Multimodality

Jeff Bezemer

Multimodality: A Diverse Field
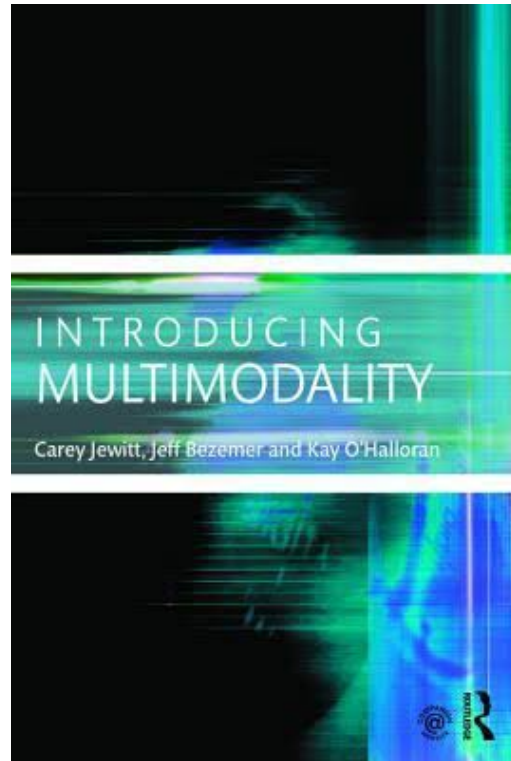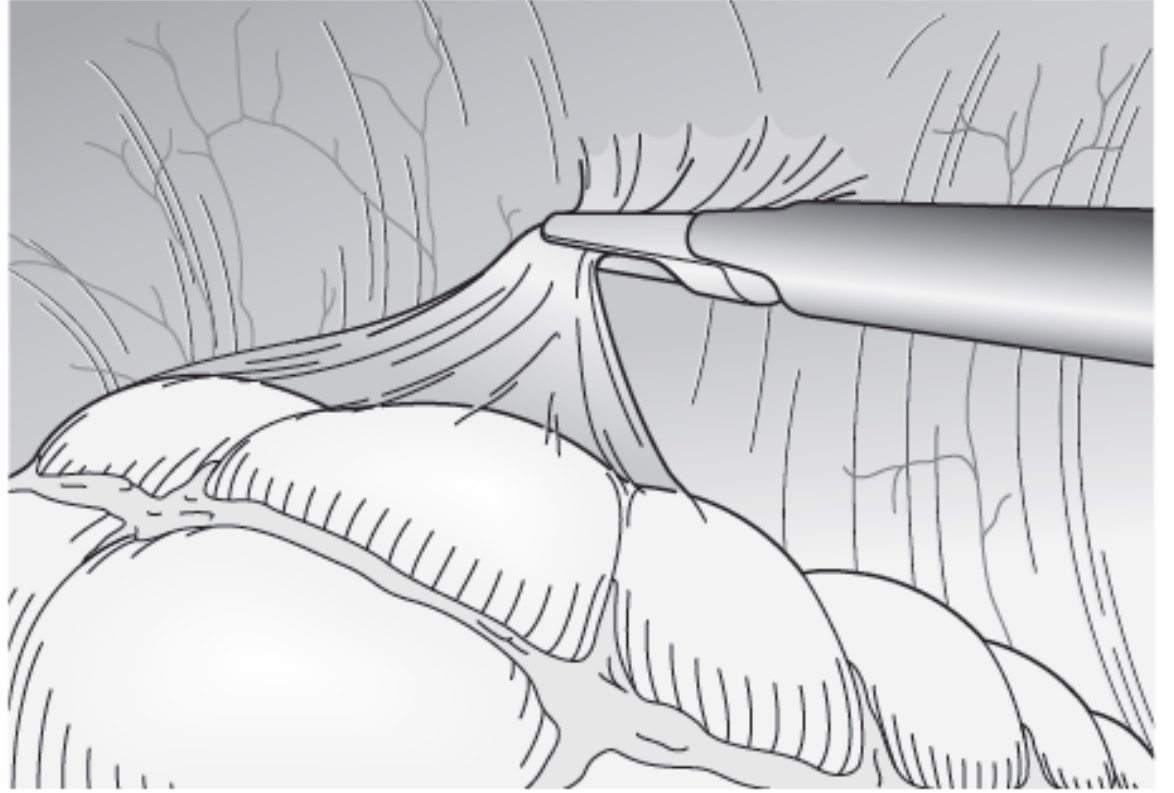
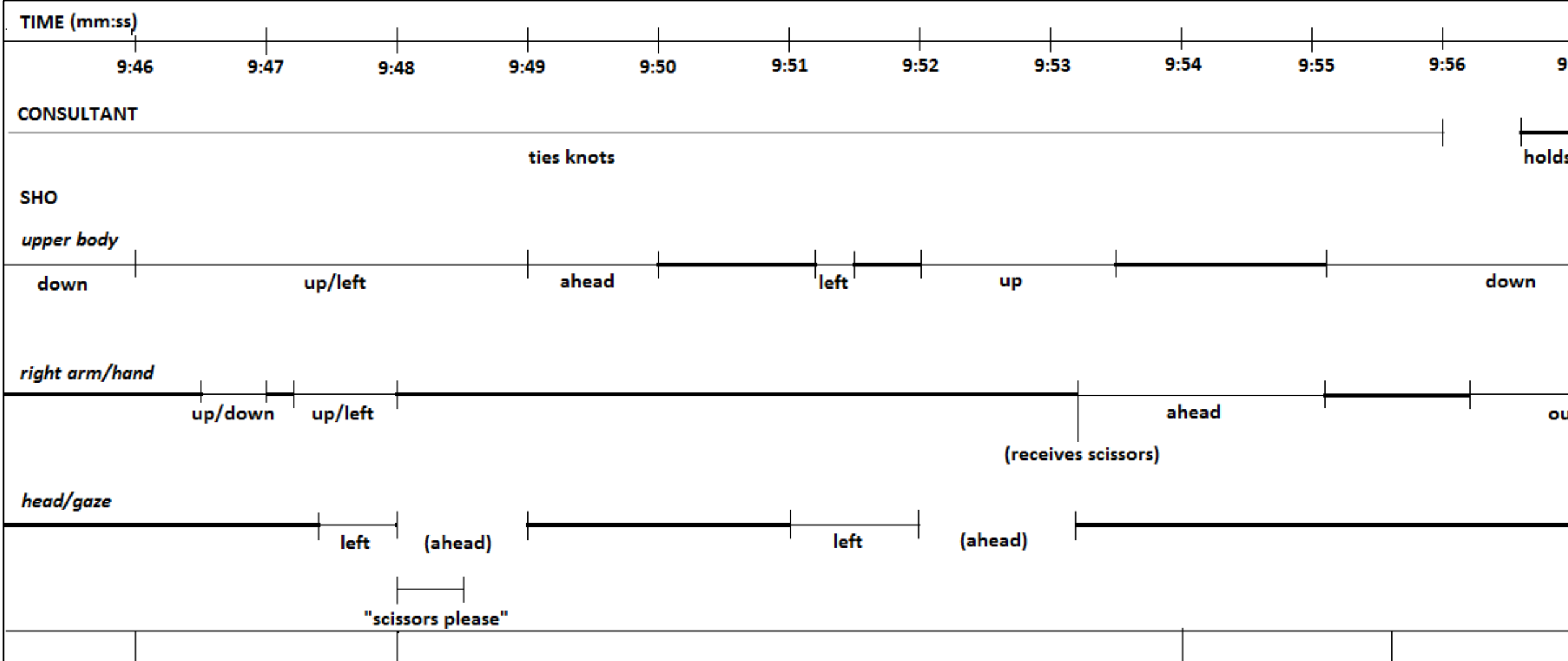|	*SFL*	*Social semiotics*	*CA*
Aims	Recognition of social functions of forms	Recognition of power and agency	Recognition of social order in interaction
Theory of meaning	Meaning as choice	Motivated sign	Sequentiality
History	European functionalism	SFL, critical linguistics, semiotics	American interactionism, ethnomethodology
Conceptualization of 'means for making meaning'	Semiotic resource, mode	Mode, semiotic resource	(Semiotic) resource
Example representatives	O'Toole, Martin, Unsworth, O'Halloran	Kress, van Leeuwen	Goodwin, Heath, Mondada
Empirical focus	Artefacts, including texts and objects	Artefacts, mostly texts	Researcher-generated video recordings of interaction
Method of analysis	Micro analysis of selected short fragments, corpus analysis, multimodal analytics	Micro analysis of selected short fragments, historical analysis	Micro analysis of (collections of) selected short fragments

