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“What are you doing?”: How Improvisational Actors use the Body in the Contextualization of the Imagined Material World

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“What are you doing?”:
How Improvisational Actors use the Body in the Contextualization of the Imagined Material World

by
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B.A., University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2006

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Linguistics 2012
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“What are you doing?”: How Improvisational Actors use the Body in the Contextualization of the Imagine Material World

Thesis directed by Professor Barbara Fox

This paper looks at how improvisational actors use multi-modal contextualization cues to create rich and detailed imagined spaces with only the barest of built, material context. Using conversation analytic and ethnomethodological methodologies this paper examines three professional long-form improvisational performances. Beyond speech actors use bodily and visual cues, vocal quality and prosody. These cues become resources for actors to construct the imagined material context, character categories, character relationships and re-contextualize or edit the ongoing action of the overall performance.
To my Grandmother, Iris Jean, who shared her name with me and her light.

To Bolton Rothwell, who taught me to be fearless, tenacious and to never expect anything less than my best when I endeavor on something that I love.

I will miss you both.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 – Introduction
Within an improvisational theater performance we can view a multi–party field of action where different sorts of participants (on–stage actors, offstage actors, characters and the audience) carry out tasks specific to their roles and contribute to the overall collaborative performance. The contributions we will be considering include not just speech, but other multimodal cues, including bodily and visual cues and, to a small extent, vocal quality and prosody. These cues are used by actors to contextualize the setting of the scene, flesh out characters and their relationships, establish the dramatic action of the scene and change or edit the ongoing action of the performance. In the examples that follow, we will see how sequentially initial bodily moves made by actors are resources for shaping first turns–at–talk and crucial moves for mediating the unfolding action of the ongoing performance and guiding interpretation of the dramatic actions of scenes.

Beyond the actors themselves, the transitional performance space is similarly a fundamental aspect of any performance as it is transformed and shaped again and again as each scene progresses. As McIlvenny (2009) notes in his discussion of domestic spaces and the disciplinary practices of the time–out, “space is [not] simply a context or a backdrop for discursive or mediated action,” rather, space/place and context are socially negotiated and constructed through language and the use of the body (2020). In the analysis and discussion of the improvisational data below, we will see the part that actors play in setting scenes and constructing context, as they rely upon both language–based and bodily visual resources, such as Membership Categorization Devices and Contextualization Cues.
Even while some of the interactional patterns observed within these data will be quite specific to the improvisational situation, others will draw upon more conventional conversational and interactive patterns. The following examples will help to demonstrate the outward bounds of the kind of context-building that individual participants are capable of. As Duranti and Goodwin note: “the analysis of participation within activities makes it possible to view actors as not simply embedded within context, but actively involved in the process of building context through intricate collaborative articulation of the events they are engaged in” (1992, 149). Improvisation offers us a chance to view extreme cases of context-building, demonstrating the full extent of our linguistic and multi-model interpretive capabilities. While these types of performed interactions are atypical for most individuals, the ways in which context is evoked and meaning ascribed to everyday cultural artifacts and activities is not all that different. Whether the individuals are actors performing on stage with minimal props or are those engaged in a typical conversation while in a normal everyday surrounding environment, the way they come to understand the interaction between individuals and between individuals and the imagined or built environment relies upon the same inferential cues. Seeing an item or imagining it are the same in that both rely upon our shared cultural knowledge of routine behaviors in order to make sense of them.

1.2 – Goals for Project

Oftentimes multi-modal cues used during unfolding interactions are depicted as being only complementary to language; even while noting that language may not carry all of what is being ‘said,’ participants potentially need to only pay partial attention to accompanying multi-modal cues or can ignore them all together (Goodwin 2003b). One of the major aims of this study is to show that the body and its usage during interactions are not merely complementary to
language, but central to mediating transitions to and from scenes and the overall flow of the performance. We will also be considering cases where the body initiates, through either its position in relation to the performance space or other actors’ bodies, the main activity of a scene, preceding turns–at–talk and helping to shape the actors’ and audience’s ultimate understanding of the activity.

This study is the first to look at improvisational performances as the interactions unfold, turn–by–turn, using Conversation Analysis. It is also the first time that bodily and visual cues have been considered alongside linguistic ones.

1.3 – Arrangement of Thesis
Chapter 2 is an overview of relevant research and methodologies useful for the analysis that follows.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I will explore how postural changes during performances can become resources for actors in one of two ways. In Chapter 3, I will show how chairs and their configurations on stage, in conjunction with turns–at–talk, are utilized as contextual cues for actors to establish setting, characters, and relationships at the beginning of scenes. In Chapter 4, I will explore how actors edit and segue from scenes during transition spaces between scenes by using metapragmatic postural changes in a vertical plane and bodily moves in a horizontal plane to end and begin scenes and to help re–contextualize previous dramatic action.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I will revisit the importance of multi–model body and visual and language cues used by actors within performance interactions and their importance for use in constructing imagined material context, character categories and character relationships.
Chapter 2: Background and Methodology

2.1 – What is Improvisational Theater?

Improvisational theater, or improv, is a theatrical genre most noted for its unscripted and unplanned format. Performers of improv spontaneously create dialogue, set scenes and develop plot through their collaborative real–time interactions. That said, even without a set structure to follow, the improv performances that emerge are themselves highly structured and organized. The spontaneous, improvised nature of the performances also makes it a particularly rich source of data to explore themes using methodologies typically used for interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis. Like other research on performance, this approach requires that theatrical performance and verbal art are not only viewed as cultural activities, but also as forms of everyday interaction.

While improvisational theater is counted as the U.S.’s most important contribution to the theater world, it can trace its performance roots to the 16th century Italian tradition of Commedia dell`Arte and many of its techniques to three legendary European directors, Konstantin Stanislavsky from Russia, J.L. Moreno from Austria, and Jacques Copeua from France (Sawyer 2003, 16). Though historically it was not often used in performance situations, other than the occasional spontaneous ad lib or an integration of a minor audience suggestion, improv has long been a source of inspiration for actors, directors and writers. It was often used to help workshop scenes that would later be written down or to help actors develop their character for scripted shows.

The nature of improv changed forever when the Compass Theater opened in Chicago in the mid–1950s. Following the tradition of cabaret, patrons of the Compass were free to drink and dine while they enjoyed fast paced, high energy theatrical performances. Originally, the
founders hoped to use short scripted scenes written for five or six actors, but found that such pieces were difficult to come by.

One of the founders, Paul Sills, offered an innovative solution when he introduced a number of children’s games his mother, Viola Spolin, had created (Sawyer 2003, 22). The games were short intertextual frameworks that were often used by Spolin in workshops to help actors shed their inhibitions and explore creative possibilities. While the games themselves were too short for the players of the Compass to use for actual performances, their improvisational nature influenced the eventual scenarios that were developed and used during the theater’s short run. Sills later went on to found Chicago’s The Second City Theater, one of the most successful and well–known improvisationally minded groups in the U.S. and the training ground of many successful American and Canadian actors over the fifty years it has been open. Though the group long ago abandoned the true improv format, most of their scripted scenes and long running characters are based around improvisational practice performances, a format that was later used by network television’s Saturday Night Live.

The two main approaches, or improvisational frameworks, of improv are the short and long form. Both frameworks rely on intertextual play, and their main differentiating feature, aside from duration, is the interconnectedness and thematic coherence of the long format, which tends to develop more slowly and orients toward character–building across scenes. Short form, which is the more widely recognized of the two frameworks, consists of the compilation of many short theater games and tends to be limited to comedy, whereas the long format is usually more varied, often consisting of a blend of serious and comedic content.

The pieces under consideration for this project include three professional long form performances from an improv troupe called The Reckoning. The Reckoning hail from one of
Chicago’s most lauded improv theaters, IO Theater, formerly the Improv Olympic Theater. The members typically perform Harolds, a style of long form improv that was developed by the late improv legends Del Close and Charna Halpern, two of the original founders of the IO Theater. The original format of the Harold weaved together a mixture of three short interrelated stories cut together with short form improvisational games. The format consisted of the following structure, though it is important to keep in mind that this structure was variable and subject to improvisational changes as the performers saw fit:

– Opening
– Scenes A1, B1, C1
– Group Improv Game
– Scenes A2, B2, C2
– Group Improv Game
– Scenes A3, B3, C3

(Halpern, Close & Johnson 1994)

True to the nature of improv, many groups have altered this basic format, doing away with the short games altogether or creating a set of scenes that are not picked back up over the course of the performance. The Reckoning’s Harold format, typically, consists of the following much looser format and begins with a one word audience suggestion1:

– Three Establishing Events (typically three objects or people related to the audience suggestion)
– Scenes (some of which are picked back up and continued later on in the performance)

---

1 The suggestions for The Reckoning’s three performances are:
1. Audience query: A human emotion; suggestion: sadness
2. Audience query: A present that you’ve always wanted, but never received; suggestion: a dog
3. Audience query: A suggestion of anything at all; suggestion: surgery
2.2 – Maxims of Good Improvisational Practice

The list that follows outlines the maxims of good improvisational practice. Though these maxims are typically adhered to by improv actors, there are other times when they are broken. The maxims were developed by teachers and students of improv alike and were all chosen because they lead to successful improvisation performances. They emphasize the ensemble cast over the individual, and demonstrate the trust and support that each actor provides and expects from their fellow performers. While discussing the importance of the ensemble, Halpern and Close note that “if everyone [on–stage] is doing their job well, then [no individual actor] should stand out. The best way for an improviser to look good is by making [his or her] fellow players look good” (1994, 37). One way actors accomplish this is through the ‘Yes, and’ maxim, which says that actors should accept the proposal made to them by the move of another actor and build on it.

