

CHAPTER 26

Disrupting Agents, Distributing Agency

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INTRODUCTION

One afternoon in Luang Prabang, Laos, I was gambling with three men over a game of pétanque. For the unfamiliar, pétanque is a game played like bocce or lawn bowling and it is a common way for people—especially men—to gamble in Luang Prabang.¹ On this day, I filmed as we played. Our game had drawn an audience of a dozen or so. The spectators lined the benches—some of them gambling, some of them just passing the time and enjoying the show. About an hour into the game, my teammate Bii began to take a shot when one spectator named Can² wandered from his seat on the bench and onto the court. Can then suddenly lifted his arms and screamed. Startled, Bii missed his shot. He glared at Can and barked accusatively, “You!”³ The audience burst into laughter and Can scampered back to his seat as the two exchanged threats.

Clearly, Can was trying to distract Bii and make him miss the shot. His scream was not merely a scream but an especially aggressive heckle in a match already brimming with trash talk. A few seconds after Can’s heckle, two audience members imitated Bii flinching in reaction: one man jerked his head, mimicking Bii’s shaking body, while the other commented, “He was surprised, all right, he went like this,” twitching his own arm to reenact Bii’s flinching arm.⁴

To everyone, there was no doubt that Can’s heckle had caused Bii to miss the shot, that it had affected Bii’s body and surprised him in ways beyond

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his control. But when I watched the video recording of the event, matters became less clear. Despite my repeated viewings, the recording showed no signs of Bii flinching. Instead, the evidence that Bii was startled resided entirely within Bii's and the spectators' own reactions. Bii had responded to the heckle in a manner implying it was effective and audience members had said that the heckle was effective, that it had made Bii flinch. While Can's scream was so loud, well-timed, and explicitly addressed toward Bii that it seems unlikely the scream did *not* affect Bii's shot, we cannot know with any certainty whether it did have an effect. Put another way, it is impossible to know whether Bii would have made the shot—which he only barely missed—had Can not screamed.

There is an inevitable and irresolvable uncertainty here; one that is, in fact, helpful to better understanding agency. Acknowledging that we cannot always know *what causes what* guides us to move away from conceptualizing agency in terms of moments of causality isolated from human interpretation. The question worth asking becomes not did Bii cause Can to miss the shot, but how did Bii and the spectators make this causal relationship—real or fictive—visible? In other words, how are causal relations understood and made apparent in interaction?

In this chapter, I explore the prevalence and subtlety of attributions of agency on the pétanque court. By unpacking a video recording of a different pétanque game, I show that a player can respond to a heckle such that, through his response, he helps to frame it as effective or ineffective. In other words, I show how people can retroactively attribute and (re)distribute agency through their responses to events. I argue that we should study agency not as a static, perspective-free property of the world (e.g., “In this moment of heckling, agency is distributed across three actors”), but as part of an ongoing semiotic process through which actors ascribe agency. To put it simply, this chapter argues for an interactional approach to distributed agency that treats the “distributed” in “distributed agency” as more verb than adjective.

(TELLING STORIES), DISTRIBUTING AGENCY

In his classic essay “Response Cries,” sociologist Erving Goffman has us imagine a man walking along a busy street. While walking, the man trips on a piece of broken sidewalk and catches himself. “Up to this point,” Goffman writes, “[the man's] competence at walking had been taken for granted by those who witnessed him . . . [but] his tripping casts these imputations

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suddenly into doubt. Therefore, before he continues he may well engage in some actions that have nothing to do with the laws of mechanics” (Goffman 1978:88–89). He might smirk to himself, signaling to any onlookers the uncharacteristic nature of the event, or “‘overplay’ his lurch,” suggesting he was playing the clown. Or perhaps he will “examine the walk, as if intellectually concerned . . . to discover what in the world could possibly have caused him to falter.”

These potential responses, as Goffman puts it, “tell stories to” the man’s stumble. In different ways, they guide how others view the stumble’s cause just as they guide how others conceive of the man, whether as “professional” or “drunkard.” The man’s “stories” point toward what caused the stumble and away from what did not (e.g., momentary clumsiness or inebriation). They serve to distribute and displace responsibility for the stumble.

This kind of “story”-telling abounds in interaction. People often signal what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur: the causes, effects, and agents that should be held responsible. While it might be tempting to dismiss these “stories” as folk understandings of agency or a cloaking of “real” causal relations, doing so would ignore the prevalence and importance of “stories” in social life. These “stories” are the means through which agency is established, communicated, and negotiated in interaction. They are often not just depictions of causality but also the evidence of it. Take Goffman’s example of the tripping man “overplaying” his stumble. Where does the stumble end and the exaggeration begin? Drawing such a line—while sometimes satisfying—only lures us into the false premise that causal processes (i.e., the stumble) and attributions of causality (i.e., the exaggeration) are necessarily distinct in time and space.

