Before, in and after: cars making their way through roundabouts

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1. Introduction

In examining the mobility made possible by the car and the road environment, the roundabout is an intriguing element because it is a turn-taking system for vehicles whose smooth-flowing is the collective accomplishment of the constantly changing staff that utilise it. Interesting to conversation analysts in one sense because around and on the roundabout the rapid interlocution of actions is accomplished without a word. There is more though to the roundabout and its realisation in mobile practices than speechless turn-taking. Inside the car there are often conversations ongoing between its occupants which the roundabout both disrupts and potentially provides resources for. Though it has one in its middle, the roundabout itself is not dealt with as an island, it is part of a gestalt of road features come upon through the practice of driving and the organising device that is a journey. More specifically the roundabout’s features are realised in different ways according to the course of action at hand. In this article an array of practice provides just such specific tasks that lead to specific features of the roundabout being realised.

At its inception called the 'gyratory', and latterly also known as a 'traffic circle', the roundabout has been involved in the merging and crossing of traffic flows for just over a century. The 'roundabout', in its modern form, appeared after an intense period of research in the 1960s and 1970s. During those decades, the geometry of wide entrances, a certain speed of circling and the 'off-side' priority were established as central to efficient roundabouts by researchers in the United Kingdom and Australia (TRB 1998, Waddell 1997). Off-side priority is the rule whereby traffic already on the roundabout has priority over vehicles trying to enter from any of its roads. Along with the off-side rule, in the 1970s, the UK Transport Research Laboratory had examined the geometry of the roundabout discovering that 'entry width, flare, outside diameter, entry angle and entry radius' (Waddell 1997: 13) had the greatest influence on capacity. Compared to traffic lights and the old, larger scale gyratories, smaller roundabouts with standardised geometric layouts reduced traffic speed on the roundabout itself which allowed gaps to be easier to find and manoeuvre into. With the new rule and standardised geometry in place, capacity increased, delays decreased. Where the new rule and the standardised geometry was used instead of other forms of junction, injury and accidents decreased by up to 40% (TRB 1998). The benefits of the humble roundabout did not end there, it was also established that they produced less noise and lower levels of pollutants than other forms of road junction (Coelhoa, Fariasz & Rouphaïc 2006, Ýyden & Varhelyi 2000, Mandavilli, Russell & Rys 2003).

The predominant orientation of existing transport research on roundabouts has conceptualised traffic in terms of characteristics as a fluid that ought to flow as quickly and easily as possible around the city (for further remarks on this perspective see Latour 2003). What I would like to do in this chapter is shift from these remote spaces of fluids and flows in order to consider what we might learn about actions, interaction and mobility from the roundabout close-up. In other words, I wish to

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1 An idea explored in previous unpublished work by Alexandra Weilenmann and Daniel Normark on revolving doors in buildings.
pursue, what Donald Appleyard and his co-authors called, many years ago, 'the view from the road' (Appleyard, Lynch & Myer 1964, Juhlin 2005, Normark 2006). As a second consequence of this move I will bring passengers into the frame as participants in and local producers of automobility (Laurier, et al. 2008, Nevile & Haddington 2010). In shifting to a perspective that is conjoint with that of the car driver and passenger one is then also shifting to a concern with the practical accomplishment of driving-in-traffic and driving as 'a together' (Ryave & Schenkein 1974). Informative alternatives to the fluid and asocial models of traffic and the road system have been provided by the ongoing studies in ethnomethodology (EM) and a branch of conversation analysis (CA), concerned with mobile multi-modal interaction (Garfinkel 2002, Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff 1999, Livingston 1987, 2008). By contrast with research that seeks to build generalisable models, ethnomethodology and multi-modal interaction studies are concerned with the local actions that achieve mobility and draw upon movement (where traffic is a classic example of a mobile social order organised in situ). These mobile practices also provide for their predictability, order, reasonableness and, thus also, for their very modelling as if they were fluids which then allows us to forget that they are also astounding collective accomplishments of drivers and passengers.

'What next' is a conjoint focus for both members of society and for studies in ethnomethodology and multi-modal interaction. 'What next' has always also been concerned with 'where next' as a concern for members in their ongoing movement through environments and at the same time 'where next' is reflexively constituted by those movements (Sudnow 1978). For instance, travellers realise that they are lost by having moved far enough into an unfamiliar environment that they no longer know how to find their way back (Brown & Laurier 2005). Earlier CA studies concerned with direction-giving-in-interaction documented how an orientation towards and emergent revelation of one another's knowledge was central to the tailoring of directions (Psathas 1986, 1991, Schegloff 1972). These studies of the where-next of direction-giving as a linguistic activity, usually drew upon recordings of phone-calls thus missing the importance of a further ordering to be found in embodied locomotional and orientational actions (e.g. pedestrian orienting of bodies and maps that preceded requesting and receiving directions (Laurier & Brown 2008, Mondada 2009)). It is only recently that the reflexive relationship between places and how we find our way on foot or in vehicles through places that are variously strange, half-known or familiar has begun to be described (Haddington 2010, Haddington & Keisanen 2009, Laurier & Brown 2008). 'Where next' need not only be bound up with navigation through unfamiliar environment it is equally important on shaping our current and projecting our future actions in familiar environments (Ingold 2000). The roundabout provides a setting where 'where next' is made relevant both for those moving in and through known and unknown environments.

