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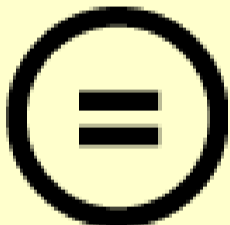
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Title:

Observing and Quoting Newsgroup Messages: Method and Phenomenon in the Hermeneutic  
Spiral.

.....

by:

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Doctoral Thesis.

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of PhD.

Department of Social Sciences of Loughborough University.

1 April 2002.

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## Acknowledgements

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This work is the bastard child of one promiscuous mother – sociology – and two fathers, competing for her attention. At times the wish for it to resemble one father has been undermined by the realisation that it was exhibiting the appearance of the other. Family resemblance aside, perhaps we will never know the true father.

Uncertain parenthood has its problems, but it also produces stubborn and strong offspring. In this case, I'd like to think that it has produced a thoroughbred and not a runt, but only time will tell.

I'd like to thank you Alan for always being there, and being a calming influence.

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Bea, 'Du bist meine Welt, und danke für Deine Liebe und Verstandnis'.

S.L. thank you, and sorry.

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With the dawning of adolescence come more problems. As the child ventures into the world, acceptance is not assured away from the confines of that adulterous home. Adults look ugly and unfamiliar. But through faltering steps and enthusiastic naivety, hopefully the child will grow into an adult and with zeal return to create more bastard children. But then again, perhaps this is not an unwanted child, perhaps it is no bastard. Perhaps it is one more example of the possibility of life; and perhaps it is this possibility that should be acknowledged. Here is the true father. In all his richness, variance and complexity, it is still his plan we follow.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to do two things: First it is an analysis of Internet Newsgroup interaction; second it seeks to understand the processes that result in the analysis of Internet Newsgroup interaction. The view is taken that the phenomenon (Internet Newsgroup interaction) exists in an intimate relationship with interpretation (the analysis of Internet Newsgroup interaction) such that object and action mutually elaborate one another in a hermeneutic spiral of meaning.

According to Mehan and Wood (1975) the 'hermeneutic spiral of meaning' is a core understanding of a sociological approach called Ethnomethodology, in which meaning is seen to exist in a documentary relationship with itself. Harold Garfinkel proposed that meaning was not absolute in some sense, but a continual practical matter of 'making do'; and that 'document' and underlying 'structure' rely upon one another for their elucidation – 'knowledge', 'understanding' and even 'truth' are the products of this documentary method.

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## The hermeneutic spiral

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In a rather mystical explication Mehan and Wood (1975) explain the hermeneutic spiral in terms of night and day based upon the philosophical writing of Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger makes a distinction between interpretation and understanding:

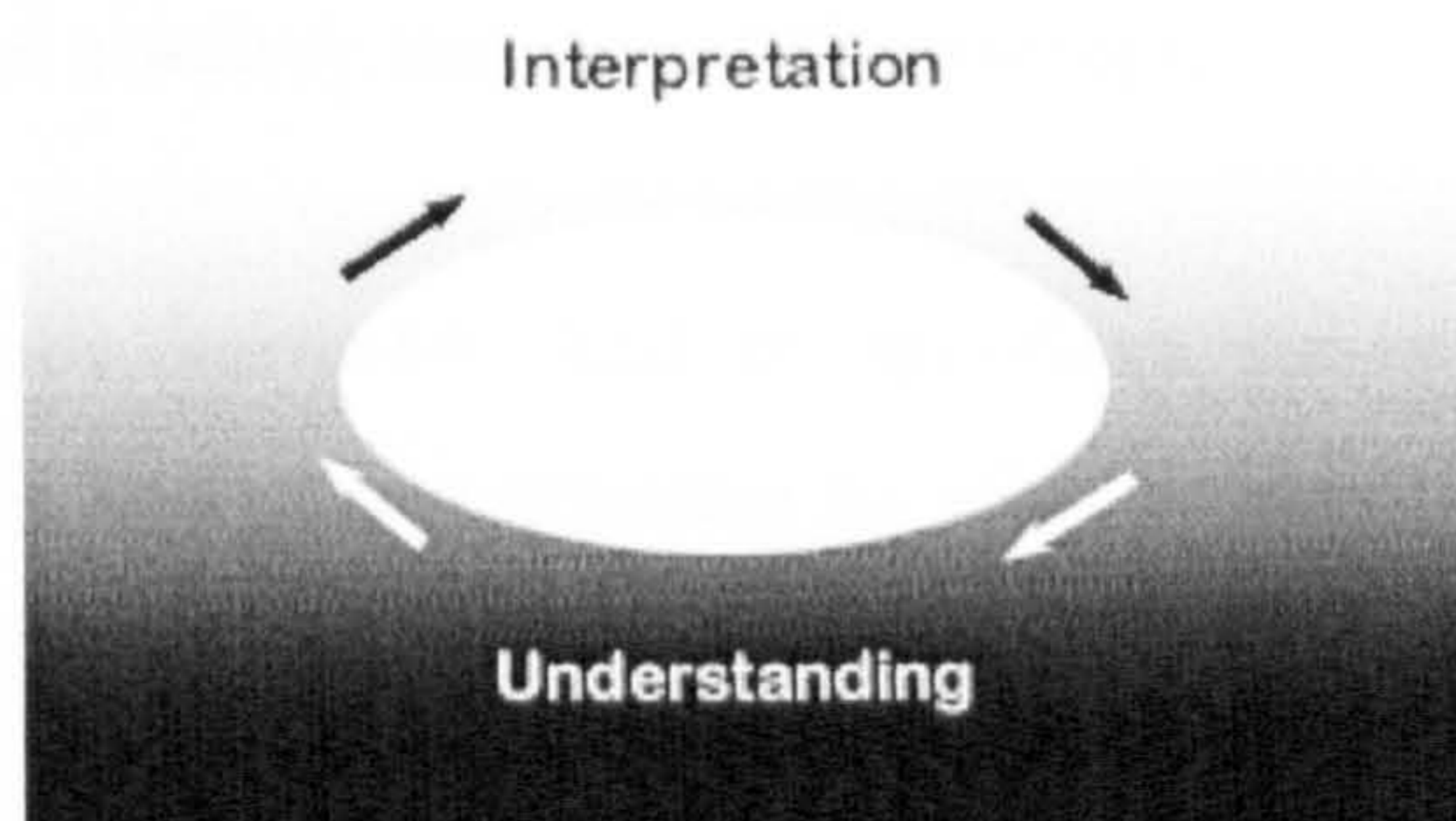
*Understanding* is the sense of a 'primordially meaningful world', in the 'here and now', where the world is given and no effort is required. An example would be a mood or emotion;

*Interpretation*, on the other hand, is a 'symbolic activity' and is constituted by practices methods and procedures and of what Mehan and Wood call 'reality work' (1975:193).

Mehan and Wood offer a 'visual metaphor':

'Understanding is like night. Interpretation is like day. People's meaningful lives spiral into the unknown like the cycle of nights and days. Any particular day has an existence independent of the previous night. But, at once, it is dependent upon the substance of that previous night, and upon the totality of nights and days before the most recent night. Just so, any interpretation has its independent meaning. It is an activity and stands apart from

the stillness that preceded it. Simultaneously, however, it is dependent upon the understood horizon that provided it with the here and now upon which the activity arose. An understood horizon includes previous interpretations that have entered the understanding. It includes previous understandings as well' (1975:193).



Mehan and Wood talk about two 'penumbras' where day meets night, and night meets day. These are 'places of mystery' in which people 'make their quantum leaps to meaningfulness' (1975:193).

'Ethnomethodologists have called dawn 'indexicality,' and dusk 'reflexivity'' (Mehan and Wood 1975:193).

The action of reflexivity and indexicality makes apparent an issue that has interested philosophers and social scientists. Described as 'the Problem' (Woolgar 1983a), it refers to the indeterminate nature of meaning.

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### **Framing the problem (and answer)**

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A wonderful practical expression of the Problem can be seen in the introduction to Erving Goffman's (1974) 'Frame Analysis'. According to Goffman, 'frames' are social mechanisms that provide boundaries around the sense of an action, a written piece of text, a theory etc. These frames not only provide a context for the activity but also do inferential work, which result in construing the activity in a particular way.

In that Goffman's introduction is an example of a frame – that is meant to tell you what the book is about (and so contextualise it) – he playfully foregrounds the tautology. After fifteen and a bit pages of introductory text there appears a row of asterisks and new text that starts, 'that is the introduction'. He then comments on the activity of writing an introduction and what it does



to frame the main text of the book. Almost immediately there is another row of asterisks and the text, 'but what about comments on prefaces'. Again he comments on the text that was commenting upon the introduction. This move is repeated another seven times, until the reader is left with the text, 'that is what frame analysis is about' (p. 20). The point being that a definition of what a frame is, necessarily involves framing it. Goffman conveys the potentially infinite moves needed to provide an absolute meaning of the concept.

'Discussions about frame inevitably lead to questions concerning the status of the discussion itself, because here terms applying to what is analysed ought to apply to the analysis also' (Goffman 1974:11).

These comments not only talk to the *task* of analysis coupled with an *understanding* of analysis, but also foregrounds the indeterminate nature of discourse. If it were possible to define, once and for all, the concept of frame without recourse to resources of sense-making, then such tautologies would not exist.

Goffman realises that framing a discussion of frames is a reflexive issue. Rather than contend endlessly with the ramifications of defining something that defines something else (etc.), he resorts to placing quotation marks around the word 'reflexive'. In this way 'reflexive', he contends, becomes a 'special sense of the word' in which its infinite reference is ignored. By defining it thus, reflexivity becomes a term that he can turn to without 'methodological self-consciousness'. His rationale being that such introspection 'sets aside all study and analysis except that of the reflexive problem itself, thereby displacing fields of study instead of contributing to them' (Goffman 1974:12-13).

We might say that Goffman asserts a practical remedy for the problem of reflexivity; he recognises that for the Problem to be solved, there needs to be a pragmatic resolution.

There is a certain playfulness in 'framing' the word reflexivity in this way, which itself might be seen as contributing to the reflexive dilemma and not actually solving it. Our position identifies a further irony in Goffman's exercise: by doing what he does, *he frames the Problem as a problem*. To wit, reflexivity engenders the potential for infinitely regressing standpoints. Only by construing the Problem, can he qualify the answer, which without the problem would not be necessary. It is a rather more rhetorical than circular relationship admittedly, but still, we sense that the one *mutually elaborates* the other.

For us, the prize in this exercise is that Goffman is able to explicitly formulate a practical remedy; he is able to give an example of the management of reflexivity. ‘Goffman’s quotation marks’ is a rather nice single example of what ethnomethodology is talking about – it shouldn’t work, but it does. As such, Goffman’s ironic exercise speaks to the position of the Problem in (our version of) ethnomethodology.

The Problem’s single virtue – in our case framed as the indeterminacy of meaning – is in its use to foreground practical activities of dealing with reflexivity and indexicality. It is here that we find meaningful (and meaning-making) social action.

We take the view that the ‘documentary method’ remains Ethnomethodology’s primary import to sociology. It spawned a program of works that attempts to answer the simple question of how such a relationship results in the social world we live in; a world that is neither inconsistent, fragile, nor un-meaningful. In this way Ethnomethodology addresses – although not directly – ‘the Problem’ of the indeterminacy of meaning. Ethnomethodology takes a pragmatic view: society *is* meaningful, it *is* ordered, we *do* experience it as stable; the issue isn’t whether these things are ‘true’, but how they are true; ‘the Problem’ is ‘essentially uninteresting’.

We take the position that recent efforts to develop the Ethnomethodological line have re-introduced ‘the Problem’ of the indeterminate nature of meaning. We argue that the Radical Studies of Work Program (or ‘Radical Neopraxeology’), based upon assertions of asymmetric incommensurability, establishes Ethnomethodology’s distinctive insight and position by drawing a distinction between EM and all other social science – characterised as ‘constructive analysis’. Such a move presumes that some meaning is determinate and some is not. This threatens to undermine the central EM position that *all* meaning is constructed through members methods of sense-making, or ‘ethnomethods’. In so doing, Radical Studies of Work Program changes Ethnomethodology’s fundamentally uninterested and unmotivated stance, to one of moral commitment.

We suggest an alternative: Pragmatic Ethnomethodology expounds a (radically un-sceptical) appreciation of social action that pursues the documentary method to its inevitable conclusion. All meaning making, including ethnomethodological, relies upon the documentary method. The hermeneutic spiral implicates ethnomethodological practice in its own worldview. ‘Getting ethnomethodology done’ is included in doing ethnomethodology. The next chapter entitled

'Pragmatic Ethnomethodology' embodies this implication, not only in its content, argument, and 'position', but also in its own generation. Pragmatism, in this case, concerns meaning-for-all-practical-purposes, which currently amounts to the writing of a PhD thesis. *Pragmatic Ethnomethodology* could be read then as 'getting ethnomethodology done in this thesis'. As an explicit formulation it is meant to act as a purposeful irony in two ways. First it foregrounds the necessary work for getting a thesis done, but more importantly it acts argumentatively to show that this is what ethnomethodology (in its own terms) has always been – always done, always pragmatic.

Pragmatic Ethnomethodology is a combination of three elements: ethnomethodological conception, conversation analytic practice, and radical reflexive insight. As such it combines a fundamental interest in the sense-making methods of social participation, pursues this through a formal method of observation, yet remains intent upon its own explication in terms of the documentary method.

Premised upon an 'empirical warrant', which claims Internet newsgroup interaction as a less mediated, less 'produced' empirical object, observation is allowed to furnish a understanding of the phenomenon. This empirical warrant is further enhanced by encountering a large data corpus, which provides evidential support for our claims through the observation of many newsgroup messages.

The documentary method can be seen to be acting at different levels: in the moment-by-moment action of reading; the empirical observation of an object; or in the writing of a description of that object. 'Reading', 'observation' and 'description' will acts as token moments of the documentary method in what is to follow. They are, in a sense, simple and fundamental; but more they populate the empirical mentality that we favour. Our focus will be observation, but this naturally incurs the reading of newsgroup messages, and their description as understandable phenomenon (for example). In 'Four strategies of looking' we highlight the propensities of such token moments<sup>1</sup> and allow them to move toward an instigation of systematic observation. As an account of the methodological career of the postgraduate work (in that they are based on working and published papers), these strategies move toward systematic observation in an inductive manner.

Chapter four applies and develops the systematic line. Systematic observation – and its constituent practices and consequences – provides for analysis of structural features of

newsgroup interaction – specifically the *quoting mechanisms* employed by newsgroup participants to ‘get stuff done’ in a meaningful manner. This practice-set, that includes the development of a technical language, provides for an empirical outcome – in the identification of the concept of *sequential integrity* – and sets the foundation for future observations, analyses and findings. We move toward recognition of this context free feature of message quoting by observing five quoting shapes. We catalogue these shapes, watch them in action, and find them in sequences; at each stage gaining greater appreciation of the phenomenon.

We return to the documentary method in the last chapter – entitled ‘The hermeneutic spiral and inductive reasoning’ – and ask how this all got done. We do so in an ‘essentially uninterested’ manner, that neither questions the truth of our findings, nor prioritises the ‘how-of-research’ over the ‘how-of-newsgroup-interaction’. Instead the chapter enjoins with the sentiment of the total exercise and recognises the mutual elaboration of participant and researcher practice. We offer a token moment in the hermeneutic spiral by recognising participants’ application of inductive reasoning with their use of quoted textual evidence. And suggest similar ‘moments of objectification’ in the inductive process.

The total work is conceived as a sociological exercise. Various strategies of formulation and argumentation are appropriated in order to convey the central premise. However an unexpected outcome of the work is Pragmatic Ethnomethodology as an approach that relates to other approaches in linguistics. In an addendum to the thesis, we comment on ‘pragmatic Ethnomethodology’, as ‘ethnomethodological Pragmatics’.

While fundamentally an empirical exercise, this work should be seen in terms of an historical backdrop of criticism of ethnomethodology, a recent history of internal and external questioning, and a current climate of novel application, and development of the area.

In that it is a reworking of the ethnomethodological exercise this work should be seen in the context of early criticism of Ethnomethodology (noted by Livingston 1987; Pollner 1991; see for example, Coser 1975; Atkinson 1988 and responses by Zimmerman 1976; Mehan and Woods 1976), and assertions of inclusiveness (Benson and Hughes 1983; Maynard and Clayman 1991). Also it should be seen in terms of commentaries on the relationship between Conversation Analyses (CA) and Ethnomethodology (EM) (Bogen 1992; Watson 1994), the combination of CA and ethnography (Moerman 1988), the EM analysis of CA (Anderson and Sharrock 1984, 1986; Bogen 1992) and EM oriented criticisms of CA as an ‘ironic cast’ (Watson 1994), as well as

'insider critiques' of CA's productive processes (Reed and Ashmore 2001) and the 'innocence and nostalgia dynamic' (Ashmore and Reed 2001). Perhaps peripherally it should be seen in relation to moves towards Derrida (Frank 1985), and the 'rediscovery of Durkheim' in EM (Hilbert 1990, 1992, 1995), and in light of the idea of 'ethnomethodology as theory' (Boden 1990).

In that the approach outlined has particular application possibilities in the area of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), it should be seen in terms of Lucy Suchman's seminal application of EM to issues of technology design (Suchman 1987), as well as novel re-workings of ethnomethodology, such as Dourish and Button's (1996, 1998) 'technomethodology'. Further it should be seen in relation to the application of CA to computer design (Frolich and Luff 1990; Chapman 1992; Gray 1993; Douglas 1995; Finkelstein and Fuks 1990; Norman 1990), the various controversies surrounding such application (Button and Sharrock 1995; Button 1990), and finally in a CA mentality toward textual computer interaction (Garcia and Jacobs 1999; Murray 1985, 1989; Wilkins 1991).

## CHAPTER TWO: PRAGMATIC ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

**Pragmatic** *prag-mat'ik*, *adj* concerned with what is practicable, expedient and convenient, or with practical consequences, rather than with theories and ideals; matter-of-fact, realistic [Gr *pragmatikos*, from *prâgma*, *-matos* deed] (Hanks 1986)

We want to set out a domain of research hereby called *Pragmatic Ethnomethodology* (henceforth PE) that combines ethnomethodology (EM) principle, conversation analytic (CA) practice and radical reflexive (RR) insight ‘for-all-practical-purposes’ (Garfinkel 1967:7). As such, we have in mind a particular outcome, and count this outcome as a contextual basis – and warrant – for this formulation. Further we claim – as one might expect – that this formulation is a truthful rendition of the (broadly) ethnomethodological exercise; and that it stands in favourable contrast to other current formulations.

First then a word about pragmatism as construed here. PE is an approach ‘for-all-practical-purposes’ (Garfinkel 1967:7), which in the current study involves the analysis of the actions and interactions of participants in Internet newsgroups. A pragmatic emphasis is taken because certain work has to be done, and certain outcomes attained. These in brief include the ‘successful’ analysis of Internet newsgroups – in that there are findings and the like; the supporting of these findings with a relevant conceptual basis, method and discussion; and the presentation of these outcomes in the writing of a PhD thesis. Similarly, certain work is done by actors in the social action under study. These include providing for mutual understanding, generating interaction, working up common spaces of action etc. Just as understanding, meaning, and facts are a concern for the author and audience of this writing, so the same forms of interpretation are a concern for those under study. Pragmatism refers to this dual concern, and provides for a position that incorporates and exemplifies such a dual emphasis.

Pragmatism, in its disciplinary sense, is concerned with the ‘use of language in context’ (Jary and Jary 1991:493). Such a definition works well with a dual emphasis. Context in this regard, refers not only to the context of language use in newsgroup interaction, but also language use in the context of writing about such contextualised endeavours (i.e. the writing of the analysis, narrative, and conclusions of this thesis).

But further than this, we claim not only a dual emphasis, but also a *mutual* relationship between the activity of newsgroup members and the author. In that the practices of participants are intimately related to the practices of the author. We will express and explain this mutuality in terms of the *hermeneutic spiral of meaning* that envisages a continual, dynamic and inescapable relationship between the objective world and its contingent construal through interpretive action. In this regard, pragmatism is a matter of freezing this continual process by producing a stable text that stands as the interpretation, conclusion, or understanding here. For the moment let us simply say that this is achieved through the format of ‘the thesis’; through the definition and discussion of an *approach*, the presentation of *analysis*, and the generation of *findings* etc.

Pragmatism therefore also refers to the unabashed and unashamedly ‘practical’ nature of this, and all, interpretation. As such it rests at one end of a dichotomy described by Ashmore (1989), in his discussion of the work of Woolgar (1981a), as the ‘in-principle’/‘in-practice’ relation of ‘uncertain’ yet ‘sensible’ meaning. Ashmore (1989) sees

‘two radically disconnected poles: on the one hand a set of documents consisting, in practice, of members’ methods of successful practical reasoning, and on the other a posited underlying pattern constituted by those fundamental, omnipresent features of discourse (indexicality, defeasibility, inconcludeability, reflexivity) whose function is, in principle, to make successful practical reasoning an impossibility’ (p. 175).

Construed in various places as ‘the Problem’ of discourse<sup>2</sup>, it is, for pragmatic ethnomethodology irrelevant. That stable meaning, in-principle, should not occur, cannot detract from its evident existence; the question for pragmatic ethnomethodology is how. Such a ‘non-sceptical’ approach is mirrored in Woolgar’s work:

‘Despite the fact that documents are indexical, that any attempt to specify their underlying meaning is in principle both defeasible and inconcludeable and that they bear a reflexive relation to proposed underlying realities, members do routinely establish connections between documents and underlying patterns, and their establishment of these connections is routinely taken to be both adequate (for the practical purposes at hand) and unproblematic. Ethnomethodology is concerned with the ways in which this occurs’ (Woolgar 1981b:12).

As we will see this is not the only understanding of ethnomethodology. Indeed, the later reflexive analysis will show that the ‘productive process’ of the ‘construal of incommensurability lines’ in ethnomethodology has succeeded in (re)introducing ‘the Problem’, this time into truth claims about proper and adequate epistemology. The ‘in-principle/in-practice’ dichotomy therefore will become useful as we recognise its *active use* as a rhetorical device in recent discussions. ‘The Problem’ is then incorporated as one more *practical* concern.

Another practical concern, and one that we will use ‘productively’, is formalism. Formalism, as construed here, will provide the means to generate the findings we require to formulate a stable text, but that we recruit formalism as a practice will be understood as a method for doing these things. The formalistic practices will be taken from Conversation Analysis as understood here. Pragmatic ethnomethodology acknowledges that it uses particular practices to get things done, but does not ignore their utilisation. By incorporating a radical reflexive line, that demands the EM/CA turn its analytic insight in on itself, it aims to understand its own practices.

In short, the analysis, understanding and conclusions of this thesis are interpretive matters; as such they are ‘intimately connected’ (Woolgar 1988) to the things they explain. Such a relationship occurs ‘for all practical purposes’ and is not ‘false’, ‘unreal’ or ‘made up’ because of its interpretive basis (Barnes 1974).

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## Ethnomethodology

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Ethnomethodology is a fundamental ‘reorientation’ (Heritage 1998:187; 1984a) of social study: of what is interesting in society, and how we get at it. First, society is made up of ‘the organised activities of everyday life’ (Garfinkel 1967:vii). Second, these ‘practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical sociological reasoning’ are treated as the ‘topic of empirical study’ (Garfinkel 1967:1). As such it is a project that, according to Garfinkel, involves a ‘respecifying of Durkheim’s lived immortal’ (Garfinkel 1967:vii). Such that Durkheim’s call to a ‘science of society’ (Douglas 1971:viii), by asserting that ‘...social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual’ (Durkheim 1938:37-38), is redefined by Garfinkel who asserts instead that social facts should be understood as the *product* of particular methods of sense-making – or ethnomethods (Garfinkel 1967:vii; Leiter 1980:39-42) – and that these are everywhere, ‘artfully’ employed and taken-for-granted by members of society.



Garfinkel is exclusively interested in the methods employed by members of society in creating the world as 'factual', 'real' and meaningful. As such, his focus on ethnomethods stands in contrast to much of sociology. His position developed in contrast to functionalism and Talcott Parson's 'voluntaristic' (1937) theory of social action (Parsons 1937:13; Coulon 1995:3; Sharrock & Anderson 1986) in which social structure is construed as emanating from an exterior correlate of goals, means and regulatory norms that result in '...the subjective direction of effort in the pursuit of normatively-valued ends' (Heritage 1984a:227).

While Parsons attempted a 'synthesis' between the *facts* of social structure and of personality (in the Durkheimian sense), Garfinkel's emphasis is the 'experience structure' endemic in members' activity (from Garfinkel, H 1952 *the Perception of the Other: a Study in Social Order*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Harvard University. – cited in Heritage 1984a:9).

According to Mehan and Wood (1975), Garfinkel's emphasis on experience structures leads some to explain ethnomethodology in terms of phenomenology – the philosophical approach of Edmund Husserl – expressed in the sociology of Alfred Schultz (Heritage 1984a). While phenomenology provides a useful explanation and shorthand for an understanding of ethnomethodology it unduly simplifies ethnomethodology.

Mehan and Wood, for example, warn against adoption of the "constitutive faith" implicit in such connections: the idea that people create "meaning out of meaninglessness to combat their own nothingness" (Mehan and Wood 1975:194; see later exposition of reflexivity). According to Mehan and Wood ethnomethodology is intimately involved in any constitutive process and is best viewed as a 'form of life' (Wittgenstein 1953). As with *all* meaning and method, ethnomethodology exists in a 'hermeneutic spiral' relationship with whatever it approaches. An object and its appreciation are mutually constitutive, and such relations are not 'one-time' (Ashmore and Reed 2000 ) or uni-directional (also Gadamer 1960).

To outline pragmatic ethnomethodology we will combine elements of ethnomethodology, radical reflexivity and conversation analysis. A basis from which to understand ethnomethodology, and its contribution to pragmatic ethnomethodology, and one that explains the phenomenological emphasis found in some works, is the *indexicality* and *reflexivity* of language.

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## Ethnomethodology: indexicality and reflexivity

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### Indexicality

The study of 'indexical or deictic' expressions has a long history in the study of logic and linguistics (Levinson 1983:45-96). They include terms such as 'here', 'now', 'this', 'it', 'I', 'she', 'you', 'today', 'tomorrow'. They are seen as a barrier to the formal analysis of language because their 'truth value' alters with situation of use (Wootton 1975).

All utterances [and all meaning production] are indexical (Wootton 1975:58; Heritage 1984a:143) and meaning is relative to who is speaking, their relationship to whatever they are speaking about, where, when and to whom they are speaking. Meaning is 'bound up with and occasioned by' the context in which words are used (Wootton 1975:58).

A consequence of the indexicality of language is that 'the analysis of meaning is never exhausted by a simple analysis of the words uttered' (Wootton 1975:59). Words do not have intrinsic absolute meaning; yet, somehow in their practical use they attain a clear meaning. Far from an 'inherent defect' of natural language or 'irremediable nuisances' indexicality is a 'positive resource' for EM (Heritage 1984a:149; Garfinkel 1967:6).

In some practical way, indexicality is 'remedied' – that is through some activity indexical expressions are 'managed'. As Garfinkel puts it the '... substitutability is always accomplished *only* for all practical purposes' (Garfinkel 1967:7, emphasis in original). Through such management practices indexical expressions become objective. Ethnomethodology is interested therefore in 'the *methods* employed to remedy the essential indexicality and opaqueness of speech' (Wootton 1975:62). Woolgar communicates this by saying 'The central research task is an investigation of the ways in which descriptions are practically managed as 'good enough' (1981a:509) and 'To ask how in practice members manage to ignore or evade the implications of the position that accounts are constitutive of 'reality'' (1981a:507). Given that all utterances are indexical, the ethnomethods employed to achieve this is a large feature of ethnomethodological enquiry.

In contrast to the constitutive faith, meaning is not created out of nothingness but is the practical resolution of existing [linguistic] propensities. While a contingent matter this management is not

without history and precedent, and there are repeated recognizable ways in which it occurs (otherwise EM could not generalise its findings).

That words, utterances and meaning making activity are indexical begs the question of how they become rationally understood. As a route to understand this, and in line with our development of pragmatic ethnomethodology, we now turn to the issue of reflexivity.

### Reflexivity

The second [‘problematic] phenomena’ that Garfinkel identifies is the ‘essential reflexivity of accounts’. As with indexicality, reflexivity has been of concern in many areas of thought over a great deal of time (Babcock 1980). There are a variety of ways of defining reflexivity (see Ashmore (1989) for an in-depth definition). For our purposes we will highlight three definitions that equate to ‘reflection’, ‘constitution’ and ‘mutual elaboration’.

#### *Reflexivity as reflection*

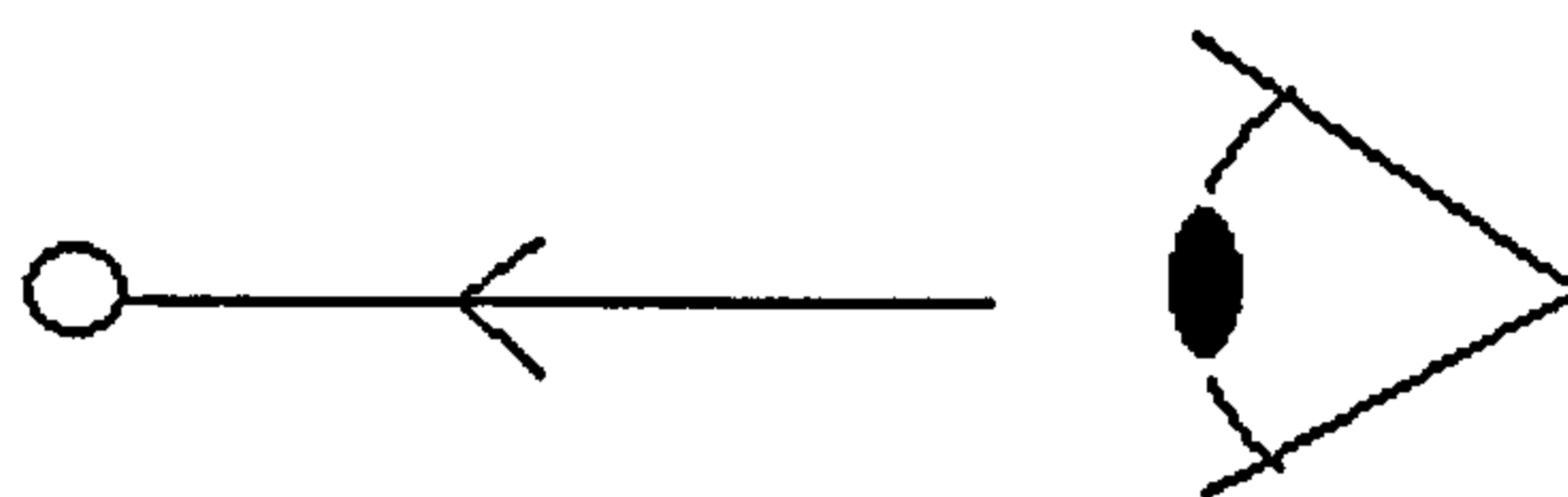
The aspect of reflexivity as ‘reflection’ is primarily a definition of *self*-reflection. Likewise in academia a reflective writing is seen as ‘the capacity possessed by an account or theory when it refers to itself’ (Jary and Jary 1991:524) or ‘self-regarding’ (Babcock 1980:1), what Ashmore (1989) calls ‘R-reference’. In this definition the experiencing subject (represented by a black dot in the following diagram), observes itself as an object (the white dot). This leads Babcock to talk of the ‘capacity of language and of thought – of any system of signification – to turn or bend back upon itself, to become an object to itself, and to refer to itself’ (Babcock 1980:2).



We might also include here ‘self-awareness’ (although other definition sets draw a distinction between this and self-reference) in which ‘self’ is demarcated into (experiencing) ‘I’ and the (experienced) ‘me’ (Mead 1934), and through which the individual learns about him/herself in relation to others in society. It is a route to understanding ourselves as others see us according to

Cooley's 'looking-glass self' and in linguistics its is a central facet of linguistic development such that 'by being able to reflect in words about words, to talk about talking, we [are] able to learn to talk and to do so successfully' (Babcock 1980:3). Babcock calls this capacity of human experience and language the 'primordial social experience essential to the development of both self and society' (Babcock 1980:2).

Reflection can also be turned toward the world<sup>3</sup>. In this case the experiencing subject (black dot) reflects upon a large variety of objects within the world (white dot). One such form of reflection is simple observation, i.e.



where the eye (black dot) reflects upon the world (white dot). Of course, the eye could be replaced with a mouth, given that reflection can also be verbal. Ashmore calls 'self-awareness' 'benign introspection' (1989:32), and similarly the reflecting eye could be viewed as a benign gaze.

Central then to this capacity of thought and language is the *separation of subject and object*, in the subjective experience of an objective entity. This conception of reflexivity is expressed in sociology with the belief that it is possible to make society an object, to reflect upon it from an outside position and, further, that it is possible to objectively experience the self experiencing such things. Durkheim saw this process in the expression of self-knowledge through myths and rituals. This apparent capacity exists beyond action; that is it is largely viewed as an endemic feature of language and thought. However as we will see later, separation of object and subject is rather an *accomplishment* of concerted and contingent action.

### *Reflexivity as constitutive*

The reader might have noticed that in the above definition the diagram was used in two ways. In one the white dot represented the self, in the other the white dot represented things in the world. These two descriptions then construed the diagram in two different ways. The indexical nature of the dots was employed through alternative descriptions to mean different things. We might say

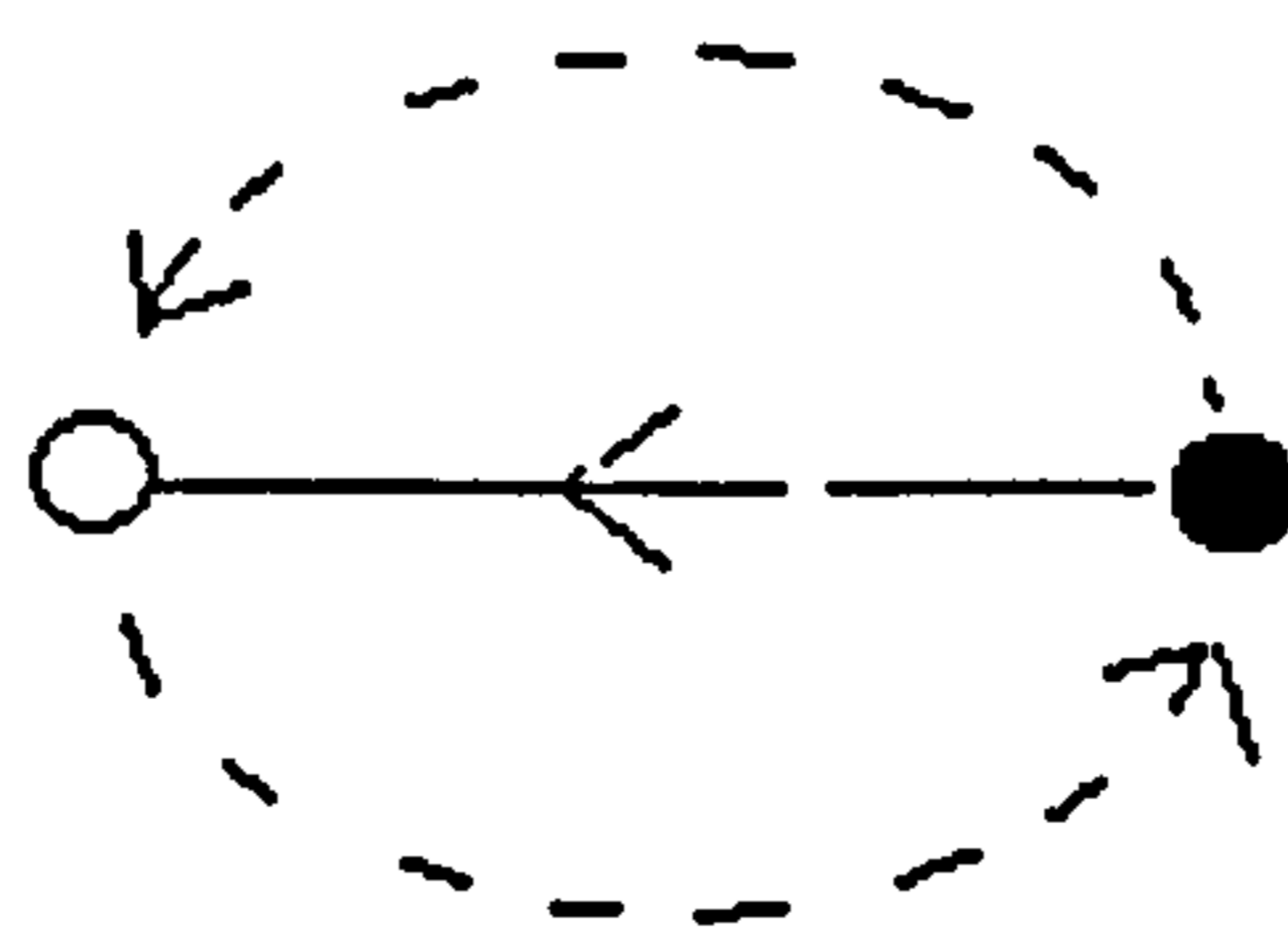
then that our own reflections constructed the object (the white dot) in two different ways. This is a form of reflexivity that we will call constitutive (borrowing Ashmore's notation let us call this 'R-Constitutive'). It can be represented thus,



The gaze, description, and reflection are no longer 'benign' but act upon the observed, talked about, understood world-as-object. We see this form of reflexivity in Pollner's (1991) definition of 'Endogenous reflexivity' which 'refers to how what members do in, to, and about social reality constitutes social reality. Thus language and action are not merely responses to an a priori reality but contribute to its constitution.... Similarly, members' "knowledge" or descriptions of the setting "turns back" into the setting as a constituent feature of its organization' (Pollner 1991:372).

R-Constitutive is part of Garfinkel's use of the notion of reflexivity. Silverman (1998:39) notes the contrast in the writings of Garfinkel to traditional social science (who according to Silverman uses only the reflective form). R-Constitutive '... points to the way understanding is constituted locally, in situ' (Silverman 1998:39). We can see this when Garfinkel asserts that 'members' accounts, of every sort, in all their logical modes, with all of their uses, and for every method for their assembly are constituent features of the settings they make observable' (Garfinkel 1967:8).

However this is not the full use to which Garfinkel puts the term. Mehan and Wood connect misunderstandings of ethnomethodology to such an abbreviated definition. One such connection is to phenomenology (see for example Heritage 1984a). To them connections to phenomenology engender a "constitutive faith": the idea that people create "meaning out of meaninglessness to combat their own nothingness" (Mehan and Wood 1975:194). A fuller appreciation of Garfinkel's use of reflexivity incorporates a realisation of the 'mutual' 'circularity' of accounts processes and the social reality they construe, i.e.,



*Reflexivity as mutual elaboration*

R-circularity, as Ashmore calls it (1989:32), describes a ‘back-and-forth’ relationship of interpretation according to Woolgar (1981b:12). With this definition, object and representation are ‘intimately connected’ (Woolgar 1988:22). Garfinkel’s use of this definition is exemplified in his development of Karl Mannheim’s idea of the ‘documentary method’:

‘...the method consists of treating an actual appearance as ‘the document of,’ as ‘pointing to,’ as ‘standing on behalf of’ a presupposed pattern.... Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of ‘what is known’ about the underlying pattern’ (Garfinkel 1967:78).

The relationship of meaning to phenomenon is not a one-way process. Instead the structure ‘known’ through a process of interpretation, itself reflects upon the understanding so derived. Object and interpretation are mutually constitutive, and mutually elaborative.

Far more than simply ‘self-reflection’, this notion of reflexivity is all encompassing. It is an essential part of language use and recognises language use as an action (Heritage 1984a). The self-reflection or self-reference of the individual, group or society is but one part of a wider process of activity in which the sensible and rational world is constituted. In that it is ‘essential’, it is inescapable, in that it is ‘uninteresting’ it is a taken-for-granted faculty of language that makes the world possible as an understandable object (Garfinkel 1967:8). That it is continual, a simple static distinction between interpretation and phenomenon is not possible: subject and object are in a dynamic relationship.

We will draw on these three definitions of reflexivity as we proceed through the rest of this chapter. Next let us turn our attention to the second element of PE, radical reflexivity.

### *Radical reflexivity*

In addition to endogenous reflexivity, Pollner introduces ‘referential reflexivity’ which asserts that analysis of any type is constitutive, and that this must therefore include EM (1991:372). He therefore calls for a ‘radicalisation’ of EM such that it includes a reflexive appreciation of itself (See also Slack (1998) and ‘stipulative’ reflexivity, and Woolgar (1988) and ‘immediate’ reflexivity).

‘...ethnomethodology is referentially reflexive to the extent it appreciates its own analyses as constitutive and endogenous accomplishments’ (Pollner 1991:372).

Flynn’s ‘suggestion to the ethnomethodological movement’ therefore, is that ethnomethodologists ‘creatively apply the movement’s significant discoveries about the intersubjective world to their own field of discourse and action’ (Flynn 1991: 283). In other words, EM analysis should include an *ethnomethodology of ethnomethodology*.

Pollner and Flynn’s advice has largely gone unheeded. This is due in part to a potential ‘epistemological paradox’ engendered in such an exercise ‘in which the mind or the culture, by its own operation, attempts to say something about its operation’ (Babcock 1980:5).

### **Infinitely regressing standpoints**

Any ‘complete’ account of a situation (Collins 1983:85) leads to an ‘infinite regress of self-regard’ (Babcock 1980:5), a continual move to self understanding. By ‘complete’ is meant the inclusion of all a situation’s elements, including the observation of that situation on the part of the person creating the account. The potential for infinite regression is especially relevant to EM. In that EM is interested in the sense-making practices of society, self-reflexivity involves the understanding of the sense-making practices of the sense-making practices. These subsequent sense-making practices then also demand attention, ad infinitum. We can show this paradox with an extension of our dot and line diagram, the first we have seen before,



Here the white dot is the sense-making practices of ordinary members of society, and the black dot is the experiencing EM analyst. As the focus moves from the white dot, it turns grey and the black dot becomes the white dot. The sense-making practices of the experiencing EM analyst becomes the object of analysis,

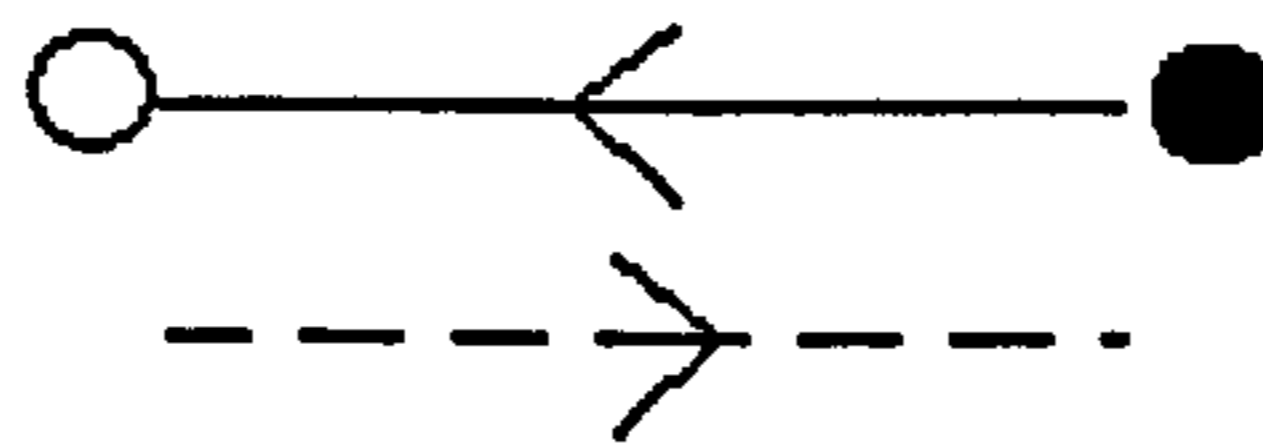


The infinite regression of standpoints would extend the procession of white dot to grey dot, black dot to white dot, and addition of a new black dot off the page and into word processor oblivion.

This is essentially a linear process. A better way to understand it is in terms of the hermeneutic spiral. We can work toward a realisation of this by considering how we might dissolve the apparent paradox.

### (Dis)solving the paradox

We can solve (or at least dissolve) the paradox by turning to our other definitions of reflexivity. R-Constitutive informs us that when we ‘reflect’ upon an object, we construe it; but further to this *we construe it as an object*. We do this by ‘doing standing outside’: Not only does the doing of standing outside *construe a stand-outside-able* object, but this stand-outside-able object allows, creates and makes possible an ‘objective’ analysis, i.e.

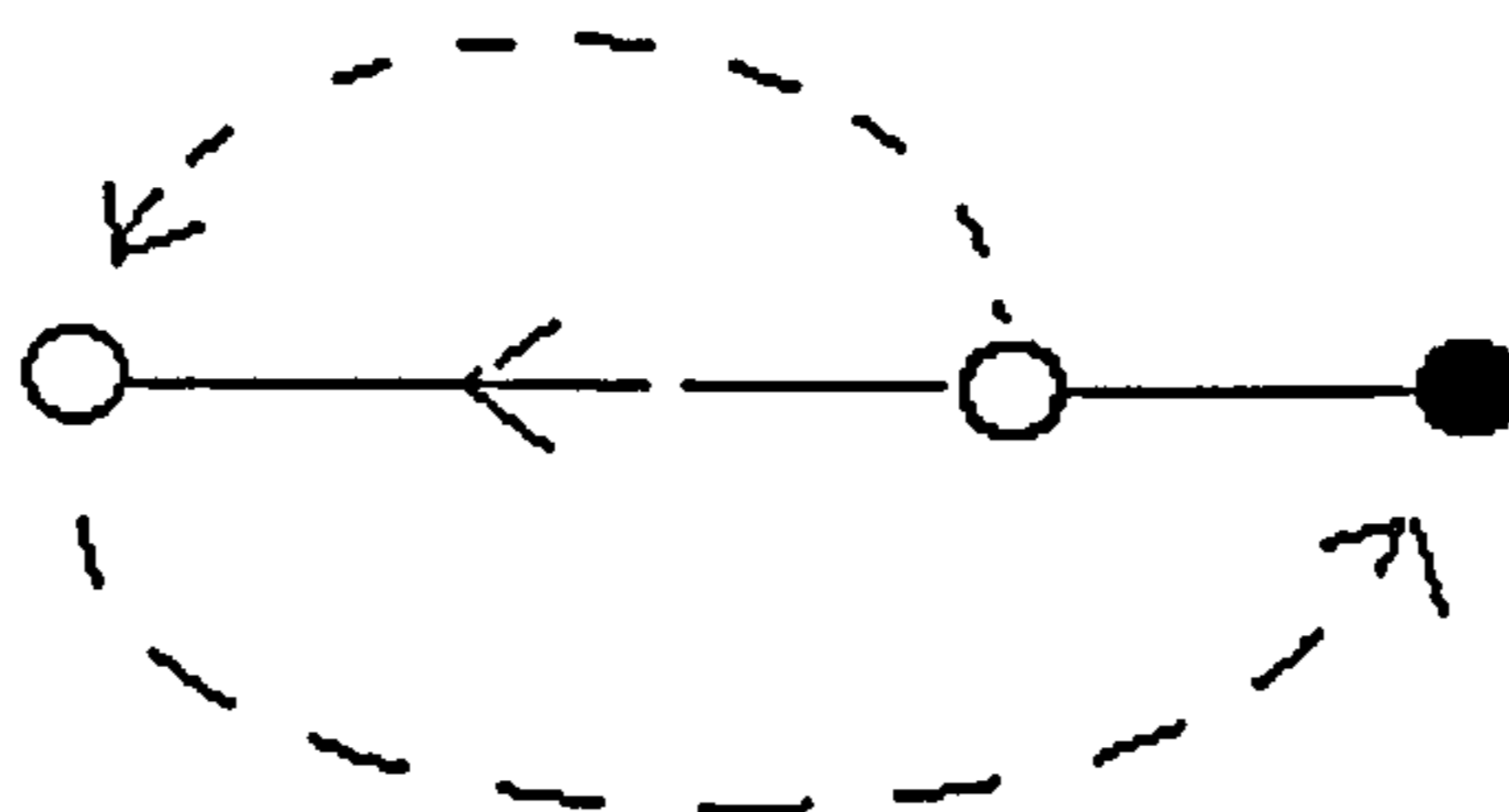


Here the dashed arrow represents the doing-of-standing-outside, the white dot the objective world, and the black dot the subjective experience. What this idea does is unsettle a simple (reflective) understanding of standing outside and observing – unsettle, but not deny. Patently we stand outside and reflect upon the world (a highly successful version of this being (natural) scientific observation), but such a move is now understood as a *contingent accomplishment*, done on each occasion, as practical matters of reflexive appreciation.