1) Yes, and…

This rule is probably the most important of all of the improvisational rules that make up good improvisational practice.

A second maxim observed by improv actors is:

2) Agreement

In observing this maxim, actors do not reject or block the contributions of other actors. Disagreement is disfavored since it stalls scenes, while agreement propels them forward. Actors must support and trust each other while on stage.

Additional maxims observed by improv actors follow.

3) Do Not ‘Drive’ the Scene

Individual actors must not attempt to exert too much control over a scene, i.e., actors must agree and build upon other actors’ contributions; they drive the scene if they choose
to block another’s contribution and instead choose their own contributions disproportionately.

4) Do Not Endow Other Characters/No Pimping

This rule limits performers from attributing character information for other actors. Endowing others constrains their contribution to the scene. A stronger form of this is called Pimping, when an actor forces another actor to undertake unpleasant or difficult character traits or actions related to their character.

5) The Ensemble is the Thing

Actors must listen to the group mind. Successful scenes emerge from the combined effort of the entire group, not just the individual actors.

6) Maintain the Fourth Wall

The Fourth wall is what separates the audience from the performers on stage. While occasionally this is acceptably broken by out–of–frame talk, it is discouraged because it pulls focus from the overall performance.

7) Show, Don’t Tell

When at all possible, actors should ‘show’ the audience who–they–are, what–they–are–doing and where–they–are as opposed to stating it explicitly.

8) Avoid Jokes

Actors should avoid going for the joke or making one–liners during scenes as they typically break the continuity of the scene. Trying to be funny rarely ever results in humorous performances. “The truth is funny. Honest discovery, observation and reaction is better than contrived invention” (Halpern & Close 1994, 15).

9) Listen and Remember
Actors should always pay attention to the entire performance. This affords them the opportunity to notice patterns and to make connections to previous scenes, to reintroduce previous characters or to continue previous plot lines. A deft connection of several previously used trains of thought usually gets bigger laughs and cheers from the audience than a contrived joke.

(Halpern & Close 1994; Sawyer 2003)

2.3 – Other Scholarly Work with Improvisational Theater

Improvisational theater has not been subject to the same level of scholastic scrutiny as other performance genres, and of the three main scholarly works on the genre, only two discuss topics of interest to those of us outside the realm of theatrical performance studies. Anne Marie Trestor (2008), for her doctoral dissertation, worked with a semi–professional improvisational theater troupe from Washington D.C. Her work is primarily concerned with studying which aspects of the improvisational performance genre figure into the individual performer’s own construction and performance of style and identity when they are offstage. To do this, she looks beyond the micro–levels of linguistic structure, phonology, morphology and syntax, and considers how broader linguistic features, negotiated intertextual frame shifts or the use of multiple voices by an individual, might come to bear on the performance of identity. She uses a combined variationist, ethnographic and discourse analytical approach in her analysis of the actors’ offstage style. While the only current work that applies linguistic methodologies to this performance genre, Trestor’s choice to use data mainly gathered from offstage interactions differs from the current approach of this project. This choice makes this work of slightly less import to the current project, as we are concerned with the actual dialogue created during a performance.
Of more interest to this project is the work of R. Keith Sawyer, whose scholarship spans sociology, psychology, education and philosophy. Sawyer (2003) is interested in examining the unconscious and unintentional patterns of the improvisational interaction. A supporter of the sociological theory of emergentism, he strongly contends that reductionist techniques are inadequate to examine collaborative interaction and its role in creating context and meaning, what he calls the dramatic frame. This emergent dramatic frame is thus not reducible to the individual actor’s intentionality or mental representations of the frame. Consequently, the outcomes of the scenes, their overall meaning and context are shaped by a collaborative force that can only be understood in terms of its gestalt properties. This frame is one of three processes within the theoretical framework he uses to examine the improvisational conversations from his data:

a. Emergence of the dramatic frame  
b. Downward causation exerted by the frame (constrains and enables individual action)  
c. Metapragmatic relations between turns

The second, downward causation, is the process by which each subsequent turn is simultaneously enabled and constrained by the emerging dramatic frame, with each additional constriction or refinement narrowing the context of the scene, i.e., the overall frame that is primarily developed over the first few turns of a new scene. The third process, metapragmatic relations between turns, deals with the main action of the turns taking place on the level of interaction occurring between actor and actor (as opposed to the level of interaction between the characters). Sawyer proposes that the two main metapragmatic actions actors are engaged in are proposals, or the “incremental creative addition to the emergent frame,” and responses, turns which determine the status of the previous proposal by accepting and building upon it or
rejecting it (Sawyer 2003, 68). These actions exist at a metapragmatic level, often embedded within other vehicular actions that exist on the level of the characters. Sawyer represents these three processes by illustrating the dialectic relationship between collaborative emergence and downward causation, demonstrating how the metapragmatic actions of each turn propel the action forward:

Figure I: The actor that initiates the scene, represented above by the $A^1$–$A^4$, produces the first offer which then leads to the other actor(s) first response, and so on. Each propositional offer and the subsequent accepting response continue to define and create the emergent dramatic frame, which in turn continues to both enable and constrain each of the turns produced by the actors. Figure I modified from original: (Sawyer 2003, 121).

To understand this proposed dialectic, we must, first, discuss the sorts of dramatic actions that are carried out by the actors as they produce utterances and define the dramatic space, context, and scene through the use of indexical speech and visual–body cues. Imagine first an empty stage; at this moment the dramatic frame is completely undefined and may exist only in the sense that we are at this moment the audience engaged in the larger overarching activity of
watching a performance. After a moment, an actress walks on to the stage, bringing with her a chair, which she places on the stage facing the audience before sitting down. This move is her initiating action, and already it has begun to influence the dramatic frame and in doing so it has set certain limits on the frame and the responding actions that will be made by other, at the moment, non–present actors. Her decision to use a chair, her postural change and the configuration she has placed it in all become resources for the next moves to set the scene. After a moment, a second actor walks on stage, but remains standing off to the far side of the actress. In a crackling and slightly fuzzy voice, he asks her:

“What can I get for you, ma’am?”

To which she responds by holding her hands up as though they rest on a steering wheel and says:

“What can I get a cheeseburger?”

This small exchange shows us the power of each initiating proposal and responding turn, how each builds upon the other and in doing so works to further define the dramatic action of the scene. The actor’s responding action, his entrance combined with his first utterance, was both constrained by the frame, i.e., he was unable to make any dramatic choice that negates or blocks the actress’s contribution to the frame, and enabled by it, i.e., the actress’s choice to use a chair opens up a number of possibilities for the scene. Thus, each subsequent turn is used to further narrow the context of the scene, beginning with no set context, and building it up turn by turn, moving from someone sitting alone in an undefined space to someone ordering fast food at a drive thru, and so forth. Sawyer’s point, the key to his whole approach to improvisational theater, is that even as each turn constrains the scene further, these constraints are less the product of the individual creativity or intentionality of either actor and more the outcome of the overall collaborative interaction.
Another observation we can make about this small scene is that each turn is combinatorily complex: in the beginning of the scene, the first responding turn could have possibly resulted in a radically different flow of dialogue and rise of dramatic action. If, for instance, the actor had chosen to stand behind the actress sitting in the chair, he could have created a scene where he was pushing someone in a wheel chair or, alternatively, a scene where he was a masseuse giving someone a massage. Typically, Sawyer does not wish to take into consideration how resources are manipulated by individual actors or how their individual choices affect the overall frame. He instead focuses on the emergent structure, the dramatic frame. Ultimately, I am inclined to agree that the overall meaning of these performances is emergent and in most cases might be better understood as a collaborative whole. Despite this, however, especially if we are to use some of the methodological tools made available to us by conversation analysis (CA), it might still be important to consider the individual actors’ contributions, how their symbolic use and choices affect and contribute to the overall frame.

Sawyer’s problems with CA and ethnomethodological paradigms are that “they focus on the conscious decisions of actors, their strategic displays of subjective understandings, and their expectations of future events” (Sawyer 2003, 52). While reductionist in nature, these approaches are not completely without merit to our discussion. First, even while the ultimate dramatic project is emergent, it comes into existence and is built upon turn–by–turn and move–by–move by the participants. So any approach that looks at turn–by–turn contributions and the overall sequential environment will help us to understand, to an extent, how the frame is brought about by an individual’s actions. Sawyer’s problems with this are not his alone, even those who work within these disciplines struggle to define the boundaries of contribution, some going so far to even consider single turns at talk as jointly produced (Goodwin & Goodwin 2004; Hayashi 2005).
Secondly, since a good deal of the metapragmatic cues relevant for inference and interpretation for improv fall into what Silverstein (1977) calls our “limits of awareness,” essentially unconscious processes that most speakers are not able to access readily, the most productive means of studying these processes, as Gumperz notes, is by analyzing them within their sequential environment (Gumperz 1992, 232). So, we must forge ahead in attempting to answer questions of collaborative emergence using, perhaps, less than satisfactory bottom–up, reductionist tools.

