

Inhabiting the family-car: Children-passengers and parents-drivers on the school run*

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Abstract

Inspired by recent advances in the field of automobility, this article explores how families inhabit cars, and how daily automobilized family routines are accomplished interactionally in and through cars' uniquely structured inner space(s). Following Urry's (2006) notion of the "socially inhabited car," the article assumes sociological and ethnomethodological sensibilities and sensitivities in researching in-car interactions. Specifically, a single strip of a familial dispute that takes place in the car on a routine trip to school is studied. The audiovisual data was taken from recordings of five urban families living in Jerusalem, Israel, during daily trips to school. A camcorder was supplied to the passengers — children of elementary school age — which served as a mobile recording device that captured the car's interior spaces and the interactions therein. Studying up-close verbal and gestural interactions reveals how family members, including driver (in the front seat) and passengers (in both the front and back seats), make use of the unique material design of the car's inner spaces as semiotic resources for communication and for affiliating and disaffiliating with the overall argumentative interaction. The article illuminates how an immediate physical context, in the shape of the car's interior, acts simultaneously as a material given and as a socially emergent or accomplished semiotic environment.

Keywords: mobility; family; talk-in-interaction; space; cars; embodiment; argument

1. Introduction — automobile spaces and families

This article studies how families inhabit cars, and how daily automobilized family routines are accomplished interactionally in and through cars' uniquely structured inner space(s). Specifically, the article attends to the emergence and

decline of a familial dispute, which takes place during a morning trip to school (the “school run”), and to the unique spatial and interactional resources and constrains within which members interact meaningfully in the car.

The article is part of a larger research project that builds on and bridges two concomitant developments in the social sciences, each of which amounts to an interdisciplinary “turn” in its own right: the growing awareness of multimodality, including the roles of bodies, mobilities, spaces, materialities, aesthetics, and so on, in the fields of linguistics, discourse studies, pragmatics, conversation analysis, and so forth, on the one hand, and the emergence of the field of automobility, as a subfield in the mobility studies paradigm, on the other. Studying how families organize and proceed with their daily lives and routines via multimodal interactions in and through automobility, supplies a semiotically rich, and (up until recently) infrequently examined site, where the situated dimensions of discourse can be explored productively.

With regard to automobility, recent publications have delineated this sphere as an emerging field of research that is part of the paradigmatic shift unto the study of mobilities, technologies, materialities, and spaces in everyday life (Featherstone et al. 2005; Urry 2007). This article follows one of the threads of this emerging field, namely the notion of the “socially inhabited car,” which, as Urry (2006: 19) proposes, “permits multiple socialities, of family life, community, leisure.”

The notion of the inhabited car is productive because it invites sociology (defined broadly) to conceive of the car as a place of coordinated activities, and to empirically examine multimodal and situated interactions therein. This article takes up an ethnomethodological perspective, which focuses on two aspects, the first of which concerns the materiality of in-car spaces. In this regard the article addresses how distinct spatial frameworks in the car — primarily the separation between the back seats and the front seats — afford communicative and interactional possibilities, and how the driver’s and the passengers’ communicative moves manage the social production of meaning and action (including that of the drive itself) within emergent contextual configurations made available in and by cars’ inner design (C. Goodwin 2000: 1490). The second aspect concerns familial interactions in particular, and how familial roles, disputes and related emotions are performed in and through sequences of talk-in-interaction, which are not only temporally ordered but also, simultaneously, spatially configured.

With the wake of poststructuralism, a number of prevailing dichotomies have been challenged, relevantly those between space/place and process/activity. While the received (structural) tradition held that space is a “given,” a bound container of and for social activity, poststructural understanding suggests that notions of space/place and activity are mutually constitutive, and that neither spaces nor places can be understood without considering historical,

social, and political processes (Foucault 1986; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994, 2005). Massey (1994) influentially contended that,

what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus . . . [a place's] identity is always formed by the juxtaposition and co-presence there of particular sets of social interrelations, and by the effects which that juxtaposition and co-presence produce.

This “spatial turn” — itself part of a larger “multimodal turn” — is effecting studies in the fields combining interaction and linguistics, and various concepts, such as Scollon and Scollon's (2003) “geosemiotics,” and Harris's (1998) “integrational linguistics,” are opening up new and creative research avenues. Recently, McIlvenny et al. (2009: 1789) suggest that place is better viewed as “a site or network of mediated activities, where language, people, artifacts and technologies are entangled together.” Rejecting stasis and essentialist notions of space as a passive material persistence which is (always) “already there,” it is argued that space should be viewed through the eyes (and actions) of its beholders: it functions simultaneously as a force that shapes interaction and as its product. This dual role is variously referred to as “experienced” and “accomplished,” and “material” and “plastic” (D'Hondt 2009; Haddington and Keisanen 2009: 1939; Mondada 2005: 16). Note that these poststructural reconceptualizations in discourse related fields sit nicely with the central tenet of automobility studies, namely the rejection of functional approaches to transportation, which conceived of cars as mere “vehicles” (mobile containers), or mechanized “riding animals” (Virilio 2004: 116), in favor of critical, systemic and hybrid/assemblage approaches.

A number of recent studies have indeed “entered” the car, and studied up close in-car interactions (mostly from the perspectives of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, see D'Hondt 2009; Haddington and Keisanen 2009; Laurier 2001, 2004, 2005; Laurier et al. 2008; Noy 2009). These studies tackle a number of issues, among which are route selection, the roles of drivers and passengers in accomplishing driving, the automobile as a mobile workplace, the “cognitive” work involved in driving practices as they are performed socially, and more.