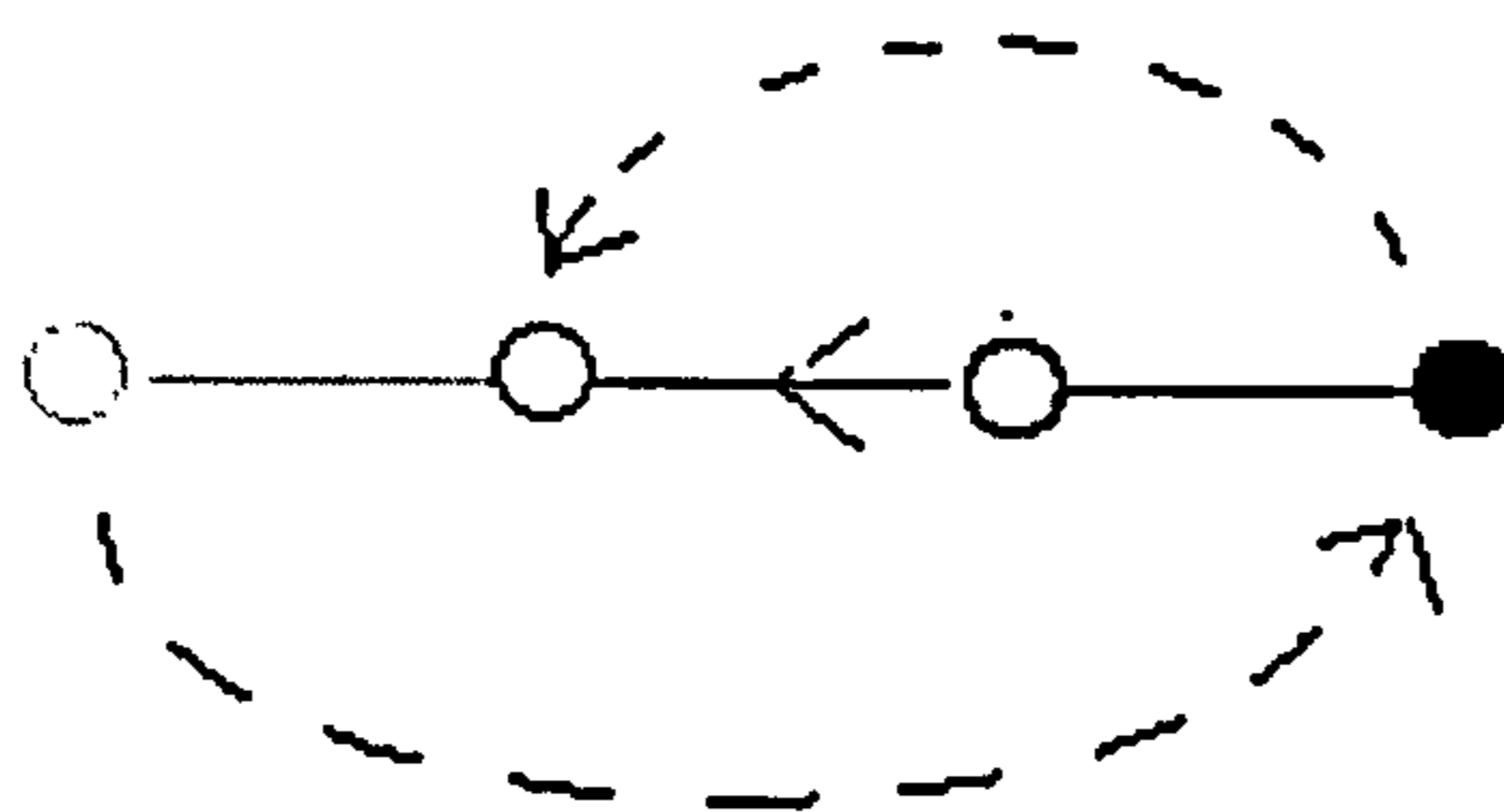


By engaging with our third definition of reflexivity, R-Circularity, we can find an alternative to the (linear) regression of standpoints and incorporate our central principle of the hermeneutic spiral into our understanding. Here the supposed 'regressive' properties of self-reflection are understood as the continual and unavoidable contingencies of the indexical world.

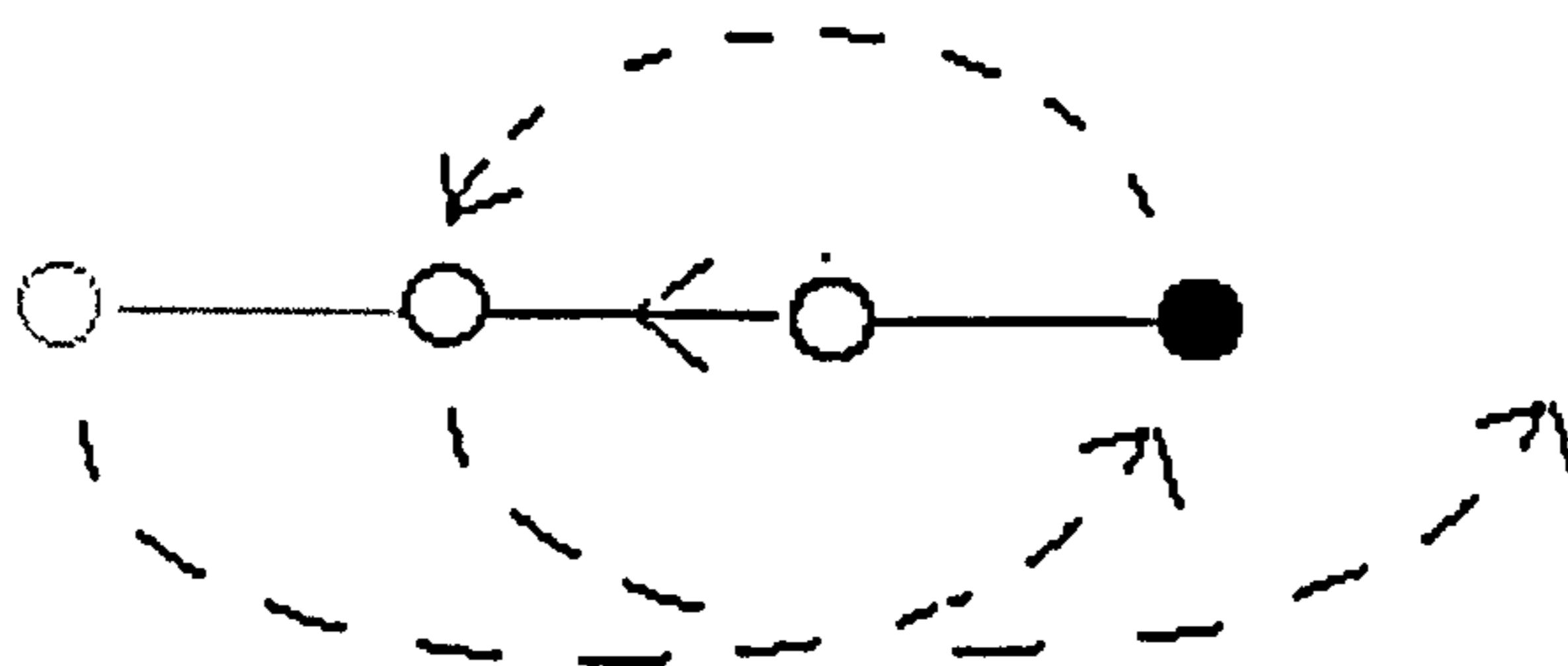
First we should recognise that the documentary method asserts that the position of reflecting, observing, or subjectivity is not static. As an object is reflexively constituted (as an object), it changes and in a circular or 'back-and-forth' manner *changes the (reflexively construed) subjective experience*, i.e.



The grey dot now represents the previous subjective position; the dotted semi-elliptical arrow at the top represents the constitution of the object (white dot), the arrow at the bottom represent the circular motion of understanding. Not only does the subjective position move, but so does the object change, i.e.



such that the experiencing subject now apprehends a changed object. This object circles back to the (changed) subject, i.e.,



and so on and so forth. The relationship between object (construed as an object) and subject (construed as subject) is dynamic, continual and never ending. Drawn as a continual back-and-forth or circular motion, we see a ‘spiral of meaning, interpretation and knowledge’ (Mehan and Wood 1975) or hermeneutic spiral. Notice here that in the terms defined by our diagram, the experiencing subject moves further and further to the right. Far from an ‘infinite regression’, we can discern (diagrammatic) similarities with the linear paradox – the unbroken line in the middle still moves (apparently) rightward. Instead of understanding Pollner’s radical reflexivity as a call to a series of moves that attempt to move the consciousness of the analyst further and further away from the object of analysis, R-circular reflexivity and the hermeneutic spiral allows us to understand such a move as mirroring the natural processes of understanding and knowledge.

This realization additionally supports Mehan and Wood’s criticism of an abbreviated understanding of EM as ‘constitutive faith’. The phenomenological position that advocates ‘bracketing the natural attitude’ is undermined because *bracketing is an action* and not a benign matter of standing outside and reflecting upon the world.

Without fear then of an infinite regression of standpoints, we can apply ethnomethodological insight in on itself. Before this we need introduce conversation analysis. We will then apply EM to both EM and CA and understand (amongst other things) the distinctions drawn between.

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### Conversation analysis

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Harvey Sacks, a colleague of Garfinkel, instigated the analysis of social action called ‘Conversation Analysis’. After his death others, most notably Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, developed the approach<sup>4</sup>. It is notable that Sacks didn’t leave behind a statement of method<sup>5</sup>. Building on the indexical and reflexive properties of social action, Sacks proposed that there was ‘order at all point’ (Sacks, 1984:21). He envisioned a sociology that entailed a focussed and rigorous empirical investigation that analysed in detail moments of order and the practices that construe them. This is achieved by capturing small moments of social interaction on tape (either audio or video) and repeatedly observing and analysing it:

‘I started to work with tape-recorded conversations. Such materials had a single virtue, that I could replay them. I could transcribe them somewhat and study them extendedly’ (Sacks 1984: 26), and further, ‘because others could look at what I had studied and make of

it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me' (Sacks 1984:26).

Sacks was intent on developing a social science that could 'handle the details of something that actually happens. It should be able to do that in an abstract way, while handling actual details' (Jefferson 1995:LC:26). Sacks was not primarily interested in conversation or language per se.

'My research is about conversation only in this incidental way, that conversation is something that we can get the actual happenings of on tape and transcribe them more or less, and therefore that's something to begin with' (1984:26).

Like Garfinkel, Sacks is interested in the 'methods persons use in doing social life' (Sacks 1984:21; as well as Sacks, "A foundation for sociology," MS, Department of Sociology, UCLA). However these methods are not best approached by considering 'known' 'big issues' or 'good problems' because they '... have large-scale, massive institutions as the apparatus by which order is generated ...' (Sacks 1984:22). Instead Sacks notes that humans are just another animal and consequently 'whatever [they] do can be examined to discover some way they do it' (Sacks 1984:22). Instead of a model in which only certain features of a society are ordered, Sacks suggests where ever we look we will find ordered features (Sacks 1984:21).

Sacks advised a regimen of 'unmotivated looking' (Psathas 1990) in which 'We sit down with a piece of data, make a bunch of observations, and see where they will go' (Sacks 1984:2). This is an essentially empirical attitude or philosophy (ten Have 1997) and warrants and underpins Sacks denotation of CA as a formal 'natural observation science' (Lynch and Bogen 1994).

Another basic element of Sacks's approach is an emphasis on on *inter-action* and 'the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand and deal with the behaviour of others' (Atkinson and Heritage 1984a:1). This has been attributed to the influence of another of Sacks's peers, Erving Goffman, as well as (in a less favourable way) R.F. Bales and G. C. Homans (Silverman 1998:32-36).

Actions are 'accountable' (Garfinkel 1967:vii) and interaction's orderliness is made in the way participants produce their actions to be understandable to each other (Sacks and Schegloff, 1973:290) in methodical ways. A focus on interaction therefore has very real methodological advantages because one action is seen to make relevant another action:

‘Whatever is said will be said in some sequential context, and its illocutionary force will be determined by reference to what it accomplishes in relation to some sequentially prior utterance or set of utterances’ (Atkinson and Heritage 1984a:6).

And further utterances project ‘... a range of possible ‘nexts’ (Atkinson and Heritage 1984a:6). In that sequences of actions are systematically related to one another in recognisable ways: they provide a route into analysis,

‘... insofar as unfolding sequences and their constituent turns are unavoidable analytic concerns for interactants, they provide a powerful and readily accessible point of entry into the unavoidable contextedness of actual talk’ (Atkinson and Heritage 1984a:6).

In this sense ‘context’ is the local, at-the-time underlying meaning attributable to action. By understanding one action in terms of the action that preceded it, its context provides for a indexed reading of that action. Consequently CA claims to analyse *what the participants themselves found to be what was happening* (Sacks and Schegloff 1973:290). Any finding can therefore be checked in regards to the ‘next turn proof procedure’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:39).

The idea of sequences of activities, given their order by dint of their relationship to previous activity, and displayed by participants for other participants, allows Sacks to claim a ‘methodical’ and ‘formal’ character for analysis:

‘Social activities – actual, singular sequences of them – are methodical occurrences. That is, their description consists of the description of sets of formal procedures persons employ’ (Sacks 1984; H. Sacks, introduction to untitled MS, Department of Sociology, UCLA).

So Sacks claims that it is possible to find descriptions of activities that occur repeatedly and that can be applied to a large number of situations. An example is the turn taking model (Sacks et al 1974), which by being both ‘context-free and capable of extraordinary context-sensitivity’ (p. 699) can be applied to virtually all talk in interaction. It is a fundamental aim of CA analysis to find features of society based upon this ‘context-free, context sensitive’ trope (West and Zimmerman 1982:524).

### Directed unmotivated looking

Sacks expresses formalism in a very direct description of the ordering processes in society in terms of a *machine*. He uses this understanding to direct the gaze of the analyst towards the persistent structuring mechanisms that produce society. In that his data were actual occurrences of meaningful action he asserts that it is ‘our business [as conversation analysts] to try to construct the machinery that would produce these occurrences’. A sequence of action is ‘really one machine product’ (Jefferson 1995:LC2:169):

‘In a way, our aim is just that; to get into a position to transform ... our view of what happened here as some interaction ... to interactions being spewed out by machinery, the machinery being what we’re trying to find; where, in order to find it we’ve got to get a whole bunch of its products’ (Jefferson 1995:LC2:169).

The machine trope is advantageous for a number of methodological reasons. First it allows the researcher to address one thing at a time, without fear that the ‘whole picture’ is being ignored. Sacks puts it this way. ‘... if you are going to build a piece of machinery ... as you build it you find things out about *its* parts as well as that it is a part of something else’ (Jefferson 1995:LC1:316) (emphasis in original). Once a part is analysed it can be used in combination with other parts. Second, it allows a *progressive* investigation of a phenomenon. Rather than having to see the whole picture – that encompasses the total thing you are looking at – you can feel easy about looking at single parts. Even if the part under investigation does not bear fruit there is no loss. It may be that a different part needs to be understood before the original part can be understood.

The machine trope also clarifies the research aim: Because this type of research starts with the observation of behaviour, it is easy to slip into a simple descriptive account that never ends. The machine trope forces the view beyond what simply can be seen to an attempt to see the workings of the behaviour. It is therefore *a way of seeing*, which structures and informs ‘simple’ observation.

When applied to newsgroup data, the ‘analytic mentality’ of the machine might seem problematic. After all we are clearly studying behaviour that occurs through a ‘real’ machine. Introducing a mechanistic mentality might then compound talk about behaviour as a machine into talk of the computer; it might, for example, anthropomorphise the machine as a motivated agent. In the event however Sacks’s machine trope crystallises questions about ‘what the computer does’ and

‘what the human does’, not by deciding that these are two separate domains, quite the opposite. Interaction mechanisms are recognised as ‘achieved’ through the resources at hand, which include the propensities of text, the timing of message delivery, the ‘computerised’ interaction. So for example the issue of whether ‘the machine allows you to do that’ is one way to mitigate against claims of inappropriate behaviour (see later analysis). Rather than two machines, the computer and interaction, the former can be mobilised in the workings of the latter. In short, the (computer) machine is one part of the broader machine of interaction on newsgroups.

Silverman (1998) notes some common misconception of Sack’s machine. While it is possible to view the machine as somehow deterministic, Sacks was concerned with how members use the machine; the machine, in other words is another way of saying member’s methods procedures, techniques etc. The machine, therefore, does not stand outside or above the actions of individuals and determine it.

Neither should the machine be seen as a set of ‘hypothetical constructs’. This belongs to the social science inspired by Max Weber, amongst others, who build a science on ‘ideal types’ ‘which are only to be judged in relation to whether they are *useful*, not whether they are ‘*accurate*’ or ‘*true*’ (Silverman 1998:64; emphasis in original). Sacks answers such ideas by saying,

‘It is very conventional way to proceed in the social sciences to propose that the machinery you use to analyze some data you have is acceptable if it is not intendedly the analysis of real phenomena. That is, you can have a machine which is a ‘valid hypothetical construct’, and it can analyze something for you.... Now that’s not what I am intending to do. I intend that the machinery I use to explain some phenomenon, to characterize how it gets done, is just as real as the thing I started out to explain (Jefferson 1995:LC1:315).

Sacks aimed, then, to inaugurate a natural observation science. Such a term is suspect, given current positions on understanding science (Lynch and Bogen 1994), and indeed such a notion appears to run contra to ethnomethodology’s position on science. However as we will see such a ‘problem’ is mis-drawn.

### **Ethnomethodology and science**

Early in ethnomethodology’s explication an opposition was created between ethnomethodological sociology and so-called scientific sociology; Such that ethnomethodology

was properly applied as a means to *understand science* (and other ‘fact-producing’ processes), *and not do it*. This opposition is misunderstood.

Science utilises very specific ethnomethods, which reflexively construe ‘objects’ and objective analysis. It does this by ‘managing indexicality’ in particular ways<sup>6</sup>. Yet it is not just scientists that perform the substitution of indexical expressions with objective ones:

‘The practical activity of every member of society rests upon making an ambiguous language exact and consists of ‘members’ use of concerted everyday activities as methods with which to recognize and demonstrate the isolatable, typical, uniform, potential repetition, connected appearance, consistency, equivalence, substitutability, directionality, anonymously describable, planful – in short, the rational properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions’ (Garfinkel 1967:10).

As we will see in the next section, EM creates stable meaning, finding and conclusions by similarly managing indexicality through particular productive processes. As an example, one such management strategy is the search for *perspicuous settings*.

### Perspicuous settings

In a paper with Lawrence Wieder, Garfinkel gives directions of how to search for instances of social action that are likely to best point us to features of interest for ethnomethodology (1992:180). They do this with reference to what they call ‘Sacks’s Gloss’. They recount a situation in which Harvey Sacks makes a distinction between ‘possesables’ and possessitives’. Simply put, the distinction between seeing something one wants and knowing one can possess the thing; and seeing something one wants and knowing that one cannot possess it. Sacks does not want to set up an artificial situation to find out the distinction, but wants people who actually use this distinction (rather than the specific terms used) to show him what it means in real life. Sacks is later seen to come back to Garfinkel having found a social scene in which these features are present. When police officers see an unattended car they have to decide whether it is wrongly parked (in which case they give it a ticket) or abandoned (in which case they organize for it to be towed away). Understanding the distinction between the ‘possessive car’ and the ‘possessable car’, is part of the everyday work of the police officers. Sacks can therefore learn from social members who employ the distinction. For Garfinkel, Sacks’s gloss reveals a ‘perspicuous setting’ (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992:180).

Rather than inscribing a scene with a particular definition of how it works, this regimen of looking searches for instances of particular features within the everyday practices of people to whom the features are of natural consequence and looks to learn from them.

So ethnomethodology says that we can observe people, and because what people do is naturally organized to be understood by those with whom they interact, the researcher can use this feature of action to gain access to the underlying sense-making practices. Any member of a social group – one who is competent in acting in accord with others in the group – is automatically skilled in these techniques. The switch in ethnomethodology is that the competent member (in this case a sociologist) turns their attention toward the ways these things are done. In this sense the researcher can employ a strategy of ‘undirected looking’ and find methods endemic to the situation. Likewise, if a particular structuring feature is understood by the researcher – in her or his capacity as a competent social member, this can lead to directed looking in which a scene is searched for in which this feature is enacted. What we have is a dual strategy of looking.

So EM ultimately shares a common methodological practice of unmotivated and directed observation with CA – a *dual strategy of looking*.

What Sacks offers is a form of systematic and rigorous analysis that remains intent on getting to the sense-making practices of everyday life. Like Garfinkel’s dual strategy of observation, CA provides a way of seeing that incorporates ‘simple looking’ with purposeful directed observation. But more than this, Sacks offers a formal basis from which to ‘observe’ the interactions of members of society, which incorporates (and we might say defuses) the contextual nature of action as an epistemological tool for understanding situated action. CA does this by offering to reveal the ‘real’ machine behind social life.

This formal stance effectively silences the hermeneutic spiral, in that we are presented with ‘knowledge’ about the world, real findings, an understood object, that is no longer prone to reflexive anxieties of interpretation.

What we do have to realise at this point, however, is that just like ethnomethodology before it, the activity of doing CA is itself action, and is in a mutually constructive relationship to its object of study. That is, in the same way that ethnomethodology should be mindful of its own



processes, and any use of it incorporate such recognition, so too CA needs to be recognised as a practice like any other. A scientific practice perhaps, but still a practice.

What is interesting then is that CA provides a way to do detailed focussed analysis of instances of social action. It achieves this through a set of 'productive processes' (Reed and Ashmore 2000) – that include the 'machinic practices' of taping and transcribing – and can be identified through a program of radical reflexivity. We will start with an appreciation therefore of EM's 'productive processes' (Ashmore and Reed 2000) through a radical reflexive program.

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## Radical reflexivity and the productive processes of EM

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### Writing narrative, explanation and description in EM. An example: Garfinkel's Asterisk.

The difficult, often confusing writing style of Garfinkel has been noted by a number of authors (Heritage 1998; Latour 1988). One aspect is his use of the asterisk tagged on the end of 'order' within the following extended quotation (used throughout the article), which also introduces the issue of asymmetric incommensurability – under the heading 'Ethnomethodological Policies and Methods':

'Ethnomethodologically, every topic of order\* – every topic of order, logic, meaning, reason, and method – is eligible to be found as a phenomenon of order\*. Every topic of order\* offers to ethnomethodological study its candidacy to a search for a phenomenon of order\* as an achievement in and as of practical action. Every topic of order\* will offer itself to the craft of ethnomethodology as an achieved phenomenon of order\*, to finding the topic as a phenomenon of order\*, finding it with the use of EM policies and methods, finding the phenomenon as an only discoverable achieved phenomenon of order\*, or to collecting, examining, describing, indicating, respecifying, or teaching a topic of order\* as a phenomenon of order\*. Any of the indefinitely many topics of order\* are eligible for discovery.

The technical, distinctive jobs of EM, the craft of EM, consist of in vivo tasks of discovering phenomena of order\* as instructable achievements in and as of their coherent details. EM's results are identical with radical phenomena of order\*.

Its maxims, policies, instructions, and methods are singular to and distinctive of EM studies. They are incommensurable, asymmetrically alternate to the corpus of policies and methods of classic studies. They furnish the sole grounds for explicating EM findings. With their use EM findings are to be treated as corrigible claims written as sketch accounts. They are to be read praxeologically as first segments of lebenswelt pairs. And they had to be found out' (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992:180-181).

This is one example of Garfinkel's writing style that also includes long drawn out sentences, the 'in and as of' formulation, the searching out and re-specification of taken for granted terms and phrases, the use of square brackets to denote indexical terms (originally seen in Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970), and extended self referential footnotes. I want the asterisk-use in the presented article to stand as proxy for all these alternative literary styles<sup>7</sup>.

Here is part of the footnote that relates to the asterisk in the above quotation, which runs in its entirety to half a page of narrative,

'We ask that order\* be read as a proxy for any topic of reason, logic, meaning, proof, uniformity, generalization, universal, comparability, clarity, consistency, coherence, objectivity, objective knowledge, observation, detail, structure, and the rest... Any and all topics of order\* are candidates for EM study and respecification... We shall understand any of the topics of order\* as locally produced, naturally accountable phenomena, searched for, findable, found, only discoverably the case, consisting in and as 'works of the streets'... [etc]' (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992:203).

The use of the asterisk does all these things. It changes the word 'order' into something other than itself. There is a sense that the long list at the beginning of the footnote is itself not exhaustive and further examples could and should be added. 'Order' has a limited, vernacular, ordinary, you-know-what-I mean-when-I-write-it (etc.) quality that requires extension. But the job is never finished, the exhaustive definition never found. The asterisk acts to denote the indexical nature of what Garfinkel and Wieder mean by the term (in their terms). Even the list in the footnote 'reason, logic, meaning, proof, uniformity, generalization...' is a technique for saying 'and every other thing'.

In writing down what the phenomenon of interest is, Garfinkel and Wieder have to attempt to manage the indexicality of the term they apply to it. They do this by inventing a signed object – the asterisk – to convey what is not conveyable. Here is another example of Garfinkel's asterisk:

'Your data is not CA data. ... CA is about this [frantic arm waving follows]' – (Gail Jefferson, conversation with author, June 2000)

The asterisk, the frantic arm waving, the 'tendentious expression' (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992:180), the square brackets, the circular narrative, the extensive footnotes, all are efforts to

convey what EM is about, interested in, looking at\*<sup>8</sup>. ‘Doing ethnomethodology’ necessarily includes writing, presenting and the like. It has to produce a recognizable object, even when this entails expanding upon a definition, conveying in unconventional ways.

And of course ethnomethodological analysis relies wholeheartedly on the pre-established meanings of Garfinkel’s asterisks. Practitioners use established terms, common practices, and a set of taken-for-granted craft competences. These are all management strategies for dealing with indexicality. If we were to take a realist line, the ‘lived-in-courseness’, ‘endogenously-displayed’, ‘achieved’, ‘accountable’ world is still just beyond the horizon.

Now we do not mean to say that what these indexicality management structures alluded to are a phantom. They are of course practical matters of sense-making. However in trying to convey ethnomethodology, reveal it, argue for it, compare it to other’s ‘it’, ethnomethodologists have only indexical resources and reflexive consequences.

With the various techniques alluded to – which we are conveying as Garfinkel’s asterisk – EM aims to breach the gap between the descriptive competence of language and the ‘real’ phenomenon of order-as-construed-through-sense-making-practices. This reality occurs in and through the writings of EM.

We can deepen this understanding if we turn to the issue of incommensurability and EM, take the reflexive turn, and understand incommensurability as a productive process.

### **Productive process: doing incommensurability**

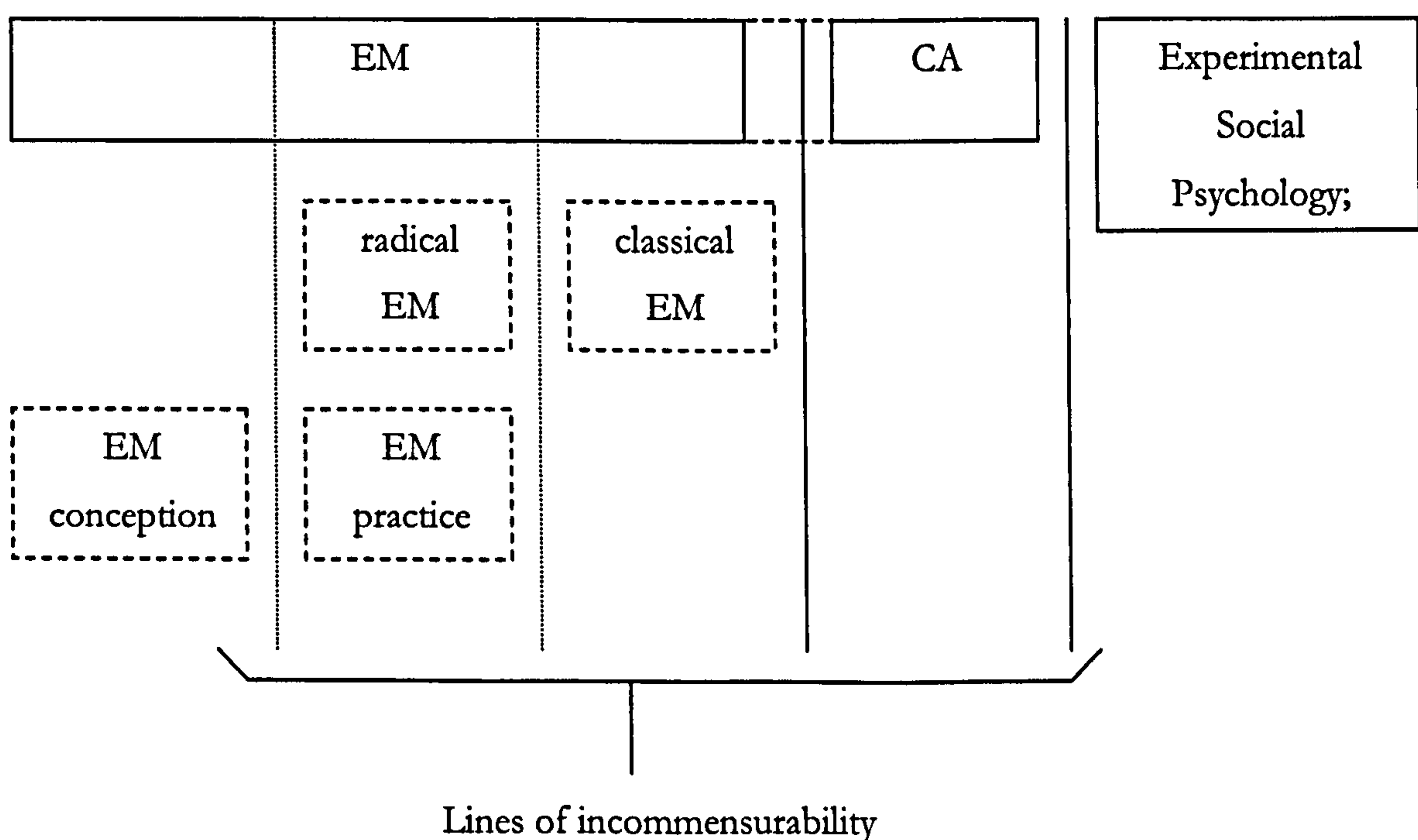
#### *Incommensurability: general (symmetric) and specific (asymmetric)*

It is relevant here to contrast *general* and *specific* incommensurability. The first – more widely understood – application of the term comes from the work of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. Sociological dictionaries define general incommensurability in terms of ‘a relation between scientific theories in which the propositions and overall content of the theories *cannot be directly compared*’ (Jary & Jary 1991:300; emphasis added) because their findings are always ‘theory-relative’. It is therefore impossible to have a ‘theory-neutral data language’ (ibid.). General

incommensurability denotes incompatibility, and does not involve value judgments about which finding is less or more theory relative.

Garfinkel's contrasts 'traditional' theory relative social science with ethnomethodology in terms of two 'asymmetric alternate technologies of social analysis' (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992:175). The former is a form of 'constructive analysis' that unavoidably imposes its own presuppositions (theories, concepts, measurements by fiat etc.) on to the social world, and the latter does not. Garfinkel's specific asymmetric incommensurability contradicts the definition of general incommensurability because it says that some observations are more theory relative than others. Specific incommensurability does not involve incompatible, yet parallel (symmetric), paradigms, and instead asymmetry is used to infer the possibility of theory-neutral insight on the part of ethnomethodology.

Various practitioners employ the term incommensurability to do definitional work; that is it defines 'true' ethnomethodology. As we will see it has been applied in a variety of places, with a variety of outcomes. In each case an 'incommensurability line' has been drawn between EM and everything else (lumped under the derogative term 'constructive analysis'). The following diagram frames this idea:



*Incommensurability line: between EM/CA and ESP*

Our interest in incommensurability starts with a paper written by Kent Drummond and the late Robert Hopper (1993) called 'Back Channels Revisited: Acknowledgement Token and Speakership Incipiency' which was submitted to *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. The three reviewers of the paper – D. Laurence Wieder, Don H Zimmerman and Karen Tracey – could not agree on the adequacy of the paper for publication and instead instigated a colloquy to consider pertinent issues relating to the combination of methods employed by the researchers: in that it included 'constructive analysis' (Wieder 1993a:152) based upon a notion of specific and general incommensurability. The colloquy allowed for 'a surfacing of a host of questions and issues that transcend Drummond and Hopper's article and its merits' (Wieder 1993a:152).

Drummond and Hopper's article builds upon an analysis of 'acknowledgement tokens' in terms of 'passive reciprocity' and 'speakership incipiency'. They aim to qualify a distinction made by Jefferson (1993; originally 1981) between two forms of acknowledgement tokens based upon the coding of instances into whether the talk changed hands ('speakership incipiency') or did not ('passive reciprocity'). Their methodology is a combination of CA 'sequential analysis' and Experimental Social Psychology's (ESP) 'distribution analysis' (Zimmerman 1993:180).

Zimmerman's objections to their approach rests upon the idea that they have decontextualised the phenomena Jefferson identifies in that '[d]istributional analysis requires the coding of raw data into equivalence categories' such that '[w]hen the finished coding scheme is applied, the rules that constitute it function as grounds for classifying some feature as an instance of a category' (Zimmerman 1993:180). Thus coding schemes, he asserts, result in 'stipulated objects', 'constructions guided by the investigator's notions of the relevant aspects of the behavior the scheme reduces' (Zimmerman 1993:180). This 'shortfall' is not due to 'indifferent effort' on the part of the authors but is a result of them employing by fiat 'the logic and practice of normal social science that routinely obscures the situated nature of human interaction' (Zimmerman 1993:180)<sup>9</sup>. Drummond and Hopper's methodology results in 'reduced data' that has its contextual interactional properties removed. By contrast CA engages with 'unreduced data' because of its use of 'single case analysis' (i.e. detailed CA analysis of single instances of a phenomenon) (see Schegloff 1993 for a discussion of quantification in CA):

'An important aspect of single-case analysis is that it allows the analyst to locate and describe participants' orientation to the events they produce and encounter in their

interaction. ... The orderliness of [CA's] phenomenon is found in the details of its actual production and comprehension by participants; it is not discovered in the statistical analysis of an aggregate of cases' (Zimmerman 1993:182).

It is not that coding is wrong per se, but that it occurs before detailed analysis of activity in context:

'For conversation analysis, the order is in the details of everyday interaction that, if it is to be reduced at all, must first be carefully described ... This method of working can yield quantitatively characterized data, but if it is to do so, it is not by starting from a coding scheme, but working up into such a device' (Zimmerman 1993:182).

Zimmerman employs an argument of specific incommensurability to say Drummond and Hopper combine incompatible methods in which distributional analysis constructs a phenomenon by reducing it into categories. The 'profound' difference between CA and ESP is that CA 'requires close examination of *unreduced data*' (Zimmerman 1993:182, emphasis added), that does not 'routinely [obscure] the situated nature of human interaction' (Zimmerman 1993:180). Zimmerman's criticism draws an incommensurability line between CA (and everything to the left in the diagram) and ESP.

It is interesting to note that while Zimmerman uses a specific incommensurability argument, Wieder (1993b), who summarised the 'issues' involved in the colloquy, takes a *general* incommensurability position: 'the exclusive claims of interest here are that these enterprises are incommensurable in the same way that work guided by *incommensurable paradigms in physical science* is' (p. 214, emphasis added). This is incommensurability as incompatibility. And his use of this line is curious given that Wieder wrote the paper on *asymmetric* incommensurability with Garfinkel. A possible explanation is hinted at in one of his footnotes:

'If EM and constructive analytic social science are incommensurable, then CA's possible incommensurability with constructive analysis has a bearing on the question of its relation to ethnomethodology. Are EM and CA, whose historical origins are so intertwined, incommensurable or closely allied enterprises?... [M]y purpose is to note the existence of an underlying question and to suggest that if it is profitable to explore the more limited questions of this special section, then it is likely that exploring CA's relation to

conventional constructive analytic social science at large and to ethnomethodology will be profitable as well' (pp. 224-5).

If, as we are about to claim, Wieder's position on this issue was already settled the year before (that EM and CA are specifically incommensurate), then it is not surprising that he engages Kuhn's general incommensurability in his discussion and not specific incommensurability. If he posits that CA is specifically incommensurate with EM he cannot support Zimmerman's pejorative position on the Drummond and Hopper article.

We have attached 'specific incommensurability' to Garfinkel alone up to this point, but the article that we draw on – as an example of this position – was in fact written by Garfinkel and Wieder: 'Two Incommensurable, Asymmetrically Alternate Technologies of Social Analysis' (1992) *published a year before* the colloquy. We claim that Garfinkel and Wieder make inferential claims about a line of incommensurability *between EM and CA*.

*Incommensurability line: between EM and CA*

Garfinkel and Wieder (1992) write,

'The technical, distinctive jobs of EM, the craft of EM, consist of in vivo tasks of discovering phenomenon of order\* as instructable achievements in and as of their coherent details. ...

Its maxims, policies, instructions, and methods are singular to and distinctive of EM studies. They are incommensurable, asymmetrically alternate to the corpus of policies and methods of classic studies (pp. 180-181).

An important aspect of the EM craft is the requirement of 'unique adequacy of methods' (p. 181), which has a 'weak use' and a 'strong use'. The weak use maintains that 'the analyst must be vulgarly competent in the local production and reflexively natural accountability of the phenomenon of order\* he is 'studying' (p. 182). The strong use asserts that 'in any actual case a phenomenon of order\* already possesses whatever as methods methods could be of [finding it] if [methods for finding it] are at issue. Comparably, a phenomenon of order\* already possesses whatever as methods methods could be of [observing], of [recognizing], of [counting], of [collecting], of [topicalizing], of [describing] it, and so on...' (p. 182). In short the strong use



claims that there is no need to add a methodology to understand a piece of social action because understanding is naturally 'built-in' through features of accountability (Heritage 1984a).

Watson notes in the introduction to the collection of works in which the Garfinkel and Wieder paper appears that this idea provides a bone of contention between EM and CA. He notes that Bilmes (1986) conceives of a fundamental difference 'For conversation analysis, order is not there only by ex post facto interpretation ... the conversation analyst tries to explain, by positing rules and procedures, how it gets there (p.166)' (Watson 1992:xvii).

### First time through; second time through

Garfinkel and Wieder (1992) introduce an example from 'canonical conversation analysis'. Stephan and Mishler, who were interested in the distribution of turns in a tutorial group, tape-recorded conversation and listened to them repeatedly and made tallies of turns amongst the participants. This according to Garfinkel and Wieder is a 'no news can't lose enterprise' (p. 183).

'If you start with a careful definition you're halfway home, but only halfway. You still have to make a tape recording. Then, by listening to the taped talk you must listen to it for events provided for in your definition over the vicissitudes of having to find in the taped talk such in vivo ordinary things as [a person who was talking has stopped talking and a next person is talking after that person has stopped talking]. These are hearably lived in vivo ordinary organizational things' (p. 183, emphasis in the original).

They note that 'these events, being done by and available to the parties first time through, are for both lay and professional analysts, at one and the same time easily recognized and intractably difficult to describe' (p. 183, emphasis in the original). They conclude, 'It is incongruous, then, that exactly the phenomenon of first time through escape professional analysts' (p. 183).

The next part is important because it could be claimed that CA practitioners are not following Garfinkel and Wieder's advice:

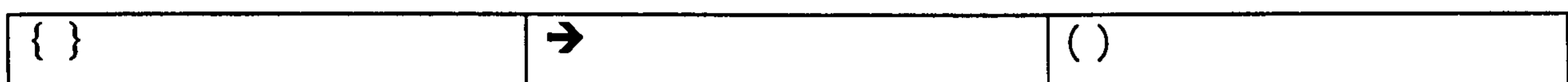
'[The phenomena of first time through] escape in the very way that analysts administer their definitions over the contingencies that the tapes present to their own search in the tapes for formal descriptive facts of conversation's endogenous achievements. Reflexively,

these contingencies compose and assure their work with the tapes' repeated play as just the work that is needed to make their definition come true' (pp. 183-184).

At this point it is not clear that Garfinkel and Wieder are referring to (Sacksian) CA. After all CA practitioners claim that they do not simply impose a definition and reflexively find it in the repeated listening to a tape; they find their phenomena within the activities of the interaction represented in the tape. However the idea of 'first time through' would mitigate against any tape recording and re-listening: Doesn't tape recording form a new (decontextualised) object who's experience 'first time through' is different to the original; and doesn't re-listening entail continual 'first time through's' which are each different experiences? (not to mention the mutual reflexive interaction of listening understanding and listening again). These ideas come in to strong focus when Garfinkel and Wieder introduce the rendering of the summoning phones.

### Garfinkel's Rendering Theorem and the summoning phones

Garfinkel and Wieder conceive of the 'Rendering Theorem' to explicate the action of constructive analysis. The theorem is represented in the following diagram:



Where:

{ } represents the 'naturally accountable lived phenomenon of order\*

→ refers to 'professional analysts' skilled use of methodic procedures'

( ) refers to accounts -signed objects – that are specified by use of →

They use the rendering theorem to explicate an 'experiment' carried out by Garfinkel's students.

### *Garfinkel's summoning phones*

Garfinkel asked his students to tape record five instances of five categories of summoning telephones and present them in the next class. The five categories of summons were:

1. a phone that is hearably summoning you

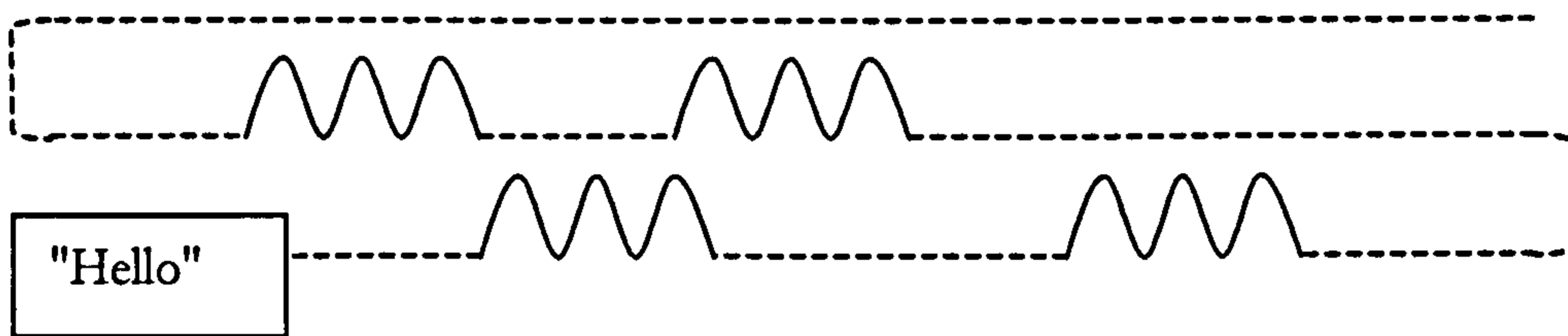
2. a phone that is hearably summoning someone else
3. a phone that is hearably simulating a phone summoning you
4. a phone that is hearably simulating a phone summoning someone else.
5. a phone just ringing, hearably not summoning at all

In the next lesson, Garfinkel applied the tapes to the rendering theorem by specifying a methodic procedure for visually describing each instance.

‘To specify this methodic procedure we’ll use a set that consists of a line,  $\text{---}$ , and a squiggle,  $\text{~~}$ ; and a collection of rules for administering them as follows: We’ll play the tape. As long as we hear a silence we’ll continue to draw a line; as long as we hear a ringing we’ll make and continue a squiggle. Call these the set of rules (R)

In the third column we’ll write the account we get when we administer ( $\text{---}$ ,  $\text{~~}$ ) according to the set of rules (R), to each of the tape-recorded episodes’.

Garfinkel played an example tape and applied the rules that he had conceived. This was the resulting diagram:



This diagram represents a signed object as account of his example phone summons.

Garfinkel then drew a rendering theorem for each of the twenty-five instances collected by his students. This is a cut down version of the resulting table (the original included all five – identical – instances):

{ }	→	( )
{Phone Summoning Me}	( $\text{---}$ , $\text{~~}$ ) (R)	$\text{---} \sim \text{---} \sim$
{Phone Summoning Someone Else}	( $\text{---}$ , $\text{~~}$ ) (R)	$\text{---} \sim \text{---} \sim$

{Phone Simulating PSM}	(--- , ~~) (R)	----~----~
{Phone Simulating PSSE}	(--- , ~~) (R)	----~----~
{Phone Ringing}	(--- , ~~) (R)	----~----~

The instances are all the same; the point is simple: by tape recording, and describing them through particular methods, those features that would distinguish the instances are lost – the instances are decontextualised. Garfinkel concludes that ‘These analyzably connected observables are the premium achievements of formal analytic [another description for constructive analysis] social sciences...’ (p. 200).

Garfinkel’s summoning phones experiment bears comparison with Schegloff’s analysis of the Summons-answer pair. In a well-respected piece of analysis dating from 1968 Schegloff works up an understanding of the opening sequence of telephone calls in which there exist a ‘summons-answer’ pair (republished, 1972). The initial summons being the telephone ring.

His recognition of the ringing phone as a summons was based solely on there being an ‘answer’ to it. However as Garfinkel’s summoning phones experiment shows, the constitutive features that demarcate a phone ringing as ‘a summons’ (to whoever) is contained in the endogenous features of the actual phone ringing. These features are missing as soon as the phone is recorded and played elsewhere. Schegloff at the very least is missing a good part of his phenomena. Admittedly his expressed phenomenon is the organized entry into telephone calls. However the point still holds that aspects of what the telephone ring does to initiate a telephone call are missing from his data. Further to this Schegloff only uses a tape of the event. This is itself a constructed object.

