

Self-Making Man

This book describes one day in the communicative life of the owner of an auto repair shop in Texas: how he walks, looks, points, shows, and explains engines; makes sense by gesture; speaks, manages, makes his life-world, and in the process reproduces social structures and himself as an individual. *Self-Making Man* is the first comprehensive study of a communicating person; it reveals socially shared and personal practices, as well as improvisational actions by which a person inhabits and makes sense of the world with others. After decades of discussion on embodiment, this study is the first to investigate one body in its full range of communicative activities. Grounded in phenomenology and committed to the methodological rigor of context analysis and conversation analysis, *Self-Making Man* departs radically from contemporary research practice: it shows that, to take embodiment in human interaction seriously, we must conceive of it as individuation and organic, self-sustaining life: as autopoiesis.

Jürgen Streeck, a professor of communication studies and anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, is known for his groundbreaking work on gesture, embodied interaction, and the bodily foundations of meaning. Among his publications are *Gesturecraft: The Manufacture of Meaning* (2009), *Embodied Interaction: Language and Body in the Material World* (edited with C. Goodwin and C. D. LeBaron 2011), and *Intercorporeality: Emerging Socialities in Interaction* (edited with C. Meyer and J. S. Jordan 2017). His articles have appeared in *Gesture*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, and *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. He has been a fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) at Bielefeld University, Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), and Carl von Ossietzky-University Oldenburg.

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Self-Making Man

A Day of Action, Life, and Language

JÜRGEN STREECK

The University of Texas at Austin



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For Ali, Ansar, Nada, and Mona Cbmeis

If individuals are to reproduce society, they must reproduce themselves as individuals. No society can exist without individual reproduction, and no individual can exist without self-reproduction.

Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life*

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

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Videos and transcripts of the main episodes can be found at
[www.jurgenstreeck.net/self-making man/](http://www.jurgenstreeck.net/self-making-man/)

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and Eiko Yasui: a self-sustaining research community with changing membership.

My children, Autri and Johannes, and grandchildren, Marley and Sunmi, give me more love and things to worry about than I could ask for.

Austin, Texas, November 2015, Thanksgiving Day

About this book and the man it is about

Meeting Mr. Chmeis

When the old Cadillac broke down that I had bought when I first arrived in America, my neighbor recommended the shop on the main avenue nearby. ‘They’re Iraqis’, she said, ‘but they’re good people’. This was during the time when America geared up for Operation Desert Storm. When the war began, Hussein Chmeis, the owner of Hi-Tech Automotive, cut off his moustache and changed the nametag on his coat from his first to his family name.¹ Being from Lebanon rather than, as my neighbor said, Iraq, did not make a difference.

Satisfied with Mr. Chmeis’ work, I became a regular customer, but I slowly also began to see in Hi-Tech Automotive a research site. It was a place to pursue two interests. First, it was (and continues to be) a site of complex and successful intercultural communication. Most research on intercultural communication seeks to explain what makes it difficult and to offer prescriptions for making it better, but I was more interested in how it routinely succeeds, which evidently it did at this shop. At Hi-Tech, the means of communication were multiple, but unevenly distributed. Only a few men spoke English—the lingua franca of the shop—as a native language; with the exception of Kenneth, Hussein’s office helper, they spoke nonstandard varieties, and I often found them difficult to understand. Second, I had begun in my research on gesture to observe that what form a gesture takes and what ‘job’ it does often depend on the material setting, the things at hand, and that sometimes simply handling a thing in

¹ Hussein later told me that on the day the U.S. bombing campaign began, he had his day in court for a civil jury trial about an unpaid bill and his refusal to release the customer’s car without payment. His lawyer was unwilling to stop the opponent’s attorney from praising the heroic effort against the ruthless dictator. Hussein lost the case.

