

Project 5: Collection and Analysis of Video Data

We utilize cues to make sense of the world, but the question remains: how does this knowledge come about? When we are thrust into a specific instance, does the knowledge gained only apply for that instance, or is it generalizable? I analyze JT, who plays the game Final Fantasy 14 on his laptop using a controller. Throughout my observation, JT utilizes signs within the virtual world he is embedded in to interact with not only the environment, but also for successful coordination with other people around him. These resources enable JT to create actions with meaning for others to read and conglomerate based on the orientation of the action in space and time.

To coordinate around a target, preparation brings features of that target more salient for all group members to focus more on that object rather than the surrounding factors. JT conveys the importance of some particular object in the world by marking it with a particular sign for his group to see and categorize the given target. We may describe these marking signs as indexes, which Melanie McComsey describes, as signs that “bear a connection of understood spatio-temporal contiguity to the occurrence of the entity signaled (McComsey Lecture: 19).” Indexes are signs that when perceived they carry meaning based on the timing and point they are referring. In JT’s case highlighted in event 3 of the transcript, a numeric symbol is assigned to a monster to be interpreted as the target to focus ignoring all others in the attended scene. On an even higher level of abstraction, we take note how individuals understand the context of the mark by having the preexisting structure of knowing what icons mean when paired in certain ways. We see these indexes creating the context of importance and focus themselves just by individuals placing the signs out in the world allowing for the opportunity for coordination to emerge.

Often, when we need to navigate towards a destination, reliability on reaching the location remains in the mental model of the path to take imposed on the attended visual world. As described in event 16-18 of the index, JT consecutively reopens his map even when verifying the location beforehand when navigating on the map. If we assume encoding is occurring due to the time JT hovers over the intended location, then JT should have no need to recheck the map to verify his positional relation to the destination. However, we can see clearly this is not the case, and we might infer JT is actually constantly crosschecking the world he is embedded in with the inscription of the map rather than simply memorizing the intended location due to the computational complexity that arises from translating over different modalities. We may instead view the map as a semiotic resource that “speaks” to JT as a dialectical relationship where as one is reoriented, the other changes alongside to try to match both fields. Goodwin provides the explanation of the capacity to reflexively change as, situated process that encompasses both the sign-making capacity of the individual...and different kinds of semiotic phenomena...lodged within the material and social environment (Goodwin 2000: 1490).” Reliably navigating in the world calls for an interactive process made possible by the individual’s ability to produce and interpret signs instead of trying to impose the map into the world with working memory.

Making sense of what’s around us is often assumed as the ability to whittle down a computational complex environment by stripping away distractions until key features are left, yet as seen in JT’s case, we see the counterintuitive addition of bringing extra resources to what we attend.

What this implication leaves us with is that instead of breaking down situations into its simplest units, we dynamically reorient the context we perceive by shifting sensory modalities and combining spatio-temporal information for synthesis. This inductive process then seeps back out to the world as a communicative relationship with others starting a cyclical analysis between speaker and respondents constantly influencing how they present the context at hand.