2.4 – Other Theories Necessary for Critical Analysis

In order to understand the dynamic interplay between the many levels of interaction present in an improv performance we first need to be able to discuss how the participants align themselves in relation to each other and how they carefully calibrate their turns to accomplish the various types of inference necessary for each interactional layer. Each turn–at–talk or bodily action is designed for one or more of the many recipients of the performance: other actors within the scene, other actors not in the scene, characters within the scene and, of course, the audience watching the performance. As Gumperz put it:

“conversational inference involves several levels of inferencing. At the activity level: it signals what the interaction is about and what the expectations are in terms of which coherence is established. At the local level: (the level of the utterance) contextualization plays a major role in our assessments of illocutionary force.”

(Gumperz 1992, 46)

We can designate the actor–to–actor level of inference as the activity level and the character–to–character level (also the level of the audience) as the local level. To manage this difficult task, many of the turns–at–talk are double–voiced, or what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossic. Since
the scene and its context are managed in real time and each turn must simultaneously be part of the overall performance of the piece, this double-voicing tactic is necessary to minimize effort and to create seamless and naturalistic seeming conversational sequences.

### 2.4.1 – Participation Frameworks

A key part of our approach to an analysis of this sort of work will rely upon an understanding of the participation of each of the interlocutors in a scene. To do this, we must look at participation in a manner that captures the shifting, varied and collaborative nature of the participation between speakers and recipients. The most beneficial take on participation may come to us from what Goodwin and Goodwin (2004) call a participation framework. This interpretation of participation takes the view that each interactional turn may be the product of not just the speaker but also the recipient. Evidence for this comes from research that looks at how speakers design their utterances for their recipients and have resources both to monitor recipient attention and to elicit attention if need be (Goodwin 1979); speakers can also modify their current speech, adding to what they are saying or adjusting the meaning to make an utterance more appropriate for a new or different recipient (Goodwin 1979). Thus, the utterance is not the product of just the speaker alone, as the recipient is also oftentimes a very active joint participant in the creation of any given utterance.

### 2.4.2 – Frame Analysis & Primary Frameworks

Frame Analysis offers us a way to describe the process of the individual’s understanding of and “organization of experience” (Goffman 1974, 11). Goffman’s goal was to “try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense of events” and it led him to posit primary frameworks, i.e., the most basic frameworks for
organizing experience that are utilized for interpretation and understanding (1974, p.10). There are two types of primary frameworks: the natural and the social, both of which aid individuals in making sense of what is going on around them. Natural frameworks “identify occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, ‘purely physical’,” while social primary frameworks “provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being” (Goffman 1974, 22). Consequently, the perception of events is directly reliant upon primary frameworks and “acts of daily living are understandable because of some primary framework that informs them” (Goffman 1974, 26). Furthermore, this leads us to one definition of context, among many others, that will be useful in our consideration of improvisational data, that context is the “immediately available events which are compatible with one frame of understanding and incompatible with others” (Goffman 1974, 441).

2.4.3 – Membership Categorization Analysis

Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) is a useful approach to studying the local management of “classifications or social types that [are] used to describe persons” within interactions (Sacks 1972; Hester & Eglin 1997, 12). These situated categorization practices found in conversational exchanges can show us “how social order is produced and maintained,” treating talk as culture–in–action (Stokoe 2003a, 2). While categories are used in–situ, if viewed in terms of overall usage in interactions they will “demonstrate robust categorical practices across time and space” (Fitzgerald 2012, 308). Thus, providing a way to see how sense making is carried out using local, interactional practices, yet understood in terms of shared social and cultural knowledge. In terms of actors, MCA provides an approach to discuss how actors establish who–they–are and what–they–are–doing.
One membership category may be linked to another, as is the case in Sack’s famous example: “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.” Since the categories of ‘mommy’ and ‘baby’ are linked together into a collection called ‘family, we hear this story as being about how the baby’s mommy picked it up. This grouping is also known as a Membership Category Device (MCD). MCDs are defined by Sacks as:

“any collection of membership categories, containing at least a category, which may be applied to some population containing at least a member, so as to provide, by the use of some rules of applications, for the paring of at least a populations member and a categorization device member. A device is then a collection plus rules of application.”

(Sacks 1972, 332)

Sacks’s concern was with ‘how’ membership categories and MCDs are made understandable and interpretable to hearers, he was expressly interested in the sorts of implicit knowledge and norms that interactants relied upon to make sense out the nouns and verbs that served “as markers of social relationships” (Sacks 1972, 325–7). From this point of view “membership categories, MCDs and category predicates […] are all examples of indexical expressions. Their sense, in other words, is a situated, contextually embedded sense” (Hester & Eglin 1997, 11).

Also of note are category bound activities, or activities that are related to one or more specific membership categories. In the case of the improv data, we will see how actors discursively produce recognizable categories through word choices that name specific categories (e.g., daughter; dad) and use of phrases that name category bound activities (e.g., ‘we’re closing’; ‘do you have a comedic piece?’).
2.4.4 – Contextualization Cues

The final piece we must consider for our analysis is what Gumperz (1982) calls a contextualization cue. Participants, in order to achieve a successful communicative event, must be able to help guide and calibrate their recipients’ interpretation of the unfolding interaction, and to do this they use contextualization cues. These multimodal signs are utilized by actors to hint at or allude to important cultural and social background information that is necessary to the interpretation of what the actors are saying and doing. The types of cues possible are potentially infinite and typically analogue in nature, including various paralinguistic and intonation cues, as well as lexical expressions and visual and bodily cues. These cues help guide interpretation, often they act as prospective indexicals, foregrounding what is to be expected from the speaker or what is to come from the overall interaction. Crucially, contextualization cues “function relationally and cannot be assigned context–independent meanings” (Gumperz 1982, 232).
Chapter 3: ‘Sweetarts’

3.1 – Usage of Chairs in Improvisational Scenes

The following chapter begins with a discussion of chairs and their configurations, demonstrating their impact on the temporally unfolding interactions within improvisational performances. Later, the discussion turns to an examination of conversational sequence organization at the beginning of improv scenes and the metapragmatic actions embedded within improvisational turns that establish scene setting, characters, relationships and the main dramatic action of a scene. Above all, we will see how actors’ bodies and their bodily moves and positions provide them with cues to use during the early turns–at–talk that establish primary contextual information.

Improvisational actors perform with the use of minimal props, relying mainly upon features of the stage\(^2\), their own body and a small number of chairs to create the material world of any given scene. When the decision was made to include visual and bodily cues in the analysis of these data a most striking pattern emerged. The choice of whether or not to use chairs in a scene seemed to have an impact on the eventual scene that played out, often leading to scenes set in certain institutional settings. To anyone familiar with the history of the chair and its symbolic meaning, this observation would probably seem obvious. For me, this observation was a starting point to begin exploring the cultural significance of the chair and the seated postural position.

Cultural anthropologist Gordon Hewes in his paper, “World Distribution of Certain Postural Habits,” places the number of physiologically feasible human postures at around one thousand (1955, 231). Importantly, he writes that while “human postural habits have anatomical and physiological limitations […] the determinants [for choosing a certain posture] appear to be

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\(^2\) The edge or boundaries of the performance areas or, sometimes, doorways or window openings that are available on professional improv stages.
mostly cultural,” an essential point for us to remember as we consider the context building of improv and the use of the chair in performances (Hewes 1955, 231). Hewes also notes that certain postures may be universal, but others are most certainly not. While seated postures where humans rest upon chairs or other types of objects can be found in cultures where people typically squat or sit on the ground, only about one third to one half of the world uses the right angled seated posture (Cranz 1998, 26).

The earliest physical chairs in existence were found in Egypt in King Tutankhamen’s tomb and date back to 1323 BC, the year of his death. However, historians have found evidence of chairs that date back even further to the Neolithic age, 10,000–4,000 BC, in the form of pottery models depicting female figures seated and reclining on objects resembling chairs with backs. Perhaps more interestingly, these same pottery models have also been used as evidence that the society that produced them was matrifocal. This observation is based upon the fact that only female figures were depicted as being seated on a chair, the reason being that an upright seated posture has long been symbolic of a higher social status (Cranz 1998, 32–33). Or as Cranz puts it:

“the form of the chair literally expresses high status; it separates, and elaborates the separation, providing distinction, while it legitimizes support of the occupant’s whole physical and psychological being.”

(1998, 34)

Below is a compilation of the ten different chair configurations that were used within three different 30–45 minute professional improv performances by the Reckoning improv troupe.