INTRODUCING MULTIMODALITY

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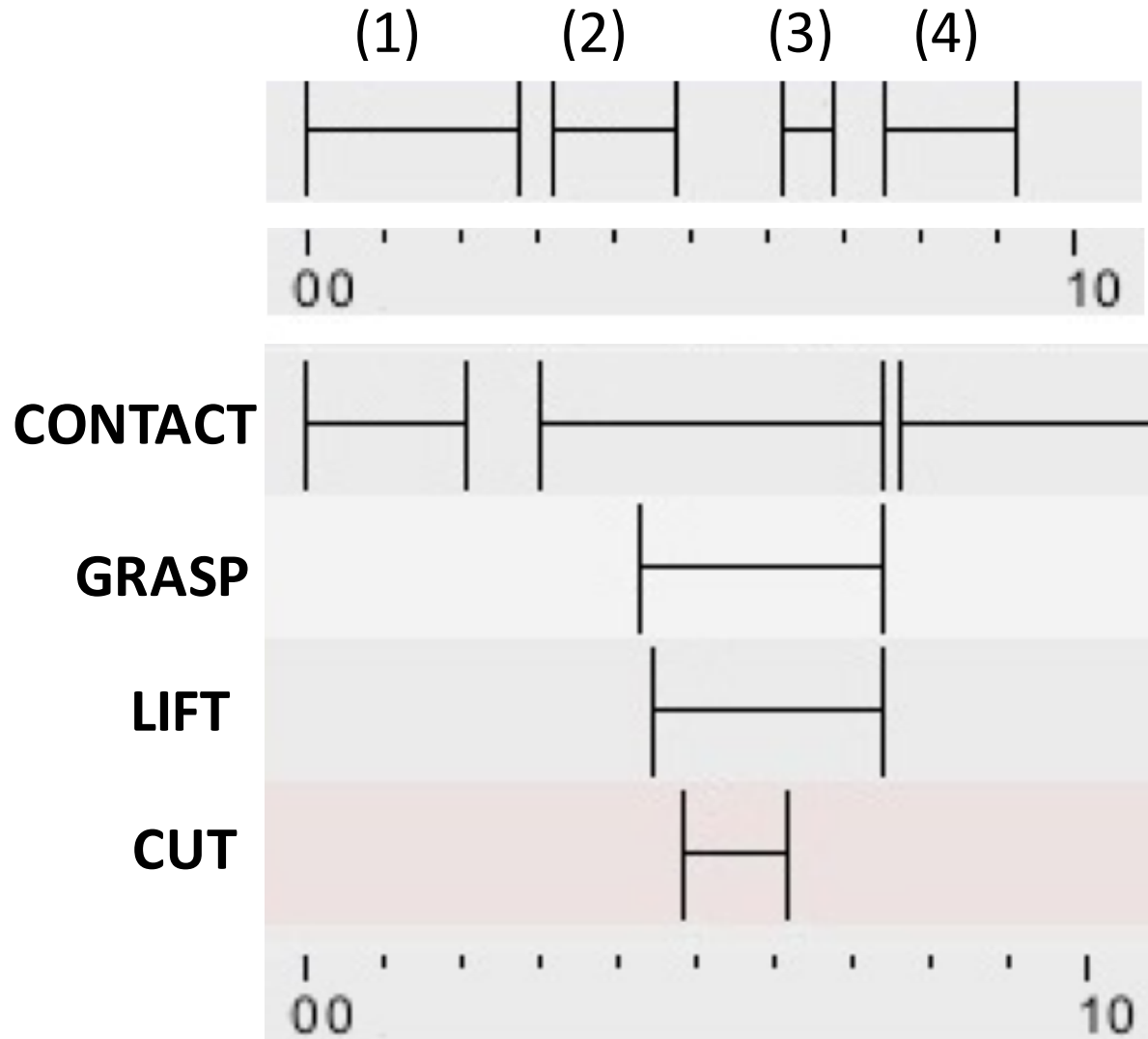
Some working assumptions