The second body of literature concerns studies of families-in-interaction, and the ways that familial activities both absorb (presuppose) and project (construct) domestic spaces. Discourse and interaction studies have admittedly paid relatively little attention to how families — “our first institution” (Aronson 2006: 619) — are constituted in and through interaction in domestic settings. Yet a number of recent studies specifically addressed issues of spaces of domesticity, pointing at the ways that familial interactions and disputes are

situated, and at the possible and actual alignments that members maintain (and disrupt) throughout interactions (Blum-Kulka 1997; C. Goodwin 2007; M. H. Goodwin 2006; McIlvenny 2008, 2009, and a special issue of *Text and Talk* [2006]). While these works have not examined automobility, it is worthwhile noting that cars' inner spaces have been repeatedly addressed as (semi-)domestic places. Among others, Baudrillard (1996: 67) argues that, "the car rivals the house as an alternative zone of everyday life . . . a closed realm of intimacy."

In terms of the spatial arrangements of social (and familial) interactions, of particular merit is Kendon's (1990) influential conceptualization, where it is argued that the basic form of spatial arrangement of a group interaction is an F-formation system: Face or facing formations. The F-formation system, where interactants face the same locus, as in a circle, can create the spatial and orientational behavior that sustains an "o-space," defined as "the space between the interactants over which they agree to maintain joint jurisdiction and control" (211). The "o-space," which lies at the core of and is sustained by the participants of interaction, is achieved if and when interactants' transactional spaces overlap, the latter being defined by Kendon as "a space that is created and maintained by individuals' behavior" (211). Kendon suggests that there are various spatial arrangements that are assumed by the F-formation system, including L-, side-by-side, vis-à-vis arrangements and more, all of which can sustain "o-space," albeit differently.

Applying Kendon's (1990) formation systems to the inner spaces of the family-car is productive, even if it warrants some adjustments (McIlvenny 2009). This is the case, because the basic F-formation rests on the notions of interactants facing each other, having "equal, direct and exclusive access" (Kendon 1990: 209). Yet the physical design of cars' inner spaces does not facilitate this type of arrangement due to two related reasons. First, plainly enough, the orientation of the seats in car is unidirectional and does not easily offer a shared point of orientation and convergence (at least not one which is inside the moving car).¹

Second, while compared with other domestic spaces, such as houses, apartments, and rooms, the car is a relatively small spatial unit, it would be inaccurate to view it as a homogenous "box." In fact, attending to the materiality of the automobile suggests that the car's inner design encompasses a number of subspaces, including the trunk which is not typically inhabited (people in the car's trunk appear in Mafia movies and TV crime series). The car's central space is physically divided into two main subspaces: the front area including the front seats and the dashboard, and the back area, where the backseats are located. These subspaces are in effect more distinct and separate than is commonly acknowledged: the front and the back spaces typically have different entrances/exits, different sitting apparatuses (separate

seats in the front versus a connected, bench-like seat in the back), qualitatively different levels of access to the car's driving and electronic equipment, different views of the outside (both in terms of traffic and scenery), and so on.

Furthermore, the front and back subspaces are separated by a number of objects, including the front seats, an elevation in the space between these seats, and sometimes also screens that descend from the car's ceiling (a simple measurement indicates that approximately half [55%] of the area between the front and back subspaces is physically blocked). As this physical arrangement supplies the immediate environment wherein interaction transpires, it ostensibly effects in-car communication and the possibility of overlap of travelers' (and drivers') transactional segments. For interactants the car's inner material setting supplies resources for interaction and for promoting communicative goals, which, as we shall see, concern both affiliation *and* disaffiliation with the familial "o-space" in the car (cf. D'Hondt 2009: 1966; Barker 2009; Noy 2009).

In light of these spatio-material features, the car's interior can be helpfully re-conceptualized as *distinct spaces* which can, with effort, be *functionally joined*. It is clear why establishing and maintaining an "o-space" in the entire space of the car under these conditions would not be a trivial accomplishment, not least because, as Kendon wisely notes, interactants' transactional space extends in the direction that is in front of the *lower half of their bodies* (e.g., legs), yet in-car spatial arrangements highly restrict leg and thigh movements. For this reason, the analysis will focus how interactants in the car make use of and manage these spatio-material features when partaking in (or avoiding) interaction.

2. Mobile methods: The twofold-mobile camcorder

There are various ways to document activities and interactions inside cars. In line with the methods used in recent works (Laurier 2004; Laurier et al. 2008), a camcorder was also employed in this research in order to record in-car interactions. Unlike devices that supply only audio data, video recording inevitably produces multimodal datasets, where rich audiovisual material is available for analysis.

In order to collect data that possesses ethnographic qualities, the method used in this research comprised of supplying a camcorder to the car's passengers (that is, children), who typically occupy the backseat. This method bears a number of consequences; the foremost being that everything recorded is seen *from the perspective of the passenger who is using the camcorder*. In other words, the movements of the camcorder do not only embody the mobility

of the car, but also (and in addition) the movements, gestures, and orientations of the passenger holding it. (Admittedly, these “twofold mobilities” supply rather hectic video images, because the passengers are themselves ceaselessly — and sometimes restlessly — on the move.) As will be evinced in both the transcription and the analysis, these movements supply an invaluable source of data, which, in addition to representing the interaction, also conveys the embodied orientation of the participant/family member holding the camera.

The school run was chosen as a research site, primarily because it presents what is commonly viewed as a rather trivial form of car trip: it is practiced on daily basis, along the same routes, with identical stops, and with the same passengers (somewhat akin to the drivers who do their daily office chores on the highway, Laurier 2004). For this reason we see fewer negotiations of routes and stops, which are characteristic of other driving practices (D’Hondt 2009; Haddington and Keisanen 2009), and less of passengers’ occupation with arriving at the trip’s destination. It should be kept in mind however that, as Schegloff explicates, a routine — any routine — is always a joint accomplishment, an “achievement[s] arrived at out of a welter of possibilities . . . rather than a mechanical or automatic playing out of pre-scribed routines” (1986: 117).