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3 One configuration found in the performances was not included above: a pile of five chairs which an actor pretends to be stuck underneath.
The tables that follow contain information about the type of scenes/settings that each of the configurations was found in:

**Figure II: Chair Configurations**

Figure II: The apex of the triangle represents the front of the chair. The audience would be located in the same place as the bottommost line of the figure. Please note: the configurations C, G, I and J would all have chairs that are ‘cheated out,’ which is theater speak for being set at an angle so as to maximize the visibility of the actor’s face to the audience.

**3.2 – Criteria Used to Demarcate Scenes**

The boundaries used to differentiate scenes were primarily determined by either a change of actors, characters, location or the main activity of the scene. The decision to separate small groups of scenes with repeating characters, actors or major themes was made based upon the appearance of metapragmatic cues used by the performers that signal the end or start of another scene. The following chapter will explain these types of cues more fully.
3.3 – Chair vs. No Chair

In order to better understand the influence the use of chairs has on the action and setting of an unfolding scene, notation was made for each of the 44 scenes regarding the difference between scenes with chairs and those without. For scenes with chairs, the types of chair configuration, scene settings and main activity are presented. For those without, only the setting and main activity are presented. Below is the breakdown of the total number of scenes from the three performances and the raw count breakdown of how many scenes included chairs. The raw count data is followed by two tables that detail the types of scenes that developed, both in scenes with chairs or without chairs.

Table I: Scenes with Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Scenes with Chairs</th>
<th>25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Scenes without Chairs</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II: Uses of Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Configuration</th>
<th>Uses of Chairs &amp; Setting types:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Car (in drive–thru); director’s chair (audition); chair in house; chair in mortician’s office; from the afterlife (actor standing on top of chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Car (pulled over by cop); classroom chairs; chairs in house; table at restaurant; bed and breakfast waiting area; bed (actor lying across chairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Job interview; table (at home &amp; at restaurant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Car (in motion, being pushed from behind by an actor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Doctor’s office waiting room; orphanage sleeping area; courtroom; final tableau (three different spaces, all on stage at once)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Alcoholics Anonymous meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Tent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>School yard/school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Counselor’s office; school administrator’s office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table III: Scenes without Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting for scenes with no chair:</th>
<th>Scene content:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houses or hotel rooms</td>
<td>Parent’s funeral/wake; couple at home; zombie stripper; probation officer visit; cancer victims commiseration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Stray dog; waiting for a ride; hit by a car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–office workplaces</td>
<td>Surgery theater; newscast; video store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office workplace</td>
<td>Drug counselor’s office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterlife</td>
<td>Orphan’s post–death meeting with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undefinable locations</td>
<td>Harold establishing scenes; historical dogs; student monologues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop class/pretend war zone</td>
<td>High school shop students in imagined war zone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of the scenes under consideration (57%) used a chair during some portion of the activity within the scene. The remaining 43% did not contain a chair for any portion of the action. For scenes with chairs, the most canonical usages of them seem to be to help establish a setting; in the cases of these performances they were most often found in institutional settings like offices, conference rooms, waiting rooms and dining areas. They were also quite commonly used in scenes to define a portion of the performance area, such as when they were used to suggest the existence of a car or other type of vehicle. The more non–canonical usages differ somewhat; they define boundaries (the tent), provide obstacles (the pile of chairs) or offer a way to separate a character from other ongoing action (actor from beyond the grave delivering monologue while standing on a chair).

For the scenes that did not use chairs it is important to note that this did not mean all of the actors were always in an upright position. In several of the scenes there were actors lying, crawling or sitting on the floor. Also, just because a scene lacks a chair does not mean that the actors are unable to establish the sort of scene that typically uses a chair. Evidence for this comes from the one instance of a typical office setting that lacked chairs, a scene set in a drug counselor’s office, where the patient was prompted to take a seat and sat on the floor. This may have been because a chair was not easily at hand, most of them being placed outside the portion
Beyond the decision to use or not use a chair, another aspect of the usage of chairs also seems to shape improvisational scenes and provide an important visual contextualization cue for the scene initiating actor to use in order to design their first offer for the scene: the configuration of the chairs themselves. In the next section we will see how the collaborative configuring of the chairs has important implications not only for the setting of the scene, but also for the alignment of the characters to each other and their individual relationships. We now turn to the analysis of the examples.

3.4 – Collaborative Configuration of Chairs

In this scene⁴, a father, Dad, and his young daughter, Girl, are meeting with a school administrator. The Girl is currently waitlisted for the school program under discussion and over the course of the scene both Dad and Girl attempt to bribe the school official with various offers in order to gain her admission into the program. The chairs for this scene are placed into the J configuration from the above table:

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⁴ N.B.: the description of the scene, the characters and their relationship are being used here as though these details were established from the start of the scene. In actuality, these details are usually established over the course of the unfolding scene and are then later applied retroactively to earlier action in the scene.
At the end of the previous scene, as the entire cast of actors run across the stage to help to segue to the next scene, the first actor, the initiating actor, grabs two chairs from upstage and begins to move them to the center of the stage. The first actor drags the chairs and sets them into a loose configuration C, i.e., the chairs face each other but still adhere to the staging principles and face slightly outward instead of being totally parallel.
After the first actor sits down in one of the chairs, the other two actors begin their journey to the portion of the stage being prepared for the action of the scene. At this point the actress begins pushing a third chair, which she places next to the first actor and sits down. The chairs are now in a J configuration. Meanwhile, the second actor begins to circle around behind the seated actor toward the last remaining chair.

The second actor reaches his arm out for his chair just as the actress sits down. He finishes adjusting it and sits down immediately after.

How the configuration emerges underscores the collaborative nature of contextualization cues that arise throughout the performance, highlighting their importance and their impact on the unfolding interaction. To understand how the transitory space of the stage is defined and transformed into the material world for a given scene we cannot rely only upon cues provided by
utterances, but, like the actors themselves engaged in the performance, must rely upon the many multimodal cues that are available to us.

Improvisational performance spaces, much like Duranti’s Samoan ritual fonos, utilize a “regionalization of the interactional space,” i.e., the setup of the space can communicate to other members in the same space the speaker’s intent and position toward ongoing talk and action based upon spatial and configuration cues. In the 'Sweetarts' scene, even before the first line of dialogue is spoken, the configuration that the chairs are placed in by the actors has helped to define certain aspects of the dramatic frame. More specifically, the formation of the three chairs has helped to narrow down or make available certain types of locations for the scene to be set and activities for the actors to be engaged in. In this instance, the collaborative formation of the J chair configuration, a non–circular configuration, has made available to the actors the option to use a specific type of institutional setting, the office.

The configuration also provides information about how the characters will be aligned to each other, helping to establish a more intimate or equal relationship between the two actors sitting next to each other. They sit in opposition to the third actor across from them, who is, by the nature of the arrangement, either more distantly connected to them or above them in terms of status. Interestingly, given what Kendon (1990) tells us about the distribution of speaking rights in non–circular F–formations, we might expect the actor playing the School Administrator to hold more speaking rights than the others. Even though he is placed at the head of the formation and, by the nature of his character and the unfolding action of the scene, has the most power over the decision to admit the daughter into the program, his first turn is delayed, even after he is addressed by the first turn–at–talk. Perhaps, the rights and power associated with being the initiating actor of a scene, which are held by the actor playing Dad, block or alter this more
normal arrangement. If this is the case, then the emergent chair configuration and the power relations it might imply are less important than the power and control afforded to the initiating actor of a scene. This is similar to the studies by McIlvenny and Duranti, which show that power relations are spatialized in parent–child interactions, in particular in how parents have control over space and the bodies of children within space. McIlvenny, drawing on Foucault, notes that the governance of space “is one of the major forms of the exercise of power” (2009, 2020). In improv scenes, initiating bodily moves, like Dad’s movement into the performance space first and his decision to use chairs, are metapragmatic proposals that establish the initiating actor’s early control over the scene that emerges. The power and control granted to the initiating actor derive from the accepted practices of improv, the practice of “Yes, and…” where each actor accepts the initial turns for the scene and subsequently contributes and builds upon them, and the sequential ordering of the bodily moves, in this case the actor’s decision to move into the future performance space first and his positioning of the first two chairs.

In the next section, we will take a closer look at how the initiating actor uses his first turn–at–talk to establish basic information about the unfolding scene.

3.5 – The Reckoning Harold: ‘Sweetarts’
Dad (DAD), Girl (GIR) & School Administrator (SCH)

((Dad moves two chairs to the center of the stage, roughly facing each other yet adhering to the standard ¾ rule, dad sits down. Girl brings in a third chair that she places next to Dad facing the second chair, Girl sits down. School administrator adjusts the second chair, school administrator sits down))

01 DAD: So my daughter’s pretty excited about this pr:ogram=

02 GIR: =>Yeah I’ve gone all day without using my inhaler<
DAD: Which I told her s’not a good idea you could really (0.4) screw up your respiratory system

GIR: ah huh ah huh

SCH: Well (0.4) you can use your inhaler if it helps you

DAD: he he y(h)es=

GIR: =h yeah .h

SCH: [Umm (alright)

DAD: [Now the bottom line

SCH: I’m sorry

DAD: Bottom line, (0.4) she’s a good student and she’ll do well here ((wink)) eh ((wink & mouth wink))

(1.7) ((intermittent laughter during this pause in talk))

DAD: u::hp ((wink & mouth wink)) ((wink & mouth wink)) uh ((eyebrow raise))

(2.8) ((intermittent laughter during this pause in talk))

SCH: She’s on the shortlist Mr. Richardson and uh the best we can hope for at this point is that a couple of people dro:p out who’ve already been accepted.