In the social sciences the growing field of mobility studies has led to a revived interest in how people and things move through the world. It has massively expanded our sense of how various, and varied, lives on the move are (Cresswell 2006, Juhlin 2005, Merriman 2007, Michael 2001, Urry 2004). Mobility studies have focused on a number of themes related to driving: on the general social periodisation and elaboration of the world and the car in terms of 'automobilities' (Featherstone, Thrift & Urry 2005), the habitable world inside the car as a new place for researching social
lives and practices (Bull 2004, Laurier 2004, Thrift 2004) and the socio-technical relations produced between driver, car and road as both assemblage and historical evolution (Dant 2004, Edensor 2003, Merriman 2007). Here I will pick up on the latter of the three foci in examining the humdrum technology of the roundabout as both configuring and configured by the driving practices which take place approaching it, waiting at it, circling and exiting it.

2. A short note on the data

The video data that follows was collected as part of Habitable Cars\(^2\) project (Laurier, Lorimer & Brown 2007) which was concerned with people travelling together as families, friends and car-sharers. A great deal of the existing research on ‘driving behaviour’, motivated by the desire to explore the causes of accidents, is produced, for very good reasons, in driving simulators. While simulating interaction on the road allows for a great deal of control over individual factors, that very same control simplifies the places through, and the routes along, which vehicles move (Watson 1999a). The tendency in simulator studies has also been to conceptualise drivers as individuals faced with perceptual challenges over the correct judgement of distance, speed and time, constantly cognising and seldom cogitating (Groeger 2000, Ranney 1994). However with video data of drivers on actual roads with passengers beside them under contingent circumstances, the drivers’ lives inside their cars take a ‘social turn’ in a number of respects. Firstly, passengers start getting involved in the organisation of the journey and indeed in the very driving of the car itself, in other words, driving becomes socially organised (Haddington 2010, Haddington & Keisanen 2009, Nevile & Haddington 2010). Secondly, the car journey becomes a setting for family, friendship and acquaintanceships, groups are then thus collectively dealing with all manner of matters of concern. As noted above there then become a much greater number of possible roles, or equally identities (e.g. mother-daughter, colleague-colleague, friend-friend) that may or may not become relevant at any moment while on the road (Laurier, et al. 2008). Finally at a conceptual level the video data helps reveal overlooked orderliness of driving in and around routine features of the road environment such as traffic lights, exit ramps and, of interest here, roundabouts.

Twenty vehicles and their occupants participated in the Habitable Cars project, from small cars to people-movers, from single people and their friends to colleagues, car-sharers and families. Each of the different groups allowed the project researcher to ride along for a week with them in their car asking questions and taking notes (Laurier, Lorimer & Brown 2007). Over a subsequent month the groups of travellers were given a pair of video cameras and asked to film half a dozen typical journeys for the project. The hundred and twenty hours of video footage generated by the vehicles was broken down into shorter clips which were given consent by the participants for further study and then indexed for retrieval. A corpus was produced of several hundred video fragments of numerous driving and non-driving related activities in cars. In what follows I will draw upon a series of video clips where the

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\(^2\) An ESRC funded project (Res-000-34-9758) on groups of people who share their cars with others http://web2.ges.gla.ac.uk/~elaurier/habitable_cars/.
roundabout is a salient feature for the car travellers. The roundabout emerges in and from the organisation of actions in driving and I will trace out that sequential ordering from its beginning to its end for a number of different vehicles. The four sequential parts of the roundabout being: approaching, entering, circling and exiting. While these form a useful device for structuring my observations and would map out their uses in driving very neatly if driving were all that was happening because they are plaited with other courses of action this plaiting disrupts that simple structure.

2. Approaching – a temporal projection

Our first straightforward episode of will be of a family car approaching a roundabout where no other activities are involved (see figure 1.1). It brings our minds to bear on the looks of things that emerge as we approach a roundabout. Roundabouts have varied visibility arrangements, in our example there are some trees and hedges obscuring its left and right sides. Driving toward the roundabout is a constant opening out of the initially narrow perspective ahead. Road signs are see-able as markers of upcoming junctions from a distance, then they are likely to be legible only for a few second and finally they are gone as they are passed. In the fragment below the roundabout itself is visible from a distance for the driver in conjunction with a road sign providing directions. At such a distance cars can already be seen circling on it. It has a single lane approach and a small traffic island in the middle. Before the driver reaches that small island she changes down gears and is decelerating and she begins looking around as she passes the island.

Not only is there traffic ahead circulating on the roundabout, the hedge on the right hand side (see Figure 1.1) continues to obscure the entrance to the roundabout on the

Figure 1.1

3 Unless indicated otherwise, figures marked in subsections are continuous temporal episodes, e.g. 1.2 follows on directly from 1.1
right. The entrance is the immediate source of competing entrants to the roundabout for the driver. Consequently there is both evidence of the roundabout being occupied and obscured exits which means she cannot see whether any other vehicles are also approaching the roundabout in convergence with her trajectory.

Figure 1.2

Having been approaching the roundabout from a rapidly shortening distance there is a stage now where the driver is [closing-in]. [Closing-in] takes a distinctive shape out of the car’s speed being brought down still slower and thus also changing down gears. [Closing-in] also brings a sudden, if expected, widening-out of perspective. The hedges that obscured both the left and the right side are passed. Having taken in a wide perspective upon the roundabout while still approaching, now that the driver has slowed down to a crawl, the right side becomes the centre for scrutiny. This is because, of course, it is the direction of arrival for vehicles that will either block or form a slot for her entry to the roundabout.