The school run was chosen as a site of research also because it is a typical site of intense familial interactions, one of many through which families are sustained (consider also homework negotiations, dinnertime chores, bedtime routines, and more. Blum-Kulka 1997; C. Goodwin 2007; Sirota 2006; Wingard 2006). As in many familial interactions, disputes and emotions too are played out interactionally, in this case within the car’s inner spaces and within the context of automobility (Katz 1999; Noy 2009; Sheller 2004).

2.1. *The sample*

The article reports preliminary findings from an on-going research project, that explores the semiotics of automobility, mainly but not solely by attending to interactions of families in and with cars (Noy 2009, forthcoming). The dataset in this research includes video recordings from five urban, middle class families (including the author’s family), residing in (West) Jerusalem. The families are heterosexual, Jewish, and secular, with 2–4 children ranging in age between nine months and twelve years at the time of the research. Each family had a standard camcorder for 2–3 weeks, during which four hours were recorded in the car, in Hebrew, focusing on trips to and from school. One camcorder was given to each family successively, together with directions asking the children to keep the camcorder on, and to record anything that they find of

interest inside and outside the car while traveling, including interactions, objects, people, traffic, views and more. In addition, two meetings took place with each family, with the aim of learning more about the families and about their driving and video recording practices and preferences.

It should be noted that although in all the families in this research both parents drive on regular basis, in over 80% of the time recorded during the school runs the mother did the driving. The children always sat in the backseat (with an exception of a baby in a security seat in the front), in what were typical four-door sedans of Japanese or European manufacturers.

With regards to glossing, the original Hebrew interaction was transcribed (italicized text) and translated in a rather free manner. In cases where clarification or higher precision were needed, which occurred on a number of times due to the idiosyncratic and non-standardized language used by children, the literal translation was added in double brackets.

2.2. *The Norman family*²

In what follows, a single strip of interaction in the Norman's car will be examined, which includes the family's first minute and half in the car, on a morning in March, 2009. In the vein of ethnographic sensitivities to the infinitely rich particularities of situated interaction, I opted for a *case study approach*, which can present with some detail an interaction of one family, in one car, during one morning (see Schegloff 1987, for a discussion of analyzing single episodes of interaction). In the interaction, the mother — Bella (female 40), and the children — Tom (male 7.5), Tamir (male 5.1) and Ronit (female 3.1), are present and in the car, and so is Xaya — the children's paternal grandmother. All family members partake in the dispute.

On most of the morning trips recorded for this project (80%), Bella took the children to kindergarten and school via a fixed route that lasted fifteen minutes each way. During these trips, the children were fastened to special security seats in the backseat in a fixed order: Ronit on the right, Tamir in the middle, and Tom on the left — behind the driver's seat.³ Tom did most of the recordings in the car. During all the trips he was the first to use the camcorder, with an overall duration of over 75% of the time when he was in the car. This pattern — where the older sibling initiates and recordings and has the largest share in it, is typical, albeit somewhat accentuated in the Norman family. Also, Tom supplied a continuous description of what was taking place during the recording. Although the directions I supplied did not specifically ask for such descriptions, Tom perceived his role while recording as a "narrator," who both describes and explains the events that are being recorded (see below, lines 3–4).

3. Inhabiting the family-car: Argumentative interactions between children-passengers and parent-driver

It was noted above that in-car spaces are challenging in terms of the incongruence between their design and basic arrangements of social interaction (Kendon 1990). Furthermore, in various cultural settings, in-car spatio-material features correspond with *pre-designated ways by which the car's spaces are routinely inhabited and used*. Regardless if it is due to social and cultural norms, legal regulations, or both, family-cars' front and the back spaces are typically inhabited by prescribed family members: in this research adults sat in the front and children in the back. With the single exception of an infant's safety seat, no deviation from this pattern was observed. Indeed, all the family-cars exhibited fixed sitting arrangements, which, moreover, were particular to each family-car (in the cases where families used more than one vehicle. This finding is also found in Barker 2009). Hence, through norm the material settings correlate with generational roles, authorities, and power-relations in the family, which, together with safety regulations contribute to the "routine" quality of the activities involved in driving the family car.

The material division into subspaces and its social correspondence in terms of the routine sitting positions obviously influence the "o-space," or indeed, the "o-spaces" in the car. The family-car's front subspace comes to correspond with a "parent room" (where adults interact), and the back subspace can be conceived as a "children's room" (where children interact). Side-by-side interactions that transpire within these subspaces are confined to them and will be refereed below as *widthwise* interaction. Interactions that run *across* the front-back division will be referred to as a *crossover* interaction. These (spatial) types of interactions can potentially establish exclusive "o-space(s)," are an inclusive "o-space" that transcends interactions that occurs within the car's front and back compartments. To be sure, these interactions do not simply occur inside the car, but are part of the participants' construction of what amounts to, at any given moment, the collaboratively accomplished mutually acknowledged "inside of the car."

3.1. *Entering the car and commencing the dispute*

The following three subsections present and discuss the commencement, advancement and conclusion of a familial dispute, which takes place immediately after the Normans have entered the car. Attending closely to the argument sequence shows how familial interactions take place in the car and how the car's spaces are constructed through members' spoken and embodied

(inter)actions, and through their (dis)affiliations with the larger argumentative interaction.

