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FROM INTERVIEW TO CONFRONTATION: OBSERVATIONS OF THE BUSH/RATHER ENCOUNTER

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INTRODUCTION

The event which commands our attention¹ is generally viewed as an interview which turned into a confrontation. This paper is concerned with some of what is necessary to explicate this view.

Since "confrontation" may be viewed as a potentially controversial formulation, there may be a ready understanding and acceptance of a proposal to explicate that way of referring to it. The point of explicating the characterization of this episode as "an interview" may be more puzzling. But the Bush/Rather affair is itself the most eloquent *prima facie* testimony to the observation that labelling and announcing an occasion of talk-in-interaction as an interview does not *ipso facto* make it one, nor does it guarantee that what began as one will remain one.

All of which is to note that both the aspect of this event as an interview, and its aspect as a confrontation (if that is what it was), require explication as *achievements*, as *outcomes* of practices of conduct in interaction (Schegloff, 1987, pp. 218-228). And that is to

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ask, how did the parties to this event conduct themselves so as to make of the occasion, to constitute it, first as an interview, and then as a confrontation—how did they “do interview;” how did they “do confrontation?”

For some purposes, these questions might well be brought to bear on the viewing audience: how did they watch—what so-called “interpretive procedures” did they employ—in order to make out what was playing itself out on their screens as interview or as confrontation? But I will not address myself to that question here.

I take it that whatever interpretive procedures the audience was employing, they were brought to bear not on a structureless set of inputs or stimuli, but on a social event, an occasion of interaction, which had an achieved shape of a particular sort, imparted to it by the practices of talk-in-interaction deployed by the participants who composed and produced it. By these practices, the participants progressively constituted the occasion so as to be grasped—by them and by others—first as interview and then as confrontation. How was that achieved?

In forming up the question in that way, I hope to avoid engaging here in a merely topical essay. Although the event under examination was a political spectacle, we need not focus on that. We can undertake to separate (to the degree that the data allow) what happened here from who was involved. The latter may have made the event particularly notable to a mass audience, but it is the former to which we need to direct analytic attention.

But it *is* worth lingering for a moment on the politically spectacular nature of the event because of the ways in which it can affect the questions which analysts direct to the data, and the ways in which it can affect the reception an analysis of such data may be accorded (and, by anticipation, affecting in a second order way the analysis itself).

There is a danger in dealing with dramatic material, whether of a political or otherwise dramatic character, that there will be a sense that the analysis should “live up” to what is being analysed. Something dramatic should get a “monumental” analysis, one “proportional” to the drama being addressed. And the analysis may be expected to shed light on just what makes the event dramatic or of

interest. At the same time, efforts to explicate just what made the event of interest may be condemned by the nature of the enterprise, as efforts to explicate jokes or poignant moments may be.

In a variant of the old methodological saw that constants cannot explain variation, it may be felt that dramatic occurrences cannot be understood by reference to mundane considerations. Thus, those who work on trials can be thought not only to miss the analytic boat, but also to show a defective moral character for directing attention to aspects of turn-taking and interaction in examining trials that deal with allegations of child abuse or murder or rape, being taken as devaluing the pain and outrage of the victims of violent attack by focussing not on it but on the mundane organization of the courtroom. On the other hand, sometimes a coup may be achieved by showing how some spectacular outcome is the product precisely of slippage in the society's mundane underpinnings—as in Whalen, Zimmerman and Whalen's (1988) account of a death due to "conversational" trouble on an emergency hot line.

In brief, what are strictly speaking extraneous considerations can be introduced into an analytic undertaking when the data are "interesting," because "interesting" very often means vernacularly, and not technically, interesting. The vernacular can distract attention from the technical, and deform not only the account but the very problematics of the analysis. Analysts and readers have their moral/political/dramatic sensibilities mobilized by the data, and it can be hard thereafter to set them aside.

But, one might ask, is it not a proper task to deal precisely with what marks the data as special? Is that not a proper task for analysis? Echoing Garfinkel's argument, and, as he reports (1981) Shils to have asked of Bales in the Chicago jury study: the issue is not what makes it a small group, but what makes it a jury?

To that it may be argued: it surely *does* matter what makes it a small group. In the context of the focus of the present analysis, whatever the source of the political notoriety of the event here examined, it had in the first instance to be conducted as talk-in-interaction, and talk of a particular sort. It is the sort which came to matter for the spectacle, but it would have been analytically relevant in any case, spectacle or no spectacle.

So also, the participants here talk “competitively.” In doing so, they avail themselves of practices in which they engage in common with other competent interactants in the society. To explicate that is the business of analysis of talk-in-interaction. What is in the first instance central are those practices, not that when these two men engaged in them, it was news. If it can be shown that these men did them differently by virtue of being who they are, or by virtue of being on TV, then that too is part of the analytic responsibility. But before addressing what is unique, analysis must specify what is the generic domain within which that uniqueness is located.

And so this analysis will look to this “special” event with mundane colored glasses, and try to turn a topically transient occurrence into a source of longer lasting analytic resources.

THE BUSH/RATHER EPISODE AS AN ACHIEVED INTERVIEW

If there is a single, most fundamental component of what is considered an “interview,” both in vernacular or common-sense conceptions of that term and in more technical accounts,² it is that one party asks questions and the other party gives answers. An orientation to this feature by the participants, it might be argued, is at least partially constitutive of an occasion of talk as “an interview.”

Note the tack being taken here. It is not that, in interviews, it is an empirically established regularity that one party asks questions and the other answers. But that an occasion is progressively and methodically constituted and “realized” as an interview by, among other things, an orientation by its participants to having one of them be doing questions and the other answers. It is by virtue of their orientation to, and practice of, so conducting themselves that what I formulated at the start of this paragraph as an empirical regularity comes to be the case. But putting it this way allows us to see *how it comes to be the case*.