- We use a range of different 'modes' to express meaning (e.g. speech, gesture, image, writing)

- Each 'mode' has distinct semiotic resources, e.g. to realize 'intensity' (loudness in speech, extend of movement in gesture, weight in typography, saturation in colour)

- "By itself each set of semiotic resources is partial and incomplete. However when joined together in local contextures of action, diverse semiotic resources mutually elaborate each other to create a whole that is both greater than and different from any of its constituent parts." (Goodwin 2000:2)

- Modes are socially and culturally shaped; they developed in response to the needs of a community.

Reconsidering 'language' and other terms

- 'Language' is not the single most powerful mode

  "...there is nothing to indicate that there is any type of information that cannot be communicated by the sentences of a natural language." (Katz 1972)

  "language is the central and most important among all human semiotic systems" (Jakobson 1970, 455)

- I don't use terms like 'paralinguistic' and 'non-verbal' as they suggest that 'language' comes first

- I don't think it's helpful to describe all modes as 'language' (cf. 'gesture is part of language'; or: 'the language of music')

TIME (mm:ss)										
9:46	9:47	9:48	9:49	9:50	9:51	9:52	9:53	9:54	9:55	9:56

CONSULTANT

ties knots   holds

SHO

upper body

down   up/left   ahead   left   up   down

right arm/hand

up/down   up/left   ahead   ou

(receives scissors)

head/gaze

left   (ahead)   left   (ahead)

"scissors please"

(1) Just be a bit careful with the planes there. There are ureters and things.

(2) I'd go superficially. Yeah.

(3) As you're doing.