(0.5)

DAD: Whoa o:k alright (.) perhaps you guys need a new scoreboard for the gymnasium,

huh?=

GIR: =yeah

SCH: ah=

GIR: =Or perhaps, ((start reaching into her pocket with right hand))
28 (0.2)
29 SCH: We’ve got a fairly updated scoreboard thank you
30 (1.3)  [(laughter
31 GIR:  [Maybe: (0.5) *this* could sweeten the deal hhh ((pulls hand out of pocket and holds it
32 towards SCH))
33 DAD:  Ok=
34 SCH:  =O:.h ((eyebrow raise)) ((takes offered item))
35 DAD:  That’s very sweet=
36 GIR:  =Who doesn’t like sweetarts
37 DAD:  I (h) do(hu hu)n’t kn(h)ow

**3.6 – Contextualization Cues and the Emergence of the Dramatic Context**

In this section, we will explore the resources that are used by actors as they define the
dramatic frame, essentially how actors make available for each other and the audience contextual
information such as location of scene, character type, character relationships and the dramatic
activity of the scene. Importantly, the first few lines of dialogue and the first few establishing
visual and bodily actions are often made with this contextualization work in mind, something
that, at least for the following example, seems to delay the production of truly naturalistic
sequentially paired sets of initiating and responding actions. In the following example, the first
turn–at–talk of the scene produced by Dad is directed at the School Administrator, yet there is no
uptake. Why is this? Does the dramatic and metapragmatic work of the early proposals used to
establish the frame take precedence?
The opening sequence of the scene is of particular interest to our discussion. Notably, after Dad produces a telling at line 01, which is directed at the School Administrator, there is no uptake from School Administrator. Instead, the next two turns are used by the Girl, who rushes in to speak, to account for how her ‘excitement,’ mentioned in line 01, manifested itself and then by the Dad to further account for his reaction to the Girl’s choice not to use her inhaler. The School Administrator does not join the conversation until line 07, at which point he takes the opportunity to also weigh in on the topic of the inhaler. His next turn, at line 10, which could potentially have been the missing second pair part, is overlapped by Dad and eventually cut off. The first possible second pair part for this turn is produced by the School Administrator at line 20.

If line 01 is indeed a first pair part, we would expect a second pair part, even if not immediately adjacent, to follow more quickly. On the other hand, even if line 01 is a pre–sequence to some other paired actions we would still expect the School Administrator to eventually pursue the topic initially directed to him. While his turn at line 20 is a potential second pair part, why is it produced so late? How can this sequence be acceptable to an audience, an audience that while perhaps unconscious of the conversational patterns that structure their own interactions still adheres to them while engaging in their own conversations.

One possible answer to this may be that the opening turns of an improvisation scene are used to complete another type of paired action, the metapragmatic actions of the proposal and response that help us to conceptualize and contextualize the dramatic frame. The audience may accept this sort of action or work being done as acceptable or adhering to normal patterns, because they themselves are also engaged in the work of building and interpreting the emerging

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5 Thanks to Barbara Fox, Rich Sandoval and Nick Williams for their comments and thoughts regarding this particular scene, all of which contributed greatly to the analytic approach in this section of the paper.
context for the scene. These paired actions contain a metapragmatic level, something used by the actors on stage to communicate on the level of actor–to–actor; in addition they also contain contextualization cues that can be used by the audience and actors alike to guide inference of the emerging dramatic frame. Thus, each turn may be thought of as being double–voiced, a strategy essential to actors who are actively involved in several participation frameworks simultaneously. Sawyer lists the following criteria for determining whether or not a turn is heteroglossic:

–Seems to be directed to the audience rather than to the putative addressee (character on the stage)

–It describes the (imagined) physical environment

–It describes the actor’s own actions

–It provides information not normally present in dialogue

–It describes inner mental states that would not usually be made explicit in conversation

(2003, 146)

While natural conversation also contains metapragmatic information and can at times exhibit its own sort of double–voicing, ordinary participants are not usually required to maintain these strategies for such long durations of time. All of this additional work may be why these actors slip up in their ‘playing at being normal’ and fail to meet the conversation analyst’s sequential expectations.

Importantly, while the early turns of an improv scene may break certain expectations we have about conversational patterns, improvisational interactions that emerge later in the scene also adhere to many of the same such patterns. The specific activity that the actors are engaged in requires them to alter what would typically be conditionally relevant, taking into consideration that the early action of a scene should include the sorts of actions produced in normal, everyday
talk, but also action that quickly and decisively establishes key points of contextual information. So the turns produced at this juncture, at the beginning of scenes, must be powerful propositions that help us all to answer the question: who is doing what where?

The actors are able to achieve this through the use of contextualization cues. One such type of cue, as discussed in the previous section, was the chairs in the scene and their specific configuration, which provided clues as to the location of the scene, the type of activity and suggested certain types of alignments and relationships between the characters. Amazingly, all of this happens before the first actor delivers even his first line of dialogue. Other such cues come from what is said and how it is said, with many of them cropping up within the first few turns of the scene. From line 01 we get several such cues (in bold) that give us information needed in order to establish the dramatic context:

01 DAD: So my daughter’s<sup>1</sup> pretty excited<sup>2</sup> about this program<sup>3</sup>=

The first line provides important information about the activity of the scene and also some character and relationship information. The first cue in conjunction with the second cue work together to establish the relationship between Dad and the actress seated next to him, designating her as his daughter. Before his first turn–at–talk we see Dad turn his gaze to the actress directly before he speaks, a move similar to what Goodwin calls an Engagement Display, essentially that the person A in a conversation is both gazing at and positioning their upper body toward person B in a conversation (1981, 96). An Engagement Display is a way for both person A, or in this case Dad, to show us two things:

1. A (Dad) is publicly scrutinizing B (actress)

2. A (Dad) has positioned himself to take an account of what B (actress) is doing

(Goodwin 1981, 96)
In our example, what Dad is ‘publicly seeing’ and taking account of is the position of the actress next to him and her heavy breathing and wide smile.

Figure V: Engagement Display

The actress draws from these membership category cues for her first turn at line 02 as well, and accepts Dad’s offer and builds on it. She establishes through what she says (her use of the possessive pronoun ‘I’ve’) that she is in fact the aforementioned daughter. The vocal quality of her speech also provides a further contextualization cue, one that establishes her as a younger girl than the female actress portraying her, while the continued breathy quality is a further display of her “excitement” and might also be a cue used later in the scene when she eventually notes her asthmatic condition. Given my limited command at designating and discussing prosodic and paralinguistic features, I will refrain from elaborating further and simply provide the observation that the vocal quality of this actress’s speech definitely contributes important information about her character.
The third cue in this turn builds upon the context already established by the choice to use chairs in the scene and their configuration. It builds upon these offers and provides additional specifics about the type of activity taking place during the scene and also gives information to the third actor, the School Administrator, about the type of character he will be portraying and his relationship to the two other actors. This analysis shows us that the first turn–at–talk within a scene is a powerful and exceptionally meaningful utterance. It provides many details of the dramatic frame, which may require immediate responses from the other actors in order set these details for the scene. This may be why other more natural conversational patterns are not present at this point in the interaction. As we see later on in the conversation, once the details for the frame have been established, the patterns that emerge from the interaction are much closer to what we would expect. For instance, Dad’s bribery offer at line 23 is responded to by the School Administrator after he produces both a hesitation discourse marker, at line 26, and after a brief pause, at line 27. These delays in production prepare us for the dispreferred response to Dad’s offer, a rejection of the bribe.

Importantly, the analysis in this chapter shows us how bodily moves and the configurations assumed by actors at the beginning of a scene are important resources for them to draw information from when defining the dramatic frame. While the actor playing Dad establishes key details about the scene during his first turn–at–talk, many of his decisions about character membership categories, character relationships, scene setting and the dramatic action of the scene are lifted from the position of the actors’ bodies and their individual bodily comportment.
As we will see in the next chapter, control over a scene, in particular the ability to edit a scene by ending, beginning or re-contextualizing it are also managed by sequentially initial bodily moves and postural changes.
Chapter 4: The ‘Video Store’ and the ‘Audition’

4.1– Types of Scenes, Bodily Scene Edits and Editing Practices

In the sections that follow we will see how the body is used by actors to edit scenes, both at the beginning of scenes and at their end; I focus especially on how editing re–contextualizes action performed within a previous scene in order to begin a new scene. This analysis is a starting point to begin looking at the relationship between embodied interaction within a performance space and an actor’s metapragmatic control over an individual scene and the overall performance. Scene beginnings and endings are mediated through the use of one or more actors’ bodies to construct metapragmatic spatial cues to help direct and guide the overall improvisational performance. These cues are made up of bodily shifts in vertical and horizontal planes, including postural changes and movement out of or into ongoing action.

