

The Multimodal Organization of Human Action
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Human action is built through the co-articulation of different kinds of signs in different media which mutually elaborate each other, and in so doing become environments for each other. Talk itself contains multiple sign systems with alternative properties. Strips of talk gain their power as social action via their placement within larger sequential structures, encompassing activities, and participation frameworks constituted through displays of mutual orientation made by the actors' bodies. The body is used in a quite different way to perform gesture, again a class of phenomena that encompasses structurally different types of sign systems. Both talk and gesture can index, construe or treat as irrelevant, entities in the participants' surround. Moreover, material structure in the surround, such as graphic fields of various types, can provide semiotic structure without which the constitution of particular kinds of action being invoked through talk would be impossible. The construction of action through talk within situated interaction is thus accomplished through the temporally unfolding juxtaposition of quite different kinds of semiotic resources. Data is drawn from videotapes of human interaction recorded in range of natural settings including conversations, archaeological excavations, and interaction in the home of a man with severe aphasia.