That is, it is sometimes impossible or at least unproductive to distinguish the “stories” that attribute responsibility for causal processes from the processes themselves. Many of the “stories” people tell are not narratives but wordless acts—smiles, looks, exaggerated falls—that blur doing and display—actions doubling as interpretations.⁵ Of course, “stories” *can* be separate in time and space from the acts they depict. For example, a stumbling man can say “That was funny” after he has tripped instead of overplaying his lurch while in the midst of tripping. “Stories” can also vary in how they attribute agency: referentially explicitly, tacitly, et cetera. As I show below, even an act as small as a pétanque player ignoring a spectating heckler can tacitly deny that the heckler is responsible for a missed shot. Ultimately, however, how one tells a “story” matters, as different methods of attributing responsibility can have different interactional effects and different consequences for how agency is distributed.

Saj jaa

What I have been calling “heckling” is what Lao pétanque players most often call *saj jaa*.⁶ *Saj jaa* literally means “to apply medicine” or “to dose” and it is a local label for actions on the pétanque court that disrupt and destroy the ability of others to focus, play properly, or control their bodies and minds. The trope is that *saj jaa* can affect its victims with the same efficacy that a pill cures a headache or a dose of methamphetamines keeps one awake. Although there is a range of techniques for *saj jaa*—being loud, standing too close, bickering about the score, telling an opponent he will miss his shot, even betting—the techniques all presumably share a goal:⁷ to disrupt the attention, focus, and calm of the targeted player; to affect his “heart;” and to make him lose, both the game and his cash.

All players are vulnerable to *saj jaa*, but most agree that some are more susceptible than others. The most vulnerable are said “not to have the heart for it” (*caj3 bòø-daj4*) or to be “weak-hearted” (*caj3 qòòn1*). They “tremble” (*san1 kathùan2*) in response to trash talk like “spring chickens” (*kaj1 qòòn1*) with “soft, porous skin” (*nang3 pùaj1*). Hecklers make them feel “angry” (*caj3 haaj4*) and “rushed” (*caj3 hòòn4*, literally, “hot-hearted”), and they play poorly as a result. Those better at resisting *saj jaa* are said to have stronger, more capable hearts (*caj3 khaw2 daj4*). They are tough and inured, like “experienced, older chickens” (*kaj1 kêê1*) with “tight, rubbery skin” (*nang3 niaw3*) and stay “calm and cool” (*caj3 jèn3*, literally, “cool-hearted”) under pressure, allowing them to play their best. A strong heart, as one longtime pétanque coach told me, is a key trait in good athletes. Being invulnerable to *saj jaa* is, thus, both valued and valuable.

While players are sometimes said to be habitually “hot” or “cool-hearted,” the terms “hot” and “cool-hearted” are also used to describe transitory emotional states.⁸ People often comment upon how others appear to be feeling. Does he look “cool” and relaxed, or does he seem “hot” and distracted? Observing players’ emotional states like this can provide valuable information. For example, take a moment from a money-gambling game: a player rushed his way through multiple shots and his opponents howled and heckled after each poor shot. Seeing this, one spectator remarked to his friend, “Don’t bet on him, he’s hot!”⁹ Monitoring a player’s emotions can also inform a heckler’s use of *saj jaa*. As one man put it, a good pétanque player should observe his opponent’s “heart” to map out his weaknesses and discover what kind of “dose” might best affect him.

One way a player can display his “heart” is in his responses to *saj jaa*. These responses also can display his autonomy as an agent. If a player maintains a “cool heart” in the face of medicine, he is likely to be seen as

unaffected by the medicine, and thus, as a relatively autonomous agent.¹⁰ By contrast, if he gets “hot” when given a dose of medicine, he is likely to be seen as being affected by the medicine.¹¹

