

1 Moving

Beginning with Mr. Chmeis' first interactions in the morning, this chapter describes how he walks and stands, alone and with others, and how small modulations of his bearing and gait give off information about his purpose and destination and whether others can approach him. We see how Mr. Chmeis, through his posture and spatial positioning, discriminates between kinds of interaction partners and foreshadows the type of interaction in which he is willing to engage. These observations are set against the background of historical debates about the 'physiognomy' and morality of walking. A section of this chapter shows in close detail how Hussein and a customer negotiate conflicting definitions of a sales interaction and their social relationship by their feet: their 'dance' exhibits with great clarity the precise coordination of body motion in interaction that humans, like other animals, are capable of, but also how this ability is put to distinctly human social-organizational uses. Movement coordination, in turn, requires the ability to anticipate one another's movements; it is discussed in light of contemporary sociological research on dance and the neuroscience of movement perception.

1.1 The day begins

Mr. Chmeis' workday is a walk-day. Already during the first few minutes we notice that walking, for him, includes more than the technicality of getting from one place to another: its purpose is made apparent or it is accompanied by other activity or it is, in careful coordination, shared with others. Like others, Hussein uses his manner of walking 'to provide the person [he] is approaching with information about ... the focused interaction he intends and ... the theme it will be about' (Schmitt 2012: 8). We cannot, therefore, understand how Hussein inhabits his world without some appreciation of his

locomotion, because he spends by far the better part of the day on his feet, walking, standing, squatting, and proceeding from one place of work to another. Because he moves about so frequently, Hussein's mind is also in motion most of the time, perceiving and scrutinizing a changing world from changing vantage points, always updating his mental image of the shop as he gathers information along his path. We all perceive the world, not from a fixed vantage point, but along a 'path of observation' (Gibson 1986: 197), a 'continuous itinerary of movement' (Ingold 2004: 331), but this is particularly visible in Hussein.

But before Hussein even begins to start the first of his numerous excursions, standing outside the front office, he already directs the movements of others. He does this by means of pointing gestures, and pointing will be a main device by which he coordinates movement, action, and coordination throughout the day. Thus, before we follow Hussein on his first walks around the shop, we will observe him standing and pointing.

After putting on his work coat, Hussein steps out of the front office and notices Hakim. They briefly talk to each other at a distance. Omar arrives with the shop's dog on a leash. He reports that the boxer had freed himself. Raising his arm to a pointing gesture, Hussein tells him to tie the dog up around the corner of the garage. Without lowering his arm, he then points out where Hakim should move the cars parked in front of the shop (Fig.1.1.1¹). Then he steps forward and moves his pointing arm back and forth, insinuating a line on the ground, indicating how one car, a Celica, should be moved from its present to a future location (line 4, Fig.1.1.2). He then points to the taxicab parked to his left (Fig.1.1.3), and makes another pendulum movement that suggests another line on the ground, this time indicating the area where the cab should be parked (Fig.1.1.4). While Hakim takes off toward the Celica, Hussein performs a second, smaller version of the pointing gesture. With a final pointing gesture he indicates again where that car should go (Fig.1.1.5), in order to make room for the cars that are for sale (line 8). As he does with all other Lebanese employees and customers, Hussein speaks Arabic with Hakim and Omar.

¹ Figure numbers refer to the chapter, the example in the chapter, and the image in the image sequence associated with the example. Thus, 'Fig.1.12.3' refers to the third image associated with example 1.12. Not all examples are accompanied by images, and there may therefore be a gap in the numbering of the figures. Dots ('•') in transcripts identify the exact moments that figures show.

1.1 *The day begins*

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Figs. 1.1.1–5 The day begins with pointing gestures

(1.1)

- 1 Omar Dayya' l-hableh.
He lost the rope.
- 2 Bi-sharafah fatah l-beb w-ma kemsho!
I swear he opened the door and was not holding it!
- 3 H Eh, biddak tshila halla' hay w-thitta some•where hek 'a janab.
Yes, you need to remove this now and secure it somewhere on the side.
- 4 Hm Wallah biddak thotta hon?
Or do you want to put it here?

