Charles Goodwin's Co-Operative Action: The Idea and the Argument

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> L'idée, le principe, l'éclair,
> le premier moment du premier état,
> le saut, le bond hors de la suite...
> À d'autres, préparations et exécutions.
> Jette là le filet. Voici le lieu de la mer
> où vous trouverez. Adieu.
> (Paul Valéry)[1]

Because of Charles Goodwin's death—foretold and still so untimely—, his latest book was meant to become his legacy. It became the personal *summa* of his research activities of 40 and more years, and this might be the reason why it is so difficult to come to an assessment, even after months of intensive and sporadic reading and familiarity with many of the examples included in the book from talks and workshops. When after long years one is used to expect from Chuck Goodwin the ever "next article" and the ever "next unearthed empirical gem" accompanied by an ingenious analysis, one is inclined to pursue this routine even against the facts rather than pretending the death of the author could interrupt this inspiration, and as if we were able to come to a final conclusion, or a preliminary judgment.

Can the book tell us something that his "next article" or "next talk" could not have? Or should we read the book with the confidence that we will find more articles and talks that Chuck Goodwin would have written, or given, and that we are to write, or give, in the future? Maybe we

could find these articles and talks or do some mock-ups of them. But alas, all this will not help: We have to take the book as his book and savour its gifts as well as ponder its difficulties. The latter are mainly two: the book's systematic structure and the central claim brought forward through its title.

1.

The biggest stumbling block of the book may be its title, in which Chuck Goodwin has invested his entire ambition. The concept of "co-operative action" is meant to embody no less than what makes a human being a "human being", a real "homo sapiens sapiens", or, to be more precise, what makes a human being a socialised and socialising being, a "zoon politicon", but equally a "homo faber" and even a "homo ludens". Given the grandness of this project it makes little sense to announce one's scepticism. One can only inspect it as to whether it succeeds, and this takes time since the presentation of the empirical as well as of the theoretical results is intricate. One reason for this is that no less than twenty articles were assembled after years of preparatory work that combined theoretical claims with extensive empirical demonstrations. A second reason is Chuck Goodwin's decision to launch a new concept that is also meant to function as a play on words: "co-operative" is meant to be something different than "cooperative", or better, to represent three different things at once.

1) In "co-operative action", *operations work on other operations* on which they build and whose material they use;
2) This is why these *operations produce cumulative effects* that can be further transformed in the course of the ongoing situation in ways that are understandable for their members;
3) And the effects of these operations may become effective as processes of learning or as stabilised artefact *beyond the present situation.*

However, "co-operation" also encompasses its "normal" meaning, or the normal analysis of a cooperative process: that we help each other in the course of an interaction and act in reciprocal benefit by mutually doing our groundwork and assisting each other in co-operative processes. Therefore, Chuck Goodwin's "co-operative" is "cooperative" as well, in each of the latter's established and traditional senses. The word thus tries to engrave in a hyphen what is distinctive for the *specific* human skill of mutual assistance, in particular, distinctive in contrast to other animals, without neglecting the term's generally established meaning.

Such a conception, if it succeeds, requires at least one generation of footnoting. Derrida's "différance" comes to one's mind: Was it really worth introducing a difference that differs from itself, a "differing" that constantly shifts and postpones itself and that stays inaudible and obtrusively legible at the same time? One may want to conquer conceptual history in this manner, or supplement it, or maybe merely confuse it. What about Chuck Goodwin's hyphenated difference? Would it not have been sufficient for the definition of "co-operative action" to register that the cooperative faculties of *homo sapiens* are "co-operative" in the three senses distinguished above, instead of emphasising that "co-operative action is not the same as what evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, and psychologists investigate as cooperation" (Goodwin 2017: 432)?