On the whole, *saj jaa* invites those witnessing and experiencing it to discuss and, perhaps interpret, what has happened in causal and agentive terms. Once it is clear a heckler has used medicine and that the player has perceived it, the player’s next action is liable to be taken as a sign of the extent of the heckle’s efficacy. His next action then becomes not merely another action but a reaction to (or, in semiotic parlance, an *interpretant* of) the heckle. This phenomenon—where a sign frames a subsequent action as a reaction—is common in discursive interaction. Let’s say, for example, that someone asks you, “What’s up?” and it is clear you have heard and understood her; if you stay silent, she is likely to take your silence not as simple inaction but as a cold “response,” as a noticeably absent, unfilled pause and perhaps as a hint not to bother you.¹² Similarly, once it is clear that medicine has been applied and that a player has perceived it and missed his shot, questions tend to present themselves: Why was the shot missed? The general ebb and flow of the match or distraction?¹³

How a player responds to a heckle often answers these questions (whether tacitly or explicitly). Ignoring a heckler entirely is paradigmatically “cool.” It can be a sign that a player is not distracted, but it can also serve as a tool for maintaining his focus. Much like taking notes during a lecture can help the note taker pay attention while also displaying focus to others, not looking at, or not responding to, a distraction can help one concentrate while simultaneously displaying concentration to others. Not ignoring the heckler, in contrast, is paradigmatically “hot.” Talking to or looking at a heckler, for example, is often taken as evidence that his medicine is working.¹⁴ Because of this, players often tout ignoring the heckler as the ideal. As one player put it, “No, [I never respond to hecklers]. [When I play], I’m not interested [in medicine]. That’s me. I pay attention to [the shots I take] and that’s it. I’m not interested in anything [else].”¹⁵

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE PLAYING WITH?”

I now turn to an example in which a player ignores his heckler and, in doing so, tacitly distributes agency. Taa, a man in his late thirties, is playing pétanque for money against Phuumii, a man in his forties. During the game, Phuumii repeatedly uses medicine on Taa, while Taa mostly ignores him. Below I present two transcripts of the event: one a more traditional interlinear transcript familiar to linguistic anthropologists, the other a

more cartoonish transcript, created by loosely outlining screenshots of my video recording of the event.¹⁶ I then walk the reader through these transcripts and show how Taa’s seemingly minute actions serve to distribute agency on the court.

But first, a basic outline of the event. It is late morning and I am filming on one of Luang Prabang’s money-gambling pétanque courts. Taa and Phuumii are playing in front of an audience of about a dozen.¹⁷ The audience members are scattered at the edges of the compacted-dirt court: some lean against nearby trees, others sit on wooden benches, and a few lounge on a newly acquired couch. They watch Phuumii and Taa’s game with varying degrees of focus and concern. Some are betting on the outcome and watch the game closely, while others chat casually.

Where my transcript begins, Phuumii is on the verge of defeat. He then makes a good shot and offers to bet Taa additional money. This offer to bet (Figure 26.1: 1) is, among other things, a dose of medicine¹⁸ and Taa treats it as such, rejecting it out of hand: “Hah . . . who do you think you are playing with?” (Figure 26.1: 2), he says. Taa then takes his shot and misses (Figure 26.2: 3). His miss seems to encourage Phuumii, who now even more enthusiastically offers to bet him. Taa ignores Phuumii’s offers and makes his second shot.

To summarize, during this short segment of interaction, Taa misses his first shot and makes his second, Phuumii heckling both times.

Taa’s disengagement from Phuumii “tells a story to” his first missed shot and to Phuumii’s heckles. The “story” is that Phuumii did not make Taa miss, that he has not gotten into Taa’s heart. As is often the case, Taa tells this “story” not through explicit comments but with a series of movements, cries, and partially addressed utterances.

As mentioned above, throughout this entire segment of interaction, Taa directly addresses Phuumii only once (Figure 26.1: 2), with a softly spoken response to Phuumii’s offer to bet: “Hah . . . who do you think you are playing with?” With this retort, Taa treats Phuumii’s offer as a frivolous kind of *saj jaa*, meant to distract him and make him shoot poorly rather than put more money on the line; in reminding Phuumii who he is playing with, he dismisses and rejects Phuumii’s offer out of hand. And while this response is addressed to Phuumii, there is some evidence that Taa is still not fully engaged with him. He does not look at Phuumii as he speaks but stares straight ahead at the pétanque balls.¹⁹ Taa also speaks much more softly than Phuumii, an incongruence that suggests an interactional distance between them. This partially oriented rejection of Phuumii’s offer foreshadows what is to come: Taa’s complete lack of engagement with Phuumii.