If we extend the alternative rendering theorem of the tape to CA practice – that is premised upon the tape as the ‘primary record’ – we have the resulting signed object (the tape) acting as the constructive method through which the next signed object (transcript) is produced.

CA’s rendering theorem might look like this:

{verbal interaction}	→ (recording of tape)	(tape recording)
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and further,

{tape recording}	→ (rules and work of transcription)	(transcript of tape)
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Conceived in terms of EM's relationship to mainstream sociology, there is evidence that CA itself is on the wrong side of the disciplinary line, in that it employs practices of a formal analytic type that render a phenomenon analysable by suspending it and removing it from its productive context.

*Incommensurability line: between 'radical' and 'classical' EM*

We start from a distinction between 'classical' and 'radical' ethnomethodology. We then ask questions about the relationship between the two, between the radical line and ethnomethodological practice as part of the radical line. This then moves to an 'in-principle'/'in-practice' (Ashmore 1989; Woolgar 1988) distinction between describable EM and EM as a 'craft skill'. What is interesting is that the classical line can be played off against the radical line. Consider the question 'how – procedurally – does Garfinkel and Wieder state, define, explicate the radical line in the above article?' They do it through a number of constructive techniques, including 'Garfinkel's asterisk'.

### **Describing and Doing Incommensurability**

What follows is an account of a series of exchanges on a public listserv called ETHNO (A 'listserv' is a text based asynchronous Internet forum<sup>10</sup>). In three message threads a number of issues are raised and discussed pertaining to incommensurability and EM's relationships, characterisations and internal developments. We would like to bring out some, but not all, of the issues raised and view them as a set of interactions and actions. In this way we are turning the relationship between object and analysis full circle. The 'approach', 'method', 'conception' of EM becomes the phenomenon in a form of interaction (asynchronous and textual) that mirrors our original research focus – newsgroups – because it occurs in a 'listserv'.

First then the message threads are entitled 'A bigger bone to chew on', 'learning EM', and 'GET ME OUT OF HERE'. It occurs in September of 2000 and involved various members of EM and those closely affiliated with EM (The issue of membership is one engaged with by the

interactants, but not here)<sup>11</sup>. Simply described the first thread follows a discussion of whether EM can constructively engage with non-EM sociology based upon the issue of incommensurability. The second thread then moves the subject to whether it is possible to learn EM through descriptive accounts, or whether the only way to learn it is as a craft skill from able practitioners. This discussion then prompts a famous and respected practitioner to demand, in verbose language, his removal from the listserv and related web site. His outrage is directed toward the discussions that have occurred viewed as redundant based upon one side of the discussion content. To wit, it is not possible to describe EM and hence discussions of incommensurability are devoid of ethnomethodological insight.

Let us start to follow the arguments through.

The first of the threads, entitled 'A bigger bone to chew on', is started by a participant we will call 'Participant One' who notes the 'fundamental question' about the relationship of 'EM/CA' work and 'conventional social science'.

'EM/CA folk complain that (1) our work is relevant beyond the EM/CA community, and (2) our work should not be evaluated by 'conventional' standards. .... But these two beliefs/complaints seem to be at odds with each other .... If we're going to persist in both of these beliefs/complaints, as is my intention, then I suggest that we need to revisit the thesis of 'two incommensurable, asymmetrically alternate technologies of social analysis.' ... It seems to me that if EM/CA work is relevant to conventional scholarship, then the disjunction between them cannot involve anything like strict incommensurability or asymmetry' (11 September 2000 3:30).

The central thrust of the message is that communication between EM and conventional social science (also referred to as constructive analysis during the thread), allows conventional social science to learn from EM with regard to how to approach certain matters. In answer to this idea Participant Two builds a position on two points: the production of theory, and the 'unique adequacy requirement'. Accordingly he asserts that 'invariably the business of conventional social sciences proliferates under the auspices of the et cetera problem and proceeds through constructive analysis (i.e. through the production of *generically theorised formats* and representations' (12 September 2000 10:30; emphasis added). Further '[t]heory of whatever persuasion cannot make the orderliness of ordinary activities available' because it does not satisfy the unique

adequacy requirement which demands that the analyst ‘be, with others, in a concerted competence of methods” (the last section is placed in quotations by Participant Two).

Conventional social science is distanced from the sense-making practices of everyday people (the basis from which understanding should follow) because of the application of theoretical practices, which belong to the analyst only. To bring them in line with EM, social scientists ‘[n]eed [to] become part and parcel in a way of the fields of practical action that constitute their objects of study’ (ibid)<sup>12</sup>. Only through becoming part and parcel of the practical actions can the analyst attain a ‘vulgar competence’ of whatever they are investigating and write ‘corrigible praxiological [sic] accounts’ (ibid.). In conclusion Participant Two notes ‘EM is only and entirely interested in members’ methodologies and they are NOT available to constructive analysis’ (ibid.). This then reiterates Garfinkel and Wieder’s position<sup>13</sup>. After this, a new participant, Participant Three, discusses the description of structure. He does this in a very interesting way. First he directly quotes Participant Two, and then he asks how this text ‘squares’ with a quotation that Participant Two has used, which he also quotes.

At this point a new writer, Participant Four, intervenes to combat the deadlock between Participant One and Participant Two. He introduces a formulation of a ‘two-level model’, which sets out a frame that allows an understanding of the differences and difficulties.

‘1 Most conventional social science works with a two-level model, on the one hand a level of abstract (theoretical, conceptual) language (level 1) and on the other a level of concrete phenomena (level 2). ...

2 The ultimate goal of conventional social science is to ‘explain’ social phenomena, which exist on level 2, by theoretical formulations (concepts, hypotheses, theories) available at level 1. ...

Social science, then, is a professional discipline that boosts its market position by stating that its unique competence lies in (1) its mastery of a theoretical language, and (2) its ability to ‘explain’ what in common sense is a mystery.

EM’s counter-position is that social science is not essentially different from common sense, that common sense actors ‘know what they are doing’ and that the job that remains for EM is to learn how they are doing what they do, *that is to ‘explicate’ rather than to ‘explain’*. In other

words, EM refutes the two-level model, which I suggested in 1 above characterizes most of social science ...' (12 September 2000 21:12; emphasis added).

Drawing out the points from this formulation<sup>14</sup> we have the idea that conventional social science is universally characterised by the 'theory' 'explanation' objective. This way of going about understanding social relations is little different to what all people do in their daily lives. It is a 'common sense' form of interpretation and knowledge production. The distinctiveness of EM to conventional social science is presented in a wonderfully simple (yet substantive) move from 'explanation' to 'explication'. *Explanation* carries inferences of interpretation, while *explication* is something like simple presentation without explanation. The explanation/explication move is a succinct argumentative point and it is noticeable that the formulation of Participant Four is widely accepted, and used, by participants to the conversation. Participant One (12 September 2000 23:25) says that he has no 'dispute with the body' of Participant Four's message, and *instead* the argument is with the content of Participant Two's message. He accepts the two-level model on the one hand, but redefines the argument to be not about 'generalities' but the specific points made by Participant Two. Essentially Participant One's reply is a reassertion of the position taken at the onset, but this time 'incommensurability' is specifically defined in terms of two alternative readings: either incommensurability equates to *irrelevance* of one position to the other; or it equates to *fundamental difference or incompatibility*. This distinction matches our earlier discussion. His argument is that a definition of irrelevance denies any communication between the two, and that this is evidently not the case.

Another use of the two-level model is seen in the next message<sup>15</sup>. Participant Five builds upon the model by turning its logic in on itself. Social science may well employ common sense practices for its understanding, but 'explication' is a practice also (13 September 2000 10:51); EM employs 'methods of explication'.

Participant Five builds further by then asserting that 'theorising' is not wrong in itself, but that instead the 'rush to theorise' is the problem (13 September 2000 10:51). This is in line with certain empirical emphases found in EM (ten Have 1997; Zimmerman 1993).

The two level model allows Participant Two to explain that 'conventional social science formulates orderliness at level 2 (the abstract level) whereas EM/CA formulates orderliness at level 1 (the concrete action level)'. As such conventional social science uses 'special methods' for doing this. As such the results 'fail to be praxeologically valid' because they do not make 'the



phenomenon of order ... available to real world inspection through description of the essential work practices for its production'. For our interests the assertion that follows this description is very interesting. Participant Two asks 'Doesn't EM use special methods though?' and his answer is 'I would say 'no' as it has no need of them insofar as its concern with the formulation of orderliness is a concern with members' methods of formulating orderliness' (18 September 2000 19:52).

Now this is interesting, not because we would argue with the 'special methods' distinction directly. Participant Two has specific types of methods in mind with this description. The point is rather that what this statement does is infer that EM involves no methods in common with conventional social science. Put another way the idea of 'special' methods allows those methods to be defined, and others ignored. For example, as we saw with Garfinkel's asterisk, it was the use of particular indexicality management devices employed to convey, describe, and define the character of EM. These are member's methods that are also applied – we would claim – in conventional social science and everyday practices of ordinary members of society.

Further, there are methods employed in EM that are distinct to the ordinary members' methods that they study. Participant One moves toward this point when he notes 'I would like to suggest that the study of members' methods involves methods which are not, in themselves, members' methods'. Hence Participant Two's assertion that EM does not use the 'special' methods of conventional social science because it is only concerned with member' methods of formulating orderliness does not hold (18 September 2000 19:52).

Five days later a new participant – Participant Seven – refers to the 'recent exchange' and comments that there is a need to make a distinction between two forms of EM:

'...there is a pervasive failure in these discussions to distinguish clearly between Garfinkel's radical program with its stipulated policies and methods, on the one hand, and the classical ethnomethodological studies and conversation analysis, which do not subscribe to those policies and methods, on the other. Thus, while these policies and methods guarantee incommensurability between social science and Garfinkel's radical program, there is no such in-principle unbridgeable gap between social science and classical ethnomethodology and conversation analysis' (23 September 2000 19:12).

The incommensurability issue is connected to a particular branch of ethnomethodology, the 'radical studies of work' programme, or 'radical' 'neopraxeology' (25 September 2000). Earlier classical EM and CA are based '... in taking the "procedural turn": an interest, not in what people do and why (paradigmatic [sic] members' questions), but rather in the procedures people employ to do whatever it is that they do. In this one respect, classical ethnomethodology and conversation analysis resemble radical ethnomethodology, but they have a fundamentally incompatible vision of what those procedures consist of (generic practices rather than unique, endogenous methods) and how they are to be studied' (23 September 2000 19:12).

The important distinction is found in the last sentence. In later writings Garfinkel was to claim that members' methods of sense making could not be generalised across occasions and are only relevant and understandable in any particular case (e.g. Garfinkel and Wieder 1992). If these procedures are unique on each occasion then CA's recognition of context free mechanisms of interaction is wrong and the construction of such decontextualised practices is an instance of pejorative constructive analysis. We take the view, in the remaining argument, that access to endogenous methods are impossible, without ways of experiencing and explaining that necessarily construct the method as understandable to others i.e. without practical remedies for indexicality. 'Unique endogenous methods' are produced as such through practices such as Garfinkel's asterisk; the 'radical line' is unsupportable because to show it as true is a productive consequence.

This message then is like the one in which the two level model was proposed. It aims to sort out the argument by providing a frame of reference outside the preceding content, which might explain the differences and allow them to be reconciled. The consequence of this framework is indeed an end to the debate.

Participant One feels that the distinction 'sheds much light on the past debate'; because if 'classical EM is commensurable with constructivist social science.... [T]hen the incommensurability argument could only stand by equating EM with Garfinkel's newer, radical version...' (23 September 2000 20:34).

Participant Two then asserts in his next message, 'for the record – my concern is entirely with Garfinkel's 'radical studies of work' programme... As [Participant Seven] observes, these latter 'policies and methods guarantee incommensurability [sic]' (25 September 2000 12:41).

So Participant One is arguing with an understanding of EM as *classical EM*; while Participant Two with EM as *radical EM*.

What is wonderful about the resolution of this debate is that it is accomplished through a realisation that each was talking from a different starting point, that they were referring to different matters (when they talked of EM), and that consequently they were talking at cross purposes. These positions were never liable to approach the subject matter in the same terms, they emanated from two different (theoretical) positions, which are symmetrically incommensurate. The debate *about* incommensurability is resolved with an agreement of incommensurability. *This is accomplished contingently, locally and in interaction through an 'incommensurability line' narrative, or mechanisms of 'positioning', 'description', 'definition' 'quoting' 'argumentation' and the like.*

The preceding section involves the identification of a distinction between radical and classical EM - between early EM that searched for generic practices, and later EM that refuted such possibilities – is an incommensurability line *within* EM. There is one more, which is seen in an action of non-action, that is carried out through an (active) refusal to take part in the conversation. It is the logical consequence of accepting the radical ethnomethodological line.

*Incommensurability line: between 'in-principle' and 'in-practice' EM; craft skill and learning through description*

Alongside the discussion in the message thread 'A bigger bone to chew on', there is another thread entitled 'learning EM'. It runs from 21 September 2000 (compared to 11 September 2000 for the earlier thread), and starts two days before the classical/radical formulation in the other message thread<sup>16</sup>. This thread is related to the earlier thread by the first message writer, who we have identified as Participant Three, when he writes that the 'recent discussion of the relation of EM to Constructive Analysis' has 'raised an issue' that he would 'dearly like to discuss' (21 September 2000 22:48),

'A number of ethnomethodologists I've read ... argue that ethnomethodology cannot be learned by reading accounts of it, for the same reason that they argue the just-whatness (quiddity, haecity, etc.) of a phenomenon is lost by merely reading accounts of it' (21 September 2000 22:48).

In contrast to this position he argues that ‘one can learn EM without trying to do it with the direct guidance and approval of an acknowledged EMist’ (21 September 2000 22:48).

This question and argument brings to the fore a central point about EM. The idea of asymmetric incommensurability means that EM cannot be conveyed through a description or account of EM, because an *account of EM*, fails the unique adequacy requirement because it does not convey EM’s methods of doing EM. If a description of EM is not EM, then how could one learn how to do EM? This idea fits with the notion of EM as a ‘craft skill’ (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992).

In the first instance, Participant One – the person who started the earlier thread about incommensurability – answers in a programmatic fashion by saying that he can’t imagine learning EM without personal guidance. However, he then asks ‘... what combination of texts would allow one to learn EM with the minimum amount of personal guidance?’ (22 September 2000 04:44).

To this a participant in the earlier discussion – but to whom we have not referred – provides a formulation of ‘try to’s’ such as ‘Try to write as clearly and as succinctly as Schegloff: try to see as clearly as Sacks...[etc.]’ (21 September 2000 06:16).

To this list of authors, Participant Three expresses thanks but claims to be ‘after something different’ (22 September 2000 17:14). He is after ‘an understanding of the theoretical points that EMists seem to make about the possibility of learning EM through accounts, and how those square with their (seemingly contradictory) arguments regarding the relationship between accounts and phenomena (22 September 2000 17:14).

Now a new participant, who we shall call Participant Eight, questions the list given by criticising some of the people mentioned as well as the list members themselves. It should be noted that this participant is widely known and seen in many circles as a ‘founder’ of EM. He writes,

‘Anyone seeking instruction on how to do ethnomethodological inquiries might be well advised to consult Garfinkel’s fullest statement in this respect: Ethnomethodology’s Program, wherein he clearly cites my work as exemplifying such inquiry. That I’m not mentioned in the veru [sic] strange list of characters being offered for good advice ... is, in light of much of discourse found here, rather more pleasing than distressing. Point: There might be a student wishing detailed help on ways for gaining access to fundamental

problems of EM description, and such a true student might consult that "hybrid" (which is essentially required for doing Ethno studies) most able to help, to wit: myself. Proviso: if you've not read [his own publication] first, don't bother, as I really don't have time to devote to those who don't read EM's fundamental literature' (22 September 2000 18:28).

Our purpose for quoting this message is not in first instance to highlight the character of the writer expressed in the text. However what we have in this message is a direct criticism of the suggested 'try to' list as containing researchers who Participant Eight does not feel are worthy to be looked to for guidance in their writings (Participant Eight does not include Schegloff or Sacks, as he makes clear in a later message). Instead people should look to him for direct guidance.

Participant Eight's frustration with the content of the messages leads him to start a thread entitled 'GET ME OUT OF HERE'

'In six months of browsing here ... all I encounter are the most perversely programmatic arguments [sic], a junkpile of trivia, a thoroughgoing lack of even minimal understanding about what CA and Ethnomethodology are about as actual practices, nor how they're different. And I mean thoroughgoing, but top to bottom. No exceptions' (25 September 2000 19:34).

Not only is EM incommensurate with conventional social science and CA but the conversation are 'perversely programmatic [sic]' and do not explain what the *practices* of EM and CA entail. The discussion are an 'embarrassment' to the founders of EM, and the members of the listerv have no idea 'what it is these radical modes of inquiry propose, and how one does such work well'. 'Harvey Sacks', he asserts 'would sooner go into the garment business than participate in discussions at such a sophomoric, undetailed, lacking-in-street-wise off the cuff nature' (25 September 2000 19:34).

Participant Eight finishes by demanding, 'Please, someone, see to it, at once, that I get the fuck out of here. I spend enough time deleting horseshit as it is' (25 September 2000 19:34). It is important to gain a sense of the anger expressed in the message because, we would claim, the writer's hands are tied; Withdrawal from the group and more particularly the discussion at hand – is the only response possible for the participant, given the trajectory and content of the messages (apart, that is from simply *not* taking part) because debates about whether one can or cannot describe, learn and compare EM *are themselves accountable descriptive events*. By suggesting that those

who want to learn EM can do so from him directly, he advances the incommensurability line; by losing his temper he expresses his concerns without describing them. We would suggest that he instantiates the incommensurability line *between* CA and EM (and between ‘classical’ and ‘radical’ EM) through such behaviour.

The point is made by Participant One,

‘I suspect that no one could SUBSTANTIVELY address, let alone redress, the problems of the type [Participant Eight] claims, without engaging in what he would call ‘perversely programmatic arguments’ (25 September 2000 22:14).

Participant One ends by noting that while the conversation on the listserv had been difficult, it had occurred. That conversations (even difficult conversation with misreading, misunderstandings and frustration) *can* occur, denies that they are incommensurate he maintains (26 September 2000 17:22).

### **Radical neopraxeology, a step too far**

The description of radical neopraxeology, or radical studies of work program came about when Garfinkel introduced the notion of ‘asymmetric incommensurability’. In this article the issue of the distinctive character of EM being the recognition of the constructed, ‘rendered’ nature of ‘traditional’ sociology, was introduced. But as ‘Garfinkel’s asterisk’ and the various mechanisms for establishing lines of incommensurability show, EM is not released from what are practical matters (devices, techniques and practices etc) of rendering the concept of incommensurability understandable.

The consequence of these efforts is to introduce a form of realism, that seeks to step outside the situated, contextual, indexical, reflexive position of the analyst, theorist, conceptualist etc. and assert the possibility of unmediated access to ‘reality’. Further such moves re-introduce ‘the Problem’ of the ‘in-principle’ nature of discourse – namely that *it shouldn’t be possible to attain stable meaning* – by denying the universal ‘in-practice’ character of social meaning, and EM’s founding recognition of the reflexive and indexical nature of *all* activity.

What Pragmatic Ethnomethodology does is re-claim the practical and dynamic nature of all meaning for ethnomethodology. This, too, is seen in the previously mentioned textual interaction.

In response to the idea that a distinction between EM and constructive analysis is one of *explication* over *explanation* (12 September 2000 21:12), a participant extends the distinction to include EM,

‘I think I might go a little further and suggest that EM is one set of members using their ‘common-sense practices’ to explicate, explore the practices of other members, to talk about them, to talk to them, about how they do what they do – but not as investigations, as inquiries, queries, questions – ‘Wow, how’d you manage that?’, ‘Grandpa, teach me how to ...’, ‘A woman knows ...’ and so forth. The epistemic claims or conferments [sic] are the ways that members do enquiring. EM people just do it their own way and make claims for it like a ‘policy for doing studies’ and so on’ (13 September 2000 10:51).

Contained in this point is the idea that EM is itself constituted by particular *methods of explication*. The participant asks ‘isn’t what makes EM EM (or makes anything else what you claim it to be) simply one’s ability in a particular situation to claim that it is what you say it is’ (13 September 2000 10:51). EM is a matter of situated contingent methods of accountability, just like every other form of social action.

The dynamic nature of what EM means is put forward by another participant:

‘...whatever is said about Ethnomethodology,... is not a matter of arbitrary decision, foremost not a decision about who is in and who is out, but a matter of argumentation. In some strong sense, nobody outside the scientific debate itself is the owner of Ethnomethodology [sic], at least after the publication of the Studies. Nobody, including Garfinkel himself... a publication is a move in a public debate and thus the book becomes a kind of life which is independant [sic] of the author’s life. Such a position is just what is expected from an ethnomethodological analysis of meaning, but now applied to ethnomethodology itself’ (13 September 2000 18:46).

Not only is the meaning of EM open to argumentation, but also such an understanding of the ‘meaning’ of EM is ‘expected’ from an ethnomethodological standpoint.

What pragmatic ethnomethodology claims then is an ‘un-PROBLEMatic’ realisation of the reflexive nature of ethnomethodology. The methods of sense-making that EM uses are open to ethnomethodological analysis. They are ‘essentially uninteresting’ however, and we do not claim here any moral position on them. Indeed, we replace estimation of whether they are right or wrong with a wholesale acceptance of such practices, and further a recognition that they are a necessary mechanism for getting work done. An ‘uninterested’ mentality extends to incorporating certain of these mechanisms to get our work done. With this mentality we approach then CA and its constructive practices. Particularly we are interested in how CA ‘successfully’ and ‘productively’ produces results. The answer, as we will see, is in practices that successfully obscure – amongst other things – ‘the Problem’ of the reflexive and indexical nature of meaning through *formalism*. We will argue that formalism found in CA is a collection of methods that successfully produce results. As such they are not different in kind to a range of procedures for routinely dealing with the indeterminacy of meaning in everyday life. The only difference being their explicit formulation as a practise-set in the methodology of CA. Formal methods, in this view, are defined by an inbuilt obfuscation of the Problem of indeterminacy.

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## The productive processes of CA

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### Sacks’s formal science

In an excellent exposition and critique of CA and science, Lynch and Bogen (1994) examine Sacks’s notion of (primitive) natural observational science and identify the reasons for its international success. While centrally ‘critical’ their aim was to ‘motivate a re-examination not just of preliminary arguments, but of the characteristic observation language, representational conventions, and research practices in conversation analysis’ (p. 75). In this sense the work has ethnomethodological intentions. It starts from an understanding of Sacks’s position on the natural sciences, which was deceptively simple.

Those features of natural science that made it science – the actions of observation-report-replication – were essentially *social*. As Lynch & Bogen put it, ‘Sacks treated natural scientific methods as formal structures of practical action: organized complexes of action, reproduced again and again at different times and places by different production cohorts, which would include techniques for producing, certifying and distributing descriptions of observable



phenomena. In other words, he viewed scientific practices not only as a means for getting access to facts, but as social facts in and of themselves' (1994:67).

What made these features of science social was encapsulated by realising that the activity of science was a 'stable' and describable practical activity. As Sacks puts it,

'The doing of natural science...was something that was reportable, first, and second, the reports of the activities of doing science did not take the form that the reports of the phenomenon under investigation took' (Jefferson 1995).

This second point alludes to the fact that descriptions of the doing of natural science were different to the reports of the phenomenon itself. These 'instructional texts' were successful in describing – in vernacular understandable by the scientist – the *activity* of doing experiments and the like. They described these activities as assembled *methods* of action. Further, the same people who carried out the actual science did not necessarily generate these instructional texts; hence methodical descriptions can be adequately made 'regardless of whether those who do it methodically give self-descriptions' (Lynch and Bogen 1994:69). 'Scientific sociology' was for Sacks already present in the methodical descriptions of natural science's accounts of itself. Given that science was not the only methodical activity – all activity was fundamentally ordered – it would be possible to 'recover and elaborate 'the body of reports of scientific activities' by producing formal descriptions of the full range of methodical human actions' (Lynch and Bogen 1994:69, quoting Sacks in Jefferson 1995).

Sacks's methodological argument is summarized by Schegloff (Jefferson 1995: xxxi-xxxii) as follows (quoted in Lynch & Bogen 1994:69),

'...from the fact of the existence of natural science there is evidence that it is possible to have 1) accounts of human courses of action, 2) which are not neuropsychological, biological etc. 3) which are reproducible and hence scientifically adequate, 4) the latter two features amounting to the finding that they may be stable, and 5) a way (perhaps *the way*) to have such stable accounts of human behavior is by producing accounts of the methods and procedures for producing it. The grounding for the possibility of a stable social-scientific account of human behavior of a non-reductionist sort was at least as deep as the grounding of the natural sciences. Perhaps that is deep enough'.

So this conception of science sets the foundation for a formal description of all activity. As Lynch and Bogen note, 'he aimed to construct accounts of how the 'technician in residence' at the conversational worksite assemble their ordinary communicational activities' and 'conversation analysis would be a science of diverse practical actions, aiming to construct formal descriptions of 'ordinary' methods for reproducing social structures' (1994:74).

The ordinary methods that Sacks wanted to identify would be understandable by everyone. Lynch and Bogen denote Sacks's pronouncements about the possibility of such as science as 'primitive' because such observations were available to anyone within a non-specialized community. Sacks told his students, 'they could see it with their eyes; they didn't need a lot of equipment' and that this was 'probably [a] very short term possibility, so you'd better look while you can' (Jefferson 1995). So,

'By starting with 'simple' and 'observable' social objects rather than obviously significant historical episodes and massive social institutions, Sacks aimed to develop a grammar for describing the social production of communicative action' (Lynch and Bogen 1994:67).

What we want to claim is that conversation analysis is better described as a form of *programmatic* ethnomethodology. That is, CA is founded upon ethnomethodological concerns but has developed and employs a set of programmatic conceptions that constitute it as a *formalistic practice*. In the move from orientation to practice it attempts to transform itself – by way of formalistic structures, conceptions, and the like – into a science. However its character as 'scientific' is reflexively consequential of the establishing of practices that make it productive; the move to the technical is concomitant with 'successful findings', 'acceptance by other disciplines', 'applicability to a range of endeavours', and the like. That is it is a method for-all-practical-purposes. And so it is understandable as such.

We can pursue this programmatic understanding by considering CA's pragmatic features: the productive processes built into its conceptual and instrumental operationalisation. First let us look at some of its conceptual productions of formalism, second we will consider its 'machinic-productive processes' in the move to tape and transcribe social action.

A recent occurrence in the literature provides access into a central mechanism in CA that deals with the contextual nature of all activity. In dealing with this problem, CA also mounts a

technique for managing 'the Problem' of indexicality and obfuscating the reflexive nature of discourse.

### CA and Context

One manifestly problematic and indexical feature of any meaning in society is the context in which some activity occurs. We claim that CA is particularly successful in countering this problem, through a set of productive processes. Indeed CA's formalist cast is understandable in terms of these practices of sense-making in the discipline. To ground the following radical reflexive analysis let us turn to a recent exchange in the literature between three leading practitioners of CA and Discourse Analysis (DA) (Schegloff 1997, 1998 1999a, 1999b; Billig 1999a, 1999b; Wetherell 1998).

The issue of context is one highly relevant to CA. Schegloff, in an article entitled, 'Whose text, Whose context', expounds a notion of context in terms of the participants actions, rather than imposed from the analyst. Schegloff starts from the observation that 'the ways of formulating the context within which something occurred are multiple' (1997:167). Categories and descriptions of persons in context are therefore similarly numerous. Schegloff asks, 'whose characterization of the conduct, and the context of the conduct, is to shape, to determine, to control our treatment of discourse?' (1997:167).

One way to decide between one contextual ascription and not another might be to talk of 'explanatory adequacy' in that the ascription fits with a particular theoretical position. Alternatively, Schegloff reasons, we should note that humans already 'orient to their context'. They '...grasp their own conduct and that of others under the jurisdictions of some relevancies and not others' whether that be matters of individual or collective identity; '...because it is the orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings, etc ... of the participants in some sociocultural event on which the course of that event is predicated, it is *those* characterizations which are privileged in the constitutions of socio-interactional reality, and therefore have a prima facie claim to being privileged in efforts to understand it' (Schegloff 1997:166-7).

Schegloff claims it is possible to 'orient to' to the 'object of inquiry *in its own terms*'; that is to what the participants count as relevant context (1997:171; emphasis in the original). Talk-in-interaction, he says, is 'furnished internally with its own constitutive sense, with 'its own terms' (1997:171), such that 'The interaction embodies and displays moment-to-moment the products

of its own endogenous mechanisms of interpretations and analysis, both of the utterances and actions which compose it and of the *oriented-to context*' (1997:184; emphasis added).

This position stands in contrast to critical discourse analysis that is premised upon a particular reading of cultural elements. Moving from a position of potential 'theoretical imperialism' to one in which is grounded in the 'indigenous preoccupation of the everyday world' (Schegloff 1997:165). 'In our times', he writes, 'the relativization and perspectivization of cultural analysis threatens the virtual disintegration of stable meaning and import into indeterminacy, and nowhere more than in discourse analysis. [Here], [d]iscourse is too often made subservient to contexts not of its participants' making, but of its analysts' insistence' (p. 183).

Schegloff, then propounds a formal analysis that does not involve bringing to analysis the concerns of the analyst. Such claims are echoed in the notions of 'unmotivated looking', 'naturalistic observation science' and the like found in the wider CA literature. He notes that such an opinion might be construed as 'methodological and epistemological naivety... a touching belief in 'reality'' (p. 171), but maintains the adequacy of such an approach.

Both Wetherell (1998) and Billig (1999a, 1999b) pick up on Schegloff's claims of adequacy. Wetherell directly criticises the notion that it is possible to not bring their own ideas when she asserts that 'Schegloff's notion of analytic description uncontaminated by theorists' categories does not entail, however that no analytic concepts whatsoever will be applied, as the example of his own analyses demonstrates. Rather, concepts such as conditional relevance, ... or the notion of accountability, or preferred and dis-preferred responses are used to identify patterns in talk and to create an ordered sense of what is going on' (Wetherell 1998:402). Calls to CA's concepts being 'intensely empirical' are inadequate and instead such a move is procedurally advantageous in that 'it gives scholarly criteria for correctness and grounds academic disputes, allowing appeals to the data, and it closes down the infinity of contexts which could be potentially relevant to something demonstrable – what the participants take as relevant' (Wetherell 1998:402). Similarly Billig identifies CA 'technical language' as incompatible with subjects' own pronouncements. 'The speakers, conventionally studied do not talk of 'adjacency pairs', 'preference structures', 'receipt design', 'self-repairs' etc. These are categories which the analyst imposes' (Billig 1999a:546). Billig situates such impositions as a necessary part of producing CA analysis: 'Like all disciplines, CA must be written. For this, it requires its own practices of writing. ... Although participants are ostensibly to be studied 'in their own terms', they are not to be written about in such terms. Instead, analysts use their own terms to accomplish this observation of participants'

own terms'. (Billig 1999a:546). This is doubly damning: Not only does CA require the application of categories to get analysis done, but analysis that claims it does not impose categories, *requires a specific type of language also*. This language is constitutive of the practice of CA.

Rather nicely, the criticism by Wetherell and Billig do some other work, which might be called ethnomethodological if one were so inclined. Both Billig and Wetherell identify in the warranted denial of the application of categories by Schegloff *the methods by which such a denial is successful*. Wetherell mentions the creation of ordered sense; Billig notes the reflexive properties of a set of conceptions that is successful in obfuscating its own practices. Both in their own way are calling on Schegloff to acknowledge his own (or CA's) constitutive practices which renders context a matter of empirical demeanour. Such a formulation allows for 'troubles', criticisms, positioning and all those situated properties of indexical language that Garfinkel speaks about. It positions CA in terms of these troubles, and more importantly *on the correct side* of such dilemmas. CA appropriates sense-making practices that strategically positions the proponent in terms of an object that is organised-for-its-own-purposes as though it pre-existed perceptual effort.

Of course, in the first instance, the criticisms of Wetherell and Billig were less ethnomethodological than ironic. Both aim to counter Schegloff's critique of politically sensitive critical analysis, Wetherell in terms of discourse analysis and Billig in terms of ideology; yet both mount a criticism that could be seen as being *in Schegloff's own terms* (presupposing that Schegloff maintains an ethnomethodological sensibility), exactly the mechanism Schegloff proposes for solving the context issue. This is of course a double irony.

### *CA's proof procedure*

The advantage for CA of the notions expounded by Schegloff when he has CA analysis attending to the context brought by participants is that it allows for a formal mechanism of proof. Consider the following section from Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson:

'...understanding of other turn's talk are displayed to co-participants, they are available as well to professional analysts, who are thereby afforded a proof criterion (and a search procedure) for the analysis of what a turn's talk is occupied with. Since it is the parties' understanding of prior turns that is relevant to their construction of next turns, it is their understandings that are wanted for analysis. The display of those understandings in the talk

in subsequent turns affords a resource for the analysis of prior turns, and a proof procedure for professional analysis of prior turns, resources intrinsic to the data themselves' (1974:712)

The feature of looking to the sequential development of the talk allows claims based solely on the data, on the activity seen in the data; and it allows the analyst to deny her own interpretive, reflexive practices.

The way that CA deals with context is one example<sup>17</sup> of a number of productive processes and procedures that includes formulation such as the 'context-free' and 'context-sensitive' character of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) turn taking model.

'[The] rules for turn-taking are context-free: that is, they allow for such local contextual variations as the identities and number of speakers, length and content of turns, and so on. But they are also context-sensitive in that they apply to the local circumstances of particular turns in particular conversations' (Hutchby and Drew 1995:185).

Other conceptual strategies are included in the following table,

Table one: Programmatic Conceptions of CA

Programmatic Conception	Consequential/related conception(s)
"Order-at-all-points" (Sacks 1984)	Ingrained detail, detailed examination, segmented data, not big issues, unmotivated looking
"Unmotivated looking" Psathas, G (1995)	Presupposition-less analysis
"Context-free, context-sensitive" (Sacks 1984)	Formal description, repeated cases, repeated looking, systematic observation
"Systematic observation" (Sacks et al 1974)	Repeated looking, external proof (checking by others)
"Sequential analysis" (Drew, 1995)	Orienting to participants, temporal development, management of indexicality, available 'object'.
"Unreduced data" (Zimmerman, 1993)	Tape as an unmediated object (immutable object), what we have, we have, transcript as mutually elaborative with tape

The upshot of these and other conceptions is the production of a formal model of social enquiry. Such programmatic conceptions as 'order at all points', 'unmotivated looking', 'unreduced data' not only help to get the work of CA done (and transform it into a technique), but also manage to cover the tracks of accountability. Understood as one form of programmatic ethnomethodology, CA is an example of the technical and practical application of ethnomethodology. However, CA does not look at its own programmatic character; instead it has within its own programmatic conceptions a set of inbuilt defences against such a realisation of itself. As Ashmore and Reed (2000) maintain 'In formulating conversation as a naturally-occurring phenomenon, their own productive work in so doing is systematically obfuscated.'

Much is made of the reliance on the 'original tape' when analysing a transcript. The idea of 'unreduced data' claims for the tape of an interaction an unmediated character and serves to obfuscate its *constructed* nature and the part it plays in *producing* CA analysis. But more, the ontology of the tape and transcript allow a dynamic of 'innocence and nostalgia' (Ashmore and Reed 2000) that culminates in rendering the un-rendered object. We can consider a number of these processes and procedures, including the 'machinic-productive processes' of the tape and transcript.

#### *Machinic-productive processes*

In a discussion of the relative merits of newsgroup text and talk as data (Reed and Ashmore 2000) CA's access to 'real' instances of social interaction through technology, and its 'transparent' orthographic presentation is questioned. Taping and recording – previously ignored features of CA analysis – are re-engaged with in terms of 'machinic-productive processes'.

'These processes are 'machinic' in that they are technologically mediated, requiring the use of audio/video recording machines and codified transcription systems. They are 'productive' because their use results in something new, something that is qualitatively distinct from the (supposedly) 'naturally-occurring' object that is said to be this novel object's original and model' (Reed and Ashmore 2000).

Because recording 'transforms an ephemeral 'been and gone' occasion into a 'frozen moment', preserved out of time' (Reed and Ashmore 2000), talk-in-interaction is available for re-listening,

repeated analysis, and the checking of findings by the writer and reader of analysis. Sacks conveys this when he comments that tape-recorded conversations:

‘... had a single virtue, that I could replay them. I could transcribe them somewhat and study them extendedly -however long it might take. The tape-recorded materials constituted a ‘good enough’ record of what had happened. Other things, to be sure, happened, but at least what was on the tape had happened’ (Sacks 1984:26).

What this quotation establishes is a number of presuppositions of talk-in-interaction:

1. that it is ‘accidentally’, or ‘irrelevantly’ collected.
2. that it is ‘record-able’ and ‘re-playable’.
3. that it is ‘transcribe-able’.
4. that it is ‘re-study-able’.

Talk-in-interaction has this ‘machinic potential’ (Reed and Ashmore 2000). Such presuppositions act as productive processes, that is they construe talk as these things. The last sentence of Sacks’s (1984:26) quote is an assertion that underpins all CA analysis of talk: the tape ‘captures’ what *actually happened*. What this does is establish a real, captured, determinate analytic object.

The most basic consequence of transcribing is a shift in modality from sound to text. In itself, a text is more distributable, more publicly available than a tape. Because the transcript is a result of ‘hearing work’ done on the tape, it also acts as a public display of the analyst’s otherwise private and subjective understandings – it has ‘evidential utility’ (Reed and Ashmore 2000).

Ashmore and Reed (2000) pursue the relationship between tape and transcript in terms of the ‘innocence and nostalgia’ dynamic. Here, relistening, re-transcribing, re-studying are cast in terms of innocent apprehension of an unchanging analytic object. In this way they trace the trajectory of a move from ‘analytic’ to ‘evidential’ utility of CA’s research objects (that include ‘the event’, the tape, the transcript and the analysis). Our purposes here are different, although based upon a similar understanding. The following quotation sets out one way that CA practitioners formulate the relationship of tape and transcript:



'The transcription of data is a procedure at the core of analysis. ... It is important to stress that, for CA, transcripts are not thought of as 'the data'. The data consist of tape recordings of naturally occurring interactions ... Given this conception of the data, the aim in CA is not simply to transcribe the talk and then discard the tape in favour of the transcript. ... Conversation analysts ... do not analyse transcripts alone: rather, they aim to analyse the data (the recorded interaction) using the transcript as a convenient tool of reference. The transcript is seen as a 'representation' of the data; while the tape itself is viewed as a 'reproduction' of a determinate social event' (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:73-74).

Although Hutchby and Wooffitt admit to some form of mutual relationship between the tape and transcript this formulation does not go so far as to talk of their mutual elaboration. We claim that the instantiation of a 'reproduction-representation' formulation works to hide the circular, mutually constitutive relationship by (pre)assuming a determinate tape.

The primary focus in this quotation is the claim that the tape is a 'reproduction of determinate social event[s]'; while the transcript is a 'representation' of the tape. We explain this as a distinction between the tape as 'realist object' and the transcript as 'constructivist object'; the point being that such a formulation, while apparently argumentative and logical *presumes (and consequentially construes)* a real object, over and above the 'real' event that is under analysis. This is achieved through a rhetorical sleight of hand by playing the transcript (as un-determinate object) off against the tape (as determinate), the latter's characterisation is itself determinate and unquestioned. There are a large number of such assertions in the CA literature. On each occasion the constructed nature of the tape is never recognised. In Ashmore and Reed (2000) the authors go into greater detail of how this is accomplished. Briefly this involves an assertion of innocent apprehension of the object. That is as the tape is returned to (to write the transcript, check it etc.) it is presumed to be a 'first-time' every time.

#### First time through – innocence

The transcript as the 'representation' of the tape-as-reproduction is achieved through repeated and rigorous apprehension. On these occasions what is re-experienced, according to CA's rhetoric of method, is an unchanged analytic object: each return is construed as though it were

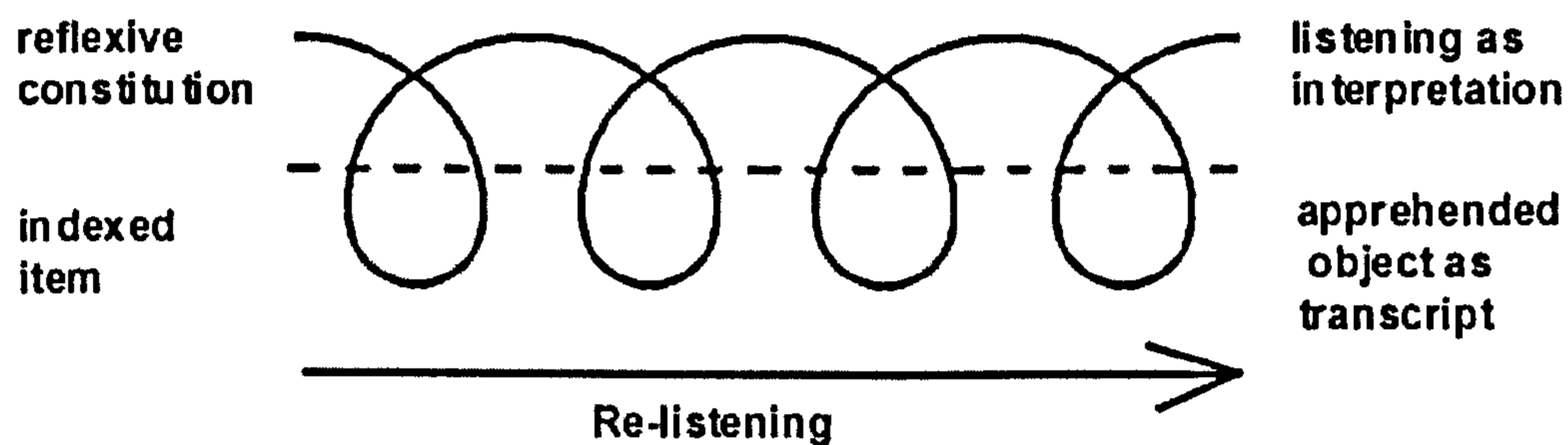
the first time the object had been encountered, as though it were through a frame of innocence. This orientation ignores the reflexive effects of returning to an object.

### Next time through – nostalgia

Instead, Ashmore and Reed (2000) present an alternative appreciation of re-listening and re-reading:

‘We understand re-listening and re-reading differently. The return to and re-working of analytic objects on a second, or subsequent-any Next Time-occasion, is not, for us, strictly speaking, a re- anything. Next time work is done on a different character of object’ (Ashmore and Reed 2000).

The hermeneutic spiral of meaning understands such interaction as a progression of reflexive processes, i.e.,



With CA the apprehended object is reified as the transcript, but the transcript acts as an index to the listening on the next time through. However CA masks these progressive processes and instead asserts a naturalistic apprehension and an inductive transcript.

This allows Sacks to maintain, "the reader has as much information as the author and can reproduce the analysis. ... I'm showing my materials and others can analyze them as well ..." (Jefferson 1995, vol.1, p. 27). Such access allows for claims of verification: "In a sense, it is possible to obtain independent verification of interactional patterns because those who hear or read a researcher's report can themselves analyze the data" (Maynard 1989:130-131). These positions are framed by an innocent, 'first time through' perspective. The claim is that other

researchers can also experience the data-whether understood as Tape or Transcript-as naïve observers. They can return to the starting point and simply repeat the process.

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### Utilising the formalist cast – newsgroups' empirical warrant

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The productive processes that allow 'naturalistic' innocent and naïve apprehension of a stable analytic object can be used to support and argue an *empirical warrant* in the study of newsgroups. This is based upon the assertion that newsgroup data require none of the machinic-productive processes of CA analysis of talk-in-interaction. This formulation appears early in the analysis notes:

'Unlike a transcript of a verbal communication, the text of a newsgroup interaction is a complete record of what occurs. There are no omissions. Neither intonation nor facial movement, body position or situational cue, are removed in the transition to paper. The observer and interactant have parity of access to the scene. Investigation of such materials is afforded a unique position rarely enjoyed by the researcher. The text accessible through the newsreader application is an exact and unchanging witness to what happened. Detailed investigation of an instance of social behaviour is possible that does not automatically instigate accusations of partial insight. There is, what might be termed, an empirical warrant associated with the material' (author's research diary).

It could be argued, however, that newsgroup textual data omits a large component of 'doing interaction'. What of the participant sitting at their computer terminal, in a particular place and time? What of the participant's typing skills, their knowledge of computers, their age, gender, and ethnicity? What about everything on the 'real world' side of the computer screen?

The empirical warrant can be supported with an argument based in CA. Unlike ethnography that presumes a window on the world based upon researcher interpretation, pragmatic ethnomethodology prioritises *what participants experience as their world*. Such priorities take a participant perspective, to avoid analytic imposition. The route to understanding the scene is not through questionnaire, interview or researcher participation, but the *interaction as participants encounter it*. What contextual information is relevant is made apparent *in* that interaction, and not imposed from without. This epistemological argument, employed successfully by Schegloff, is foundational to CA's formalism. The empirical warrant claimed here builds on CA's argument;

unlike tape recordings, newsgroup data is not a record of the activity, it is a complete manifestation of the interaction as participants experience it.

Newsgroup data is plentiful and public; access is unproblematic and uncomplicated. Newsgroup data is textual; it arrives formatted and transcribes. It is bounded, in that there are distinct messages, threads and groups; it doesn't require sorting, cutting down or some 'accidental' recording. Newsgroup data are 'persistent'; it is stored, archived, returnable-to and re-readable. Newsgroup data does not have to be transcribed as sequential<sup>18</sup>. Newsgroup data *is* the original. Koreman and Wyat (1996:277) remark that 'transcripts of face-to-face communication are *redacted*, that is, they are *records* of communication and not the communication itself; textual phenomena like newsgroups 'are not redacted transcripts of communication but the actual communicative interaction of the group. Reading the transcripts is the same as observing the interaction in the ... forum'.

Newsgroup interaction requires neither recording nor transcribing. Neither does it require productive processes that formulate it as 'unreduced'. As far as the interaction is concerned, newsgroup data is a complete record of communicated elements. The productive processes of taping/transcribing – in the case of CA analysis of talk-in-interaction – and the 'threadedness, textual composition and retrievability – in the case of the CA analysis of newsgroup data – both result in an analysable object. That the former involves exclusively *analyst work* while the latter *participant work* qualifies the superiority of newsgroup data. The procedures needed to transform newsgroup interaction into data for analysis are less 'radical' than those needed for conversations.

'Newsgroup messages are, as it were, pre-'recorded' and pre-'transcribed' as an inherent part of their production: they are already public, already preserved and, of course, already text' (Reed and Ashmore 2000).

An argument for an empirical warrant for newsgroup data is in relation then to 'normal' CA data: Newsgroup data is better data because it requires less analyst productive work to render it an object for analysis.