In order to better understand how actors use bodily edits, notation was made for each of the 44 scenes from the Reckoning’s long form performances. Careful attention was paid to scene boundaries and the overall sequential flow and positioning of scenes in relation to each other. Over the course of this process several patterns became apparent. The first was, as discussed above, how actors used various, but very specific, bodily moves as scene terminating and initiating actions. The next most striking pattern had to do with actor selection for scenes, and fell into one of two types:

1) All the actors at the beginning of a new scene self–select

2) The initiating actor self–selects at the beginning of a new scene, but chooses the next actor(s) in the scene

This distinction became the first way to categorically separate scenes from each other. The final observation provided a further categorical distinction, splitting the second category into two:
1) At least one character from an immediately previous scene carried over into the next scene

2) At least two actors from an immediately previous carried over into the next scene

For these two types of scenes attention was paid to how actors were selected and what sort of strategies were used to either connect an actor or actors to an immediately previous character or to differentiate the actors from the immediately previous characters. Selection strategies include gaze; body position (torso facing toward selected actor); touch; and on two occasions, in–frame or out–of–frame talk directed at multiple actors on stage during the transition into a new scene. The main strategies for differentiating between actors from previous scenes or linking characters from previous scenes had to do with topic change or maintenance; Changes in vocal quality for differentiating between scenes where the same actor plays a new character in a scene that is sequentially next; maintaining a marked vocal quality, a cue that connects two adjacent scenes where the same actor plays the same character; continuing or discontinuing situated activity (activities produced by individual characters carry during scenes, e.g., holding head in pain); maintaining or discontinuing body posture. Below are tables that show the distribution of these strategies for the two types of carry–over scenes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>15 out of 17 Scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gaze:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body:</strong></td>
<td>13 out of 17 Scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Touch:</strong></td>
<td>5 out of 17 Scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use Out–of–Frame Talk/In–Frame Talk:</strong></td>
<td>2 out of 17 Scenes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV: Actor Selection Strategies
All but two scenes used gaze as a method of other actor selection, a total of 88%. The upper body position was used in conjunction with other selection strategies in 76% of the scenes; touch was used in conjunction with other selection strategies in 29% of the scenes. In the two scenes where gaze was not used, it is posited that this strategy may have worked because all of the actors on–stage from the previous scene, as well as at least one character, carried–over into the next scene. Perhaps choosing not to gaze directly at anyone becomes a resource for selecting a larger group for the next scene.

Table V: How Actors Link Current Scene to Previous Scene (Character Carry–Over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintain Topic</th>
<th>13 out of 13 scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Marked Vocal Quality</td>
<td>4 out of 13 scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued Situated Activity</td>
<td>5 out of 13 scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Body Posture/Position</td>
<td>5 out of 13 scenes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI: How Actors Differentiate Current Scene from Previous Scene (Actor Carry–Over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discontinue Topic</th>
<th>4 out of 4 scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discontinue Marked Vocal Quality</td>
<td>2 out of 4 scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinue Situated Activity</td>
<td>2 out of 4 scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Body Posture/Position</td>
<td>4 out of 4 scenes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6N.B.: The continuity and discontinuity of marked vocal qualities in the new scene relied upon the use of a marked vocal quality in the immediately prior scene. In many cases, actors did not use a voice that was radically different from their own normal voice, so in these cases vocal quality was not tabulated as either changing or staying the same.
For both types of scenes, topic continuity and discontinuity were the most important resources for actors and the audience alike to determine whether or not characters from an immediately prior scene were carried over into the new scene. For character carry–over scenes, the other strategies always overlapped with topic maintenance, with maintained vocal quality being used 31% of the time and continued situated activity and body posture being used 38% of the time. For actor carry–over scenes, vocal quality and situated activity changes were both present 50%, though this is a percentage out of only four total scenes. Discontinued body position was present in all scenes of this type, which might suggest that change on a vertical plane is an integral component for interpreting and understanding segues into this type of scene; however, these data only contained four examples of this type of scene, not enough to make any conclusive statements about.

4.2 – Breakdown of Scene Types

The charts that follow are broken down by these two categorical divisions and consist of three separate types of scenes. Note that scenes of the total–scene–change type do often have characters and actors that carry over from previous scenes; however the distinction I am making is related to the sequential ordering of a given scene within the overall performance, i.e., relates directly to scenes that immediately precede or follow the scene in question. Also, any preceding scenes that contained all of the available actors on–stage, resulting in repeat actors performing in two sequential scenes were only distinguished as carry–over type scenes if the initiating actor selected the next actor or actors to be in the next scene, otherwise they were marked as a total–scene–change scene:

1) Total–Scene–Change: A scene with no carry–over of either actors or characters from the immediately previous scene; all actors self–select
2) Character Carry–Over: A scene with at least one character that is carried over from the immediately previous scene; only the initiating actor self–selects

3) Actor Carry–Over: A scene with at least two actors that are carried over from the immediately previous scene; only the initiating actor self–selects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene Type</th>
<th>Number of Scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total–Scene–Changes</td>
<td>28 out of 44 scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Carry–Over</td>
<td>12 out of 44 scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor Carry–Over</td>
<td>4 out of 44 scenes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the scenes (63%) exhibited complete actor self–selection and had no instances of either actor or character carry–over from the immediately previous scene. The remaining 37% of scenes include one type of carry–over scene and actor selection by another actor. The majority (28%) consists of the character carry–over type and only 9% of the total scenes are that of the actor carry–over type. Given this breakdown, total–scene–changes appear to be the preferred type, possibly because they are the scene type that adheres most strongly to the improvisational practices that discourage individual actors from attempts to over–direct narrative elements of scenes and those that limit actors control over other actors’ actions and character choices. Another possibility is that this scene type, due to the fact that it is more easily distinguished from immediately preceding actions, is more easily understood both by other actors within the performance and the audience.
4.3 – Types of Bodily Scene Edits

Below are charts with the breakdown of the types of bodily scene edits and the accompanying vocal productions, both lexical and non-lexical sounds and secondary gesticulations found across all three types of scenes.

All actions that refer to those that occur at the beginning of a scene include: actor selection; horizontal and vertical space change; narrator voice, touch moves (to select); and touch moves (to tap in) (see figure VI below).

Figure VI: Bodily Edits at Beginning of Scenes

All actions that refer to those that occur at the end of a scene, or immediately prior, include: movement onto stage/across action; wave moves (to clear); touch moves (to clear); and narrator voice (see figure VII below).
Figure VII: The above figures represent the different types of scene edits made by actors at the end of scenes. A: Movement across in front of or into the horizontal space of ongoing action in order to end the scene; B: waving arm moves used by an actor to clear another actor offstage; C: touch moves used by an actor to clear another actor offstage.

Table VIII: Total–scene–changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total–scene–changes:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All actor self–selection</td>
<td>27 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal space change at beginning</td>
<td>22 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical space change at beginning</td>
<td>13 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator voice</td>
<td>5 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to select actor(s))</td>
<td>0 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to tap in)</td>
<td>0 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>3 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>2 out of 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement onto stage/across action to end</td>
<td>27 out of 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart covers the different types of bodily scene edits and actor selection practices used within total–scene–changes. At the beginning of scenes, both horizontal and vertical plane change moves are commonly used to establish new scenes. Of those listed, over 11 scenes included both horizontal and vertical moves, making the total number of scenes of this type with either change on one or both planes 24 out of 27, or 89%. All of the scenes that lacked
horizontal or vertical movement in the beginning of the scene had actors who maintained positions they had established during a scene terminating move.

To end scenes, off–stage actors often move onto the stage, i.e., enter into the space being utilized by an ongoing performance, or move across in front of ongoing action in order to terminate scenes. For this type of scene, this manner of edit was used in all 27 of the scenes. Other terminating bodily scene edits, touch moves or wave moves used to clear actors from the stage, happened a total of five times, or 18.5% of the time. However, each of these edits was always found to correspond with movement onto stage or across action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Carry–Over:</th>
<th>13 out of 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor selects other(s) to be same character(s)</td>
<td>13 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal space change at beginning</td>
<td>10 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical space change at beginning</td>
<td>9 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator voice</td>
<td>2 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to select actor(s))</td>
<td>4 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to tap in)</td>
<td>2 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>0 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>0 out of 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement onto stage/across action to end</td>
<td>11 out of 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like the first scene type (see above), character carry–over scenes also exhibit a high number of horizontal and vertical space changes at the beginning of scenes. Of the instances listed in the chart, over eight of the moves overlap, the total number of this type of beginning scene edits appear in 11 out of 13 total scenes. The two scenes that lacked these types of movements both had off–stage actors who made horizontal moves during the previous scenes and used a tap–in touch, i.e., selecting the actor they wanted to replace on stage by touching them in some manner, which prompted the selected actor to exit the stage. Actors in this type of
scene also utilized another touch move on four occasions when they selected other actors to be in a scene. Other actor selection strategies will be discussed in more detail below.