- 5 H W hay deh l-Celica jehzeh, bi-twa'if awwal sayyara h•on, ha-Celica.
 And this Celica is ready, you park it first right here, the Celica.
- 6 W haydeh l-Capr•i jehzeh, bi-twa'if waraha hon.
 And this Capri is ready so you'll park it behind it over there.
- 7 (H) Wih deh, tn•en.
 One and two.
- 8 H W hay bitsheela 'a jan•ab w-minbalish nwa'if sayyarat lal-be'.
 And this one will be put aside and we'll begin to put up cars for sale.

Hakim for his part points to another car, a Honda, and Hussein, walking over, raises his left arm to form a large and sustained gesture. He points to the car, not with an index finger but a flat hand, the palm turned up (Fig.1.1.6). Besides identifying the referent of his talk, the shape and orientation of the hand also show a communicative action, namely that Hussein is asking a question (Kendon 2004, ch. 13): What is the matter with that thing? Hakim answers (his answer is inaudible for us) and points to the Honda as well, and the two men meet in an L-formation by the car, each orienting himself halfway to the other and halfway to the car (Fig.1.1.7).

- 9 H W hay l-Honda, shu beha? Mniha sallahne•ha.
 This Honda, what's wrong with it? we fixed it.
- 10 () ()
- 11 H Wen el-mifteh?
 Where is the key?
- 12 Hk Eh ma ba'rif, • rajja'u.
 Ah, I don't know, they've returned it.
- 13 H Eh.
 Yes.



Figs. 1.1.6–7 'This Honda, what's wrong with it?'

1.1 *The day begins*

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Pointing gestures coordinate the men's motions: they specify objects of shared concern and indicate paths toward them.

Hussein now walks away, coffee in hand. He tries to open a car door, finds it locked, and casually walks back to the shop. On the way there he calls on Art, who is in charge of the tow truck:

(1.2)

- 1 H Art?
- 2 Let's park (- - -) the truck inside right now?
- 3 Temporary.
- 4 I'll see what we wanna do later.

Note how he mitigates his directive by including himself as a partner in the action: '*Let's* park the truck.'

A few minutes later, after a few transitory interactions, Hussein goes inside the shop, gets inside a car, and starts it. He gets out, closes the door, walks around the front, and turns his gaze to a pile of tires on the floor. He points to them with his left hand. He makes this gesture when he begins to talk before it is even clear to whom he is talking and who should therefore see his gesture. Cedric turns around (Fig.1.3.1, in the background) and walks over. Somehow he knows that he is the intended recipient of Hussein's directive. As Cedric turns his gaze to the tires, Hussein again points to them (Fig.1.3.2). For a moment, Hussein and Cedric look at the tires on the floor together.

(1.3)

- 1 H Let's t•ake all the used t•ires across the street
- 2 those

Although the workday is only a few minutes old, Hussein has already initiated several encounters with pointing gestures. Each time the gesture



Figs. 1.3.1–2 Pointing to a group of tires



Figs. 1.4.1–2 Meeting the first customer of the day

is made at the beginning of the interaction or even before any word is spoken. Hussein's gaze during these moments is focused on objects of concern, rarely and only briefly on the other participant. This changes when the first customer arrives. Hussein's bearing changes, as does his gait (Fig. 1.4.1). We see him, coffee still in hand, walking toward the customer who is waiting for him outside, and his posture is now erect, his shoulders are broadened, and he is taking long strides, but unhurriedly.

(1.4)

- 1 H Go•od morning, Sir
- 2 C ()
- 3 H Fine, how are you.

The customer walks to his car. Just before Hussein catches up with him, he turns around and leads Hussein to his car, where they enter an 'L-formation' (Schefflen 1972): positioned at a 90° angle at the car's front end, they look at the engine (Fig. 1.4.2). It is the same formation Hussein had previously established with Hakim and Cedric, but the process in which it is formed is different. Hussein and his customer, before they focus their attention on the object at hand, for a moment maintain a face-to-face orientation. In contrast, when he interacts with employees, making pointing gestures, Hussein proposes a focus of joint attention 'out there', often even before he starts talking to them. There is rarely an initial 'phatic' communication phase (Malinowski 1922). A summons, a pointing gesture, and a visible movement by the addressee suffice to initiate an encounter. The change in Hussein's bearing when the first customer arrives is reminiscent of the changes in the comportment of wait staff transiting from the kitchen to the restaurant that Erving Goffman (1959) described: it marks a change from *backstage* to *frontstage* behavior. For the benefit of the

customer, by modulating bearing, gait, and voice, Hussein assembles a *front* (see Chapter 7).