Let me illustrate this point from the Bush/Rather episode, by examining the first exchange between the two participants.³ In doing so, I intend to be explicating how at the outset they constitute

this occasion as an interview, and deliver “the context,” and the “definition of the situation,” which has been announced (Schegloff, 1987, pp. 220-226).

Among the questions that parties to talk-in-interaction in general may undertake to do—and *not* just in interviews—some appear to their speakers to require some “background,” some “leading up to.” In ordinary conversation, this can present a problem because of the way the organization of turn-taking for ordinary conversation appears to work. Participants who undertake to produce a turn can ordinarily *count on* getting to produce only a single, recognizably complete unit (like a clause or sentence).⁴ If they undertake to “lead up” to a question, they may find any possible ending of a unit in their “leading up” talk treated as the end of their turn, with others starting up turns of their own at that point. And, even worse, talk which is innocuous enough as “background” may have a very different interpretation if taken to be what the speaker meant to say in its own right.

Consider, for example, the following exchange (taken from Schegloff, 1980, pp. 117-120) between two janitors, one of whom—Vic—has swept up a mess of broken glass at the building of the other—James. Now Vic wants his garbage pail (which he had left at James’ building) back, as well as a little credit for the good turn he has done James.

(1) *US: 45-46*

- 1 → V: The pail is in yuh hallway, [(uh,)
 J: [I know it hu(hh)h!
- 1 → V: The-the- I didn’ have a broom wit’ me, if I adduh
 hadda [broom I’d uh swept [up.
 2 → J: e(hh)h! [That’s alright.
 V: so [(dat’s, right on).
- 2 → J: [That’s a’ri’-Somebody-[got it up, I don’t now who
 V: (Look). But do me a favr-
- 3 → V: Do, me, one fa:vuh, I [cleaned it up!
 J: [Yeh hh
 J: Yeh right. I-ih-deh ca:n, (I- brought de) can
 (I’ll) set it dehr own the sidewalk. [Izzat ehkay=
 V: [No.

- J: = [No.
V: [Didjeh [sweep up duh rest a' duh me [ss.
J: () [NO I didn'
sweep up nothin!
V: Well o [kay well that's why I left the can [innuh hallway
J: [Leave ih deh. [I'll do it
(early) [innuh maw:ning.
V: [-so if you hadda br [oo:m then you c'd=
J: [Yeh right.
V: =sweep up duh dust [()-
J: [Very, uh- very good I
[appreesh- 'hhh
V: [-the glass,
J: I apprecia [te that Victuh,
V: [Tomorruh I-
4 → V: No. [Tomorruh I want my pail back. Dass a [ll.
J: [E(hh)h yeh. [Ye(hh)h!
J: I don'know I may keep dat pail.

For Vic, as we come to see in the sequel at arrow #4, the talk at the start of this sequence (at the arrows numbered 1) is leading up to a request for the return of his pail. But James hears it as said in its own right, and, far from giving Vic credit for a favor done, he understands Vic to have apologized, accepts the apology and credits some anonymous person for cleaning up the glass (at the arrows numbered 2).

So, “leading up” to something, or doing talk as prefatory to something else, can pose problems of sequential organization for the participants in ordinary conversation. And, indeed, by virtue of the structurally recurrent character of this possibility, there are specific practices of talking in interaction which are addressed to it. One of these I have had occasion (1980, p. 116) to dub a “pre-pre,” a preliminary to a preliminary; it is an utterance which marks what directly follows it as said not in its own right, but as preliminary to something which will follow. One way of doing a “pre-pre,” for example, is to formulate in advance the type of utterance or action being led up to, and that is done by an “action projection” such as “Can I ask you a question?” In Vic’s dealing with James, he follows the “misunderstood” talk with such an action projection (at arrow 3: “Do

me one favor”), after which his preliminaries get heard as preliminaries, and his request gets registered as a request (Schegloff, 1980, pp. 117-120, for a fuller analysis). All this, recall, is in ordinary conversation.

Now when we shift our attention from ordinary conversation to a different speech-exchange system like “interviews,” or more specifically “news interviews,” a different turn-taking system may produce different problems and different opportunities of sequential organization. If one constitutive property of interviews is that one of the parties—ordinarily a particular predesignated one—asks questions, then the turn-taking system may obviate the “problem of preliminaries” without the services of a “dedicated solution” like “preliminaries to preliminaries.” On this view, the designated questioner’s turn is not “over” in a sequentially relevant sense, and it is not its recipient’s turn to talk, until a question has been asked. And it *is* over, and it *is* the other’s turn to talk, when a question *has* been asked. In that case, one of the ways in which the parties could—in concert—accomplish the occasion *as an interview* would be by organizing the talk to display that some such orientation was being jointly sustained. They would be doing it with one another, showing it *to* one another, showing it to the audience, and to us as technical onlookers as well.

With this theme in mind, examine (2), the transcript of the first exchange of the Bush/Rather episode following the end of a prepared videotaped feature, and parse the surface of its turn-taking and sequence-organizational structure.