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### Summing up: Pragmatic Ethnomethodology

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Ethnomethodology is interested in the practices through which members of society makes sense in and of the world. Such features are the proper focus of sociological study. Practices of sense-making – properly construed as reflexive and indexical – exist in all rational activities, *even those that go towards understanding such a state of affairs*. Radical reflexivity encourages the understanding of EM and CA, and by following its lead we have identified properties in EM and CA useful to us. Conversation Analysis involves ‘formal productive processes’ that act as practical remedies for these regressive tendencies for *all-practical-purposes*.

Pragmatic ethnomethodology maintains the practices that make possible objective outcomes, yet re-engages an ethnomethodological appreciation of how these work, through an acceptance of radical reflexivity. It is conceived as an approach-for-all-practical-purposes that, in this practical instance, takes as its quarry the studying of Internet newsgroup interaction. Ultimately, it will be recognised that the character of this interaction is reflexively tied – in a documentary fashion, or hermeneutic spiral of meaning – to the methods by which it is rendered. Specifically the practices of formalisation, which allows the production of ‘findings’ and a known object through regimen of looking: a dual strategy of ‘simple’ and ‘directed’ naturalistic observation.

## CHAPTER THREE – STRATEGIES OF LOOKING

In the previous chapter our aim was to re-combine the conceptual elements of EM, CA and RR in terms of Pragmatic Ethnomethodology. We claimed that EM's orientation to social activity – the investigation of members' methods of sense-making – was successfully operationalised in a formal programmatic form of EM called CA. Both EM and CA fail to turn their (foundational) reflexive understanding toward themselves and instead manage such propensities with various strategies of sense-making. We were keen to highlight one set of strategies that result in CA as a formal method. That CA finds specific conceptual strategies necessary and appropriate warrants their appropriation in the current study, which likewise requires recognisable outcomes.

In this chapter, we apply the resulting formal methodological mentality through four observational strategies, which engender 'simple' and 'directed' naturalistic observation<sup>19</sup>:

1. Initial observation through comparison
2. Observing conventions and rules
3. Observing time and sequence
4. Systematic observation, simple structure, coding, and quoting catalogue

These strategies also provide a practical route to approach newsgroup interaction as data. There are over thirty thousand newsgroups, containing millions of textual messages and all are available for study. Unlike other areas of sociological analysis, a first problem is not gaining access to the detail of the activity but rather where to start, what messages to collect, and how to read them<sup>20</sup>. The observational strategies alleviated such issues.

Data were collected in three ways: First a small-scale sample of forty messages was drawn from two newsgroups whose topics were of interest to the researcher; Second, specific messages (based, in the first instance, on questions generated from the small-scale sample<sup>21</sup>) were sourced through various computer search facilities<sup>22</sup>; Third, a large-scale corpus (724 messages in total) was collected from four (supposedly distinctive) newsgroups<sup>23</sup>. While these data were publicly available, initial attempts were made to hide the identity of the writers<sup>24</sup>. The experience of searching for messages, however, showed the redundancy of such efforts<sup>25</sup>.

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## Initial observation and comparison

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### Strategy of Comparison

It was decided to carry out a small-scale comparison of two newsgroups chosen on the basis of personal interest and a common-sense notion of difference. Ten messages were collected from two newsgroups – one serious and one non-serious<sup>26</sup>. Observations and questions were allowed to generate concerns and issues, and prompt detailed analysis of particular features<sup>27</sup>. Figure One and Figure Two are examples from the forty collected.

What is immediately apparent is the complexity of the messages. They contain a number of textual features that include text generated by some automatic systems, new text generated by the current participant, and apparently, 'old' text copied from previous messages. An initial concern was then how to describe the variety of features such that observation could be conveyed. Also, there was the need to 'point to' particular elements, in particular messages. These were then methodological issue of naming and deixis.

#### *The need to name*

To be able to describe similarities and differences some 'known' feature had to be referenced. An initial first step then was to give descriptive names to the features encountered, labels to demarcate each message, and where appropriate create graphical representational and notational strategies to help 'see' things (such as to whom text belonged, the relationship of one message to another and the like).

#### Naming features of the content

Terms were developed for generic features that were found in various places. An example of this is the generic description 'identifier', that included a range of 'participant identifiers' such as 'From line identifier', 'footer identifiers' and 'quoted participant identifier'.





Figure Two

Subject: Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Worshipers Jump with Joy  
 Date: Fri, 20 Feb 1998 08:40:59 -0500  
 From: Greg Gyetko <ggyetko@nospam.newbridge.com>  
 Organization: Fossil Construction Division, Illuminati Headquarters.  
 Newsgroups: can.politics,alt.atheism,talk.philosophy.humanism  
 References:<34d0c399.505529@News.IslandNet.com><34D18741.F7B@earthlink.net>  
 <34d3668f.5352880@News.IslandNet.com> <Enpn6F.2pI@hermes.hrz.uni-bielefeld.de> <3

Nicolas P. Demers wrote:

> Greg Gyetko wrote:  
 > >  
 > > That's why, at least in Canada, the line is currently drawn at some 24 or 25  
 > > weeks of gestation, after which (last I checked) a woman can't get an  
 > > abortion.  
 >  
 > Uh... no, I don't think so. For the last 10 years, abortion has been  
 > decriminalized in Canada. No restrictions whatsoever.

Didn't we have a big trial. Chantal what's-her-name, the Quebecois who wanted an abortion against the wishes of her boyfriend. As I understood, they were rushing the trial because they wanted to get it figured out before they hit the 24-week barrier.

Anybody remember that stuff?

I think she ended up running the border and getting an abortion in the states, didn't she?

Greg.

--  
 alt.atheism Atheist #911  
 "I'd worship Satan, but I'm going to hell anyway,  
 so why waste my time?"  
 EAC homepage: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Vault/9916/>

When a participant sends a message to the newsgroup, the application records, and presents, the name and e-mail address of the participant. In its simplest form, this *From line identifier* consists of the person's actual name. However at times this 'normal' name may be replaced by a pseudonym or nickname. An example would be 'Mindflayer' (t.p.h. 23/2/98 9/20<sup>28</sup>) another would be 'Ouroboros' (u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 4/20).

Participants often include a section of text at the bottom of each of their messages that contains their name or nickname. This *signature text* is normally the same for each message and infers that it is generated automatically by the computer application. The signature may also contain web page addresses and witty, irreverent or obtuse comments.

In some cases, simple drawings are created with basic ASCII characters (see later tiger example). These 'ASCII identifiers' are peculiar to a participant and may entail the depiction of an abstract shape or motif, or may depict the person's name. An example of each is given below:



Sender	Subject	Date	
Peter Howard	OTP: HB in 'An Unsiutable J... [OTP] Piracy ( was Re: S3 V...	02/20/98 10:26	..1
Donald Drake	Re: [OTP] Piracy ( was Re: ...	02/20/98 10:39	..2
Peter Howard	Re: [OTP] Piracy ( was Re: ...	02/20/98 10:49	..3
Ouroboros	Re: [OTP] Netscape (Was P...	02/20/98 15:03	..4
Wayne Andrews	Re: [OTP] Netscape (Was P...	Mon 10:51	..5
JayZ	Re: [OTP] Piracy ( was Re: ...	02/20/98 16:34	..6
Mick Everett	Re: [OTP] Piracy ( was Re: ... OTP Third roch from the sun...	02/21/98 04:15	..7
Donald Drake	Re: OTP Third roch from the...	02/20/98 10:45	..8
Donald Drake	Re: OTP Third roch from the...	02/20/98 10:46	..9
Ouroboros	Re: OTP Third roch from the...	02/20/98 15:04	..10
Peter Howard	OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: Re: ... Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/20/98 10:52	..11
Ouroboros	Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/20/98 15:03	..12
Ouroboros	Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/20/98 15:04	..13
Ouroboros	Re: Irish TV was series ques...	02/20/98 15:04	..14
Donald Drake	Re: Irish TV was series ques...	02/21/98 09:24	..15
Ouroboros	Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/20/98 15:04	..16
Ouroboros	Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/20/98 15:04	..17
Ouroboros	Re: OTP: BBC Enterprises (...	02/20/98 15:04	..18
Peter Howard	Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/21/98 01:52	..19
Astro	Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: ...	02/21/98 08:48	..20

(u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 1-20)

The second from talk.philosophy.humanism:

Sender	Subject	Date	
Justin Lehmicke	Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Wors...	02/17/98 10:37	..1
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 11:17	..2
Beth Wise	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 13:39	..3
Greg Gyetko	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 13:44	..4
Nicolas P. D...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 15:45	..5
Greg Gye...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/20/98 05:40	..6
Nicola...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/20/98 12:56	..7
Patrick Lepine	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 17:53	..8
MindFlayer	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 21:21	..9
jdrayton@im...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	Sun 18:05	..10
Frank O Wustner	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 22:29	..11
Frank O Wustner	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 22:32	..12
Patrick Lepine	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/21/98 02:55	..13
Frank O Wustner	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/21/98 14:19	..14
Lars Ormberg	Re: Capital Punishment in T... Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Wors...	Sun 19:26	..15
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 11:30	..16
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 11:32	..17
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 11:42	..18
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 11:45	..19
Frank O Wustner	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/21/98 14:21	..20

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 1-20)

Key to reading diagrams: Each diagram is a screen print (an exact copy) of a series of messages. In the left-hand column under the title 'sender', messages are denoted by icons in an hierarchical relationship – subordinate 'replies' are rightward. Each icon is accompanied by the writer's name, except those that represent an original message – to which these messages are replies - some time earlier. As indicated by the titles the next two columns contain the subject line and the date (see discussion of date). In the final column is a message number for reference purposes.

Through such graphical notation and representation and the development of descriptive titles and names, a picture was built of the newsgroup messages, which allowed a comparison of the two groups.

## Comparison

### *Similarities*

The participants of both newsgroups used certain textual devices to identify themselves and others. It was supposed at this stage that 'who wrote what', 'to whom, and 'who was quoted', would be an important aspect of communication in the group. In later analysis this would turn to an examination of the *strategic omission* of the *signature file* (the composite of various elements such as ASCII name identifier, ASCII motif identifier). As well as the use of first name references to direct a message at a particular person, the pointed omission of a 'personal reference' in ensuing message and the like.

Other textual devices, such as the use of capitals and asterisks to emphasize particular words, the drawing of faces with ASCII characters (called smileys or emoticons elsewhere) was found in both newsgroups. The first of these, the use of capital letters, appeared to provide emphasis in particular sequences of words. That is they appeared to suggest an 'intonational-like' structure. Consider the following two examples,

28 > Ah, you meant if the sperm can BY ITSELF do all that stuff? No, it  
 29 > cannot. Neither can an embryo or a fetus, BY ITSELF, become a human being  
 (t.p.h.23/2/98 3/20)

10 On looking at the TV listings, I discovered it WAS Ms Baxendale, this  
 (u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 1/20)

What is interesting here is that the *text* appears to mimic *vocalised* communication. It is as though these lines are meant to be heard as speech. This was another early noticing that developed into a later interest in, amongst other things, the 'construction of turn units' (see later). This feature also provides support for our stated 'empirical warrant' for studying newsgroups. Consider the following segment from the 'Transcription Glossary' of a well-known CA textbook,

'CAPITALS        Works in capitals mark a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it' (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:vii).

The capitalisation of text to denote emphasis is already in place when we approach newsgroup messages; it is part of their 'machinic-productive processes'. Capitalisation is a participants' ethnomethod for getting certain meaning done. Transcription data in CA rely on work done by the researcher to see these features.

### *Differences*

In comparing the contents of the data recorded from each group it was noticeable that both groups used 'quoted participant identifiers'; both sets of 'From line identifiers' contained nicknames; however, only the uk.media.tv.friends newsgroup contained 'ASCII motif identifiers' or 'ASCII name identifiers'.

### Topic Adherence

The most noticeable feature of the 'uk.media.tv.friends' messages is that none appear to relate to the supposed subject of conversation, the situation comedy Friends (apart from message 1 which could be a reference to an actress that appears in the program). Each 'subject line' starts with the letters 'OTP' and an initial hunch is that this is an abbreviation for something like 'off the point'. The messages in talk.philosophy.humanism all relate to the topic of the group. This 'hunch' leads to more detailed analysis, outlined below.

## Participation patterns

Nineteen out of the twenty presented messages from the 'talk.philosophy.humanism' are referenced by the subject line 'Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Worshipers Jump with Joy -'. Seven different subject lines reference the messages of 'uk.media.tv.friends':

OTP: HB in 'An Unsiutable Job For A Woman'

Re: [OTP] Piracy ( was Re: S3 Videos )

Re: [OTP] Netscape (Was Piracy ( was Re: S3 Videos ))

Re: OTP Third roch from the sun (was Re: OTP: Frasier! – and more on the Wild Domain)

Re: OTP: Red Dwarf (Was: Re: OTP: BBC Enterprises)

Re: Irish TV was series question

Re: OTP: BBC Enterprises (Was: Re: Series question (C4,N2))

Participation in the latter newsgroup consists of posts written by people contributing to differing lines of interaction at the same time. Peter Howard, for instance, takes part in subject 1 (02/20/98 10:26), subject 2 (02/20/98 10:49), and subject 5 (02/20/98). Donald Drake participates in subject 2 (02/20/98 10:39) subject 4 (02/20/98 10:45 and 02.20/98 10:46), and subject 6 (02/21/98). Ouroboros takes part in subject 3 (02/20/98 15:03) and subject 4 (02/20/98 15:04) subject 5 (02/20/98 15:03; 02/20/98 15:04; 02/20/98 15:04; 02/20/98 15:04), and subject 6 (02/20/98 15:04). Notice that many messages are minutes apart, some have the same time and date stamp. Participants in uk.media.tv.friends take part in many more subjects at the same time.

## Group specific language use

Peculiar to participation in 'uk.media.tv.friends' is the use of abbreviations. The abbreviations are placed within sentences. Some of the meanings of these abbreviations are more obvious than others and can be understood in reference to either earlier text within the message they appear, or in the text found in earlier quoted messages. Examples of the use of abbreviations are as follows:

15 >:Nostalgia eh! BTW, my all time favourite arcade game is older than a lot  
16 >: of members of this NG!

(u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 3/20)

And,

19 I've heard these storys of IE4, What exactly happens then? I also heard that  
 20 Win98 was going to be much like this sort of like a browser come OS. I'm  
 21 hanging on safe with Internet Explorer 3, and Win95. They do not crash too  
 22 often, but if I have too little hard disk space, then it can often go a bit  
 23 wrong. Especially at my server page, though IMHO, they have made use of too  
 24 much technology.

(u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 4/20)

These and other acronyms were peculiar to uk.media.tv.friends in this comparison. It was supposed that such abbreviations as were 'BTW', 'NG' and 'IMHO' were a form of specialised knowledge and that use of this knowledge denoted 'competence', 'experience' and membership of the group.

While both groups used 'smileys' or 'emoticons', i.e.,

53 Well, pregnant women also like to eat pickles with ice cream, so I don't know  
 54 if their respective states of mind count ... :-)

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 4/20)

'uk.media.tv.friends' contains far more occurances of the use of emoticons than 'talk.philosophy.humanism' in a ratio of about nine to one.

An additional feature of 'uk.media.tv.friends' is the use of denoted non-verbal behaviour, again through the use of the '\*' character:

13 :\*nods\*

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 4/20)

Another difference observed was the use of acronyms in the subject line of the messages. Specifically the 'OTP' acronym was seen to be prevalent in the uk.media.tv.friends messages, while absent in talk.philosophy.humanism. In the pilot study the interest in the use of these acronyms was to do with 'topic adherence' in that, taken at face value, the contents of the messages appeared discrepant with the name of the newsgroup (and hence the supposed topic of discussion).

This broad observation motivated a look at the contents of the messages, and then a search in the sequence of messages for additional information.

## Comparison of serious and non-serious as formal and informal language

The first newsgroup uk.media.tv.friends is characterised by irrelevance (off-topic-ness), frequent small messages in a variety of subject line headers (often written by the same writers), more 'interpersonal' participation (rate of smiley-use, action tokens) and creativity (ASCII elements in signature). The common-sense notion that it was 'non-serious' was borne out in the content. Further, such issues as topic adherence and the creative use of textual elements fits with a CA notion of 'formal' and 'informal' talk. Here, the latter (also known as institutional talk) is perceived to be more constrained (Beach 1990; Heritage and Greatbatch 1991). Beach in an analysis of focus groups, for example, claims,

'One of the basic and useful distinctions for examining variations in social conduct involves contrasting talk in 'natural/ordinary/casual conversation' with 'institutional interaction'. Best viewed on a continuum, casual talk displays a wider range of possible and expectedly 'appropriate' activities. ... In contrast, institutional talk is constrained by such features as the narrowing of activities – a uniformity of interactional shapes and devices, for example – as specific talks and roles get noticeably worked-out' (Beach 1990:200).

In an important sense *all newsgroup messages are constrained*. They are all carried out through application software, which constrains format and the like; all are text, which is constrained to particular set of characters; and all are carried out through a computer medium that constrains communication to 'asynchronous' messaging. Therefore it might be better to use the notion of *relative constraint*. Beach's 'continuum' idea provides for various positions that allow us to see the relative informality of uk.media.tv.friends.

Given this idea, it is not surprising therefore that we see *active devices* for getting informality done, which have a rule-like application. The 'OTP' acronym is an active device *that allows off-topic-ness*. Participants do not let the topic drift – as we see in informal talk (Jefferson 1984) – they apply a technical warrant for doing so. Indeed, as we will see in a moment, there is a strong sense that the omission of the OTP is a warrant-ably chastise-able activity.



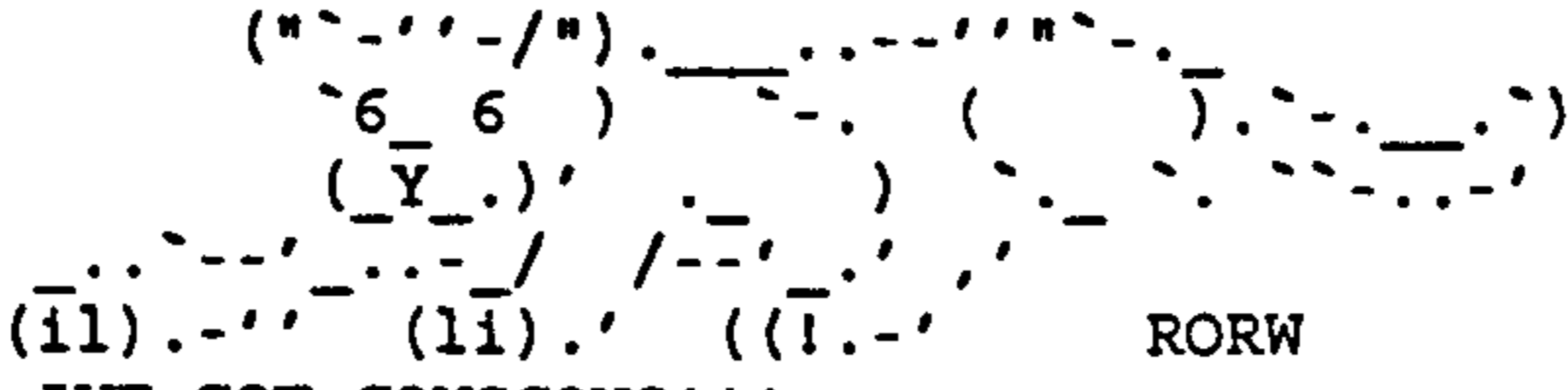
## Pursuing the OTP

The 'hunch' from the initial ten messages in uk.media.tv.friends was that OTP stood for 'Off The Point'. A search for further occurrences of the acronym revealed a series of messages that specifically addressed what the letters stood for<sup>32</sup>. One example is shown below<sup>33</sup>

```

7  In article <6lcl08$hhf$1@taliesin.netcom.net.uk>, fosman
8  <fosman@netcomuk.co.uk> writes
9  >sorry to be naive, but WHAT THE HELL IS OTP?
10 >
11 >Thanks
12 >
13 >Fosman
14 >
15 >
16 >
17 no worries, it means Off Topic Post
18
19     luvbug
20
21
22     the wild bug
23     of the webb
24 YOU MAY HAVE KIWI, BUT IVE GOT COUSCOUS!!!

```



(u.m.t.f. 10/06/98 2)

It was reasoned that the message found that did not contain the OTP acronym in the subject line, should return to the apparent topic of conversation, 'Friends'<sup>34</sup>.

The first occurrence of the lack of the OTP acronym occurs in message 14 (u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 14/20). We have already seen the total text earlier. A previous (quoted) participant has commented on the off-subject nature of the message,

```

41  :> This has really got very much off-subject. Lets get back to talking about
42  :>Friends :)

```

A reply to this message element (again quoted in the current message) asserts,

```

43  :
44  : No, I've OTP'ed it :)

```

Here we have the notion that 'to OTP' a message allows it to be off-topic. The present writer, Ouroboros, adds the text:

```

46  Long live OTP!

```

However message 14 does not itself carry the abbreviation OTP, as we have already noted. As well as the text in line 46 the message contains other text written by Ouroboros, none of which

returns to the topic of Friends. This would then appear to count against the idea the OTP is the only way a message can be off subject.

However the reply to message 14 notes the mistake in protocol. As well as including the total text of message 14 it contains the following remark (line 59),

```
52 >:> This has really got very much off-subject. Lets get back to talking about
53 >:> Friends :)
54 >:
55 >: No, I've OTP'ed it :)
56
57 >Long live OTP!
58
59 You've just dumped the OTP, ouroboros....
```

(u.m.t.f. 23/2/98 15/20)

Ouroboros is mistaken; he has removed the OTP acronym, yet continued the 'off-topic' conversation; indeed he has 'dumped' the OTP. This is not just an off-hand reference to the lack of inclusion. Ouroboros's message would have *automatically* contained the previous message's subject line<sup>35</sup>; therefore he has deliberately removed the acronym from the subject line.

An 'OTP' is a device that participants deploy in order that they might warrant-ably break the normal rules of newsgroup topic adherence. It is only successful for the message in which it is placed. Subsequent messages that do not contain the 'OTP' should return to the topic of conversation.

The use of the OTP acronym was only found in the uk.media.tv.friends newsgroup. It appeared to be specific to the group. And in that it was employed in the group to do recognisably defined things (in that a person could be told off for omitting it), it went some way to characterise the group as a particular community/group of associates with a shared set of practices and rules. Observations pointed to a collection of shared conventions underlying behaviour that were made relevant by participants at particular times. One question is whether 'the rule' would have been recognised if the participant had not commented upon it. That is, whether the rules determine behaviour – and this instance was a case of deviance – or whether rules are actively used to do interactional work. We will return to this question in a moment.

The comparison of two sets of messages from two different newsgroups produced some interesting observations. Amongst them, the issues of rules, formality and constraint came to the fore. The basis for constraint in newsgroups comes from its computer-based nature. All

newsgroup messages are constrained by these features. Relative constraint can be ascertained when we recognised particular *forms of discourse*. That is *participants' behaviour* make some newsgroup formal and others informal. Immense creativity is possible within these boundaries. Rules of newsgroup use – as they apply within the constraints already mentioned – on the other hand are matters for interactional comment.

---

## Observing convention and rules

---

What the comparison exercise accomplished was an initial sense of newsgroups. It stands alongside a number of empirical accounts of newsgroups and related media. These include the study of MUD's – "Multiple User Domains" – (Bartle 1996; Rheingold 1991; 1995), IRC – "Internet Relay Chat" – (Rintel and Pittman 1997) and Usenet newsgroups (Baym 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1997; Mackinnon 1995; McLaughlin et al 1995; Smith et al 1997a; 1997b).

Typically these studies incorporate the notion of netiquette (or net-etiquette) to formulate a picture of a range of novel cyber-cultures and virtual societies as ordered virtual environments. In turn, the existence of these new environments is the basis for a range of predictions for the Internet, its future use, and its effects on society as a whole (Brown 1997; Markley 1996). In this way these approaches accept netiquette's various incarnations as a *resource* to understand behaviour.

These studies have a number of similarities. They usually involve direct participation on the part of the researcher, as well as the use of questionnaires and interviews (Baym 1997). What they miss is the opportunity – afforded by the persistent nature of textual interaction – to simply observe the behaviour. By contrast our strategy is to turn the 'use of rules' into a topic of investigation by simply observing what people do.

Ethnographic accounts do involve observation, however the methodology is often predicated on what is 'already known'. For example, McLaughlin, Osbourne and Smith (1995) (also Smith, McLaughlan and Osbourne 1997a; 1997b) use the notion of 'reproach' to establish a taxonomy of 'reproachable conduct' on Usenet. As with studies of deviance 'conduct-correcting episodes' are used to reveal pre-existent norms and values. Their analysis of episodes of reproach is 'supplemented by the widely posted "required reading" on netiquette' (McLaughlin et al 1995:96). For example, according to McLaughlin et al the following message invokes a pre-existing rule about message length and quoting practice:

(2) Hey, <postername>, if you're going to post followups, perhaps you could "trim down the included article", as they say. At least delete the headers. It's common netiquette.

(McLaughlin et al 1995:99)

Such examples lead Smith et al (1997a) to claim that ‘...conventions such as ... flagging material with a subject pointer (an acronym, word or phrase, which conveys the nature or content of the post), are newsgroup specific and have evolved as *communication rules* for posters’, and conclude ‘In addition to newsgroup-specific norms for communication, overarching Usenet standards, collectively know as "netiquette" guide proper interaction’ (Smith et al 1997a).

What is immediately apparent is the obvious tautology of conceiving conduct-as-reproach in terms of a list of netiquette rules (the ‘required reading’) and then allowing the ensuing analysis to lead to an identification of an ‘overarching’ set of guidelines; the rules are allowed to inform the recognition of certain behaviour as ‘conduct-correcting’, and then these episodes are used to support the notion of newsgroup specific and Usenet-wide sets of standards.

Ethnomethodology would claim that such appropriation of participants’ text is inappropriate, if not naïve. Such episodes of reproach are far more than unmediated indicators of objective structures; they are actions within a particular context at a particular time (Suchman 1987). As an episode of ‘rule telling’ the message above has constitutive power over the scene and the terms discussed. In telling-the-rule, the participant supports and constitutes the specific-rule-relevant-here as part of a broader scheme of understanding. To treat such episodes as simply describing a set of conventions is to do the interactive features a disservice.

The McLaughlin et al (1995) work is an example of where empirical investigation misconstrues the interaction of participants as opportunities for social scientist to ‘see-into’ a social scene. Not only does it miss the interpretive (and interactional) work done by participants, it also misses the interpretive work done by the researcher to ‘see’ the rules manifest in the text.

The place of rules – and the technique through which they are found – is not always as explicit as claimed by McLaughlin, Osbourne and Smith (1995; 1997a; 1997b). Participant observation diminishes the ‘distance’ between participant and researcher by allowing the researcher to take part in the scene. Here we are less likely to find explicit commentaries on the rules of a situation; instead we are presented with an interpretation of ‘what actually happens’.

An example is the work of Nancy Baym (1995a; 1995b; 1997). Through 2 years of ethnographic work on a discussion group called ‘r.a.t.s’, Baym details the features that constitute the group as a community. Through participant observation – and a cultural studies approach called the ‘practice perspective’ – she is able to highlight various pre-existing structuring processes that

result in particular rules and norms. The 'emergent' character of the group is based upon the 'interactive appropriation' of 'pre-existing rules and resources' that creates 'structure beyond that which already exists' (Baym 1995a:150). So, for example, the use of acronyms in newsgroup subject lines comes from the 'fan culture' of the 1920's. While sophisticated, this approach remains committed to pre-existing rules and norms and Baym's conclusions are much like McLaughlan et al. We are told that, 'Usenet etiquette ... includes norms aimed at preventing others from having to read useless material, limiting the extent to which one can fictionalise identity, protecting other users' privacy, retaining attribution when following up an idea, and remaining readable' (Baym 1995a:159). In a reference to Usenet-wide rules we are told that 'some of these norms are codified into informational postings distributed across the network' (commonly called FAQ's). Finally, rather like the notion of 'reproach' we are told, 'In Usenet's unmoderated groups...people turn, in effect, to shaming people into compliance by drawing attention to their violations' (Baym 1995a:160)<sup>36</sup>.

In both the McLaughlan et al, and Baym works, the researcher's presupposition of a system of rules, is incorporated with actors' accounts, which are utilised as unproblematic description of 'what goes on', 'how it really is' and the like. Never is it questioned what these accounts also do by way of description. Baym accepts that 'the active collection and codification of the group's expressive forms demonstrates the self-reflexivity of computer-mediated community' (Baym 1995a:152), yet she misses the essentially reflexive nature of the accounts of the participants and her own interpretations.

### When the netiquette rules are told<sup>37</sup>

An alternative to pre-existing rules and norms is the idea that 'rule-telling' is a constituent of interaction. We can see this by returning to the earlier example. The following text comes from two messages before message 14. By message 14 it has become quoted text:

45 This has really got very much off-subject. Lets get back to talking about  
46 Friends :)

(u.m.t.f. 19/02/98<sup>38</sup>)

The discussion that Mark refers to has continued for some time. In no place during previous thirty or so message has the issue of off-topic-ness been raised. In Wieder's (1974a, 168) terms, this rule-telling event has *multi-consequential* and *multi-formulative* outcomes:

An immediate outcome is that the issue of 'topic-ness' is made a pertinent issue. As Wieder puts it, for the participants, the rule-telling event 'function[s] to re-crystallize the immediate interaction as the present centre of [their] experiential world' (Wieder 1974:168). In this case it makes the issues of off-topic-ness a matter for immediate concern. It also formulates a number of other elements of the environment and its surrounding structures:

1. It formulates what had been happening in the newsgroup amounted to a discussion of a topic that does not involve Friends.
2. It formulates the correct topic of interaction, i.e. Friends.
3. It formulates that this issue is a matter of rule-breaking i.e. 'there *is* a correct thing to be talking about'.
4. It formulates and evokes the OTP rule as something applicable here.
5. It formulates the participant's action, as well as the reason for the action, i.e. 'I'm not continuing with this line of conversation *because* it is off-topic' (and hence formulates such future action as understandable).
6. It formulates the participant's motives for writing the line, i.e. 'I am writing this because the rules say that I must'.
7. It formulates the immediate relationship between the current and previous participants as 'rule-teller' and 'rule-breakers'.
8. It places the ongoing occasion in the context of the participants' 'trans-situational' relationships, as members of a newsgroup with particular rules and a responsibility to follow these rules.

A consequence of the line 'This has really got very much off-subject. Let's get back to talking about Friends :)' is that the participant negatively sanctions the preceding interactions between members of the group. There is a sense of moral evaluation that to be off-topic is wrong. The line calls for a cessation of the off-topic-ness in the interaction in that it is a breach of the (now defined) exterior and constraining rules of the group.

An important consequence of such a move is that following messages must address the issue of 'on-topic-ness', and orient themselves to the rules. This consequence can be seen in the message that follows it. Here the participant changes the subject line to 'OTP: Irish TV was series question' and places the following text at the end of the message:

42 >This has really got very much off-subject. Lets get back to talking about  
 43 > Friends :)  
 44  
 45 No, I've OTP'ed it :)

(u.m.t.f 20/02/98)

As noted above the consequence of claiming that the message has gone 'off-topic' is that subsequent messages can neither ignore the 'off-topic-ness' of the previous interaction, nor avoid the rule-bound nature of doing interaction on the newsgroup. By placing the OTP acronym in the subject line and answering the specific concerns mentioned, the current participant has countered the claims that the interaction is deviant. In turn his message has multi-formulative and multi-consequential features. So for example:

1. The line, 'No, I've OTP'd it' again tells what just happened, i.e. 'you have claimed that the previous messages are off-topic and that off-topic-ness is wrong; I am answering those concerns',
2. The line formulates the motive of the next participant in that it is saying 'I recognize the rule about 'off-topic-ness' and feels it necessary to follow that rule',
3. It evokes the part of the OTP rule that states 'Off-topic messages are acceptable is there is an OTP acronym in the subject line.
4. The roles of the previous and present participant are re-formulated as 'rule-teller' and 'rule-follower'
5. The nature of this interaction in the newsgroup is formulated as rule-bound, and rule-adherent.
6. There are consequences as well. The line brings to an end the concerns about rule-lessness by making those concerns mute from this point forwards; hence allowing for the continuation of the conversation as rule-bound.

The line 'No, I've OTP'd it :)' does another important thing. It subtly adapts and changes the off-topic rule. The first message elements 'tells' the 'it is wrong to off-topic' part of the OTP rule (as conceived by ethnography); while the second message 'tells' the 'off-topic-ness is alright as long as there is an OTP in the subject line' part of the OTP rule. However a consequence of the two lines in conjunction is that the rule now has a temporal dimension. This goes something like 'It is wrong for a message to be off-topic once it is pointed out to be off-topic'. The rule now carries more prospective than retrospective force.



What we have here is an example of the *etcetera clause* (Garfinkel 1967) where participants 'discover the scope and applicability of a rule in the developing occasions in which rules are used' (Wieder 1974:166). The 'open and flexible nature' of netiquette-in-interaction allows the OTP rule to be applied in a creative way. The rule, as well as the interaction it is applied to, is the reflexive accomplishment of the participants. Alternatively we could assert that the previous conversation was not 'off-topic' until the first message element defined it as such.

There is one final, yet vital, formulative and consequential outcome from the above message elements. That behaviour could break the rule, infers that there must be a rule, or a set of rules, to break. It can be seen that this and other occasions of the 'telling of netiquette' reflexively constitute the newsgroup environment as rule-bound, regular and ordered.

Ethnographic accounts can be characterised as an example of rule-telling. Just as participants of a newsgroup employ netiquette to make a scene logical and reasonable, so ethnographic accounts use rule-telling to *formulate* a set of structuring norms and values. In making the participants' formulations of a scene an unproblematic description, the ethnographic researcher ignores their contextual interpretive work. In ethnomethodological terms, the participant's sense-making practices are used as an un-explicated resource for doing sociology. To prevent sociology from being simply a 'folk' discipline it is necessary to take these resources and turn them into an explicit topic of investigation. This section is an example of how this might be accomplished.

---

## Observing time and sequence

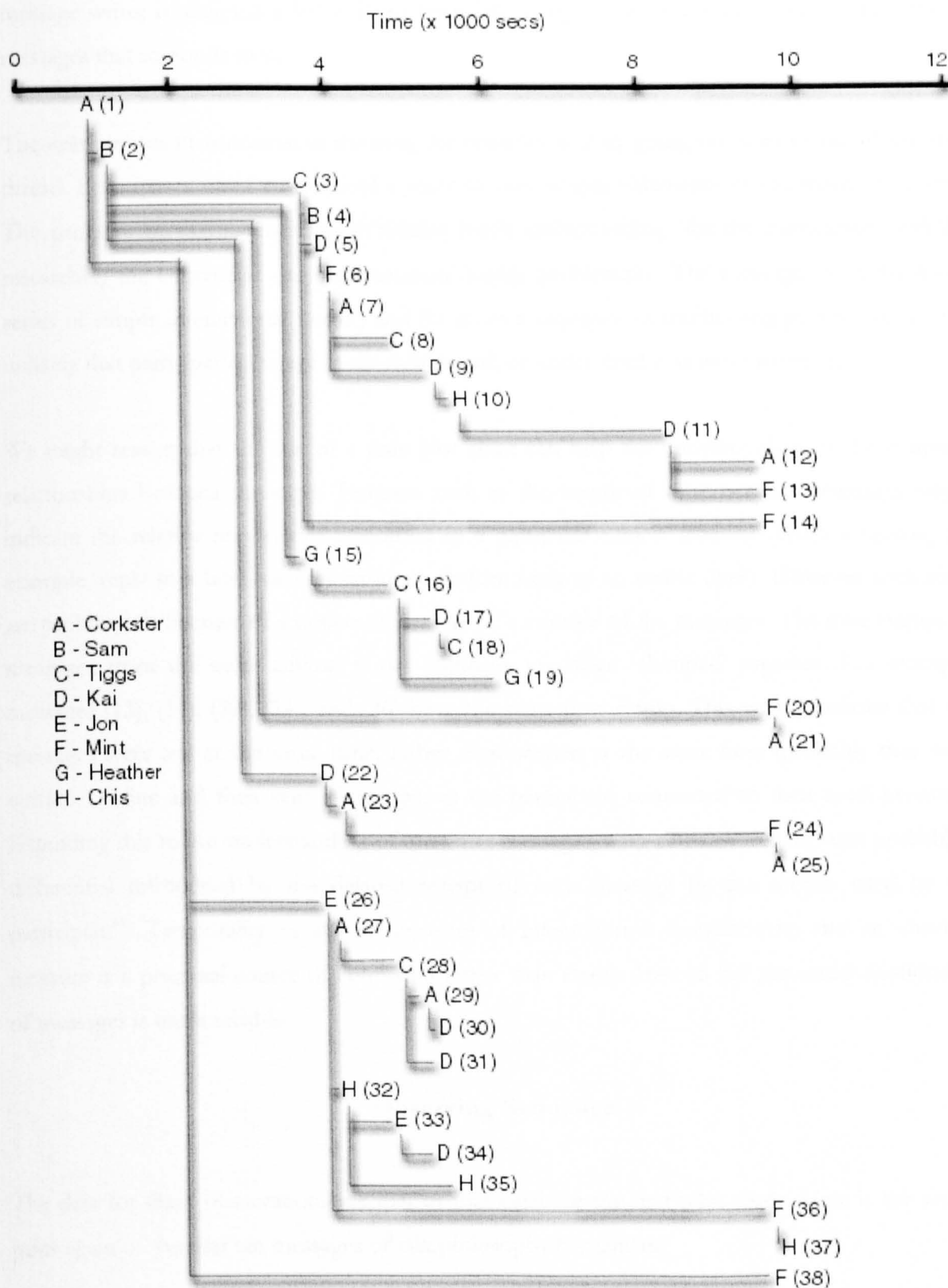
---

The third strategy is to observe 'time' and 'sequence'. This is based on the previous observations that messages are related in some way and that they constitute an interaction.

First we would make a brief note about temporality and the wider literature. Much has been made of the 'asynchronous' nature of newsgroup text messaging system (Black et al 1983) as opposed to other media such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Multiple User Domains (MUD's) and other 'real-time' messaging systems. The latter are taken to better fit a model of face-to-face communication because the text appears instantaneously and participants engage with each other at the same time. The existence and importance of synchronicity and asynchronicity is pre-supposed in the ethnographic literature. The observation of time is an effort to engage with such pre-suppositions. In this way 'time' is turned into a topic of investigation rather than a resource from which investigation starts.

Our interest was engaged when discrepancies appeared in the times on the newsreader screen print and the header information of the message represented. For example, message one on the screen print has the time stamp '02/17/98 10:37' (t.p.h. 23/2/98), whereas the time stamp within the message reads 'Tue, 17 Feb 1998 13:37:37 -0500'. Even taking into consideration the fact that this second time stamp indicated that it was from a time region five hours behind GMT, there was still a two-hour discrepancy.

One way to react to this is to say that a better way is needed to find and represent the 'real' time. Perhaps the computer application that produced the screen print is faulty in some way, and the time shown in the header information of messages is the 'correct' time because the participant's computer defines it. The following time-plot diagram denotes the time<sup>39</sup> in the message header in an extended thread in uk.media.tv.friends:



(A diagram representing a message thread, plotted against time.)

The above diagram represents a message thread over time; the various tributaries of the messages connected by lines. Zero time relates to twelve midnight preceding the first message. Each

message writer is assigned a letter. Read from left to right, each message is followed by the messages that responds to it.

The exercise was instrumental in showing the complex activity going on in an extended message thread. Participants often contributed a reply to two or more elements of the thread at a time. The progress of varying message tributaries made understanding (for the participants and the researcher) the content as one 'conversation' highly problematic. The messages were far less a series of simple interactional 'turns', and far more a sequence of multiplying parallel turns. It is unlikely that participants engage in the *total* thread, or understand it as *one* conversation.

We might reason that the use of a time plot chart can help the understanding of the temporal relationships between messages. Features such as the length of time between messages might indicate the relative importance attributed to a particular subject element (Does a person, for example, reply to a later message tributary, before reply to an earlier one?). However such ideas are problematic because of a noticeable feature of a number of the messages. The time-stamps of messages from the same author, if not identical, are often 'clumped' together. For example, messages (13), (14), (20), (24), and (36) have the same time stamp. This would indicate that the messages were *sent* at the same time, rather than written at the same time (probably they were written off-line and then sent in one go, as the participant connected to their local network). Extending this to our understanding of the other messages, a lag of a few minutes was probably a differential introduced by the delayed receipt of each message by the service used by the participant<sup>40</sup>. Temporality as a 'real' measure of interaction is questionable; and an absolute measure is a potential source of confusion rather than clarity. Instead the sequential relationship of messages is more reliable.

### Observing Sequence

The data for these observations are half of that used for the first pilot study. Here is the screen print again of the first ten messages of talk.philosophy.humanism:

Sender	Subject	Date	
	Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Wors...		
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 10:37	..1
Justin Lehmicke	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/17/98 11:17	..2
Beth Wise	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 13:39	..3
Greg Gyetko	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 13:44	..4
Nicolas P. D...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 15:45	..5
Greg Gye...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/20/98 05:40	..6
Nicola...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/20/98 12:56	..7
Patrick Lepine	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 17:53	..8
MindFlayer	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	02/19/98 21:21	..9
jdrayton@im...	Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus ...	Sun 18:05	..10

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 1-10/20)

At a simple level, the ten messages follow one another; priority is given the *related* nature of each message over the time stamp. This can be seen when we compare the time stamps of messages 7 and 8 as opposed to the graphical representation of sequence of messages 4 to 7. Time gives way to sequence.

Motivated by the strategy of moving from simple to directed observation, we turn to the content of the messages and ask how such related-ness is manifest.

### *Looking at the content of the messages in sequence*

In our data messages 4 and 5 are the first that are prioritised in terms of sequentiality, rather than temporality. Here is the text from the first two of these messages,

```

1 Subject: Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Worshipers Jump with Joy
2 Date: Thu, 19 Feb 1998 16:44:12 -0500
3 From: Greg Gyetko<ggy@nospam.newbridge.com>
4 Organization: Fossil Construction Division, Illuminati Headquarters.
5 Newsgroups: can.politics,alt.atheism,talk.philosophy.humanism
6 References: <34d0c399.505529@News.IslandNet.com> <34D18741.F7B@earthlink.net>
7 <34d3668f.5352880@News.IslandNet.com> <Enpn6F.2pI@hermes.hrz.uni-bielefeld.de>
8
9
10
11 Justin Lemicke wrote:
12
13 > Arthur Mason wrote:
14 >
15 > > When your fetus starts crying for attention, we'll
16 > > talk.
17 > > You can rationalize every which way you want about
18 > > all the similarities between the foetus and a baby and you
19 > > can focus as hard as you can on the potential of the foetus,
20 > > but it simply does not relate to us as a person . A baby can
21 > > cry and babble, and in many other ways indicate its mood and
22 > > intent -- in other words, declare itself as a person to be
23 > > dealt with. The fetus cannot.
24 > > Even a paralyzed man, unable to talk, would arouse
25 > > in us an effort to communicate with him, by gesture or
26 > > whatever, because we sense, even if he is in a coma, that

```

27 > > there is a person there to reckon with. Not so the foetus.  
 28 > > All the effort and histrionics used to convince  
 29 > > people that the foetus is really a baby is going to continue  
 30 > > to look foolish to the majority of the population.  
 31 > > Cheers,  
 32 > > Arthur  
 33 > > "Suffering is a sexual treat for the celibate."  
 34 >  
 35 > A question for you: if a baby were born comatose and unable to breathe or  
 36 > eat without mechanical life support, would it be alright to kill it?  
 37  
 38 It would be very unlikely to survive being born. The child \*has\* to breathe  
 39 when it comes out of the womb, otherwise the wall between two of the chambers  
 40 of the heart doesn't form and the kid wouldn't be able to get any air from its  
 41 lungs anyway.  
 42  
 43 > After all, the only difference between this baby and an unborn fetus is  
 44 > position.  
 45  
 46 That's why, at least in Canada, the line is currently drawn at some 24 or 25  
 47 weeks of gestation, after which (last I checked) a woman can't get an  
 48 abortion.  
 49  
 50 > Another thing: how can you say that a paralyzed man arouses an urge in  
 51 > everyone to communicate with him, while a fetus arouses this urge in noone.  
 52 > If fetuses never arouse this urge, then why do pregnant women often talk to  
 53 > their unborn babies?  
 54  
 55 Well, pregnant women also like to eat pickles with ice cream, so I don't know  
 56 if their respective states of mind count ... :-)  
 57  
 58 Greg Gyetko  
 59  
 60 --  
 61 alt.atheism Atheist #911  
 62 "I'd worship Satan, but I'm going to hell anyway,  
 63 so why waste my time?"  
 64 EAC homepage: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Vault/9905/>

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 4/20)

1 Subject: Re: Prolifers kill Cop; Fetus Worshipers Jump with Joy  
 2 Date: Thu, 19 Feb 1998 15:45:58 -0800  
 3 From: "Nicolas P Diser" <hhh@cs.sfu.ca>  
 4 Organization: Simon Fraser University  
 5 Newsgroups: can.politics,alt.atheism,talk.philosophy.humanism  
 6 Nigel  
 7 References: <34d0c399.505529@News.IslandNet.com> <34D18741.F7B@earthlink.net>  
 8 <34d3668f.5352880@News.IslandNet.com> <Enpn6F.2pI@hermes.hrz.uni-bielefeld.de>  
 9 <3  
 10  
 11 Greg Gyetko wrote:  
 12 >  
 13 > That's why, at least in Canada, the line is currently drawn at some 24 or 25  
 14 > weeks of gestation, after which (last I checked) a woman can't get an  
 15 > abortion.  
 16  
 17 Uh... no, I don't think so. For the last 10 years, abortion has been  
 18 decriminalized in Canada. No restrictions whatsoever.  
 19  
 20 --  
 21 Nicolas P Diser npd@cs.sfu.ca  
 22 <http://www.cs.sfu.ca/~npd/personal/index.html>  
 23  
 24 "I could never figure the calendar's flow  
 25 Nor can I work out how the wild wind blows  
 26 But I'm ready from within and we're starting to go  
 27 Away from the place of no tomorrow..."

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 5/20)

The second of these messages is far smaller than the first; large portions of text are ignored. Out of 64 lines of text only 4 lines are copied to Nicolas P. Diser's reply. It starts with what we have

previously called a *quoted participant identifier* 'Greg Gyetko wrote:' at line 11. For the text at lines 17 to 18 to make sense, the current participant has quoted a segment from the previous message between lines 12 and 15.

The sequential relate-ness of the message 5 to message 4 is accomplished through the use of this quoted text. As we have said, the idea that participants have some mental temporal record of the interaction so far is challengeable – given the extended period of time taken and the complicated relationships developed. From the point of view of the participants (and the researcher) a better method for appreciating the newsgroup threads are the sequential propensities of quoting.

### Textual turns at interaction

There have been relatively few observations of textual turns at interaction. Within CA Mulkey (1985, 1986) and De Rycker (1985) provide examples of the analysis of letters as interactions.

