Young children engage in orderly, recognizable conduct with peers before they are able to speak. Early-appearing forms of peer communicative action are carried out through visible body behavior (including the deployment of objects) and nonverbal vocalization. When children begin to speak, they employ this newly available interactional resource within and by reference to already established practices of peer sociality.

In this report, we examine the use of body behavior as observable action among very young children, and in particular, we show how the observability of this conduct is itself a resource for accomplishing action in interaction. We aim to show that very young children can not only produce body behaviors that count as communicative actions, but that an orientation to the availability of this conduct to their peers—as recognizably action in a course of action—can itself be a constitutive feature of those actions. Specifically, we examine two ways that very young children recurrently employ objects: presenting an object to another child and putting an object away. However, here we examine cases where these actions are used to accomplish something else. In each case, the recognizable or exposed course of action turns out to have one or another embedded trajectories that differs from or subsumes its initial appearance. That is, we show how very young children employ the appearance of one action to accomplish another.
From a methodological point of view it seems important to establish, at the outset of a line of investigation into the social life of very young children, that their conduct is understood by them—that is, it is produced and treated by them—as recognizable actions in structured courses of action, since this very basic feature of sociality can legitimately be called into question in the case of these children. Examining practices that look like they are designed to be recognized as launching one course of action while turning out to be in the service of another course of action seems like a perspicuous site for establishing this, in the case of very young children.

The materials examined here come from a corpus of videotape recordings that have been collected from several classrooms at two infant-toddler programs in an ongoing study of peer sociality among very young children 12 months to 30 months of age.1 At times, the daycare setting affords us an opportunity to examine very early forms of peer communicative action relatively unencumbered by the asymmetrical competencies and “scaffolding” of adult-child interaction. In what follows we first show how presenting an object to another child can be used to set up a presentation—withdrawal tease sequence and then we show how putting a toy away can be used as a method for retrieving a similar toy from a playmate.2

AN ECONOMY OF OBJECTS

The possibility of object transfer is a commonplace circumstance among toddlers in a group care setting. Moreover, the mere availability of a play object can provide an occasion for a take attempt whether it is being offered by another child or not, or whether it is in use by another or not. The looming possibility of object transfer is a source for both cooperation and conflict—and constitutes a training ground for sociality. The practices involved in the repeated handling and transferring of play objects may provide one basis for the early recognizability of action and action sequences. Such early forms of sociality as

1 This project was supported by grants from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of California, Santa Barbara, through the “Research Across Disciplines” program.
2 In both cases, we examine sequences of action that have sequence-initiating and sequence-responding parts. However, it is important to note that these “action pairs” do not fully conform to what has been termed “adjacency pair” organization (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), since the initiating and responding actions take place as embodied action in the absence of any talk. As these actions are not constrained to placement within adjacent turns at talk, they need not be constrained by the organization of turn taking as is the case for adjacency pair organized action sequences. For example, the relationship of a presentational offer of a toy figure to its acceptance/rejection can include its continued production until recognized or responded to and does not have to come to an end or be renewed at the next possible completion of a turn—constructional unit.
object acquisition and object defense are built upon the recognizability of object transfer sequences.

Toddlers can treat objects as being bound to other children in only a very weak fashion—that is, visible social connection to an object may not be regarded as a strong claim or entitlement for continued possession. Even "in hand" and "in use" objects can be treated as potentially takable by current possessor/user and potential next possessors/users alike. Potential takers sometimes design their take attempts in a fashion that makes it clear they are treating the object as a (defendable) possession of the other child and sometimes they treat it as merely residing with that child—i.e., as freely available. In both cases the object is nevertheless treated as take-able.

This "weak purview" over objects can shape the structure of peer encounters.³ For example, one child, involved in play with a toy, can orient to a foreseeable possible course of action from the mere approach of a second child; the first child can treat the approach—before any outright attempt has been made—as an incipient take attempt. We plan to make these assertions the subject of a subsequent report (see Lerner, Kidwell, & Zimmerman, 1999, for a preliminary sketch); we mention them now only to furnish a conceptual context for the more limited investigation reported here.

