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# RITUAL TALK

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# RITUAL TALK

PHIL MANNING

*Abstract* The analysis of talk is important for Goffman's examination of the self in face-to-face interaction. Here I suggest that his target is best described as being our *ritual talk*. Goffman defined ritual in two ways: as the smooth running of everyday encounters and as the honouring of the selves who people them. He suggested that ritual talk is structured by both prevailing rules of social interaction and by the sequential organization of talk. However, on occasion he hinted that this account is too simple. I agree, and suggest ways of furthering his investigations.

## *Introduction*

In this paper I look at Erving Goffman's account of the way the self is displayed in everyday talk. I call this 'ritual talk' – an expression referring to the way talk can be used to accommodate and honour people. Individuals are accommodated by discretion and tact, and honoured by an array of passing exchanges. Talk of this kind exhibits the normative constraints which Goffman regularly exposed in a wide variety of contexts and activities, and to this extent ritual talk is rule-governed. However, it is remarkably difficult to specify the rules that govern ritual talk – a problem which, incidentally, plagued the formulations of Goffman's doctorate. Here I suggest a solution which is in the spirit of one of Goffman's later texts, *Relations in Public* (1971): the solution being *that ritual talk displays the rules of interaction governing conduct among 'ratified'<sup>1</sup> strangers*. By using this as a bedrock specification for everyday interaction, it becomes possible to see rule-breaking as a resource for affirming friendship. However, the resource is precarious and can backfire, as appropriate levels of rule-breaking vary between friendships, and all too frequently remedial work is required. Matters are made more complex by Goffman's distinction between the person and the self. By 'person' he referred to an entity of flesh and bone, by 'self' the claims projected on the person's behalf. These claims are, in Goffman's word, a person's 'footing', and we often project several selves during face-to-face interaction. The rule-breaking dilemma becomes even more complicated as people struggle to honour perversely the different and often competing selves of those around them. In his early work Goffman considered this dilemma in a paper concerning embarrassment. Much later he produced a kindred analysis of the performances of disc-jockeys, showing the ways in which they skilfully reduce themselves to single self beings in order to protect a prevailing definition of the situation. Radio talk provides valuable data about ritual talk because disc jockeys frequently project a friendly self which is obliged to treat strangers as if they were friends. Further, the hallmark of the professional disc jockey is the affirmation of friendship without recourse to ritualised rule-breaking. Disc jockeys have few resources with which to convey a sense of friendship, and yet somehow they succeed. And there is a further restriction to be considered: ritual talk

honours selves within the constraints issued by what Harvey Sacks called the 'machinery' of talk. This paper hopes to merge sequential studies of conversation with ritualistic ones in order to explore various presentations of self in talk.

### *Talk and Rule Following*

Goffman's interest in everyday talk stemmed from his doctoral dissertation, *Communication Conduct in an Island Community*, which began: 'This is a report on a study of conversational interaction' (1953:1). His particular concern during this study was to identify the conversational practices which occur in face-to-face interaction (1953:1), his assumption being that these must, in some sense, be 'rule-governed'. In the introduction to the doctorate he treated this awkward question cautiously, commenting:

When in the field, I tried to record happenings between persons regardless of how uninteresting and picayune these events seemed then to be. The assumption was that all interaction between persons took place in accordance with certain patterns... (1953:3).

The description of interaction as 'patterned' suggests something which is loosely habitual; it connotes a regularity without evoking more definitive ideas about 'rules of interaction', a formula which is vulnerable to the exceptional case. Definitive ideas of this sort were incompatible with his field observations: whilst writing *Communication Conduct* he discovered that however he stipulated rules of interaction there were occasions when rules could be broken in a communally approved way. A major problem for the thesis was to preserve the idea of following a normative rule despite the observation that the words 'following' and 'breaking' are often indistinguishable in social life. The absence of a clear distinction seems to entail the view that the everyday world is more or less chaotic – a suggestion contrary to most of our experiences of it. Towards the end of the second chapter he was less cautious about these matters:

Given the rules of the social order, we find that individual participants develop ruses and tricks for achieving private ends that are proscribed by the rules, in such a way as not to break the rules (1953:38).

This rather tortuous sentence describes what on other occasions he more elegantly called 'gain strategies'; but both formulations convey implicitly the misleading idea that social rules are external regulations which must either be observed or abused. However, in actual conversations it seems that abusing social rules is not only tolerated, it is often *demande*d. Much later in the doctorate he mentioned this curious phenomenon:

If rules of tact are followed, often boredom sets in. If rules of tact are broken, often embarrassment sets in. Apparently a fundamental source of involvement consists of the slight infraction of tactful rules... (1953:257).

Here a strange notion of rule-following is at work; indeed, perhaps the notion of rule-following is on holiday.<sup>2</sup> And yet this account is intuitively believable: the

problem is to explain the apparent paradox that whilst it makes sense to talk about both the rules of social interaction and about pressures to adhere to them, we typically follow rules by ignoring them in some way or other. Clearly this practice has little in common with rule-following in a game such as chess, since 'slight infractions' of stipulations such as 'bishops move diagonally' dissolve the game. By contrast, at the right time and place, infractions in social life enhance rather than undermine the activity. Is it, then, that the notion of the rule obfuscates analysis? Against this must be placed the appeal of many of Goffman's re-descriptions of everyday encounters, which show normative guidelines present in the most trivial exchange or outburst, even in apparently spontaneous 'spill-cries' such as *oops!* (1981:101–2). In this example the spill-cry denotes a minor failing and a temporary loss of control, which the vocal sound attempts to cover over whilst repairs are done. It also points to the tacit directive in public life to maintain silence – this being a show of deference to others present. So, rules of interaction seem to be everywhere – a thought which prompts another: where lies the *infertile soil*, if even a split second of talk contains ritual constraints? The success of his analysis of *oops!* raises the suspicion that all outbursts are impregnated with similar treasures. If so the task of cataloguing them will be never-ending, and cumulative work impossible.

The implication of this is that if the analysis of the ritual uses of talk is not going to limit itself to the citation of discrete examples, it must clearly distinguish rule following from rule breaking and then specify the rules in question.

Goffman's doctorate attempted to classify and describe both the rules followed by crofters on a Scottish island and the means by which they circumvented such rules.<sup>3</sup> This approach pointed to the complexity of conversational exchanges without raising the question of their precariousness. His admirable concern to delineate a field of study – that of face-to-face interaction – was too programmatic, the consequence being that instead of analysing pressures upon us to contravene social rules, he often bypassed this important detail. This simplification opened the door to such uninspiring claims as 'a person who breaks rules is an offender; his breaking of them is an offence' (1953:35). From this he proceeded directly to a taxonomy of rule breaking in conversation: good form but dull content.