Mulkey's (1986) analysis conceives of letters sent between scientists in terms of 'compliment response' and 'preferred and dispreferred seconds to agreement and disagreement' (Pomerantz 1984). He claims that letters are like conversation in that they 'employ direct, personal address; they require participants to respond appropriately to others' contributions; they involve a turn-taking sequence; and several contributors can take part' (Mulkey 1986:303).

De Rycker (1985) is interested in the 'local and overall mechanisms' of what he terms 'correspondence'. In line with Sacks et al (1974) he conceives of a *turn-taking model* for didactic personal correspondence in terms of two elements: the 'turn-constructive component' and the 'turn-allocational component' (1985:637). A 'turn-at-writing' is conceived as one turn unit. The most common 'unit-types' include letters, postcards, greeting cards, telegrams and telexes. Only one unit can be used in the construction of a writing turn. And a correspondent is entitled to only one unit in a turn. 'The end of the unit constitutes – upon its reception by the addressee – a transition-relevance place...[which is] the point at which writers/senders may change' (1985:637). The 'turn-allocation component' of correspondence consists of the 'techniques and devices used in the distribution of turns at writing' (1985:638). With correspondence this occurs in two possible ways: either the current writer selects the next writer, or one of the two writers self-selects. With correspondence the device used is normally the first one<sup>41</sup>.

With newsgroup interaction we find instances where participants select the next person to participate, however by far the more common action is an open ended request for participation from anyone, such as in the following message,

20 Didn't we have a big trial. Chantal what's-her-name, the Quebecois who wanted  
 21 an abortion against the wishes of her boyfriend. As I understood, they were  
 22 rushing the trial because they wanted to get it figured out before they hit the  
 23 24-week barrier.  
 24  
 25 Anybody remember that stuff?  
 26  
 27 I think she ended up running the border and getting an abortion in the states,  
 28 didn't she?  
 29  
 30 Greg.

(t.h.p. 23/2/98 6/20)

A more productive use of De Rycker's work is the notion of 'textual turns at talk'.

### Textual turns at talk

First a simple two message example. This is the text within the message body of the second message of the data set:

9 Arthur Mason wrote:  
 10  
 11 > Who else would want to make a  
 12 > person's decision about their own body a criminal act?  
 13 > Traditionally, anti-abortionists have always stood firmly  
 14 > behind the death penalty.  
 15  
 16 Someone please explain to me how a fetus with a unique genetic code is  
 17 part of the mother's body.  
 18 -A pro-lifer who is firmly  
 19 opposed to the death penalty

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 2/20)

Line 9 makes it clear that the inserted text is from a previous message written by Arthur Mason. The text following this 'participant identifier line' may, or may not be the full text that appeared in the earlier message. This need not concern us as a person reading this new message is also unaware of the full content of Arthur's message. For the purposes of understanding this message (on the part of the researcher as well as the other participants) we can take Arthur's text (lines 11-14) as the first turn and the remaining text (lines 9-10 and 15-19) as the second turn. (Written by 'Justin Lemicke' according to the 'From:' line of the message). First a word about the structures of each turn element: The first can be seen to be made up of two sentences, the first a question and the second a statement, assertion or, perhaps, accusation. The reply is also made up of two



sentences, the first a request the second a statement. The two-sentence reply of Justin, complements the two sentences written by Arthur. We might say that it mimics the first's structure by addressing each element separately and in the same order. Hence 'Who else would want to make a person's decision about their own body a criminal act?' is answered by the (mocking) request, 'Someone please explain to me how a fetus [sic] with a unique genetic code is part of the mother's body' We might gauge from this that both participants are referring to the rights and wrong's of abortions (or at least we can be confident that that is how Justin is reading Arthur's message). The second two sentences again complement each other. The statement by Arthur 'Traditionally, anti-abortionists have always stood firmly behind the death penalty.' Is addressed by Justin with the statement (and mock signature) ' - A pro-lifer who is firmly opposed to the death penalty'. Note the upgrade of 'anti-abortionist' (line 13) to 'pro-lifer' (line 18).

The second example comes from the third message within the dataset (t.p.h. 23/2/98 3/20).

This message is already the combination of parts of four messages. Beth, the writer, quotes Brainman, who quotes Justin, who quotes another participant who is not identified. Already, in the quoted message(s), there have been three turns:

An unknown participant contributed:

```
14 >>> Has anyone considered making the Pro-Lifers happy, by _EVERYONE_ sending
15 >>> all their un-fertilized sperm cells to them, i n large containers ???
16 >>>
17 >>> It would be interesting to find out what they would do with all those
18 >>> un-born Children/Embryos/Fetuses (Whatever)....
19 >>>
```

This was countered by Justin (identified earlier in the message with quoted participant identifier at lines 9-10) by:

```
21 >>What is an "unfertilized sperm cell" (I wasn't aware that a sperm cell could
22 >>be fertilized) and how is it un-born child? Is there some biological
23 >>process by which a sperm cell can spontaneously generate 23 more chromosomes
24 >>and became a human being?
```

Brainman then quotes both messages and adds the following comments:

```
26 >Yes, there is -- by coupling with an egg. Similarly, embryo can become
27 >human, by gestating within mother's body for months.
28 >Ah, you meant if the sperm can BY ITSELF do all that stuff? No, it
29 > cannot. Neither can an embryo or a fetus, BY ITSELF, become a human being.
30
31 > Now, what the fuck where you talking about?..
```

The new message, the one that contains the above extracts, does not aim to continue the particular debate but instead makes an overarching comment, and forms a rationale for this type of debate.

33 You know, I think I've finally figured out why there's no uproar over eggs  
 34 and sperm like there is over fetuses. The only difference is in how they're  
 35 finally presented to the world: Menstrual blood and ejaculate are rather  
 36 unappealing, whereas fully developed babies are cute and cuddly and they  
 37 make babbling idiots out of otherwise intelligent people ("Goo goo ga!  
 38 Gitcher tummy! Gitcher tummy!" Sheesh).

Line 31, '> Now, what the fuck where you talking about?..' [sic], would appear to be an attempt at winning the argument. Having included this element in the quoted text, Beth would appear to be accepting it as such. The argument is finished (or at least accepted/presented as such by Beth) and hence further participation involves commentary on the argument, rather than a continuance of the argument.

Further note, while lines 21-22 are a challenge to the definition of sperm cells as 'un-fertilized' in line 15, the text does not appear, or is not placed, after the relevant section. Instead the message there are an additional four lines, which include the text 'It would be interesting to find out what they would do with all those un-born Children/Embryos/Fetuses (Whatever)...'. Using quotation marks "unfertilized sperm cell", highlights the specific phrase referred to in lines 21-24. This places the relevance of the comment within the previous message without having to appear directly after it (A device that might parallel the conversational use of 'When you said.....').

The section in line 26, '>Yes, there is -- by coupling with an egg', is a subtle upgrade and serves to redefine or clarify the meaning of 'un-fertilized sperm cells'. The word 'Similarly' (line 26) attaches the import of the combination of sperm and egg with embryo and mother, so setting up the parallel emphasis of 'sperm..BY ITSELF' and, 'fetus, BY ITSELF' (lines 28 and 29 respectively). The use of the (vocalized) word 'Ah,' (line 28) denotes a realization of what the previous message was referring to. It implies a stream of consciousness. However by placing the text in lines 28-29 after that in lines 26-27, the spontaneous nature of the second two lines are up for question. 'Ah' might therefore be read as sarcasm, as mock realization.

#### Graphical turns at talk

The subordinate representation of the icons in the circled section of the diagram infers that each subsequent message is in answer to the one above it.

The four messages concern themselves with a point of law – whether abortion is a criminal offence in Canada. The first point to make is that Nicolas’s reply (message 5) to Greg’s message (message 4) concerns itself with only one portion of the original message (See Greg’s total message in the Appendix – t.h.p. 23/2/98 4/20). Nicolas chooses to selectively quote the following text:

```

9   Greg Gyetko wrote:
10  >
11  > That's why, at least in Canada, the line is currently drawn at some 24 or 25
12  > weeks of gestation, after which (last I checked) a woman can't get an
13  > abortion.

```

And directly challenges its accuracy:

```

15  Uh... no, I don't think so. For the last 10 years, abortion has been
16  decriminalized in Canada. No restrictions whatsoever.

```

(t.h.p. 23/2/98 5/20)

Note the vocalized ‘Uh...no,’ this might be similar to a dispreferred second or lack of agreement (Pomerantz 1984). The ellipsis points might infer a break or period of time.

In message 6 of the dataset (t.h.p. 23/2/98 6/20) the whole of Nicolas’s message is copied by Greg and the following additional comments added:

```

20  Didn't we have a big trial. Chantal what's-her-name, the Quebecois who wanted
21  an abortion against the wishes of her boyfriend. As I understood, they were
22  rushing the trial because they wanted to get it figured out before they hit the
23  24-week barrier.
24
25  Anybody remember that stuff?
26
27  I think she ended up running the border and getting an abortion in the states,
28  didn't she?
29
30  Greg.

```

(t.h.p. 23/2/98 6/)

Notice the appeal to a wider audience in line 25 that we have already mentioned.

Nigel addresses the challenge by accepting that he could be wrong, without actually conceding defeat:

21 Mmm... I remember that, vaguely, but this was long before I got  
22 politicized. Don't remember anything about a 24-week barrier. It must be  
23 a Quebec thing, or else not a law as such. I'm almost positive abortion  
24 is totally decriminalized in Canada.

(t.p.h. 23/2/98 7/20)

This final text extract may then be seen as a form of 'repair' (Schegloff 1979). By changing the frame of reference – 'It must be a Quebec thing' – Nicola is able to concede a possible error without having to back down on his original point.

A broad point to make about this sequence of interaction is that it mimics everyday talk. Once Nicolas has singled out the particular issue he wants to address the following two posts may be seen to behave like normal turns of talk.

An important discovery here, then, is that newsgroup interactions exhibit features seen in every day conversation. We can see features such as the 'adjacency pair' (Jefferson 1995:521-532) and actions such as 'closure' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) and 'repair' (Schegloff 1979). An emphasis on turn of interaction provides significant insight. But already a problem of magnitude presents itself. To this point we have been looking at small numbers of messages. The next section takes the insights we have gained and applies them in a strategy of systematic observation. To do this we start over and look at a single message. From this we develop an understanding of the structure of newsgroup messages and work toward a systematic appreciation.

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## Systematic observation

---

This section is a matter of deliberate systematic observation; as such it employs a strategy of *directed observation*. It takes advantage of the persistent nature of newsgroup messages which mean that, unlike CA – which has to employ particular machinic-productive processes to construct an ‘immutable mobile’ (Latour 1987) – real instances of actual behaviour can be seen. In so doing it incorporates a practice seen in the phenomenon itself, the empirical presentation of observable features through quoting<sup>42</sup>.

We will start with a detailed observation of a single message<sup>43</sup>. The results of which will further direct our observations toward *structural features* of individual newsgroup messages in the context of the mass of newsgroup messages. This will be operationalized in terms of a ‘descriptive coding’. The details of this move – i.e. the coding categories, the table formatting etc. will be given, and will lead to efforts to collect and catalogue various ‘quoting shapes’. We will then observe single cases, and groups of cases, in terms of these structural features – specifically the action of *quoting* as a practice within the messages – and form an observational analysis of a set of messages. In this way we will develop a grammar of *quoting mechanisms*.

### Detailed observation of single message

First two notes: first, this is a *composite observation*, that is, while the message is a single authentic text, the observations made about it are a combination of observations of a large number of messages over an extended period. Examples from other messages are brought in to develop the narrative; second, for sake of brevity, only selected observations are presented<sup>44</sup> (A full text observation is to be found in the Appendix<sup>45</sup>).



The first set of observations, recognise the general structure of the message. The message is made up of three elements: the 'Header Information text', the 'Message Body text', and the 'Signature text'.

### *Header information*

The first element, the 'header information', is seen to be separate to the message text because it is included in the total text by dint of it being generated by the computer application(s) used to generate and read the message.

### Subject line

The first line of the header information is the 'Subject.' In the example shown this includes various elements:

'Re: Irish TV was series question'

The first element – the 'Re:' text appears in all 'replies'. It is generated automatically by the computer application whenever a reply command is carried out. It appears to follow a convention in formal correspondence in which the subject line of a letter is preceded by 'RE:' when the subject is repeated, referred to etc. In addition the element 'was series question' refers to a previous subject line.

The subject line is often self-referential in this way. Subject lines vary in their specificity to a recognisable subject. So for example they may be relatively specific, such as 'Boltz' Tribute to Angis Porkingham' (r.s.p-w.f 02/10/99)(note here again the referential nature of this subject line); or may be more complicated, e.g. 'NWCJ/TJP 321BLAST! 9.30.99 2/4' (r.w.p-w.f 03/10/99).

The text in the subject line may be treated as part of the body text. For example in one message the subject line reads 'HOTTEST PROPERTY IN E-WRESTLING – YES OR NO?!!', (r.s.p-w.f. 02/10/99) and the text in the message totals one word 'NO' (r.s.p-w.f. 02/10/99).

So the 'subject' line is not simply something like the *subject* of the message, although it may describe it. It may be treated as part of the actual text, it may contain referential force, and may contain additional contextualising cues such as a first element square bracket '[OTP]' which denotes the content as an 'Off Topic Post'. While it is 'automatically generated' by carrying out a 'reply', it is editable and may be changed. In some cases the subject line is completely changed<sup>46</sup>.

The notion of messages organised by 'topic' is somewhat problematic. As we have seen the subject line does more than specifically name, or describe the topic. In addition we might ask whether it is possible to denote *a* topic, i.e. adequately prescribe, adequately demarcate boundaries and the like. 'Topic-ness' seems an ambiguous quality – at least in terms of its definition in the subject line.

#### Date line

The next line starts 'Date:' and appears to contain a specific time stamp for the message. This includes the day, the day of the month, the month, the year, the time (hours, minutes, seconds), and an indication of a time zone (in this case 'GMT', 'Greenwich Mean Time'). Out of all the header information, this text has been the most difficult to work out. One would presume that 'time' would in some sense be 'dependable'; however, the time-stamp within a message may be different to that represented in the graphical/relational representation of a newsreader. In fact the time-stamp is far from dependable: it may relate to the settings of the computer of the writer – the time on that computer at which the message was sent; or it may relate to the time settings of the Internet Service Provider used by the writer; alternatively it may represent the time settings of the Internet Service Provider through which the reader accesses the message. Different applications pick different details. As one computer engineer remarked, 'these settings can be all over the place'<sup>47</sup>.

#### From line

The next line starts 'From:', followed by, what appears to be, the name and email address of the sender of this message. 'From lines' contain recognisable 'real' names, or 'nicknames'; 'Ouroboros' is a nickname (This is also the name that appears in the signature file 'drawn' in ASCII characters). Following the name element is the email address of the writer:



'donotsendanyspam@myaddress.please'. This is a made up email address; and takes advantage of an application feature which allows manual editing. The humorous, or whimsical nature of this email is typical of the group (other examples include '[spam@cornbcef.co.uk](mailto:spam@cornbcef.co.uk)') and is one example of 'creativity within technical constraints' mentioned earlier.

The 'From line' may also include the participant's 'real' name, e.g. 'boltzsov@aol.combustable (Joey Ray)' (r.s.p-w.f. 03/10/99)<sup>48</sup>.

### Message ID<sup>49</sup>

The title Message ID is followed by a series of characters generated by the computer application that gives the message a unique identity. The characters include an indication of the server used to connect to the internet, which also ensures that no character set is reproduced. When a reply to the current message is created the message ID is copied into the 'References' line in combination with the contents of the current message's Reference line. The newsreader application then compares the Message ID's of messages and their Reference lines to order the total message set.

### Reference line

The following line starts 'References:'. It contains a series of textual elements that each has a similar structure to that found in the Message-ID line. It turns out that these elements are the Message-ID's of previous messages in reverse order. Message-ID lines may include all of the identifying marks of previous messages (back to the original 'new' message), or may include only the most recent. Different applications present different numbers of ID's. It might be guessed that this is because the computer program only needs to know the preceding few ID's to work out the relationships involved.

### *Message Body text*

#### Automatic text (a.t.)

In the first segment of the example we find the following at line 10:

‘ARobot said, that N Esterville mentioned...’

This is an example of ‘automatic text’ that prefaces a piece of text taken from an earlier message. In this case the automatic text conveys a quote within a quote. As is, this is a very simple version of the automatic text elements of message body text. While we call it automatic text, it is highly editable and format-able<sup>50</sup> and may contain many elements. Here is a more complicated example:

‘In article <37f874a7.2222159@news.freemove.net>, tiggs@theonewith.com (The One, the Only, Andy K) wrote:’

The second element ‘37f874a7.2222159@news.freemove.net’ is the Message-ID of the previous message, while the third element is the previous writer’s email address, nickname and real name. The first element ‘In article’ and the last element ‘wrote:’ are text defined by the application. Some participants edit this text into a mini-narrative. While automatic text (a.t.) does not always appear in the position indicated in this example, it always precedes quoted text. It provides a context for the quoted elements.

### Quoted text (q.t.)

The next segment of the message contains the following text,

```
12 : > No. Channel 3 is (will be?) a totally commercial venture. (I think a canadian
13 : > broadcaster has a majority shareholding, and they already run a channel, also
14 : > called Channel 3, in somewhere like New Zealand - this is all from memory so
15 : > I might be wrong with these countries).
16 :
17 : Hmmm, taken them a while to get a commercial venture up and running hasn't it?
18 : I mean ITV launched in 1956, and Channel 4 launched in 1982. And theres been no
19 : ads in ireland? How to they live.... :)
```

The characters to the left of each line of text (‘>’ and ‘:’) denote quoted text and are automatically added to text when a reply command is carried out. The first two characters (‘>’) is a combination of the second (‘:’) with the addition of ‘>’. The first denotes quoted text, that was itself quoted in the previous message – second order quoted text (‘q.t. (1)’). Message writers have control over what characters denote quoting in this way. The default is the ‘>’ character, such that successive orders of quoted text accumulate the single character e.g. a third order quoted segment would typically be preceded by ‘>>>’.

Quoted text is fully editable, but it is noticeable that text within a segment block is not edited, even when there are apparent inaccuracies. There is a sense of respecting what the previous writer has produced, as well as the order in which it was produced. So, for example, in the current message, the various quoted sections appear in the order that they appeared in the previous message. In that there is a named author of this copied text, and that the text is acknowledged as originating in a specific message, it acts rather like an academic reference.

One other interesting feature of this quoted text is the use of 'hmmm', which an example of vocalised-like text that we saw in the initial comparative exercise.

#### New text (n.t.)

The text that follows the quoted segment (lines 21-26) is new text written by the current participant:

```
21 Well I expect. No adverts. That'd be well cool!!! Do you have to pay a licence
22 fee?
23
24 What'd be good would be if you lived on the border, and got BBC1-2,
25 ITV(ulster), and C4-5, plus the five Irish ones. That way you'd get 10
26 channels. More if you can get wales.
```

This new text follows on from the last point made in the quoted elements. One frequent use of 'well' in verbal communication is as a prelude to an 'assessment' (Pomerantz, 1984). We again see then a vocalised quality.

New text appears twice more in the message (lines 35 to 40 and line 47). Each time it is preceded by a quoted segment (lines 28 to 33 and 42 to 45). The current writer has strategically placed the new text in particular positions. Note too, that the previous participant has also placed new text in relation to elements of the text that preceded it. What is interesting here is that the current writer has followed the segmenting of the previous writer; s/he has followed the previous message's format.

#### Quoted text and new text in combination

What is interesting about the structure of these elements is their combination into identifiable structural segments that follow the following pattern:



Chis – Who is now crying and mourning – and you will never now how much!!!'

'Chis' is the writer of the message. We see another complicated automatic signature in the message from which this manual signature originates,

```

\..
Be Nice And Smile,                chis@argonet.co.uk (2E1CFA)
Be Happy And Be Wild!             (spam of the food kind welcome)
http://bounce.to/chis            "Did I mention that I hate this school?"
"I hope you choke, on your Bacardi and Coke"
"I'm sorry, but we accidentally replaced your heart with a potato"
"Fear is the path to the dark side, fear leads to anger,
anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering."
"Mulder it's me...What do you mean? It's me...
Scully!...Glad we got that one cleared up"
Sept '99
The Wild Girl of the Web® (accept no imitations)'

```

This message contains similar content with the addition of a number of quotations from television programmes. "I'm sorry, but we accidentally replaced your heart with a potato" for example is from the American comedy 'South Park'.

In other messages, the automatic signature may contain similarly detailed content, or it may contain simple information about the author (such as the person's full name or nickname). It is usual that computer applications used to access newsgroup messages include the facility to define a 'signature file' that is placed in each message sent. It should be noted, however, that not all participants have a defined automatic signature, nor include one in their messages. In practice 'signing-off' the message is unnecessary because the participant's identity is contained in the 'from line'. A question, then, might be what interactional work can be done with the use of (automatic or manual) signature.

So far we have set out some observations of a single message with additional information, so as to broaden the simple observation here to encompass a series of observations made by the researcher over the period of study. We have called this a *composite* observation. Further we introduced descriptive terms, such as 'header information', 'quoted text' and 'message body text'; and more specifically 'automatic text', 'quoted text' and 'new text'. Finally we have started to comment on how these message elements combine to form particular structures within messages.

While we have detailed and described features of the structure of the messages, we have not started to ask questions about how these features function in the actual activity of sending messages. We might say that simply describing does not get us to an *understanding* of the central question, *how* newsgroup messages get done.

The question here then is how we can extend these observations and broaden our understanding of these structural features the doing of newsgroup interaction.

The answer taken is to make observations of a large number of messages and describe each in terms of the structural features; to extract verbatim elements such as participant name, message date stamp; and to represent the messages in terms of their relationships in a particular tabular format. In this way we utilise these observations of a single message.

### A method of Descriptive Coding

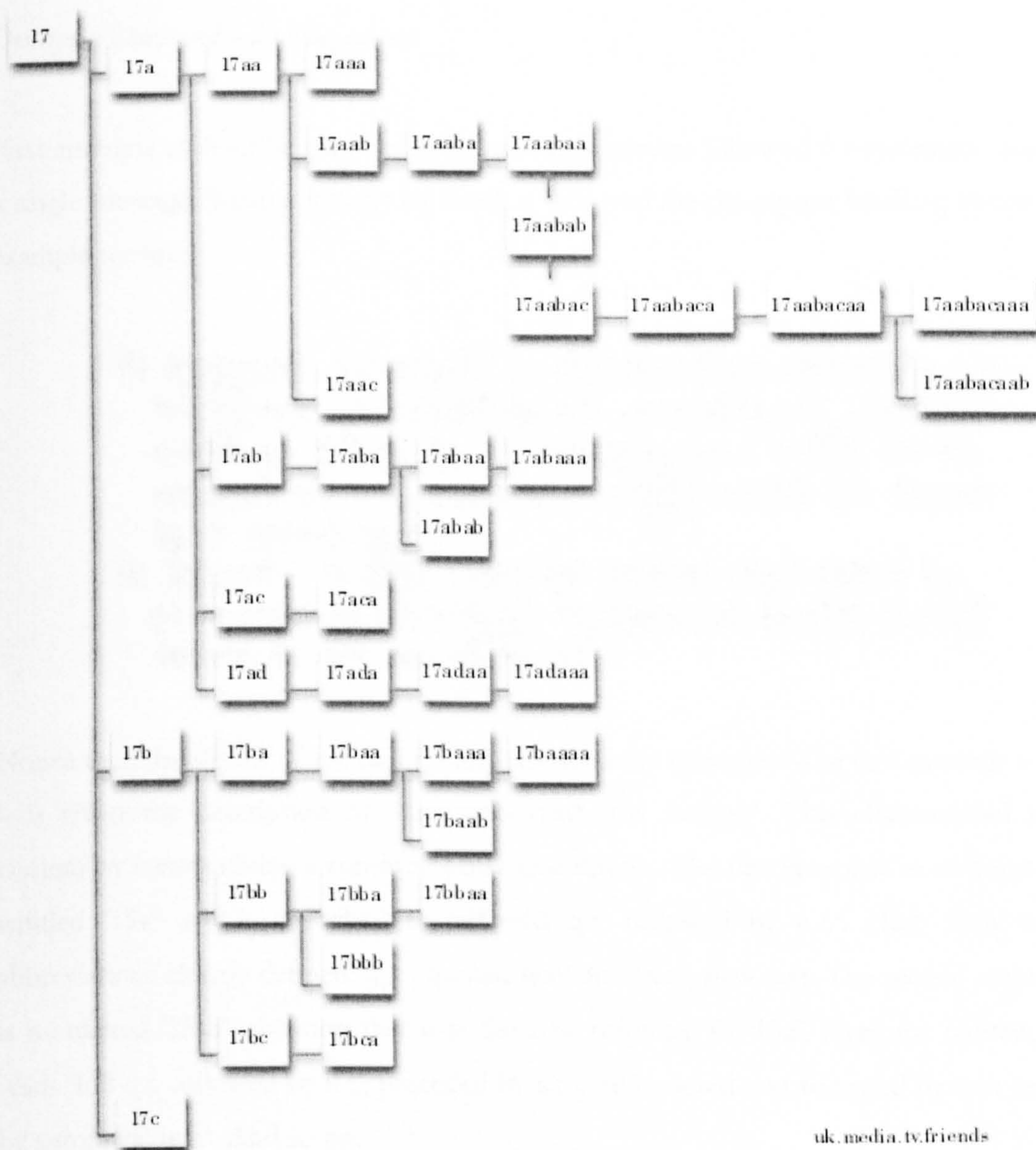
Let us then start to detail this broader observation strategy 'descriptive coding'. The strategy involves:

1. Working through a large collection of messages, one at a time, in the order that they appear.
2. Copying particular features of the phenomenon into the coding table
3. Providing and developing a *descriptive shorthand* for observed features, including a descriptive labelling and the structural features detailed in the systematic observation of a single message.
4. Developing a descriptive tabular format for the message relationships

#### *Descriptive Shorthand – labelling messages*

We previously labelled each message based upon the data of acquisition and consecutive numbering. With the large-scale corpus this method is problematic for practical reasons, but more importantly our efforts are now geared toward a descriptive labelling, based upon our directed and systematic strategy.

In the initial stages of developing a descriptive coding it was realised that the sequential relation of message to message was important. The labelling scheme reflected this observation. Messages were simply numbered (based upon the order in which they were downloaded) but this numbering conveys which messages followed which (i.e. which messages answered others). So, the first message was labelled '1' and the first 'answer' to that message, '1a'. The second answer was labelled '1b' and so on. The first answer to message 1a, was labelled 1aa, the second answer 1ab, and so on, and so forth. This strategy had a number of additional benefits. By counting the number of letters for example, it was possible to gauge the 'distance' from the original message. It also provided for a tree like appreciation of the various tributaries of message threads. The following drawing shows this labelling scheme (drawing such as this one also aided visualisation of the thread<sup>51</sup>):



uk.media.tv.friends

(The diagram can be read as follows:

17 is the original message (the number relates to the total message data set)

17a is the first 'response' to message 17; 17b is the second; 17c is the third; etc.

17aa is the first 'response' to message 17a; 17ab is the second; 17ac is the third; etc.

etc.

The number of letters appearing denotes the 'level' of the response, so for example 17abc is a third level response, or a response to a response to a response to a message).

Note that, unlike the time-plot shown in the earlier section, these messages are only semi-ordered by time; temporal relationships give way to sequential relationships in line with our observations of time and sequence.

### *Descriptive Shorthand – detailing content*

First attempts at describing a number of messages content followed the systematic observation of a single message. Written initially by hand, it followed the descriptive labelling above. Here is an example section:

15. Announcement (t.v. ratings): r1 (15a) selected q.t. followed by n.t.;  
 r2 (15aa) full q.t. followed by n.t., preceded by a.t.; r3 (15ab)  
 selected q.t. followed by n.t. preceded by a.t.; r4 (15b) full q.t.  
 interspersed with n.t., preceded by a.t.; (15ba) selected q.t. followed  
 by n.t. preceded by a.t.  
 16. Statement; r1 (16a) selected text (signature only) followed by  
 n.t. preceded by a.t.; r2 (16aa) (by person who's signature it was)  
 followed by n.t. preceded by a.t.;

Notice then the details of the descriptions ascribed the messages. The first message – message 15 – is given the description of 'Announcement (t.v. ratings)'. This characterised the message content by incorporating a common-sense description. The first response to message 15 – 'r1' is entitled '15a' and is described as 'selected q.t. followed by n.t.'. Here then we find two abbreviations already defined: 'q.t., quoted text' and 'n.t.', new text. The second response – 'r2' – is numbered '15aa', showing that it is the first response to '15a'. Here the content description reads 'full q.t. followed by n.t.; preceded by a.t.', 'full quoted text followed by new text; preceded by automatic text'. And so on.



During the describing process a number of new elements appear. It should be noted that they were not pre-formulated; it wasn't decided what to call the message elements before they were observed; the descriptions occurred spontaneously. These extra descriptive elements include adjective qualifications, such as '*full* q.t.' and '*selected* q.t.'. Let us detail these elements:

'Full quoted text' (f.q.t.)	This is where the quoted text contains all the text in the body of the previous message (that is without the header information).
Selected quoted text (s.q.t.)	This is where only part of the full text of the previous message is copied into the new message as quoted text. The term 'selected' infers that some preference has been attached to the text that appears over that which doesn't. However while it is less than the full content of the previous message, it might still be quite long. At times parts of it might seem unrelated to the new text that appears.
Specific quoted text (sp.q.t.)	Here the text that is copied from the preceding message as quoted text is specific; it is entirely relevant to the new text that appears. There is a greater preference for this text to appear as quoted text. There is no unused text, if you like. Incidentally this description developed through the observation process. The term 'selected quoted text' was used in all cases, but when it was noticed that quite small text elements were quoted, an additional descriptive element was added i.e. '(minimal) s.q.t.'. It was decided after awhile that this type of quoted text should have its own description.

What we would note here is that these terms were meant to convey the 'feel' of the messages. Rarely was it checked, for example, whether the complete text appeared from the previous message (although this was carried out to begin with). Instead the observation allowed familiarisation and a common-sense appreciation. In this was it is claimed that the researcher developed something like members' competence through observation.

### *Descriptions of the relationship between quoted text and new text*

#### Simplest case

In that text is copied into a new message, it stands in relation to new text that appears in that message. This was conveyed in the descriptions. The two simplest relationships are:

f.q.t. followed by n.t.	Full quoted text of the previous message, followed by the new text in the new message.
n.t. followed by f.q.t.	The new text in the new message, followed by the full quoted text of the previous message.

Here a message has been replied to and the computer application has copied the previous message into the current writer's message. The writer has then either written at the beginning or at the end of his or her message. The distinction between these two new text positions is a matter of 'rule-telling' as we saw in the earlier observations. However the position of the new text can be determined by the computer application's default settings. It is the consequence of technical constraint, rather than a matter of purposeful interaction.

Given the differing quoting formats already identified we can add to these simple cases the following:

s.q.t. followed by n.t	Selected quoted text followed by new text
n.t. followed by s.q.t.	New text followed by selected quoted text
sp.q.t. followed by n.t	Specific quoted text followed by new text
n.t. followed by sp.q.t.	New text followed by specific quoted text

#### Edited quoted text

So far we have noted descriptions in which the quoted text – whether full, selected, or specific – stands alone. That is where it appears as a block of text alongside (either after or before) some new text. However once copied into a new message, these quoted segments can be 'cut up'. That is new text can be placed *within* the quoted text. Consequently there developed two more descriptions to convey this.

Firstly the adjectival term 'inserted' was used to denote when new text appears within the quoted text. So we may have 'f.q.t. inserted n.t.', 's.q.t. inserted n.t.' and 'sp.q.t. inserted n.t.'. The new text elements might amount to one 'insertion' or more. However a characteristic of this new text positioning is that there is additional un-referred-to text in the new message. For example a

message that is described as 'f.q.t. inserted n.t.' – where this new text amounts to only one insertion – has text *after* this new text that is redundant.

A second adjectival term was used where there appeared to be no redundancy, and where there were always more than one inserted new text elements. The description 'interspersed with' conveys a situation rather like the shuffling of a packet of playing cards in which the pack is split in two and positioned edge to edge. The action of shuffling mixes the two packs. The difference between this and the inserted of quoted elements is that there is no redundant text at the end. Each quoted element is followed by relevant new text.

### Developing the descriptive table

Hierarchical representation and linear description of content structure were combined in table that expressed graphical and linear features. Here is an example section.

1	Rob 2 Oct 08:41:54 +0200	n.t. [16 lines] [Announcement] [with Greeting]
2	Bing Girl 2 Oct 17:35:35 +0100	n.t. [31 lines] [Statement] [with Greeting]
3	Mark 2 Oct 23:48:39 +0100	n.t. [Question with Greeting] → m.s.
	3a Jeffers 3 Oct 12:23:03 GMT	a.t. → f.q.t. [cut 'thanks, cut m.s.] → n.t. → m.s.
	3aa Mark 3 Oct 20:01:39 +0100	n.t. → m.s.
	3b Chis 3 Oct 21:23:47 BST	a.t. → s.q.t. [cut to] → n.t. → a.s.
4	Sean 3 Oct 12:28:48 +0100	n.t. [4 lines] [Announcement] → m.s. [inviting replies to participant]
5	Rob Forey 3 Oct 15:59:40 GMT	n.t. [9 lines]
	5a Barry Somers 3 Oct 17:54:15 +0100	a.t. → s.q.t. [cut to] → n.t. <sup>52</sup> → a.s.
	5aa Rob Forey 3 Oct 17:28:47 GMT	Sp.q.t.[1] → n.t. [from 5 participant]
6	Tiggs 4 Oct 15:08:14 GMT	n.t. [Announcement that members of group are leaving, and asking for tributes] → m.s. → a.s.
	6a Chis 4 Oct 22:07:07 BST	a.t. → sp.q.t. → n.t. [incl. 3 o.r.'s] → m.s. → a.s.
7	Rob Forey 4 Oct 16:57:31 GMT	o.r. <sup>53</sup> → n.t. → a.s. [about a web page]

7a Alex W 4 Oct 19:16:24 +0100	a.t. → f.q.t [incl o.r. – which is 'Al] → n.t. → m.s. → a.s.
-----------------------------------	--

In the left hand column is the message label, the name of the participant and the date stamp from the message header information; the relationships between each message is denoted by indentation. In the right hand column there are descriptions of the content of each message, in terms of new text, quoted text, other referents, manual and automatic signatures. (The full descriptive coding table can be found in the appendix.) Additional information that was added included the number of lines in new messages, and additional relevant comments such as that the message included a greeting.

#### Developing the quoting descriptions further

As the same messages were repeatedly observed more descriptions developed. Here are the details:

- f.q.t. [cut s]            Here the total text from the previous message was copied into the new message, except that which relates to the signature of the first message. This description developed as it was realised that this was a repeated occurrence. This became more specific with the following,
- f.q.t. [cut m.s.]        Here the total text from the previous message was copied into the new message except the manual signature.
- f.q.t. [cut a.s.]        Here the total text from the previous message was copied into the new message except the automatic signature.

Another reoccurring quoting technique was to selectively quote only the new text in the last message, when in that message there was already quoted text from previous messages. This seemed relevant because the person was only engaging with the text from one message ago. The description applied to this was 's.q.t. [1]'.

The descriptive coding was a process. That is, in having to describe the features of messages, the observational terms developed, in turn the observer became aware of these features, returned to those feature, and further developed the descriptive resources.

This total effort, then, was an attempt to detail specific features of a group of newsgroup messages; but more it was an effort to detail *observation*. So often – in fact normally – in CA and EM literature observation has an ‘off-stage’, almost ignored character. Simply described as ‘repeated detailed observation’ (or some similar phrase), things of interest are revealed in their telling, rather than detailed in the doing of observation.

In line with our wish to detail and comprehend the productive processes that go to make up our analysis, we deliberately set about making observation a matter for comment. But more than this, the actual process of description was instrumental in producing the formalist line. This is an important point. In order to detail ‘observation’ it was necessary to describe observation; the action became an object, and this objectification-as-action formulated a formalistic practice.

The benefits of the formal descriptive coding are that once produced the scheme can be interrogated. We asked questions of the data, looked for similarities, grouped and ordered various repeated qualities. This had one major consequence; the development of a *catalogue of quoting shapes*.

#### A catalogue of quoting shapes

The tabular format allows for easy sorting. Each message content structure was grouped into five broad shapes categories (a full copy of this table can be found in the Appendix), and then the total data set was ordered in terms of these categories. The five categories were:

1. n.q.t – ‘no quoted text’
2. n.t.→x.q.t. – ‘new text followed by some quantity of quoted text’
3. f.q.t.→n.t. – ‘all the text from the previous message, followed by new text’
4. s.q.t.→n.t. – ‘a selected amount of copied text, followed by new text’
5. f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t. – some quantity of quoted text, with one or more text elements inserted into the quoted text.

This action grouped the shapes into something like a phenomenon set (see Drew, 1995 and collections of phenomenon), which then prompted a return to the detail of the original messages, re-reading and description. The outcome of which are detailed in the next analysis chapter. One

point that should be made is while the coding and sorting exercise aided recognition; the five categories were as much the result of the ongoing observation, as they were of the formal sorting.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DOING THINGS WITH QUOTING MECHANISMS

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### A catalogue of quoting shapes

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In that we are interested in how newsgroup activity gets done over a number of messages, we are going to concentrate on a feature that transcends a single message. That is we are going to focus on the *quoting mechanisms* employed by the participants. What we will do here is catalogue the quoting strategies observed over the course of the development of the descriptive coding table in terms of their *simple coding shape*.

First we need to be clear about what we mean by quoted text. We are only referring to the copying of text from previous messages and not to quoted text from other media (WWW, newspapers, word documents etc.). Neither are we referring to what might be called written quoted text. That is where a message contains a passage that reads something like, ‘the other day when you said such and such’; or where there is the quoting of sayings or lines from a television programme<sup>54</sup>. In contrast, ‘quoted text’ refers to that text *copied from previous messages* – either through the automatic features of the newsreader application, or by ‘cutting and pasting’ – in the same newsgroup and ‘message thread’. Neither, then, are we concerned with quoted text from other newsgroups. Quoted text typically comes from the message prior to the one in which it appears.

Through repeated observation of the newsgroup messages, and the refinement of the observation table, it was found that the quoting strategies fall into five ‘shapes’. Each shape has broadly different consequences for the interactions that occur. They exist on a scale of complexity, whereby the later shapes have greater interactional potential; by which we mean that they lead to more and more complicated message structure. The five shapes are shown in the appendix<sup>55</sup>; with each message the simple quoting shape is written along side the quoting description generated in the descriptive coding table. We view these shapes as a refinement of our observation, which expresses our growing understanding of message content; but more, we recognise their practical nature as methods of seeing the amassed data in terms appropriate to our task.

What we would do here is describe these (general) quoting shapes – including listing the various descriptive codings that fit each general shape (sub-shapes); in the next section we start to develop an understanding of the consequences of each shape (in interactional terms), through reference to their descriptive coding in the context of surrounding messages, and most importantly, by returning to example messages.

First we want to introduce an epistemological presupposition that will stand as basis for the shapes and make description easier – we call this the ‘default position’.

### The default position

When quoted text is not included in a reply, we cannot be sure whether the text was included in the first place or edited out. That is we have no way of knowing whether the computer program has copied-in the text automatically or not. There are a variety of newsreader applications, and each does different things ‘by default’ when a reply command is carried out. Also, each application has a set of ‘preferences’ that can be changed; while they may well have been set initially to copy the entire previous message into a reply, or set to generate a blank message, the participant has the facility to change these options. An economy of effort rationale might suggest that for the participants it is far easier to allow the computer to copy in the previous message’s text, and then to edit out what is not needed. The author’s experience is that the first case prevails; however such experience is far from comprehensive.

As a message thread continues, the copying of text from a previous message becomes more complicated. For example, the reply to a message that already contains two or three quoted elements (from the message preceding this message, the message preceding that etc.) might contain only parts of those quoted segments and not others. Even if the initial preferences are to copy the whole message, we have no way of telling whether parts were cut out and then reintroduced when deemed necessary or whether the parts that are missing were systematically removed. All we have is the final shape. We are not privy to the shape or the activity of forming the current message<sup>56</sup>.

One way to highlight this dilemma is to be explicit about the variety of ways that a message *could* have gained the overall shape that it does. However we assume that all the previous message text has been copied into the reply and then text edited out. This *default position* stands as a shorthand for this assumption.



If it is felt that this is an untoward imposition, it should be remembered that the reader of any message has exactly the same quandary. They too have no idea how the message got the way it did, they simply have the finished message in front of them. Just like the participant, the researcher is not interested in how a particular shape came to be; but instead what a particular shape does. Our reason for employing the default position is to ease the narrative, rather than say something definitive about what the person sitting at a computer screen does.

In any case, that we do not know need not concern us. The empirical warrant argument notes that what is important is how participants make relevant *to one another* particular features. Editing, typing, and all other 'keyboard-side' activity is only relevant when participants make it relevant to each other. The outcome is all participants have. In a sense this is similar to Garfinkel's (1967) idea that there is no need to look 'under the skin' of members of society. It is in the intersubjective arena that meaning is made.

Let us start with the simplest quoting shape.

#### No quoted text (n.q.t.)

As one might expect, this quoting shape occurs most often when the message is 'new'. That is when the message is not a reply to a previous message. In the sense that it is a first message, there has not been chance to answer it. However, while first posts are not always comprised of newly typed material, there are a few examples. For example a 'new' message may not be new at all. It may be a continuation of an older message thread with a new subject line. Some newsreader applications present the messages by the subject line<sup>57</sup>; the change in subject line then warrants its representation as a 'new' thread. Sometimes there is the inclusion of a previous message's text in a brand new message window (we can tell this by examining the message ID's of the 'new' message and the message from which it takes text). In other words a new message has been generated and is 'cut and paste' into this alternative text. It should be stressed that either case rarely happens. Another 'new' message that is very similar to the 'cut and paste' scenario just encountered is where text from other media, such as web pages, IRC text, and the like are included in the new message. Again this is a rare occurrence.

More relevant to our purposes here is when a reply message contains only new text (n.t.). In this case the description 'no quoted text' becomes relevant because either the participant has their

newsreader application set to not quote material automatically, or they have created a reply with all the text from the previous message and deliberately edited out this quoted text. In either case they have deliberately not quoted.

There are a number of included descriptive terms that fall into this quoting shape. These are where the new text is followed by/includes a signature element (either manual or automatic, manual and automatic or where this is an additional commercial a.s.). More interestingly, it includes a reference to a previous message in the form of automatic text (a.t.) without actually including any text.

#### **New text followed by some quantity of quoted text (n.t.→x.q.t.)**

This general quoting shape includes all of the following sub-shapes descriptions: n.t.→f.q.t. – new text followed by full quoted text; n.t.→s.q.t. – new text followed by selected quoted text; and n.t.→sp.q.t. – new text followed by specific quoted text. The essential characteristic of the general shape is that quoted material appears *after* the contribution by the current writer.

With n.t.→f.q.t. the default position maintains that all the text from the previous messages has been copied to the new message, and then the current participant has typed new text at the beginning of the message. With n.t.→s.q.t. all the text from the previous message has been copied into the new message and then sections have been erased by the current writer, who has then typed new text at the beginning of the message. With n.t.→sp.q.t. all the text has been copied into the new message and the sections edited erased have left quite specific textual elements. The current writer has then typed new text at the beginning of the new message.

#### **All the text from the previous message, followed by new text (f.q.t.→n.t.)**

This quoting shape leaves a full copy of the previous message in the new message and then new text is placed after it. Where this also includes the placing of the cursor by the computer application after the quoted text, it is the default position; and assumes that the new text is in this position because the computer has placed the cursor at the beginning of the message. As such, the default position maintains that the participant has done no more than complete a reply command and start typing. As we might expect, the inclusion of the full quoted text has a broad range of effects: starting from simply incorporating the complete text for reference purposes ('pointing to' the previous message), to an active use of this full quoted text in the new text that

follows. As full quoted text (f.q.t.) depends upon the extent of the size of the replied-to message, it may range from a single line to many pages of text. With this shape, 'what can be done' with a quoted element depends upon the character of the previous message. If for example the previous message was very large, the quoting of it in the new message amounts to a large block of text. If the previous message is a collection of small quoted elements, stretching back three or so messages for example, the full quotation text might be quite specific already. The new text might be already party to a detailed quoting history and consequently the range of work possible done in the current message increases.

Full quoted text may include signature elements at the end of it, and depending on the quoting history of the previous message, a full range of text elements (automatic text, other referents, quoted signatures etc.).

**A selected amount of copied text, followed by new text (s.q.t.→n.t.)**

Here we come to a complicated quoting shape. At a generally level, s.q.t.→n.t. denotes any amount of quoted text *less than the full text* of the previous message. To say that there is a 'selected' amount of copied text potentially incorporates many sub-shapes. However the observation maintained an impressionistic, and therefore non-specific, appreciation of the size of this selection. The issue of how much text was selected came into focus at certain times, when it appeared important – that is where it was 'noticeable' for some reason. For example, this occurred when the selected text amounts to quoting the whole text from the previous message minus the signature element (also called 'f.q.t.[cut s]→n.t.'). Editing out the signature file at times amounts to simply leaving in the content of the written text of the previous message and removing references to the previous writer. The cutting of personal referents such as the signature file is an interesting and prevalent action of participants<sup>58</sup>.

The second noticeable sub-shape is 'sp.q.t→n.t.', or 'specific quoted text followed by new text'. Here the selected text is very specific and might amount to one or two lines or even one or two words. In that smaller text elements have less content, they may seem a more efficient quoting technique. When a small amount of text has been copied, the effect is that this small amount of text has been deliberately chosen for a particular reason; the text is 'particularised'. As we will see with other quoting shapes and sub-shapes, this particularisation is a constitutive technique for a number of actions and allows rather fine and detailed activity to take place.

Where the quoting technique of 'sp.q.t.→n.t.' starts to show its colours is where selected text incorporates text from the previous two messages (i.e. the quoted element already includes a quoted element). This is described as the sub-shape 'sp.q.t. [2]→n.t.'; or 's.q.t.[2]→n.t.' with larger elements. The smaller sub-shape, 'sp.q.t. [2]→n.t.' allows for a particularised activity that resembles turn taking (see later section on sequential integrity).