- (1)
- 1 {View of the front seats}
- 2 ((Rear door closing))
- 3 Tom: *zhe* (.) *zhe ha'oto* (1.5) *hayom*↑ °>*hevenu mashu axer*<° *hayom*↑
This (.) this is the car (1.5) today↑ >we brought ((pl.)) something
else< today↑
- 4 *hevenu et hape'a itanu* (.) *ani lo yodea lama* ((falling intonation))
(1.5)
we brought the wig with us (.) I don't know why
- 5 ((Bella enters the car and sits in the driver seat, then closes left front door.
6 Xaya begins entering from the front right door))
- 7 <°okeh°>
o.k.
- 8 Bella: ((Buckles seatbelt, unlocks gear lock, and ignites the engine))
- 9 *LO MA'AMINA SHE'ESER* (.) *MISH::MONE MENASIM*
DON'T BELIEVE IT'S TEN, SINCE EIGHT [WE'VE BEEN]
TRYING ((pl.))
- 10 *LEZET ITAM ME'HABAIT*
TO LEAVE THE HOUSE WITH THEM
- 11 {view shifts from the front seats to the space above Tom's thighs where
12 he is playing with a thin metal cord}

The camcorder is activated by Tom immediately after he and his siblings have been buckled to their special booster-seats by their mother. The first image that the camera captures is of the front space: front seats, window, and some of the urban view beyond, as they are seen from the back (left) seat (line 1, above, Figure 1, below). This image — mostly an internal car-scape — is emblematic of the physical and visual orientations of the family-car's backseat passengers. In fact, regardless of the specific sibling operating the camcorder or the particular family in which it was operating, in the majority of the instances when the camcorder commenced recording it was this internal car-scape that was captured. This is not surprising considering the aforementioned unidirectional sitting arrangement: a view of the car's inner spaces is the “default” perspective of backseat passengers/children. Note that for those in the front, the available view is of the dashboard and beyond — the road, and in order to be able to see the backseat, those in the front seat must either rotate their head and body some 125 degrees, or use the partial view available in the front mirror.

Tom's words, too, confirm that this image conveys the space of “the car.” Conceptually, Tom's short description (lines 3–4) serves as a kind of an opening or introductory comment, that instantiates his act of inhabiting the car as

both passenger and family member. His words demarcate the car's inner space not from an objective/neutral perspective, but from the embodied-familial perspective of a child-passenger who occupies the backseat. He is observing, but at the same time also establishing the car as a relevant environment for action and interaction.



Figure 1. "This is the car"

Immediately following these words, and after an "okeh" that marks a topical shift, Tom succinctly introduces two themes that relate to the routine practices involved in inhabiting the car. First, there is a *temporal aspect* which frames this particular occasion of occupying the back space of the car within a larger temporal sequence, and portrays it as a particular event in an unfolding narrative of the family's everyday activities. Tom's words indicate the similarities and variations between the different stretches of time and activities during which the family-car is inhabited. One of the noticeable variations on the mundane routine, to which Tom points out, is illustrated by the object of the wig. There are a number of additional irregularities on this occasion, such as the presence of the children's grandmother, and the occurrence of the Jewish Holiday of *Purim* (which might be indexed by the mentioning of the wig).⁴

The second dimension that Tom succinctly evokes concerns the car space's *quality of containability*, which too, is an essential condition of inhabitability

(“today we brought the wig with us,” lines 3–4). As part of the domestication of the family-car, various domestic objects travel (in)to its spaces, moving back and forth between various homescapes, workscapes, and leiscapes (Barker 2009; Noy 2009: 104–105). These objects call to mind the notion of “duplication of [domestic] accessories” (Virilio 2004: 116). Indeed, the recordings show different categories of objects which are found in the area of the backseat, including toys, dolls, children books (stuffed in pockets on the backside of the front seats), schoolbags, and articles of children’s clothes. Of course, not only non-human objects travel (in)to the car: family members too are “brought” into the car and assume the roles of passengers and driver therein for various durations, much like other “domestic objects.”

Once Tom’s short introductory remarks are complete, that is once he has addressed/introduced in words and visual images (captured by the camcorder) the shared (familial) space of the car, he gradually shifts the camcorder unto a game he is playing, in an intimate space that lies right in front of his body (lines 12–13). More precisely, these are the activities involved in this game — touching the string, his thighs, and talking about Lacey, that *establish* this space as an intimate space. The shift is a spatio-orientational move from the car’s shared space, to Tom’s own personal transactional space (Kendon 1990). Note that this shift occurs immediately after Bella’s meaningful utterance — more on this below).

At this point in the sequence, and after having entered the car, the mother’s words (lines 9–10) are clearly hearable in the backseat. In this front seat initiated turn, Bella produces a performative expression in the shape of a complaint, which realizes her conjoined physical place and familial role in the family-car: Bella’s dual roles as driver and family member (both parent and daughter-in-law), are performed simultaneously through a number of verbal and physical engagements. Essentially, her expressive statement is produced *precisely when she ignites that car*. This simultaneity is performative, because it demonstrates the *entanglement of the dual roles she undertakes* as the person who is both responsible for the operation of the vehicle (driving), and for the organization and management of the family (Mom). Her utterance literally sets the Norman family in (e)motion: it starts the motion of the car and (re)sets the mood inside it and the ensuing familial interaction for the rest of the duration of this trip. It is in and through these words that Bella can potentially (re)assume her role as mother *and* driver, and practice her authority in the car: she is “carrying over,” as it were, her authoritative role as a parent — and the difficulties and frustrations she experiences with this role — from the immobile domestic environment of the home to that of the mobile and domesticated spaces of the car.

By the time Bella’s utterance is complete (“TO LEAVE THE HOUSE WITH THEM,” line 10), Xaya has entered the car and sat, and has done so expectedly

in the (adult) seat at the front. While Bella is addressing Xaya via a width-wise (side-by-side) exchange between adult family members occupying the front space, the volume and tenor of her words are such that the children in the back space will hear her. Covering the entire in-car space, everyone now is a ratified participant of Bella's complaint, responsible by degrees for engaging with it. In other words, through volume and tone, Bella establishes a familial "o-space," where everyone in the car are "inhabitants of the same [familial] realm" (Goffman 1974: 127). The lack of bodily movements here is not surprising — not so much because the possibilities of bodily movements in the car are limited, but because Bella is actively operating the car ("driving") with her hands, and hence she has only her voice as a resource.