Goffman's schemata of conversational practice were heavily dependent on the material he had to hand. Much later, in *Relations in Public* (1971), the rule-following skeleton of his doctorate was fleshed out with new supplies; conversational repair work. Examples of remedial exchanges presented him with a means of re-invoking his earlier insight that 'slight infractions' of everyday rules are often demanded by social encounters. Here, amongst the 'slop of social life' (1971:171), the details of remedial interchanges induced an overhaul of prior classifications.

Underlying remedial interchanges is 'the cross of personal character', evident in the simplest ritual dialogue:

A: Would you pass the milk?

B: Here.

A: Thanks. (1971:223,175).

A's offer of thanks is not only courteous, it also shows him to be alive to the fact that an infringement on B has been made. And structurally speaking, A's 'thanks'

also begins and ends a closing sequence to the conversation. Here, then, the slightest deviation from everyday rules is seen to produce remedial work. The sequence is ritualised, and attends in advance to the possibility of adverse reaction, a consideration often noted by a minimizing response by B such as 'it's okay' or 'no problem'<sup>4</sup> – another case, incidentally, of a ritual move doubling up as a structural one, since the emission will also be heard by A as closing the conversation.

The formality of this interchange provides a clue to the rule following dilemma which was somehow *missed* by Goffman himself. It seems that *rules of interaction outline the types of respect strangers have reason to expect of each other*. Following them, therefore, implies that those present are strangers and that the balance sheet of personal involvement and friendship is precisely nil. One of the ways in which we affirm different sorts of friendship is by showing that the ritual constraints owed to strangers have been suspended.<sup>5</sup> The infraction of everyday rules is a means of expressing and affirming relationships and, in certain contexts, to act otherwise displays an inappropriate level of formality. It is by these means that the infringement of structural constraints is put to ritual use; although the alarming consequence of this is that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish acts of conversational aggression from ritualised displays of affection. Producing this distinction requires an intricate combination of animation and bracketing, variations to which allow strikingly different interpretations of the same semantic strip of talk. With this in mind consider the following episode, which Goffman cited as an example of a 'devastating' comeback to an aggressive gambit:

A: Fuck you.

B: Man, you haven't even kissed me yet. (1971:216, footnote).

In context Goffman was right to interpret this episode as exemplifying rule violation amongst strangers. Here B handles an unsubtle onslaught with destructive humour. However, other interpretations of the episode are possible<sup>6</sup> and it is instructive to replay the exchange, hearing the conversational snippet not as aggression but as bravardery between friends. Now the first pair part 'Fuck you' is rather different, no longer a verbal attack but instead a demonstration of a friendship in which rules specifying apt occasions for swearing can be infringed. Literal understandings of aggression are inverted. B's reply is not, in these circumstances, an attack on A, but an affirmation that A was right to assume this level of intimacy, an exercise B nicely celebrates with an entertaining interpretation of A's exclamation.

Perhaps, then, the precariousness of talk, revealed most clearly by the prevalence of remedial work in conversation, attests to the difficulty of matching appropriate levels of rule breaking to the distinctive requirements of particular relationships.

In *Relations in Public* Goffman didn't suggest that the baseline for rules of interaction is a set of normative guidelines for regulating conduct between strangers. If he had he could have made progress with the dilemma of the indeterminacy of rule following in social life. Instead he presented a series of observations which skirt its rim, coming very close to the *strangers* solution at one point:

... a very limited set of ritual enactments are available for contrite offenders. Whether one runs over another's sentence, time, dog, or body, one is more or less reduced to saying some variant of 'I'm sorry'... After an offence has occurred, the job of the offender is to

show . . . that whatever happened before, he now has a right relationship – a pious attitude – to the rule in question – and this is a matter of indicating a relationship, not compensating a loss (1971:149, emphasis in original).

The emphasis on the way talk indicates relationships is the nub of the *strangers thesis*, and one solution to the troublesome question of rule following and rule breaking in social life.

In the next section I look more closely at the notion of the ritual self in Goffman's work. This will pave the way for a discussion of its reception amongst conversation analysts later in the paper.

### *The Ritual Self in Talk*

At different times Goffman proposed different definitions of the terms *ritual*, *self* and *talk*; sometimes he did this in the spirit of conceptual elaboration, sometimes as a way of marking a change of direction or focus. Caution is therefore required. In his *Face-Work* paper, written soon after the completion of his doctorate, he suggested that a ritual order is an accommodative process, in which people avoid discrediting information by an intricate assemblage of 'blindness, half-truths, illusions and rationalizations' (1967:42–3, orig. 1956a). Here the self is conceived as a shelter maintained by discretion and tact. We 'save face' because in everyday encounters 'there is much to be gained from venturing nothing' (1967:43), and by these means the precariousness of the social world is lent a little solidity. Underpinning this early account is the assumption that ritual is an amoral technique for the management of self; it lubricates the social machine so as to produce frictionless interaction. His 'Supportive Interchanges' paper, in *Relations in Public*, begins by defining ritual as 'a perfunctory, conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value. . . .' (1971:88). This is almost an about-turn on his previous definition, as it inserts morality into what was previously considered to be a matter of technique or competence. The justification for the to and fro between matters of morality (perhaps of honour) and competence is that there is

a functional relationship between the structure of the self and the structure of spoken interaction [which must be] pursued with ritual care (1967:36, orig. 1956a).

Taken together these two accounts of ritual suggest that the self is a *deity* of sorts, that it is itself the object of ultimate value which should be honoured. Another early paper concludes with precisely this thought:

. . . in one sense this secular world is not so irreligious as we might think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of some importance (1967:95, orig. 1956b).

These different senses of ritual can be wrought together to connote an accommodative technique and homage to a moral good, these two meeting up in Goffman's notion of the self. In the *Face-Work* essay he spoke of the 'ritual roles of the self' in terms similar to this, the self being expressed in the flow of events, as a

player in a ritual game, struggling to cope with 'the judgmental contingencies of the situation' (1967:31, orig. 1956a). In an excellent piece of exegetical work, Lofland has shown that, despite shifts of label, Goffman – in his early work at least – operated with two accounts of self: an official self, located and contained in a social situation, and an all-too-human-self, situated behind these 'ready-made' (Goffman 1961:88) role performances.<sup>7</sup>

There are no definitions of the word 'talk' in his early work, a strange omission. Later, in *Forms of Talk* (1981), he went to some trouble to distinguish our various uses of this word. His most general claim was that talk 'lodges' us in 'some sort of intersubjective, mental world' (1981:71). In *Frame Analysis* he defined talk slightly differently, as 'a rapidly shifting stream of differently framed strips. . . ' (1974:544) – a definition which questions the cohesion of any segment of talk by suggesting that different frames may be in operation.