Is game theory's understanding of "cooperation" in effect so dominant that it can be premised as general tenor of the research literature? Does the definition of cooperation as "costly behavior performed by one individual that increases the payoff of others" coined by Boyd and Richerson (2009) and quoted by Chuck Goodwin right on page 5 truly represent the standard meaning? Maybe the state of theory was as one-sided when Chuck Goodwin started his theoretical and empirical Argonaut journey in the 1970s and 80s (Goodwin 1979, 1980, 1981), but times are changing. Game theory's coinage of the concept of "cooperation" has for years been exposed to an increasing critique, and Chuck Goodwin's question of how "cooperation" is related to culture, as something that is

teachable and learnable, nowadays not only defines research activities but also the concept itself. By now, a great number of evolutionary biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have addressed "co-operative action" as characterised by Chuck Goodwin, not least after having consulted his papers and the literature referenced therein.

Still one might emphasise that Chuck Goodwin's insistence on "co-operative" linguistic events differs from other approaches in that it is unique in dissociating the concept from former individualistic (if altruistic) orientations, including recent work into altruism by Michael Tomasello (2009, 2014) and his research group. This is particularly well visible in Chuck Goodwin's methodology. He succeeds in representing, understanding, and analysing social events as dynamic, emergent, intertwined totalities, not as aggregations of individual acts that are sequentially performed, as not only variants of speech act theory but even of conversation analysis have it, at the very least in its linguistic offshoot known as "interactional linguistics". The same holds for several kinds of Goffmanian sociology that are oftentimes much less concerned with "moments and their men" than with "men and their moments" by relating communicative interchanges to inner desires and wants and even strategies of the participating actors (e.g., "cooperation in facework", Goffman 1967: 27). In contrast, Chuck Goodwin's pioneering methodological work as of now has established a wholly new strand of CA—"embodied" or "multimodal interaction research"—that takes this holistic stance towards interactional situations as its starting point. It is for this reason that today it is standard to encounter comic-like drawings of social events, verbal actions, and gestural practices in the most professional scientific journals that give an impression of the holistic gestalts of interactional situations in which members are embedded and operations, practices, and actions mutually elaborate one another. Along with few other scholars, all this is the result of Chuck Goodwin's ceaselessly innovative thinking and pioneering work.

Theoretically, the idea that "co-operation" must be decoupled from ideas of individuals acting for their mutual benefit is certainly not new. Not only has Georg Simmel counted concurrence as one of his typical "forms" of socialisation. Phenomenological sociologists as well as social anthropologists who resisted to become distracted by contemporary claims of game theory have long established traditions that insist that "cooperation" is equally present under conditions of rivalry, and that a Janus-faced constellation of cooperation and rivalry may establish particularly stable social arrangements that form the basis of entire societies. And still, Chuck Goodwin's book presents better than most the altruistic constitution of human interaction, even in the sense of the definition as "costly behaviour" quoted by him: We assist and help one another, mutually correct and repair ourselves to assist one another, and perform actions and accomplish practices that mutually elaborate one another in order to be in the world together and to get things done. Without our permanent mutual assistance, we would not be able to speak and act at all. The most exciting collection of examples of "altruistic behaviour" at the moment may well be Chuck Goodwin's book.

Having said all this, what remains is merely the "accumulative" dimension of human "co-operation" that theoretically distinguishes his concept from the "normal" concept of cooperation. Here, Chuck Goodwin's theoretical proposition is as radical as it is simple: Human cooperation is "co-operative" in that it uses the processes and components of preceding operations (by *ego* and *alter*) as its building material. No other animal is as capable of "bootstrapping" all the time from mutually provided situational resources as the human being. Human "co-operation" defines the characteristics of human "cooperation".

Other definitions of human cooperation, equally covering the dimensions that are at the centre of Chuck Goodwin's, have been suggested. Take, for example, our own definition of cooperation as "the mutual accomplishment of common goals, means, and processes" (Schüttpelz/Meyer 2017: 158). Goals, means, and processes are accom-

plished mutually, i.e. they are co-operative in that they are continually accomplished on the basis of, and by means of, former operations of others, to use Goodwin's words. In the course of these operations, common goals, means, and processes are created, which are partly restricted to the time of the joint activity and partly extend beyond it. Each of Chuck Goodwin's examples of multimodal sequences shows in detail "a mutual accomplishment of common goals, means, and processes", even those examples where the co-operative action leads to conflict or dispute, or where the means become misused to the disadvantage of the counterpart. For even in these cases, the co-participants are situated in the midst of a common, jointly staged event, they use and re-use common, "public" means that are partly created ad hoc, and they agree on a common goal, be it the agreement to publicly disagree by arguing or even fighting.