**Some quantity of quoted text, with one or more text elements inserted into the quoted text (f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.)**

Again this shape is highly complex and it has two main descriptions. The first, which is utilised for the general shape, is f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.. The second shape is f.q.t./s.q.t. *interspersed* with n.t. The latter is a special case of the former. The distinction developed over the course of the observation to make apparent a single distinction. We can explain this diagrammatically:

Diagram one – inserted new text,

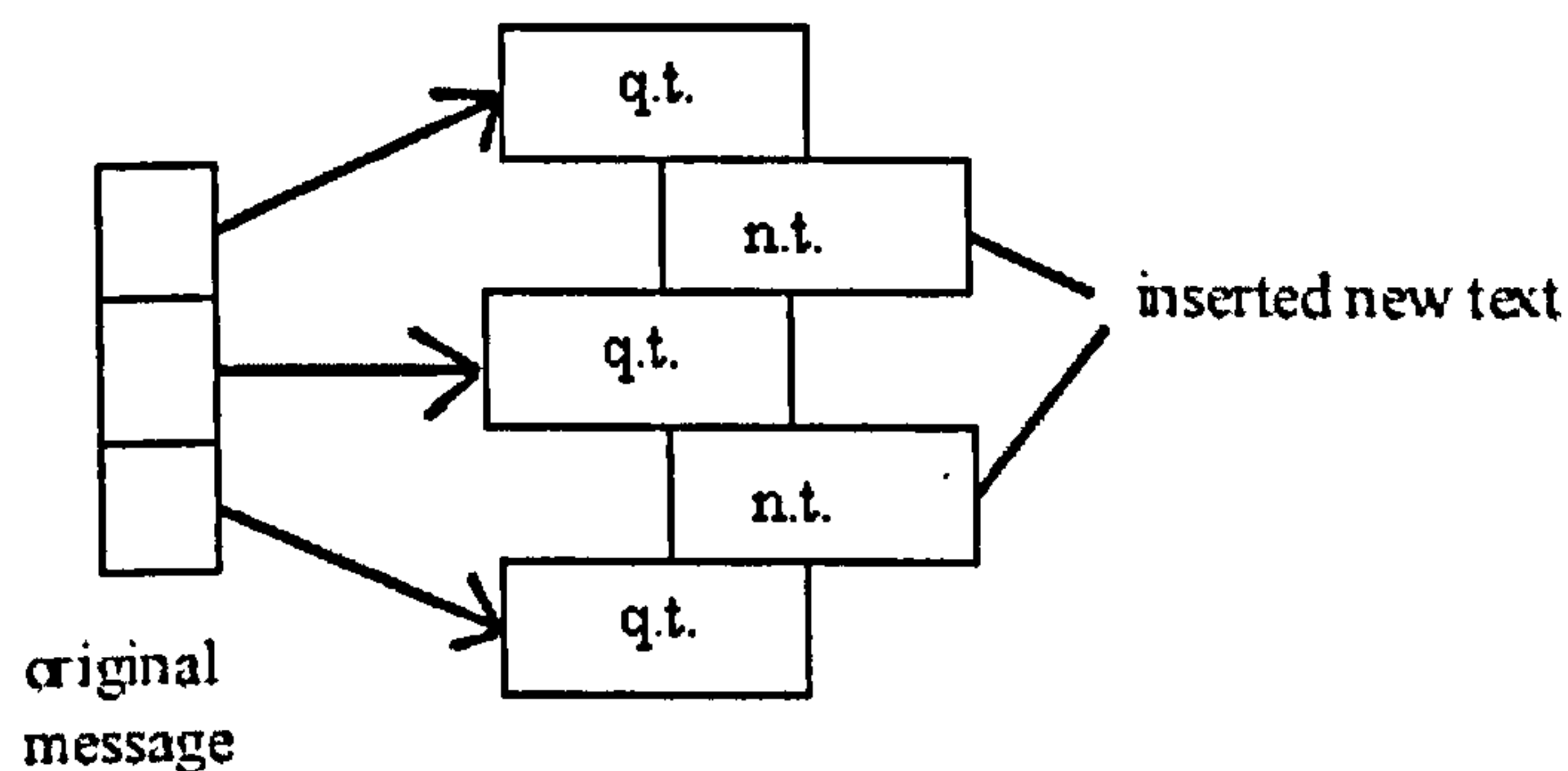
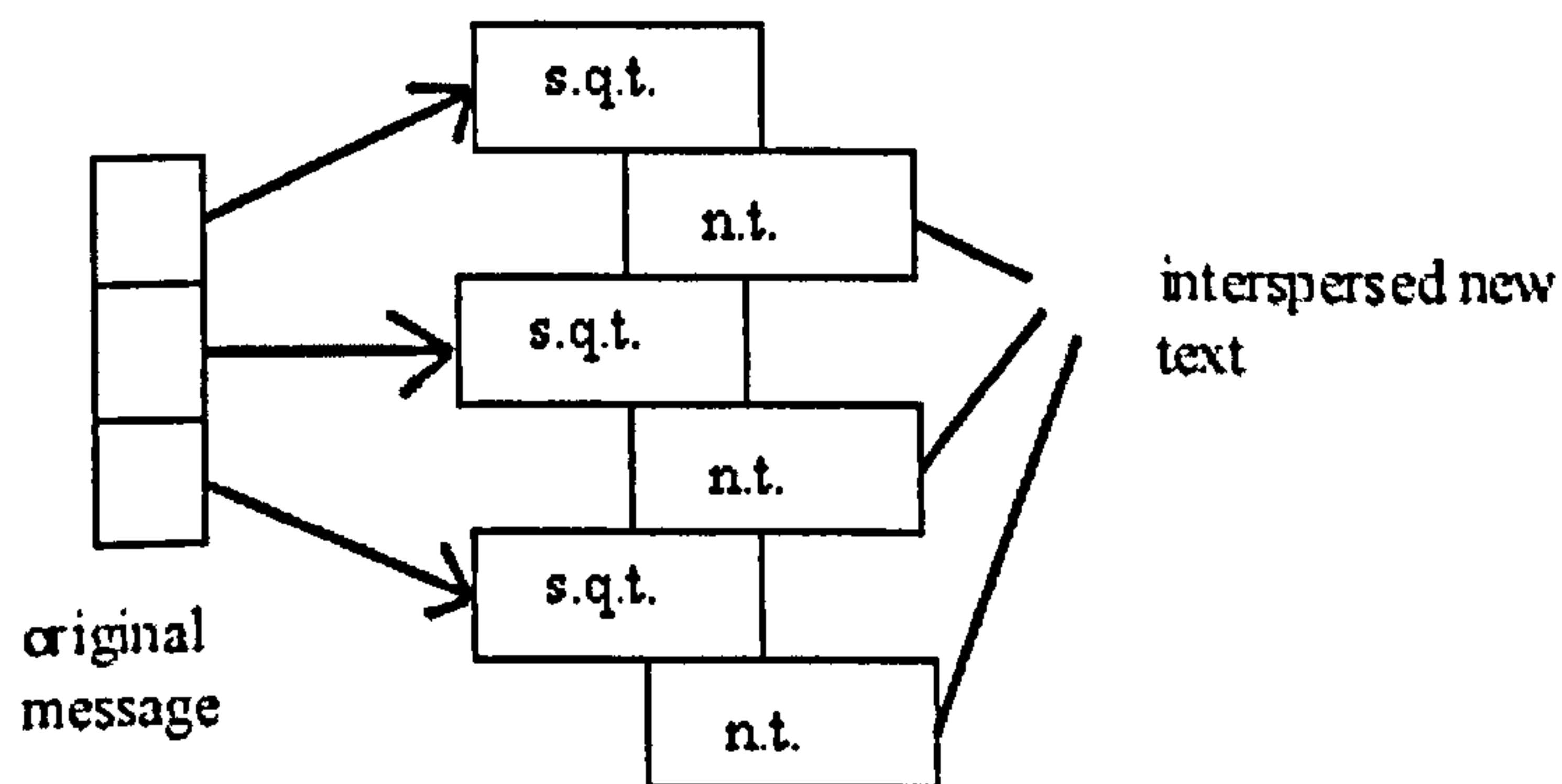


Diagram two – interspersed new text:



While inserted new text can appear anywhere in the new message, with the interspersed sub-shape *every quoted element* is followed by new text (Diagram two). With the second description, what we see are a series of s.q.t.→n.t. elements. Furthermore, the interspersed message has a completeness denied the inserted message because *there is no redundant text*. That is, there are no quoted elements at the end of the message to which there is no referencing new text.

As indicated by the general shape 'f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.', there are two forms of each case: one in which all the previous message is included in the current message; and another where only part of the preceding message is included. Just as f.q.t.→n.t. and s.q.t.→n.t. have varying outcomes, so too do the two types of inserted and interspersed shapes. Given that f.q.t inserted n.t. (general shape) includes a full copy of the previous message, and s.q.t. inserted n.t. (general shape) includes selected text, we might guess that the first is more likely to exhibit redundant text. As it turns out, this is even more likely when the message quoted includes a signature element. The f.q.t. inserted n.t. (general shape) would have to follow the signature element with new text.

The guess here then is that there are more s.q.t. interspersed shapes than s.q.t. inserted (in which there would be redundant text) because the latter while indicating active editing by the current writer would mean that they had deliberately left in redundant text. Similarly we would guess that there are more f.q.t inserted n.t. (with redundant text), than f.q.t. interspersed n.t., which would necessitate engagement with all the quoted text.

The general quoting shape f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t. includes sub-shapes that incorporate automatic referencing text (a.t.), additional manual and automatic signature elements (m.s. and a.s.) as well as other referents (o.r.).

---

## Example analyses

---

In the following sections we apply the understanding of this catalogue of quoting mechanisms in three example analyses<sup>59</sup>: the first is an examination of the use of the simple quoting shapes identified above, with comments about the general consequences of various shapes; the second analysis engages with a message thread in two ways: by following the first level answers to one message; and by following a series of answers-to-answers from the same message. The utilisation of differing quoting shapes comes to the fore; third we suggest an underlying concept of quoting, sequential integrity, and use our quoting shapes to inform and engender the evidential support offered.

---

## Quoting mechanisms in action

---

What we want to do here is consider the general quoting shapes and observe what sort of things happen. These observations are opportunist in that they are based upon a series of features that we found interesting as we were going through the descriptive exercise. Their random nature allows us to move toward a more deliberate regime in the next section.

### No quoted text (n.q.t.)

The first shape is 'no quoted text' (n.q.t.) The simplest case where no quoted text appears in a new messages. No quoted text in this case carries certain responsibilities – participants are meant to include enough relevant information to make their text make sense. By way of example the following new message seems to be a problem to participants:

```

18  [Header Information]
19
20  They have since phoned up to say they will remove it and flag us never to be
21  DACSed again. That means they must have had enough complaints to warrant
22  implementing a flag system, then!!
23
24  They are back on my christmas card list, but for everyone else, I have these
25  words of advice - <anne robinson>create a fuss, make a noise, shout about
26  it!!</anne robinson>
27
28  Good luck everyone and thanks for your support!
29
30  --
31  Tags
32  web design - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk
33  html help - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/htmlhelp/
34  search - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/search/
35  --
36  "I watched the stars crash in the sea"

```

(u.m.t.f. 33)

This is the total text that appears in the message. The new text then starts at line 20 and reads 'they have since phoned up to say....[etc.]'. To this message, Alex W posts a reply:

```

21  [header information]
22
23  Tags wrote:
24  >
25  > They have since phoned up to say they will remove it and flag us never to be
26  > DACSed again. That means they must have had enough complaints to warrant
27  > implementing a flag system, then!!
28
29  What's this all about then?
30
31  Al
32  --
33  Learn to live,          "That's not even a word!!" - Monica
34  Have fun,              "Eeeeextrordinary!" - RD Cast

```





```

32
33 /me pours himself another drink.
34
35 Orif: Any excuse.
36 Mike: Keep it quiet - I'm not sure about the UMTF quarantine laws
37     outside of crossposts...
38
39 Am I the only one left puzzling over what the subject line meant? Am
40 I meant to read into that? ;)
41
42 --
43 Mike Dickinson
44 IRC Nickname:      MikeUMTB      | ICQ#:      18575308      |
45 UMTB FAQ @:      http://www.buffyuk.org/umtbfaq.html      |
46 Amorphous @:      http://www.btinternet.com/~weatherwax/index.htm |
47 'You are young, grasshopper, but you will learn.'- Simon
48

```

(u.m.t.f. 48b)

At lines 19-20 (u.m.t.f. 48b) we find automatic text that references the previous message. By including the automatic text marker but editing out the actual text, the current writer refers to the previous message without quoting it.

There are three other messages that reply to the extended message. Here they are represented in the descriptive coding table,

Message No./Name	Quoting Shape	Descriptive coding
48 Corkster and Ouroboros	n.t.	n.t. [in the style of IRC][2401 lines][incl quoted IRC text] [coming out story]
48a Lovebug	n.q.t.	n.t. [with intro 'it's me lovebug']→m.s.
48b Mike Dickinson	n.q.t.	a.t. [no q.t.]→n.t. a.s.
48c Chris	n.q.t.	a.t.→<snip> [no q.t.]→n.t.→m.s. [?]→a.s.

Message 48c has the same shape as 48b in that it starts with an automatic quoting reference. This time the message contains a 'snip token':

```

19 [Header information]
20
21 On Mon, 11 Oct 1999 19:32:15 GMT, Corkster and Ouroboros wrote from
22 the address Corkster and Ouroboros <dead@parrot.com> this post in 2401
23 lines:
24
25 <snip>
26
27 There are times when i wish that i'd kept up with newsgroups, and now
28 is one of those times. I haven't read for a while (you prolly hadn't
29 noticed since i don't post much) and when i get back i see this post
30 from Jim and Corkster. After reading it (it took ages!) I had to wade
31 through about 1300 posts to find out what else was going on.
32
33 Jim, Corkster : if you're still subscribed, hope everything goes well.
34 I don't know you that well but i'll still miss your posts.

```

35  
 36 Come back soon! (even if only to say hello)  
 37  
 38 Anyone else that's going (temp or permanent): good luck with whatever  
 39 you're doing  
 40  
 41 Hopefully see you on IRC sometime (unless you're stopping that aswell)  
 42  
 43 Chris  
 44 e-mail - [chris@theonewith.com](mailto:chris@theonewith.com) | ICQ #37290758  
 45 IRC nick - ChrisL or CIL  
 46 Gemini - <http://www.leversuch.freemove.co.uk>  
 47 UMTB FAQ: <http://www.buffyuk.org/umtb/umtbfaq.html>  
 48 UMTF FAQ: <http://>  
 49 UMTB site: <http://www.buffyuk.org>  
 50 UMTF site: <http://www.theonewith.com>  
 51 Webmaster of The One With All The Merchandise: <http://merchandise.theonewith.com>  
 52

(u.m.t.f. 48c)

The snip token foregrounds the activity of cutting out the message text and is often a comment on the length or quality of the previous message. An alternative way to mimic the snip token whilst making a deliberate comment about the previous message's text is seen in the following message:

14 [Header information]  
 15  
 16 Caesar J. B. Squitti ([squittis@tbaytel.net](mailto:squittis@tbaytel.net)) wrote:  
 17 [A lot of shit...]  
 18  
 19 While Canada has clearly adopted some extremely suspect laws recently in  
 20 response to the gender issue, you are clearly a member of the  
 21 religious-right and guilty of even greater bullshitting for your own cause.  
 22 You'd be better off posting this crap to alt.feminism where it will get  
 23 the flaming it deserves.  
 24 Mark

(t.ph 8a)

In this case it seems more understandable that the text was replaced. To reproduce it in the current message would appear to validate it. Notice here that there is a rather creative interplay between the written and automatically generated text.

The final example of the n.q.t. shape is message 48a which does not contain the automatic reference:

15 [header information]  
 16  
 17 Its me Lovebug..  
 18  
 19 i just want to dedecate this post to Jim nad Andrew...  
 20  
 21 Im sure this post (if it was read) chocked up many of us, and even made us cry,  
 22 i know i did.  
 23  
 24 but lets think of all they have done for us, God knows they did so much, thats  
 25 why when they come back it will be \*that\* much more special.. But EVERYONE here  
 26 is soo valuable to umtf, this newsgroup CANT SURVIVE without all of you lot and  
 27 i salute you all... im not quite sure what im trying to say.. just that

28 putting this in perspective made me realise how much everyone in my lif e mean  
 29 to me.. and when i said i was just lurking from now on i think i might be doing  
 30 that.. because i havent been paying enogh attention to all my closest friends,  
 31 who i need and who needs me. But by saying that, it would mean ill be letting  
 32 UMTF down. which aint gonna happen! i will post as often as i can, im sorry if  
 33 its not as often as you would like and that i would like, but in honour of Jim  
 34 and Andrew, we will keep tthis group going, even if its the death of me (which  
 35 it probably will be)  
 36  
 37 all my love Katy Lovebug

(u.m.t.f. 48a)

Instead we see a number of devices within the message text itself that connects this message to the earlier one. First there are references to the earlier post (line 21) and its writers (line 19). Second, the content makes the message a topic of conversation by including Lovebug's thoughts and realisations following the previous message. The personal nature of the narrative seems to offset the need to directly reference the message because it is directed at members who have read the message, who are 'in the know'.

This message manages to reference the message without including the automatic reference.

This use of n.q.t. follows a large message. To have copied the contents into the reply would have made it large also. There are a number of times in which the preference appears to be n.q.t. over large messages. In certain messages where large messages have been reproduced this has been met with a rule-telling event in which such behaviour has been condemned.

### **New text followed by a certain amount of quoted text (n.t.→x.q.t.)**

One example of this shape is new text followed by a complete copy of the text of the previous message (n.t.→f.q.t.). One consequence of n.t.→f.q.t. is that replies rearrange the order of the accumulated quoted material. Here is an example from the descriptive coding table:

<b>Message No./Name</b>	<b>Quoting Shape</b>	<b>Descriptive coding</b>
23baa Tags	n.t.→x.q.t.	n.t. [incl 'thanks']→a.s.→f.q.t
23baaa Paul Hyet	s.q.t.→n.t.	a.t.→s.q.t [edited]→n.t. [has to rearrange the order of the q.t.]→a.s.

Message 23baaa by Paul Hyett is a reply to message 23baa, by Tags. Tags's message has the shape 'n.t.→f.q.t.'. Here is a full copy of Tags's message:

22 [header information]  
 23  
 24 Cool, I have a Hauppauge WinTV card - could you give me the URL for that  
 25 upgrade please? I couldn't find it on the hauppauge website.  
 26  
 27 Cheers,  
 28  
 29 --  
 30 Tags  
 31 web design - <http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk>  
 32 html help - <http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/htmlhelp/>  
 33 search - <http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/search/>  
 34 --  
 35 "I watched the stars crash in the sea"  
 36  
 37 Paul Hyett wrote in message ...  
 38 >On Sat, 9 Oct 1999, Chis <spam@cornbeef.co.uk> stated this considered  
 39 >view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -  
 40 >>o> PS, Loads of great potential vidcaps from this show - check out my  
 41 >>o> website in the next day or so.  
 42 >>  
 43 >>ooh fun!  
 44 >>  
 45 >>Paul do you do sound waves too?  
 46 >  
 47 >Well I (foolishly) downloaded an 'upgrade' to my WinTV software, and now  
 48 >I can't capture sound files.  
 49 >--  
 50 >Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!  
 51 >  
 52 >Website at <http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/>  
 53 >  
 54 >  
 55 >  
 56 >

(u.m.t.f. 23baa)

Here is the subsequent message by Paul Hyett:

21 [header information]  
 22  
 23 On Sat, 9 Oct 1999, Tags <tags@limitwebdesign.co.uk> stated this  
 24 considered view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -  
 25  
 26 >>>Paul do you do sound waves too?  
 27 >>  
 28 >>Well I (foolishly) downloaded an 'upgrade' to my WinTV software, and now  
 29 >>I can't capture sound files.  
 30  
 31 >Cool, I have a Hauppauge WinTV card - could you give me the URL for that  
 32 >upgrade please? I couldn't find it on the hauppauge website.  
 33  
 34 You want an upgrade that PREVENTS you from saving sounds? :)  
 35  
 36 The upgrade I have is 2.1 for W95, but that was several months back so  
 37 there may be a letter one by now.  
 38  
 39 I DID find it on the Hauppauge website though.  
 40 --  
 41 Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!  
 42  
 43 Website at <http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/>

(u.m.t.f. 23baaa)

This message contains quoted text from Tags's message that itself contained a full copy of the message that preceded it. However in Tags's message this text appears *after* the new text that he writes. In the above message by Paul Hyett, these textual elements are rearranged such that part of the quoted elements in Tags's message (lines 45-48, 23baa) is placed *before* the text that was

written by Tags (lines 24-25, 23baa). In this way Paul Hyett places Tags's comments as logically following that of the previous writer; the contents are seen to be semantically at odds with the meaning of the previous message. The previous writer to Tags downloaded the 'upgrade' but is having problems with it; Tags's enthusiasm for finding the web address of the upgrade contrasts with these problems. By rearranging the text the current writer emphasises this discrepancy. In this case there is particular reason to reorient the text, to place the text in a logical order.

The consequence of the 'n.t.→f.q.t.' shape employed by Tags is that to accomplish this move Paul Hyett has to rearrange the text. The rearranging of text is very rare in the data corpus collected. There is the feeling that the 'n.t.→f.q.t.' causes *problems* for the subsequent messages if the members wish to re-quote the elements.

Interestingly another sub-shape in this quoting shape occurs in the next two messages, and again there is a particular consequence. The next two messages have the following shapes:

Message No./Name	Quoting Shape	Descriptive coding
23baaaa Tags	n.t.→x.q.t.	n.t.→a.s.→s.q.t. [1]
23baaaaa Paul Hyett	s.q.t.→n.t.	a.t.→sp.q.t[1]→n.t.→a.s.

To the message by Paul Hyett, Tags sends this message:

```

24 [header information]
25
26 Oh duh! I really should read messages before replying!! I bought my card
27 last week, so I should have the latest version of the software. I can't
28 seem to record sound without video, though. How did you do it before it
29 started not working?
30
31 --
32 Tags
33 web design - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk
34 html help - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/htmlhelp/
35 search - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/search/
36 --
37 "I watched the stars crash in the sea"
38
39 Paul Hyett wrote in message ...
40 >You want an upgrade that PREVENTS you from saving sounds? :)
41 >
42 >The upgrade I have is 2.1 for W95, but that was several months back so
43 >there may be a letter one by now.
44 >
45 >I DID find it on the Hauppauge website though.
```

(u.m.t.f. 23baaaa)

Notice then that Tags has again placed the quoted text at the end of the message. The quoting shape is again n.t.→x.q.t. Paul Hyett's return message looks like this:

```

23 [header information]
24
25 On Sun, 10 Oct 1999, Tags <tags@limitwebdesign.co.uk> stated this
26 considered view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -
27
28 > I bought my card
29 >last week, so I should have the latest version of the software. I can't
30 >seem to record sound without video, though. How did you do it before it
31 >started not working?
32 >
33 AFAIK, just following the instructions given in the manual for using the
34 wintvcap program.
35 --
36 Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!
37
38 Website at http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/

```

(u.m.t.f. 23baaaaa)

Here then we do not see the rearranging of quoted elements. This is because Paul Hyett has only quoted the new text from the previous message (lines 26-30, 23baaaaa). In this way there is no incongruency within the quoted segment. This sub-shape – sp.q.t.[1]→n.t. – fits within the s.q.t.→n.t. quoting shape. By particularising only certain parts of the previous message Paul Hyett has avoided a potentially confusing combination of quoted element and new text. This is an alternative to rearranging text ordering and shows the utilisation of one of our other general shapes s.q.t.→n.t. in the strategic righting of quoted elements.

There are a greater number of these moves in the coding table than the rearranging of text (see, for example, messages u.m.t.f. 43aa, u.m.t.f. 43ab and u.m.t.f. 43ac.) In the third analysis section we will argue that this is due to an underlying feature of newsgroup message quoting – the *sequential integrity* of message content.

In these replies we see two responses to the n.t.→x.q.t. shape, in each case the potential confusion of quoting ordering is avoided: in the first case by rearranging text; and in the second through use of a particular quoting shape.

### **The full text from the previous message followed by new text (f.q.t.→n.t.)**

As was mentioned earlier, the full quoted text basic shape in practice describes a wide variety of sizes and existing shape collections. If the message quoted has a complicated structure, then to simply quote all of it into the new message retains this complicated structure. However the

defining feature of this general quoting shape is that *whatever* was in the previous message appears in the new message *in one block*.

In an earlier example we saw one way of dealing with large messages, i.e. the use of the n.q.t. quoting mechanism with an automatic text reference resulting in a referenced object. Another way is to produce 'following on text'. This follow on text takes a number of forms. In this first case the quoted text is followed by text that points at the content. Here is a simple example:

```

22 [header information]
23
24 In article <7tg6cu$ndm$1@uranium.btinternet.com>, Corkster
25 <andrew.corcoran@lineone.net> writes
26 >If you do not want the rest of your Season Five viewing spoilt by finding
27 >out what happens in the S5 finale, try to avoid Heat magazine this week. It
28 >gives away the big surprise on the front in big letters.
29 >
30 >It's a really good article inside, though - well worth a read, plus it has a
31 >screenshot of S6. :-)
32 >
33 >Corkster
34 >
35 >
36 Too late, the bastards advertised on radio and actually blerted it out.
37 I could f**king kill 'em. Anybody got an email addy so I can shout at
38 them?
39 --
40 [signature text]

```

(u.m.t.f. 19b)

Here is another example:

```

20 [header information]
21
22 MLW5844 (mlw5844@aol.com) wrote:
23 : Some people fail to recognize the fundamental
24 : flaws biologically inherent in
25 : the character of many human beings; namely,
26 : selfishness, laziness and fear
27 : (which leads to cowardice). Recent scientific
28 : evidence further supports the
29 : theory that these flaws are "hard-wired"
30 : in our personalities at birth (See Dr.
31 : Michael P. Ghiglieri's book, "The Dark
32 : Side of Man"). This apparent fact of
33 : life does not argue in favor of, or in
34 : opposition to, any particular set of
35 : exegeses, extant or traditional, whose goal
36 : is promoting the ongoing betterment
37 : of humankind. Rather, it gives us a more
38 : focused blueprint of who we are at
39 : birth, and which biologically inherent
40 : deficiencies we must overcome in order
41 : to improve ourselves as individuals. In
42 : any event, once again it appears there
43 : is no simple or easy solution to this
44 : set of problems. Everything worthwhile
45 : gleaned from life's experiences is the
46 : result of hard work. I welcome serious,
47 : philosophical commentary on this observation. Thanks,
48 : Mike W.
49
50 Ghiglieri's thesis isn't accepted by most scientists, and if
51 he wants to make a case to this news group he can post his

```

52 views here.  
 53  
 54 To ascribe complex behaviour to our genetic makeup and testosterone  
 55 is a little far fetched.  
 56  
 57 Classifying 'negative' behaviours as a deficiency in our makeup  
 58 is also irresponsible. Many of those behaviours or characteristics  
 59 are important to our survival.  
 60  
 61 Ron

(t.p.h. 10a)

'Ghiglieri's thesis' is used here as a shorthand for the opinions expressed in the piece. This is a type of formulation work that, in this case, has a direct relevance. The previous writer has used Ghiglieri as a reference and basis for the opinion expressed. The new text picks up on this basis and uses it as a point of connection between the textual elements.

Another way to formulate the previous turn is to be more general. In the following new text, the previous quoted segment is described as 'your story':

24 [header information]  
 25  
 26 taichi <taichi@eastwind.net> wrote in message  
 27 news:01bf2b05\$74aeb220\$LocalHost@default...  
 28 > Welcome to the new world of scientific fairy tales.  
 29 > Forget the idea proven by science that we evolved from apes now it seems  
 30 > that our nearest relative is the dandelion. That must be why we say,  
 31 > "children grow like weeds". I was watching a PBS special about evolution  
 32 > and now scientists have arrived at a new family tree in accordance with the  
 33 > construction of DNA. Personally, I think the scientists were seriously  
 34 > affected by DDT or LSD. As we all know, DNA is made up of four basic  
 35 > chemicals. The order and combination of these chemicals is what gives life  
 36 > its variety. By cloning microbes and testing their DNA, it was determined  
 37 > that the combinations of chemicals are like the notes on a score. By  
 38 > placing the eight basic notes in various orders and adding short notes and  
 39 > long notes you can play a tune. By using the same principle with the for  
 40 > basic chemicals of DNA each living species has its own tune. some are  
 41 > classic, some jazz, some pop, so on and so forth. While apes may have  
 42 > classic DNA, We may have country western. All of this is supposed to prove  
 43 > evolution is not a theory but a fact. Personally, I prefer Good old  
 44 > religion and creation. The only thing that DNA proves is God had used the  
 45 > DNA chemical construction to repeat the creation of various living types.  
 46 > Trees being a living organism also have DNA and apparently plants are the  
 47 > closest match to our DNA pattern. I am not sure I got the story straight  
 48 > so you might want to check it out and get back with me.  
 49 > If you want classic children, you might want to play them lots of classic  
 50 > music while they are in the womb or not, they might turn out to be an ape.  
 51 > Personally, I believe we are created in the image of God and would I like  
 52 > to keep it that way. DNA is God's way of making it so.  
 53 > Taichi  
 54 > Electrostantialism - people living in harmony with a created reality.  
 55 >  
 56  
 57 You have not got your story straight. Humans have 99.4% of their DNA in common  
 58 with chimps. Which also means that Country and Western is 99.4% classic [sic].  
 59 This is what you get for watching PBS specials about subjects your  
 60 religion-enfeebled brain cannot possibly hope to understand. DNA is science...  
 61 you are a theist... leave it alone.  
 62  
 63 --  
 64 Goatboy  
 65 rendle99@hotmail.com  
 66 aa #1684  
 67  
 68 "Even things that are true can be proved"  
 69 Oscar Wilde

(t.p.h. 13f)



The text 'your story' at line 57 is a shorthand for all that was written in the preceding text.

Another way to formulate previous messages is to ascribe to it a particular intent. In the following message the new text starts 'oh, don't worry about it'. The quoted text acts in total to underpin the idea that there is something to worry about/ be concerned about, or the like. For a comment such as 'don't worry about it', it necessary to have enough text to convey the mood of the participant (complaining? Moaning?). The f.q.t. acts as an object to which the new participant responds:

```

22 [header information]
23
24 > What does a guy gotta do...
25 > -Take a six month retirement and come back with a vengeance?
26 > -Pretend with my RP's that i'm in a net fed when it's really uxwa?
27 > -RP with Spam + a tired gimmick + ton-o pics?
28 >
29 > You've probably never heard of me, John D. aka. Napalm... a seemingless quiet
30 > guy, doesn't talk that much smack, is considered a good RPer, pretty tight with
31 > some good RPer's. A contender.
32 > But I think of myself kinda like D-Lo brown... a great wrestler, good mic
33 > skills, but'll never have a chance at a world title run... If you don't get my
34 > analogy what I'm sayin is that .... nothin I'm just complainin. bah. F' you
35 > all.
36
37 Ah, don't worry about it. Play for the fun of the game. I've been in the
38 XBWL seven months, and I'm currently a three time North American (rookie)
39 champion, mostly due to different feuds. The way things are looking, it
40 will take another year and a half before I can be considered for the World
41 title. And that's fine by me. I don't care. Just have fun. It's not all
42 about belts. (RL Example) Some people love Tommy Dreamer in ECW, and in his
43 six plus years with the company, he has won one singles title.
44
45 Please, no posts about how you think Dreamer sucks, etc. It's not relevent.
46
47 [signature text]

```

(r.s.p-w.f. 5c)

And, sometimes the quoted text has a more object-like feel:

```

20 [header information]
21
22 In article <7tnqn2$85d$1@minus.oleane.net>, "WIN" <win@win.co.uk> wrote:
23 o>
24 o> How to join? Just answer 4 questions on www.pantene.co.uk
25 o> In return for becoming part of the panel, we'll enter you in a free prize
26 o> draw to win one of 10 hair and beauty makeovers in London.
27
28 Yeah like I use the crapness that is pantene - YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD CON ME
29 WITH THOSE ADVERTS DIDN'T YOU??? Eh?? BUT YOU DIDN'T! DID YA???
30
31 [signature text]

```

(u.m.t.f. 35a)

While a full quote might still perform this object role, it can also seem that the new text is directly relevant to the quoted text, especially when the full quoted text amounts to a couple of lines with one main point. For example:

```

18 [Header information]
19
20 sheldon wrote:
21 >
22 > See the new official Friends 2000 calendar at....
23 > http://www.calendarmart.com
24
25 That's okay.. I saw it in Clinton Cards aaaaaaages ago.
26
27 Al - Mmm.. calendar
28 --
29 Learn to live,          "That's not even a word!!" - Monica
30 Have fun,              "Eeeextrordinary!" - RD Cast
31 And kick ass!         "Ohhhh..No" - Phoebe
32
33 [ ^ ] - Aniston Online - http://come.to/anistononline -
34 [ | ] - The Wild Slang Fan of the Web! -
35 [ | ] - al@riptide.com -
36
37 A crowd counts many heads but few brains.

```

(u.m.t.f. 14a)

### Some amount of quoted text followed by new text (s.q.t→n.t.)

In a sense, the shape 's.q.t.→n.t.' is the pivotal shape within the range of quoting shapes. This is the first shape in which the quoted elements are edited; where we have a sense that the current participant has deliberately chosen this particular text. The important thing to remember with this last idea, however, is that whatever selection occurs, the quoted element remains in *one* segment in the new message. This stands in contrast to the 'f.q.t./s.q.t inserted' shape in which there is more than one quoted segment in the new message (see next section). For now let us say that certain f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted sub-shapes (specifically the 'interspersed' sub-shape) are a combination of a number of s.q.t.→n.t. elements and provide for greater complexity of action.

In order to detail the s.q.t.→n.t. shape let us think of the 'selecting' of quoted text as existing on a continuum. At one end we have a vague notion of selection in which the default position tells us that some amount of text is removed, and at the other end we have the idea of selecting very specific quoted textual elements.

As we said in the earlier catalogue section, this latter situation was instinctively described differently (it was a noticeable difference) by calling the quoted element 'specific quoted text'. First let us get a sense of the more general 'selected' shape. We can do this by considering the 'cutting of signatures'.

There are two types of signature identified in the descriptive coding: the 'manual signature' (m.s.) and the 'automatic signature' (a.s.). The first is written by the participant on each occasion that a

message is produced; the second is stored as a preference, and reproduced automatically by the computer application each time a message is produced. The important point about automatic signatures is that they are always placed at the end of a message. At times, this non-deliberate consequence of the computer application produces redundant text. Therefore, at times we have found it necessary to see the automatic signature as non-body text.

The manual signature, on the other hand, is a typed element. We therefore make a distinction between the 'cutting' of an automatic and manual signature, although in some senses the outcome is the same i.e. the removal of the 'personal referent' ('other referent' – o.r.) of the previous writer. Another similar element is when the signature (either automatic or manual) contains additional text that does not specifically convey the previous writer's identity, and amounts to a 'further comment' or postscript. On these occasions it is possible for respondents to treat the signature as body text (whether it be manual or automatic). The following analysis delves into these issues. First let us consider the cutting of *automatic* signatures.

#### *The cutting of automatic signature*

The following descriptive table segment contains two examples of the 'cutting' of the 'automatic signature'. Both follow the same message:

#### Message No./Name

17ab  
heatherbell 7 Oct 16:32:28 +0100  
17aba  
Tiggs 8 Oct 10:11:21 GMT  
17abb  
Mint 11 Oct 17:29:32 GMT

#### Descriptive coding

a.t. → sp.q.t. → n.t. → a.s.  
  
a.t. → f.q.t. (2)(cut a.s.) → n.t. (3 p.t.)  
→ m.s. → a.s.  
a.t. → f.q.t. (2)(cut a.s.) → n.t. (3 p.t.)  
→ a.s.

Here is the total text of the first message:

```

29 [Header Information]
30
31 Sesame Slang wrote.
32 > (did ya think i'd get mad? nah.. i can take some things ya know.. i'm
33 > just glad there ISN'T a Giles Jovoth)
34
35 oh for heaven's sake, what have I missed now?? who was "giles jovoth"
36 then?? I guess this has been discussed on IRC then cos as usual I've no
37 clue what the hell is going on around here...
38
39 --
40 Hevbell :) The wild flower of the web

```

(u.m.t.f. 17ab)

Here is the first reply:

```

28  When "heatherbell" <heatherbell@igallacher.freeseve.co.uk> was let
29  out on to uk.media.tv.friends for the day, the following was recorded:
30
31  >
32  >
33  >Sesame Slang wrote.
34  >> (did ya think i'd get mad? nah.. i can take some things ya know.. i'm
35  >> just glad there ISN'T a Giles Jovoth)
36  >
37  >oh for heaven's sake, what have I missed now??  who was "giles jovoth"
38  >then??  I guess this has been discussed on IRC then cos as usual I've no
39  >clue what the hell is going on around here...
40
41  I was surprised by this, too.
42
43  He was invented to stop the OTP. (not so sure how successful he was -
44  he just got my back up *bigtime*)
45
46  Anagram of "Evil Jo Ghost" apparently.
47
48  Tiggs
49  --
50  "Oh my, it's the Tigger-boy!"
51
52  Tiggs (a.k.a. Andy K)
53  The Wild "Lost Traveller" of the Web
54  Occasional Panther
55  Lover of Insanity

```

(u.m.t.f. 17aba)

Hevbell's automatic signature (17ab, line 39-40) no longer appears in the text. This allows the current writer to continue the line '>clue what the hell is going on around here ...' (17aba, line 39) with 'I was surprised by this, too.' at line 41.

Tiggs responds with personal tone, using personal pronouns rather than names. 'I was surprised by this, too' points to the content of the quoted element and formulates the text as an instance of 'surprise'. The new text relies on the quoted text of Hevbell's for the reference of 'He' in 'He was invented....he just got my back up....' (lines 43-44). The line 'Anagram of 'Evil Jo Ghost' apparently' refers to the question about 'who was 'giles jovoth'<sup>62</sup>. The quoted text provides for an efficient referencing move.

We see a similar move in the other answer to Hevbell's message:

```

32  :->oh for heaven's sake, what have I missed now??  who was "giles jovoth"
33  :->then??  I guess this has been discussed on IRC then cos as usual I've no
34  :->clue what the hell is going on around here...
35
36  maybe an easier question would be, who wasn't Giles Josovoth
37  and that sure beats Jon's old tricks hands down :o)

```

(u.m.t.f. 17abb)

Again Hevbell's automatic signature is deleted. The new line by Mint 'maybe an easier question would be, who wasn't Giles Josovoth' appears to be an answer – in a broad sense – to Hevbell's 'who was "giles jovoth" then??'. Although this time it is not a direct answer to the last line of Hevbell's message 'what the hell is going on round here...'. The quoting of Hevbell's (as well as that of sesame slang) text helps to construe her confusion and the new text has a more distant feel to it, as though it were a comment-on, rather than engagement-with, Hevbell's text.

Both examples show the cutting of automatic signature. In each case there are strategic reasons for doing this. What is important to realise is that the reasons are contingently relevant, that is they are understandable in the accomplishment of situational concerns through essentially sequential activities.

*Example of cut manual signature*

<b>Message No./Name</b>	<b>Descriptive coding</b>
18baa Mint 11 Oct 17:29:52 GMT	a.t.→s.q.t [2] →n.t.→m.s.→a.s.
18baaa Chis 11 Oct 18:55:34 BST	a.t.→f.q.t. [incl m.s.]→n.t. [following from part of signature]→a.s.
18baab Steven 11 Oct 19:12:06 +0100	a.t.→s.q.t [3]→n.t.→a.s.

Message 18baa is followed by two messages. The second of these reply messages cuts the (manual and automatic) signature of 18baa,

```

20 On Wed, 6 Oct 1999 20:53:00 +0100, steven
21 <Steven@nospam.penalunas.freemove.co.uk> wrote:
22
23 :->>There's going to be NO-ONE left to respond to my reviews! :)
24 :->
25 :->Well I'm still here (well, I'm subscribed anyway!), not that I respond
26 :->to your reviews. In fact, why did I just respond to this message? What a
27 :->waste of bandwidth. What a divvy I am... Too many pasties.
28
29 Mmm, pasty! Can I have one?
30
31 Mint << on a bandwidth waste high
32 --
33 O ( ) Dru bagged a slayer? She didn't tell me!
34 ( )\/( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) thehellmouth @ lineone.net
35 EFNet: #hellmouth #irc_addicts #centralperk
36 Spikevamp @ sms.genie.co.uk (off-peak only)

```

(u.m.t.f. 18baa)

This message by Mint contains both an automatic and a manual signature. The characters from line 33 to line 36 are reproduced in every message that Mint sends, and is therefore an automatic signature. The line 'Mint << on a bandwidth waste high' is new to this message and is a manual signature (line 31).

The second reply to Mint's message is written by Steven:

```

22  [Header Information]
23
24  In article <38020cfd.25351369@news.lineone.net>, Mint
25  <dontspamme@thisaddress.com> writes
26  >On Wed, 6 Oct 1999 20:53:00 +0100, steven
27  ><Steven@nospam.penalunas.freemove.co.uk> wrote:
28  >
29  >:->>There's going to be NO-ONE left to respond to my reviews! :)
30  >:->
31  >:->Well I'm still here (well, I'm subscribed anyway!), not that I respond
32  >:->to your reviews. In fact, why did I just respond to this message? What a
33  >:->waste of bandwidth. What a divvy I am... Too many pasties.
34  >
35  >Mmm, pasty! Can I have one?
36
37  What flavour do you want?
38  --
39  ( ~ | Steven
40  (   | ICQ: 14258697
41  ( \ | Yahoo pager: Stevey_P
42  (   | Friends, Mariah Carey, and me @
43  (   | http://www.penalunas.freemove.co.uk
44  -

```

(u.m.t.f. 18baab)

In a similar way to the earlier cutting of automatic signatures, Steven removes the signature file of Mint, such that his new text 'What flavour do you want?' (line 37) follows immediately upon '>Mmm, pasty! Can I have one?' (line 35). In the same way removing the signature allows the new text to be immediately relevant to the quoted text, to 'follow-on' from the text. On both occasions we get the sense that the respondent has removed redundant text such that they can engage with the body text of the previous message.

However through observation it was noticed that at times the manual signature was left in, which, in the first instance, appeared to undermine the notion that signatures (manual or automatic) became redundant text when they were quoted. For example, the first answer to Mint's message does not cut the manual signature, just the automatic:

```

23  In article <38020cfd.25351369@news.lineone.net>, dontspamme@thisaddress.com
24  (Mint) wrote:
25  o>
26  o> On Wed, 6 Oct 1999 20:53:00 +0100, steven
27  o> <Steven@nospam.penalunas.freemove.co.uk> wrote:
28  o>
29  o> :->>There's going to be NO-ONE left to respond to my reviews! :)
30  o> :->

```



what we will later call a 'three part turn'. For now let us simply observe one instance of specific quoted text:

12 [Header Information]  
 13  
 14 First of all, let me say this. Putting [OT] before the message helps nothing.  
 15 Put [On Topic] or [Off Topic], cause OT can mean either one.  
 16  
 17 Secondly, do you think the world is going to end at 2000? It's an interesting  
 18 question. We were talking about it in science class a couple of days ago, and  
 19 we had a pretty good discussion. Here's what I think.  
 20  
 21 I'm not exactly sure, but I don't think it will, because if it does end at  
 22 2000, then by who's calendar? There are tons of calendars out there. American,  
 23 Jewish, Egyptian, etc. So, who's calendar will it end by? America is the world  
 24 dominator, so will it end with ours? The Jews are the main race dealt with in  
 25 the bible, so will it end with theirs? Well, The Jewish calendar starts in  
 26 their month Abib, which corresponds to our month April. It's in the bible (12th  
 27 chapter of Exodus or so), and you can do some research to find out it goes with  
 28 April. America goes by the Gregorian calendar, which was "made" by Pope  
 29 Gregory. But, he messed up. Jesus was born in year 1 if you're religious. Pope  
 30 Gregory's calendar begins at the year 4, meaning that right now it's really  
 31 2003. The majority of the world runs by this as well. You can prove this by  
 32 research as well.  
 33  
 34 Also, if you know what calendar/day it will end, with what time zone? Australia  
 35 is somethin like 8 hours ahead of Los Angeles or somethin like that. Some  
 36 places are whole days ahead. And is New York and the Eastern Time Zone gonna  
 37 end/disappear or something? Then the Central Time Zone, then Mountain, then  
 38 Pacific? I can imagine watching the news:  
 39  
 40 [We cut to live footage from the Central Time Zone and Eastern Time Zone  
 41 border.]  
 42  
 43 Reporter: And right now we are awaiting the destruction of the East. It's 10:59  
 44 right here in the Central Time Zone. And, and- wait! SOMETHING IS HAPPENIN!!  
 45  
 46 [The picture of land on camera begins to vaporize or disappear or dissolve or  
 47 something.]  
 48  
 49 I mean c'mon. That probably won't happen. So if you think it's goin to end,  
 50 there's a lot of questions to answer. What do you guys think?  
 51  
 52  
 53 oOAFRO LiGHTNiNOo  
 54 --RSPWF's #1 FLAME TaNK--  
 55 MaRKS FoR STRiCTLY BuSiNeSS :)  
 56 i HaNDLe:  
 57 CHRiS HuRTe - FA  
 58 ALeX GaRRiSON, 1/2 MyTHS & MiLLioNS- ICW [3 - 0] CaReer [5 - 0]  
 59 #25 Tag Team on E-Wrestling Mid-Years  
 60 M&M TaG TeAM oF THE NeW MiLLeNniUm!!

(r.s.p-w.f 36)

This is a rather large message posted to the rec.sports.pro-wrestling.fantasy newsgroup. Here is a reply to this message:

19 >First of all, let me say this. Putting [OT] before the message helps nothing.  
 20 >Put [On Topic] or [Off Topic], cause OT can mean either one.  
 21  
 22 Uhm...  
 23  
 24 If your posting to a newsgroup I assume that your posting on-topic. So why is  
 25 there a need to post [On-Topic]? [OT] Doesn't mean "on" or "off" topic it means  
 26 only, off.  
 27  
 28 I hate when people put [On-Topic] at the front of their posts. It's  
 29 meaningless.



30  
 31 Am I done..  
 32  
 33 Yeah, I guess so.  
 34 [signature file]

(r.s.p-w.f. 36c)

The writer of message 36c has selectively quoted two lines from the thirty-six written by the previous participant. This allows the participant to particularise one element of the previous message, specifically the lines relating to the OT acronym. Particularisation like this might seem rather simple (and simple to point out), however such a move provides for many activities. Fundamentally specific quoting like this simplifies previous texts. And this allows for the local management of interaction.

Throughout the descriptive coding exercise it was noted that messages rarely contained accumulated quoted elements from more than four messages ago and typically quoting only amounted to a quoting history of two or three messages. The following is a section of the descriptive coding table. Notice that we can judge the number of previous messages in a thread by counting the number of characters after the number in the label. The message, 17aabacaaa, for example has a potential quoting history of eight messages, yet in this example it has only four (noted by the [4]) quoted textual elements.

#### Message No./From line

17  
 Corkster 5 Oct 19:00:54 +0100

17a  
 Sesame Slang 6 Oct 20:44:00 GMT

17aa  
 Tiggs 7 Oct 13:54:29 GMT

17aaa  
 Sesame Slang 7 Oct 16:14:22 GMT

17aab  
 Kai 7 Oct 17:49:18 GMT

17aaba  
 Jonbluez 7 Oct 20:03:25 GMT

#### Descriptive Coding

s.q.t [2]→n.t.  
 [including  
 o.r.'s]→m.s.  
 a.t.→f.q.t interspersed  
 with n.t.→a.s. [one of  
 o.r.'s ? IRC slang]  
 a.t.→s.q.t [2]  
 interspersed with n.t.  
 [three 3  
 p.t.'s]→m.s.→a.s.  
 a.t.→s.q.t [2]  
 interspersed with  
 n.t.→a.s. [nb only 2  
 ref again]  
 a.t.→s.q.t [2]  
 interspersed with n.t.  
 [technical discussion  
 of how to identify  
 respondents from  
 how they write]→m.s.  
 a.t.→sp.q.t.[edited?]→  
 n.t.→a.s.