These formulations are useful tools for analysing face-to-face interaction. However, their usefulness is limited by the ill-formalised notion of rule-following which underpins them. I want to suggest that this problem can be overcome by viewing interactions with *strangers* as bedrock specifications for rules of interaction. In the presence of strangers talk lodges us in an intersubjective world and provides, by its own hands, a means of honouring those around us with a vast array of small offerings and courtesies. We can ask a pedestrian the time and express abundant thanks, we can display civil inattention in elevators, respectfully marking the presence of others with silence, and we can apologise ahead of time for the minor intrusions we make. By these strategies we honour those we know only through proximity, expecting only reciprocity in return. In the presence of friends talk provides a means of affirming that these people are not strangers, an affirmation we perform perversely by dishonouring those around us, a license made possible by a reciprocally relaxed attitude to prevailing rules of interaction. The institutionalised rule breaking which is entailed here is, however, precarious, and the possibility of 'going too far' always exists. Hence no matter how intimate two people are, both maintain the right to reclaim the ritualised honour owed to them by the other; that is, both maintain the right to ask to be treated as a stranger.

But matters are yet more complex: the foregoing discussion has assumed that ritual honour or dishonour is something owed to an individual. But the word 'individual' is too clumsy a tool for detailed analysis. Instead it is necessary to distinguish the individual from the self, this distinction allowing us to allocate several selves to each individual, which in turn allows us to consider the different ritual honours or dishonours owed to each. In *Relations in Public* Goffman warned us that the words 'person' and 'individual' cover 'multiple sins of imprecision' (1971:23) and it was this issue to which his warning alludes. Failure to heed this may push analysis towards the *two selves thesis* at work in *The Presentation of Self*, and in perhaps all dramaturgical studies, in which the person is reduced to a manipulator behind a set of masks.

Important for this argument is an early Goffman paper about embarrassment. Distinguishing the self from the individual he made the following stab at explaining this strange phenomenon:

Because of possessing multiple selves the individual may find he is required both to be present and to not be present on certain occasions. . . . Embarrassment ensues: the individual



finds himself being torn apart, however gently. Corresponding to the oscillation in his conduct is the oscillation of his self (1967:110, orig. 1956c).

Embarrassment marks breaches in a person's conduct which somehow lessen or conflict with a prior sense of identity. Although there are many different types of embarrassment, each contains this component. Embarrassment is thus an excellent resource for research on the self. Here it highlights the importance and difficulty of successful rule-breaking in face-to-face interaction; the interactional problem occurring when an individual is unsure about what the correct response to an individual should be. Rules appropriate for one of the individual's selves seem inappropriate for another. For example, it is often difficult to consult a doctor who is also a friend. Typically we become embarrassed when a conflict of this sort is enacted in an encounter – a dilemma nicely highlighted by an unusual source: the failure of formal attempts to specify in advance rules of conduct. Practical resolution to interactional difficulties requires work irreducible to a formal structure of the kind, 'in this circumstance, do this!'. As is well known, Goffman sometimes held up one version of this kind of instruction book – etiquette manuals – as an exemplar of formal sociological description; but he knew that these are thin descriptions of our actual performances. The writings of Mrs. Emily Post and others are of some direct use to sociology, but their long term value will probably be an unintended one – to highlight the impossibility of providing a book of rules for etiquette which is akin to a book of rules for chess. Etiquette manuals cannot but ignore our manipulation of rules of interaction. The limited value of these manuals is disclosed in *Behaviour in Public Places*:

It is my feeling that the main drawback to using . . . [etiquette manuals] as data for social science is . . . that these books tend to provide a mere catalogue of proprieties instead of an analysis of the system of norms underlying these proprieties (1963:5 – 6).

This reflective element was emphasised in his earlier analogy between people and deities, where he suggested that individuals are viable gods because they reflect upon the significance of ritual (1967:95, orig. 1956b).

Our ability to manipulate norms of behaviour is a severe test of sociology's ability to describe even a single example of face-to-face interaction. Interpretation seems to rest instead on a non-formalizable and less tangible faculty, that of judgment. Goffman resisted this conclusion, choosing instead to insert the formalization of rules of social interaction as a *regulative ideal*. Consider this extract from his *Replies and Responses* paper:

However tortured the connection can become between last person's talk and current speaker's utterance, that connection must be explored under the auspices of determinism, as though all the degrees of freedom can somehow be mapped out, conceptualised, and ordered, somehow neatly grasped and held, somehow made to submit to the patterning-out effected by analysis (1981:72).

The threefold repetition of 'somehow' suggests that the connection between last person's talk and current speaker's utterance cannot be grasped under the auspices of determinism, cannot be mapped out, conceptualised, ordered and subjected to the patterning out effected by analysis. Nevertheless, he chose to avoid the

conceptual chaos which results when the aspiration towards this conceptual order is abandoned.<sup>8</sup>

Although he often parodied cumulative ambitions for the analysis of talk, likening them to attempts to construct a 'Pandora's box, Goffman was more of an architect than he was prepared to admit,<sup>9</sup> and it is on this front that his work is closest to the scientifically-minded conversation-analysts, to whom I now wish to turn.

### *The Cumulative Analysis of Talk*

Talk is one of the way in which we express and manufacture a sense of self, a task each of us achieves against a backcloth of shared expectancies, guidelines and *risk*. The importance of the last of these is attested by our willingness to cover over the interactional blunders of those around us, and by our subsequent tact about our tactfulness, a point noted in *The Presentation of Self* (1959:227 – 230).

Strangely, the honouring of ritual selves takes place under the aegis of our shared expectancies of how talk itself is made. These shared expectancies concern the ways in which we produce talk. At issue, then, is talk's structure. Following the pivotal work of Harvey Sacks, it has become common to refer to this production as a *machinery* which cranks out conversations and is used consciously or unconsciously by all competent members of speaking communities. Conversation analysts attempt to lay bare the nuts and bolts of the machine, showing in ever more detail just how finely tuned talk's engine is, and needs to be, to accomplish the work we set it. Only with the aid of hindsight and in the light of many empirical studies, can we see how imaginative Sacks was to realise that mundane talk is intricately patterned. In *Relations in Public* Goffman acknowledged this, saying: 'Sacks has been an originator in the close study of conversation sequencing, and I am much indebted to him' (1971:151, footnote).