(2) *Bush/Rather, 00:00*

Rather: ...Today, Donald Gregg still works inside the White House as Vice President Bush’s trusted advisor.
 ((End of feature; start of live broadcast.))
 000 (1.0)
 001 Rather: ‘hh Mister Vice President, tha:nk you for being
 002 with us toni:ght, ‘hh Donald Gregg sti:ll serves
 003 as y’r tru:sted advi#sor, =he w’z dee:ply involved
 004 in running arms t’the Contras an’ he didn’ inform
 005 you. =

006
 007 Rather: { (0.5) } + Now when President Rea:gan's, (0.2)
 008 trusted advisor: Admiral Poindexter: (0.6) failed
 009 to inform hi:m, (0.8) the President-(0.2)
 010 fired'im.hh
 011 (0.5)
 012 Rather: Why is Mister Gregg still: (') inside the White
 013 Hou@se'n still a trusted advisor. =
 014 Bush: =Becuz I have confidence in im, (0.3) en becuz
 015 this matter,Dan, ...

Bush brings hands together and mouth opens.

+ Bush separates hands.

@ Bush's lips part (with in-breath?).

Rather begins with an appreciation/greeting (lines 001-002); no question, no next turn taken by Bush. Rather next produces, as a first preliminary to a projected question, what amounts to a bridging repetition of the last sentence of videotape lead-in, including its key terms, "Donald Gregg" and "trusted advisor." At the possible completion of the unit, Rather employs a practice used in ordinary conversation to interdict a possible start-up by another and to extend the current speaker's turn (cf. Schegloff, 1982)—he rushes into the start of a next unit (line 003), here marked by the "=" between "advisor" and "he w'z deeply involved." But although there is some evidence that Bush has monitored this spot in the talk as structurally a place where a next speaker might otherwise start (the evidence being a slight postural adjustment and an opening of the mouth—marked in the transcript by "#"), he does not actually move to start talking here.

In fact, Rather produces additional talk coming to a quite decisive sounding possible completion, at "inform you" (line 005). Here he stops to take a big in-breath, one lasting about half a second—quite a long time, conversationally speaking. To be sure, the long audible and visible in-breath projects an "intention" on Rather's part to continue, but such gaps are not infrequently exploited by aspiring next speakers. Not here, however, although Bush again gives some indication of registering the opening, the possibility, by another adjustment of the position of his hands (marked in the transcript by "+").⁵

Next, at lines 007-010, Rather produces the second preliminary, the second component of the problem with which he means to confront Bush. There are several pauses here—of 0.2, 0.6, 0.8, and 0.2 seconds respectively—but these are internal to units of turn-construction, and are not in the first instance places for an interlocutor to enter the talk.

But the silence at line 011 is quite another matter. Here, another unit of talk has been brought to recognizable possible completion, *and*, furthermore, the second element of Rather's problem/challenge has been articulated. Here is an eminently ripe place for Bush to enter in. But the question itself, however strongly adumbrated, has not yet been posed. And here we have the apex of Bush and Rather together doing a display of the occasion as interview. It is virtually choreographed: Rather leaves a yawning gap with the challenge glove off his hand but not yet thrown to the floor, and relies on Bush to withhold entering the lists. And Bush, raring to go, withholds until such a unit of talk is done as properly occasions his response. And, indeed, at the first possible completion of Rather's actual question at lines 012-013—at the word "House"—Bush's lips part in an apparent pre-turn in-breath, and directly on the next possible completion of the question, with not a moment of gap, Bush begins his turn, designed from its very outset to reveal itself as "an answer"—a "because" to fit to Rather's "why."

Here, in this first turn of the occasion, we see Bush and Rather orienting to the constitutive properties of "interview," and organizing their conduct to produce them. It is by virtue of such orientations and conduct that they collaborate here to produce an exchange, a potential statistical "case" if you will, in which one asks a question and the other answers. For Bush clearly "*could have*" talked earlier, at the several junctures which I have mentioned. And then it would *not* have been one of the cases which lead to the conclusion that in interviews one party asks questions and the other gives answers.

But as long as they proceed as they have at the first exchange, participants will produce interviews in which overwhelmingly one party produces questions and the other answers, because the latter party will not talk where talk might otherwise be done if a question has not been asked, and the former party will provide that type of

turn which will allow the occasion properly to proceed from turn to turn and phase to phase. And thereby the participants constitute—do—the context which might otherwise be thought of, indeed is often described as, “supplying” the setting for their talk (Schegloff, 1987; see also Greatbatch, 1988, 409-413; Clayman, 1988, 479-480).

But we need not conjecture about Bush hypothetically talking at the earlier junctures in the “development” of a question. The Bush/Rather affair supplies us with actual occurrences. Shortly after the initial exchange which has just been briefly examined, Bush does precisely that: he talks at those earlier junctures, which is at least part of how we come to understand this occasion as “an interview which turned into a confrontation.”⁶ It is not possible here to track step-by-step the devolution, or reversion, of this occasion of talk-in-interaction from “interview” back to a version of ordinary conversation,⁷ but it may be useful to explicate one of the forms which this transition takes.

Rather’s first question engenders a long response from Bush, which itself engenders a number of touched off sequences, including ones in which Bush complains about the videotaped feature which had preceded the “interview” and challenges Rather in various other respects. This clearly enough is a departure from the interview format, and is the occasion for several flurries of overlapping talk. At the end of one such spate of contentious talk, about three minutes into the interview, Bush appears to key the resumption of “interview” talk explicitly by returning the floor to Rather by inviting/demanding a question. The consequence affords a telling display of the ways in which “interview” requires realization in practice and in conduct, and not merely institutional settings and declared intentions.

(3) *Bush—Rather, 03:00*

- 000 Bush: ...‘hh An’ I’ve answered every question put
 001 before me. =now if you have a question, (0.2)
 002 [‘hh what is it.]
 003 Rather: [I do have one.]
 004 Bush: Ple [ase.]
 005 Rather: [I-] I have one.