1	Phuumii	iin5 play	khanéén2 Point	qaw3 take	bò1 NEG	As he says this, Phuumii walks toward the other end of court, Taa steps into the spot where he will throw from.	
2	Taa	béén4 semen	tii3 Hit	kap2 with	phaj3 who	Taa lines up to throw at the pétanque ball. He watches the ball as he speaks, smiling slightly toward the end of his utterance. He does not look at Phuumii.	
3	Phuumii	iin5 Play	khanéén2 Point	bò1 NEG		Phuumii continues walking toward the other end of court and glances back at Taa.	
4	Taa					Taa takes a shot that eventually misses his target.	
5	Phuumii	iin5 play	khanéén2 Point	bò1 NEG	Taa Taa	Phuumii begins to speak as the ball is sailing through the air.	
6	Taa	qoo CRY				Taa says this immediately after his missed shot lands.	
						"Oh!"	
7	Phuumii	iin5 Play	khanéén2 Point	bò1 NEG	Taa Taa	Phuumii forms a pointing handshape with his right hand and oscillates it back and forth, rapidly. He begins to lean in close to the already thrown pétanque balls.	
8	Phuumii	tii3 Hit	nuaj1 Ball	ni4 DEM	haa5 5	Phuumii leans in closer toward the already thrown pétanque balls and points at the target ball. He then circles his hand around to show where the "five points" are coming from.	
9	Phuumii	hee4 CRY				Phuumii moves back from the target ball's area as Taa winds up to take his shot.	
						"Hah!"	
10	Taa					Taa takes a successful shot	
11a	Taa	bii3 little.ball	paj3 Go			[This line co-occurs with 11b]	
11b	Phuumii	hee4 CRY					
12	Taa	qoo CRY	jaan4 scared	thuuK5 hit	bii3 little.ball	qaq1	As he says this, Taa walks toward the other end of the court and briefly glances at Phuumii. Phuumii does not look at Taa.
							"Ohhh, [I was] scared of hitting the little ball."

TRANSCRIPTION 26.1

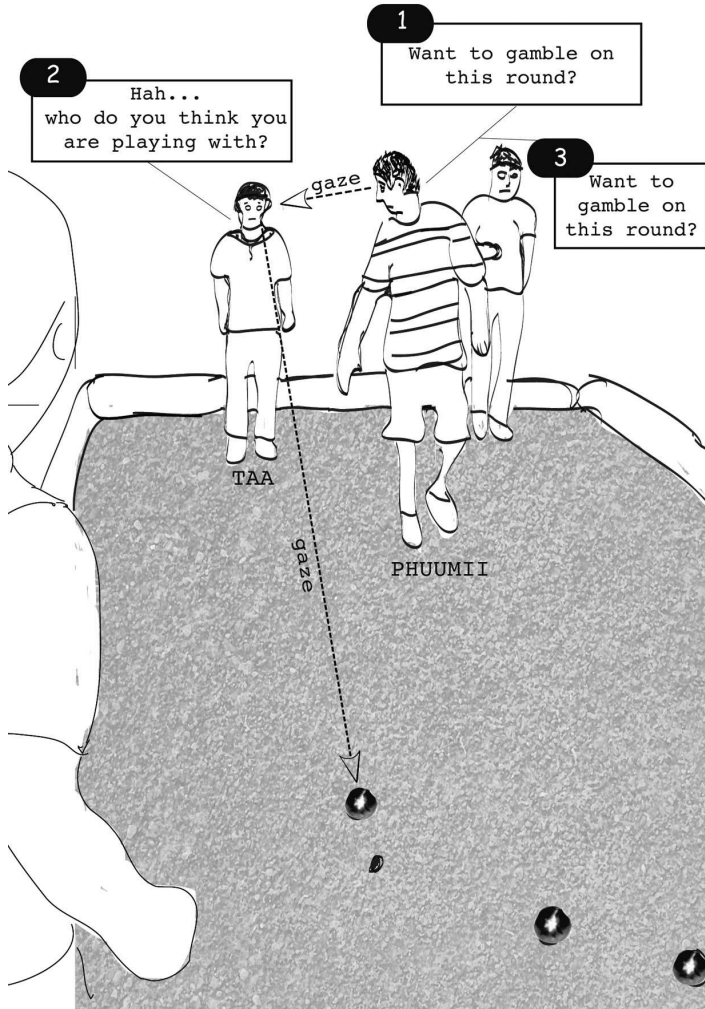


Figure 26.1 Scene 1.