Terminating edits consisting of either movement onto stage or across on–going action occurred 11 out of 13 times, or in 85% of these scenes. The two scenes that lack this movement are moved into using touch moves that select actors to start a new scene; the other two instances of this touch type coincide with the movement onto the stage or across type edits.

Table X: Actor Carry–Over

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor Carry–Over:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor selects other(s) to be same character(s)</td>
<td>4 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal space change at beginning</td>
<td>2 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical space change at beginning</td>
<td>3 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator voice</td>
<td>0 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to select actor(s))</td>
<td>1 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to tap in)</td>
<td>0 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>0 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>1 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement onto stage/across action to end</td>
<td>2 out of 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the four actor carry–over scenes contain a beginning scene edit where there is a change on the horizontal or vertical plane, of these one scene contains both movements and the remaining three only contain one.

Three out of four of the scenes contained terminating edits with movement onto the stage or across ongoing action. The one scene lacking this edit is a scene that segues from another actor carry–over scene and contains a postural change that used to re–contextualize previous action and guide the inference of the change. The single instance of wave moves to clear the stage is used in conjunction with the terminating scene edit movement, the scene change begins when an actress produces an out of frame postural change that disrupts the ongoing action, before crossing in front of other actors involved in the scene and producing several wave moves that clear other actors. It is also during this transition that the single touch move that selects
another actor for the next scene is produced, again by the actress who cleared the last scene. These two scene changes will be discussed in more detail in the next section below.

Table XI: Totals for All Scenes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totals for All Scenes:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal space change at beginning</td>
<td>34 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical space change at beginning</td>
<td>25 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overlap</td>
<td>20 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Either or both</td>
<td>39 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator voice</td>
<td>7 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to select)</td>
<td>5 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to tap in)</td>
<td>2 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>3 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave moves (to clear actor(s))</td>
<td>3 out of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement onto stage/ across action to end</td>
<td>41 out of 44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above is a compilation of the total number of times each bodily editing move was used in all of the 44 scenes. The most notable scene edits, based upon the totals are edits with movement in the horizontal and vertical plane, or in both planes. Horizontal and/or vertical space changes at scenes beginnings were used in 89% of the total scenes. Movement onto stage or across action at the end of scenes was used in 93% of all scenes. Also worth mentioning is the fact that while out–of–frame talk (narrator voice) can be used as a strategy to start or end scenes, in all cases of its use, in 16% of scenes, it coincided with a bodily editing move. This suggests that bodily moves more than turns–at–talk are the preferred method of producing metapragmatic moves during scene transitions.

4.4 – Bodily Scene Editing Practices

Scene beginnings and endings seem to be mediated through the use of one or more actors
bodies, more specifically we will see in the following data sets how contextual changes are signaled and managed by postural changes and how previous dramatic action can be re-contextualized by an actor’s bodily move, in this case the choice to sit down.

The following transcript shows us the last few lines of a scene involving four actors attending an AA meeting which is terminated by several bodily moves that lead to the beginning of the next scene, an actor carry-over type. The pictures in figure 7 correspond to the silence that follows the final line of the transcript, line 16, and show us the bodily scene edits undertaken by the actress:

4.5 – The Reckoning Harold: ‘AA Meeting’ (end portion)
01 Actor: hi:: (. ) my name is uh (0.3) [°Mitchell°
02 (((audience laughter))
03 (0.9)) ((intermittent laughter during this pause in talk))
04 Actress: hi [hi Mitchell]
05 Other 1: [hi Mitchell]
06 Other 2: [hi (0.5) Mitchell
07 (0.7)) ((intermittent laughter during this pause in talk))
08 Actor: u:::hm (0.8) my rock bottom was ah:: (1.4) wrestle mania seventeen
09 (after the actor finishes his turn, the actress, while facing off left (most likely making eye contact with another actor or someone else offstage) raises her right hand and draws a
finger across her throat, seemingly asking permission to cut from this scene, see figure 6 below.}

(2.3) ((audience laughter))

Actress: °can you stand°=

Actor: =um (0.3) I can’t [I don’t have any legs

Actress: [oh I’m sorry I’m s–hh–orry=

Other 1: =(…)

Actress: I’M SORRY (1.2) I’M SORRY

Actor: I DRANK MY LEGS OFF. (1.2) I DRANK MY LEGS OFF

(6.5) ((intermittent laughter during this pause in talk)) {scene transition}

4.6 – Throat Cut

During the actor’s turn at line 08, we find evidence of an out–of–frame action made by the actress that breaks the fourth wall. This move, and the turns that follow, seem to be the actress’s attempts at something akin to a pre–edit, essentially moves made to both assess the appropriateness of a scene terminating edit and an attempt to force a postural change of another actor, perhaps to use his move as the first part of a scene ending edit. Her pre–edits may be in response to growing length of the scene; at the start of line 01 above two other performers, another actor and the actress, have already shared their AA rock bottom stories. The description that follows is a move–by–move account of this sequence.
While the actor is speaking at line 08, the actress directs both her upper body and her gaze toward someone off-screen. With her gaze held steady on the same position she raises her right hand and draws it across her throat, from left to right, in an action that seems to be asking the question of whether or not she should end the scene. After finishing the move, she turns her attention back to the actor stage right from her, the actor who had previously been speaking. At her next turn–at–talk at line 14, using a voice spoken at a much lower volume than during her previous or subsequent turns, she asks the actor to stand up while simultaneously motioning upward with her left hand. Given what we know about the typical actions of improvisational turns, we might expect the actor’s response to her request to be to stand up. However, in a move that breaks the “Yes, and…” maxim, the actor refuses the actress’s request with his next turn–at–talk by saying “=um (0.3) I can’t (I don’t have any legs)” thus blocking the request. The actor’s blocking and refusal to accept the request gain him the opportunity to extend the scene and take another turn. While eventually the actress does end the scene with a bodily edit, it is not until after she and the other on–stage performers begin to recover from their own laughter elicited by the actor’s unexpected delivery at line14. The laughter of the on–stage performers may be why there is such an extended pause between the final line of dialogue at line 18 and the beginning of the next scene, a pause of 6.5 seconds.

The actress’s failed attempt at pre–edits, especially the one attempted with her request made at line 14, stand as a counterpoint to the next section, where we see her successful scene terminating and initiating edits. The main difference between her failure and success are the actions she uses to achieve them: the former is a double voiced, in–frame offer made by a turn–at–talk and the latter is done with out–of–frame, metapragmatic bodily moves.
Figure VIII: Actress's Throat Cut

The actress, facing screen left, makes eye contact with some unseen actor or person.

Still maintaining eye contact, she raises her right hand, with the index finger extended, to her neck and begins tracing along her neck from left to right.
4.7 – Scene Terminal and Initial Bodily Edits

The still images below outline the actions carried out after the final turn of the last transcript:

1. End portion of AA meeting scene (chairs in an I configuration, one actor off screen to the left).

2. First segment of bodily editing: when the actress stands, the previous action and dialogue halts. The actress turns to her right and waves her arm toward the actor in this position, causing him to stand.

3. Second segment of bodily editing: Actress turns to right, gestures to the other two actors and causes them to stand.
Figure IX: Scene Terminal and Initial Bodily Edits (continued)

4. Third segment of bodily editing: The actors on the left of the performance space continue to stand and begin to move their chairs out of the performance space; the actress touches the remaining standing actor and begins speaking to him.

5. The beginning of the next scene, a clerk and a patron in a video store:

   Actress: uh we we’re closing (you’re gonna hafta go home)

Crucially, these stills show us how through the use of postural change, gesture and touch an actor can assume control over the performance, ending the previously ongoing action, clearing unnecessary props and actors and selecting another actor with whom to begin the next scene. In this case, the previous scene’s action was associated with the seated postural position, and when the actress stands she disrupts this configuration. Also of importance is the fact that she keeps her back to the audience during this move. This is a secondary cue that allows her fellow actors to know that her move is metapragmatic in nature and not an “in character” move, one which would have required the maintenance of forward facing staging to uphold the audience oriented participation framework. Another clue to the metapragmatic nature of her turn is the uninvited nature of her postural change; within the three performances whenever actors make an in character postural change, either standing up or sitting down, they are always invited to do so either verbally or gesturally by another on–stage, in–character actor.
In the previous chapter, we began to explore how the relationships between actors within a scene are built out of the “disequilibrium of bodies” and how the sequential nature of bodily moves and turns at talk grant certain actors more power and control over the unfolding interaction. Work on ritual and ceremonial greetings has shown us that participants rely upon multiple channels of interconnected semiotic signals and show us clear cases where the body and space are more central than language when “defining the setting, the situation, and the participants” (Duranti 1992, 657–58). In Keating’s work on Micronesian feasts she finds that the understanding of ceremonial greetings used on these occasions relies upon “non–verbal acts that precede the utterance of formulaic phrases” and spatial relations among participants (2000, 304). In the data below, we will look more closely at how postural changes can impact and re-contextualize the action of the performance.