The great merit of Chuck Goodwin's book is to enrich these dry-boned definitions and distinctions with an opulent, fascinating, and awe-inspiring feast of examples and with intricate details of the specifically human faculty to indexically and incrementally accomplish all multimodal parameters within a semiotically rich and stimulating environment. He does so in such way that after reading his book one is convinced that in our everyday social life, we do *nothing else* but that. And Chuck Goodwin is right: All human and all multimodal cooperation is "co-operative". Human co-operation is the specific form of cooperation that maybe only *homo sapiens* is capable of. The title of the book could thus also have been "*Human* Cooperative Action". Skip the hyphen or leave it in place.

2.

Thus, Chuck Goodwin has succeeded, in a far more convincing manner than any interaction theorist before him, in defining what makes a human being a human being. What are the systematic consequences of his approach? (Admittedly, this may be a typically German question to ask.)

In an article from 2013 he already exposed the "co-operative" structure of human actions, partly anticipating the structure of his book. The sequence ran like this:

1) "Structure-preserving transformations on a public substrate";
2) "The laminated organization of human action";
3) "The accumulative power of the laminated structure of human action";
4) "Co-operative transformation zones";
5) "Human tools";
6) "Building epistemically competent actors through co-operative action" (including "professional vision").

Compared with the article, the book is much more exhaustive (20 vs. 500 pages), but it starts with the same examples and concepts, particularly by comparing the *ongoing linguistic junction of permanently heterogeneous components* characteristic for interaction—its "lamination"—with *material tools* in the Stone Age that are equally, and often literally, "laminated"—i.e. stuck and glued together. This principle of construction—the "accumulative moment" of the two components of an assembled artefact—stands at the beginning of both the article and the book, and both end with the formation of specialised actors. However, in the book the "co-operative transformation zones" play a much lesser role than in the article. They are mentioned only twice and have become conceptually expendable, even though ironically, they were integrated in the title of a recent festschrift for Chuck Goodwin. Still, the article contains the book *in nuce*.

Goodwin explains the systematics of the book twice, once in a summary (2017: 9-12) and then chapter by chapter (2017: 12-17). In the first part, he refers to three phenomenal dimensions that are affected by the concept of co-operation: language, sociality, and the creation of techni-

cally adept actors (in other words, skill). The extensive explication of the chapters then especially emphasises the following keywords:

- Language and socialisation;
- The linguistic and multimodal reference to the environment and the mutual anticipation of events;
- The reference to past and absent persons and things, and pedagogy as universal attribute of the human species that anticipates, and prepares, future;
- And finally: The formation of specific actors who possess specific stocks of knowledge.

When reading the book, one becomes aware that the systematics cannot be entirely met by the author, simply because he, time and again, uses the same examples, so that often "later" categories are mentioned or become theoretically relevant earlier than they are explained. One of Chuck Goodwin's favoured examples for "professional vision" is the pedagogical behaviour of archaeologist during excavations, and they are introduced in the first third of the book, while pedagogy becomes theoretically relevant only at the end. The same holds true for other categories and their respective examples. But the book was certainly not intended to expose and gradually explain a theoretical argument. Its strength is that it makes the abundance of human interaction and co-operation evident, visible, and palpable. And this is where Chuck Goodwin has done so much pioneering work: In finding and developing methods that make the richness of the details of co-operation scientifically describable and evident and thereby render justice to the artfulness of human co-operation, methods that teach a professional vision to less experienced interaction researchers and thereby create technically adept actors in this area. In other words: The book itself is a pedagogical device that incorporates Chuck Goodwin's year-long experience of presenting, and rendering experienceable the multimodal details of in-

teraction to an audience that, in their professional vision, is less skilled than himself.