- 006 Bush: Please [f i r e a w a y .] ()
 007 Rather: [You have said that] y- if you had know:n:
 008 you sed th'tf hed known: this was an a:rms for
 009 hosta[ges swap, 'hh that you would have opposed it. =
 010 Bush: [Yes
 011 Rather: = 'hhh You've a:lso [said that- that you] did not]
 012 Bush: [Exactly. (Many-)] May I-] =
 013 Rather: = [know:: that you:]
 014 Bush: = [May I May I] answer that.
 015 Rather: Tha [t wasn't a ques] tion. It was [a statement.]
 016 Bush: [(Th- right] [Yes it was] a
 017 statement, = [an' I'll a:nswer it. = T h e President =]
 018 Rather: [Let me ask the question if I may first.]
 019 Bush: = created this progra:m, 'hh has testifie-er: stated
 020 publicly, 'hh he di:d no:t think it was arms fer
 021 hostages.
 022 Bush: 'hh [It was only la:] ter that- and that's] me.
 023 Rather: [That's the President.] Mr. Vice President.
 024 ()
 025 Rather: ['hh Well-
 026 Bush: [Cuz I went along with it becuz- <y'know why Dan,
 027 { 'hhh/(0.2) } becuz [I w o r r i e d w h e n] I saw =
 028 Rather: [That wasn' the question] Mister
 029 [Vice President]
 030 Bush: [= M i s t e r ::] 'hhh Mister Buckley, 'hh uh'r heard
 031 about Mister Buckley being <tortured ta death. > Later
 032 admitted as the CIA chief. 'hh So if I erred, I
 033 erred on the side of tryin' ta get those hostages
 034 outta there. =
 035 Bush: = ['hh And the who:le story has been to:ld] =
 036 Rather: [Mister Vice President, you set thee:-
 037 Bush: = [t o t h e C o n g r e s s .]
 038 Rather: [you set the rules for this::] this talk here.
 039 >I didn' mean to step on yer line there, <
 040 'hhh but you insisted that this be li:ve, en
 041 [you know (th't) >we have a limited amount of ti] me. < =
 042 Bush: [E x a c t l y . T h a t ' s w h a t I : -]
 043 [>That's why I wan[na get my share < in: he:re,
 044 Rather: [= 'h h h h] Now
 045 Bush: [on something] other than whatchu wanna talk [about.
 046 Rather: [The President-] The
 047 President- () h's- has spoken for him:self. = I'm

- 048 asking you: to speak [for your:self, which you have=
 049 Bush: [Please
 050 Rather: =not been willing t'do in the pa:st,=[if I m--=
 051 Bush: [()
 052 Rather: =if I may- u- suggest th't- that- this is what leads
 053 people to sa:y, 'hh quote, "Either George Bush wz
 054 irrelevant, (0.3) or he w'z ineffective= >he said
 055 himself he wz outta the loop< = >now lemme give
 056 [an example, you said to ask you a question<]
 057 Bush: [() o u t t a t h e l o o p] May I
 058 explain "outta the loo:p." No: operational ro:le. Go
 059 ahead.
 060 Rather: Now. You've said that if you'd known it wz 'n arms
 061 fer hostages swap you would've opposed it.=You said
 062 the first you knew it was an arms fer hostages swap
 063 wz in <December of Nineteen Eighty Six> [correct?]
 064 Bush: [w h e n]
 065 the who:le thing became brie:fed ta me by Senator
 066 Duerrenburger,
 067 Rather: Exact [ly
 068 Bush: [and the pro:ximity of arms to hostages 'hh much
 069 closer. [than we had thought, on these hearings that w-]
 070 Rather: [But Mr. Vice President, you went ta Israel in]
 071 <July of Nineteen Eighty [Six?>]
 072 Bush: [Yes
 074 Rather: 'hhhh And- a member of your own sta:ff Mister Craig
 074 Fuller.- ((swallow/(0.5))) has verified. And so did
 075 the o:nly other man the:re. Mister Ni:r. Mister
 076 Amiron Nir, 'hh who's the Israeli's 'hh to:p anti-
 077 terrorist man,
 078 Bush: [Ye: [s.
 079 Rather: ['hh [Those two men >were in a meeting with you an'
 080 Mister Nir not once, < but three: times. three times,
 081 underscored with you that this was a straightout
 082 arms [fer hostages swap.] = 'h h h [] =
 083 Bush: [W h a t t h e y : : (') w e r e d o i n g .]
 084 Rather: =Now [how do you- How] do you reconc-] I have (sir)
 085 Bush: [Read the memo] Read the memo.] What they::]
 086 were doing.
 087 Rather: How: can you reconci:le that you were there< Mister
 088 Nir a- underscored three:: separate occa:sions, 'hh
 089 that it was a- arms fer hostages swap an' to:ld you
 090 we were dealing with the most ra:dical elements in

- 091 Iran: You were dealing straightaway with the
 092 Ayatollah [Khomeini
 093 Bush: I was told what they: were doing, and not
 094 what we were doing en that's the big difference...

In response to Bush's invitation/demand for a question, Rather begins as he had done at the outset, by laying the groundwork for the question with some preliminaries (lines 007-009). His procedure appears to be the same as before: he will introduce two claimably incompatible events or assertions, and challenge Bush to reconcile them. The talk at 007-009 is the first of these, much like that at lines 002-005 in (2) above. But unlike the earlier instance, Bush does not allow the production of the second preliminary. Indeed, before the first preliminary has been completed, there are indications of trouble for "the interview."