As we see in the second frame of figure 1.2, there is traffic on the roundabout. The driver very quickly makes sense of the projected courses of those vehicles. A small black car on the roundabout already exiting to her right, a blue articulated lorry continuing directly through the junction and another small black car taking the outside lane and exiting again immediately. Moving toward the roundabout behind this last car is another silver car. This is the one car that the driver acts upon directly. By pushing straight on to the roundabout, before this silver car reaches it, she manages to establish her priority over the silver car. This move is very finely judged: if she had come to a halt at the roundabout the silver car could have gotten ahead of her. And yet her fine-timing is also reliant on the temporal parameters of both their actions being monitored by one another (Sudnow 1972). Our driver is expecting yet also monitoring that she will be seen to have grabbed the slot and that the silver car

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4 Bracketing marks a suspension of the action thereby marked while we examine what constitutes it.
will halt (which it does). Those of us who are drivers will know about the skill required to slip onto the roundabout ahead of another driver whose trajectory is in close conjunction with our own. It is likely that if they see us come to a halt even for a second they will not halt themselves and slip ahead on to the roundabout. There are also times on mini-roundabouts when stand-offs emerge as the timing gate is too tight. Features of close synchrony reminiscent of conversationalists’s use of the turn-taking system. What we also see in figure 1.2 is that the driver’s young daughter in the rear looks to the right in tandem with her to monitor for oncoming vehicles. This joint orientation of driver and passenger to the right-hand-side of roundabouts is remarkably persistent across the video corpus and seems all the more remarkable here in terms of how young children are already entering into being active passengers.

In the next video fragment (see figure 2.1) we will shift onto a more complex approach both in terms of what happens in the driving and in non-driving related conversation. The driver and passenger in question have been car-pooling their commute to work for several years and are colleagues at a scientific research establishment. When they approach a roundabout the following occurs:

The driver switches quickly between two activities. On completion of her question as to whether the programmes will have ‘a new model and data’ (first frame, figure 2.1), the driver flicks the indicator on. Then, as we see in the figure, while the passenger responds to her question the driver examines the mirror to see if any other vehicles are approaching from behind. In this setting the standardised relational pair of passenger-driver organises a number of asymmetries of perception and activity. Clearly the driver is and should doing the majority of the driving work, however the passenger also turns extendedly toward the driver who only makes minimal if any head turns or glances toward the passenger. Passengers routinely have to wait quite a few beats longer for gestural responses such as returned gaze, nods or grimaces than would be the case in face-to-face focused interaction (Goodwin 1980). Consequently their method is to

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**Figure 2.1**

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rest without direct pursuit for the gaps that drivers find in-between driving's lookings when they can return the passenger's extended glance. What can also hopefully be seen in the second frame is how, although he has oriented his upper body and face toward the driver, the passenger is looking sideways to track their approach to the roundabout. It is thus a complex bodily configuration of orientations which allow for both pursuit of a response and brief sideways glances at the road. Not only does the passenger investigate the road ahead while waiting for a response, when the driver does ask him a follow-up question, he then turns away from her to peek into his side mirror, checking whether the bus lane is free (this look is captured in the fourth frame of figure 2.1).

While the passenger's ongoing monitoring of the road is not treated by the driver as intrusive, or as a cause of complaint, there are some differences in how the two looks are produced. Monitoring of upcoming driving phenomena is necessary for the ongoing convergence and coordination of the multi-activities of driving and work discussion (Mondada forthcoming). The first of the passenger's looks takes in the roundabout ahead, seeing how far away it is, whether there are long queues of traffic or not and so on, which then provide temporal projections for what more can be said as the roundabout approaches. Nevile (forthcoming) provides a useful distinction between noticings that are made 'with driving' and 'for driving'. The former are those things that a passenger might notice that are in the surrounding environment but do not have direct implications for the driver's current action, while the latter do have implications. In the fragment the passenger provides no verbalised noticing from his peek at the side mirror. By the very fact that it is a rapid peek it is not necessarily hidden from the driver for the inferences that the driver might make so much as not in itself requiring attention to be paid to it by the driver. Here again Nevile's (2007) earlier work on airline pilots producing on hand movements across the instruments as 'for witness' and 'not for witness'. In the case here the mirror-check was 'not for witness'. The driver need not attend to, nor ought not to respond to, the passenger's look into the mirror.