His use of the indefinite article here silently recognises the contribution Sacks' co-workers, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. It is perhaps also a veiled attempt to include his own work under this mantle.

Conversation analysis opened up a more or less autonomous field of inquiry – naturalistic talk. This concerns itself with, so to speak, talk's machinery rather than with its mechanics; a distinction which enables a cumulative methodology to be forged out of Sacks' belief that talk can be studied as an observational science. From it sprang the almost botanical attempt to specify the basic constituents of the structure of talk. The seminal paper here is Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's study, 'A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation', published, significantly perhaps, in a linguistics journal, *Language* (1974:696 – 735). The title alone is very revealing, as it signposts the authors' intention not to disclose merely a simple outline of turn-taking in talk, but to disclose the *most simple* account thereof. Turn-taking is the first building block in the cumulative, observational analysis of conversation. Once established the basic minimum requirements of a 'speech-exchange system' can be considered. The trivial point that conversations are structured by turn-taking is immensely significant: it is a crucial preliminary to the linchpin of conversational-analytic work; namely, that a lot of conversations can be analysed in terms of adjacency pairs and the subsequent

sequencing of a 'turn's talk'. Sacks and Schegloff defined an adjacency pair as the ordering of two utterances, spoken by different speakers (1973:295–6). (This account makes no ritual claims, although other accounts – perhaps noticeably the one given by Heritage (1984:247) – do build in this element.) The notion of sequencing is a looser, though similar observation, which Sacks *et al.* explained thus:

... it is a systematic consequence of the turn-taking organization of conversation that it obliges its participants to display to each other, in a turn's talk, their understanding of other turn's talk. More generally, a turn's talk will be heard as directed to a prior turn's talk, unless special techniques are used to locate some other talk to which it is directed (1974:732).

Various kinds of mistakes are made during a turn's talk which may require 'repair' – the fourth element of the foundation of conversation analytic work, complementing turn-taking, adjacency pairs and sequencing. Conversation analysts have successfully delineated the different sorts of self-repair and other-repair that are routinely used in everyday talk, and incorporated their findings into the conversation analytic foundation. This foundation is, in a sense, both 'context-free' and 'context sensitive', since talk's machinery is present in all contexts of conversation, and is therefore largely independent of any particular context (Sacks *et al.* 1974:706).

Perhaps the last decisive assumption (it may be a discovery), which is pertinent to the conversation analytic hope of securing a cumulative inquiry is Sacks *et al.*'s belief that

... it appears likely that conversation should be considered the basic form of speech-exchange system... (1974:735).

This last claim is the fifth and final building block. Sacks' legacy, put crassly, is his realisation that conversation is susceptible to detailed analysis, and his demonstration that cumulative work is possible. He could demonstrate this because turn-taking, adjacency pairs, sequencing and repair are generic features of conversation. The last ten years work in conversation analysis has been the partial realisation of the cumulative project envisioned by Sacks in the 1960s and formalised by him in the early 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

This foundation makes no normative claims, and whilst its structure may be put to ritual use, there is no requirement for this to take place. Goffman emphasised this distinction, contrasting the following exchange:

A: What's the time?  
B: It's five o'clock.

With:

A: Do you have the time?  
B: Sure. It's five o'clock.  
A: Thanks.  
B: (gesture) It's okay (1981:15–16).

The first of these exchanges meets what Goffman called basic 'system requirements', the second what he called 'ritual requirements'. The notion of system requirement is very similar to Sacks' idea of the machinery of talk, and, after the fashion of the *Simplest Systematics* paper, he specified the nuts and bolts of the system (1981:14–15). However, there is no conversation analytic analogue of Goffman's subsequent specification of ritual requirements. This is not surprising – Sacks and his followers are not interested in the manufacture of self in talk, but in the actual machinery of talk.

Goffman frequently attempted to construct a bedrock level for the description of the ways in which selves are expressed and produced in talk. In part both expression and production draw upon talk's machinery, in part they append themselves to this structure. Except for those occasions when systemic features of talk are used ritualistically, his concern with system constraints was always secondary to his concern with ritual constraints. The focus was the ways in which we manipulate normative rules to produce a sense of self.

The intractable vagueness of this programme partially explains the scepticism it meets amongst conversation analysts. Even after ransacking talk for the project, Goffman was obliged to draft and re-draft bedrock specifications, unable to convince himself that a foundation existed for his project comparable to that identified by conversation analysts for theirs. His introduction of the human mechanics into the inquiry seemed to undermine the attempt to specify simple first principles. By contrast, Sacks and his students built up an impressive array of empirical studies in what Schegloff came to call the 'conversation analytic business' (CA). The apparent security of CA's foundation, whose crystalline structure is the antithesis of Goffman's rough classifications<sup>11</sup> allowed a plethora of studies with naturalistic data, in which an analytic trunk could be shown to support transcribable branches and leaves. Against this Goffman's legacy seems to amount to little more than what Schegloff has aptly called a 'sociology by epitome'. Schegloff recently compared this legacy to Sacks', using the distinction between system and ritual constraints:

This is, I think, the central point. For Goffman, what he calls 'ritual' is the heart of the sociology in studying interaction; the 'system' is somehow pre-sociological, engineering, biological, whatever. Here I think him seriously mistaken (1988:97).

Schegloff makes two clear criticisms here, the first concerning Goffman's misunderstanding of sociology, the second his mistaken preference for the ritualistic. The suspicion is that both criticisms confuse points of *difference* with points of *error*. Schegloff is right to say the Goffman sees ritual at the heart of sociology and that he consequently underplays the systemic features of talk; but he is wrong to suggest there is somehow a 'better' sociology for Goffman to practise, as he is wrong to conclude that Goffman must think that the systemic is 'biological, whatever' – why must he think this? Perhaps Goffman just thought that system constraints are a different focus of inquiry, existing on the blurred edges of his own concerns. The decision to leave them there is neither more nor less justified than CA's decision to put them centre stage. What sort of justification could there be? Instead it is probably more accurate to say that Goffman had different interests to those of the conversation analysts, but that on occasion these interests meshed.