First, well before the first preliminary has come to possible completion, even before the grammatical juncture of its initial conditional clause, Bush interpolates a receipt token of sorts. Most like a "continuer" or "backchannel" response, its ordinary use in conversation is to pass, on behalf of its speaker, a place at which that party might otherwise talk. Its use in the Bush/Rather episode at line 010 is in any case somewhat special, because even in ordinary conversation, this would not be (in strictly turn-taking terms) a place for Bush to talk;⁸ passing an opportunity to talk would, then, not ordinarily be an issue at such a point.

But such an interpolation, and the one at the start of line 012, is particularly anomalous in the context of a news interview. In news interviews, neither party (albeit each for a different reason) ordinarily registers what the other has said with recipient tokens, either to register receipt of information (cf. Heritage, 1985), or to pass an opportunity to talk. One does not find continuers in news interviews,⁹ because interviewers do not treat themselves as the true recipients of interviewee's talk (ibid.), and interviewees only respond to questions, whereas continuers specifically pass the opportunity to do a full turn such as "answering." As early as midway through the first of Rather's preliminaries, then, there is evidence in Bush's continuer that commitment to the practices of "doing interview" has broken down.

Furthermore, as soon as Rather has projected, and begun producing, a continuation of his preliminaries, Bush interrupts at line 012, proposing to “answer.” When Rather explicitly invokes the constitutive property of interviews to block Bush’s talk: “That wasn’t a question. It was a statement,” and “Let me ask the question if I may first,” it appears that he may not. Bush seems to concur that it was a statement, but insists on “answering” in any case (thereby adhering at least rhetorically to the constraint that interviewees should only do “answering”). And here we have empirically what we had earlier conjectured hypothetically: Bush (and interviewees generally) *can* talk at earlier junctures preceding production by the interviewer of a question. When they do so, the interview *qua* interview breaks down.

The talk initiated under these auspices continues to line 035, and engenders further talk to line 059. At line 060, Rather tries again, repeating the first preliminary from lines 007-009 at lines 060-061, followed by some more preliminary talk, with the question which Bush invited at line 002 finally being delivered at line 087.

Throughout this spate of talk, the interview format of questioning and answering seems to be rather fully in abeyance. And in this spate of talk (though not for the first time in the program), recurrent bouts of overlapping talk occur. The passage of this occasion from “interview” to “confrontation” thus appears to come in two guises. There is first the dropping of the specialized turn-taking system for interviews, and in particular the withholding of talk by one party conditional on production of a question by the other, with the consequent reversion of the talk to something resembling the turn-taking system for conversation. And there is, secondly, the development, within that reversion to something like conversation, of one of the “stretchings” to which that turn-taking system can be subjected—persistent and competitive overlap. And it is to the latter that I now turn.

ASPECTS OF OVERLAP IN THE BUSH/RATHER ENCOUNTER

Writing in the days following the Bush/Rather broadcast, *Los Angeles Times* television critic Howard Rosenberg commented that when two public personalities go at one another as these two did,

others (whether onlookers to the interaction, or, more to Rosenberg's point, a television audience) focus on the fact of the face-off, not on what is being said. Even for an experienced viewer like himself, Rosenberg wrote (1988, p. 11), "I got only a sense of what they were saying while watching the interview live, grasping the details only when replaying a tape of the interview and taking notes."

For now I will take Rosenberg's observation as correct, in part because onlookers, at least to a TV program, may well experience difficulty hearing, grasping – apperceiving – what is being said through all the hubbub. I have worded that claim carefully: "they *experience* difficulty," even though it may turn out to be the case that they have actually, demonstrably, heard much or all of what was said. But the vernacular view of overlapping talk is that it may impair hearing or understanding; an account for not hearing being available, one can come to find oneself needing it.

On the other hand, it is regularly the case that the simultaneously speaking participants demonstrably *do* attend to what the other is saying – "demonstrably" because they exhibit the product of that hearing in their own subsequent conduct. That attention may demonstrably be directed not only to the *sense* of what the other is saying, but to its *details*. And indeed it is not uncommon that the simultaneous, indeed competitive, talk is extended precisely by one of the parties responding to what the other has just said in the overlap, and the other then responding in turn, both of them talking all the while.

In such cases, there is an even greater disparity than may otherwise occur between, on the one hand, what the *parties* to an interaction attend to and respond to – what *drives* the interaction in the trajectory which it follows as the evident real grounds of their conduct, and, on the other hand, what outside *observers* attend to and understand to be transpiring. This divergence between actors', or participants', or members' versions of a course of action and that of observers is, of course, a key and classical problem for the social sciences, or at least some of them.

Attentiveness to this disparity in the Bush/Rather affair provides the opportunity to address again the analytic task of laying bare the practices of conduct through which the *parties themselves* methodically construct the courses of action and interaction out of which the

social world is fashioned. On such occasions the relevancies and practices which are the basis for the progressive constitution of the interaction may not be accessible to *outsiders'* real time observation at all. Finding here some disparities between the observers' grasp of what is going on and what demonstrably informs and propels the participants' actions, we may be encouraged to be skeptical as well on those occasions in which a vernacular observational grasp *does* seem readily available. Perhaps there too it diverges from what informs the participants' conduct, and we would do well to get access to the participants' grasp of what is going on, by reference to which each next development on the unfolding cusp of interactional time is produced.

One feature of their circumstances with which Bush and Rather recurrently had to deal on this occasion was that they found themselves speaking simultaneously. Now with the exception of a very few types of talk which are properly done simultaneously, talk-in-interaction is organized to be done one at a time. In part this is accomplished by the availability and use by participants of systematic practices for the resolution of simultaneous talk into one-at-a-time talk.