Bella uses Xaya's presence resourcefully, as she directly addresses her, yet indirectly implicates the backseat passengers, whose (mis)behavior is apparently the cause of her complaint. Thematically, her complaint raises a common familial theme, concerning the lack of cooperation on behalf of the family's young in completing a "morning chore" (that is, getting ready to leave the house, leaving it and entering the car), and the access of time and effort that this (mis)conduct demands of the parents (hence "trying" is in plural form. Note also that as Bella is in a hurry and Xaya is the last family member to enter the car, and it might also be that the former addresses the latter by way of hurrying her inside the car). Bella's words, which charge the spaces of the car with affect, draw a connection and continuation between two domestic spaces. If Tom's earlier reference to the wig drew a material connection, Bella's affective utterance draws a causal and emotional connection. In other words, as she raises the theme concerning adults' attempts at "getting the family out of the house," her complaint *establishes* the space of the car as an intimate-familial place, where affective parental complaints and reprimands can be routinely expressed (and, as we shall see shortly, also challenged).

Finally, the point of inhabiting the car affectively is significant in relation to automobility, because traditionally, views of the field presented a rational (Habermasian) space, which possesses no emotional value or significance. This is the case, despite everyday observations and experiences of drivers, passengers, and pedestrians, which include numerous expressions of affect related to the system of automobility (Katz 1999; Sheller 2004).

3.2. *Replies from the backseat: The dispute develops*

As the dispute develops and reaches its climax, members' engagement in the interaction intensifies and the dispute subsumes the overall shared space of the car.

- (2)
- 13 Xaya: ((Replies to Bella while entering the car)) [(unclear words)]
 °lakaxat et ze be'izi°
 to take it easy
- 14 Tom: ((Playing with a metal cord)) [*zhe sroxy*:↑]
 This is Lacey
- 15 ((Unclear exchange between Bella and Xaya. Sounds of radio and mobile
 16 phone turned on))
 17 . . .
- 18 Xaya: ((Unclear words)) *lama lehit'azben, axeret kol hakef yeza mi'itanu*
 why get upset, it'll ruin all the fun ((lit. the fun
 will leave us))
- 19 Ronit: =*IMA* (.) *YAZA LANU HA:KEF*
 =MOMMY. IT'S NO FUN FOR US ANYMORE ((lit. the fun left
 us))
- 20 {The picture turns rapidly to Ronit}
- 21 Bella: *ken*↑, *at hozet li takef* (.) *she'ani mevakeshet mimex*
 Yea, you ruined the fun for me ((lit. took the fun out)), in that I ask
 you
 22 *eser pe'amim lashevet ve'at lo makshiva* (1.7)
 to sit ten times and you don't listen
- 23 {Picture turns to Bella}
- 24 Ronit: *veyaza hakef*↓
 and it's no fun ((lit. the fun's gone out))
- 25 {Picture returns to Ronit}
- 26 Bella: *yoffi, az ulai naxzor habaita* ((*car moves slowly forward*))
 Great, so maybe we'll return home
- 27 {Picture returns to front}
- 28 Ronit: *ennaahhh* ((*babyish intonation*))
 ennaahhh

There are several possible reactions that the passengers can pursue in relation to Bella's complaint (including disregarding it). Two immediate reactions can be observed: The first is expectedly Xaya's, who is replying while entering the car (line 13). Because Xaya is partly outside the vehicle, and because she speaks quietly, some of her words are unclear, but towards the end of her reply she says something of the type of "take/taking it easy." Xaya will follow this line throughout the sequence, where she is repeatedly trying to sooth Bella's frustration and calm her. Her reply constitutes the beginning of a widthwise interaction — an exchange that takes place intermittently between the adult family members in the car's front space. Here we can see another crucial reason that accounts for why Xaya's reply and later talk are significantly quieter:

we will see that through volume and tone she attempts to *confine the exchange* with Bella to the car's front space, which is where the (grand-)parent(s) is/are sitting.

At this point it can be seen that Xaya simultaneously inhabits the material confines of the car and her role within the systems of the family and automobility. In the exchanges with Bella and with the children, Xaya assumes the combined roles of a family member *and a passenger who partakes in the activities of driving*, even if only in an indirect fashion. As the "older and wiser (and slower)" family member, who tries to calm things down in the front and back compartments, Xaya is also involved in and shows responsibility for the drive. Laurier et al. (2008) have recently discussed the roles performed by those persons occupying the seat *next* to the driver. Contra the perceived notion of the car-driver as an "individual consciousness," they indicate many instances of "driving together," where front-seat passengers expressed participation in driving related activities. This they accomplish via gestures and verbal comments. "To share the vehicle as a passenger," Laurier et al. (2008: 6) observe, "is to become partly responsible for its driving and partly responsible for its drive."

In light of this, it might be tentatively hypothesized that Xaya's actions, though not commenting on Bella's driving skills or the state of the traffic, in effect actively *partake in* the shared accomplishment of driving the family-car, doing so by *intervening emotionally*. We will see that hereafter Xaya's efforts will be directed at trying to calm the mother/driver and to confine her in-car interactions to the front space (on family roles in in-car interactions see Dori-Hacohen 2009; Noy 2009).

The second observable reaction to Bella's complaint is produced by Tom, and indeed it takes the form of a (non-verbal) disregard. When Bella completes her utterance, the camera starts shifting *away* from the view of the front space to the view of the front of Tom's body (lines 11–12 in section 3.1). In this intimate space, Tom is playing with an improvised game which he brought with him from the house (he has been playing with this game for the last number of days). The game consists of a magnate and a small metal string or lace. Tom affectionately gives the string a nickname ("Lacey"), and by doing so he partakes in common familial discursive practice of affectionate nickname-giving (using an endearment term, see Blum-Kulka 1997: 160–162; Figure 2, below). The movement of the camera away from the front space, right when a possible reaction to his mother's complaint could have been expected, suggests that through disattending the complaint (Mandelbaum 1991) he is refusing to partake in the joint "o-space" of the family/car. Stated positively, here is Tom's way of inhabiting *his* place in the family/car. Tom's self-talk nicely illustrates how within the limited and confined (sub)spaces of the car, passengers can *avoid* interaction through creating/inhabiting spaces of and for themselves.