We now turn to an examination of how "presenting an object" (ostensibly to launch an object transfer sequence) can be used to conceal and launch a derivative course of action: an offer-withdrawal or "mock transfer" sequence.⁴ We examine a series of three offer-withdrawal sequences (from VYC tape 980213A1–LC) in which a small play object (a "Mommy" figure) is presented by one child (Kelly) to another child (Derrick) and then subsequently withdrawn each time before the other child can gain possession of it. (Some may find it useful to know that both children are 22 months old.) In the parlance of childhood (cf. Knapp & Knapp, 1976), one child attempts to "trick" or "fool" the other child into responding, and then when response is provided, the first child teasingly refuses to give over the object. (Derrick’s mother [Mom] is also

³ Correspondingly, one recurrent task for caregivers seems to be detecting and enforcing the entitlement of a current possessor of an object to continued use until the object is voluntarily given up or the child loses interest in it.

⁴ Developmental psychologists begin to observe teasing behaviors such as this in children who are about 20 months of age. For example, Shatz (1994) mentions two examples of teasing at about this age. However, she does not distinguish the very different types of action sequences involved in these two cases, nor does she explain the practices that comprise them. It is only through the description of these practices and sequences of action accomplished through these practices that we can gain an appreciation of the specific analytic resources that are available to very young children in the management of their daily lives.
present for the first presentation, but for the most part, we do not examine her participation in the interaction here.)

In the following discussion we do not specifically address how this series of sequences may be related to each other as, for example, a sequence of sequences. It will have to suffice to say that after each of the first two offer-withdrawal sequences the engagement between the participants is broken off and there are intervening engagements with others in the setting. And in addition the initiation of each of the three tease sequences constitutes a fresh approach by Kelly to Derrick during or right after he has been engaged elsewhere. There is some continuity in Kelly’s intervening actions, but the later presentations do not seem to be specifically designed as subsequent versions or attempts—nor do they seem to be treated as such, (Of course, these are quite difficult matters to establish when examining the interactions of very young children.)

Presenting an Object

In the first of the three presentation sequences, Kelly approaches Derrick and Mom from behind as Mom is attempting to disengage herself from Derrick and leave. Kelly extends her right arm with her hand grasping the small Mommy figure and then, leaning over the edge of the table, presents the figure to Derrick as shown in Fig. 27.1. There is no attention paid to the “fact” that she is entering an ongoing encounter, except insofar as she has to maneuver around for her’s hot to get in position to present the doll.

In response, Derrick turns his gaze from Mom to the approaching figure (i.e., to the approach of the figure that is coming toward his face) and then to the (stationary) figure itself. He smiles as he does this, but as far as we can tell does not make an immediate move to reach for it. At just this point, after Derrick has fixed his gaze on the figure, Kelly rapidly withdraws her hand (seemingly, from Derrick’s possible reach which could foreseeably come next) and then brings the figure to rest against her chest as in Fig. 27.2. Just as Kelly withdraws the figure, Mom says, “Oh: you’re giving that to Derrick? What is that”.

The timing and relative speediness of the withdrawal and the destination of the retreating hand seem designed as a response to an anticipated attempt at taking the figure. Demonstrating resistance to an anticipated (or even hoped for) attempted retrieval shows that Kelly is oriented to her object presentation as a recognizable proffer which has made relevant an impending

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5 This event was caught in the “crossfire” of two cameras, so in addition to the view visible in Fig. 27.1, we were able to examine a frontal view of Derrick from a second camera.
retrieval by Derrick. Kelly’s action treats Derrick as a possible taker (whether or not he was that during the presentation) and this proposed alignment to the object and action can be consequential for subsequent action. Moreover, resisting what can thereby be seen as an anticipated take can establish the object as worth having and worth taking. Thus, Kelly’s action can embody an invitation to play—acting as if the recipient of the object presentation may be a potential taker invites him to act in just that fashion at the next opportunity. In sequence–organizational terms, her action establishes or implicates an opportunity to participate for her recipient as not or not only a viewer of the object presented, but as a possible taker at the next opportunity—and that opportunity is not long in coming.
Anatomy of a Tease