The organization of these practices for overlap resolution is ordinarily very effective and efficient; most overlapping talk in talk-in-interaction is over very quickly. Part of the sense of confrontation in the Bush/Rather episode is produced not only by the recurrence of simultaneous talk, but by the extended duration of particular outbreaks of it. These can be heard to be the product, on the one hand, of neither party exercising those practices which would resolve the overlap, and, on the other hand, of each party so conducting himself as to extend his part of the competitive talk. This is not the place for an explication of the practices of conduct in simultaneous talk, but one practice in particular will be worth noting in the present data—intra-overlap response to the competing talk.

The Bush/Rather episode contains a number of episodes of simultaneous talk in which Bush and Rather each pursue their own line while the other is also talking. For example, in (4) at lines 052-059, Rather is remarking on what he claims to be Bush's past unwillingness to be responsive to certain questions, while Bush insists on explaining the meaning of the phrase "out of the loop."

(4) *Bush/Rather, c. 04:00*

- 043 [>That's why I wan[na get my share< in: he:re,
 044 Rather: [= 'h h h h [Now
 045 Bush: [on something] other than whatchu wanna talk [about.
 046 Rather: [The President- [The
 047 President- (') h's—has spoken for him:self. =I'm
 048 asking you: to speak [for your:self, which you have=
 049 Bush: [Please
 050 Rather: =not been willing t'do in the pa:st, = [if I m—=
 051 Bush: ()
 052 Rather: =if I may- u- suggest th't- that- this is what leads
 053 people to sa:y, 'hh quote, "Either George Bush wz
 054 irrelevant, (0.3) or he w'z ineffective= >he said
 055 himself he wz outta the loop< = >now lemme give
 056 [an example, you said to ask you a question<]
 057 Bush: () outta the loop] May I
 058 explain "outta the loo:p." No: operational ro:le. Go
 059 ahead.

In such cases, of course, what each man is doing may be prompted by what the other is doing or has just done, and may be touched off by it (for example, by the occurrence of the phrase "Out of the loop" in Rather's just-preceding talk at line 055), but the talk is not what I will call "retortive" within the overlap. Each man adopts and presses a line, either self-initiated or responsive to something mentioned by the other, and either sustains it in the face of simultaneous talk by the other or withdraws from the competition for the turn-space.

But there are more densely interactive exchanges laced through the simultaneous talk of this interaction as well, which can easily get lost in the hubbub accessible to onlookers and audiences. Consider, for example, the talk in (5) at lines 079-088.

(5) *Bush/Rather, c. 04:15*

- 070 Rather: [But Mr. Vice President, you went ta Israel in]
 071 <July of Nineteen Eighty [Six?>]
 072 Bush: [Yes
 074 Rather: 'hhhh And- a member of your own sta:ff Mister Craig
 074 Fuller.- ((swallow/(0.5))) has verified. And so did

- 075 the o:nly other man the:re. Mister Ni:r. Mister
 076 Amiron Nir, 'hh who's the Israeli's 'hh to:p anti-
 077 terrorist man,
 078 Bush: [Ye: [s.
 079 Rather: ['hh [Those two men > were in a meeting with you an'
 080 Mister Nir not once, < but three: times. three times,
 081 underscored with you that this was a straightout
 082 arms [fer hostages swap.] = 'h h h
 083 Bush: [W h a t t h e y:: () were doing.] =
 084 Rather: =Now [how do you- How] do you reconc-] I have (sir)]
 085 Bush: [Read the memo Read the memo. What they::
 086 were doing.
 087 Rather: How: can you reconci:le that you were there < Mister
 088 Nir a- underscored three:: separate occa:sions, 'hh
 089 that it was a- arms fer hostages swap an' to:ld you
 090 we were dealing with the most ra:dical elements in
 091 Iran:. You were dealing straightaway with the
 092 Ayatollah [Khomeini
 093 Bush: [I was told what they: were doing, and not
 094 what we were doing en that's the big difference...

Rather is finishing the presentation of the second of two elements of an apparent contradiction which he is about to ask Bush to reconcile, when Bush intervenes preemptively at line 083 to claim that the “this” in “this was a straightout arms for hostages swap” refers to what the Israelis were doing with Iran, not what the U.S. was doing, thereby dissolving the contradiction. As Rather proceeds to request the reconciliation (line 084), Bush is enjoining him (line 085) to “Read the memo. Read the memo.”

Note then, that Rather momentarily abandons his utterance-in-progress, the demand for an account (Line 084: “Now how do you – How do you reconc –”), to respond in continuing overlap to the insistence he has just been confronted with in overlap. He abandons his utterance-in-progress at just the point at which Bush’s repetition of “Read the memo” is coming to an end, thereby showing his attention and uptake of Bush’s utterance not merely roughly, but in precisely timed detail. He drops into this now abandoned utterance a retort to its competition, (Line 084) “I have (sir),” thereby engendering an extension of the overlap with Bush’s continuing talk. Note,

by the way, that by his use of the pro-term “have,” Rather builds in as presupposition that he has monitored Bush’s talk, is responding to that, and requires of Bush that he grasp that. The injunction (to “Read the memo”) having been parried, Rather then resumes his previously ongoing talk (line 087), and specifically produces it *as* a “resumption” by re-employing the same identifying lexical building blocks, namely, “How can you reconcile...” Here, then, Rather has popped out of his own ongoing talk to respond to something said in overlap with it, the response itself being in overlap, and then has returned to his earlier abandoned line.

Earlier in this same exchange, (6) at lines 022-023, we see another sort of exit from a similar, intra-overlap, densely interactive exchange.