an unusual or even the usual fashion can be a communicative act. Gestures are often ‘environmentally coupled’ (Goodwin 2007; LeBaron & Streeck 2000; Streeck 1996, 2009: Ch.4). This observation gradually opened up a new view on the communicating body as ‘always already’ immersed in the material world, as its *inhabitant*, not a viewer (Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron 2011). An auto shop is a setting for *hands-on* practical and communicative action. It is cognitively complex, full of artifacts and technologies, a place of socially shared cognition (Hutchins 1995; Resnick, Levine, & Teasley 1991), practical work, talk, banter, and silent physical interaction. Interaction is centered around objects that are initially ‘opaque’, like a human patient with abdominal pain: what is the case needs to be found out, not just by looking or asking others, but by exploratory activities of the hands. While this did not initially concern me, the fact that the owner of an auto shop is also an institutional actor became relevant once I turned to his talk: Hussein’s words—and sometimes his gestures—can create obligations for others and himself, beyond those that come with any conversation: he is the principal of an organization. Videotaping interactions at Hi-Tech, I concluded, would enable me to focus on a range of fundamental issues of human communication within a single corpus of data, and so I began to explain my work and my interest to Hussein and seeded the idea of videotaping him.

A workday

After a few tentative recordings,² I finally told Hussein that I would like to film him for an entire day, and he agreed. For one Friday in March 1995, I shadowed Hussein with my Hi8 video camera.³ I spent the next days logging what I had filmed, activity by activity (for example, ‘unpacks brake pads’, ‘orders injector’, ‘inspection’, ‘greet customer’), which yielded around 1,000 entries (see Appendix 1). There are, of course, many alternative ways to slice up the activities of a day in a human life; I simply made a new entry when I felt something new had begun. My interest was in part in changes in activity, in the very diversity and rapid shifting of communicative tasks with which one person has to cope in the course of one day. The number, 1,000, may give a sense of the frequency of such changes in Hussein’s life.

² By Elliott Makin and myself.

³ Follow the links on the author’s website, jurgienstreeck.net, to view select video recordings of interactions at Hi-Tech Automotive.

About this book and the man it is about

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This is how Hussein himself describes his workdays:

I feel sometime I'm crazy:
 all day like this,
 all day like this (gestures).
 How I answer the phone,
 sometime I am handling two three line quick altogether
 and in meantime I'm checking invoices
 and I'm going sometime this way
 the technician here
 they expect me outside
 suddenly they see me in front of them
 then I done here
 then I change my way
 then I go this way
 to see something else going over there
 and then the technician they get confused
 they don't know how to catch me
 they don't know how to run away from me.
 This the only way I make money
 because I invest everybody time.
 I make my best.

A day is a natural unit for humans; we live and structure our lives by days, and workday by workday. A day seemed to be an adequate 'unit of analysis' for the study. From Hussein's perspective, a day was a long time to be videotaped, and I knew from having been at the shop enough that a day would yield enough data to analyze *forever*. (Had I known that 'forever' would turn out to mean twenty years, I would probably have filmed him for just an hour.)

A composite individual

Many ethnographies and ethnographic films have portrayed cultures through the prism of a single member. A study that has informed the present one is Harper's (1987) classic *Working Knowledge*, a study of a car mechanic in Upstate New York. Harper focused closely and intensely on the sensory knowledge of this man, how he can feel when metal has reached the right temperature under the torch so he can begin to bend it, how he knows what causes corrosion in a car part: his 'professional touch' (cf. Goodwin 1994). Hussein is very different from Willie, who would disparagingly call him a 'part changer', someone who does not

mend, but replaces broken parts. Hussein is not much of a mechanic at all anymore; he is a manager, and my focus is on his communication.

A classic study in social and ‘ecological’ psychology is Barker and Wright’s (1951) *One Boy’s Day. A Specimen Record of Behavior*, which followed the same heuristic and produced

a record of what a seven-year-old boy did and of what his home and school and neighborhood and town did to him from the time he awoke one morning until he went to sleep that night. It . . . describes the actions of Raymond and the physical and social conditions of his life that could be seen and heard by skilled observers. . . . *One Boy’s Day* is a specimen of the behavior and the cultural and psychological habitat of a child. It is a field study in ecological psychology. . . . It is an interpretive record too because it reports what these observers inferred as to the meanings to the boy of his behavior and of the persons, things, and events that he saw and heard and felt throughout the day. (Barker & Wright 1951: 1)⁴

This book picks up, as it were, where Barker and Wright left off; concerning Raymond, it would ask: How does he do the things he does? What are his *methods* for doing them? These questions characterize my *micro-ethnographic* perspective on Hussein’s day at work.

