''This is the house that Jack built.'' We as interactants have been constructed by the world that exists prior to our engagement

in interaction. So too has the physical and social setting in which we interact been constructed already – both we as interactants and our interactional surround have been built before we arrive on the scene of engagement. All of this prior structuring is upstream of us and the resulting currents in the stream not only provide an external environment within which we must swim but they flow within us as we do our swimming, coursing through our veins and muscles and brains.

Temporally downstream from the immediate moments of our interaction there are also consequences that flow, joining the continuing main currents and to some extent shaping them. In classic social theory there was a tendency to treat the large-scale ''structures'' of society and culture as if they operated in ecologies that were separate from the level of social organization found in face-to-face interaction. This view is partly justifiable, since macro phenomena do to some extent take on a life of their own. Until computers began to assume some of the functions of human brokers, stock market trading used to be conducted as a series of face-to-face transactions. The sum of the effects of the separate transactions made by many particular sets of persons in face-to-face encounters at particular moments in time on a trading floor became an aggregate *market phenomenon* which was then engaged by other persons in places and times entirely removed from the trading floor on which that phenomenon originated.

Market processes more generally operate anonymously, resulting in patterns of capital flow that individuals can conceive of and monitor but which are entities that are no longer locatable directly in immediate social interaction between acquainted individuals. Patterns of ownership of the means of production, and patterns of ideology – which result in the interested stances of the social positionings of local social actors – operate in the aggregate.

Social institutions – e.g. law, education, medicine, family – and the particular formal and informal organizations that instantiate such institutions – e.g. a given courtroom, school, hospital, household – mediate between the levels of general social organization and social process – economy and society – and the level of the immediate interactional encounter. The standard operating procedures of organizations, another aspect of the prestructuring of current work situations by upstream social processes, both constrain and enable local social actors engaged in interaction face to face to take certain courses of action rather than others, actions

directed both outside the group in relation to the larger organiza-
tional surround, and within the group, interacting in certain ways
with one another rather than in other ways. Thus I am not able to
take the place of a defendant in a courtroom, nor to speak there
unless called as a witness. But if I am a lawyer I may be authorized
to speak to the judge and jury on behalf of either the state or the
defendant. What I say as a lawyer is constrained by certain rules
of procedure and those same rules of procedure provide me with a
resource for making tactical moves in defending or attacking the
defendant. The point is that when I walk into the courtroom
the turn-taking order and other arrangements for the social organ-
ization of talk, which differ considerably from those in ordinary
conversation, are already there in the room waiting for me. I do not
invent them on the spot.

There is much to be said for the notion that we don't build anew
each day, from the ground up, the little social worlds in which we
encounter other people in local interaction. Yet there is a danger in
this line of reasoning. Taken too far, it portrays a social world in
which everything fits together neatly and operates automatically.
Political economy and ideology, our material, objective circum-
stances of action and our symbolic subjective worlds of meaning
and value judgment, can be seen in social theory as working en-
tirely globally (as if competing social classes and their attendant
world-views were battling dirigibles, risen from the level of the
ground on which people live their everyday lives). Their only
connection to local social actors is that they provide those engaged
in everyday life with a series of top-down pressures, from the top of
the social order down to the bottom. In such an overdetermined
social world, standard operating procedures (or general cultural
and linguistic norms) are the only procedures possible. There is no
room for deviation, no wiggle room. There is also no room for
change across time, no room for history.

It is patently obvious that the social world is not like that, for
some change does happen, even as other things stay more or less
the same. Neither the extreme of social determinism nor that
of voluntarism fits what we know about how macro and micro
social processes actually work. Being realistic about the constraints
social actors face while also recognizing how those constraints
are not totally determinative is a tricky business. We come to
understand that every limiting circumstance contains certain affor-
dances. The tensions involved in seeing the glass half full *and* half

empty – seeing social structure as constraint and enablement and social process as both conventional and innovative – are by no means well addressed either in many studies of the local conduct of discourse practice or in much of the literature of general social theory. It is difficult to deal with these tensions affirmatively, without collapsing them or reducing them one to another. I will return to these issues explicitly in the final three chapters. They will also appear implicitly, as instanced in various ways in the four chapters of examples which follow directly upon this one.