(6) *Bush/Rather, c. 03:10*

- 014 Bush: [May I May I] answer that.
 015 Rather: Tha [t wasn't a ques] tion. It was [a statement.]
 016 Bush: [(Th- right Yes it was] a
 017 statement, = [an' I'll a: nswer it. = T h e President =]
 018 Rather: [Let me ask the question if I may first.]
 019 Bush: =created this progra:m, 'hh has testifie-er: stated
 020 publicly, 'hh he di:d no:t think it was arms fer
 021 hostages.
 022 Bush: 'hh [It was only la:] ter that- and that's] me.
 023 Rather: [That's the President.] Mr. Vice President.
 024 (·)
 025 Rather: ['hh Well-
 026 Bush: [Cuz I went along with it becuz- <y'know why Dan,
 027 { 'hhh/(0.2) } becuz [I w o r r i e d w h e n] I saw =
 028 Rather: [That wasn' the question] Mister
 029 [Vice President]
 030 Bush: [=M i s t e r::] 'hhh Mister Buckley, 'hh uh'r heard
 031 about Mister Buckley being <tortured ta death.> Later
 032 admitted as the CIA chief. 'hh So if I erred, I
 033 erred on the side of tryin' ta get those hostages
 034 outta there. =

Here, Bush has begun a response at lines 017-019, “The President created this program...” At a possible completion of this response,

Rather enters (line 023) with a riposte attributing the position to the President as a way of preparing to demand again Bush's own position, "That's the President." But Bush, as it happens, adds an additional unit to the response which he had been producing (at line 022), and this addition entirely overlaps Rather's incipient challenge. Just as in the prior instance we saw Rather abandon an utterance-in-progress to respond to something said to him in overlap, so here (line 022) Bush abandons *his* utterance-in-progress with a retort to Rather's challenge—"And that's me."

Unlike Rather in the previous instance, however, Bush does *not* return to his abandoned utterance. Instead, his continuation is fitted to the response on whose behalf he interrupted himself. Thus the overlapping exchange is not "encapsulated" within what had been the ongoing talk, but in fact shapes the new direction which the talk comes to follow. The trajectory of the ensuing course of the talk has at this point been set by the detail of interactive events whose detail may not be accessible at all to real time observation by non-participants.

A more extended spate of such densely interactive exchanges of retorts in overlap can be found in (7).

(7) *Bush/Rather, c. 05:35*

- 000 Rather: [But Mister Vice President,] Mister Vice President,
 001 Bush: [Yes]
 002 Rather: [The] President himself has said he wants all the
 003 facts out. 'hh He gave up such things as even his
 004 own diary. =
 005 =E:very principal, including: [:m Secretary S:Schultz
 006 Bush: He did not give up his own
 007 diary. = ['s diary was brief] ed.
 008 Rather: [He gave up some of it]
 009 Bush: Well,
 010 Rather: [Well-
 011 Bush: [Dan, let's be careful here, becuz { 'hhh/(0.2) }
 012 you're (sp-) a political] p r o f i : : l e
 013 Rather: [Yes I wantchu to be careful,] Mister Vice President]
 014 [becuz th'problem he-] [B't th'pro:blem here:: =
 015 Bush: [I will be careful,] 'hh but [I wanna get my side
 016 of this] o u : : .]
 017 Rather: [= i : s] that you] repeatedly sat in the meetings,

- 018 { .hhh/(0.2) } you sat in (a/the) meeting- (.) in
 019 which Secretary Schu:ltz, 'hh in the most forceful
 020 way:, { 'hhh/(0.5) } raged- regist'd his objections.=
 021 [En then you said you never heard anybody regist'r objecsh]
 022 Bush: [I wasn' there for his most forceful way:.
 023 If it was the most forceful way, =I've heard George Schultz
 024 be f-(') be uh: { 'hh/(0.2) } ver:y very forceful. 'hh
 025 A:nd if I were there, an' he was very very forceful
 026 at that meeting 'hh I woulda remembered that. I
 027 don't remember that.=
 028 [a n d t h a t i s s w h a t t I'm saying.]
 029 Rather: = [Then how do you explain th't you can't remem] ber
 030 ('t/n) the other people at the meeting
 031 [say he was apoplectic.]
 032 Bush: (W'l) maybe I wasn't th ere, at thatt pointt.
 033 (1.0)
 034 Rather: You weren't th- you were [n't in the meeting?]
 035 Bush: I'm n o t s u g gesting.
 036 I'm just saying. "I don't remember it."
 037 (0.8)

This "round" begins with Bush's challenge at line 006, where he interrupts Rather to correct an earlier assertion.¹⁰ "He did not give up his own diary" contests Rather's assertion to the contrary, and Rather yields the floor to the interruption, withdrawing before completing the unit he was in the middle of. But Rather has heard Bush's objection in detail and not just that he was talking simultaneously, and he partially backs down in the face of it—"He gave up some of it" at line 008. This backdown seems targeted to come at the end of Bush's turn, but Bush adds another unit to his turn, thus putting Rather's backdown into overlap. But this does not appear to have impaired Bush's uptake of it, anymore than Rather's uptake of Bush's objection was compromised by *its* being in overlap. At lines 009-011, Bush urges caution on Rather, in a moment of solo talk rare in this part of their interaction. Rather immediately turns this caution back on its issuer, with a retort now again in overlapping talk "I wantchu to be careful...", and this is followed by another retort of a participant abandoning an utterance in progress to respond to an utterance veiled in overlap, "I will be careful."

Note then that we have here not just a kind of conversational machismo—with two combatants butting verbal heads or horns. It is not just talking at once, louder, competitively, although that may well be what we *think* it is, as Howard Rosenberg suggested. In “confrontations” like this, the recurrent and extended spates of simultaneous talk may embed within them exchanges of substance, charges and countercharges, claims and objections, barbs and retorts. These with their details, and not just insistence on outlasting the other’s talk, may fuel the extension of the “contest.”