As Sacks (1992:1, pp. 363–369) noted, children learn that their actions are observable from their appearances. And once they learn this, they can use it as a resource for producing actions that are different than they appear to be. In the case under discussion, Kelly launches what appears to be one course of action—an object proffer—which turns out to be the beginning of a mock offer sequence which is one sort of tease sequence. This might even be characterized as a practical joke—a joke that hinges on a completely practical course of action—in which the recipient is tricked. The success of the mock offer sequence depends upon the initial recognizability of the proffered figure as a serious offer to hand it over—that is, success hinges on its concealment as launching a mock offer sequence in which the offer will be abruptly withdrawn. We now turn to a discussion of the second presentation, which is also part of an object presentation—withdrawal sequence, but in this one Derrick actually “takes the bait” and reaches out to retrieve the figure from Kelly’s outstretched hand.⁶

Fig. 213 shows Kelly again presenting the Mommy figure to Derrick. This takes place about 20 seconds after the first presentation and just as Derrick’s mother departs. During this time there are several exchanges between Kelly and Mom about the figure and then Mom turns back to her son Derrick in order to complete her leave-taking. Kelly first turns away from the table and then begins to prepare for the next presentation. Kelly moves into Mom’s place just as she (Mom) leaves and begins the presentation. The figure is moved to within Derrick’s reach, though he is at first turned away from its approach as he is watching his mother depart; indeed, the figure is almost literally pushed into his face to bring his gaze to it. One might say Kelly is actively fishing for Derrick to attempt taking what is seemingly being offered to him. This presentation puts the figure into a transfer-ready position and seems to be treated by its recipient as an offer or even an attempt to give it to him. He must pull back from the figure, which is at the corner of his left eye, and turn toward it to be able to see it. As before, he first seems to orient to the movement by turning toward it and pulling back, and then stabilizes his gaze on the object once his head movement stops. At just this point he reaches up to take the figure as shown in Fig. 214. Kelly has provided Derrick with an opportunity to take possession of the figure—one might even say that she has tempted him with the

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⁶ As has been mentioned there is also a third presentation–withdrawal sequence. This occurs about a minute later and runs off in a fashion similar to the second sequence. We will not discuss it further in this short report; however, note that even though it is the third presentation of the figure, Derrick does not treat it as a presentation–withdrawal challenge. That is, he still does not compose his retrieval effort in a fashion that attempts to pre-empt the withdrawal of the figure. This may be in part because the object is again presented without warning as a form of re-engagement to a child who does not see it coming. One might even suggest that in all three instances teasing was used as a method for initiating engagement.
Figure 27.6

figure—and he attempts to take it. Significantly, there is no hint in the manner of his reach that he is oriented to the possibility of a withdrawal of the figure (even though she had preemptively withdrawn it a few moments earlier). However, she again rapidly withdraws her hand (Fig. 27.5) just as he begins to close his fingers around the figure and then she laughs. Derrick then extends his arm and grasping hand in what appears to be an appeal for the figure (Fig. 27.6). That is, he is pursuing the object rather than, for example, acknowledging the teasing nature of Kelly’s actions. In this case, the recipient seems to treat the presented figure as a genuine offer, since he has not make a grab for it and when it is withdrawn his hand follows it with what might be characterized as a pleading gesture—an open handed reach. Here instrumental action (retrieval) is transformed into its gestural counterpart (pleading) as the behavior moves from one position in the sequence of actions to another.7 As Kelly withdraws the figure to her chest, she steps back from the table and so there is no possibility that Derrick’s reaching hand could actually grasp the figure. (In fact, she almost stumbles back from the force of the figure withdrawal.)

One criterion for a “successful” tease is met when a recipient takes up a course of action that is seemingly implicated by the teaser’s initiating action, followed by the teaser withdrawing from that course of action before it can be completed—that is, revealing, post hoc, the different course of action the presentation was actually launching. In this instance, the teaser succeeds in eliciting a take response and withdraws the figure. She then marks this success by laughing. On the other side, the child who has been “taken in” does not ratify the success or even existence of her accomplishment in any way; indeed he

7 There is also at least some negative evidence that Kelly is designing her sequence initiating action as a proffer and not an open challenge. She holds the figure out with a fully extended arm, and does not wiggle it around in the way someone might if they were marking the proffer as a challenge to the recipient to try and take what will surely be withdrawn when the attempted retrieval comes.
pursues the transfer as if it were still the operative course of action. At this point, they are not treating this sequential environment in symmetrical ways—there is what Jefferson (1981) called "interactional asymmetry" in their orientations to the ongoing action sequence and therefore their opportunities to participate within it. This might be compared to one type of "po-faced" response to teasing described by Drew (1987) in which a recipient of a teasing remark ignores the teasing or humorous feature of the action and responds "innocently" to the matter that carries the tease. (Note that Drew is describing a response to an openly teasing remark, whereas Derrick's response is to a tease that was accomplished though a trick he has fallen for—that is, he has already committed himself to an "innocent" response to a prior action.)