From lines 3 to 11b, Phuumii addresses Taa multiple times but Taa never engages him. As Phuumii becomes more animated, Taa stares only at the pétanque balls. When Taa does talk, he seems to address the court generally, rather than Phuumii. Take, for example, his frustrated cry, “Oh!” in line 6. This cry happens immediately after the miss and is apparently a reaction to it. It suggests Taa’s surprise and seems to be a kind of “self-remarking,” addressed to no one in particular (Goffman 1981b:97).²⁰ That this frustration is not addressed to Phuumii distributes responsibility for

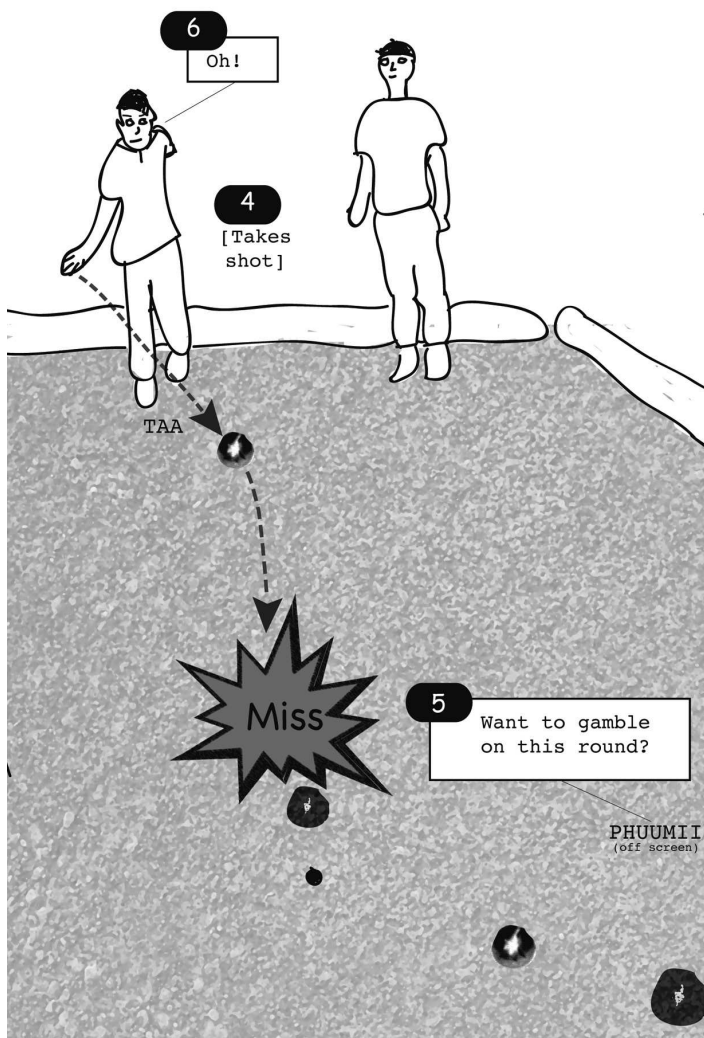


Figure 26.2 Scene 2.

the miss through a kind of negative evidence: Taa is frustrated at something for making him miss, perhaps himself, but not at Phuumii.

At every turn, Phuumii meets Taa's aloofness with exaggerated engagement. In lines 7–8 (Figure 26.3), Phuumii encroaches on the space that Taa is going to throw toward (and where Taa is looking) and points to the target ball. Phuumii's pointing gestures hover over where the pétanque balls sit, invading Taa's line of vision. Phuumii shouts at Taa and lies to him: he says

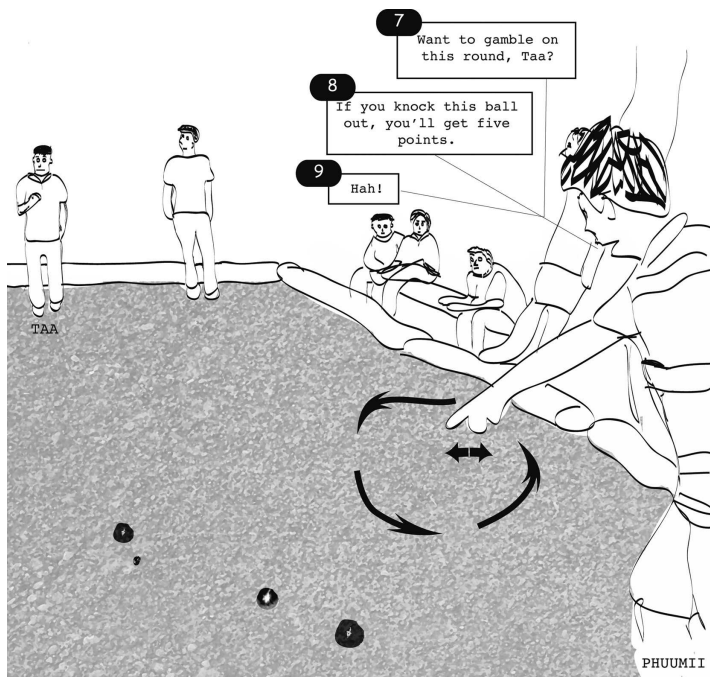


Figure 26.3 Scene 3.

that if Taa can knock the target ball off the court, he will score five points, which is not true. Phuumii floods the court with stimuli addressed to Taa, and retreats from where the pétanque balls sit only just before Taa takes his shot.