17aabaa	a.t.→f.q.t.	[cut
Chis 7 Oct 23:17:11 BST	s]→n.t.→a.s.	
17aabab	a.t.→s.q.t	
Tiggs 8 Oct 10:11:20 GMt	[2]→n.t.→m.s.→a.s.	
17aabac	a.t.→s.q.t [2] [edited?]	
Kai 8 Oct 18:14:06 GMT	→n.t. →m.s. →a.s.	
17aabaca	a.t.→f.q.t [3][cut	
Chis 9 Oct 00:24:03 BST	s]→n.t.→a.s.	
17aabacaa	a.t.→s.q.t [3] [cut	
Kai 10 Oct 20:17:04	s]→n.t.→m.s.→a.s.	
17aabacaaa	a.t.→f.q.t[?]	
Chis 11 Oct 17:21:47	[4]→n.t.	
BST	[formulation]→s.q.t	
	→n.t.→a.s.	

This noticing lends weight to the notion of the 'local management' of Internet newsgroup interaction (Reed, 2001). One way that the number of quoted elements is reduced is to carry out a specific quoted text turn.

**Some quantity of quoted text, with one or more text elements inserted into the quoted text (f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.)**

As we said, this shape has two broad categories. The descriptive coding developed a way of manifesting the difference with two terms: 'inserted' and 'interspersed'. The second term denotes a special case where all the text is engaged with, including (if it existed in the quoted message) the signature file. The difference is an issue of 'redundant text'.

In the earlier section we offered the hypothesis that under the general shape f.q.t./s.q.t inserted n.t. there would be a greater prevalence of f.q.t. inserted n.t. than f.q.t interspersed n.t. because the latter would involve engaging with the total text of the previous message. When this previous message included a signature element, this would necessitate – under the f.q.t interspersed shape – that the signature element was engaged with.

There are only a few examples of the 'f.q.t. interspersed with n.t.' shape. Here is one:

```

28 [header information]
29
30 I couldn't care less why was "Corkster" <andrew.corcoran@lineone.net>
31 cool...:
32
33 >> o> c) Giles Jovoth
34 >>
35 >> EvilJo Ghost!
36
37 Despite not liking "Giles Jovoth".. i must say.. that's one hell of an

```

```

38  anagram!
39
40  >> sorry - well we're sharing aren't we?
41  >
42  >The best anagram the world has ever seen!!
43
44  Yeah! (did'ya think i'd be pissed off? <g> I can surprise people like
45  that...)
46
47
48  >OK, Jim's gonna be REALLY mad at me (who cares, I'm leaving anyway!!) but I
49  >take partial blame for GJ too. We stopped him when it began to go too far
50  >(IIRC Slang almost left, so I had a talk with Jim about it - UMTF can't lose
51  >a Slangarang!).
52
53  Hell no! I am the one and only Slangarangalangatangapanga.
54
55  > It doesn't matter who pulled what chords
56
57  I call A-minor! [okay, lame, but i just came back from guitar lessons,
58  for chrissake]
59
60  >(OK I did a couple
61  >of IRC chats with him, but you only kicked me anyway. ;-)) but rest assured
62  >Giles Jovoth - the EvilJo Ghost - is consigned to the same fate.
63
64  thank Gord
65
66  >OK well that felt good to get off my chest. And yes Al we *had* forgotten
67  >about him. :-)
68
69  heh.. and i think we better forget about him
70
71  >Corkster - ready for the rotten tomatoes.
72
73  Well.. I would be pissed off... but ive decided not to be.. life's too
74  short to be pissed at nice guys like youse and jim :)
75
76  (did ya think i'd get mad? nah.. i can take some things ya know.. i'm
77  just glad there ISN'T a Giles Jovoth)
78
79  Slang "Hurn Furn Burny" - [insert something funny here]
80  --
81  Proud co-founding member & Keeper of Ed in the Church of Nakey!
82  --The Wild Barenaked Ladie of the Web!--
83  http://sesameslang.theonewith.com / ICQ UIN: 1860304
84  sesameslang-AT-theonewith-DOT-com / AOL IM: SlangBNL
85  *** Replace the -AT- and -DOT- with @ and . ***
86  Ed: "I am the god of fudge!"
87  Steve: "And I am the god of little sprinkles!"
88
89  "Oh yeah, I saw them in 99, and he played guitar with a box!" - Steve

```

(u.m.t.f. 17a)

In the above example the signature element of message 17 is found at line 71 '>Corkster - ready for the rotten tomatoes'. The current writer follows this signature with, 'well.. I would be pissed off... but ive decided not to be..' (line 73). So the new text engages with the signature element of the previous message. However as we see, this signature element is followed by additional text. As part of the signing off text Corkster adds 'ready for the rotten tomatoes'. This allows the new writer to engage with part of the signature.

In this example we see a rare example of the f.q.t. interspersed shape in which text appears after every quoted text segment. In this case this is made possible by the extra textual element in the signature.

Here is another example in which the textual makeup of the signature file (this time an automatic signature a.s.) allows for textual continuation. In this case it is a comment on the text. One of the groups studied revolves around American style wrestling. As well as other things, participants of the group play games in which they create characters and 'fight' them against one another. These competitions result in scores for characters, and more generally for the participants, who claim to manage, or 'handle', these characters. The statistics that relate to these competitions often form part of the automatic signature, as with the full quoted segment in the following message. The line 'Yeesh', at line 91, is a comment on the statistical content of the automatic signature of the previous message (lines 83-89).

```

23 [header information]
24
25 > Well, it seems that FINALLY everyone has realised that _I_ Wayne Peett
26 a.k.a
27 > Tommy ``Lord`` Lionheart IS in fact, the HOTTEST PROPERTY in e-wrestling.
28 I
29 > have been in e-wrestling since August '97 and it has taken this far to
30 prove I
31 > am _THE MAN_
32
33 Um...okay.
34
35 Who's this Tommy Lionheart? I'm curious now.
36
37 All I remember hearing about him is a few RSPWF posts claiming he's a
38 Jericho ripoff...no idea about him otherwise.
39
40 > Last Monday I won the VSW Featherweight title in my second match. I've
41 also
42 > won the ICW Juniorweight and Continental title this year. I have my own
43 fed
44 > called the English Wrestling Promotion [EWP] and I'm on the ``March To The
45 > Millenium`` SUPERCARD in the Unholy Tag War match, teaming with Johnny
46 > ``Sexy`` Bod.
47
48 Ummm...
49
50 Yeh, I have a guy in there too...brand new.
51
52 "Nipples" McVeigh...total nobody. Oh well. :)
53
54 > I was voted #70 on RSPWF Top 200 1998 and in mid years was #91!!
55
56 Um...yay for you?
57
58 I wasn't around for the 1998 200, but the midyears William Craven placed
59 much higher than that.
60
61 I mean...not to toot my own horn or anything.
62
63 > But now I'm on my way to the top!! I compete in the VSW, L.A.W and ICW
64 where I
65 > have a chance to become North American champion tonight on their Fallout
66 > card.....
67
68 Ummm...
69

```

70 > Let me know why you like me or whether you dislike me.....I like feedback  
71  
72 I just don't know who you are...sorry. :)  
73  
74 > - WAYNE PEETT -  
75  
76 Who?  
77  
78 > Handler of:-  
79 > TOMMY ``Lord`` LIONHEART  
80  
81 WHO?  
82  
83 > - Current VSW Featherweight Champion -  
84 > -Former ICW Juniorweight and Continental Champion -  
85 > - Number 70 on 1998 RSPWF Top 200 -  
86 > - Number 91 on Mid Year 1999 RSPWF Top 200 -  
87 > - Competes in VSW [1-1] -  
88 > - Competes in L.A.W [0-0] - But making BIG impression  
89 > - And ICW [17-7-4]  
90  
91 Yeesh...  
92  
93  
94 --  
95 Every last damn thing I've typed in this post is (c) and (r) Moze Howard, by  
96 god! Whoo-hah!!!  
97  
98 This freak handles several fictional freaks in these leagues...  
99 -----  
100 William Craven - EMWC.  
101  
102 #4, RSPWF top 50 brawlers, '99.  
103 #22 RSPWF Midyear 200, '99.  
104 #11 EWZ Midyear 100, '99.  
105 #1 Heel, and various other placings in the E-wrestling midyears '99...  
106  
107 Do I brag about it?  
108  
109 NO!!!  
110  
111 8oP  
112  
113 "The Professional" Salvatore Cassanini - ACWA.  
114 Yokozuki Robotto - Zenchi Puroresu..  
115 ACWA homepage URL: <http://welcome.to/ACWA>  
116  
117 A conversational bit. Dan Rushing and myself.  
118  
119 FWH CEO: I know.. I saw you ranting about religion.. \*backs off\* :0  
120 FWH CEO: :) even  
121 ScarredCraven: He's what I refer to as a modern Christian, worshipping the  
122 Christos, IE-Zeus, the Christos.  
123 ScarredCraven: ROFL!  
124 ScarredCraven: Anyway...  
125 FWH CEO: stop! i agree with whatever you end up saying!

(r.s.p-w.f. 25c)

The current writer also engages creatively with the signature element of the previous message:

74 >- WAYNE PEETT -  
75  
76 Who?  
77  
78 > Handler of:-  
79 > TOMMY ``Lord`` LIONHEART  
80  
81 WHO?

Here then the identity of the previous message and the character 'TOMMY "Lord" LIONHEART' are questioned. This fits with the general tone of the message that criticises the general content. Incidentally, as part of the wrestling role-play, it is common to write negative, critical or even quite aggressive messages in this newsgroup<sup>64</sup>.

In the above message we not only have an example of where additional signature text (m./a.s.+ ) allows for an interspersed shape, but we also see an example of where the signature file itself (i.e. the name of the person) is engaged with.

The second 'guess' or hypothesis presented in the earlier section was that there would be fewer 's.q.t. inserted n.t. shapes' because the 'inserted' element suggest that there is redundant text at the end of the message. It was reasoned that if a participant had *selected* an amount of text, they would not do this and leave redundant text. In the total corpus of messages, there was only one example of the shape 's.q.t inserted n.t.' Here it is:

```

28 [header information]
29
30 Steve Won wrote:
31 >
32 > Vince Brannigan <firelaw@pressroom.com> wrote in message
33 > news:382B3FE6.F100D264@pressroom.com...
34 (snip)
35 > > I think you are confusing willing with eager. I hope no one become a
36 > > Marine who is not willing to go to war. War is their stock in trade.
37 > > Only a handful are eager for it, and that is also as it should be.
38 > >
39 > > Vince
40 >
41 > That's not how she said it. "For someone so willing to engage in the
42 > practice of war," and then she says I shouldn't be worried about where the
43 > body count comes from. That carries (with me at least) the implication that
44 > I have some sort of fascination with it. In context, it sounds like she
45 > thinks I'm bloodthirsty or something.
46
47 From your .sig and the fact that you are a Marine, I would
48 suspect that you are more beerthirsty than bloodthirsty.
49
50
51 Chris
52 > -----
53 > Semper Fi
54 >
55 > Pvt. Steven H. Won
56 > "Ding"
57 > WpnsCo, 2nd Bn, 24th Marines
58 >
59 > "Beer is living proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy."
60 > -Benjamin Franklin
61 >
62
63 -----
64 No dogs in my email address.
```

(s.r.h. 63aaaaaaa)

The text at lines 63-64 is an automatic signature element and therefore it would appear at first glance that lines 52 to 61, appearing as they do after the manual signature ('Chris', line 51) of the

current writer, is redundant text. However a closer look at the actual text in the message reveals a reason for this additional ending text, as well as its placement *after* the new text. Lines 47 and 48 read:

```
47  'From your .sig and the fact that you are a Marine, I would
48  suspect that you are more beerthirsty than bloodthirsty. '
```

This follows the quoted text of the previous message in lines 41 to 45:

```
41  > That's not how she said it. "For someone so willing to engage in the
42  > practice of war," and then she says I shouldn't be worried about where the
43  > body count comes from. That carries (with me at least) the implication that
44  > I have some sort of fascination with it. In context, it sounds like she
45  > thinks I'm bloodthirsty or something.
```

The reference in the new text to bloodthirstiness relates to an implicit accusation felt by the previous writer about some unknown woman. Notice however that the initial part of the text reads 'From your .sig and the fact that you are a Marine'. The signature file is directly referenced as reason to believe that the previous writer is not bloodthirsty.

The last quoted element is the signature file of the previous writer (52-61), it reads,

```
52  > -----
53  > Semper Fi
54  >
55  > Pvt. Steven H. Won
56  > "Ding"
57  > WpnsCo, 2nd Bn, 24th Marines
58  >
59  > "Beer is living proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy."
60  > -Benjamin Franklin
61  >
```

The idea that the writer is more 'beerthirsty' comes from the reference at the bottom to an apparent saying of Benjamin Franklin. So we can see that the apparently redundant text is nothing of the sort. It provides necessary reference and support for the assertion of the current writer. Further, the new text links from the opinion that the previous writer is bloodthirsty to the signature file. Both quoted elements are required to carry this out.

With the single case of a 's.q.t. inserted n.t.' we find that while bearing the 'inserted' description, the quoted text performs a referential role. The new text does two things at once: referencing backwards towards the issue of bloodthirstiness and forwards towards signature file.

## Summing up

What we have done in this section is use the general quoting shapes as a basis for looking at the message corpus. In many sense these efforts are random and opportunist. In the next section, we take a more purposeful approach to observation.



---

## Quoting mechanisms in sequence

---

It is possible to take the insight that we have gained from the previous analysis and apply it to a series of messages. The following observations are based around two strategies. First we take one message and look at seven 'first level' answers and observe the various quoting mechanisms used. The second strategy starts from the same message but then follows a series of subsequent answers.

In each case the 'general' (coded) and 'sub' (described) quote shapes help us see the interaction. In addition we note practices of quoting that 'do temporality' in the threaded sequence. The starting message is shown below (u.m.t.f. 18):

```

17  [Header Information]
18
19  Dear All
20
21  /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
22  load for himself too.
23
24  Unfortunately I have returned to Cambridge and found life to be
25  extremely hectic once again, to the point where I've barely had time to
26  lurk these last few days. However, do not fear, while I cannot read the
27  NG for the next nine weeks, I will try my best to be on IRC every Sunday
28  night and my permanent connection to the internet means I am always on
29  ICQ (13993976 for those of you who don't know!). Also, I'm definitely
30  up for a meet in London on Sat 16th October, although I won't be there
31  until at about 12:30pm.
32
33  Al, please can you keep me informed of all Meet updates via e-mail as I
34  really want to come!!!! :)
35
36  Finally, it was with much sorrow that I read Jim's and Corkster's posts
37  about leaving UMTF.
38
39  JIM:
40  You have been the heart and soul of UMTF for the last two and a half
41  years. I can't imagine a UMTF without you and you'd better come back
42  soon or I'm gonna come round your house and use Jo's bat on you!
43
44  CORKSTER:
45  We've never met IRL, but I consider you a friend (as I do all the
46  regulars here!) and I hope you can make the meet in London. I'm going
47  to miss your excellent FEG posts and your DJ-ing. I hope you come back
48  soon and organise a meet in Manchester!
49
50  Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.
51
52  /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
53  I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
54  be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
55
56  --
57  Nathan
58  The Wild CompSci of the 'net

```

(u.m.t.f. 18)

Let us first observe some features of this message. The message starts with an ‘other referent’ ‘Dear All’ at line 19. Following this there is an ‘action-denoter’, a textual device derived from an alternative textual medium, MUD (Multiple User Domain)<sup>65</sup>:

```
21 /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
22 load for himself too.
```

So the writer, Nathan, hands Kat a large box of tissues. Later there is another action, where Nathan gives everyone ‘a \*massive\* hug’ (line 52).

The text that follows the first action (lines 24 to 31) gives reasons for the participant ‘leaving’ the newsgroup. The participant writes that they will still be connected to the Internet and will still be able to participate in ‘ICQ’ (another form of real time textual interaction) and that he is ‘up for a meet’ (That is he wants to meet face to face with the other participants). However they will no longer read and write newsgroup messages.

We have a first ‘personal referent’ at line 33, in which Nathan asks ‘Al’ to keep him informed about meetings via email. There is a second personal referent at line 39 (‘JIM’) that stands as a title for a paragraph of text (lines 40-42). This text is directed with the use of personal pronouns ‘You’, ‘you’re’ etc. toward the named individual.

Again at line 44 we have personal referent title (‘CORKSTER’) that heads up a paragraph of directed text (lines 45-48). This is followed by a joint ‘gratuity’, ‘best of luck to both of you’ (line 50). Of the total text, fourteen lines are directed at particular individuals rather than the whole group – either through action-tokens or through direct-reference text.

The remaining text amounts to the initial reasons for ‘leaving’ and the ending paragraph (lines 52-54) that starts with an action (hugging) and tells the ‘group’ that they will be missed. In a sense it is directed at the group (‘Dear All’). The message ends with signature text (lines 57-58).

### **Message in a thread one – first replies**

This message is the first of seventeen. Each of the subsequent messages is either a direct answer to this one, or are ‘answers-to-answers’. Nathan’s message is followed by seven initial responses.

They contain a variety of repeated quoting shapes (general and sub-shapes). Here is a section of the descriptive coding table showing the general (coded) and sub-quoting shape of each message:

Message No./From line	Coding Shape	Descriptive coding
18 Nathan Dimmock	n.q.t.	n.t. [incl greeting to 'all' and 3 o.r.]→a.s.
18a Heatherbell	s.q.t.→n.t.	a.t.→sp.q.t.→n.t.→a.s.
18b Paul Hyett	s.q.t.→n.t.	a.t.→sp.q.t.→n.t.→a.s.
18c Barry Somers	s.q.t.→n.t.	a.t.→f.q.t [cut to]→n.t.→m.s.→a.s.
18d Corkster	s.q.t.→n.t.	Sp.q.t [same as 18a]→n.t.[incl o.r.]→m.s.
18e Lovebug	n.q.t.	n.t. [mimics 18, 'dear all aswell]
18f Kat	f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.	s.q.t. [edited] interspersed with n.t.→m.s.→a.s.
18g Kai	f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.	a.t.→s.q.t. interspersed with n.t.→m.s.→a.s.

Let us go through each of these initial responses in turn. Message u.m.t.f. 18a has the following appearance:

```

24 [Header information]
25 Nathan Dimmock wrote
26
27 > /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
28 > I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
29 > be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
30 >
31
32 *sob* I think I'm gonna cry now... geeze, everyones leaving all of a
33 sudden... and just when i got my sig back too..... *sob* Remember
34 and email tho'!
35 --
36 Hevbell :) The wild flower of the web

```

(u.m.t.f. 18a)

Here a participant called 'Hevbell' quotes three lines from Nathan's original message (lines 52-54, umtf 18) at lines 27-30, 18a. This quotation is preceded by automatic referencing text (a.t.) 'Nathan Dimmock wrote'. If we show Nathan's message again we can see which parts have been quoted (shown in bold type):

```

17 [Header Information]
18
19 Dear All
20
21 /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a

```

22 load for himself too.  
 23  
 24 Unfortunately I have returned to Cambridge and found life to be  
 25 extremely hectic once again, to the point where I've barely had time to  
 26 lurk these last few days. However, do not fear, while I cannot read the  
 27 NG for teh next nine weeks, I will try my best to be on IRC every Sunday  
 28 night and my permanent connection to the internet means I am always on  
 29 ICQ (13993976 for those of you who don't know!). Also, I'm definitely  
 30 up for a meet in London on Sat 16th October, although I won't be there  
 31 until at about 12:30pm.  
 32  
 33 Al, please can you keep me informed of all Meet updates via e-mail as I  
 34 really want to come!!!! :)  
 35  
 36 Finally, it was with much sorrow that I read Jim's and Corkster's posts  
 37 about leaving UMTF.  
 38  
 39 JIM:  
 40 You have been the heart and soul of UMTF for the last two and a half  
 41 years. I can't imagine a UMTF without you and you'd better come back  
 42 soon or I'm gonna come roudn your house and use Jo's bat on you!  
 43  
 44 CORKSTER:  
 45 We've never met IRL, but I consider you a friend (as I do all the  
 46 regulars here!) and I hope you can make the meet in London. I'm going  
 47 to miss your excellent FEG posts and your DJ-ing. I hope you come back  
 48 soon and organise a meet in Manchester!  
 49  
 50 Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.  
 51  
 52 /me gives everyone a \*massive\* hug.  
 53 I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to  
 54 be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.  
 55  
 56 --  
 57 Nathan  
 58 The Wild CompSci of the 'net

(u.m.t.f. 18)

In order to 'quote' the relevant section, the default position would have it that the participant has removed lines 18 to 51, and then removed lines 55 to 58. The participant has then typed:

32 \*sob\* I think I'm gonna cry now... geeze, everyone's leaving all of a  
 33 sudden... and just when i got my sig back too..... \*sob\* Remember  
 34 and email tho'!  
 35 --  
 36 Hevbell :)                      The wild flower of the web

This message (18a), falls under the general shape 's.q.t.→n.t.', while its specific shape includes both an automatic referencing text (a.t.) and an automatic signature (a.s.). The full shape is 'a.t.→sp.q.t.→n.t.→a.s', where 'sp.q.t.' denotes that a specific text section has been quoted. This shape denotes a deliberate selection; text has been removed from before and after.

The immediate text to that quoted is '\*sob\* I think I'm gonna cry now...' The text '\*sob\*' is another device used by newsgroup message writers to denote an action (other examples include \*laugh\* \*sniff\* and \*grin\*. Note the asterisk is also used to denote intonational emphasis). The activity of 'sobbing' and the spaced out text with ellipses give the new text the feel of 'real' behaviour (crying and fragmented vocalisation).

The quoted text starts with an activity ‘/me gives everyone a \*massive\* hug’. The new text is similarly started with an activity. Each initial activity then contextualises the text that follows it. Both quotation and new text have something like the shape <activity><accompanying vocalisation>. With the second instance this vocalisation is more emotional perhaps, with the pauses and additional terminating action (\*sob\*).

So this sp.q.t.→n.t. shape succeeds in providing a quoted segment; the new text doesn’t so much follow on from the quoted text than mirror it as an object. The act of quoting has a particular consequence in which the new and old texts act together to give this impression. It is a particular moment of mutual elaboration, in which the documentary relationship of the text elements can be seen.

To show alternative moments of documentary definition we can look to other answers in which the exact same text is quoted. In one case this amounts to exactly the same quantity of text (i.e. there is no additional text quoted); in another two cases the same quoted element sits alongside other quoted elements. First then let us look at the message that quotes exactly the same segment. Message 18d is written by one of the named individuals in the original message, Corkster:

```

20 [Header information]
21
22 > /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
23 > I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
24 > be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
25
26 Celt was right - things DO happen in threes.....
27
28 Sad to see you leaving too, Nathan. Get back to UMTF ASAP but I understand
29 exactly what you mean, what with the work load (and I'm just at A-Level -
30 imagine next year [shudder]).
31
32 Corkster - ibbbycsSisesiqhingini :-)
```

(u.m.t.f. 18d)

In this message we have the same quoted element as in message 18a. The new text that follows it starts by referring to another participant, ‘Celt’ (this is the nickname of the participant who writes message 18c, Barry Somers). As we will see when we look at Celt’s message, the line ‘Celt was right – things Do happen in threes.....’ is a reference to the content of message 18c, in which Celt makes this assertion (the ‘three things’ are the leaving of Jim, Corkster and now Nathan from the group). The quoted text then is used here as evidence for, as substantiating, the claim

that 'things happen in threes'. It acts as an object that evidences the fact of the third person leaving.

There are two cases in which the same quoted segment is used in a larger message (and in combination with other quoted segments). We will look at these larger messages in their entirety in a moment; for now we show those sections of the messages that include the quoted element that we are interested in.

The quoted segment appears in message 18f written by Kat (the person handed the tissues by Nathan). It occurs at lines 37 to 39. Here is the full message:

```

21 [header information]
22
23 Nathan Dimmock wrote...
24
25 >/me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
26 >load for himself too.
27
28 /me bursts into tears
29
30 oh man! why is everyone leaving? its killing me
31
32 >Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.
33
34 Best of luck to everyone who is leaving. Please come back!!!! Don't forget
35 e-mail! katherine.dwyer@virgin.net
36
37 >/me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
38 >I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
39 >be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
40
41 /me gives everyone an even bigger hug
42 bye
43 :((((((((((((
44
45 Kat
46 --
47 The Wild (Meowing) Kat of The Web! :)
48 Visit 'Kat's Friends Page' at http://zap.to/katsfriends
49 E-mail me: katherine.dwyer@virgin.net
50 kat_in_a_bag@hotmail.com
51 People seem to think I'm insane - It's NOT TRUE!
```

This time the quoted segment appears at the end of the message. We see that Kat uses the quoted segment in a similar way to message 18a, in that the 'hug' action is what is made relevant. Kat follows the text with '/me gives everyone an even bigger hug' and then follows this with the text 'bye :(((((((((((('. The hugging of 'everyone' is in line with the rest of the message content, which is generally directed to the rest of the group (see later). So in this case the same quoted element performs a particular function of something like copied action at the end of the message. Just as Nathan had hugged everyone, so Kat gives everyone a hug. Notice here the upgrade from a '\*massive\*' hug to an 'even bigger hug'. The quoted text serves to allow for this upgrade.

In the other example where the same quoted segment is used a different part of the segment is referenced. This message written by Jim, the other person leaving the group (and named in the opening message), contains the following section,

```
42      : /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
43      : I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
44      : be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
45
46      Me too... for these past two years...
47
48      Jim
```

With the text 'Me too... for these past two years...' Jim is referencing and referring to the section of the quoted segment *after* the 'hug'. The line appears to follow directly on from 'I've had so much fun this summer', by an agreement with 'I've had so much fun' but then a redefinition of the period of time during which the fun has been had 'for these past two years'.

In a sense this is the most specific use of the quoted segment. While Kat emphasises the 'hugging' involved, Jim continues the quoted segment, and engages its specific content through agreement and redefinition.

In these instances of the re-use of the same quoted segment we see the various ways in which a segment can be utilised to do different things. These observations support the notion that quoting mechanisms are 'context neutral' and 'context sensitive' in that while the same quoting mechanism does the same sort of technical activity, how that particularised text is used is a contingent matter. And further, 'what the text means' is defined by the following text, and similarly any new text is contextualised in terms of that quoted.

So far then we have strategically observed one specific quoted segment in its use in a variety of places. A second strategy that we can employ is to note the different quoting strategies employed in each message.

Message 18b quotes a different segment of the original, however again this message has a 's.q.t. →n.t.' general shape (and indeed exhibits another a.t. →sp.q.t. →n.t. →a.s. sub-shape). In this case though a different segment is specifically engaged with:

```
19      [Header information]
20
21      On Tue, 5 Oct 1999, Nathan Dimmock <ned21@cam.ac.uk> stated this
22      considered view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -
23      >
24      >Finally, it was with much sorrow that I read Jim's and Corkster's posts
```

```

25 >about leaving UMTF.
26 >
27 There's going to be NO-ONE left to respond to my reviews! :)
28 --
29 Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!
30
31 Website at http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/

```

(u.m.t.f. 18b)

Lines 23-26 in 18b come from lines 35-38 of message 18. Here the news of Jim and Corkster's leaving is made an object of reference. The following new text, 'there's going to be NO-ONE left to respond to my reviews! :)' is a comment on this news. What is interesting perhaps is that nowhere in the quoted segment does the issue of Nathan leaving the group appear. It could be of course that it was Jim and Corkster who normally responded to Paul's reviews. However perhaps a better reading is that this news is better understood in terms of Nathan's description of 'great sorrow'. That is Nathan is sorrowful that Jim and Corkster is leaving, while Paul is more concerned that with there leaving there will be 'no-one left'. In other words Paul is particularising the expressed emotion of the text rather than engaging with the specifics of the content. We see at the end of the new text segment and emoticom ':)', which in this case might be read as a small smile. This stands in contrast to the expressed emotion, and hence might be read as an ironic grin. As though the strong emotion expressed (including the use of capital letters on 'NO-ONE') is tempered by a terminating opposition – rather like saying 'I didn't really mean it':

There is a real sense of 'doing emotion' in this post. Emotional work can also be seen in the following message. In this case emotion is expressed differently. Rather than emphasising words, and particularising the emotional content of the original, the writer uses the format of the message to convey and emotive reaction in almost a temporal manner. This is the 'all bad things happen in three's' referred to by Corkster.

```

22 [Header information]
23
24
25
26 Nathan Dimmock wrote:
27
28 > Dear All
29 >
30 > /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
31 > load for himself too.
32 >
33 > Unfortunately I have returned to Cambridge and found life to be
34 > extremely hectic once again
35
36 I knew it, I KNEW IT
37 Bad things DO happen in 3's
38 I said it before and I'll say it again!
39 :(
40 We're in trouble if another person says there leaving cause then we'll loose
41 2 more after that
42 No One say a word.....
43

```



44 Slán Abhailé, bye bye  
 45 --  
 46 Barry Somers (Celt)  
 47 WWW: <http://www.CourteneyCox.net>  
 48 WWW: <http://www.CourteneyArquette.com>  
 49 E-Mail: [barry@courteneycox.net](mailto:barry@courteneycox.net) AOL IM:CCoxNet ICQ#:10929871  
 50  
 51 For Newbies TOW The One With/Where

(u.m.t.f. 18c)

First let us observe the new text. It starts, 'I knew it, I KNEW IT'. First we might notice that this contains a repeated phrase element. Notice also the use of capitals to upgrade the second occurrence. The repeated phrase element is indexical. 'I knew it' not only indexes some piece of knowledge – what is known – that we are required to understand from some other source. But also the use of such an indexical expression carries a vocalised character. It sounds like something one would say.

Now to understand what it is that this phrase indexes, and to deepen our understanding of the repeated phrase as a vocalised action, we must turn to the quoted text.

We can see that the quoted segment starts from the beginning of the message. Here is the initial message again (message 18) with the text that will be quoted in 18c in bold print:

17 [Header Information]  
 18  
 19 **Dear All**  
 20  
 21 **/me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a**  
 22 **load for himself too.**  
 23  
 24 **Unfortunately I have returned to Cambridge and found life to be**  
 25 **extremely hectic once again, to the point where I've barely had time to**  
 26 **lurk these last few days. However, do not fear, while I cannot read the**  
 27 **NG for teh next nine weeks, I will try my best to be on IRC every Sunday**  
 28 **night and my permanent connection to the internet means I am always on**  
 29 **ICQ (13993976 for those of you who don't know!). Also, I'm definitely**  
 30 **up for a meet in London on Sat 16th October, although I won't be there**  
 31 **until at about 12:30pm.**  
 32  
 33 **Al, please can you keep me informed of all Meet updates via e-mail as I**  
 34 **really want to come!!!! :)**  
 35  
 36 **Finally, it was with much sorrow that I read Jim's and Corkster's posts**  
 37 **about leaving UMTF.**  
 38  
 39 **JIM:**  
 40 **You have been the heart and soul of UMTF for the last two and a half**  
 41 **years. I can't imagine a UMTF without you and you'd better come back**  
 42 **soon or I'm gonna come roudn your house and use Jo's bat on you!**  
 43  
 44 **CORKSTER:**  
 45 **We've never met IRL, but I consider you a friend (as I do all the**  
 46 **regulars here!) and I hope you can make the meet in London. I'm going**  
 47 **to miss your excellent FEG posts and your DJ-ing. I hope you come back**  
 48 **soon and organise a meet in Manchester!**  
 49  
 50 **Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.**  
 51  
 52 **/me gives everyone a \*massive\* hug.**  
 53 **I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to**

54 be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.  
 55  
 56 --  
 57 Nathan  
 58 The Wild CompSci of the 'net

(u.m.t.f. 18)

The quoted segment in message 18c is the first seven lines of text in the original. What is immediately noticeable is that the quote only includes half of line 25 in message 18. The quoted segment goes up to just before the comma. This quoting sub-shape is 'f.q.t. [cut to] → n.t.'. The quote starts from the beginning of the original and then text is removed up to the point where the new text sits.

The repeated phrase 'I knew it, I KNEW IT' comes at the first instance where enough information is presented. The vocalised character is enhanced (or qualified) because this is very much how talk works. At the first possible instance of a recognised new event, the person 'jumps in' to express their realisation of the news item (or guess at the content of the news item etc.). 'I knew it, I KNEW IT' also has the feel of exaggerated 'jumping in'. It says something like 'I knew it all along, and here is the evidence'. We might go so far as to say that this is a pseudo-overlap, or a 'doing-of-textual-overlap'<sup>66</sup>.

What is fascinating about this quoting mechanism/new text shape is that we get a real feel of time. That is we sense that the 'news' of the original is unfolding over time, and at the first temporal moment that enough information is received the new participant steps in and makes a response.

Let us be clear, the likelihood that the present writer did not read the whole message before generating the reply is slim. Probably he has read the whole message before replying. In the constructed reply, however, he edits the text such that the new message conveys a temporal character.

If we look at line 42 of message 18c we see the end text 'No one say a word...'. Not only is the vocalised quality of any subsequent message characterised, but we also have the 'doing of time' with the ellipses – a listening pause if you like.

Temporality is also characterised in the following message. Again let us realise that the writer has almost definitely read the whole message before carrying out the editing and typing required to

generate the message. It is the message that we have already seen part of, written by Jim.

Here it is in its entirety:

```

20 [Header information]
21
22 The right honourable Nathan Dimmock wrote:
23
24 : Dear All
25
26 : /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
27 : load for himself too.
28
29 Tissues? this can't have a good ending? :((
30
31 : Unfortunately I have returned to Cambridge and found life to be
32 : extremely hectic once again, to the point where I've barely had time to
33 : lurk these last few days. However, do not fear, while I cannot read the
34 : NG for teh next nine weeks, I will try my best to be on IRC every Sunday
35 : night and my permanent connection to the internet means I am always on
36 : ICQ (13993976 for those of you who don't know!). Also, I'm definitely
37 : up for a meet in London on Sat 16th October, although I won't be there
38 : until at about 12:30pm.
39
40 : Al, please can you keep me informed of all Meet updates via e-mail as I
41 : really want to come!!!! :)
42
43 Oh well, it will again be another sad loss to the group but in the same
44 position I totally understand and think that that thing called life
45 *just* ranks above umtf, really!! :)1
46
47 : JIM:
48 : You have been the heart and soul of UMTF for the last two and a half
49 : years. I can't imagine a UMTF without you and you'd better come back
50 : soon or I'm gonna come roudn your house and use Jo's bat on you!
51
52 Oh I will :)
53
54 : Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.
55
56 And to you!! Goodluck!
57
58 : /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
59 : I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
60 : be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
61
62 Me too... for these past two years...
63
64 Jim
65
66 --
67 I'm not so blind that I can't see where we're all going
68 And its no fault of mine if human kind reaps what its sewing
69
70 Eris Free Network - #hellmouth #starbug #centralperk

```

What a wonderful line, 'tissues? this can't have a good ending? :(( is. The action of handing Kat the tissues is suspended by Jim and commented upon. This comment particularises 'Tissues' and then feigns ignorance of the remaining text. 'What could this mean?', 'What portent is this?'. This is such a strong temporal move. The question erases forward, it characterises the experience of the message as happening 'in real time'; in which, of course, the future *cannot* be known. As we read we move forward through the message that now is ascribed a temporal character.

At lines 43 to 45 we see Jim responding to the news of Nathan's leaving (the quoted text used as an object of reference). 'Oh well,' Jim starts, just as though he were conversing with Nathan (Heritage 1984b). This vocalised text is in line with the expectation of some bad news occurring (Schegloff 1988). Here we are given Jim's reaction to the news. Line 52 is again conversational, 'oh, I will', that answers the call for him to 'come back soon'. Lines 54 to 56 appear to be like an adjacency pair interaction:

```
54 : Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.
55
56 And to you!! Goodluck!
```

Finally we have the reaction to the end section of Nathan's message that we have already looked at earlier.

The overall effect of Jim employing a 's.q.t. interspersed with n.t.' sub-shape, in addition with the reflexive construal of temporal stepwise progression, gives this message a conversational feel. As we will see in the analysis of the three-part turn construction, the conversational character (and by this I mean 'real-time', face-to-face, interactionally achieved) of newsgroup messages are instantiated. The 'doing of' temporal interaction in text can also be seen in Kat's reply to Nathan's message. Here temporality is achieved through the writing of reciprocal actions.

```
21 [header information]
22
23 Nathan Dimmock wrote...
24
25 >/me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
26 >load for himself too.
27
28 /me bursts into tears
29
30 oh man! why is everyone leaving? its killing me
31
32 >Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.
33
34 Best of luck to everyone who is leaving. Please come back!!!! Don't forget
35 e-mail! katherine.dwyer@virgin.net
36
37 >/me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
38 >I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
39 >be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
40
41 /me gives everyone an even bigger hug
42 bye
43 :((((((((((((
44
45 Kat
46 --
47 The Wild (Meowing) Kat of The Web! :)
48 Visit 'Kat's Friends Page' at http://zap.to/katsfriends
49 E-mail me: katherine.dwyer@virgin.net
50 kat_in_a_bag@hotmail.com
51 People seem to think I'm insane - It's NOT TRUE!
```

(u.m.t.f. 18f)

So Nathan hands Kat the tissues at lines 25 to 26. Kat ‘burst into tears’ at line 28. Following this we have Kat’s vocalised ‘oh, man!’ question and statement ‘why is everyone leaving? Its killing me’. We have an adjacent action at 32-35 widened out to ‘everyone who is leaving’. This works to support the ending action of Kat – which we looked at earlier – in which she gives and ‘even bigger’ hug to ‘everyone’.

More than just envisioning the scene of a group of friends exchanging farewells, we are involved in the temporal playing out of emotions and actions in our reading. Unlike a play script, for example, where actions are directed (‘Romeo kisses Juliet’) here the activity is present, we are intimate with its doing and party to its experience.

Finally in this examination of the initial seven replies to Nathan’s message, we find a message that does no quoting at all. It has the general shape n.q.t.,

```

15   [Header information]
16
17   Dear all aswell
18
19   although jim and andrew are leaving and lurking
20   we have to keep umtf alive for if and when they come back it will be shining,
21   and not scraping along!
22
23   ill miss you both sooo much, but i hope everything goes well, and we'll see ya
24   on irc, or icq!
```

(u.m.t.f. 18e)

Notice here that the new text makes reference to the text that has not been quoted. ‘Dear all aswell’ clearly references the ‘Dear all’ at the beginning of Nathan’s message. However the content of the message is less a response to the messages that preceded it and more directed towards the consequences for the group. We get the sense that the emphasis of ‘all’ is the group remaining. It is a call to what everyone knows. There is no need to quote the message because those that are addressed are necessarily those that have read the original message (and probably the replies).

### Messages in a thread two – replies to replies

The following table shows the descriptive coding of one thread leading from the initial message by Nathan.

Message No./From line	Coding Shape	Descriptive coding
18 Nathan Dimmock	n.q.t.	n.t. [incl greeting to 'all' and 3 o.r.]→a.s.
18g Kai	f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.	a.t.→s.q.t. interspersed with n.t. →m.s.→a.s.
18ga Kat	f.q.t./s.q.t. inserted n.t.	a.t.→s.q.t [2][edited] interspersed with n.t.→m.s.→a.s. [incl 3 p.t.]
18gaa Mint	s.q.t.→n.t.	a.t.→s.q.t [3] [cut to]→n.t.→a.s.

This thread includes the response by Jim or Kai (18g). In addition we see two further responses, the first to Jim's (18ga), and second the response to that (18gaa). Here is the initial response by

Jim:

```

20 [Header information]
21
22 The right honourable Nathan Dimmock wrote:
23
24 : Dear All
25
26 : /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
27 : load for himself too.
28
29 Tissues? this can't have a good ending? :(
30
31 : Unfortunately I have returned to Cambridge and found life to be
32 : extremely hectic once again, to the point where I've barely had time to
33 : lurk these last few days. However, do not fear, while I cannot read the
34 : NG for teh next nine weeks, I will try my best to be on IRC every Sunday
35 : night and my permanent connection to the internet means I am always on
36 : ICQ (13993976 for those of you who don't know!). Also, I'm definitely
37 : up for a meet in London on Sat 16th October, although I won't be there
38 : until at about 12:30pm.
39
40 : Al, please can you keep me informed of all Meet updates via e-mail as I
41 : really want to come!!!! :)
42
43 Oh well, it will again be another sad loss to the group but in the same
44 position I totally understand and think that that thing called life
45 *just* ranks above umtf, really!! :)1
46
47 : JIM:
48 : You have been the heart and soul of UMTF for the last two and a half
49 : years. I can't imagine a UMTF without you and you'd better come back
50 : soon or I'm gonna come roudn your house and use Jo's bat on you!
51
52 Oh I will :)
53
54 : Best of luck to both of you - I hope your journeys are short ones.
55
56 And to you!! Goodluck!
57
58 : /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
59 : I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
60 : be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
61
62 Me too... for these past two years...
63
64 Jim
65
66 --
67 I'm not so blind that I can't see where we're all going

```

68 And its no fault of mine if human kind reaps what its sewing  
 69  
 70 Eris Free Network - #hellmouth #starbug #centralperk

(u.m.t.f. 18g)

As we have seen Jim's message has the general shape 'f.q.t./s.q.t inserted n.t.', in that he takes part of the previous message and inserts his own text within it. Here is Kat's response to Jim's message:

```

22 [header information]
23
24 Kai wrote...
25 >The right honourable Nathan Dimmock wrote:
26
27 >: /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
28 >: load for himself too.
29 >
30 >Tissues? this can't have a good ending? :(
31
32 No.....one person announces they're leaving and the rest of umtf decides
33 that they should really admit to everyone what they've been thinking for
34 ages.
35
36 >Oh well, it will again be another sad loss to the group but in the same
37 >position I totally understand and think that that thing called life
38 >*just* ranks above umtf, really!! :)1
39
40 We all understand.
41
42 >: /me gives everyone a *massive* hug.
43 >: I'm going to miss you all - leaving UMTF (even temporarily) is going to
44 >: be so hard as I've had so much fun this summer.
45 >
46 >Me too... for these past two years...
47
48 :o)
49
50 Kat
51
52 --
53 The Wild (Meowing) Kat of The Web! :)
54 Visit 'Kat's Friends Page' at http://zap.to/katsfriends
55 E-mail me: katherine.dwyer@virgin.net
56 kat\_in\_a\_bag@hotmail.com
57 People seem to think I'm insane - It's NOT TRUE!
```

(u.m.t.f. 18ga)

Kat takes the first quoted element and response from Jim's message (lines 25-30) and adds another text segment at lines 32 to 34 (Kat the writer of the present message is also the person 'handed' the tissues in the quotation from Jim's message).

A large segment is removed from Jim's message (lines 30-42, umtf 18g) such that the next segment of quoted text was that written by Jim himself (and not text quoted by him). Kat's 'we all understand' is directed at Jim and his ranking of life just above interaction on uk.media.tv.friends. Kat's selective quoting particularises Jim's text, which itself was a comment on the quoted text that preceded it. Kat's selective quoting does two things: it particularises Jim's

text and allows a direct response to Jim; and it also separates Jim's comments from the text that it formulates and allows for its re-formulation.

Kat's final quoted segment, which includes Jim's following on text to Nathan's comments about 'fun this summer', is responded to with a single emoticom. This emoticom might be read as a simple emotional response.

With the three quote/response segments, we might expect in the following message to see complementary placing of new text at the ends of each quote/response segment (see later analysis), however what we get instead is a block quotation, that only includes the first two quote/response segments from Kat's message. The quotations are not separated out with new text, instead the block quotation is followed by new text.

```

20 [Header information]
21
22 On Sat, 9 Oct 1999 09:47:04 +0100, "Kat" <katherine.dwyer@virgin.net>
23 wrote:
24
25 :->Kai wrote...
26 :->>The right honourable Nathan Dimmock wrote:
27 :->
28 :->>: /me hands Kat a large box of tissues in preparation, and then takes a
29 :->>: load for himself too.
30 :->>
31 :->>Tissues? this can't have a good ending? :(
32 :->
33 :->No.....one person announces they're leaving and the rest of umtf decides
34 :->that they should really admit to everyone what they've been thinking for
35 :->ages.
36 :->
37 :->>Oh well, it will again be another sad loss to the group but in the same
38 :->>position I totally understand and think that that thing called life
39 :->>*just* ranks above umtf, really!! :)
40 :->
41 :->We all understand.
42
43 These past few days have been very emotional for many of us,
44 good luck Nathan too, sorry I missed your departure, quite a few have
45 left, but the bond us strong and good friends we will remain, I can
46 picture some of us hanging out in a coffee house years from now looking
47 back at these days of our lives...
48
49 getting pilo...philof....philosov...
50 ....very memorable for a Monday aft
51
52 --
53 O _____ (_____) Dru bagged a slayer? She didn't tell me!
54 ( ) \ ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) thehellmouth @ lineone.net
55 EFNet: #hellmouth #irc_addicts #centralperk
56 spikevamp @ sms.genie.co.uk (off-peak only)

```

(u.m.t.f. 18gaa)

The new text works to summarise the 'past few days' – by way of formulation – and engages something like an ending narrative, looking to future times in which the friends will meet up again. The quoted text acts as (pointed-to) evidence for the summary.



### Quotation mechanisms in action – Summary

We have seen a number of quoting mechanisms and their reflexive use in the activity of posting messages. We have seen that it is possible to take our observations of general and sub-quoting shapes and show how these can help us understand and observe the ongoing interaction.

Perhaps most interesting has been the way that certain quoting shapes (and following new text) are able to generate a temporal feel, a real time emerging interaction. Within this temporal interaction we see the possibility of doing things like reacting to news receipt, emotion displays at appropriate moment, and actions. But more than this we are privy to a sense of real-time conversation. This can be seen most clearly in the later 'three-part turn unit construction' analysis.

---

## A concept of quoting: sequential integrity

---

The following analysis is an argument, and gives evidential support, for an underlying feature of quoting-in-interaction on Internet Newsgroups. The concept of *internal sequential integrity* asserts that messages exhibit a respect for the order in which text was produced – that quoted elements appear in temporal relation to one another and that new text always follows the related quoted elements. As messages are answered not only is the order in which the text appeared in the previous message maintained but also new text is placed in sequentially respected positions.

Sequential integrity is asserted as an underlying and foundational feature of quoting mechanisms, in the same way as turn-taking in conversation. It is a primary ordering procedure upon, and through, which other procedures are possible. We aim to support this conception through three bits of evidence. First, we tell an incidence of rule-telling (where the rule is the sequential nature of quoting elements); second we watch a defence of the criticised behaviour in terms of technological determinism – in the ‘telling-of-the-machine’; third we show an instance of ‘sequential integrity repair’, where a participant’s mistake is iterated by re-imposing the temporal sequential nature of quoted elements. We finish by considering some of the consequences and possibilities afforded message structure due to the instantiation of sequential integrity: the interactional construction of the ‘three-part-turn unit’ which allows newsgroups messages express verbal conversation-like qualities.