Studying an individual over the course of a day—if it is a day filled with people, activity, and unpredictable circumstances—raises many interesting questions for researchers of social interaction, some of which I will take up in the following chapters. The disciplines that convene in the empirical, ‘naturalistic’ (observational) analysis of everyday interaction are usually and rightfully interested in ‘social facts’ (Durkheim 1982), in the words, grammar, rules, practices, and beliefs that members of a community share—in what is ‘generic’ about their interaction. The individual is regarded as a bearer of culture and social order, but not as a unit of analysis in its own right. It is assumed that the individual more or less consists of an accumulation of sociocultural ‘stuff’ (concepts, words, knowledge, beliefs, etc.) and sociocultural methodologies (‘ethno-methods’; Garfinkel 1967) that are ‘enacted’ or ‘used’ in moments of social life. But observations of a person during an entire day irritate that picture, because so much of what he does appears improvised, handmade, invented for the moment and then forgotten: a solution for the single case at hand. Culture is a storehouse of routine solutions for *kinds* of problems or tasks (Hutchins 1995). The very culturality of the person is thus called into

⁴ Another relevant study of an individual is Calbris’ (2003) investigation of the gestures with which French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin expressed his political thinking. Various points of overlap occur between Calbris’ account of gesture and the analysis in Chapter 5.

question when we observe how a person ‘ad-hocs’ (Garfinkel 1967) his way through the day. In Hussein’s case anyway, his persona is sponsored by at least two ‘cultures’, and his actions and utterances are built from resources of multiple cultural and historical origin. Hussein is a *composite*, and so is every speaking human, because the system of human face-to-face conversation itself is a composite of systems of heterogeneous origins and with different evolutionary trajectories (Levinson & Holler 2013). But we rarely know where, say, a grammatical construction or a familiar gesture comes from (Arabic or proto-Semitic? The Eastern Mediterranean, Pan-Arabia, the whole world?). All we can observe, and can study rigorously, is what individuals make of cultural resources and personal habits and how they make meaning and create social moments from them together with others.

Focusing on an individual also, trivially, brings into focus the issue of *individuation*, which Agnes Heller explain this way:

If individuals are to reproduce society, they must reproduce themselves as individuals. We may define ‘everyday life’ as the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu*, make everyday life possible. . . . Every human being has his own everyday life. . . . The content and structure [are] not the same for all individuals. . . . Reproduction of the person is always of the concrete person: the concrete person occupying a given place in a given society. . . . Very few activities are invariant, and even these are invariant only as abstractions in the lives of all persons. We must all sleep (if not in identical circumstances, and not in the same way) and we must all eat (though not the same things and again not in the same way). (Heller 1984: 3)

In recent years, investigations of *habitus* by the late Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1990, 2000), of the inscription of culture and social class in the tacit dispositions of the body, and Foucault’s late lectures on the ‘techniques of the self’ (Foucault 2005, 2010, 2011), have motivated a number of sociologists, who regard practices as the ‘site of the social’ (Schatzki 1995, 2002; Schmidt 2012), to study ‘subjectivation’ or ‘subject formation’ in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave 1991). Bourdieu defined habitus as

a certain way of [the body of] orienting itself towards [the world] . . . , of bringing to bear on it an attention which, like that of a jumper preparing to jump, is an active, constructive bodily tension towards the imminent forthcoming. (Bourdieu 1990: 144)

This raises the question of how this ‘attention’ is acquired or socialized, how individuals are molded and mold themselves into adequately

skilled ‘bodies of praxis’. This cannot be investigated with research methods that operate on the time-scale of moments, but requires longitudinal study and other methods in the ethnographer’s kit. And yet, individuation, the making of a viable self, also takes place in every fleeting moment.