Lane-changing itself is incipient when approaching a roundabout on a dual carriageway because there are emerging new courses of action. Selecting the lane prefigures placing the driver in the inner or outer ring of the roundabout which then in turn shapes up their position for selecting their exit from the roundabout. If changing lane was all there was to do then all would be well but the requirements to select lanes on approach meet a number of further contingencies: surrounding traffic, lengths of queues at roundabouts ahead, being in an overtaking position on approach, other cars also changing lanes ahead of the roundabout. In the episode illustrated in figure 2 there is a bus lane which excludes cars until they are a short distance from the roundabout. The fragment is all the more pertinent because the driver changes lanes mistakenly:
The driver uses ‘oh’ (second frame of figure 2.2) to both mark a switch between the multi-activities and to preface her repair and realisation that she has mistakenly changed lanes. As is illustrated in figure 2.2 she has two uncompleted turns in negative format: ‘I don’t’ & ‘no’. What she produces on her third turn beginning is a self-repair with an account, in the past tense, of having intended to ‘try’. Her verbal repair is combined and furnished with further sense through a rearward and sideways point toward the lane they have just left. The past tense of ‘I was going’ is important in formulating alternative courses of action in the car. The forward movement of the car results in certain actions such as taking an exit no longer being possible and these tense shifts mark this (Brown & Laurier 2005, Keisanen forthcoming). Pedestrians by contrast can more easily reverse direction and thus other routes remain in the present tense of possibilities for longer. In figure 2.3 below the passenger provides a further refinement of her account by taking the lane change as the first step toward an alternative route to their work. In doing so the passenger is also treating the driver’s account as still insufficient. Putting together the mistake in changing lanes and then also not being able to provide an adequate explanation of one’s original intention, the driver is looking rather foolish. Indeed it is the driver who provides a smile and a suppressed laughter particle first, establishing that she has seen the humour in her mistakes and thereby allowing the passenger to come in laughing in agreement (Glenn 2010). Where some driving mistakes can become fraught, especially under the time pressure of an approaching roundabout the driver establishes this is not her stance on the matter.
Because she has switched lanes and another car has travelled up beside her, their car is locked into the left-hand lane. And, of course, the ongoing movement of the car brings the roundabout still closer even as the driver and passenger come to terms with the driver’s mistake. While the laughter displays the driver’s stance upon her error, it is also occurring in the very last few seconds before they reach the roundabout. The passenger’s four-particle burst of laughter ends just as the driver changes down to a low gear and brakes harder. When it becomes apparent that they will not be able to enter straight into the flow of the roundabout the driver grabs this pause to return them to their previous work topic (see penultimate frame of figure 2.3). A re-initiation being required here given from the passenger’s perspective the driver by their bodily direction is directing their attention to traffic rather than their work situation. However having initiated this switch back to work as topic the driver is almost immediately drawn back into the demands of driving because entering the roundabout is involving edging forward to see past another car (visible through her window in the final frame of figure 2.3) moving in parallel and blocking her view of oncoming traffic on the roundabout.

This second fragment has begun to reveal how approaching the roundabout is interwoven with a question and answer sequence about work matters. Echoing Mondada’s (forthcoming) descriptions of convergent conduct, we also saw how the passenger ongoingly monitored road conditions and the course of the passenger’s skill in fitting his actions in and around what was happening on the road and what the driver was doing. In our third fragment we will move onto a situation where we have three courses of actions in the approach to a roundabout. In the car are three members of a running club that car-pool to travel to races. Out of a paper napkin the driver has been eating a chocolate brownie:
Driving on the straight section approaching the roundabout is relatively undemanding and the driver skilfully adjusts the steering wheel in-between prising the food out of the napkin. Meantime the front and backseat passengers are engaged in describing mountain bikes they have tried out. Approaching the roundabout sets a projected ending for the driver’s snacking activity and is one that he rushes to meet. Although he still has two or three more bites before the brownie is finished, the driver brings disposal of the napkin forward so that it is complete in advance of reaching the roundabout.

At this roundabout there is a common feature of roundabouts that we haven’t considered until now: a queue of vehicles waiting to get on. Joining the back of a stationary or slow-moving queue can provide a potential additional slot of time before the driver has to deal with the more taxing work of entering and circling the roundabout. Roundabouts are however not as straightforward in their temporalities as traffic lights which have a repeated predictable periodicity to their switching between red and green. At the roundabout, the queue shifts forward as each car finds a slot to enter the roundabout. When the queue is short as it is in figure 3.1 above then it may in fact have disappeared entirely by the time the vehicles reaches the edge of the roundabout. Which is in fact what happens (see penultimate frame of figure 3.1) leaving the driver without the extra few moments in which he might have finished his snack.
Figure 3.2

The set-up in this car with two passengers rather than one brings with it other properties than number involved just as simple multi-party conversation does compared to a two party dialogue. Even on the undemanding straight road, the driver’s multi-activities are not part of the same participation framework as those of the two passengers. The two passengers themselves are located front-to-back rather than face-to-face or side-by-side which creates further complexities. For instance, finding a space between the backs of the chairs to talk between the back and front sets up only the two passengers in a dyad and the driver is left as peripheral. Despite not currently engaging the driver in their discussion the passengers are nevertheless ongoingly oriented to the driving (we gain an impression of this from figures 3.1 & 3.2) as they look toward the approaching roundabout and then to the right hand side on reaching its entrance. When there are both front and rear passengers, the front seat passenger has privileged visual access and thus knowledge (compared to the backseat passenger) of events unfolding on the road ahead and the driver’s actions in response to them.

What we have begun to come upon in this section is the temporal character of the roundabout that is realised in approaching it. The driving-activity of approach the roundabout can be simple as it is in the first fragment, or more complex as it is in the lane-switch and the mistake in the second fragment. Finally the queue at the roundabout has a distinctive character compared to that of traffic lights because its pace is established through the flow of traffic. In the next section we will examine the complexities of entering the roundabout itself.