During Taa's second turn in the game (Figure 26.4), when he successfully hits the target ball, he continues to ignore Phuumii and again does several things that tacitly attribute responsibility for his initial missed shot to himself and not Phuumii. For example, as he throws his ball and it flies through the air, he and Phuumii yell simultaneously: Taa yells, "[Knock] the little ball [out]!" (line 11a), and Phuumii yells, "Hah!" (line 11b). Phuumii's "Hah!" again floods the court with stimuli directed toward Taa. Taa's shout, in contrast, works more subtly: in this situation, Taa would not want to knock the little ball, also called the jack, out at all (as this would score him fewer points than if he knocked his target ball out); he is thus shouting a kind of anti-wish, expressing what he does not wish to happen. Anti-wishes like this are not uncommon on the pétanque court and function to anthropomorphize and challenge Taa's pétanque ball as it flies through the air; perhaps akin to telling a problematic copy machine, "Jam again, I dare you."²¹

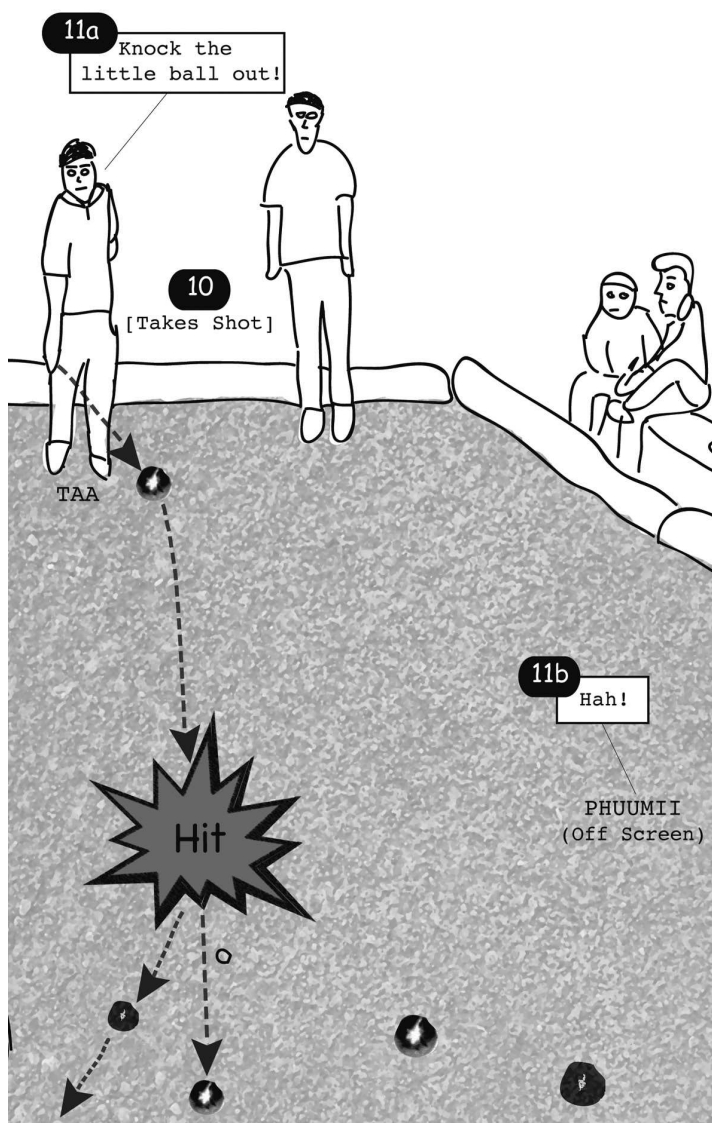


Figure 26.4 Scene 4.