Self-making/autopoiesis

It would not be productive to try to separate out which of Hussein’s patterns and practices are cultural and which ones are idiosyncratic, as well as which cultures the cultural parts come from. Hussein is surrounded by global cultural material, and has previously been surrounded by it in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, and he continuously fashions a viable communicative self out of them. As a communicator, he is the ongoing product of his own self-making. Different parts of his repertoire link him to different cultures, but do not always make him a ‘member’. He is a member of his family, of an Arab American association, and perhaps a member and practitioner of international ‘automotive culture’ (whose lingua franca is English). But his cultural identity is a hybrid, and he himself does not apply ethnic or quasi-ethnic (‘Shiite’) labels to himself, but defines himself by his openness to relating to anyone. From member of a culture (or two cultures) and user and reproducer of sociocultural forms, Hussein thus transforms for us, without losing those identities altogether, into an ongoing product of individuation.

Modern biologists looking for a formal definition of life, as well as their philosopher allies, emphasize that individuation is a feature of all organic life. Thompson writes:

Living beings affirm their own identities by differentiating themselves from their surroundings and thus demand to be seen from an autonomy perspective. Autopoiesis is basic autonomy in its minimal cellular form. . . . A cell . . . is a self-sustaining unity . . . that dynamically produces and maintains its own identity in the face of what is other. (Thompson 2007: 149)

‘The term “self” [is] unavoidable in any description of the most elementary instance of life’ (Jonas 1966: 149).

The concept of *autopoiesis*—of self-making—thus took on relevance in this study of a person at various levels or scales: at the ‘micro’ scale of utterance, action, and action sequence, for example, when a

spontaneous gesture makes itself and mediates the self-organization of the communicating ensemble; but also on the biographical scale, for Hussein's 'repertoire of practices' or *habitus* is a product of his own making. It is a by-product or *sediment* (Merleau-Ponty 1964) of his situated actions. Sedimentation itself—the slow incorporation of a practice—is not something that we can observe during the course of a single day, although there are moments when a practice or habit is being corrected and modified or replaced by another. But we can see sediments—or layers of sediments—in Hussein's linguistic repertoire (in Chapter 6). Hussein's English is not in full accord with standard grammar. His utterances often lack markers of tense and number and subject-verb agreement, and his word order is irregular at times. Yet he masters the all-important aspect of information design (or 'information structure'; Lambrecht 1994) with much subtlety and precision. Idiosyncratic constructions are sediments of his concrete, personal adaptation, and he does not share these with anyone. There is no community, no 'code' to which these constructions belong, in the way native speakers of English share a lexicon and grammar. Hussein's repertoire has emerged from unguided learning and autopoietic structuring and adaptation.

Hi-Tech Automotive: a self-made man's life-world

Hussein Chmeis is a prototypical American self-made man: immigrant, founder and owner of a successful small business (which has since grown to three locations), head of a large family, owner of a spacious home in a gated community, a respected man in the multiethnic, secular, Arabic-speaking community of his city. A self-made man is both a perfect and a problematic model of self-making: his self-making, while taking place under imposing and complex constraints, is in many ways less constrained than that, for example, of his employees. While everybody in the shop operates under economic and time constraints affecting the viability of the business, Hussein's actions are never constrained by what someone tells him to do. In this respect, self-made men are atypical self-makers, or self-makers as one finds them only in a socioeconomic class whose members own 'means of production'. (Car repair is not literally productive labor, but a repair shop owner belongs to the same socioeconomic class as a small factory owner.)