Of course, this plays directly into Kelly's tease in that Derrick's continued interest in the figure allows the tease to be extended. Kelly next upgrades her withdrawal by first drawing the figure (which is hidden in a two-handed grasp) to her side (Fig. 27.7) and then by moving it behind her and holding it there with both hands behind her back (Fig. 27.8). She is responding to his plea by pointedly doing "moving it out of his reach" thus extending the tease sequence. (Note that she was not actually within his reach and he is trapped in a "box chair" he could not quickly exit.)

At this point she initiates a sequence of verbal teasing oppositional assertions between herself and Derrick concerning whose parent (figure) this figure represents. As he pleads for the figure (and possibly says something about it), she responds with "No, my mommy" to which he responds with an in kind oppositional assertion, and this is then followed by another round of oppositional assertions. Kelly seems to be continuing the original tease sequence (which Derrick did not acknowledge) by action accomplished through talk, and this time Derrick takes part.  

Object-withdrawal teases are not limited to children. In one case involving adults, the current user of a butter dish, after repeated requests and coaxing, finally picks up the dish and extends it toward the requestor. But as the requestor reaches for the dish, it is pulled out of his reach momentarily. This is followed by an exchange of laugh tokens as the transfer is completed. Unlike the presentation-withdrawal tease discussed previously, this one is inserted into a transfer that fulfills a request, whereas Kelly's proffer of the Mommy figure seems composed as a tease sequence from its beginning. However, in each case, the recipient treats the object as transfer-ready when it is presented.

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8 It is worth noting that after the second round of oppositional assertions they are clearly no longer referring to the figure, but to their actual parents (and it may be that even the first oppositional assertions were not or not only or not distinctly referring to the figure in Kelly's hand). From this point on they no longer address each other, but are both seeking assurance about their parents' whereabouts from a caregiver, while continuing to use the format of the oppositional assertions.
This type of tease, then, is something like a "sequential surprise." To initiate the sequence it is necessary to produce an action (presenting the figure) that appears to implicate a subsequent action (handing over the figure) which the presenter can then noticeably fail to follow through on, after the responding party commits to the initiated course of action. Note, however, that there is a risk to the presenter, because the offer that is being feigned has the possibility of succeeding before it can be withdrawn. An orientation to this possibility can be seen in the "premature" withdrawal of an object as seen in Fig. 27.2 described earlier.

So, how then does one produce a successful tease? In simple terms, its realization is "parasitic" on the launching of a recognizable object proffer
sequence. Here the tease, when it is revealed, is seeable as having been a second alternative to an object proffer (cf. Sacks, 1992:2, p. 456). This sort of tease plays off of the recognizability of one type of action sequence in the service of accomplishing another. We now apply our understand of this practice—using the appearance of conduct as a resource in producing a course of action—to another domain in order to show that this form of action organization is not unique to tease sequences among very young children (though it may find a home there), but may constitute a more general interactional resource.

ESTABLISHING A PERSPICUOUS OCCASION FOR ACTION EMULATION

In this section, we describe how even a very young child can act in a fashion that is designed to get another child to follow their lead. This is done by producing an action—timed and positioned to be seen by another child—that provides an occasion for, or even makes specially relevant, a corresponding action by the other child, as part of a recognizable joint activity. In the present case, the joint activity consists of putting away toy tools after finishing with them. Our interest is not only in the emulation of an action per se, or even in the fact that a child can be shown to be oriented to the position and design of their own actions in order to get another child to follow suit. We undertake this analysis here because it illustrates another way in which the appearance of an action as an element in one course of action can be used as a resource in implementing a course of action with a different trajectory.