Figure 2. “This is Lacey”: Tom’s personal playful space

As Tom talks to his imagined (that is mediated, but also to his immediate) audience, the conversation in the front between Bella and Xaya continues. Most of the exact wording of this widthwise interaction is hardly discernable, yet Bella’s voice is constantly louder than Xaya’s. Bella is attempting to activate a particular familial engagement, where her complaint will be redressed by the backseat passengers (rather than soothed by the co-driver, or ignored by Tom).

With no one else having done so in the backseat, Ronit replies to her mother’s complaint (sixteen seconds after it has been uttered). She says in a loud and accusative tone, “MOMMY. IT’S NO FUN FOR US.” Her utterance notably commences with an *address* (“Mommy”), which is expected when other resources for signaling the utterance’s addressee are limited. As Noy (2009: 107) indicates, “[t]he lack of direct eye contact, so central to face-to-face interaction, means that interactants are not aware of each others’ availabilities in terms of engaging in conversation. This condition requires that more checking be done before actually engaging in interaction.” In this and in other family-cars, utterances that initiate interactions often commenced with an address. Yet in the present interaction, the reason to commence the utterance with an address — a summons — concerns the fact that Ronit is interrupting an ongoing conversation and does not want her reply to be left unaddressed.

Further, unlike her mother's complaint, which engaged the children in the backseat indirectly and as a group, Ronit engages her mother directly and as an individual. Symmetry is constructed, where familial identities ("parent" versus "children," single versus plural) and spatial locations ("front" versus "back") are opposed. Although Ronit is aware, as is everyone in the car, that her loud call is heard and can be replied to and commented on by all, the address "Mommy" stresses that Ronit is performing a *crossover interaction*, crossing from the "children space" to the "(grand)parent space." This is accomplished, again, via the resource of her speech volume (she is nearly shouting).⁵

As Ronit interrupts the exchange between Bella and Xaya, she paraphrases a number of words that Xaya has just said to Bella. Xaya said (literally) that the fun will or might "leave us" (*yeza mi'itanu*) as a condition in future tense, and Ronit says (literally), "the fun has left us" (*YAZA LANU HA:KEF*) in past tense, as a disappointment and blame. This repetition (which further develops in lines 21 and 24), resembles structures of format tying which are typical of argumentative exchanges in general and in families in particular (M. H. Goodwin 1990: 177–188; C. Goodwin 2006). In this way, Ronit confirms once more that the space of the car is a space of familial over-hearings, and that what goes on between the adults in the "parent room" is not completely concealed from those occupying the "children rooms." In this sense Ronit is actually helping Bella establish a shared space of orientation ("o-space"), even if an argumentative one. To state again, format tying in the car serves as a resource for Ronit and for Bella in their attempts to establish coherent crossover communication — each acknowledges having heard what the other had said in a different (sub)space in the car.

Ronit's reply induces two immediately observable responses, the first of which is her mother's, to be discussed shortly. The second reaction is gesture-based and non-verbal and is, again, discernable via the embodied movements of the camcorder: as Ronit talks, a speedy shift is performed by Tom (line 20), changing the view from the transactional space in front of him, where he is playing, unto Ronit (who is sitting to his right, beyond Tamir). The camcorder's motion is instantaneous so as to suggest that it is less a matter of what Tom thought was worthwhile recording (Tom the director), and more a matter of a sibling's *embodied engagement* with an ensuing familial dispute. The camcorder's swift shift tells, then, how Tom is drawn out of his transactional space to engage, together with everyone in the car, in the interactional argumentative o-space that Bella established.

The second reaction to Ronit's reply comes from her utterance's direct addressee, namely from her mother (Bella), who instantaneously stops the conversation with Xaya, and replies angrily. In her reply, Bella, too, recycles a variation of the combination of the words attesting to a sense of dis-

appointment (“took the fun out”). Bella thus squarely exchanges blame with her three-year-old daughter in the backseat (lines 21–22). As with all disputes, here too there is a common ground, which is that presently there is “no fun,” and that there *should have* been fun. This is why the “no-fun” situation is upsetting, and requires that someone would assume responsibility of it.

After Ronit’s quieter reiteration (line 24), Bella’s response (“Great, so maybe we’ll return home,” line 26), tells yet again that she is speaking from within the possibilities and confines of her dual roles of parent and driver. As drivers assume their place by the wheel, sets of possible activities (walking, face-to-face interaction, and so on) are exchanged for other, situated sets of possible activities, which relate to driving (acceleration and deceleration, controlling the car’s wheel, driving on, turning around etc.). With this shift, the ways in which parents can exercise authority and control must also transform. While driving the car, parents do not face their children and can hardly see them directly and know of their doings. Not only can the parents see less, but they can also *do less* about what they see or hear. Indeed, in recorded instances when parents physically engaged their children, whether for the sake of disciplining or offering help, they tended to do so when there was a relaxation in the demands put on them in their roles as drivers, that is, occasions when the car stops at a red light or in a traffic jam.

The enmeshment of family and automobility roles is evinced in Bella’s words (above), which suggest possible means of discipline and punishment that are available to the parent-driver. Neither driver nor passenger(s) take this threat seriously, that is, concretely, because Bella is not speaking as loudly as she did before, she uses a condition (“maybe”), and more importantly, her *actions as the driver of the vehicle do not correlate (but rather refute) the threat she is making*: she has just begun accelerating the car and the passengers can see and hear this (line 26).

Indeed, Ronit’s babyish “*ennaahhh*” (line 28), serves to recognize her mother’s intentions as playful, and marks the beginning of the diffusion of tension in the car.