(4) Tha:t's the right plane.
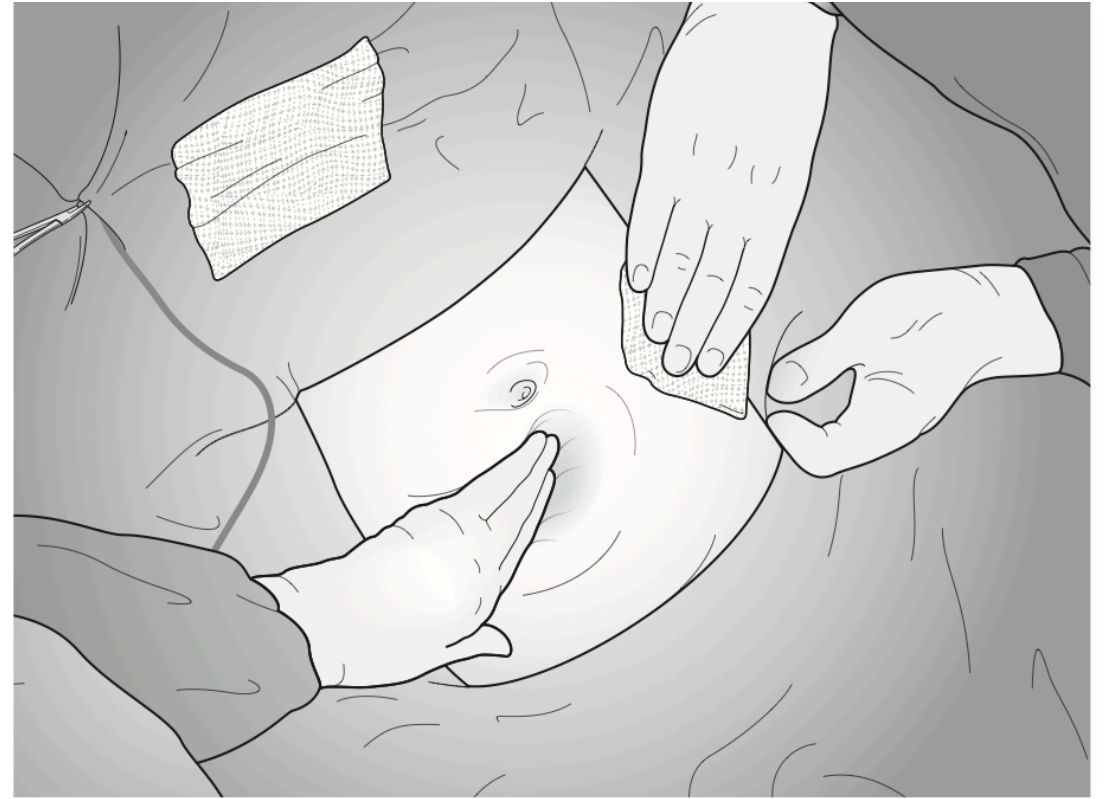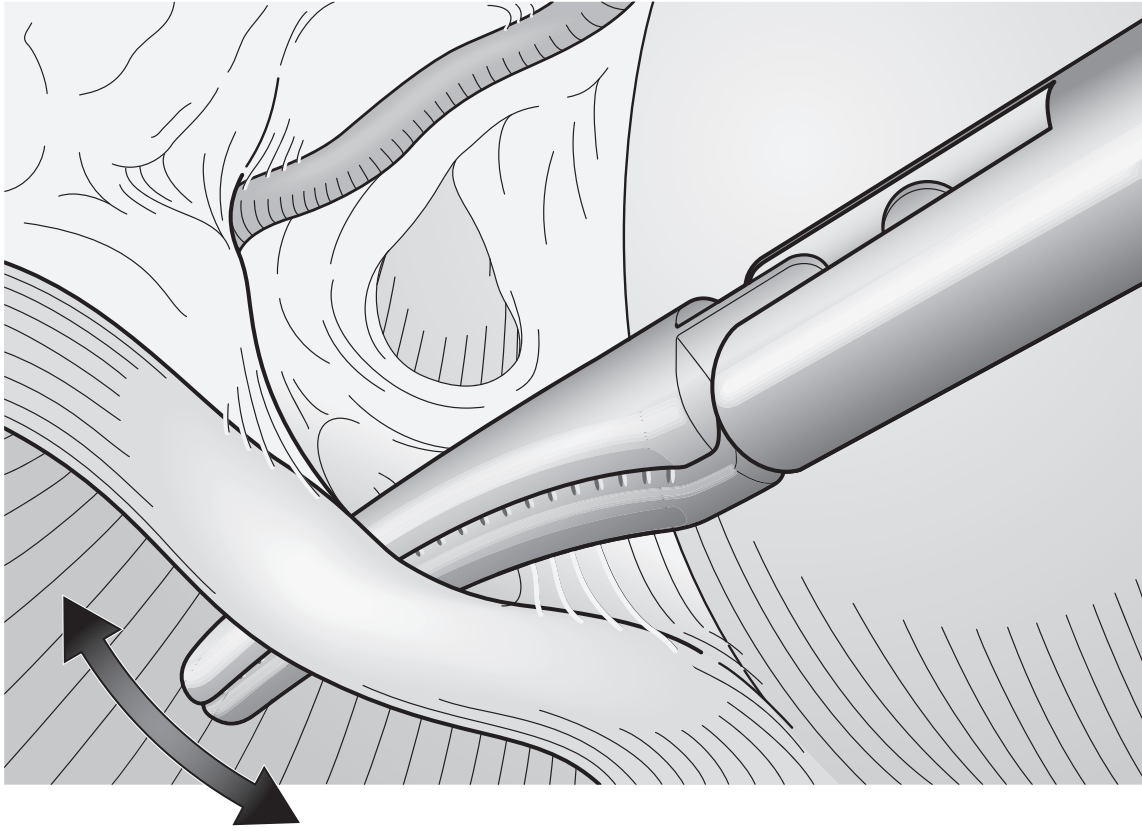
Drawing after still from video recording by Celia Roberts & Sarah Campbell

Some methodological considerations

- Making and gathering video recordings
  - Camera frame, angle
  - Producers: researchers or media

- Developing interpretations: how do you know?
  - Video: observable orientations/responses to prompts
  - Interviews and written reports: participants' post-event reflections
  - Dictionary vs situated meanings

- Method of transcribing video
  - What is included and what is excluded?
  - What is foregrounded?
  - What modes of transcription?