Putting a Toy Away as a Method to Regain Possession of Another

Before describing the play completion sequence in which a plastic hammer is returned to its basket, it may be useful to sketch out some of the initial events of the incident. At the beginning of this course of action (from VYC:980121A1—

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9 Sequences of action can have a range of relationships to other sequences—for example, as a preliminary sequence or a reciprocal sequence or a counter sequence, and so on. See Schegloff (1995) for an inventory of sequence relationships. The "second alternative" sequence exhibits another relationship between sequence types.

10 For the most part, the social psychological literature on modeling has been concerned with the effects that one person's behavior and attributes (usually an adult) have on another person's behavior (usually a young child). The modeler's actions are seen as only unintentionally furnishing a public display that could be noticed and repeated in a disconnected way. This literature ignores the situated use of modeling by the modeler and the sequential relationship between the first occurrence of an action and its subsequent emulated realization by another. See Lerner (2002) for one discussion of utterance and gestural matching that takes these matters into account.
LC) Alan, who has been playing alone next to a basket of plastic tools, makes a direct attempt to take back a plastic hammer that Barb has just come over and taken from the basket. (Both children are close to 2 1/2 years old.) First, he successfully takes it out of Barb’s hands, saying “that’s my tools, okay,” as he returns the hammer to the basket from which she has just drawn it. However, she immediately retrieves it again and draws it to her chest. Alan directs her to put it back into the tool basket as he again attempts to take it from her. This time, however, Barb resists and carries the hammer off. (As she leaves the play area, Alan appeals to the nearest adult, but the adult does not intervene.) From the outside, Barb then begins hammering on the cabinet that forms the boundary of Alan’s play area, but withdraws abruptly (pulling the hammer to her chest) when he stands up and moves toward her, even though the cabinet is between them. When Barb goes off with the hammer, Alan first hammers on the cabinet with his fist and then picks another hammer from the basket and continues hammering, while positioning himself so as to be able to monitor Barb’s whereabouts and so she can see his hammering. (He seems to be demonstrating the proper use of the tool to her—in his words, “for working.”)

A few moments later we come to the sequence of actions we are interested in examining: Alan again attempts to get the hammer back—but this time he does this by putting his own hammer away. When Barb returns to Alan’s play area just under a minute after first acquiring her hammer, Alan abruptly stops hammering and quickly pivots to face the tool basket as she approaches it. With Barb gazing at the basket, he stoops slightly and drops his hammer into it (Fig. 27.9). Alan then slowly straightens up while still looking at his deposited hammer. He seems to be waiting for her to follow suit here. When she does not, he looks up at her—actually he seems to direct his gaze toward her hammer (Fig. 27.10). He holds this gaze for a moment, but she neither makes a move to follow suit or retreat. He then does what might be characterized as an instrumentally shaped or iconic point to the tool basket (Fig. 27.11). That is, his point takes the form of an arm motion that looks like he is (feebly) tossing something into the basket, again culminating in a point at the apex of the gesture. Barb begins turning to leave as he completes this gesture and he turns his gaze from her hammer back to the basket.

Though it is not completely clear, it does look like that when he releases the hammer it is done in a fashion that results in something like a point. This may just be the result of how he releases the object, but it is possible that he is building a pointing gesture onto the instrumental action of releasing the hammer.
What is Alan doing here? We suggest that he is *doing* “being done.” It is not simply that he happened to finish playing at just the moment Barb arrives back in his play area. Rather, he seems to be using a play–completing action and therein initiating a possible play–completing sequence as another attempt to regain possession of the hammer. This is an indirect attempt—or better, an embedded attempt—to retrieve the hammer after prior, more exposed attempts have met with resistance and failure. He is using the appearance of his action (returning his hammer to the tool basket just as Barb approaches) as a recognizable play–completing action and as a recognizable play–completion sequence initiating action. Dropping the hammer into the tool basket can here embody the return of a toy to its appropriate place and thus (hopefully) make relevant or suggest the same action to Barb. He has constructed an occasion—a momentary sequential environment or context—for Barb to follow suit and relinquish her hammer. This attempt also turns out not to succeed, but lack of success does not invalidate the practice. He then makes clear that the hammer toss was performed on Barb’s behalf by looking to her. When she again makes no move to emulate his action, he then makes explicit the intent of his actions by pointing to the basket with a tossing motion.\(^2\)