In some places Bush deflects from what he is in the process of saying in order to address what Rather has said while he (Bush) was saying it, and vice versa (i.e., Rather deflects...). When this happens, the “responsive” talk reveals that these participants are monitoring what a simultaneously speaking other is saying and doing, and monitoring it very closely indeed. There is no reason to think that these are the only times that such monitoring is going on; it is only on these occasions that one party finds it in point to stop what he is doing in order to respond. It might repay the investment of attention to examine when, and for what, each participant chose to deflect, and for what they did not. And to examine which deflections were temporary excursions from an utterance or line which was then resumed, and which deflections “stabilized,” and became for a while the main line which that party followed, and possibly the track on which the interaction ran.

To understand what is going on, then, why and how the interaction has the trajectory which it comes to have, we need to understand this practice of talking in overlap. It is a feature of *ordinary* talk in interaction, and the transient “stretchings” to which its turn-taking system can be subjected. And here, where an “interview” has for a while lapsed back into the ordinary conversational format from which it is otherwise derived by transformation, the occasion has inherited all of conversation’s systemic vulnerabilities.

CLOSURE

When we examine the Bush/Rather episode, we can focus on what is special and/or unique about it—that it is the Vice President and the star Anchor for a major network, that it is a chapter in the

story of the contest for the Presidency, that it is “performed” for a national television audience, etc. Or we can focus on aspects which this event has in common with others, ways in which it embodies and confronts us with more or less general features of talk-in-interaction—features such as the occurrence and resolution of overlap, or features of such a specialized but nonetheless not uncommon genre as the news interview.

I have adopted the latter course, and have concentrated on how we can see in this specially publicized, and claimably very unusual, event some recurrent features of the *sort* of event which it was, features which it shares with much more mundane occurrences. But this is not entirely to ignore its “specialness” and its import for those concerns which make it special—concerns with the conduct of civic life and politics. For by the elucidation of the operation in it of quite ordinary modes of conduct, by bringing to bear on it the ordinary analytic concerns which talk-in-interaction ought to mobilize, we can clarify and constrain the political and policy interpretations which we might be tempted to offer. The contingencies and opportunities of talk-in-interaction are not different in kind for Vice Presidents and Anchors than for others, though which one will be pressed and which avoided may certainly vary. But Vice Presidents too must decide whether to yield to competing talk or not, whether to abandon an utterance in order to respond or not, whether to return to what they were saying or stay with the new tack, and all of this while both are talking, and onlookers may hear nothing but noise.

Such scenes of moment for what we “know” are the momentous issues in the civic polity are played with the same practices of conduct as inform the most humble scene. We disregard the common practices of mundane sociality at the peril of misunderstanding what is, at least officially, of much greater seriousness.

NOTES

- 1 The “assignment” to which the present paper is a response was to take up matters of interest in an “interview” conducted “live” with George Bush, then running for the Republican Presidential nomination, by Dan Rather, Chief Anchor of the CBS Evening News on Monday, January 25, 1988. The episode—which included heated exchanges of charges, simultaneous talk and an abrupt ending by Rather—became a cause celebre in the following days, subject to interpretations of “ambushes” by each side, and reviews of the character of George Bush and of the media coverage of national political campaigns.
- 2 For example, on the employment interview, cf., Button (1987); on the medical interview, cf., Frankel (forthcoming); and, most relevant here, on news interviews cf., Clayman (1988), Greatbatch (1988), Heritage and Greatbatch (forthcoming), Heritage (1985).
- 3 The whole of the Bush/Rather episode (not including the prepared video feature shown before the beginning of the “interview”) lasts approximately 9 minutes. I transcribed no further than the first seven minutes, and only about two and a half of those first seven minutes. As with all transcripts, the one with which I am working is virtually endlessly revisable. However, in the respects which matter for the discussions in this paper, I believe it is reliable.
- 4 Of course, in point of fact they may end up producing more, but prospectively they are systematically assured of but a single “turn-constructural unit” (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).
- 5 It is not just that he marks these places by adjustments of hand positioning; to this point he has not moved except at such “structural joints” in the talk.
- 6 Another might be the actual reversal of the questioning “role,” as in the following exchange about six minutes or so into the talk:

Bush: ...'cause I wanna talk about why I wanna be
 Presidenh. 'hh why those forty one percent
 a' the people are suppo:rting me,=
 ['hh en I don' think it's fair to judge a who] le=
 Rather: = [And Mister Vice President, these questions()]
 Bush: =caree:r, 'hh it's not fair to judge my: whole
 caree:r by a rehash on Iran.('hh How wouldju like
 it.(0.2) if I judge your career by those seven
 minutes when you walked off the set in New York.
 (1.0)
 Rather: Well [Mis-
 Bush: [Wouldju like tha:t?
 (0.2)
- 7 Clayman and Whalen (this volume) address themselves to this development.
- 8 But cf., Lerner, 1987, on the juncture between “if” clauses and their consequents as an “opportunity space” for collaborative completion by a recipient of current speaker’s talk. Furthermore, production of such continuers or “backchannels” and leaving room for them can have uses relevant to accomplishing particular activities and alignments in the talk, uses which may get them placed at just such turn-taking junctures.

- 9 See Greatbatch, 1988, pp. 411-413. For this observation, and many others in this paragraph, I am indebted to John Heritage.
- 10 By "interrupt" I mean, he starts talking while Rather is already talking and not on an approach to a possible turn completion, or even unit completion.

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