3.3. *Xaya’s interventions and the dispute’s final conclusion*

In the third and last strip of argumentative interaction, Xaya repeatedly attempts to pacify the dispute — an effort at which she eventually succeeds. She accomplishes this by directly addressing the contents of the dispute (expressing themes of resolution), and at the same time also by engaging the mother-driver in a widthwise interaction in the front space.

- (3)
- 29 Xaya: =*dai, taphsiku, Bella (2) °at mit'azbenet stam, xaval*
 =Enough, stop (pl.) it, Bella (2) °you're getting annoyed for nothing, it's not
- 30 *al ha'energiot°* ((*car moves slightly backward, exiting the parking lot*))
 worth the energies°
- 31 ((*Car accelerates*))
- 32 (10) {Picture gradually shifts to the passengers in the backseats}
- 33 . . .
- 34 Tamir: *Hhhey::: yesh li ra'ay::on (.) ani- (0.7) kol hayeladim↓*
Hhhey::: I've an idea (.) I- (0.7) all the children↓
 ((*both wrists move horizontally from left to right*))
na'ase milxama neged ima, gam saphta ti'ye
 37 *itanu, ve'ima tilaxem levad↓* ((*gesturing with body forward*))
 will do a war against Mom, Grandma too
 will be on our side, and Mom will fight by herself↓
- 38 Tom: =*eze min ra'ayon zhe? Tamir, eze min ra'ayon zhe?*
 =What kind of an idea is this? Tamir, what kind of an idea is this?
- 39 Xaya: *kulanu le'ota matara °°ma, ima shelax ba'a levad?°°* ((*unclear words*))
 All of us for the same cause °°so, your mother is coming by herself?°°

Right after Ronit's playful "ennaahhh" (previous section), Xaya, persistent in her efforts to engage Bella in the front seat, intervenes with a direct address aimed at Bella (line 29). Xaya is trying to calm her daughter-in-law, the driver, suggesting that "it's not worth the energies." The (ten seconds) long pause in crossover interaction, i.e. between front and back seats, the gradual turn of the camcorder from the front space to the backseats, and little (undecipherable) interaction between the adults in the front seats, suggest that Xaya is successful in this intervention.

Yet now it is the turn of another family member — Tamir, who has not participated in the dispute thus far, to pick up on the resistive thread. Tamir suggests explicitly that the children seated in the backseat should launch a "war" against their mother (lines 34–37). The point of interest here concerns his hand movement, or more accurately the wrists' gesture, which he performs (Figure 3, below). As his body (waist and shoulders) is tightly fastened to the booster-seat, his wrists accomplish a sweeping lateral movement in a direction from left (Tom) to right (Ronit). This occurs while he is saying "all the children" (after a self-repair, where he alters the form of the pronoun from single to plural). This gesture is significant because of its wide lateral movement, which

indexes the spatial fact that the “backseat is united,” and which could have been produced *only by someone sitting in the middle of the backseat* (that is, between passengers), which is precisely Tamir’s spatial location within the car’s sitting arrangement.

In this way Tamir assumes his place in the car — where he is the only passenger sitting in-between passengers, and in the family — where he is the middle sibling, by partaking in the ensuing interaction through “overlaying” familial organization with spatial coordinates of the car’s inner spaces. His gesture, as well as his position, can be appreciated in Figure 3 (below), from which we can learn that both Ronit’s and Tom’s orientations converge on Tamir’s reflexive gesture. This Tamir accomplishes by patiently waiting for the camcorder’s gradual shift back into the backseats (which took approximately ten seconds), and then ceasing the opportunity to perform in front of the camcorder’s lens when it is facing in his direction.



Figure 3. “*All the children will do a war against Mom*”

Tamir’s words present an attempt to participate in the familial dispute and “o-space,” accomplished via an interactional structure of crossover exchanges. His evocation is a tease, suggesting a disaffiliation with the mother and an affiliation with siblings and grandmother. Yet Bella does not reply, and instead he receives his brother’s critical reaction — a reprimand communicated via wide-wise communication — for raising an undeserving idea (line 38). In this

way, Tom, the older brother, performs his role as the “leader of the backseat,” and establishes symmetry with the grandmother’s role as the “responsible adult” in the front seat: both are the older family members in their respected subspaces, and both try to *retain the interactions to these subspaces*, that is, shift it unto widthwise communication.

The crossover response that Tom does receive comes not from Bella but from Xaya, who endorses his suggestion playfully and succinctly, advocating solidarity rather than discord (“All of us for the same cause”). Importantly, she swiftly (re)turns to engage Bella, through shifting from crosswise to widthwise interaction, which she accomplishes by addressing Bella directly while significantly dropping the volume of her talk, and by changing topicality to issues of “adult concern” (inquiring about Bella’s mother. Line 39). In other words, while the content of her response suggests solidarity in the car/with the back-seat passengers, she in effect successfully *separates* the interaction and engages Bella in the front space.

Thus, in the capacity of a “co-driver” who sits near the driver in the front seat, Xaya is persistent in her attempts to contain the mother-driver’s interactions to the front space, which is the adult space in the car. Note the similarity in the structure of her interventions on lines 29 and 39, as she repeatedly addresses the dispute in terms of the overall space of the car, yet and immediately shifting to engage Bella. As mentioned earlier, it is her way of participating in and helping with the collaborative ongoing achievement of driving the family-car. Indeed, when Xaya eventually manages to maintain widthwise communication with Bella, the familial dispute is virtually exhausted. At this point, a minute and half into the trip, the emotional negotiation of members’ move from the house to the car is complete, as members retreat to their personal transactional spaces.

4. Discussion

Situated within the paradigmatic shift to the study of automobility, this article “enters the car,” seeking to illuminate its interior spaces as socially animated, interactionally inhabited and collaboratively accomplished scenes. The article offers observations that address how the family-car in particular is inhabited, indicate that through sets of situated or emplaced activities, here in the shape of a dispute concerning the move from house to car, familial and automobile roles, actions, emotions and meanings co-emerge interactionally.