1.2 Practices

These initial observations suggest that Hussein applies routine methods for approaching employees and initiating interaction with them, and a different set of methods for approaching customers and initiating interaction with them. These methods comprise both bodily actions and ways of speaking. We call these methods *practices* (Streeck 2013a). Practices are *methods for doing things*, for performing social actions. A practice, for example, is the way in which Hussein coordinates a pointing gesture, gaze, and some verbal device when he initiates an ‘object-focused’ encounter with a technician. A different practice (or coordinated set of practices) is the combination of bearing, gait, gaze, and voice projection as he recognizes and greets a customer. Another practice is the upward rotation of the flat hand while aiming it at an object, which displays a questioning stance toward an object. Practices, finally, are the uttering of a first name, spoken with loudness and question intonation, to summon someone, as well as the mitigating ‘*let’s* directive’, which attributes an action that is being requested of another person to an ‘us’, rather than a ‘you’.

We can note a number of features of practices.

1. Practices are embodied. They are enacted through movements of the body (including those required for speech).
2. Embodied practices include practices for the performance of instrumental, including solitary, actions and practices for social, communicative acts. As methods of bodily action, the two modes are not necessarily distinct: the same motor-schema can be involved in performing an instrumental act (opening a soft drink can) and in giving a gestural version of it, a demonstration. Moreover, instrumental acts can be transparent, ‘speak for themselves’, be communicative in the way they are practical. It is implausible to consider the two realms, the practical and the communicative, as separate spheres (Leroi-Gourhan 1993). Yet, because our concern in this book is Hussein’s methods of making sense with others, his practical actions (e.g., repairing cars) will concern us only insofar as they are reflected, in, or organized by, communicative action.
3. Practices may be modal or multimodal, comprising the acts of only one or a combination of body parts, often involving structured

- relations between movements distributed across body parts and modalities (e.g., eyes/gaze, hands/gesture, voice/speech).
4. Practices are skilled, methodical. They are practiced ways of doing things, requiring bodily training, usually of the tacit, ‘implicit’ kind.
 5. Practices are iterable; they can be applied to new circumstances. Usually, we will count an act as an enactment of a practice only if it is performed more than once.
 6. Practices are adaptive; they mesh with situated particulars and common ground to produce local meanings and locally operative acts. (Moving the index finger like a pendulum to project a tract or path and to thereby evoke in the knowing listener an image of a track is an example of a locally adaptive imagery-making practice.)
 7. The term ‘practice’ is scalable (Hirschauer 2013); we can apply it to the turning up and opening of a hand in a gesture of questioning, but also to the larger method of projecting a questioning stance toward an object of concern, which may not only consist of a gesture, but also include the movement of gaze and speech.
 8. Practices are nested: displaying a questioning stance may be part of Hussein’s coordinated practices for ‘checking up’ on the work of apprentices.
 9. Practices are socially implicative: their enactment has consequences for both the agent and others. A pointing gesture can be an order to do something; the formula ‘I will see later’ commits the speaker to take some action in the future.

While the various versions of praxeology that are currently practiced define practices at different levels or ‘scales’, attributing to them different ‘sizes’, our investigation, micro-ethnographic as it is, will primarily focus on those that are usually enacted in seconds or fractions of seconds. However, at various points throughout this book, but especially in Chapter 7, ‘lower-level’ practices are implicated in ‘higher-level’ activities such as maintaining ‘positive’ customer relations. And the way in which Hussein incessantly directs the actions of his employees by pointing gestures (exemplified by the title picture) can serve as a metonymy for his specific agency and position in his world.

1.3 The physiognomy and sociology of walking

Close observation of Hussein’s manner of moving, of his gait and bearing and of the way he moves his arms when he walks, clues us in to some of the

1.3 *The physiognomy and sociology of walking*

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many ways in which body motion can be meaningful beyond the immediate, instrumental tasks that it addresses and solves. That walking is more than a means of transporting, that its manner can reveal social information about the person walking, was recognized and led to extensive moral and scientific debates at different times during the unfolding of social thinking in the West, of which the Roman republic and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may be among the most interesting periods. The citizens and writers in the Roman republic considered movements of the body indications of the *motus*, the motions of the soul. Paraphrasing Cicero, Corbeill, in his book on body movement in ancient Rome (Corbeill 2004), notes that ‘the properly discerning eye can recognize deviance in a human being’s movement in the same way that it can judge an art object . . . [so that] the reading of morality becomes an aesthetic practice, and one that can be learned’ (Corbeill 2004: 109). At a time when politicians from the rural provinces, or those who borrowed their style (so-called *populares*), began to compete with the indigenous Roman elite (*optimates*), the stride of members of one party was contrastingly judged by members of the other as rustic or effeminate, respectively. Moral assessments of someone’s movement style were justified by the conceit of naturalization: human beings, Cicero argued, ‘are disposed by nature to disapprove morally of ways of sitting and standing that displease the eyes and ears’ (Cicero 1942: 114). A politician would promote his own habitus as both natural and truthful, as a style that reveals the motions of the soul directly and efficiently and contrasts with shameful attempts by a member of the opposing party to feign qualities that he did not really possess or to suppress ones that he has, by appropriating someone else’s gait. Motor habits thus became entangled in discourses around authenticity and style, elitism and populism, country and city. At the same time, ideas about movement and related systems of signification such as fashion served strangers as codes to make sense of one other’s unfamiliar background and identities.

It is no coincidence that another, much more recent period during which people’s gait was subjected to moral and sociological scrutiny was also an era of social and geographical mobility: the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during a time when the European capitals, notably London and Paris, grew on a massive scale and thus created the need to interact with—and assess—strangers from unknown cultural backgrounds by the visible characteristics of their conduct, including those shown when they walk across cities (Sennett 1977). Regulating one’s body motions

according to a perceived moral code became a concern of the rising bourgeoisie, and the famous writer of bourgeois life, Honoré de Balzac, endeavored to write a *théorie de la démarche*, a theory of physio-psychical ambulation: ‘Gait is the physiognomy of the body. . . . Everything in us corresponds to an inner cause’ (Balzac [1833] 1968: 225, transl. J. S.).

Balzac’s theory turns on the multiple senses of the word *démarche*, which signifies not only gait and ambulation, but also a ‘procedure’ or ‘manner of proceeding’, including the proceeding of thought. (In German, the analogy is expressed by the word *Gedankengang*, ‘thought walk’, ‘train of thought’.) That walking is thinking in motion is a notion that lately has again gained currency, for example, among neuroscientists (Llinàs 2001), philosophers (Sheets-Johnstone 2010, 2012), and anthropologists (Ingold & Vergunst 2008), and we will return to their reasons for promoting this idea later. This is how Balzac envisions practicing his *théorie de la démarche* as an observational science:

I went to sit down on a chair on Boulevard de Gand, in order to study the gait of all Parisians who, to their own misfortune, would pass by me during the day. And that day, I collected the most profoundly curious observations I have ever made in my life. I returned home loaded like a botanist botanizing who has collected so many plants that he is forced to give them to the first cow that comes his way. Only, the theory of the *démarche* seemed impossible to me to publish without seventeen engraved plates and without ten or twelve volumes of text and notes, enough to scare the defunct Abbey Barthéléme or my erudite friend Parisot. Finding out what is the sin of vicious forms of walking? Finding the laws to whose observation the beautiful manners of walking were due? Finding the means by which one can make one’s gait lie, just like the courtiers, the ambitious, vindictive people, comedians, courtesans, legitimate spouses, spies make their features, their eyes and their voice lie? Investigating whether the ancient ones walked well, which people walks the best among all peoples? Brrr! The questions proliferated like crickets! (Balzac [1883] 1968: 225; transl. J. S.)

Balzac’s project was, as his diction indicates, a critical, if not a satirical, one. He meant to show that it is impossible to give a scientific basis to moral norms of social comportment, that claims as to the superiority or greater ‘naturalness’ of one’s gait, to seek to support class-based moral and esthetic judgments with scientific experimentation and methodical observation, were pure ideology. The circularity of the attempt was obscured by the *démarches* of the proponents’ own minds, their bias toward their own idiosyncratic mental and corporeal habits.