Mr. Chmeis' family hails from the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, but he grew up in the town of Choueifat, near Beirut, as the eldest son of an illiterate

baker, and gained his first business experience as a child helping his father run his business, especially the financial part. Hussein also told me that he never was a good student and in his youth had no interest in cars. When he graduated high school (at the bottom of his class), he did not even know that cars run on gas rather than water. Yet Hussein enrolled in a nearby technical college run by the German development agency GTZ, and graduated after three years, having discovered his skills as a mechanic. He then moved to Saudi Arabia, where he worked in the oil industry for four years before opening his first shop in Riyadh with a few associates, which over time would grow to become one of the biggest auto shops in the capital, employing forty-five men. In his thirties, Hussein tired of the restrictive life in Saudi Arabia and moved his family to Texas. After working out of his home for a year, he started his new business in 1987. Hi-Tech Automotive is located at a main thoroughfare near downtown Austin, with two locations, facing one another, in the vicinity of what were at the time two working- and lower-middle-class neighborhoods. Hi-Tech's customer base has always been ethnically diverse; only about 40 percent of the customers on the day when the recording was made were white. Today, Hi-Tech Automotive sits in the middle of Austin's main tourist drag, and the neighborhoods all around have been gentrified.

These were the employees at Hi-Tech Automotive at the time of recording, in approximate order of seniority (see Table 1): Hussein's closest confidant was Ashraf, who worked during most of this day in the shop 'across the street'. Ashraf apprenticed with Hussein in his shop in Riyadh and later followed him to Texas. The shop across the street was run by Hassan, whom Hussein occasionally consulted in technical matters, and whom he counseled in business affairs. Art and Victorio were Hussein's most trusted technicians, followed by Arturo, whose specialty was transmissions. Cedric worked on tasks of lesser technical complexity, including fixing tires and brakes. All men did much of their work independently, as did Uncle Ahm, the welder or 'body man' across the street, who, as Hussein said, could 'weld wood to wood'. There were two apprentices (junior technicians), Alex and Mike, and Omar, a distant relative from Lund, Sweden, who was doing a three-month 'internship' with Hussein. Kenneth worked in the office, advertising and selling cars, helping with billing and checks, and keeping tabs on customers with outstanding loans. A special role was played by Dr. M. (Hakim), a physician without a license to practice medicine in the United States, who served as the shop's runner, getting parts from suppliers, taking cars to the car wash, or giving customers rides home. Chito, the only one who

does not appear in this book, was an independent contractor who refurbished transmissions. Hussein's sons Ali and Ansar made a brief appearance when Hussein sent them to the butcher across the street to buy ribs for a barbeque.

Since the 1980s, Austin has been a rapidly growing and economically thriving city, its growth rate now resembling that of cities in Asia. Several of Hussein's employees have left and started their own businesses. Today, twenty years later, Ashraf still works with Hussein, and Hussein has occasional contact with Art and Victorio. Hassan has long had his own shop, and Hussein's sons, along with their sisters, Nada and Mona, work in the three shops the family now owns, two children after graduating from a nearby Catholic university. Altogether, Hussein employs about thirty people today.

Because we are close in age, arrived in the United States at about the same time, and his shop is in the neighborhood, in the direction that my desk faces, I inevitably compared our lives at times, struck by the differences between them: here I was at home all day, seated; there Hussein was on his feet from morning to night. Here the blocked writer cursing and cursed by the loneliness of academic work, there a man giving work to dozens of people and never not talking to someone. But Hussein looked back at me and saw a teacher, and teachers he holds in high regard, often deploring their meager pay in America. The joy it gave him to be the object of my research had much to do with his own desire to be a teacher—of his customers, employees, and children. It was a role he was happy to perform. The videotapes would document his ubiquitous teaching.⁵

Methodology⁶

This book has the double ambition of illuminating both an individual person and his idiosyncrasies *and* the generic, socially and culturally shared practices this person enacts. The methodology is 'micro-ethnographic' (Streeck 1983, Streeck & Mehus 2004): the domain of social reality it is

⁵ Throughout this book, and in contrast to my other publications, I consistently use masculine pronouns to refer both to Hussein and the men working with him, and to generic roles such as 'actor' or 'speaker'. I do so because choosing feminine pronouns to demonstrate gender neutrality would seem strange in this context, to Hussein, given his cultural background, but also in light of the fact that almost all of the instances cited to support general claims include only male participants.