In the introduction, it was argued that Kendon’s (1990) F-formations model should be modified when attending to the interior space(s) of the automobile (and of nearly all vehicle transportation), where the basic arrangements do

not conveniently offer shared spaces of mutual orientation and communication, nor equal and direct access to the interactants and the car's resources. Recently, McIlvenny (2009) suggested a number of modifications to Kendon's F-formation system, which, although originating from a different context than that of automobility, share with this study a critical perspective on how places are institutionally and commercially set for people in general and for family members in particular. McIlvenny promotes the notion of a *D-formation*, which plays on the idea of a deformed and/or deforming space of and for sociability. In a D-formation family members' positions and (inter)actions are situated or emplaced in ways that restrict a symmetric access to other participants' transactional spaces (a prerequisite of the "o-space"). "A D-formation," McIlvenny (2009: 2026) holds, "is both an interactional and embodied formation, as well as a de-formation of the power relations of the F-formation system." It is suggested that cars' interior offer a D-formation of a specific arrangement: the actual sitting is that of a spatially sequential side by side arrangement (the number of rows can be reflexively increased: n-rows from the driver to the backseat).

Within this arrangement, family members co-operate in the joint effort of producing meaningful action and communication *and* collaboratively managing and accomplishing the very act of driving. The article shows that they do so by using and switching between widthwise and crossover orientations and interactions, which both enable and disrupt "o-spaces" in the front and/or in the back compartments — sometimes creating a shared, overall orientational space in the car. This is accomplished through changes of volume and tone, head orientation, the use of addresses, and whatever bodily gestures are possible for bodies that are firmly fixed to their places (usually head and arm movements). Of course, individual family members in the car also intermittently sustain and enjoy their personal transactional spaces, pursuing such activities as eating, playing, reading, and gazing outside.

Since the "school run" is an everyday family routine, we expectedly observe little attention paid to views and routes. Referring to argumentative sequences, Charles Goodwin (2006: 449) recently noted that, "[f]or parties involved in the dispute . . . the detailed structure of the talk in progress is a far more relevant and consequential environment for action than the SUV they are sitting in, the freeway, and the landscape that is passing by." This is true enough, at least as far as urban routes and views are concerned, yet the argumentative actions in the example above were produced in a *reflexive relationship* with the car's inner space(s) and were at the same time also contingent on the space(s) within which they are produced. In other words, the interactants' communicative moves accomplished coherence and meaning within the contextual configurations made available in and by the car's inner design (cf. C. Goodwin 2000: 1490). The point being that for people in the

car, the interior design is both given and emergent simultaneously, and its distinct (sub)spaces are functionally joined or disjoined by the interactants' actions.

While a number of recent studies on automobility focused on the individual-in-the-car, the social interior of the family-car teaches that at least some cars are animated and motivated by a number of people. What is said of the relations between individuals and cars — for instance in the following quote, “an intertwining of the identities of the driver and car generates a distinctive ontology in the form of a person-thing, a humanized car or, alternatively, an automobilized person” (Katz 1999: 33), can be interestingly rephrased in terms of a group of people — in this case a family. As family members simultaneously inhabit dual systemic roles, we see the emergence of the family within automobility, or vice versa — the automobilized family. Recent works have shown how different social organizations inhabit and produce the route and the drive itself (D’Hondt 2009; Haddington and Keisanen 2009; Laurier et al. 2008). In the present study, participation in driving-related activities and managing the automobilized family trip was subtle and roundabout, and took the shape of older family members who performed the role of maintaining the functionality of the family-car (in both front and back subspaces). For the Norman grandmother, who is also the mother-in-law and the person occupying the seat near the driver, exhausting the argument meant retaining the attention of the mother-driver to the front seat where and wherefrom the activities involved in driving are conducted.

Finally, the methodological and conceptual move into the family-car and the study of its social inhabitability by family members offers a wealth of research issues. The collaborative accomplishment of both family and automobile routines (such as the school run), the performance of familial power relations and authorities in the (context of) the family-car, and the relations between automobilities and families' leisure life are a few such issues that beseech detailed and contextualized inquiry in the future.

Notes

- * I am deeply indebted to Pentti Haddington, Tiina Keisanen, Maurice Nevile, and two anonymous reviewers for their many constructive comments to earlier versions of this article.
- 1. Note that while the unidirectional seat arrangement is shared by nearly all forms of transportation, the lack of possible leg movements of travelers is a characteristic of the sedan car. As D’Hondt (2009) recently noted, in public transportation the case is different, and the mobility of travelers (and personnel) is a prerequisite for its function as public transportation.
- 2. All the names are pseudonyms. The family was supplied with a draft of this article, which they read and discussed with the author, and agreed for its publication in the present form.

Transcription conventions:

CAPS	Louder than surrounding speech
°quite°	Quieter than surrounding speech
°°quieter°°	Considerably quieter than surrounding speech
stress	Syllable or word is stressed
<fast>	Faster than surrounding speech
<slow>	Slower than surrounding speech
[]	Speech overlap
. . .	Short segment that was not transcribed
He:::	Prolongation of sound
(1.3)	Silence, measured in seconds and tenths of seconds
(.)	Brief silence
hell-	Truncated word
↓	Lower pitch
↑	Higher Pitch
.	Terminating intonation
,	Continuing intonation
?	Question intonation
=	No interval between the end of a prior turn and the start of the next
((comment))	Transcriber's comments
{ }	Camcorder's orientation and movements

3. The data is taken from a country with right-hand traffic, where the driver seat is located on the left of the vehicle.
4. During *Purim* the tradition is to wear costumes and masks (a bit like Halloween), hence the wig. On this day, preschools are open although attendance is lenient.
5. Note that from where Ronit is sitting — diagonally from Bella, some direct view of her mother is possible; yet it is difficult to speculate if and what affect this direct view bears.

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