We should therefore ask less whether Chuck Goodwin has succeeded in keeping up his theoretical systematics throughout his book than what systematics he actually envisioned. For example, in philosophical questions, is the systematics presented so far appropriate for a constitutional analysis or suited for the preparation of such? How plausible are the passages from one point to the next? Are there argumentative gaps or discontinuities?

Let us once again paraphrase the core theses of the book in a "co-operative" manner in Goodwin's sense, i.e. in a mixture of his and our words. To do so, we again use his explications of the chapters in the introduction, since in the chapters themselves the arguments become intertwined and the systematics he envisioned become invisible.

Let us recapitulate his theoretical argument, starting from "language" and moving, via "human sociality", to "creating skilled, competent members" (2017: 9-12, 12-17):

– Verbal interaction and linguistically shaped interaction, or language and interaction, are not only cooperative, but first of all co-operative. This means that verbal interaction constantly furnishes its co-participants with "public" resources that they can re-compose in the course of the interaction and that through this activity gradually "accumulate".

– The compositions and re-compositions that are undertaken in verbal interactions are based on a compositionality of resources, which is characterised by mutual assistance and by permanent de-compositions and re-compositions triggered by small troubles occurring all the time. The compositionality of language itself is permanently co-operatively produced and re-produced, confirmed and re-confirmed, through its very quality of ongoing assistability and reparability. Only those materials that are repaired and discovered and

treated as repairable and discoverable by the co-participants are to be treated as linguistic (lexical, syntactic, prosodic, morphological, pragmatic) "units" at all.

– In this way, we not only inhabit the language of others but also a part of their thoughts, specifically the kind of "thoughts" that we can anticipate in the course of an ongoing interaction. In the process of their ongoing accomplishment we are able to repair only those verbal actions (or operations), intentions, and meanings that we are also able to anticipate; and all that we are able to anticipate we are also able to think, feel, and project together with *alter*. Conversely, our thoughts, feelings, and projects are bodily, mentally, and linguistically accompanied, sometimes even co-experienced, by *alter*'s anticipations. Thus, these verbal occurrences at the same time constitute the elementary sociality of an interaction as well as a "distributed cognition" in the sense of Edwin Hutchins, one important source of inspiration for Chuck Goodwin's research.

– Through our common and mutually shaped language we do not only inhabit a mutually accomplished sociality and its "distributed cognitions" but also its non-linguistic environment, including things that we talk about, use, and modify. Even these things are part of language, as they are included via language and via talking-about-language. Language and sociality do not end at the margins of things since we also "inhabit" things through language (an outcome of our early childhood tactile, gustatory, and olfactory experiences with them). We can point at things and direct our joint attention to them, and while we talk about them, they become just as verbal as our words. We can elaborate on our words, meanings, and intentions by pointing at things. Then, these things are part of talking-about-language.

– We live in language not only together with our co-participants present but also, in particular through things we use, with absent persons—those who were here just now, those who were here before,

those who were here a long time ago, or those who were somewhere else, and who all have helped furnish this place—thus with predecessors and things past. Mutuality is partly suspended here, but still our predecessors have anticipated us as later inhabitants of this place, who will be active here during their absence and after their presence. In the same way, we anticipate our successors as broadly as possible and continually brace ourselves, and our place, for them. We are also able to prepare our stocks of knowledge for the future.

– This is possible because of their teachability and learnability. We ourselves were (and still are) taught in many of our skills thanks to the teachability and learnability of knowledge, i.e. through "pedagogy". Such a pedagogy simultaneously creates modified persons, a modified knowledge and a respective skill. Is there a general knowledge and skill that encompasses everybody and another specific knowledge and skill that only creates specific persons? In cultural comparison or between two languages there is no such difference, but within one and the same culture, a large number of specialisations and professionalisations emerge that are characterised by particular forms of knowledge and skill.

– This specialised, professional knowledge and skill is invisible and inaudible for non-specialised, non-professional others when they watch or listen, even though it is just as "public" as what we all jointly perceive and process. Even for those similarly specialised and professional, those who are skilled, it is visible and audible only for the time of the respective co-operation and its mutual monitoring and joint attention. However, the specific knowledge is potentially just as stable as more generalised stocks of knowledge or skill. The specialised, professional knowledge and skill thus exhibit the same qualities as any other form of knowledge and skill. Eventually, adequate cooperative behaviour and precise knowledge merge to form a specific personality.