CA's criticisms, if they are to be effective, must show weakness in his idiosyncrasy. Their efforts to do this almost invariably focus on one element of his work: his eclectic method of data collection.<sup>12</sup> The baseline for CA's critique is that the analysis of talk can be an observational science, and that the scientific study of talk is better than a speculative study thereof. Sacks was the first to describe what is specific to CA's procedure:

I want to argue that, however rich our imaginations are, if we use hypothetical, or hypothetical-typical versions of the world we are constrained by reference to what an audience, an audience of professionals, can accept as reasonable.

Our business will be to proceed somewhat differently. We will be using observation as a basis for theorizing... (Sacks 1984:25–26, originally from unpublished lectures, 1966–71).

These programmatic comments clarify matters: Sacks claims here that people who use invented data are constrained by what they and their audiences will beforehand find reasonable. Contrary to this, CA begins with observations which fuel theorization. Some comments on Sacks' comments are called for.

The claim that CA is an observational science cannot mean that his analysis is presuppositionless: we approach everything with the aid of an array of presuppositions and there is no reason to believe that the study of conversation is an exception. However, this doesn't mean that CA's project is senseless, just that the 'observational science' slogan requires specification. Probably it means that CA uses presuppositions which are unproblematic and trivially true. Sacks' subsequent claim to derive theory from observations of actual conversations also requires specification – probably theory here means generalization.

Yet Sacks' point about the importance of naturalistic observation remains. It does indeed seem to be the case that his argument is forceful, and that invented data is weakened by its need to display the prior understandings of analyst and audience.<sup>13</sup> Goffman was almost certainly wrong to exercise a blanket avoidance of transcribed data; by so doing he cut off avenues of research in advance and with no gain.<sup>14</sup> And whilst it is true that he rarely attempted the close description of talk which is associated with CA, transcribed data would have been useful to his project of describing the general characteristics of social interaction.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember the differences between his sociological practice and CA's. Goffman constructed conceptual schemata and exemplified them in a manner similar to the research produced by CA. But unlike CA he supplemented this procedure by undermining these efforts. He never tired of reminding his readers that his schemata are inadequate descriptions of the complexity and heterogeneity of the social world. Typically he did this by *showing* their inadequacy with counter-examples subsequently employed in the construction of new schemata. Later the inadequacies of these schemata were shown. By these means his analysis remained, in Weber's expression, 'eternally young' (1948:112).<sup>15</sup>

This style of analysis is anathema to CA. The clearest rejection of it has been given by Schegloff, for whom the assumption that sociology has eternal youth is a hasty and ill-justified 'analytic nihilism' (1988:118) – an expression which nicely suggests a neo-Kantian underpinning. But Schegloff's acute paper runs into problems when it merges two quite separate issues: that of human freedom on the one hand, and the

possibility of cumulative work on the other. Schegloff suggests that Goffman's analytic nihilism is 'motivated by an assertion of human freedom (a sharp turn from the closing of *Stigma*, where he teases those who would keep a corner of the world, or was it the soul, safe from sociology)' (1988:117).

Schegloff's frustration with what he takes to be Goffman's argument is evident in his indifference to the details of the passage from *Stigma* (is it world or soul?). The passage Schegloff has in mind, in any case, is probably not from the end of *Stigma* but from the end of Goffman's essay, 'Role Distance'; but the more important point is that the whole discussion of freedom obfuscates rather than clarifies, as both Goffman, Schegloff and just about everyone else routinely accept an unphilosophised belief in human agency. But where Goffman and Schegloff really do disagree is over the question of a cumulative sociology, and on this question Schegloff's analysis is beautifully clear and penetrating. Sloganising his thought somewhat, one could say that he believes that Goffman's *assumption* of a non-cumulative sociology is too hasty, and that CA's work is a demonstration of its falsity. There is, though, a compromise solution here: accept cumulative work for system constraints but not for ritual ones.

### *Multiple Selfing*<sup>16</sup>

Small talk and passing exchanges are some of the ways by which we exhibit deference to those in our immediate presence; talk of this kind is a small token which, at its purest, elicits nothing but mutual honouring. First pair parts such as 'Hi! How are you' are not questions about a person's well-being but little ceremonial gifts. Like other gifts, the pleasure of receiving them turns into embarrassment should the offering be made too often in too short a space of time – a point accounting for the feeling of awkwardness experienced by people who meet the same people regularly in the corridors of large institutions. Rituals of this sort are the low risk, low return, bread and butter fare of public life. At bottom they exhibit the rule following characteristics which affirm respect for those known only by proximity, and they ask only reciprocity in return. Earlier I suggested three aspects of rules of social interaction:

1. that they are bedrock specifications for conduct between strangers,
2. that such rules are broken as a perverse way of showing friendship, and
3. that displaying friendship by rule-breaking is precarious because interactants must gauge the appropriate level of rule breaking and abuse for different relationships – a taxing accomplishment.

Too little rule breaking may make the person appear too formal, too much too aggressive. Context, biography and accompanying animation are essential ingredients of successful formulae. However, there is a form of *insurance* that can be taken out to offset the liability of unsuccessful rule breaking. The policy draws upon our general capacity to talk as if someone else were speaking. Goffman referred to this as *embedding* or *footing*: it is a device we use to distance ourselves from what we say; in a strange way embedded words free-float, owned by no-one. A footing is a projection of self of uncertain status; as Goffman nicely put it: 'In truth, in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and

down on another' (1981:155). By embedding rule-breaking talk speakers limit the amount of remedial work necessary should the exchange fail. This is possible because such talk is not attributable to an identifiable person, and failed messages can be framed as inconsequential play.

Embedded talk is not just an insurance policy; amongst other things it is a form of entertainment: comedy, for example, depends upon it. Here I intend to consider only the way embedded talk overcomes the precariousness of our frequent decision to affirm friendship by expunging etiquette. It manages this by circumnavigating one of the sequencing system constraints – that a turn's talk should show understanding of prior turn's talk. Insurance is possible because this constraint can be placed in abeyance. Because talk is sequential the success or failure of a piece of rule-breaking is normally displayed in next turn's talk. Contrary to this, embedding makes it possible to defer this display *by complicating the notion of the speaker*. The result is that whilst competent interactants can respond straightforwardly to the surface form of a turn's talk, they must hesitate before judging the tenor or import of speaker's words. From a ritual point of view, the procedure is amoral, amenable equally to the honouring and dishonouring of selves. Goffman described the procedure for embedding talk as a *production format* (1981:145). His first description of this is buried in a footnote in *Relations in Public*, where he commented that people sometimes 'clown... a character' not their own, allowing themselves to be ventriloquized, assuming perhaps that 'real rules only apply to real people' (1971:155, footnote). And later he outlined the gist of what became the *Footing* paper:

... the individual does not go about merely going about his business. He goes about constrained to sustain a viable image of himself<sup>17</sup> in the eyes of others... Each lurching of whatever the individual is standing on will have to be offset, often by his leading into the fall with a self that has been projected as unserious, the real person thereby made free to take up tacitly a counterbalancing position (1971:223).