When Taa does make his shot (Figure 26.5), he walks back to the other end of the court and says (line 8), perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek, “Ohhh, [I was] scared of hitting the little ball.” As he says this, and for the first time in this segment of the interaction, he briefly glances at Phuumii. Like much of what Taa has done, this utterance implies the ineffectiveness of Phuumii’s



Figure 26.5 Scene 5.

doses. Even though Taa might not actually have been “scared of hitting the little ball,” his utterance nevertheless functions to foreclose the interpretation that he was scared of, or even attending to, Phuumii’s talk—he was scared only of hitting the little ball. This utterance also seems to explain away Taa’s first, missed shot. Perhaps, it implies, Taa had missed that shot because he had overcompensated in fear of hitting the “little ball.”

That Taa successfully made his second shot helps him tell a “story” about his first, missed shot. Because Phuumii heckled Taa during both shots, Taa’s ability to make his second shot while being heckled implies that the cause of his first, missed shot, was something other than heckling.

In the interaction as a whole, Taa and Phuumii are talked about, and treated as, different kinds of agents. While Taa comes off as cool and in control, Phuumii exhibits a kind of frantic “hotness” aimed at sensorial overload. During my research stint more generally, I noticed that Phuumii tended toward such states; others said so as well. During this game, in fact, a number of spectators commented on the ragged state of Phuumii’s heart. One man shouted out, for instance, just before Phuumii was offering to bet Taa and the above interaction began, that Phuumii’s heart was “confused” and “disordered,” that he “couldn’t even sit still.”²² Later during the game, Phuumii was again accused of losing his cool. He had just shouted

and missed a shot when a spectator called out that in using medicine on Taa, Phuumii had dosed himself instead. Like a chemist organizing dangerous chemicals and accidentally spilling them on his skin, Phuumii was falling victim to his own medicine.²³ According to the spectator, Phuumii was an agent of self-destruction, “hot” and uncontrollable. Of course, ascriptions of agency and responsibility like these can in and of themselves be effectual. In saying Phuumii was “hot,” the spectators were perhaps themselves “dosing” Phuumii; compare the frustration one feels when repeatedly told to “calm down” during an argument.

CONCLUSION

“Stories” are told not only on pétanque courts. Much like a man stumbling on a sidewalk can “tell a story” about why or how he tripped, people—with varying degrees of explicitness—often frame what has happened and who is responsible. This sometimes has serious consequences. As it does, for example, in a court of law, often the most ritualized and important venue for attributing agency. Take the state trial of the officers who beat and brutalized the late Rodney King, which resulted in the officers’ acquittal. In the trial, the defense used a number of visual and linguistic devices to guide how people viewed the video of King’s body being beaten. As Charles Goodwin (1994:621) writes, the video of the beating was framed such that “a rise in King’s body [was] interpreted as aggression, which in turn justifie[d] an escalation of force [by the officers]”. In this case, the defense “told a story” about the beating, and attributed responsibility for it to King, not the officers. They presented King’s writhing body not as the victim of the officers’ force, but as the entity with agency, in control of the situation.

If we take attributions of agency seriously, some dimensions of agency rise to the fore. First, attributions of agency are often contested. People can and often do disagree about who or what is responsible for an act, and, thus, about how agency is distributed (see Hill and Irvine 1993). Furthermore, some people may be better at telling their “side of the story,” because actors have differential access to authority and the resources to represent agency (e.g., legal training, ownership of a projector, etc.—see Kockelman 2007 and Kockelman this volume for a discussion of the agency of representation itself). Would Taa’s “story,” for instance, be as convincing if he had not made his second shot? Second, “stories,” or whatever we might want to call attributions of agency, often distribute agency differently across time and space. That is, agency and the distribution of agency are interactionally

emergent, not fixed properties of things or people. Third, agency is often attributed gradually. That is, the attribution of agency is not an all-or nothing-act; people can be held responsible to different degrees. And, fourth and finally, causality—and what we might call agency²⁴—can be distributed to groups or dimensions of humans other than biological individuals and to things we might not typically consider “agents.” In pétanque, for instance, players and audience members often attribute responsibility for a missed shot to a variety of things: slippery pétanque balls, stray bottle caps, poorly placed stones, bad luck, inebriation, et cetera.

Following this approach, the relevant question becomes not so much who is responsible for what, but, how does responsibility emerge interactionally, how is it distributed, and how might these distributions be negotiated and contested?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1. Because of limitations in space, I am here not addressing the way in which the game fits into broader life in Laos—its sociological, economic, and historical context, its gendered dimensions, the discourses about its unseemliness, and so

- on. These topics are, obviously, hugely important to fully understanding what is happening on the court. Note, too, that all of my examples come from games in which men are playing for money (as opposed to beer, which is also often gambled).
2. This name, along with all the other names of players in this chapter, is a pseudonym.
 3. In Lao, “*caw4 nii4 naq1*.” For transcription of Lao in this paper, I am following the system outlined in Enfield (2007).
 4. In Lao, “*tùun1 qoo1 con3 vaa1 hêt2 cang3 sii4 lee2 mùu4 kii4 naq1*.”
 5. See Duranti (2004:454) and Hill and Irvine (1993) for discussion of the discursive construction of responsibility and the relation between responsibility and evidence. Generally, the argument in this chapter builds on some prevalent arguments in linguistic anthropology concerning “metapragmatics” and “reflexivity” (e.g., Silverstein 1993). Others, especially Ahearn (2010), have built on these arguments somewhat differently. Note that, in contrast to some classic statements on agency from Ahearn (2001) and Duranti (2004), and in line with the work of the editors of this volume, my argument moves beyond a primary focus on grammatical categories (e.g., ergatives) and explicit framings of agency to include the alleged suburbs of language: gesture, gaze, and so on.
 6. *Saj1 jaa3* is a verb, and the nominal form is *kaan3 saj1 jaa3*. For ease of reading, I will refer to it as simply *saj jaa*, without tone markers.
 7. This is a slight simplification, because sometimes actions that could be considered medicine are claimed to be “only a joke.” In the final analysis, what counts as *saj jaa* is, like agency, negotiated in interaction.
 8. For further discussion of “hot” and “cool” heartedness in a similar context, see Cassaniti (2009).
 9. Emotional moments like this shape players’ reputations, but, of course, reputations are not merely an aggregate of these moments. Some moments are inevitably more lasting, salient, or important than others.
 10. Or at least autonomous vis-à-vis the heckler.
 11. Note that this is a simplification for multiple reasons. First, people can interpret these signs in very different ways. Second, the distribution of agency is often gradient. Players or audience members can, for example, downplay a heckler’s agency by saying the heckler “joked just a tiny bit,” implying the missed shot was due to the player’s heart, not the strength of the medicine used. In contrast, people can characterize medicine as being so powerful that anyone would be affected. In fact, this is what happened later in the interaction between Bii and Can when Can screamed in Bii’s face. The scream was so intense, people said, that of course Bii was affected, no matter the state of his heart.
 12. See the concept of “conditional relevance” for further discussion (Schegloff 2007:20).
 13. In regard to the ebb and flow of sports, I asked one man what he might say to calm a friend down who is feeling “hot-hearted.” He offered: “Don’t worry about whether or not you are going to make the shot, who could possibly make every shot in sports?”
 14. Of course, players do at times deny that a heckle is getting to them—sometimes explicitly—by directly engaging with the heckler.
 15. In Lao, “*bòd1 khòj5 bòø-son3 caj3 khòj5-qaq1 khòj5 tang4 caj3 khaw5 tang4 caj3 tii3 lèqø-kao-lêew4 khòj4 bòø-son3 . . . son3 caj3 ñang3*.”

16. These “cartoons” are not meant, in any sense, to be accurate portrayals of the people involved; in fact, their main appeal, besides the ease with which they can be read, is that they preserve anonymity as the drawings look quite different from the people they represent.
17. Although each player has a teammate, neither of their teammates talk during the course of this segment.
18. That is, Taa treats Phuumii’s actions as medicine, as should become clear below.
19. This is not unusual in sports, as players are generally expected to focus their attention on the game; cf. Goffman’s (1981a: 134–135; 1981b:112) notion of an “open state of talk.”
20. Nor is this discourse-oriented response cry generally used in situations in which one is scolding or chastising another’s actions, but instead, as Nick Enfield writes, it tends to be used as “a news receipt which expresses disappointment or concern” (2007:313).
21. Players often shout commands at the balls, addressing them with directives like “Stop,” “Go,” and so on. For some similar themes, see Benjamin Smith’s discussions of marbles and bad luck among Aymara children (2010:230; chapter 20 in this volume).
22. In Lao, “*cit2 caj3 . . . ñung3 ñaak5 leej2 nõq1 laaw2 bòø-saang1 juu1 lèq1.*”
23. In Lao, “*saj1 jaa3 khaw2 bak2 haajø-haaj4 lèq1 tuaø-qèng tòun1.*”
24. I do not have space to address this question here, but merely point the reader to the introductory chapters by Enfield and Kockelman of this volume and some popular arguments that deal with the possibility of nonhuman agents (Gell 1998; Latour 2005).

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