In the course of the development of his argument, Goodwin has wandered through a great portion of linguistic, social, and cognitive theory:

– Grammar, prosody, gesture, lexemes, speech acts (if one wants to call them such), and, in total, the compositionality and de-compositionality, reparability, and projectability of language;
– Interaction, including interaction with co-participants present and absent, cognitive behaviour, specialization, institutions (at least in the form of "predecessors"), materiality of social relations;
– Anticipation, inhabiting the minds of others, joint anticipation, repair as well as jointly and individually distributed cognitive activities (recognising, memorising, feeling, etc.).

In Chuck Goodwin's model, these three dimensions are not separated as isolated processes, but they coalesce. But can Goodwin's pedagogical order be viewed as an phenomenological constitutional analysis of the subject-matter at hand? At least it can be read as such:

– It starts from the co-operative compositionality and reparability and goes on to referencing and anticipation;
– Referencing and anticipation form the basis for the inclusion of past and future through anonymous, or anonymisable, generalisations of what accumulates and can be created in a specific situation;
– Situations, therefore, encompass potentials of specialisation and, thus, the possible exclusion of the unknowing and un-belonging. Thus, co-operation sometimes creates non-cooperation as well as occasionally even non-co-operation; and at least in the making of professional actors, it certainly provides practical resources for excluding non-professionals from professional core activities.

Thus far, we have dealt with Goodwin's concept of "co-operation". But what about the second element of the title, "action"?

For reasons of space, we are unable to fully cover the sprawling discussion about action theory in philosophy and sociology when contextualising Goodwin's conception of action. Let us merely say that his concept of action is intended to be just as laminated as his conceptualisation of co-operation (cf. 2017: 14). First of all, he says that actions are built by "practices that human beings use [...] in concert with each other" (2017: 1). "Practice" appears to be interchangeable with "operation", as actions, for Chuck Goodwin, are also built "by performing systematic operations" (2017: 11, 30). Operations, or practices, "occur simultaneously in the midst of single actions, rather than sequentially" (2017: 13) as any theory that reduces interaction to the chained (strategic) moves of individuals would have it. They thus form jointly created "action packages" that "combine opportunistically quite different kinds of semiotic materials" that "mutually elaborate each other" (ibid.). For Goodwin, this "combinatorial power of human action" (ibid.) is an important aspect of the uniqueness of the human species. On the other hand, it is "by competently building an appropriate next action" that co-interactionists demonstrate to one another their understanding of prior actions, as he says in reference to Wittgenstein and Sacks (2017: 40). This forms the basis for the "orderly unfolding of sequences of actions" (ibid.) and for the social order in general. Thus, sometimes, apparently minor (individual) actions are contributed to major (co-operative) action packages in order to sustain intersubjectivity. To be clear, (individual) actions contribute to the unfolding, or building, of (co-operative) action, even though the latter, once realised, is irreducible to the former.

Thirdly, social organisation as a whole is an outcome of co-operative action starting with

the collaborative actions of speakers and hearers within utterances, through the co-operative construction of social action by those who are copresent to each other, to encompass social ties that extend be-

yond kin to link into courses of common action groups widely dispersed in both space and time. (2017: 1-2)

Here we can see Goodwin's intuition about the lamination of action: from actions contributed by individuals to actions built co-operatively by co-participants in a situation to common actions of groups. As he says, this "laminated organization of action enables actors living four hundred years apart to construct a single action" (2017: 14). The reflexivity of action consists precisely in, and is a direct outcome of, its layering as action *within* action *within* action.