At the start of the following scene, which picks up where the last data segment ended, the actress and actor have established through their collaborative bodily moves and turns–at–talk a setting, two characters and the dramatic action of the scene (a video store; a video store clerk and a patron; the patron’s search for the movie “Independence Day”). The actor playing the character of the patron is asked by the clerk to perform a scene from the movie so that she might be able to help him locate the movie in the store. At this prompt he produces an elaborate pantomime with sound effects (see figure X below) depicting various moments from the film; the transcript below picks up immediately at the end of the AA Meeting scene and runs through the duration of the video store scene until the transition to the next scene:

**4.8 – The Reckoning Harold: ‘Video Store’**

01 Actress: ‘scuse me um:

02 (0.5)
Actor: uh

(0.5)

Actress: uh we’re closing (you’re gonna hafta go home)

(0.2)

Actor: I I know what I want I I’ll b– it will be just a minute (.) °yeah°

(actress stays in same place, miming movement with her hands (at this time her
movement is not yet defined); the actor, while mumbling to himself, paces the length and
width of the stage in a space that is still not completely defined)

(2.5)

Actor: °m kay°

(2.0)

Actor: °Independence Day°

(2.0)

Actor: °Independence Day Independence Day°

(0.9)

Actor: (sound crescendo) [Independence Day (0.4) Independence day

(((audience laughter))

(9.8)

Actress: oh there’s nothing in the east wing {in response to actor’s movement to a part of the
performance space that was, in a previous scene, labeled as the east wing.}

Actor: okay

(2.8)

Actor: I’m sorry excuse me I’m looking for A:: I’m looking [for

((actor’s hand slap))

that Will S– uh that Will uh ((mmpp lip pop)) (0.5) Independence day u:::h I’m
28 looking for that is that how wo– would that be would that b– [alphabetical:]

29 Actress: [Unfortunately ah u[h

30 Actor: [uh in order

31 of importance

32 (0.3)

33 Actress: we d/t– [we

34 ((audience laughter

35 (0.8)

36 Actress: probably have the (0.2) movie but h this is gonna sound crazy um (0.7) I’m not

37 really good with titles of movies I’m I’m better with uh maybe like a scene from it?=

38 Actor: =[oh yeah sure sure. (0.6) Yeah yeah Independence day uh:: ((sti:::eu:::

39 ((audience laughter))

40 (6.6) {acts out scene, see figure 8 below}

41 Actor: yeah (0.2) yeah yeah uh RUN for cover (0.3) u::h here they come, sit down, relax.

42 (0.7)

43 y’know, y’know that movie right?

44 (0.4)

45 Actress: u:m let’s take it from the top but I just want you to um (0.4) imagine that this really

46 is the end of the world
Figure X: Independence Day Pantomime

= [oh yeah
sure sure.
(0.6) Yeah
yeah
Independence
day uh::

((sti::eu:: ))

yeah
(0.2)
yeah
yeah uh

RUN for
cover

u::h here they
come, sit down,
relax.
4.9 – The Reckoning Harold: Segue from ‘Video Store’ to ‘Audition’

01 Actress: u:m let’s take it from the top but I just want you to um (0.4) imagine that this
02 really is the end of the world
03 (0.6)
04 [(During the actor’s next turn, the actress moves a chair into frame and sits down)]
05 Actor: uhm::: (0.3) um (0.2) well (0.2) okay uh I don’t think that that’s what that movies
06 about. (0.2) I think it’s more of a of a story about rebirth–
07 Actress: {While seated} Yeah [and do you do you have a comedic piece?]
08 Actor : [and uh community
09 (5.8)
10 Actor: I was told this was for the Merry Wives of Windsor?

Figure XI: Bodily Re–contextualization

Corresponds to Lines 01-03

Actress sitting down, corresponds to Lines 05-06

Actress seated, delivers Lines 07 onward. She also displays different types of situated activity: smoking (shown above) and holding clipboard/papers of some sort

At Line 01, we see the actress’ first attempt at a re–contextualizing segue. The bolded portion of her talk, “let’s take it from the top” is a construction that signals a change in character category membership; with this line she attempts to transform herself from a video store clerk into some sort of casting director. This change is signaled in part by her language
choice, as “take it from the top” is a commonly used construction in theatrical rehearsals and auditions, but also by her upcoming postural change and her production of a second turn that also indexes theatrical auditions, “do you have a comedic piece?” The actor’s response at line 10 displays his uptake of the scene edit and a correct interpretation of her preceding action. This response at line 10 differs from his initial response at lines 05 and 06, which shows that the actor has not fully understood the actress’s re–contextualization of his pantomimed performance with her request to “take it from the to” His drawn out hesitation marker at the beginning of the line and the several minor repairs throughout the line indicate that he may be having difficulty understanding how her utterance at lines 01 and 02 fits with the previously established action and setting, also that the actresses turn is dispreferred. While the actor produces this at lines 05 and 06, we find the actress simultaneously adjusting a nearby chair and sitting down. It is at this point, after her postural adjustment, that she produces her utterance at line 07. This line is then quickly, and this time more deftly, responded to by the actor with his utterance at line 10, an utterance that clearly indicates that the actor has now understood the previous re–contextualizing of the pantomimed scene from “Independence Day” and the segue from the video store scene to the audition scene.

In this case, we can see how actors can utilize their bodies both to contextualize an emerging scene and to re–contextualize previous actions and scenes. In keeping with Keating’s work on the emergent hierarchy in Pohnpeian ritual feasting, we also find in these that language is not always the defining semiotic mode of an interpretive framework, both “the body and space can also take a central role in […] providing a central interpretive framework” for an interaction (2000, 304). In the audition example, we see that it is not just the membership category shift that occurs in the actress’s language choices in line 07 that signals the boundary between the previous
action and its re-contextualization, but also the act of sitting down. This postural change provides a strong segue cue that when coupled with the construction “Do you have a comedic piece” clearly signals to the actor the correct interpretation. Thus, the action of the previous few moments in the performance, the acting out of the scene from the movie, “Independence Day,” comes to be re-contextualized and the setting of the new scene shifts from the video store to an audition space. Thus, the bodily moves made by actors at transition spaces between scenes are not merely complementary moves that accompany turns–at–talk. These moves mediate, edit and re-contextualize action and are central to the understanding the actors and the audience have of the unfolding dramatic action within the scene. Talk in many cases, rather, complements and supports multi-modal bodily moves.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 – Conclusion
In the previous examples, we found evidence that the initiating bodily moves and actions of actors could be used as resources to shape the dramatic action of the scene and the first turn–at–talk. In Chapter 3, the initiating actor’s choice to use chairs and the collaboratively formed configuration impact the eventual scene that unfolds. Furthermore, the actor’s noticing and reference to the actress’s chair position and bodily actions, her heavy breathing and facial expression, in his first turn–at–talk demonstrate how fully attuned improv actors are to potential contextualization cues within scenes. As we saw in Chapter 4, actors must also monitor bodily moves in the transition spaces between scenes, watching for changes in participation frameworks to determine when a scene is ending and when a new scene is beginning.

What the evidence suggests is that the first moves of improvisational scenes are made by actors’ bodies and that the following turns–at–talk are usually complementary or secondary moves. This runs counter to what we might expect given our understanding of CA. However, through the analysis of the examples above I have shown sequentially how the first bodily moves of a scene affect the content of first turns–at–talk. We also see how important bodily moves are utilized in managing the temporally unfolding interaction; engagement displays become resources for us to see what the actors see, to find cues that guide the creation and, ultimately, the interpretation of the unfolding interactions. Both engagement and disengagement displays like those used during scene edits become ways for us to see who will be part of a new scene and signs that a previous scene will be coming to a close.

Briggs and Bauman, in a discussion about intertextuality within oral performances, highlight the practice of a storyteller using discursive means to link specific oral texts with other
texts in order to establish a framework that aids in the production of the story and promotes an audiences’ understanding:

“The perspective that I am suggesting here is founded upon a conception of a social life as discursively constituted, produced and reproduced in situated acts of speaking and other signifying practices that are simultaneously anchored in their situational contexts of use and transcendent of them, linked by interdiscursive ties to other situations, other acts, other utterances. The sociohistorical continuity and coherence manifested in these interdiscursive relationships rests upon cultural repertoires of concepts and practices that serve as conventionalized orienting frameworks for the production, reception and circulation of discourse.”

(Briggs & Bauman 1992, 2)

These interdiscursive ties between local situations and larger, cross-contextual social cultural practices are how we are able to ‘get’ references and understand cues that are made during performances. In order for references to make sense in a local, anchored context we must always understand them in terms of their connection to our enduring social and cultural ‘repertoires.’ Thus, the same apparatus used by the actor to spot a viable contextualization cue is used by the audience to make sense of the scene. Hopefully these data have shown the true extent of human inferencing and sense-making. Even with only the barest of built, material context, actors are able to create rich and detailed imagined spaces, and audiences are able to fill in the details. Though real life interactions tend to occur in built spaces filled with objects that act as their own contextual cues, our understanding and interpretation of such cultural artifacts
rely upon the same inferencing skills utilized by the actors and the audience during improv performances. The world and the cultural artifacts that surround us do not hold meaning; instead we give them meaning. More importantly, that meaning is regulated by our own cultural and societal norms. A chair in the western world would then evoke a different meaning than in a place where the chair is not an everyday object.
Works Cited:


