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Interaction ritual and the body in a city meat market

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ABSTRACT

Service encounters are often fleeting interactions between strangers, which are beset with trip wires and obstacles. The potential for instability in such encounters is often countered by ritual interaction – small ceremonies in which civility is freely given, and transgression is accounted for and forgiven. Service encounters are not conducted through speech alone, but through embodied communication, in which interactants do not only speak, but point, smile, shrug, nod, gesture, grimace, and so on. In this paper, we consider the deployment of embodied communication, including but not limited to speech, as supportive and remedial interaction in a service encounter between a team of city centre butchers and a customer. The example is from extensive field work conducted in a four-year ethnographic research project across four cities in the UK. The analysis finds that in seeking to understand how people communicate in encounters with strangers, we must pay close attention not only to speech, but also to the ritual deployment of the body as a resource for communication.

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The role of language and the body in social interaction has been revisited in recent research, with proposals for new ways to conceptualise how communicative resources are mobilised by speakers and other participants within social interaction, and ultimately how human action is organised (Mondada 2016). Everyday life is characterised by semiotic repertoires in which multimodal and multilingual resources make meaning together. However, the question of how people communicate in increasingly superdiverse environments is not answered only by observing that the body has a significant role to play in everyday encounters. We also need to know more about how people negotiate the complex and precarious business of contact with others. Much existing research on communication between people who look and sound different from each other explains what makes it difficult, and offers prescriptions for making it better. However, we might also profitably focus on how such communication routinely succeeds (Streeck 2017). To this end, we return to Goffman's (1971) notion of "interaction ritual". The contribution of the present paper is to report research which presents examples of supportive and remedial interaction ritual, so necessary to the stability of everyday encounters, instantiated through embodied communicative action which includes, but is not limited to, speech.

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Semiotic repertoire

Kusters et al. (2017) point out that communicative repertoires are multimodal, so we should refer to “semiotic repertoires” rather than “linguistic repertoires.” Semiotic repertoires include, but are by no means restricted to, the linguistic. They include aspects of communication not always thought of as “language,” including gesture, posture, how people walk, stand, and sit, the way they tilt their head, their gaze, the shrug of their shoulders, their smile or frown. All are part of the semiotic repertoire. Much existing research does not consider heterogeneous semiosis in terms of repertoire, but views semiotic systems as separate (Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron 2011). Assumptions about what constitutes language have often rendered bodily forms of communication peripheral (Pennycook 2018). But the integrated nature of the semiotic repertoire is fundamental. Embodied communication is not separate from linguistic communication. They are integral to each other to the extent that they are one and the same. It is not useful to separate gestures from the spoken language with which they often co-occur (Norris 2004).

What form a gesture takes, and what job it does, often depends on the material setting, the things at hand, and sometimes simply handling something can be a communicative act (Streeck 2017). To understand gesture, we have to introduce the material setting in which it is made (Goffman 1964). Furthermore, gesture is more than a simply visual phenomenon (Goodwin 1986). It plays a key role in organisation of the access participants have to each other. Gesture provides a resource for negotiating the moment-by-moment organisation of the interaction within which it emerges. Gesture is not simply a way to display meaning, but an activity with distinctive temporal, spatial, and social properties that participants actively use in the organisation of their interaction (Goodwin 1986). McNeill (1985, 351) pointed out that gestures are verbal, and “the whole of gesture and speech can be encompassed in a unified conception.” To separate them is, therefore, an artificial process. Every gesture is significant, and conveys something in relation to something. In other words, gestures are never meaningless, even if it may at times be impossible to recover exactly how they contribute meaning to the communicative situation (Streeck 2017).

A semiotic repertoire can be understood as a heteroglossic realm of embodied ideologies, potentialities, histories, and constraints (Kusters et al. 2017). That is, the availability of semiotic resources will vary in response to relations of power. Different resources are not only differentially accessible, they are also ascribed different values, and are assessed differently in different times and spaces. When people with diverse linguistic backgrounds come into contact they deploy semiotic repertoires which include a wide range of practices for making meaning. Interactants do not separate the linguistic from the embodied, but make meaning through repertoires which integrate verbal and non-verbal action. Beyond this, however, there is more to say about how people survive the complexity and precarity of social interaction.

Interaction ritual

Goffman defines ritual as “a conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value to that object of ultimate value or its stand-in” (1971, 62). “Positive ritual” includes small acts of kindness or generosity, or at least civility, which speak of the performer’s good will. Such an act provides a sign of an

individual's involvement in and connection to another, and offers the recipient the opportunity to affirm the relationship through a show of gratitude, and "both moves, taken together, form a little ceremony – a supportive interchange." Negative ritual is characterised by interdictions, avoidance, and staying away. Nevertheless, it may also lead to dialogue, particularly when the offender is required to account or apologise for an action. Such a transaction involves a "remedial interchange." These two basic interchanges, the supportive and the remedial, "are among the most conventionalized and perfunctory doings we engage in" (Goffman 1971, 64), and are crucial to human interaction.

Interaction ritual practices are aimed at the restoration or preservation of normal relations (Rampton 2014). Interaction ritual offers a defence against the vulnerabilities of the ordinary world, and is oriented to the maintenance and recovery of stability. Ritual is a form of action which may be deployed to re-establish the flow of everyday life. In analysing communication, we might ask what kinds of change, tension, or uncertainty are particular types of action orienting to, how are the interactants dealing with them, and what rituals are invoked in this cause (Rampton 2006). Rampton proposes that "in their apprehensions of social stratification and efforts to develop new solidarities from ethnolinguistic difference, it looks as though people draw on interaction ritual practices that may well be fundamental to human society in general" (2014, 297).

Goffman (1983) refers to the fleeting relationships of service encounters, and notes that in contemporary society almost everyone is involved in service transactions almost every day. He concludes that whatever the significance of service encounters, how people are treated in these exchanges is likely to flavour their sense of place in the wider community. We propose that people's sense of place in the wider community is ever more crucial to the social fabric of neighbourhoods and societies as they become more diverse. Goffman (1983, 63) noticed that "forms of face-to-face life are worn smooth by constant repetition on the part of participants who are heterogeneous in many ways and yet must quickly reach a working understanding." In this process of quickly reaching a working understanding, exchanges between people are suffused with interpersonal rituals. Goffman (1967, 19) refers to ritual acts "through whose symbolic component the actor shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it." When persons are present together, many contingencies arise that can reflect discreditably on them, and "when individuals come into one another's immediate presence, territories of the self bring to the scene a vast filigree of trip wires which individuals are uniquely equipped to trip over" (Goffman 1971, 106). In the example to follow, people in a city meat market catch their feet on interactional trip wires, and yet find ways to restore their balance and equilibrium.

Everyday interactions in the market

Markets are places where we encounter difference. They define engagement with difference, with different people, different clothes, different goods, and different ways of speaking (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). They offer "an ideal setting to explore the relationship between economy and society, especially when we consider the ways that these markets reflect, but also shape, the nature and meaning of social and cultural diversity" (Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015, 16). They entail encounters between people, frequently across lines of social and cultural difference. Watson (2009a, 2009b) proposes that the sociocultural context of markets warrants investigation to make sense of when, where,

and how encounters across difference occur. Markets offer particularly rich seams for social research because they “exemplify the global process of space–time compression, juxtaposing people with backgrounds from distant places and distinct cultures together in the same place” (Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015, 17). They also offer sites at which embodied communication comes plainly into view.

The example in this paper is part of a four-year project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, “Translation and Translanguaging. Investigating linguistic and cultural transformations in superdiverse wards in four UK cities [AH/L007096/1].” The multi-site ethnographic project is directed by Angela Creese. Its aim is to investigate how people communicate when they bring different histories, biographies, and trajectories in contact. We designed the research so that in each of the four cities we would conduct ethnographic field work where people came into contact and had a need or desire to communicate. In the first phase of the research, we examined business sites, in the second phase leisure, tourism and heritage sites, in the third phase sports settings, and in the fourth phase legal advice settings. We were interested in all forms of communication in the superdiverse city. Of course, observing and listening in to the communicative practices of a million people was quite impractical. So we narrowed our focus along two dimensions. First, we focused our attention on a single “ward” – the smallest unit of political administration, typically of around 5000 residents, who elect and are represented by a councillor or councillors. Second, we took as our starting point the most recent government national census, in particular, the question which asked residents what is their main language other than English. In the case of Birmingham, the ward we took as our focus was Ladywood, in the city centre. The category of languages most commonly reported by residents of the ward to be their main language other than English was “Chinese languages.” We located a small business in the Bull Ring indoor market, a butcher’s stall run by a couple, Kang Chen from southern China, and Meiyen Chew, from Malaysia. We approached them to ask whether they would participate in the research. We offered them payment, and the opportunity to take a course leading to a qualification. They agreed and signed consent forms. Over a period of four months, researchers (Adrian Blackledge and Rachel Hu) observed communicative practices at a butcher’s stall in the city meat market. The researchers wrote around 100,000 words of field notes, made 35 h of workplace audio-recordings and video-recordings, made 30 h of home audio-recordings, took more than 200 photographs, collected online, digital, and social media material, and conducted interviews with 18 market stall holders. The key participant, Kang Chen, had arrived in UK 12 years before the research was conducted. In this paper, we analyse a single service encounter between a customer and Kang Chen and his two assistants, Dave, a newcomer to the business, and Bradley, an established team member. We examine a single and entire interaction because the structure of the interaction is of significance, and because we study gestures in their contexts of occurrence, where “context not only means the physical and social setting, but also the concurrent and prior acts of co-participants within unfolding turns and sequences of action” (Streck 2009, 7). Participants “fundamentally orient to emergent actions and their sequential positioning, to prior and next, to initiating and responding actions” (Mondada 2016, 361). The interaction was video-recorded by a film-maker, with researchers also present. The video-camera has a shotgun microphone. Kang Chen and Bradley also wear lapel microphones and digital voice recorders. Each of the episodes discussed here can be viewed at the specified YouTube links.

Episode 1 (<https://youtu.be/knzM5zncd4I>)

It is morning, shortly after the market has opened. A customer (C) arrives as Kang Chen (KC) and Bradley are dealing with a delivery of meat. Kang Chen greets the customer, “hello my friend, how are you?.” The customer responds, “always good.”

1	KC	hello my friend how are you?
2	C	always good
3	KC	always good
4	C	yea how about you?
5	KC	yea yea ju- just getting tired
6	C	ha ha ha ha
7	KC	you need anything today?
8	C	(xxxx)
9	KC	how many case?
10	C	no leave there
11	KC	there there I still will deliver for you
12	C	he he
13	KC	eh? cheap cheap

At the initiation of an encounter greetings mark a period of heightened access among participants (Goffman 1971). In the meat market, as in other service encounters, the dyadic relationship is likely to be short-lived. The greeting is an important ritual in marking the beginning of the encounter. Together with farewells, greetings provide ritual brackets around a spate of joint activity, and are termed by Goffman (1971, 79) “access rituals.” The access ritual between Kang Chen and his customer creates space for further communication. The protagonists have entered a state of talk (Goffman 1971). Kang Chen mirrors the customer’s speech, “always good.” The ritual is not yet complete, however, and the customer in his turn asks the butcher, “how about you?” Kang Chen says, “yea, just getting tired.” The light-hearted complaint indexes Kang Chen as a working man, linking him to others who similarly labour. The customer emits an exaggerated roar of laughter (Figure 1), far exceeding the wit of Kang Chen’s remark. This is supportive ritual laughter (Goffman 1971), creating a convivial context in which to do business.

Now Kang Chen looks squarely to the customer as he moves from access ritual mode to commercial mode, “you need anything today?” (Figure 2). The customer makes an indeterminate sound. Perhaps encouraged by this hesitation, Kang Chen asks, “how many case?”



Figure 1. C laughs.



Figure 2. KC looks at C.

The customer says “no, leave there.” Now Kang Chen looks out through the large plate glass window onto to the street outside, and points, right arm and index finger fully extended (Figure 3). He appears to be pointing towards neighbouring China Town, where the butchers daily deliver meat to restaurants.

The customer follows the direction of Kang Chen’s pointing. Kang Chen drops his arm and says, “there there, I still will deliver for you.” The customer smiles, and continues to gaze out through the window. The customer laughs again, and touches Kang Chen on the right shoulder with his right hand (Figure 4). Bezemer and Kress (2014) propose that “touch” is a fully semiotic, communicational resource, produced to address a specific other, a participant in communication. Here the customer’s touch with his hand on the butcher’s shoulder crosses normative boundaries. Certain categories of people are permitted to touch other persons as a means of conveying friendly support or familiarity. Others are not permitted to touch (Goffman 1967). It is unusual for customers to touch butchers in this market (for an alternative scenario in a different market, see Kusters 2017), because they are usually separated by a counter one metre deep. But the customer’s hand on the butcher’s shoulder links them together, as the customer acknowledges both the butcher’s light-heartedness and his sales pitch. Kang Chen adds, ‘cheap



Figure 3. KC points to the street.



Figure 4. C touches KC on the shoulder.

cheap', a phrase we heard Kang Chen use regularly (Blackledge, Creese, and Hu 2015). The access ritual is characterised by embodied communication, as both men deploy their semiotic repertoires. Pointing, touching, laughing, talking, looking at each other and in the same direction, the proximity of their bodies, all contribute to the protagonists engaging in readiness for further exchange. During the four months during which we observed and got to know Kang Chen he told us on several occasions, "my English sucks." We know little about the language proficiency of the customer on this occasion. However, we are able to conclude that he too was a migrant, who did not speak English fluently or with confidence (and who made no attempt to speak Mandarin or Cantonese). Embodied communication was therefore at a premium in this interaction, as it was in many encounters in the market.

Episode 2 (<https://youtu.be/icz1eqqt2jU>)

With the convivial preliminaries concluded, Kang Chen moves to his meat counter. There is a step in front of the butcher's stall. Most customers remain on floor level. However, this customer climbs onto the step. The assistant behind the counter is Dave, a new member of the butcher's team. The customer points with the middle finger of his right hand, identifying a piece of pork belly (Figure 5). He says "that," and takes a step backwards, off the step, still pointing at the pork.

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | C | that |
| 2 | D | this one? |
| 3 | | you want it in half? |
| 4 | C | chop er small one |
| 5 | D | yep (.) rib out? |
| 6 | C | yes please |
| 7 | D | six pounds fifty |
| 8 | C | I need pork |
| 9 | D | how much more? |
| 10 | | about there? |
| 11 | C | with that half |
| 12 | D | half? |
| 13 | C | yea yes please thank you |
| 14 | D | eleven pound |
| 15 | | eleven pound |
| 16 | | rib out cut small and the meat as well? |
| 17 | C | yes please thank you |



Figure 5. C points to pork.

Dave reaches towards the pork belly, saying “this one?.” He lifts it onto the electronic scales behind the counter. The customer makes three cutting gestures with his hand (Figure 6). Many forms that gestures take are grounded in manual activity in the material world – the language of gesture is a language of action (Streeck 2017). Dave seeks confirmation of the meaning of the instruction, saying “you want it in half?,” pointing to the middle of the piece of meat. The customer mounts the step again, reaching over the counter top, extending his reach so that he is able to touch where he wants the meat cut (Figure 7). The action is transgressive, as he invades the space reserved for the butchers. The customer touches the meat in two places, and Dave mirrors the action, also touching the meat in the same places, checking his understanding. A common way to show that one has understood a pointing gesture is to respond with a pointing gesture of one’s own (Streeck 2017). The customer steps down from the step as Dave takes the pork belly to the cutting area. As Dave brings the two halves of the pork back to the scales, the customer interrupts, saying “chop er, small one.” Yes, says Dave. He places one of the halves of belly on the scale, and makes repeated cutting signs with his left hand over the meat, saying “rib out?.”

Dave weighs the meat and announces, “six pounds fifty.” The customer points to other pieces of pork on the counter with repeated cutting gestures, and says “I need pork, pork.”



Figure 6. C makes three cutting gestures.



Figure 7. C reaches over the counter to touch meat.

The pointing gestures seek to gain the attention of the assistant butcher, and at the same time point out the additional meat the customer requires. Dave points to the meat on the counter, and asks, “how much more?.” The customer points to another piece of pork belly. He also raises his other hand, with the index finger and thumb splayed open to indicate a measurement. Dave says “about there?,” and picks up the pork belly. The customer makes a quick, expansive cutting gesture with his right hand, saying “with that half.” As Dave takes the meat towards the cutting area he pauses and, looking back over his right shoulder, asks, “half?,” touching the mid-point of the meat with his finger (Figure 8). Yes please, says the customer. Dave brings the meat back to the scale, and says “eleven pound.” The customer extends his left arm to make a gesture with thumb and index finger (Figure 9). Dave again confirms the instruction, “rib out, cut small, meat as well?.” Yes please, says the customer, thank you.

Social relations are, first and foremost, created through processes of “intercorporeal resonance” – the way bodies shift in relation to each other in interaction – which form the basis for any further personal exchange of stances, representations, ideas, and opinions (Meyer, Streeck, and Scott Jordan 2017, xxvi). The customer’s gestures are conventional in the spatial repertoire of the market: pointing to the meat he wishes to purchase,



Figure 8. D touches the mid-point of the meat.



Figure 9. C gestures with thumb and forefinger.

indicating with his hand that he wants the meat cut. However, he takes up body position and posture which are less conventional, leaning into the space normally reserved for butchers in white coats and striped aprons. Moreover, he *touches* the fresh meat on the butcher's side of the counter, subverting the norm of customer behaviour in this market. Rather than protesting, the assistant butcher engages in a kind of *pas de deux* with the customer, in which the assistant butcher's extended index finger responds to the extended index finger of the customer, falling almost into step as the intricate negotiation ensues, both touching the meat while not quite touching each other. The exchange becomes a collaboration, in which (as in the ballet) the assistant butcher and his customer come to agreement without recourse to speech. Only later in the story will we discover that the protagonists did not share a common understanding of the dance.

Episode 2a (<https://youtu.be/t5LUGDNa4ak>)

Episode 2a covers 15 seconds of the same period as part of Episode 2, when Kang Chen intervened, speaking to the customer.

1	KC	come on man
2		Christmas only little bit eh
3		get some more
4	C	oh no it's for me only
5		heh heh very busy
6	KC	no no no worry
7	C	maybe next day I buy more
8		because I have to keep getting

Kang Chen calls to the customer, saying “come on man, Christmas, only little bit, eh? Get some more.” Kang Chen's sales patter is double-voiced here. It is an attempt to persuade the customer to buy more, but it is also teasing, market-place banter. The customer makes a remedial interaction move, offering an account to explain why he is not buying more meat (Goffman 1971), “oh no, it's for me only.” He immediately moves into phatic mode, making small talk, “heh heh very busy.” No worry, says Kang Chen. The customer reverts to a second remedial account, offering the possibility that he will buy more meat the following day, “maybe next day I buy more because I have to keep getting -.” The explanation acts as an apology, and as a promise that he will do better next time



Figure 10. C makes a cutting gesture.

(Goffman 1971). The two accounts remediate the offence of refusing to “get some more” meat today. They contribute to the stabilisation of the relationship between the butcher and his customer.

Episode 3 (<https://youtu.be/s1O16nBdRw0>)

The customer stands in front of the stall, and fixes his gaze to the point where Dave is cutting the pork belly. After 5 s, he shouts something indeterminate, which sounds anxious and disapproving. The shout attracts Dave’s attention, and he turns round, knife in hand. The customer raises his left hand to make an emphatic cutting gesture (Figure 10). He says loudly, “I say you cut this one.”

- | | | |
|---|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | C | (xxxx) I say you cut this one |
| 2 | KC | straight |
| 3 | C | straight like that |
| 4 | D | just cut like that? |
| 5 | KC | thirty (xxxx) five year |
| 6 | | you OK sir? |

Kang Chen looks over at Dave, and when the customer says “I say you cut this one,” Kang Chen says “straight.” The customer makes further cutting gestures (Figure 11), and



Figure 11. C makes cutting gestures.



Figure 12. C strikes his head.

says “straight like that.” Dave asks, “just cut like that?” Yes, says the customer and nods his head. The customer gestures with his left hand, palm open, hand raised quickly to his forehead, index finger and thumb striking the forehead (Figure 12), hand and arm quickly returned to his side. He then gestures with the open palm of his left hand, the angle of the arm and hand directed towards Dave. He raises the palm a little, making the same gesture at a slightly different trajectory. He raises the palm further, so the open palm of his hand strikes his forehead, and returns to the previous trajectory. Then the hand moves slightly forward and back in the direction of Dave (Figure 13). Kang Chen understands the customer’s dramatic gestures as complaint, and as referencing his view that Dave is a less than competent butcher.

Kang Chen immediately responds to the customer’s complaint by holding up three fingers of his right hand and five fingers of his left, saying “thirty (xxxx) five year,” with the word after “thirty” indeterminate. His point appears to be that he has a high turnover of staff (thirty in five years – an exaggeration), and that he is unable to train them adequately. As such, Kang Chen’s explanation is a move which ritually remedies the acknowledged offence (Goffman 1971). The customer turns away with a rueful grin on his face. He makes a “throwing” gesture, metaphorically rejecting the butcher’s explanation, but still smiling. Kang Chen smiles broadly as he says to a new customer, “you OK sir?”



Figure 13. C gestures towards D with an open palm.

Episode 4 (<https://youtu.be/4g2hBDyM3Jw>)

The first customer watches as Kang Chen serves the new customer (C2). The first customer now asks Kang Chen, “how much?” At this moment, Dave holds up the pork belly with his right hand, touches it with a meat cleaver (Figure 14), and says, “small pieces, yea?” The customer does not hear or take notice of the question. His gaze does not appear to waver from Kang Chen and the ham hocks.

1	KC	you OK sir?
2	C2	how much?
3	KC	this?
4	C2	how much?
5	KC	with the feet three pound each
6	C2	three pound?
7	KC	yes cheap cheap
8	C	how much?
9	D	small pieces yea?
10	KC	you check any fresh or no?
11	C	I said how much
12	KC	three quid
13	C	one
14	KC	one (.) you want any chop?
15		OK whole one
16		no chop?
17		shut up!
18		one two three
19	C	but not totally chopped, just (xxxx)
20	KC	you just slice
21	C	slice only
22	KC	yea one slice like that
23		like that
24	C	yes please
25	KC	so one two three
26	C	three only
27	KC	four four four pieces
28	C	three pieces
29	KC	(6) like that?
30		three pound
31		Da- er Dave you get money

Kang Chen says to the customer, “you check, any fresh or no?” The customer says, “I said how much?” Kang Chen makes a gesture with three fingers (Figure 15), “three quid.” The customer quickly touches one of the hocks, says “one.” “One,” repeats Kang Chen. He



Figure 14. D holds up meat, touches it with a cleaver.



Figure 15. KC holds up three fingers.

places a hock on a board, and says, “you want any chop?” Receiving no answer from the customer, he says, “OK, whole one?” He seeks confirmation, “no chop?” Throughout this part of the encounter there is a loud banging noise, as an engineer is repairing heating pipes. Kang Chen glances in the direction of the noise, and says “shut up!”

Now the customer leans his body forward, and points to the ham hock, which Kang Chen holds up. The customer makes three small cutting gestures, touching the meat as he does so. Kang Chen says slowly, “one, two, three” The customer says, “but not totally chopped, just” Kang Chen transfers the hock from his right hand to his left, examining it closely. He points to the hock, touching it (Figure 16), runs the tip of his finger rapidly down its length, and says, “you just slice,” as he does so returning his gaze to the customer. “Slice only,” says the customer. This is language teaching and learning: “slice” is the word the customer needed when he was explaining how he wanted Dave to cut the pork belly. Kang Chen focuses his gaze on the ham hock again, lays his right hand flat across the piece of meat, and says “yea, one slice, like that” (Figure 17). He displays the meat, and his gesture, for the customer to see. Mondada (2016) observed interactions between a cheese vendor and her customer and noted that touch constitutes both a lay experience and an expert practice, a “professional touch.” She described subtle negotiations and confrontations of embodied access, perception and knowledge. Gestural and manipulative actions of the “showing” type are indispensable for apprenticeship, the transmission of both embodied and factual knowledge (Streeck 2017). While pointing serves to direct



Figure 16. KC points to hock.



Figure 17. KC lays his hand on the hock.

attention and action, showing explicates what is thus attended. Showing makes objects intelligible, discloses their dispositions and hidden features, reveals how they behave within their material and practical contexts, and prefigures actions to be taken on them. While pointing is about directing attention and action, “showing is *pedagogy*. It is part of learning” (Streeck 2017, 202, emphasis in the original). The customer leans further forward, reaching across the counter to touch the hock. Kang Chen repeats, “like that,” as the two men collaborate in embodied pedagogy. The customer says, “yes please.” Kang Chen says, “so one, two, three, four piece” The customer says “three only, three pieces.” Neither seems anxious about the difference in their understanding of how many pieces there will be if the hock is sliced three times.

Kang Chen takes the hock to the cutting machine. After 12 s, he turns round, holds the hock aloft, and says, “like that?” The customer approves with an elongated cutting gesture. Kang Chen lays the cut slices on the chopping board, and says to Dave “three pound.” The customer places a 20-pound note on top of the counter. Kang Chen says, “Dave, you get money,” his instruction indexing his authority as head of the business.

Episode 5 (<https://youtu.be/g-IJxyuYYeg>)

Kang Chen directs his gaze to where Dave is chopping the pork belly. He puts down the tray he is holding, and stands to watch (Figure 18). After 8 s, he turns to the customer. He looks at the customer, pointing towards Dave. He confesses to the crime to which he is witness, and for which as the business owner he is ultimately responsible. Anxiously he says, “chopping cubes,” and looks at the customer (Figure 19), making a small pointing gesture towards where Dave has cut the pork belly into cubes rather than ribs.

2	KC	chopping cubes (.) ah?
3	C	oh my goodness
4	KC	Dave
5		it's just get out
6		what I'll do for you
7		leave leave it on there
9		he want slice he no want cubes
10	D	he said cubes cut it small



Figure 18. KC watches D.

The customer holds his hand to his head, turning his face away (Figure 20). Not all gestures are intentional. Some are spontaneous, simple, pragmatic, and conceptual – gestures of which the speaker may be unaware. These gestures are not made by the speaker *in order to* express an idea; rather, they embody, *happen to* the speaker (Streeck 2017). The customer says, “oh my goodness.” Kang Chen looks in the direction of his assistant, and says, “Dave.” He speaks to the customer, “it’s just get out, what I’ll do for you,” and takes the 20-pound note from the counter. The customer gestures with his arm extended towards the cutting area, in another negative construal of the assistant butcher (Figure 21). Kang Chen says to Dave, “leave, leave on there.” Kang Chen takes a new pork belly, and sets it on a board for the customer. He indicates two points on the belly with his hands (Figure 22). The customer nods his head, and Kang Chen takes the meat to the cutting area. Kang Chen takes control of the situation, again indexing his authority in his place of business. He dismisses Dave as the person responsible for cutting pork belly. The customer looks at the other assistant butcher, Bradley, and makes a gesture with his right hand. Over at the cutting area, Kang Chen speaks to Dave, “he want slice, he no want cubes.” Dave responds with an account in his defence, saying, “he said cubes, cut it small.” He does not accept responsibility for the offence, as “the circumstances were such as to make the act radically different from what it appears to have been, and, in



Figure 19. KC looks at C.



Figure 20. C holds his hand to his head.

fact, he is not really at fault at all” (Goffman 1971, 110). Dave’s account is met not by a reply which acknowledges that the explanation has been received. Instead, it is met by Kang Chen’s silence.

Episode 5a (<https://youtu.be/SMfN-aOuSQM>)

Bradley’s microphone records the brief interaction between the customer and Bradley (B) when Kang Chen takes the pork belly to the cutting area. Bradley speaks to the customer.

- 1 B he’s new, he’s all right
- 2 he’s new
- 3 still training
- 4 C I always buy my meat here
- 5 B yea I know I usually cut it for you (.) one chop!

Bradley’s account is a remedial interaction ritual, working to restabilise the exchange with the displeased customer. He adds, “still training,” offering an explanation for the offence. The more mitigating circumstances can be argued, the more it can be established that the offensive act is not an expression of moral character (Goffman 1971).



Figure 21. C gestures towards D.



Figure 22. KC points to pork with his hands.

Bradley's remedial strategy on Dave's behalf is different from Dave's own remedial move. Dave's account denies responsibility. Bradley's account claims reduced responsibility as Dave is new to the business. The customer says that he always buys his meat at this stall. Bradley acknowledges that the customer is a regular, and performs a larger-than-life, stylised voice, "one chop!," further seeking to remediate the offence with humour.

Episode 6 <https://youtu.be/plomGltLhaE>

Kang Chen returns to the scales with the meat. He weighs it and says to the customer, "ten pound, ten forty."

- | | | |
|---|----|---------------------|
| 1 | KC | ten pound ten forty |
| 2 | | what size? |
| 3 | | like that? |
| 4 | D | he said cut small |

The customer makes a sweeping upwards gesture which seems to indicate assent. He gestures with his left arm fully extended, his thumb and index finger spaced to indicate a measurement. Kang Chen lays the palms of his hands on the pork belly, his fingers slightly spread (Figure 23). "Like that?," he says, and the customer tilts his head slightly and opens his hand to show his agreement (Figure 24). As Kang Chen arrives at the cutting area, Dave says, "he said cut small." As before he does not accept responsibility for his offence of cutting the meat into small pieces. He takes a stand relative to the perceivable deficiency in question (Goffman 1971, 187). His account is a ritual move anticipating a reply which will allow him to move on. A remedial interchange usually, but not inevitably, will leave the participants in a position to act as if the issue can be dropped (Goffman 1971). But Kang Chen does not complete the ritual with a ceremony of forgiveness. Instead, he cuts the pork belly quickly and efficiently, in the way the customer wanted, and in silence.

Episode 7 (<https://youtu.be/HgUKD8U5tis>)

Kang Chen puts the hock into a bag which already contains the pork belly. He says, "just belly, and the hock, yea?"



Figure 23. KC lays the palms of his hands on the pork.

- | | | |
|---|----|------------------------------|
| 1 | KC | just belly and the hock yea? |
| 2 | | thir- thirteen pounds please |
| 3 | C | I leave twenty eh? |
| 4 | KC | where's twenty? |
| 5 | C | I don't know |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | you always do the tricks |
| 8 | KC | thank you |
| 9 | C | thank you very much |

Kang Chen says “thirteen pound please,” unsmiling and apparently serious. He has, of course, already put the customer’s 20 pounds in the till, and is playing a practical joke. The customer says, “I leave twenty, eh?” (Figure 25). Kang Chen, still straight-faced, asks “where’s twenty?” Bradley, who is watching, laughs. The customer gestures with his right arm, saying “I don’t know.” Bradley, still laughing, makes a sideways and downwards movement with his head and eyes (Figure 26), acknowledging the practical joke, and including the customer in this acknowledgement. Pointing gestures are usually understood as done with the hands, “but they may also be done with the head, and by certain movements of the eyes” (Kendon 2004, 199). Bradley’s action is embodied meta-commentary, as the movement of his head and eyes comments on the typical joking behaviour of his boss. Kang Chen places the bag of meat on top of the counter, and



Figure 24. C tilts his head and opens his hand.



Figure 25. KC straight-faced.

immediately goes to the till to get the customer’s change. As he takes the bag from the top of the counter, the customer, smiling, says, “you always do the tricks.” Kang Chen gives the change to the customer, and now he is laughing too. The customer receives the change, says “thank you very much,” and moves to leave the scene.

Episode 8 (<https://youtu.be/yNk3cyNktLo>)

As he leaves, the customer notices something else he would like to buy. He catches Kang Chen’s attention, but the butcher is busy with another customer. Bradley notices the customer’s action, and goes to where he waits. The customer points to a pig’s stomach on the counter. Bradley points in his turn and touches the stomach. Bradley picks it up, and the customer says “you give me discount?”

- 1 C you give me discount?
- 2 B discount?
- 3 I’ll give you a free carrier bag (.) or two
- 4 three fifty
- 5 C I need two
- 6 B you want two?
- 7 C two like that
- 8 D he said to me he said cut them small
- 9 B six fifty



Figure 26. B points with head and eyes.



Figure 27. C raises his thumb.