But what is the threshold beyond which operations, or practices, are actions? Actions are constituted by practices. But how is this done? Goodwin's approach differs from established phenomenological or (other) sociological attempts in describing the foundational dimension of action, as, for example, "pre-reflexivity of practices", "habitualisation" or "habitus", or "routine". Instead, he introduces the notion of "operations" that "accumulate" and "mutually elaborate each other" in order to highlight the material and procedural, and not yet fully social, bases of action. For him, operations constantly transform, or specify, or modify the ongoing action which is only action insofar as the co-participants possess a vague idea (and not a definite "working consensus") about what they are doing *together* (playing, chatting, talking about snow, investigating the ground, etc.) that makes action a potential object that can be talked about. Alfred Schutz (1967) has made a similar distinction between *action*—as ex post facto attribution of a socially known concept to an event that has ended and can be observed and talked about as a finite entity—and *acting*—as ongoing, emergent process of doing that can be changed in character at any moment, so that it is still unclear where it goes and how it will be possible to talk about it.

This is where we have accomplished our journey through the concept of "co-operative action". Our co-operative journey started with a real phenomenological constitution theoretical insight: that all verbal

utterances are outcomes of co-operative actions, or of practices; and that mutual reparability is at the centre of their compositionality. And it ended with the equally important consequence that cooperation and non-cooperation, inclusion and exclusion coincide in professional (and other) ways of acting and perceiving, before and beneath becoming an action by actors.

At the very least, we are able to say that these (necessarily rough-grained) keywords indicate that Chuck Goodwin has worked intensively on the question which of his parameters presuppose others for their explanation or should be preceded by others for pedagogical reasons. The structure of the book follows a gradual passage from resources of interaction formed and continually furnished in the "here and now"—i.e., compositional, laminated, and material resources—goes on to the integration of the future and the present-absent past to end with professional specialisation. It must be added here that every co-operative interaction continually creates its own indexical past and its own indexical future—including personal memories and anticipations, so that in a common situation we, in the words of Alfred Schutz, "are growing older together" (1967: 166). It is this "growing older together" that we can take with us into our future as premise for the idea that a concluded interactional episode pertains to the past.

Anyone familiar with Schutz' and Luckmann's "structures of the life-world" (1973) or Berger's and Luckmann's "social construction of reality" (1966) will feel reminded of their theoretical endeavours, especially of the idea of "stratifications of the life-world" that likewise start from foundational dimensions in the here and now and go on to past and future worlds, anonymous typifications, stabilised stocks of knowledge and skill, institutions, and more personal and specific dimensions that are the basis of social differentiation. Indeed, the similarities are striking. There is a salient difference, however, which relates to the methodological starting point: While Chuck Goodwin starts with the situation that creates its participants and their intentions and actions, Berger,

Luckmann, and Schutz, at least in the texts mentioned, start from the individual actor. This is why Goodwin's innovations in methodology are so important: they succeed in representing and making analysable the intertwining and mutuality of co-operative actions and practices. In doing so, they render justice to the assumption brought forward by ethnomethodology and other practice theories—and implicit in Chuck Goodwin's book—that individuals, or social persons, are a consequence of interaction rather than a prerequisite. Co-operation is pre-personal as well as trans-individual, even pre-intentional. Just as we have noted on the formative environments of co-operative action, individuals are not the originators of such activities, rather they can become entitites that can be talked about, once the involvement in the situation of co-operation has ended and a new reflexive situation has opened. Part of this *ex post facto* talk-aboutability is the attribution of motives (or intentions) through vocabularies, grammars, and rhetorics of motive to oneself and others.

Max Scheler has expressed this in an unparalleled way: In interaction occurs

> an immediate flow of experiences undifferentiated as between mine and thine, which actually contains both our own and others' experiences intermingled and without distinction from one another. Within this flow there is a gradual formation of ever more stable vortices, which slowly attract further elements of the stream into their orbits and thereby become successively and very gradually identified with distinct individuals. (1954: 246)

It is thus in the methodology and rigid implementation of this basic idea that Chuck Goodwin has realised, where the great strength of his book develops. We can watch the flow and the vortices, the orbits and their gradual identifications in action.

Notes

1 "The idea, the principle, the flash, the first moment of the first condition, the leap, the jump out of series... To others, the preparation and execution. Cast your net here. This is the place in the sea where you will make your catch. Farewell." (Valery 1948: 44) ("Extracts from Monsieur Teste's Logbook")

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