4. Entering – seeing what is oncoming

Once drivers come to entering the roundabout monitoring the oncoming traffic becomes of prime importance. Before we look at our first fragment we can draw briefly on the previous figure 3 to note that their vehicle is in the right hand lane
at the roundabout which means they have a clear view of the oncoming traffic and thus the undertaking is only to identify a slot into which they can enter and get onto the roundabout. In the next extract which again has a driver and two passengers in the car, they like the car in figure 2 are in the left-lane with cars moving up on their right:

**Figures 4.1 & 4.2**

Although the car has a clear view ahead which we can see in the first frame of figure 4.1 the driver uses an ‘oh’ prefaced noticing to bring the occupants of the car’s attention to an as yet unformulated action, object or person. Quite what she has noticed has to be established, though she provides it as current and vexing by adding “now” to the “oh”. That what she has seen is live is then confirmed as she provides a further brief negative assessment ‘tsk’. In frames 2 and 3 of figure 4.1 the passengers are looking around and then spotting the truck ahead. Given that, at that brief point
in time, it is blocking their entrance to the roundabout it is one possible target for her critical remark. However the rules of the roundabout allow them to see that its actions are in keeping with moral order of the road. Their search for the problem is redirected by the driver continuing to look to her right even though the truck has now exited to the left and extending and elaborating her complaint about the other agent “this is another one that thinks I’ve got ESP” (frame 1, figure 4.2). Additionally she maintains the present tense that locates the object of her complaint as not having moved away.

What it is, is the common problem (e.g. also suffered by the driver edging forward in figure 2) of a car on the right moving so far forward that they obscure the view of the oncoming traffic. Its commonality and, presumably its status as a member of the group of drivers doing such a move, is marked by the driver’s formulation “this is another one”. “ESP” would, of course, be required to allow our driver to see through the black car that has moved out in front of her. As a consequence of the other car’s excessive edging-forward they then have to wait until it pulls away and thus clears their lines of sight again. The driver laughs, inviting the others to see the humour in her complaint. When this isn’t affiliated with by the passengers she provides a second humorous remark around their position of being recorded for the research project and the expected censoring of bad language that would go with that. Second time around, in the third and second last frames of figure 4.2, she gets laughter in response from the front-seat passenger and a smile from the rear. Finally, once the car is able to circuit the roundabout the other activity of the conversation about their friends begins again.

In this video fragment the driver was dealing with the visibility problems created by a driver in the parallel lane to hers. Although the passengers appeared to be jointly watching what was happening at the roundabout they did not immediately see what could be the cause of the driver’s consternation. This suggests an ongoing distinction between the driver’s engagement with the situation generated in and through the activity of driving and the passengers’ engagement with the situation for the purposes of an awareness of what is happening that is of relevance to them as passengers but also in terms of being able to secure the driver’s attention.

For our next fragment we will return to the same vehicle again though this time with only the driver and front-seat passenger. They are entering a roundabout and the driver has to make judgements about whether she can take the next slot or not:
In the fragment depicted in figure 5 there is no other course of action in which the two are engaged. The passenger is silent looking ahead out of the window (the semi-fish-eye lens makes it appear she is looking sideways). Continuing our line of inquiry from earlier, it is the driver who sees the bus first as she prepares to enter the roundabout. It is only spotted quite late because the pine tree obscures the right hand entrance. The passenger is watching the road ahead but without a time-consequential analysis emergent out of driving’s requirements. It is the application of the brakes that the passenger responds to, searching out what might have been the source of braking by the driver. Braking which she feels in their joint deceleration as a unit. Here then we gain a sense of how the motions of the car are monitored by and made sense of by passengers.

Further roundabout phenomena we come upon here are the visual analyses that the driver (and passenger) can make of the possible timings of entries of certain sorts of vehicle. For the driver the bus that appears (see frame 2) is seen to slow down for the car on the roundabout ahead of it. In seeing that it is almost stopped the driver uses its categorisation as a bus to also estimate its speed of entry on to the roundabout. Where her car can nip onto the roundabout, the bus as a large and heavy vehicle only lumbers forward. As we see in figure 5 she does indeed nip onto the roundabout ahead of the bus. Entering roundabouts is one of the features of the road that makes salient the relative inertia and accelerational properties of different vehicles.

5. Circling – Attentive drivers

Circling the roundabout brings together cornering, lane changing, merging and following, which means it also brings in centrifugal forces on vehicle occupants, a salvo of glances to see forward, rearward and parallel lane situations, the management of the gap between the car and the vehicle ahead and more. It is no wonder then that other activities are often suspended, interrupted or abandoned when the driver is on
the roundabout. The surprise is when we see and recall that the occupants of cars do also routinely continue activities on roundabouts as often as they desist. In part this is because despite the possible complexities of circling the roundabout, the driver’s job can come down to merely cornering and then straightening-up again.