These observations underpin the more sophisticated accounts of embedding offered in *Frame Analysis* and *Forms of Talk*, which analysed our habit of playing both ventriloquist and puppet at the same time. In order to explain the way in which we separate ourselves from what we're saying, Goffman classified different types of speaker. In *Frame Analysis* he distinguished four:

1. the *principal* – the person or party held responsible for the position attested to by the meaning of what was spoken;
2. the *emitter* – the 'actual sounding box' – the speaking entity;
3. the *animator* – the expressive actions accompanying talk;
4. the *figure* – the human or non-human characters enacted by the speaker (1974:517 – 23).

A person frequently enacts all of these different speakers at the same time. In his *Footing* paper he reworked this analysis, running together the notions of 'emitter' and 'animator', and distinguishing 'principal' from 'author'; the former being the position established by the speaker, the latter the creator of that position. Taken together Goffman called the animator, author and principal the 'production format' (1981:144 – 5). The notion of the 'figure' was kept although left out of this definition (1981:147). The result of the conceptual elaboration is the loosening of the connection between speakers and their talk. Goffman made the point graphically:

... although it will never be that a two-headed green man from Mars will debate with the ghost of Andrew Jackson, it is structurally just as easy during real talk to replay a purported scene between these two as it is to replay a conversation which occurred that morning with the postman (1974:524).

A structural and a ritual point follow from this. Structurally, the complexity of the notion of the speaker makes the linchpin of conversation analysis – the sequencing of turns at talk – look less impressive; for whilst it is true that a recognition of prior turn's talk is displayed in present turn's talk, there may be an infinite number of ways of effecting that display.<sup>18</sup> Goffman's target hereabouts is Sacks and Schegloff's claim that answers to questions are only understood by their 'sequential placement' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973:299; Goffman 1981:51, footnote). The suspicion is that the decision to treat sequencing at an almost Parsonian level of abstraction renders the analysis which follows true but trivially so; since *anything* which sequentially follows a question is in danger of being read as an answer. Goffman put the matter tersely, saying that this account of sequencing cannot be disproved (1981:51, footnote). Conversation analysis places an incredible burden on the notion of sequencing, since if its analysis fails to limit what will count as sequence, conversational structure will evade prior accounts of its form. Instead, conversations will be seen to lift themselves up by their 'own bootstraps', to be continued by any intelligible response spoken by any credible principal or figure. Thus conceived, conversations can be contingently strung together by anything the imagination can flail at, these including frame-breaks, reflexive comments, changes in footing, bracketing and passing thoughts somehow equivalent to verbal scratches or yawns. System constraints are honoured or abused, in the course of which they are themselves presented as thin accounts of talk's machinery (1981:73–4).

Ritual matters are no easier to resolve. Speaker complications warn analysis against the conflation of different 'I's under the umbrella term 'identity'. The shifts in meaning between the statements, 'I feel a chill,' 'I will take responsibility,' and 'I was born on a Tuesday,' evade easy description (1974:519). Goffman acknowledged a debt to Wittgenstein's *Investigations* here, and with good cause. Wittgenstein's interrogations of our different uses of the words 'I' and 'my' have shown that 'there is a great variety of criteria for personal identity' (1958:#404, emphasis in original).<sup>19</sup>

The ease with which a speaker can talk as if he were a two-headed man from Mars or the ghost of Andrew Jackson magnifies the problem of the referents 'I,' 'me,' and 'self'. The complexity of ritual talk not only emphasises the difficulty of saving faces and honouring selves; it also points to the problem of saving the different faces and of honouring the different selves of a person. And after that there is also the *strangers* problem to contend with. Goffman's analyses of everyday talk attempted to describe the shifting meanings of the word 'I'.<sup>20</sup> The conversation analytic focus on the sequential organization of talk tells us little by itself about the problem of self-reference.<sup>21</sup>

To make progress Goffman sought out an empirical realm in which individuals are obliged to project one and only one self during extended strips of 'fresh talk'; i.e., during extemporaneous talk (1981:146). One such realm is the world of the disc jockey (hereafter DJ). DJs produce a fluent flow of words under conditions that lay speakers would be unable to manage (1981:198), making remarkably few faults.



Nevertheless, mistakes are made and these can be taped and transcribed. From one set of transcriptions Goffman classified and described different sorts of fault, distinguishing, for example, a stutter from a slip or a gaffe, and different corrective measures, these ranging from the truculent decision to 'drive through' a speech error, at one extreme, to the embarrassed 'flood-out' at the other (1981:209 – 19). The professionalism of the DJ has made audiences more sensitive to on-air speech errors than to similar errors in everyday talk.

Speech faults are significant for DJs because they jeopardise their efforts to limit prevailing definitions of the situation. A looser constraint affects lay speakers – although there are exceptions – such as when it is felt that an individual should be upset, evidence for which should and is most easily provided by situated speech disturbances (1981:223). But such faults usually point to elements of a verbal performance that a speaker would prefer not to be identified with.

When DJs talk they often manage to convey a sense of intimacy with people they cannot see and do not know. In the course of this they ritually honour strangers as if they were their friends, an interactional equivalent of walking on water. But their performance is on occasion even more miraculous, for DJs resolve the *strangers* problem without recourse to rule-breaking; that is, they display friendship, and are heard to be so doing, without the resources often displayed in everyday encounters. Goffman suggested that DJs manage this by aligning themselves exclusively with what he called their *frame space*. This space is delineated by a speaker's production format and by his participation status; the first of these referring to the combined notions of animator, author and principal, these constituting Goffman's account of the speaker; the second to the relation between the hearer of an utterance and the utterance itself (1981:230). The DJ's basic skill is the manipulation of frame space so as to project an individual with a single self.

But there are exceptions, the most extreme being formal announcements, where even the DJ's single self is taken from her: nothing is spared save the actual sounding box. In general, however, DJs project a friendly self. This projection is presented as all the person is; a fact often institutionally enforced – as, for example, in the case of the B.B.C., who contractually prevent their announcers from appearing in commercials, i.e. they prevent announcers from displaying an other self (1981:238). Conveniently for DJs, fresh talk is the talk most easily understood and the one best exemplifying friendship: they therefore attempt to simulate it. In addition, DJs endeavour to avoid touching the sensitivities of their audience. To this end they steer clear of matters such as race, religion or political belief. Because of the heterogeneity of audiences there are all too many taboo subjects, each a possible cause of offence.