⁶ See also the note on methodology at the end of this book.

Table 1 The Men of Hi-Tech Automotive



Ashraf



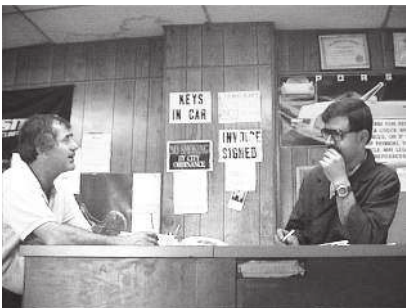
Victorio



Art



Uncle Ahm



Hakim



Cedric



Arturo

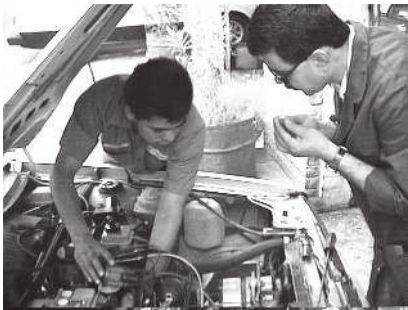



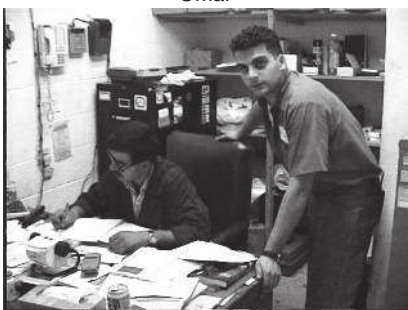



Kenneth

About this book and the man it is about

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Table 1 (cont.)

| | |
|---|---|
|  |  |
| Alex | Mike |
|  |  |
| Omar | Chito |
|  |  |
| Hassan | Ali and Ansar |

designed to capture are the communicative practices (or methods) and forms whose enactment by the members of a ‘practice community’ bring about intelligible actions and interactions, and, for moments at a time allows them to inhabit, make, and understand a piece of the world together (Streeck 2013a). The methodology will explain itself in the following chapters, and readers interested in its history, beginning in the 1930s with Bateson and Mead’s photographic and cinematic analysis of the

embodied culture of Bali (Bateson & Mead 1942), can turn to other publications for more detailed accounts (Kendon 1990: Ch.2; Streeck 2009a: Ch.2; Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron 2011). Still, a few remarks are in order.

Critical to research on communication among humans who are in each other's immediate presence is to recognize that every communicative act emerges as the result of interaction, in a particular 'place' or 'slot' within a sequence of social acts, and is designed to deal with the tasks of acting and securing understanding as they present themselves at this particular moment. Meaning does not inhere in forms (of speech and body motion), but is a *relationship* between form and context (Schefflen 1974). 'Context', in turn, in the first place means the interaction between the parties just prior to and at the moment: where they look, how they are positioned in relation to one another, but also 'where in the sequence' they are. For example, a certain gesture would not be seeable as a gesture of rejection if it were not for, say, its 'post-suggestion position', its being made following a suggestion (or other rejectable communicative act). We cannot understand how communicative understanding is achieved and action is accomplished unless we pay close attention to interaction's *sequentiality* (Schegloff 2007) and, more generally, *temporality* (Deppermann & Günthner 2015). Interaction builds itself within layered sequential matrices: an action-unit is produced within a turn-at-talk and is part of a sequence of actions within an interaction episode or encounter, which may or may not in turn be devoted to a particular project of collaborative action. This circumstance is at every point relevant to our investigation of Mr. Chmeis' repertoire of communicative practices, because it is within such contexts that these practices are enacted and for which they are designed. The term *multimodal communication* has become commonplace to describe these phenomena; the term alludes to the fact that human communication is a *composite* (Enfield 2011; Levinson & Holler 2013): each moment of understanding is the result of a local montage of heterogeneous resources, from prosodic contours to the grip with which one holds an object in one's hand, to the word someone uses, with the particular grammatical history and history of human migrations that may be embedded in it.