Returning to figure 2.3, if you remember, after having resumed their work discussion the driver did not then continue because she became engrossed in jockeying for position at the roundabout’s entrance. We rejoin them in figure 2.4 when taking up the baton, the passenger provides a series of repetitions that edge his claim, about being able to do the programming, forward as the car also edges forward. The most significant reshaping of his claim is in the repetition of ‘we can probably do it’ from frame 4 of figure 2.3 in frame 1 of figure 2.4:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.4**

His repetition is initiated exactly in time with driver pulling away into her slot on the roundabout. As we get a sense of in of figure 2.4 he switches his attention from the traffic (frame 1) to then monitoring the driver (frame 2) for the response to his claim to be able to undertake a job at work. What the driver and passenger then enter into is divergence in the multi-activity. The driver is engrossed with the complexity of circling the roundabout and does not return the passenger’s gaze (see also Mondada forthcoming). At the end of his TCU “in a few weeks” (frame 2) he gazes at the driver pursuing response even as she remains focussed on the road ahead. When no response is forthcoming he presents his second-part problem to the previous claim (frame 3). Finally he also adds his laughter to this problem shaping up his stance on it (frame 4). After a short pause the passenger provides a minimal response in her nod (also frame 4).
What the passenger has failed to realise perhaps is that the driver is remedying her mistake from earlier by changing lanes as the circle of the roundabout comes to its end. A movement that becomes apparent later and is illustrated in figure 2.5. The driver’s concentration is thus expectably oriented toward watching the other lane of the roundabout for a gap to move into. Given the passenger has already launched his deepening of the complexities at work he continues to elaborate on the problems facing him even as he also monitors the traffic and is pursuing a response at the moment the driver indicates.

What this fragment helps us appreciate then is that drivers and passenger do not fit their activities perfectly to the upcoming challenges on the road ahead. However passengers have ways of continuing in the face of minimal involvement from the driver. For a brief period the driver becomes a more passive recipient who is treated to still be listening at a minimum level. During this minimal but still potential listening the passenger incrementally scaffolds a more elaborate turn waiting for the passenger’s return to full engagement in the discussion. We can note that the driver does return with an interruption a few seconds after the end of the fragment in figure 2.5 with a response to the earlier problems raised by the passenger.

Circling the roundabout can raise more widespread troubles for the occupants of the cars due to both the increase in engine and road noise and the centrifugal forces. We can see this in the continuation of one of our earlier figures of the running club:
Again what is remarkable is that the passengers struggle on through the disruption caused by circling the roundabout. The front seat passenger braces herself on the window-frame of her side-door (second frame of figure 3.3) and also does not attempt to return the rear-seat passenger's gaze between the chairs. The rear-seat passenger shifts her gaze toward the passenger (fourth frame of figure 3.3) to monitor for either return of her gaze or a shake or nod of the head. Because the driver is driving one-handed (the snack being in his other hand) he cannot smoothly adjust the steering back, when they switch to an alternate force on exiting the roundabout. His exit thus throws the occupants around a little.

We have noted earlier that there appears to be an abiding and inevitable divergence between what the driver sees and the passenger even though they are looking through the same windscreen with very similar access to what lies ahead. A deviant case will help underline this point, it is from the running club again, the same roundabout, though with four people in the car this time, the passenger is now the driver, the driver is a rear seat passenger with the former rear-seat passenger and there is a new front-seat passenger:
What the figure shows nicely is what can happen when a passenger looks away from the roundabout for just a few seconds. The front-seat passenger, with the privileged view we noted earlier, turns around to be presented with the car directly in front and because he cannot judge its speed and direction for a moment sees it as potentially on a collision course.

**Exiting roundabouts**

Exiting the roundabout carries with it the expectation that the driver’s attention can return from driving back to whatever other activities may be taking place in the car. And yet, because entering and circling the roundabout absorb the driver in driving and orients the passengers to the road environment, the roundabout makes relevant
noticings, ‘with driving’. More significantly they make relevant noticings not ‘for driving’ (Nevile forthcoming) but, to adapt that phrase slightly, relevant ‘for journey’ and ‘about driving’. To provide a flavour of this we will return to our very first fragment (figure 1.1) and examine its continuation to provide an example of leaving the roundabout making relevant a ‘for journey’ orientational question:

Figure 1.2

As you may recall the driver had been dealing with entry to the roundabout and not talking with her children up until this point. In the first frame of figure 1.2 she initiates a new action directed at her youngest daughter sitting in the middle in the rear. In the first frame we see her using the rear-view mirror to quickly check whether her daughter is in a state of readiness (e.g. not asleep, turned toward her sister etc.). What we see here is also a variant of Nevile’s (forthcoming) noticings ‘for driving’ and ‘with driving’ in another sense. The driver is using a question format rather than an ‘oh’-prefaced noticing to bring the child’s attention to bear upon finding the way. Moreover she provides two questions formats: one beginning with ‘which’ that requires the daughter to make a selection from amongst the town names she knows and, the second, a more complex request to recall followed by a ‘what’ question. The daughter does manage to provide a town name though one which fails to show correct awareness of where they are on their journey.

Pursuing noticing too far here will lead us away from the ongoing educational work within the family. In this case it is of teaching a very young child to find their way along a road they regularly travel. What has to be passed on then is those features of the road that provide markers of ‘where you are’ in a journey. That the driver has just read the signs, that roundabouts (and other junctions) also serve as points of arrival as well junctions is thus not incidental. Nor, as is the point here that their traversal is a period when the car’s occupants attend to the road environment. When addressing the children in general, on another journey, which takes them through the very same roundabout the mother provides a noticing in the familiar format described
by Nevile (forthcoming) and Keisanen (forthcoming):

![Figure 7](image)

The noticing “oh look they’re out playing bowls girls” in the third frame of figure 7 is not relevant to either the activity of driving nor to their joint activity of journeying. It is ‘with driving’. The mother does, once again, close her noticing by selecting her addressee – this time all the “girls”. The absence of response from the youngest points towards why she selected her previously. What we might also take from the youngest’s non-participation this time, and failure in the previous section, is that the very assumption of involvement, participation and access to the environment in journeying which is expected of members travelling together in the car. What the children are learning to manage is their subordinate and intermittent involvement in car travel. To learn in other words how to be passengers with a driver as well as daughters with a mother.

To return to exiting’s relationship with ‘for journey’ noticings we will consider a fragment from two car-pooling commuters trying a new route to work. Here the driver has previously tried the new route by herself at the weekend. On the basis of it saving her time and stress she has recommended it to the passenger. They are driving along it for the first time together:
Figure 8

As was the case with the mother and youngest daughter in figure 1.2 exiting the roundabout has made relevant remarks about the route they are taking. In this case we see how rather than simply being a way of working out where they are in their journey it is serving as a measure of how far they have travelled along this section of the route. Like a milestone, if far more perceptible from a moving vehicle, the roundabout allows the driver to measure that they are more than halfway and thus calculate how it compares with their previous route. Thus, in the second frame of figure 8, the driver provides a first assessment of the route in terms of its time-saving qualities. It is understandable that the passenger provides no response, because she has limited epistemic rights to do so (Raymond & Heritage 2006), not yet knowing quite how far along the new route they are, how close to their destination and thus how much time has been saved. In the absence of a response the driver provides an upgraded second assessment herself (e.g. ‘unbelievably’ in frame 3). The auspices under which the driver can continue to provide assessment is that the route is still also new to her as well having only driven it once before so she can continue to be justifiably surprised by its qualities.

Further handling the passenger’s absence of response the driver poses a question which the passenger as fellow commuter with equal access to this knowledge could answer ‘so what time do we normally get in?’. As fellow commuter and time-aware in relation to their journey the passenger is expected to know this to within less than five minute intervals (Laurier, Lorimer & Brown 2007). On continuing to receive no response from the passenger, the driver, in the third frame of figure 8 provides her own response to the question in terms of their departure time which leaves space for
the passenger to belatedly provide an arrival time based on that departure. It thus also deals with the absence of a response being due to the variability of arrival time according to departure time as well as journey time. The driver’s ‘At least ten past’ is also a particular form of time unit that is being given that registers an absence of anyone having consulted the clock on departure (or that at least the driver did not, though the passenger might still provide an exact time). Exact times (e.g. ‘two minutes past nine’) when marked do different sorts of work from larger proximate units such as indicating a desire for promptness (Sacks 1992; Mchoul 2007). ‘At least’ and ‘at most’ invite in the hearers to provide more accurate times if they have them or to agree or disagree with the estimate. The passenger provides a simple agreement. This might reflect her orientation toward memorising this route while she travels over assessing it, as well as her lack of access to the temporal qualities of the route (until the she travels it for a second time).

While she offered no assessment of the road on exiting that roundabout, the passenger does venture an independent assessment of the new route again on their exiting the roundabout:

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9**

As we see in figure 9 the passenger is, this time around, able to declare ‘this is a great job’ (frame 2), though even here she softens her assessment with a tag question. In frame 3 of figure 9 in the response to the tag question (e.g. ‘isn’t it’) the passenger pursues of a meeting of their gazes for agreement (Mondada forthcoming). Here we see the maintenance of gaze by the passenger beginning in frame 2 and continuing into frame 3 where it is not only receipted but with an aligning smile. The addition of
the smile being a common feature of agreeing to evaluations (Peräklyä 2004). Having the preceding context of providing positive assessments of the route that we saw in figure 8, the driver need not provide an agreeing assessment here. She provides instead a verbalisation of their emotional stance ‘high five’. As a formulation it is finely tuned to a small victory, a clever ruse in the face of the endless defeat of traffic jams and roadworks.

Let us now move on to considering circling and exiting the roundabout then making relevant a noticing ‘about driving’. This is interesting because as Watson (1999a) observed noticing for driving can already be taken as criticisms, thus any comment on the actual driving is dangerously rich in inference. It might not come as a surprise that we will return to the runners club travelling through the roundabout while the driver is eating a snack:

![Figure 3.4](image)

As you will likely remember the car had shaken its occupants around when the driver released the steering wheel from his one-handed grip. After the shake the rear passenger pauses and then abandons her dialogue with the front seat passenger about mountain bikes. In the first frame of figure 3.4 we see the contortions required to try and gain an embodied orientation toward the driver when he is sitting directly in front. They are in a line one-behind-the-other, face-to-back, an orientation similar to that documented by McIlvenney (2010) of cycling one behind another or in tandem on the same bike. The rear passenger here uses her hand: placing it on the headrest to serve as a speaker selection and participation device. As noted earlier, the particular seating arrangements of passenger set up lines of visibility and responsiveness and thus centrality and peripherality of participation. In figure 3.4 the passengers are on a diagonal of the rear and front-seats which allow the rear passenger to monitor shifts of the head and shoulder of the front seat passenger. The rear seat passenger can then search for and benefit from moments when the front seat passengers turns right-
around to align mutual gazes at some points in the journey. Thus it is that it sets up an embodied axis of participation between the passengers that to some extent precludes the driver.

However as we observed earlier the rear passenger used her hand on the back of the driver’s chair to select him as recipient and continues to rest it on the headrest until she completes her turn. It is initially formatted as an observation directed at the driver - that one cause of the car’s shaking is that the driver is not familiar with the courtesy car he is driving today. What her observation ‘about driving’ also does is attribute the movement to the car as its behaviour. By doing so the driver is thus made less accountable because he has only failed to adapt to this new car rather than being a careless driver in general. The rear passenger’s tag question then also directly pursues the driver as respondent by providing the opportunity to name him directly as recipient of the question. Because of the driver’s previous lack of participation in the conversation he may be not attending now and thus the tag question with his name sets in place an alternative second-pair part of repairing a problem with hearing. The tag question may also be further warranted because the driver initially provides no head movements that would indicate he is now orienting to the rear passenger rather than the driving. Finally it may also be that this a common feature of talking between front and rear in the car when there is more than one potential recipient in the other half of the car. Without the use of gaze to help speaker selection that is an ongoing resource in face-to-face situations recipients have to verbalised.

In response to the passenger’s question in frame 3 of figure 3.4 the driver agrees with her observation, formulating the experience as ‘funny’, using a contrast term ‘wee’ to indicate the small size of the car providing for its peculiarity to his usual vehicle. What the driver does is thus also place the shaking as a general problem of driving a smaller car than one is used to. It is only as he finishes his turn that he looks sideways. Such a sideways shift might have been meant to direct the response back to the rear passenger but in its sweep it then also catches the front passenger as a potential recipient. That driver and rear passenger are politely evading another potential cause is then quickly brought to light. The front seat passenger adds her blunt explanation (final frame figure 3.4): “it’s cause you’re eating at the same time”. The video grab in the final frame of is from in-between the front seat passenger’s turn and the rear’s “doesn’t necessarily help”. For us, as late-in-the-day witnesses, it is lovely in that the driver is incriminating himself by taking another bite just after the front seat passenger has laid the blame for their shaky ride around the roundabout at his feet. While the driver is still munching on his snack the rear passenger then agrees with the front passenger while tying it into her earlier account of the difficulties of driving a new car (eating at the same time will not aid his difficulties).

This final fragment seems a particularly apposite one to finish presenting the data on driving toward, around and out of roundabouts. It makes clear that certain additional activities cannot be woven through the roundabout without causing trouble for the driving. While we have seen that the driver’s conversational participation can be paused and then resumed without disrupting the driving, activities that, even when paused, occupy his hands can then continue to create problems for his driving
activities. The passengers’ work here has been to remind the driver of the moralities of attempting such activities while driving. They are thus serving as local judges of what is appropriate and safe driving. Before we place too much weight upon what is happening, after the events documented in this final figure they return in the very next turn to discussing what is the appropriate size of mountain bike frame for themselves. It is a reprimand but not a prolonged one.

Conclusion

Let us briefly remind ourselves of what has been involved in traversing roundabouts. In approaching the roundabout we examined the driving activities that prefigure the arrival. Alongside those driving activities passengers more or less attentively monitor the roundabout ahead in order to fit whatever conversations they are having in and around the driver’s work. On entering the roundabout, finding a slot becomes closely timed and challenging for the driver. Where engineers established the most efficient geometry we saw how that was dealt with on the ground. The wide entrance point which allows sorting of vehicles for their exits and entry two or three at a time, at ground level this then involves jockeying for first entry to roundabout. A jockeying which then involves the blocking off of visibility for one or two lanes. Once circling the roundabout, we noted how this offers a point of resumption for conversations, yet as often, requires the continued absorption of driver. The trouble for the passengers was in judging whether to continue their conversation with only a potentially attentive driver. Finally, we travelled through the exit that can, again, be a point of resumption for other activities. What we found was that traversing the roundabout made relevant both the driving and the journey, consequently this was also a likely point for noticings and other remarks in about the driving and the journey.

Building on existing studies of noticings during car travel (Keisanen forthcoming, Nevile forthcoming) we added two further orientations of those noticings. The first was of the driving itself, manifest in a somewhat deviant case where the passengers were shaken around while circling a roundabout. In other unpublished analysis from the project (Laurier, Lorimer & Brown 2007) we found that noticing driving was topicalised under extreme weather and, similar to the first account of the shakey ride, when driving a newly purchased car. The second noticing was of features relevant to the journey rather than driving. While it is the case that cars are driven together in ways under-examined by traditional safety-based research on driving (Nevile & Haddington, 2010), the more obvious and profound shared activity that occupants of the car are involved in is the journey. Roundabouts are relevant to the journey in that they serve as potential markers and thus make relevant where we are, at what time we are at this point in our journey and so on.

What examining roundabouts in detail brought to the surface was a further observation about the driver-passenger relational pair. While earlier research in this area has made significant findings in demonstrating the front-seat passenger’s contribution to the work of driving, navigating, organising the journey and other work that supports automobility, what this pairing also serves to do is to distribute looking
and seeing. In our latter fragments we considered how children were learning that once in the car they ought to be aware of what is going on even though they are only along for the ride. In such daily-repeated situations with their parents and other carers they were being inculcated into how to be competent passengers. Through the episodes we saw though that for competent passengers that they need not and do not see as the driver does because the driver’s seeing is seeing-in and as-driving in a moral and potentially fatal order of traffic. Happily for the passenger they can and so still daydream while they watch a roundabout approaching.

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