It seems that the best way of detailing the problems facing the DJs' awkward footing is to describe situations when their erstwhile professionalism fails and they take a fall. A simple account of this will now be given.

A DJ's fresh talk breaks down when speech faults occur. Faults can be of this form: 'To me English is an enema . . . enigma!' (1981:216); these revealing an anxious self observing a drowning one. DJ-ing problems here are analogous to problems facing lay speakers. But in addition to these, DJs are beset by 'faultables'; that is, by faults containing an ambiguity which would normally pass unnoticed in everyday talk. One of these is the 'contextual unfreezing' of expressions, as when an *ABC* sports announcer declared (1981:216): 'Leo Lebel has been competing with a pulled stomach muscle, showing a lot of guts!'

Another concerns problems of reference, shown by a newscaster who said: 'The loot and the car were listed as stolen by the Los Angeles Police Department' (1981:245).

Another the problem of innocent words with salacious meanings, as in the following radio commercial:

Calling all parents, calling all kids! Here's your chance to buy a Davey Crockett bed – yes, friends, Hunt's Furniture Store has Davey Crockett beds – it's a twin size bed, just right for the kids – with scenes of Davey Crockett in action on the mattress! (1981:252).

An odd exception hereabouts is Contestant shows, in which presenters and participants alike aim to maximise faultables in the fault-free production of humour. But in general avoidance is the norm. When faults do occur they can be left without a change of footing. However, should remedial work be attempted delicate footwork will be required, as disowned selves must come to light. The simplest example of a re-alignment involves the shift from friend back to DJ, a move cued in by a frame-bracketed comment such as: 'I've lost my place, I'll have it for you in a moment' (1981:294); a confession which destroys the illusion of fresh talk. Other re-alignments display other selves, these on occasion being wittier and shrewder than the self the DJ would normally choose to project. For example, amidst routine banter, a DJ's speech fault prompted him to let us glimpse a reflexive self at work, who dryly commented: 'I was going to say it was a nice name before I tripped over a syllable' (1981:294); where humour and accuracy (note that the DJ said a syllable and not an unspecified number of syllables) inappropriately reveal a keen mind leashed to pat talk.

The most extreme case of re-alignment occurs when a DJ is caught in an unmistakable disaster. In these terrible circumstances his final obligation is not to save face as DJ – that is already lost – but to save the self which is cripplingly embarrassed by being identified with what the unsalvageable DJ self has just said. The ritual talk which follows such disasters is a final honour to a fallen deity. Goffman found a beautiful example of this in the following commercial, in which a male announcer said:

Try this wonderful new bra...you'll especially love the softly lined cups that are so comfortable to wear. You gals who need a little something extra should try model 718. It's lightly padded and I'm sure you'll love it. I do!...I mean I like the looks of it... Well...what I am trying to say is that I don't need one myself naturally, as a man...but if you do, I recommend it...How do I know? I really don't...I'm just reading the commercial for Mary Patterson who is ill at home with a cold! (1981:302, 'dotted lines' in original).

This segment of ritual talk highlights the distinction between individual and self. The individual is 'a palpable thing of flesh and bone', a see-able entity. The self, by contrast, is not a physical thing; instead it is a set of claims made on behalf of the individual. These two definitions allow us to consider the different selves of the individual: on some occasions these will be complementary, on others contradictory or competing. This is, I think, the most appropriate way of understanding Goffman's elegant vocabulary: by defining the individual as flesh and bone and the self as a set of claims we can understand the idea of a person's 'footing' as a

projection of self which displays a falsifiable claim about what the individual is. Ritual talk endeavours to honour viable projections of self and to accommodate discredited ones. In the above commercial there is only one identifiable person, but there are many selves, and these can be identified and itemised. There is the:

1. *listener's friend*; this self surfacing in the comment: 'you'll especially love the softly lined cups...'
2. *appreciative wearer of the bra*; this fateful self emerging in the line: 'I'm sure you'll love it. I do!'
3. *admiring onlooker of bras*; shown by his statement: 'I like the look of it';
4. *self as man*; as in his claim: 'I don't need one myself naturally, as a man...'. The fifth self is already at some distance from his official one: it is the
5. *self as self-questioner*; the pertinent line being: 'I recommend it...How do I know? I really don't...'. Sixth self is the official one, the
6. *DJ*; this being shown by 'Try this wonderful new bra...'. The seventh and final self is the
7. *self as human, all too human*; this one appearing in the desperate comment: 'I'm just reading the commercial for Mary Patterson who is ill at home with a cold!'

This example provides data for what we all catch ourselves doing: changing footing so frequently that we fall over. Ritual talk honours our successes and is tactful about our failures. In the commercial the announcer projected a straggle of contradictory selves in quick succession, only to find that he had already discredited most of these by prior utterances. Indeed, by the end the only selves that had survived his *hara kiri* were those concerning, firstly, his claim to be a man and, secondly, his prosaic claim to be human, all too human.<sup>22</sup>

Implied in this section is an offbeat criticism of CA's forward lurch. The criticism is offbeat because it is of a quite different order to those which allege that CA is too deterministic, too behaviouristic or too micro-sociological. Instead, on a different footing as it were, this section has questioned the methodological decision to prioritise observation. Whilst it is true that the observational science banner was useful for certain purposes, it is question-begging as well. It was useful in organising a cumulative inquiry which could resist the assumption that the details of everyday life are residual features of theoretical schemata. It is question-begging because the slogan falsely suggests that theories can be exclusively derived from observations. The slogan is false because observations are underpinned by presuppositions; and hence CA's foundation is itself *above* bedrock level, resting on presuppositional stilts about social life and talk. Ironically, its falsity might not have been a serious problem: the existence of these presuppositions wouldn't have been serious if they had been either trivially true or unproblematic. However, at least one of these presuppositions – concerning the definition of the speaker – has been shown to be problematic. Realising this has allowed several conversation analysts to make use of Goffman's elaborations.<sup>23</sup>

Slightly more newsworthy is the methodological point that CA's forward lurch can be fuelled by *both* observation *and* by the sharp conceptual work of which Goffman is sociology's finest exponent. Thus the forward lurch can be made both forwards and backwards, the former by detailed studies of naturalistic data, the latter by the elaboration of the *significance* of analytic presuppositions. Divorcing these inquiries is to the detriment of both.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusions

In this paper I argued that ritual talk honours and accommodates individuals. To give this thesis force the individual must be given different selves, each of which can, and usually is, honoured and accommodated in its own right. Individuals are flesh and bone, selves are projected sets of claims. The selves of individuals are honoured in accord with prevailing rules of interaction and within the constraints and possibilities of the sequential organization of talk. The baseline for this honour is what I've called the *strangers thesis*, which is that rules of interaction bestow honour on those known only by proximity. Rules of interaction are sometimes broken as a perverse way of affirming friendship. This strategy is, however, precarious, and when it fails remedial work follows. Sequential studies of talk must recognise the complexity of the notion of the speaker, and identify the different speaking selves of the individual. Work in this area revives interest in a valuable legacy, and bridges the antagonistic divide between Goffman and conversation analysis.