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------|
| 10 | C | good skin good skin |
| 11 | | thank you very much |
| 12 | B | not a problem |
| 13 | C | take it easy |
| 14 | B | thank you haha |
| 15 | C | thank you |
| 16 | B | thank you cheers |

Bradley says “discount?,” and points towards the customer, saying “I’ll give you a free carrier bag or two” – an ironic rejoinder, as the stall does not charge for carrier bags. The butchers’ reparation of Dave’s error does not extend to a discount on prices. Bradley places the stomach on the scales, and says, “three fifty.” The customer gestures with his left hand, and says, “I need two.” Bradley says “you want two?,” and goes to get another. “Two like that,” says the customer, as he places money on top of the counter. As Bradley picks up the second stomach Dave says to Bradley, “he says to me cut them small.” Bradley does not reply, but places the stomachs on the scale. “Six fifty,” he says. The customer raises his thumb in approval (Figure 27). He points to the pig stomachs (Figure 28), and repeats the raised thumb gesture, saying “good skin.”



Figure 28. C points to pig stomachs.



Figure 29. C raises his thumb.

Compliments are little pieties which play a role in social organisation (Goffman 1971). As Bradley bags the stomachs the customer says “thank you very much,” and again repeats the “thumbs-up” gesture (Figure 29). Kendon (2004) notes that the thumbs-up signals a point reached in interactional routine, including leave-taking, acknowledging another’s action, and showing understanding. The message has been received, its import has been appreciated (Goffman 1971, 64). “Not a problem,” says Bradley. As Bradley hands the bag to the customer, the customer says “take it easy,” and Bradley says “thank you,” and laughs. The implied relationship is agreed to exist, the performer has worth as a person, and the recipient has an appreciative, grateful nature (Goffman 1971). Bradley gives the customer his change, and the customer says “thank you.” “Thank you, cheers,” says Bradley, and the access ritual is complete.

Discussion

Goffman (1963, 1967, 1971) analysed the ways talk is deployed as interaction ritual to enable people to survive and even make the best of encounters with others. More recent research has demonstrated that people do not communicate through speech alone, but through semiotic repertoires (Kusters 2017; Kusters et al. 2017; Mondada 2012, 2016; Streeck 2017). The original contribution of the present paper is to report research which finds that supportive and remedial interaction ritual commonly occurs in embodied communicative action, including, but not limited to, speech. The interaction rituals which are so crucial to the everyday running of society are constituted in semiotic repertoires. Our empirical observations in the market suggest that the stability of communicative activity is established through semiotic repertoires in which the body is a fundamental resource. Taking “semiotic repertoires” as a frame of reference enables us to understand how people deploy communicative resources when they come into each others’ presence. In the single service encounter presented in this paper a range of communicative practices was in play, including pointing, head tilt, eye gaze, touching, posture, laughter, hand gesture, speech, and smiling. Often performed at the same time as speech, many of these embodied communicative acts were identifiable ritual interaction moves.

Kang Chen points to the abstract world and promises to deliver boxes of meat to his customer, an offer of “free goods” (Goffman 1983) which bespeaks his good will, if also his entrepreneurial spirit. He offers the customer a lesson in butchery, showing him

how and where the ham hock should be sliced. The same event is a language teaching and learning exchange. The micro-lesson in butchery constitutes symbolic goods freely given. Little pieties of supportive ritual are evident throughout the exchange. The customer's exaggerated laughter at Kang Chen's jokes is an act of performance in the social theatre (Goffman 1983). He offers compliments on the pigs' stomachs, attesting to his civility (Goffman 1971). He takes Kang Chen's practical joke in good part, and repeatedly makes the "thumbs up" gesture to indicate that all is well. But supportive ritual may not be sufficient to survive the trip wires of contact with others (Goffman 1971). To make it through unscathed also requires remedial interchange.

In the service encounter accounts are given, confessions made, apologies extended, practical remedies rapidly found, jokes performed. When an offence is committed against the customer, Kang Chen rights the situation not with a spoken apology but with remedial action, presenting a new piece of pork, which he cuts himself. The remedial action is sufficient, and things can move on. Kang Chen's practical joke does further remedial work, as humour and play contribute to the transformation and resolution of potential conflict (Streck 2017). The tilt of Bradley's head, and his wide grin, are key resources in the ritual action. Everything is resolved convivially and with good humour. Everything, that is, except the unresolved offence of Dave, the assistant butcher, who still awaits absolution. Ritual ceremony is not inevitably concluded to the benefit of all agents in the exchange. Kang Chen deploys silence to reprimand the assistant who caused offence to the customer. He knows what Bakhtin (1986) knew: silence can speak, and can assume the status of utterance (Farmer 2001). Kang Chen's silence is ritual action which stands in the place of forgiveness. His silence refuses the completion of the remedial ceremony.

In this paper, we propose that, despite their apparent differences, people normally get along successfully through the regular deployment of supportive and remedial ritual interaction in which the body is a fundamental resource. We suggest that in seeking to understand how people communicate when they come into each other's presence, we should pay close attention not only to speech, but also to the ritual deployment of the body as a resource for communication.

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