Overview

This book, then, is an investigation of the ways in which one man copes with the communicative tasks of an average workday: of his habits of

walking and standing, of looking and pointing, his methods of showing others how things work and what should be done, for gesturing and speaking and organizing, or ‘getting things done’, mainly by others. It explores how its subject does these things methodically *and* spontaneously, as an improvising ‘manager of the unexpected’ (Weick & Sutcliffe 2011). To find a path into this unwieldy corpus of materials, I focused on ‘uses’ of the different modalities one by one: gait and posture, gaze, gesture, and so on. But of course, these modalities are not deployed one at a time, but always in combination, as whole-body products. Therefore, the case analyses in this book occasionally ‘fold back’ upon themselves, as new phenomena and layers of meaning are ‘laminated’ onto previously analyzed scenes (Goodwin 2011). We will accordingly enter some scenes repeatedly. There are also ‘stories’, episodes that feature a single car or customer, but unfold in multiple installments: in Chapter 7, we follow along with a car, a red Mercury Capri⁷, as it goes through its ‘patency’ in the shop. The Capri, the first patient to arrive in the morning, is also the last one to be discharged. It gets to spend an entire hour in Hussein’s immediate care, because he has to remedy the effects of his own malpractice, but its *operating chain* in the shop (de France 1983) also involves a handful of technicians. The episode provides an opportunity to observe how Hussein ‘soft-assembles’ (Thelen 1994) his component skills during different types of organizational action, and how he ‘executes’, how he enacts his managerial roles. Our focus throughout is on communication, on how Hussein *makes sense* with others.

The sequence of chapters of this book follows a simple heuristic: it relies on the different parts of the body that are visibly involved in social interaction as a structuring principle. Beginning with the feet, in Chapter 1 I describe how Mr. Chmeis walks, both alone and with others, and how he positions himself and stands when he communicates with others or observes what is going on. Chapter 2 focuses on how Hussein uses his eyes, what kinds of vision-based activities he engages in, and how he communicates by gaze when facing others in focused interaction. Three chapters are devoted to the diverse and complex communicative work of the hands: in Chapter 3, I investigate how Hussein directs the attention and actions of others by pointing, perhaps his most important and most characteristic communicative action. Chapter 4 explores how Hussein reveals and illuminates features of objects at hand by touching, tracing,

⁷ More than one car circulating through the shop on this day was named after a Mediterranean island. There was also a Corsica.

and manipulating them—what he calls ‘showing’. A separate chapter (Chapter 5) is devoted to Hussein’s spontaneous gesticulation during conversations. Even though it is the longest in the book, it captures only a fraction of Hussein’s habitual gestures. Yet it is an attempt to break new ground in the study of the elusive phenomena of gesticulation, and it is in this chapter that the theory of autopoiesis—the self-making of living beings – and of motion as the most basic form of sense-making is explicitly applied. The chapter explains gestures as *living* phenomena—not as replicas of premade forms (see Cuffari & Streeck to appear). Chapter 6 takes stock of some of Hussein’s linguistic routines, preformatted bits of verbal action that he has developed as he has been learning English on the job and by which he manages his shop, coordinates activities, and enacts institutional roles, and it also portrays him as a poet, as a speaker who occasionally is tuned to the music of his own language and relies on this tuning to build utterance after utterance. Chapter 7, finally, brings the parts together in an analysis of Hussein’s *organizing*; communicative actions are analyzed within the context of the work of the *organization* ‘Hi-Tech Automotive’: the chapter shows how Hussein manages knowledge by acquiring and spreading ‘situation awareness’ (Norman 1993), how he participates in cooperative physical labor, which organizationally relevant *transactions* (Taylor 2011) he participates in, and how he ‘performs’ in his role as visible ‘front’ of the organization (Goffman 1959). Finally, Chapter 8 integrates findings from the previous chapters into a picture of Hussein as a ‘generic’ communicating person, representing everyone.