## Notes

1. Panhandlers, mobs and (other) street performers are unratiated and constitute a problem beyond the reach of this paper.
2. See Wittgenstein's *Investigations* para 38.
3. For this succinct summary I am indebted to Robin Williams' essay 'Goffman's Sociology of Talk' in Jason Ditton's collection: *The View From Goffman* (1980), Macmillan, especially pp. 210–211.
4. In French this process of minimization is taken to its logical extreme, B's reply being, almost invariably, *de rien* – 'it's nothing'.
5. I think this is one (paradoxical) way of fleshing out Giddens' nice observation that 'Even the most evanescent of encounters tends to establish something of a bond of moral solidarity between participants'. See 'Erving Goffman as a systematic social theorist' in his *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (1987), Polity Press.
6. At one point in the 'Remedial Interchanges' paper Goffman recommends this use of the subjunctive mood as a research technique. He wrote: 'a technique of analysis: to get at the significance of a move, play through the interchange not only as it actually (or purportedly) happened, but also as it would have happened had all the participants acted in the most routine, mechanical fashion imaginable or, contrariwise, the most cuttingly; then compare' (1971:209–10).
7. See J. Lofland (1980): 'Early Goffman: Style, Structure, Substance, Soul', in J. Ditton (ed.) *The View From Goffman*, Macmillan. Lofland's findings agree with my suggestion that *The Presentation of Self* contains a two selves thesis. Lofland doesn't seem to think that this thesis is a weakness, however, which is my own opinion.
8. When put in these terms Goffman's project is remarkably similar to Habermas' studies of 'communicative action'.
9. Goffman skirted between contingency and necessity when he supposed that we make sense of conversational exchanges by a limited set of reinterpretation schemata, each of which could be applied to any segment of talk. This supposition promises cumulative work by contracting to specify a metaschema of these different reinterpretation schemata. If Goffman could do this he would avoid the criticism that his work was just an 'endless catalogue' of examples (1981:68). Goffman produced such a metaschema, although he couched it in tentative terms. Nevertheless his concluding comments about it were unequivocal: 'It is some such framework of frameworks that we must seek out; it is

- some such metaschema that will allow us to accumulate systematic understanding about contexts, not merely warnings that in another context, meaning could be different' (1981:70).
10. See Atkinson and Heritage's edited collection of papers: *Structures of Social Interaction* (1984), Cambridge University Press.
  11. The allusion here is to Wittgenstein. See his *Philosophical Investigations* (1958:#107).
  12. For example, see David Helm's review of *Forms of Talk* in *Human Studies* (1982:147–57), or W.W. Sharrock's review of *Frame Analysis* in *Sociology* (1976:332–4).
  13. Curiously, Goffman himself supported the use of tape recorders for the analysis of talk in the introduction to his doctorate (1953:3), although he later expressed reservations – these concerning the practical problems of taping the crofters' conversations.
  14. The only example of Goffman using an extended piece of transcribed data is in *Frame Analysis* (1974:548–9). Ironically the data is accompanied by no analysis.
  15. This analysis owes much to Robin Williams' paper. 'Understanding Goffman's Methods' in Drew and Wootten (1988).
  16. This odd expression derives from *Frame Analysis* (1974:521, footnote).
  17. This point re-emerged as 'Felicity's Condition' (*American Journal of Sociology* June 1983).
  18. At risk here is the metaphorical description of talk as a machine, which now begins to look misleading.
  19. Wittgenstein showed that statements such as 'this is my foot' assume that the foot has certain qualities, which, if missing, undermine the sense of 'my'. Thus, when walking my foot is unproblematically mine, but is it equally mine when anaesthetized or paralysed? (1958:#411).
  20. On these matters I have been helped by Gareth Evans' paper, 'Self-Identification', in his *The Varieties of Reference* (1982:205–57), Oxford University Press.
  21. By this wording I want to leave open the possibility of using sequential organization as part of an explanation of multiple selfing.
  22. The awkward question of frame is not resolved here, however.
  23. See D. Maynard and D. Zimmerman: 'Topical Talk, Ritual and The Social Organization of Relationships' in *Social Psychology Quarterly* (1984, Vol. 47. No. 4 pp. 301–16). See also D. Maynard: *Inside Plea Bargaining* Plenum Press (1984). S. Clayman's paper, 'Footing in the Achievement of Neutrality' has shown how interviewers change footing to preserve an image of neutrality. Also of note is D. Tannen and C. Wallat's paper 'Interactive Frames and Knowledge Schemas in Interaction: Examples from a Medical Examination/Interview' in *Social Psychology Quarterly* (1987. Vol. 50 No. 2 pp. 205–16).
  24. Let me mention very briefly one piece of empirical analysis which has very nicely combined research on the sequential organization of talk with studies of its ritual significance. This project looked at one of the ways by which individuals shift between their different selves. On these occasions talk's machinery is put to ritual use. A recent paper by Michael Emmison investigated the social organization of ceremonial congratulations and commiserations (see M. Emmison 1987: 'Victors and Vanquished: The Social Organization of Ceremonial Congratulations and Commiserations' in *Language and Communication* (1987, Vol. 7, pp. 93–110). Emmison analysed transcripts of post-match interviews with sports personalities. After the triumph or failure of the day these figures often receive praise or commiseration from media interviewers. However, they often meet this reception by suggesting that outcomes could easily have been different, and that future games will disclose different fortunes. Thus, within the experience of winning today is the thought of losing tomorrow. Typically this is displayed in talk by downplaying the claims attributed by the interviewer to the

winning self. The winner uses structural resources to shift footing to other selves with more modest claims. Emmison showed how carefully placed laughter can downgrade ascribed status, allowing the individual to shift between selves (1987:107).

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