At this point we can consider the possibility that this form of sequence organization might draw upon another form of sequence organization—action emulation sequence organization. The organization of Alan’s actions around returning his hammer to the basket and the next action it makes relevant for Barb may build upon the emulation practices that can structure toddler *social* play. Briefly, one child will begin some activity and then one or more other children will produce the same actions themselves, more or less elaborately, and the originating child can then acknowledge this in some fashion. In sequence organizational terms, action emulation sequences furnish a way to launch social play from Second position—in response to another’s action—rather than from First position, in which a child must specifically design an action that invites another child to participate in a joint activity.\(^3\)

We are just beginning to investigate how such individual play

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\(^2\) Additional evidence for what he is up to here comes just after Barb leaves without relinquishing her hammer. After watching Barb leave, Alan turns back to the tool basket, retrieves his hammer and resumes hammering, while continuing to monitor the whereabouts of the hammer Barb has taken with her to another play area. Moreover, sometime later, Alan does sneak over to Barb’s adjacent play area and retrieve the unattended hammer while she has her back turned. He then runs back with it, places it in the tool basket and moves the basket out of sight.

\(^3\) We are not suggesting that very young children do not launch any sequences of action with a First position initiating action (for example, see Jones, 2000), only that they are just beginning to find ways to launch joint play sequences. They are still novices when it comes to inviting others to play with them.
establishes occasions for action emulation and nascent social engagement. We can only briefly mention the beginning of one such instance here. One child (Randy) walks over to a small portable platform with wooden sides and begins to hammer on it with a spatula. At the same time, another child (Veronica) steps off of a different part of the platform and picks up another spatula Randy had been using earlier. With spatula in hand, Veronica sees and hears the onset of Randy’s hammering. She then alters her direction of travel, walks over to the side of the platform Randy has just hammered on, and proceeds to hammer on the edge of the same platform side Randy had targeted. The first child, Randy, then resumes hammering, this time in exactly the same spot that Veronica is hammering. Each of their actions furnishes an occasion for the other to act and each acts in a fashion that can be seen by the other as connected to the prior action—as occasioned by it. Thus, they come to be hammering together on the same spot. This establishes a visible connection of activities: one child does something, another child emulates that action in the presence of the first child. This can be followed by some recognition or appreciation of the shared action—that it is a shared action—by one or both participants in the activity. In this example, the first child adjusts his hammering target to match the child who was emulating his action.

Returning to the case in which a hammer is dropped into a basket, Alan’s actions may draw on this form of organization. However, there seem to be two additional organizing features beyond action emulation; (a) Alan produces actions designed to be emulated, and then, in pursuit of emulation; and (b) there is the stronger sequence relationship of a next action being made relevant by a prior action as parts of a sequence of actions. Here following suit would be more than emulating an action; it would be producing an action that was implicated by a prior, corresponding action as part of a joint activity—putting away toys after use. And here these recognizable and achievable structures of action are used formally. They are not (just) employed in their own right, but as components in a differently construed course of action—one that could lead to the repossessing of the hammer by Alan.

This episode is reminiscent of an old folk tale popularized in a children’s book by Esphyr Slobodkina (1988 [1940]). In short, a peddler gets all of his merchandise (caps) back from a tree full of monkeys when he finds that throwing his own cap onto the ground in frustration is followed by all of the monkeys throwing their caps to the ground as well. Unlike the peddler, Alan seems to have already learned this lesson—that what you can be seen to be doing can be consequential for what others do.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The observability of action furnishes members of every society with a fundamental resource for understanding the organization of human sociality and engaging in predictable, coordinated conduct. In this view, the early development of a "theory of mind" is bound up more with the acquisition of commonly held practices for producing and observing action than with the translation of recognized action into terms of individual motive (cf. Frye, et al., 1991; Whiten, 1991). It is, in part, the in situ recognizability of action that counts as "knowing the mind of another." One question, then, for investigators of social life must be, "what are the earliest traces and forms of the observability of action?" One can describe the beginnings of full-fledged sociality—its organizational forms—if one can spot the beginnings of the observability of action. Work in this area must certainly examine mother–infant and more generally adult–child interaction. However, one can find this resource exercised in the peer interactions of very young children as well. When left on their own, they can not only produce and recognize embodied actions, but as we have shown they can also employ the appearance of one action to accomplish something else, thus revealing an orientation to their own body behavior as social action.

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