### Telling sequential integrity and the default position

In the newsgroup uk.media.tv.friends a participant called Jiles Jovoth<sup>67</sup> criticises a previous message for not following the accepted practice of putting the quoted elements before new text:

```

12 [header information]
13 On Wed, 9 Jun 1999 19:26:58 +0100, The Loony wrote:
14
15 >When u have a date then let me know as I'd like to see who I've been lurking
16 >in the background <spying> reading posts about.
17 >All plans seem good 2 me except c & f
18 >Not much of a sportsman unless there's beer involved
19
20 [snip overquote]
21
22 You know you weren't all that interesting the first time, so what makes
23 you think you're any better the second? Kill the 100 odd lines of
24 quoting, put the quotes on the top of the reply not the bottom, and sort
25 out the OTP: business please.
26
27 GJ - This is going to be fun.
28
29 --
30 Everybody gets a chance. Some people get two.
```

(GJ<sup>68</sup> 20/06/99<sup>69</sup>)

The order to 'put the quotes on the top of the reply not the bottom' refers to the ordering of the textual element of the previous message. The message by 'the Looney' is structured thus: n.t.(4)→a.s.→a.t.→f.q.t (88 lines). (That is four lines of new text followed by an automatic signature file, followed by an automatically generated message identifier line, followed by a full quoting of the previous eighty-eight lined message).

Jiles Jovoth demands that the quoted element (f.q.t.(88 lines)) should precede the new text (n.t.). Composed as a three part list (to cut the length of the quote, to position it at the top and to sort out the general OTP issues) it comes across as an instance of rule telling – a packaged detailing of appropriate activity. This rule telling forms part of a broader critical stance towards the previous participant.

The next message in the sequence is by the original poster. It is structured such that the quoted element *follows* the new text, n.t.→a.s.→f.q.t.(18 lines). The new text (n.t.) is an apology:

'Ever so sorry I'll consider my hands slapped  
Do you feel better now?'

(GJ 12/06/99)

Jiles Jovoth's message continues the critical line:

12 [Header Information]  
13  
14 On Sat, 12 Jun 1999 14:35:58 +0100, The Loony wrote:  
15  
16 >Ever so sorry I'll consider my hands slapped  
17 >Do you feel better now?  
18  
19 No I fucking don't! You don't get the point do you??  
20  
21 1) You reply AFTER you quote  
22 2) You only quote the previous message that was relevant to what you are  
23 replying not the ENTIRE message!!  
24  
25 If you are going to post here, you are going do it properly - GETTIT?  
26  
27 GJ  
28  
29 --  
30 Everybody gets a chance. Some people get two.

(GJ 13/06/99)

The formulation of rules is stronger in this message through the use of a numbered list:

21 1) You reply AFTER you quote  
22 2) You only quote the previous message that was relevant to what you are  
23 replying not the ENTIRE message!!

This message formulates a rule of quoting. The next message in the sequence – written by a new participant called 'Jacqui' – foregrounds the machinic properties of 'replying'. The important lines are highlighted:

```

13 [Header Information]
14
15 Giles Jovoth wrote
16 The Loony wrote:
17 >>Ever so sorry I'll consider my hands slapped
18 >>Do you feel better now?
19 >
20 >No I fucking don't! You don't get the point do you??
21
22 Please don't swear. It's not big and it's not clever.
23
24 >1) You reply AFTER you quote
25 >2) You only quote the previous message that was relevant to what you
26 are
27 >replying not the ENTIRE message!!
28
29
30 A lot of newsreaders (MSOE included) want you to type at the top of the
31 message not the bottom. It is just one of those things. No need to
32 bite people's heads off. I'd sooner see them reply at the top than
33 include every single attribution and posting detail like some people
34 do... there is no need to include e-mail addresses in quoted replies,
35 but - oh, *you* do it! Silly me, that must be alright then. As to
36 quoting whole messages - sometimes it is relevant, despite appearances.
37 There's nothing more annoying than one-line replies that make no sense
38 at all (known as OLFs in some groups, and likely to get you flamed)
39 because the poster has snipped almost an entire post.
40
41 >If you are going to post here, you are going do it properly - GETTIT?
42 And if you are going to, please be considerate. You are not God. You
43 are not the Prime Minister. You are not Matt le Blanc or MNL :- ) This
44 is an unmoderated group and in theory anything goes. I understand the
45 concern about OTP stuff, but Sky have finished series 5, C4 have not
46 started S5, and reruns are reruns. If you're going to bite people's
47 heads off for posting on-topic comments without spoilers - which weren't
48 needed - no wonder nobody seems to be on-topic at the minute. As for
49 the computer literate among us, OTP posts can be avoided through
50 killfiles. Attitudes like yours seem to make it through - I'd sooner
51 spend 30 seconds doing "mark thread as read" than reading aggressive
52 posts from someone I've personally *never* noticed here before in a year
53 of lurking and posting. Please be a bit more polite. What you are
54 saying is right, the way you're saying it is not.
55
56 Jac

```

(GJ 13/06/99)

The message counters the specific quoting rule formulated by Jiles by making the computer program a relevant issue. By introducing the subject of newsreaders and ascribing a causal connection between the computer application and the action of the participant, Jacqui formulates a form of technological determinism. The newsreader 'want[s] you to type at the top', hence leaving the automatically quoted element at the bottom. By introducing the agency of the machine, Jacqui mitigates the *responsibility* of the participant. In this way interaction is developed such that certain allowances should be made when accusing participants of deviance. Yet, a

deeper consequence of formulating this exception rule is to qualify the rule's normal application, i.e. given appropriate software, the rule of sequential ordering is in place.

To summarise, the message by 'the Looney' is criticised for employing a particular quoting technique – the placing of quoted elements after new textual elements. This criticism is accomplished by a number of rule-telling events that formulate correct behaviour. An instance of rule-telling is undermined through the formulation of the automatic features of certain computer programs. The 'telling of the machine' works to alleviate the criticism of 'the Looney' by removing the responsibility to act in a particular way in this situation.

What this sequence shows is that even the default features of a computer application, in this case the automatic full 'quoting' of previous messages in a newsreader application, is open to interactional accountability; whether activity should be seen as a product of the machine – in some sense automatic and beyond individual responsibility – is a product of interaction. The 'machine telling' event works interactionally to address troubles, alleviate blame, and do a range of other interactional work.

In this case the quoted/new text ordering is made a matter of comment. Looney is a new participant and over time 'learns the lesson' of correct text ordering. However in the next example the participant employs the new text/quote shape repeatedly, even when he is criticised by a number of people. The impression given is that he deliberately employs the new text followed by quoted text shape to do particular interactional work – while acknowledging the previous participant and placing his message in the sequence of the thread, he makes irrelevant the particular content of the previous message, and provides greater license for his own message to range in content. He misuses the sequential properties of newsgroup messages that provide for context.

It was noticeable from the coding exercise that a participant identified as 'taichi' continually places new text before the quoted element of his messages. In this case however the quoted segment is not the full message, instead new text is placed before a selected piece of the quoted text (that includes an automatically generated identifying line). Here is an example message:

```
16 [Header Information]
17 Hi Dave from Germany,
18 Did you here about the veteran of world war two who lived in the USA who
19 tried to get veterans benefits here and it turned out that he was in the
20 German army? It is said that in war time, it is not who is right but who
21 is left!
22 If you check out my post to Genein, you will find that I see the spirit
```

23 world in a little different light. I lean towards the Sci-Fi explanation  
 24 of various planes of reality with similar functioning laws and physical  
 25 attributes. Possibly, some day we will figure out a way to communicate  
 26 with other planes of existence but as long as scientists will not accept  
 27 the fact that this is a possibility, it is not likely. There is also the  
 28 possibility that we can create physical things through electronics like the  
 29 Sci-Fi replicator but as long as science does not want to deal with  
 30 creative concepts that is another unlikely. there is endless possibility  
 31 if people can make the quantum leap to open end possibilities. Give a  
 32 German tool maker a machine and a piece of metal and who knows what he  
 33 might come up with. Maybe our dreams are much more real than we imagine.  
 34 In another dimension, purple dragons may be common place.  
 35 Taichi  
 36  
 37 Dave Blair <davex158@bigfoot.com> wrote in article  
 38 <JamW3.4867\$Gj3.278838@typ11a.deja.bcandid.com>...  
 39 >  
 40 > genein <genein@worldnet.att.net> schrieb in  
 41 > im Newsbeitrag:  
 42 > 80btan\$iju\$2@bgtnsc02.worldnet.att.net...

(t.h.p. 13aaaa)

The message to which this message is anchored, the one denoted by the line 'Dave Blair  
 <davex158@bigfoot.com> wrote in article' looks like this:

28 genein <genein@worldnet.att.net> schrieb in  
 29 im Newsbeitrag:  
 30 80btan\$iju\$2@bgtnsc02.worldnet.att.net...  
 31 >  
 32 > MadGuide <EvilEvilEvil@hotmail.com> wrote  
 33 in message  
 34 >  
 35 news:382922c1.5062370@news.mindspring.com...  
 36 > > We were created in the image of God?  
 37 > >  
 38 > > Does God have a nose? Why? Does he need  
 39 > > to breath too?  
 40 > >  
 41 > > Does God have teeth? Why? Does he need to  
 42 > > eat?  
 43 > >  
 44 > > Does God have legs? Why? Does he walk  
 45 > > wherever he is?  
 46 > >  
 47 > > Does God have hair? Why? He doesn't need  
 48 > > it at all.  
 49 > >  
 50 > > We couldn't have been created in the  
 51 > > image of God. That's a fairy  
 52 > > tale.  
 53 >  
 54 > in one of my posts not too long ago i  
 55 > stated much the same, but for different  
 56 > reasons, it is my belief (assuming a god)  
 57 > that it is the spirit of god that is  
 58 > being spoken of not the physical.....and so  
 59 > the possibility is still there and  
 60 > yet to be disproven.....  
 61  
 62 Interesting point. Does the "spirit of God"  
 63 exist only in "men's hearts", as the saying  
 64 goes, or do you mean a spiritual God living  
 65 outside our dimension (to use modern sci-fi  
 66 allegory)? I know religious people who see it  
 67 both ways. In the former, no, it can't be  
 68 disproven or proven, it's more a metaphoric  
 69 statement of personal orientation than a  
 70 literal statement of faith. The second cannot  
 71 be proven, but \*is\* an unsupportable claim,  
 72 so the "prove there isn't a purple dragon"  
 73 counterargument applies.  
 74

75 Dave  
 76  
 77 --  
 78 Dave Blair <DaveX158@bigfoot.com>  
 79 Halle/Saale, Germany

(t.p.h. 13aaa)

The previous message by Dave Blair might be glossed as being broadly about God. The quoted section sets up the notion that for humans to be created in the image of God is a 'fairy tale' because God does not have physical attributes. This is then developed by the quoted section from Gegein who points to the 'spirit of god' being the replicated feature in humans. Dave Blair's concern then is to build upon this argument and by asking exactly what is meant by the 'spirit of god'.

In Taichi's message, this whole argument is missing. The message addresses Dave Blair directly with a shortened version of his name (that seems to infer familiarity) and the denotation of where he is from – 'Dave from Germany'. There follows a peculiar story about a German veteran who claims benefits here (USA perhaps). Then follows a section that might seem to address one small aspect of the previous message:

22 If you check out my post to Gegein, you will find that I see the spirit  
 23 world in a little different light. I lean towards the Sci-Fi explanation  
 24 of various planes of reality with similar functioning laws and physical  
 25 attributes.

This could be seen to be referring to Dave Blair's implied question about the 'spirit of god' being in some way 'outside our dimension'. The message then moves on to elaborate this 'sci-fi explanation' and moves towards the broad assertion that 'there is endless possibility if people can make the quantum leap to open-end possibilities'.

The point we would like to make is that by not placing the previous message as a quoted element (at the beginning of his message) Taichi has greater freedom to construct his message as he pleases. The placing of the minimal quoted element at the end seems to anchor the new text in the previous message but disengages the need for Taichi to specifically address the points being made. The reason that it is placed at the end is perhaps because cutting it down leaves the identifying line. If it was placed at the top there would be an obvious gap, the message would be recognisably ignored (or some such thing).

Taichi repeats this structure (or ones very similar to it) a number of times. Out of the 27 messages in the corpus authored by Taichi, 18 are of similar structure to that outlined above, 2

contain no text at all, five contain full quoted text *at the end of the message* and only in 2 does he engage with the previous message and place text within a quoted section. Both are answers to participants who have engaged with one of his previous messages and called him by name.

The placing of quoted segments at the end of the message would appear to distance Taichi from the need to engage with the previous messages. This causes annoyance on the part of the other participants. In one case a participant edits back in a feature of a previous message that Taichi has edited out (13laaac).

### Maintaining sequential integrity

As we have seen, there are occasions where the automatic functions of the software program can unsettle internal sequential integrity. When a reply command is carried out and the previous message's text is automatically copied into a new message window the cursor can be automatically positioned in two different places: either before or after the quoted text segment. It might seem an unimportant and analytically uninteresting point, but it has very real consequences for the structure of the new message. Put simply, the new text *precedes* the quoted text. Now if the assertion made above is true, that the internal sequential integrity is a fundamental feature of newsgroup messages, we should see the participants actively reinforcing the appropriate order of text elements through particular editing techniques.

One such example occurs in the corpus of 'turn-taking units' collected for this thesis (we have seen part of this message thread earlier):

```

19 [Header information]
20
21 On Sat, 9 Oct 1999, Chis <spam@cornbeef.co.uk> stated this considered
22 view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -
23 >o> PS, Loads of great potential vidcaps
24 >o>from this show - check out my
25 >o> website in the next day or so.
26 >
27 >ooh fun!
28 >
29 >Paul do you do sound waves too?
30
31 Well I (foolishly) downloaded an 'upgrade' to my WinTV software, and now
32 I can't capture sound files.
33 --
34 Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!
35
36 Website at http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/

```

(u.m.t.f. 23ba)



This message is some way into a sequence of messages. To give the message a descriptive history the writer of the present message is also the person that wrote the lines from 23-25 in which a conversation about 'Friends' the American sitcom has turned to the recordings of elements of this show on computer ('vidcaps', line 23) and their presentation on Paul's web page. The previous message writer has responded with an affirmative 'ooh fun!' (line 27) and asked whether these recordings contain sound. In this message Paul admits that he has upgraded the necessary software but now cannot record sounds (lines 31-33). The message that follows this one is written by Tags:

```

18 [Header information]
19
20 Cool, I have a Hauppauge WinTV card - could you give me the URL for that
21 upgrade please? I couldn't find it on the hauppauge website.
22
23 Cheers,
24
25 --
26 Tags
27 web design - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk
28 html help - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/htmlhelp/
29 search - http://www.limitwebdesign.co.uk/search/
30 --
31 "I watched the stars crash in the sea"
32
33 Paul Hyett wrote in message ...
34 >On Sat, 9 Oct 1999, Chis <spam@cornbeef.co.uk> stated this considered
35 >view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -
36 >>o> PS, Loads of great potential vidcaps from this show - check out my
37 >>o> website in the next day or so.
38 >>
39 >>ooh fun!
40 >>
41 >>Paul do you do sound waves too?
42 >
43 >Well I (foolishly) downloaded an 'upgrade' to my WinTV software, and now
44 >I can't capture sound files.
45 >--
46 >Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!
47 >
48 >Website at http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/

```

(u.m.t.f. 23baa)

Tags's message has a full copy of the text from Paul's message (lines 34 to 48). This quoted text comes *after* the new text that Tags has contributed (lines 20 to 31). In this new text Tags asks for the URL ('Unique Resource Location') of the 'upgraded' software mentioned by Paul.

The fact that the new text written by Tags appears before the quoted text – to which he is referring – would seem to go against the notion that the sequential order of text is an important feature. That the message structure seems to contradict the notion of sequential integrity is a matter for the participants themselves. As we can see this if we look at Paul's response to Tags's message:

19 [Header information]  
 20  
 21 On Sat, 9 Oct 1999, Tags <tags@limitwebdesign.co.uk> stated this  
 22 considered view. Waking from my doze, I hastily scrawled -  
 23  
 24 >>>Paul do you do sound waves too?  
 25 >>  
 26 >>Well I (foolishly) downloaded an  
 27 >>'upgrade' to my WinTV software, and now  
 28 >>I can't capture sound files.  
 29  
 30 >Cool, I have a Hauppauge WinTV card - could  
 31 >you give me the URL for that  
 32 >upgrade please? I couldn't find it on the hauppauge website.  
 33  
 34 You want an upgrade that PREVENTS you from saving sounds? :)  
 35  
 36 The upgrade I have is 2.1 for W95, but that was several months back so  
 37 there may be a letter one by now.  
 38  
 39 I DID find it on the Hauppauge website though.  
 40 --  
 41 Paul 'US Sitcom Fan' Hyett - The Wild Frame Grabber of the Net!  
 42  
 43 Website at <http://www.activist.demon.co.uk/USsitcoms/>

(u.m.t.f. 23baaa)

If we work out which textual elements have come from where we notice that Paul has rearranged the text from the previous message. Lines 26-28 in 23baaa have come from lines 43-44 in 23baa and lines 30-32 in 23baaa has come from lines 20-21 in 23baa. This second segment comes *before* the first in the original message, but here comes after. Paul has selectively edited the message so that the message elements follow each other in a sequentially relevant order. He has reinvested the new message with *internal sequential integrity*. This rearranging of the text, in itself, does not follow the principle of sequential integrity (in that it does not respect and maintain the order of the text in the previous message). However in breaking with the principle Paul has 'repaired' the sequential order of the message elements.

What is clear – and often taken for granted – is that newsgroup activity is characterised by sequential integrity. That is messages are constructed in such a way as to exhibit both relational (between messages) and internal (in the text of messages) features that mimic and respect sequential ordering. Where this is not the case there is accountable marking of messages. These features are explainable in terms of local management of interaction. That is the building of textual structures precipitated on contingent and immediate concerns.

### **Consequences and possibilities of sequential integrity – the three-part-turn unit**

The observation of the data corpus resulted in a reoccurring 'noticing' of textual formations denoted, at the time, as a 'three part turn' (3 p.t.). An example is seen in the above message. At a common-sense level these were felt to 'look like' conversation in that the text from two or more

participant's messages were arranged in close relation to one another. The textual elements were usually quite short (one maybe two sentences), contingently relevant to one another (in that they 'developed a point', 'argued an issue', and the like), and message or turn elements were arranged in three's<sup>70</sup>.

The following message was identified in the descriptive coding exercise as containing a turn-taking unit of text:

```

14 [header information]
15
16 >o> > ooh fun!
17 >o> > Can we feed pidgeons too?
18 >o>
19 >o> We can mug em too :)
20 >
21 >Nooooooooo!
22 >We can't!
23
24 yes we can, they deserve it i had one sit on my shoulder and peack my head I
25 had sunburn on my shoulder tooo!!

```

(u.m.t.f. 9aaaa)

In this example (9aaaa), the lines from 16 to 25 contain a series of textual elements. Lines 16 to 22 are quoted textual elements denoted by the use of the '>' and 'o>' ASCII characters. By counting the number of quoting characters, the participants can determine (as can the analyst) from 'how many messages ago' the particular textual element comes. The 'new' text, written by 'Lovebug', is contained in lines 24 to 25.

The effect is a series of textual elements fitted together in a conversation-like manner. In that it 'appears' conversational, it also mimics or represents a textual representation of verbal interaction – it has a script like quality. Each textual element (quoted or new) is represented without identifying text and is dependent upon the content of the previous textual utterance for its relevance or context. In this way it engenders a sense of immediacy and contextual relevance that mimics the temporal relatedness of verbal interaction.

This message structure furnishes a temporally separated series of written textual messages (generated by geographically dispersed interactants) with a character akin to face-to-face communication. We can look to see how it developed over time by looking to the 'contingent history' of the conversation-like message.

## Tracing the 'contingent history' of a message<sup>71</sup>

The phrase 'contingent history' conveys the notion that a newsgroup message, and its constituent elements, develops over a series of turns at interaction; and that the eventual outcome (the current message content) is dependent upon a specific set of activities carried out in the *preceding* messages<sup>72</sup>.

The message that immediately precedes message one is this one:

```

20 [Header information]
21
22 In article <37FA62CE.5125451D@riptide.com>, Alex Washtell <al@riptide.com>
23 wrote:
24
25 o> Kew! You can come? Excellent.. this
26 o> sounds like it could be *the*
27 o> meet.. with a poss 8 or so people, and
28 o> maybe more :)
29
30 yes but like I said @ 2pm
31
32 o>>o> Activities: Mug old ladies..
33 o>>o> seriously, anything is up, suggest now!
34 o>>
35 o>> ooh fun!
36 o>> Can we feed pidgeons too?
37 o>
38 o> We can mug em too :)
39
40 Nooooooooo!
41 We can't!
42
43 Only if they chase me - btw if I'm going near pidgeons is neil coming?
44
45 o> Al - Who adds Chis, Fiona and Chis' laddo o> to the list
46
47 Put a question mark by Chis' Laddo btw, because he may or may not come -
48 DON'T READ INTO THAT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
49
50 [signature]
```

(u.m.t.f. 9aaa)

Message 9aaa, written by Chis, is larger than that written by Lovebug (9aaaa). By comparing the two messages we can trace the textual changes that have occurred. When a reply command is carried out in a newsgroup application, the default position tells us that the total text is included in a new message window. The person who carries out the reply command has the option to edit the automatically generated text and add new text. The 'quoted' text in 9aaaa (lines 16 to 22) appears in lines 32 to 38 in 9aaa. This means that Lovebug, the writer of 9aaaa, has removed the remaining text – lines 21 to 34 and lines 42-50 (and the signature file).

The message by Chis (9aaa) already contains a number of quoted elements. Lines 25-28, lines 32-38 and line 45 contain text from one message ago. Lines 32-38 contains quoted elements from

three messages ago, two messages ago and one message ago. The segment 32 to 41 (that includes the quoted segments, 32-38) looks like the conversational segment from the first message we looked at.

Let us turn to the message that preceded 9aaa; 9aa was written by Al:

```

18 [header information]
19
20 Chis wrote:
21 >
22 >In article
23 > <37F9217F.A377BB8B@riptide.com>, Alex >Washtell <al@riptide.com>
24 > wrote:
25 >o>
26 >o> Okay, it is getting really hard to
27 >o> organise a meet here with so many
28 >o> people saying something like "Yeah,
29 >o> sounds cool" but not actually giving
30 >o> me any more information when I ask
31 >o> them...
32 > o>
33 > o> This is what was originally planned:
34 > o>
35 > o> Place: London
36 o> Date: Sat October 16th (A week this
37 > Sat)
38 > o> Time: 10am (Negotiable)
39 >
40 > Hmm can I meet you guys at 2pm somewhere???
41 > Preferably paddington...actually if
42 > anyone whos goings got a moblie I can
43 > ccall them to tell them what time I'm
44 > gonna get in and blah blah, I'll
45 >probably bring Fiona and maybe my laddio
46 > if he's down.
47
48 Kewl! You can come? Excellent.. this sounds like it could be *the*
49 meet.. with a poss 8 or so people, and maybe more :)
50
51 >o> Activities: Mug old ladies.. seriously, >o> anything is up, suggest now!
52 >
53 > ooh fun!
54 > Can we feed pidgeons too?
55
56 We can mug em too :)
57
58 Al - Who adds Chis, Fiona and Chis' laddo to the list
59 --
60 [automatically generated signature]

```

(u.m.t.f. 9aa)

The quoted segment in 9aaa at lines 25-28 is the lines 48-49 in 9aa. Lines 32 to 38 in 9aaa are lines 51-56 in 9aa, and line 45 in 9aaa is line 58 in 9aa. This means that lines 18 to 47, and 59 onwards have been removed from 9aaa. Lines 53-56 in 9aa contain the text that will end up in example one as part of the turn-taking unit. Here in 9aa they already have the characteristic of a series of textual turns.

The message that preceded 9aa is the following written by Chis (9a). For the first time we see a message that does not contain accumulated quoted elements; instead, the message contains

quoted elements from only the message that preceded it (this is not surprising, given that 9a is the second message in a message thread). Lines 48 to 49 contain the textual elements that will eventually form part of the turn-taking unit in 9aaa.

```

21 [Header information]
22
23 In article <37F9217F.A377BB8B@riptide.com>, Alex Washtell <al@riptide.com>
24 wrote:
25 o>
26 o> Okay, it is getting really hard to
27 o> organise a meet here with so many
28 o> people saying something like "Yeah,
29 o> sounds cool" but not actually giving
30 o> me any more information when I ask
31 o> them...
32 o>
33 o> This is what was originally planned:
34 o>
35 o> Place: London
36 o> Date: Sat October 16th (A week this Sat)
37 o> Time: 10am (Negotiable)
38
39 Hmm can I meet you guys at 2pm somewhere???
40
41 Preferably paddington....actually if anyone whos goings got a moblie I can
42 ccall them to tell them what time I'm gonna get in and blah blah, I'll
43 probably bring Fiona and maybe my laddio if he's down.
44
45 o> Activities: Mug old ladies.. seriously,
46 o> anything is up, suggest now!
47
48 ooh fun!
49 Can we feed pidgeons too?
50
51 [automatically generated signature]

```

(u.m.t.f. 9a)

If we look to the first message in the sequence, message 9, we can identify the editing move performed by Chis in 9a:

```

18 [Header information]
19
20 Okay, it is getting really hard to organise a meet here with so many
21 people saying something like "Yeah, sounds cool" but not actually giving
22 me any more information when I ask them...
23
24 This is what was originally planned:
25
26 Place: London
27 Date: Sat October 16th (A week this Sat)
28 Time: 10am (Negotiable)
29 Activities: Mug old ladies.. seriously, anything is up, suggest now!
30
31 That's all the details you need to know right now.. either you can make
32 it or you can't.. IF you can, I know that at least 4 or 5 people are
33 coming, then I'll discuss details...
34
35 But because I received few replies, this meet date may seem to early for
36 you, so be my guest to rip it to shreds and suggest a new one.
37
38 And for god sake, PLEASE R*S*V*P as I want to get this sorted...
39
40 Thanks,
41
42 Al - MMM... Meet
43
44 [automatic signature]

```

(u.m.t.f. 9)

What Chis has done is separate out line 29 from message 9 for comment. The separated line 'Activities: Mug old ladies.. seriously, anything is up, suggest now!' is separated out because of the insertion of text after the line, 'Time: 10am (Negotiable) that generates comment on the time and place of the 'meet'. The writer of example four has removed all the text that comes after the 'activities...' line.

The 'separating out' of the single line is what informs the foundation for the building of the (various) turn-taking units that follows. One of which being the eventual incident identified in the coding exercise. This separating is a reflexive move that defines a previously continuous part of a message as a part individually comment-on-able. By so doing it construes the lines as a single object.

We might say that the occurrence of a turn-taking unit – that is a series of single lined textual elements arranged as a conversation – is dependent upon the separating out of a line of text at some point in the contingent history of the message. There needs to occur at some point in the contingent history of a message the formulation of a *single turn unit* in which the text needs to become an object.

An important point to note is that both the single turn unit and the turn-taking unit are the product of human activity. They are not a product of the computer software. The potential for such features are written into in software in the possible moves that each participant can make, but they require specific activity, on the part of a series of participants, to bring them about. Both the turn unit and the turn-taking unit are the *accomplishment* of participants in their mundane activity.

The sequential integrity of newsgroup interaction quoting allows for the accumulation of simple line elements over a series of messages – eventually leading to the 'conversation-like' textual construction.

---

## Implication and applications

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The presented analysis of newsgroup interaction built upon four strategies of looking to gain a systematic appreciation of newsgroup message content, structure, and quoting mechanisms. Participants, in the course of their participation and interaction, employ these mechanisms to do a number of creative activities within the affordances of the machine environment. The finding of sequential integrity as a context-free feature of interaction was predicated upon the development of a technical language – to describe each message and its content, simple observation of message content – and its presentation in the descriptive coding table, and directed observation – in the identification of quoting shapes. This practice-set and resulting research products are available for alternative analysis. Indeed an advantage of these methods is exactly this availability. Other analytic efforts, not presented here, include two directed toward identity: in an extension of the cutting of signature ideas; and the creation of a ‘fictitious’ character. Both in some way relate to the constructed nature of participation and authenticity.

The specific finding of sequential integrity was presented at HICCS, the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, a conference dedicated to scholarship and design. With respect to the design of applications the paper pointed toward a particular design mentality:

‘That these processes are contingent and situated should warn against so-called ‘plan based’ design initiatives, and encourage design that recognizes human mechanisms of sense-making within the boundaries set by the application. With regard to the particular sense-making practices here, design should enhance, rather than restrict, those human quoting mechanisms employed by the participants’ (Reed 2001:9-10<sup>73</sup>).

A pragmatic ethnomethodological basis holds great potential for addressing and developing issues related to design. Not only is empirical investigation of everyday practices advantageous (and necessary) for areas such as HCI, but a keen eye toward the practices of the researcher in such endeavours can only motivate a conscious awareness of reflexivity issues. The mentality of this thesis underpins the author’s current research into the development of telephone conference systems as recreational mediums under the multidisciplinary PACCIT initiative<sup>74</sup>.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE HERMENEUTIC SPIRAL AND INDUCTIVE REASONING

Harvey Sacks envisioned a social science that takes instances of social life and simply observes them. As such this vision has been characterised as an ‘empirical philosophy’ (ten Have 1997). His means of accomplishing this was through the tape recording of telephone conversations. He might not have everything that happened, but at least what he had he knew happened (Sacks 1984). In this thesis, we have claimed an empirical warrant for newsgroup interaction – which does not require *researcher* machinic-productive processes – and claim this to be a truer instance of ‘collecting moments of social life’. More than knowing what-we-have-actually-happened, we can say that we have the total happening; whatever interaction was done, we have – newsgroup data are un-reduced and non-redacted (Koreman and Wyatt 1996). Taking instances of social life is further aided by the *persistent nature* of such interaction; once instantiated they remain, recorded, archived, and indexed. If Harvey Sacks were still alive perhaps he would turn to such persistent moments.

Newsgroups interaction entails a mutual experience of a text based message system – that by Internet standards is old and unsophisticated – by participants who need never meet nor come from the same country, culture or social group. Yet it is sensible, logical and meaningful to those who take part. The question has to be ‘how’. In Garfinkel’s terms Internet newsgroup interaction comes packaged as a conspicuous setting<sup>75</sup>.

One way that this interaction is structured is through particular behaviour afforded by the technical nature of the environment; textual quoting provides means through which participants can do a range of interactional things: by systematically observing a large number of messages we were able to develop a descriptive shorthand to show this; by finding that descriptions fall under five basic shapes we were able to approach the activity and understand the consequences of the various quoting mechanisms employed; by directing our observation, we gained a picture of the quoting mechanisms in and as sequences of activity. Ultimately we were able to see an underlying feature of all quote based interaction, the sequential integrity of internal textual ordering. That sequential integrity was ‘underlying’ came across in the ways it was worked up as a fundamental expectation that could only be mitigated against by introducing the computer application as

determinant of behaviour. Sequential integrity was in this way construed as an automatic consequence (or not) of participation, it was a taken-for-granted aspect.

Sequential integrity is a context-free feature of newsgroup interaction that is enacted by participants (and the machine) largely without realising it. Messages are represented in the order in which they are produced (external), and text within these messages respects the textual ordering of the messages from which they draw (internal). Only when deviation from placing text in authentic sequential relations occurs does it become necessary to do some sort of repair work. This might occur in a rule-telling event, or by enforcing sequential integrity through directed rearrangement of text. Deviant quoting does have its uses, and disregarding sequential integrity can be used creatively. In all deviant cases, however, sequential integrity is a 'noticeable absence' (Sacks et al 1974).

Internal sequential integrity – that is, within messages – is not fully constrained by the technology. The gap provided by the creative 'affordances' (Hutchby 2001) of the technical machine, allows the human machine to function. Internal sequential integrity is fundamental to a range of behaviours in newsgroups. These include enacting physical action, emotion and intimacy. The script-like quality of accumulated textual elements enacts a performance of reality that, like the written novel, play, and musical score, 'does temporality'. Linear time is no longer a resource but an accomplished practically enacted and understood matter.

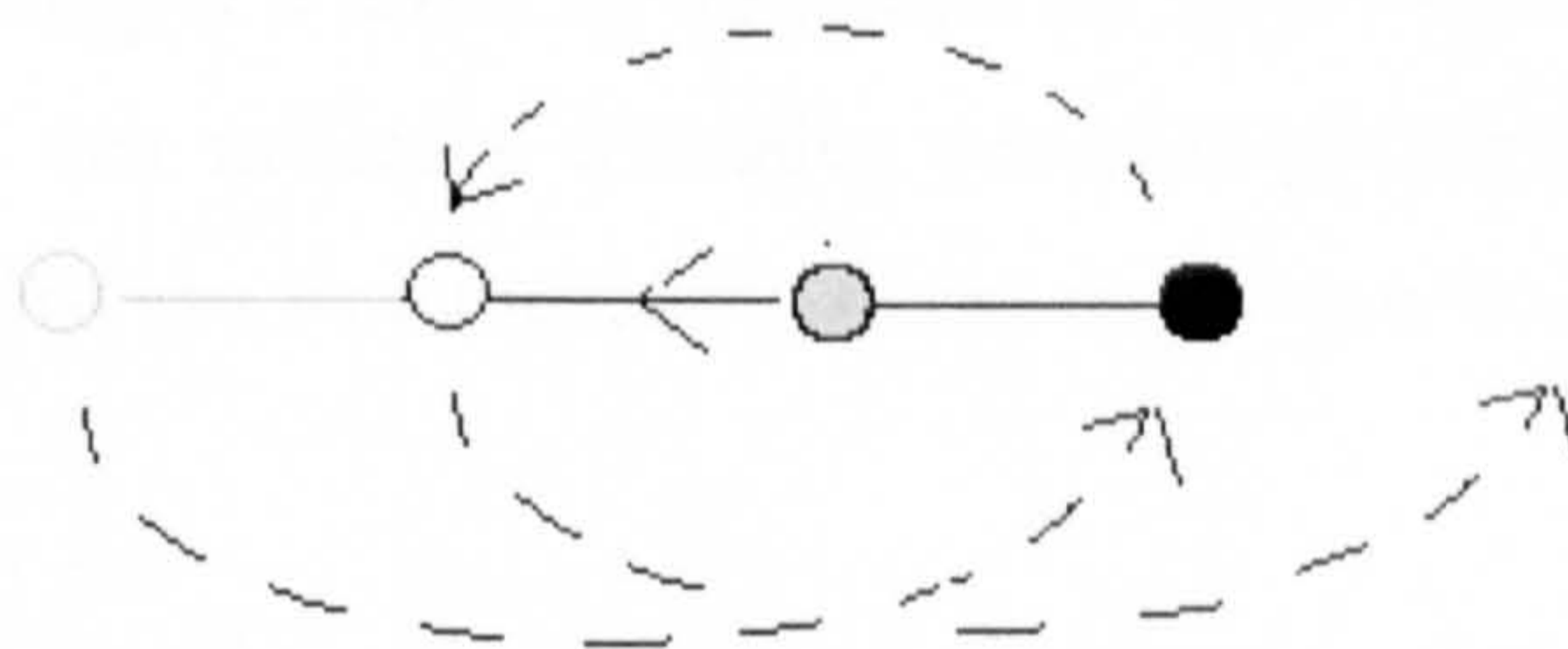
Sequential integrity is not a unique feature of newsgroup interaction. Sacks long ago showed that story and joke telling were contingent matters of enacting particular elements in order (1974; 1978; 1986). The problem of such accounts however is that for conversation analysis (CA) sequence has become a taken-for-granted element and is built in to the productive processes of analysis<sup>76</sup>. And more, because sequence and time are complicit in verbal behaviour, it is impossible to have one without the other. In the newsgroup medium not only can we see time enacted through sequence, but also sequence is an ingrained feature, produced-as-observable before analysis. Far from a new form of behaviour, newsgroup interaction provides a more fundamental access to sense-making in human activity.

Our project embraced the formalist cast to achieve these insights, however we also made part of our rationale recognition of how such activity is construed as a matter of documentary interpretation. Our chosen route to enable us to do this was the notion of the hermeneutic spiral. In that we have embraced formalism, we are responsible to say something about empirical or

inductive reasoning and the hermeneutic spiral. Much of our reflexive insight and intent should be evident in the manner in which this thesis is written<sup>77</sup>. However, the following is an exemplar of the reflexive turn, which seeks to describe certain methods employed. In that pragmatic ethnomethodology finds such reflexive processes ‘essentially uninteresting’, we mean this as a description and not a criticism. We have no wish to undermine the ‘how of newsgroup interaction’ with the ‘how of research’<sup>78</sup>; instead we recognise their mutual elaboration<sup>79</sup>.

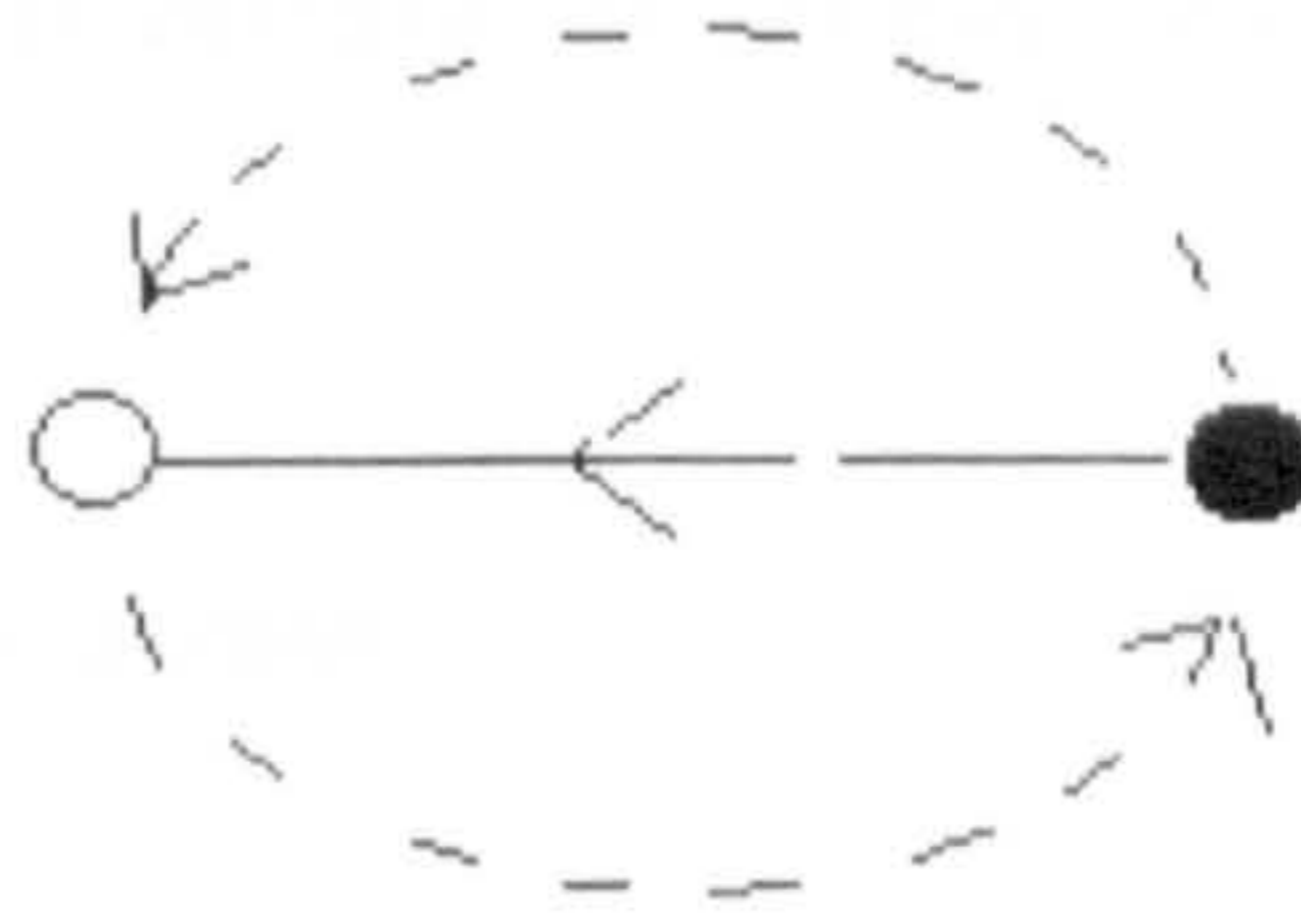
### The hermeneutic spiral revisited

As a reminder, we conceived of the hermeneutic spiral as a continual process of reflexivity and indexicality. In terms of our diagram, the dots move rightward in an incessant manner:



As the observing subject (the black dot) reflexively interprets the phenomenon (the white dot), it changes the object. This object then acts as an indexed understanding for the next turn at turn at interpretation, which has moved due to the change in the object. Indexed understanding and reflexive interpretation exist in a documentary relationship, such that one relies upon the other in a mutually elaborative relationship.

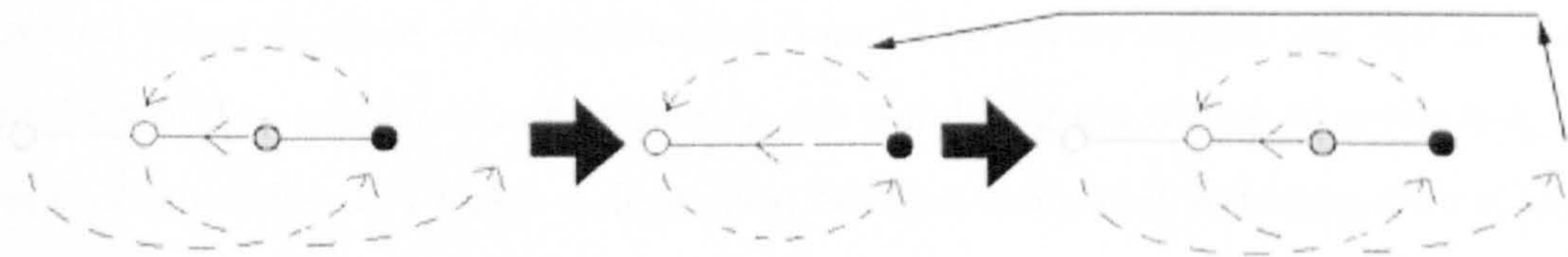
All reasoning is populated by moments of objectification where the rightward movement of the dots is stilled and the hermeneutic progression is forgotten. These are moments of the management of reflexivity and indexicality. We have encountered a number of these, including ‘Goffman’s quotation marks’ and ‘Garfinkel’s asterisk’<sup>80</sup>. Here, the *same* object is experienced by an *unchanged* subject, or,



This time the dashed arrow at the top and bottom are actively construed as having no consequence for either object (white dot) or subject (black dot)<sup>81</sup>.

Such moments do not persist however and soon the progression of black dot to grey, and the movement of white dots, start again.

Similarly, inductive reasoning is a series of 'progressions' and 'stops' in the hermeneutic spiral. The main difference<sup>82</sup> is that inductive reasoning provides persistent objects – or immutable mobiles (Latour 1987) – that can be returned to later in the progression.



Possibly the most interesting aspect of inductive reasoning are the moves from one to the other (i.e. the black arrows). However that will have to remain a future interest.

#### *Token moments in the hermeneutic spiral*

We can think of token moments of objectification or stops; and token moments of progression – where we can see the mutual elaboration of object and subject (phenomenon and analysis).

## Token moments of objectification

### *Newsgroup interaction as a persistent phenomenon*

A primary moment of objectification with our phenomenon is in its persistent nature. Newsgroup messages are written recorded and archived textual objects. But what we would offer here is the work necessary to see them as persistent. To shore up newsgroup data as an object it was necessary to claim that it amounted to the total activity *of relevance* to our endeavours. Building on Sacks, we claimed what we had was all there was to have. In claiming this we *necessarily* disregarded a host of aspects. Not least the reading of the messages by participants sitting at their computers. But more particularly, in our observation of these data, we claimed to observe (and experience) them as participants do. What this required was a token moment in objectification, which is employed continually without recourse in everyday experience.

### *Observation*

The simplest token moment of objectification occurs in everyday experience. We do not merely observe the world as naïve voyeurs; as soon as the wandering eye settles on something, it settles on a *perceived* something. CA makes a distinction between motivated and unmotivated looking, as though it were possible to apprehend without bringing interpretative resources. We used the distinction simple and directed observation earlier to denote two possible moments of apprehension, but in truth, all observation is directed in some fashion, at a fundamental level. The assertion of simple unmotivated observation is a practice for removing subjective apprehension and is employed continually in a wide variety of members' truth claims, which rely upon what a person has seen, their experiences, what they know, etc.

The perception of things in the world is a token moment of objectification. As something like an ingrained feature of all experience, it stands as a foundation for a series of 'strategies' of seeing. One such strategy of seeing is writing. It is impossible to write down everything we see; not least because observation requires examples, and finding examples requires further observation. But more substantially, when writing, sensory information does not flow onto the page, but is represented through orthography – interpreted in characters, words and sentences. Orthography enforces reification of the perceived object. We have of course written down our observations of newsgroup messages.

### *Systematic observation*

Once described through deliberate *looking and writing*, narrative attributes a phenomenon a characteristic; once a characteristic, this attribution functions to index future *seeing*. (For an extended use of the looking/seeing trope see Ashmore and Reed 2001). For example, once a part of a newsgroup message is described as 'quoted text', it is difficult to not see quoted text in messages. These moments of objectification are cumulative and provide a picture of something seen. But more, indexed observations elaborate future 'seeings' of the same object.

Developing a systematic mentality, wherein 'looking' was aided and objectified in the descriptive coding of newsgroup messages, further enhanced the warranted observation of newsgroup interaction. Not least because evidencing the study's operationalization, reclaimed the 'lost moments' of CA observation. But more, the observation of a large number of messages increased the evidential utility of our data: the features we observed, we observed in hundreds of newsgroup messages.

### **Token moments of mutual elaboration**

We can offer a few token moments where the mutual elaboration of research object and research practice can be seen to be in a progressive intimate relationship. To do so we have to turn them in to moments of objectification.

### *Quoting and evidence*

We can detect an aspect of the hermeneutic spiral in this work when we consider the documentary relationship of pragmatic ethnomethodology – as an empirical approach – and the action of quoting real text in our research phenomenon. Just as such quoting is treated as evidence for our claims, so participants in Internet newsgroups utilise the realist cast to get their work done. Quoted text for them is an unproblematic object, which they formulate to form their own subjective existence. And so do we.

We played with this feature in our approach section when we quoted from an academic listserv, and used such text as a basis for claiming a particular position on incommensurability. The fact that we didn't engage with 'the argument' (at least directly) contained in the text, but instead utilised it as an instance of interaction between those engaged in the debate, mirrors what newsgroup interactants do as a matter of course. They too choose between pointing-to-text-as-an-object (as evidence) and engaging-with-the-text-as-a-matter-of-contingent-relatedness (as conversation). For our argumentative purposes, we chose the former possibility.

### *Turn units and contingent history*

In what might be seen as a complicated admixture of objectification and mutual elaboration, we recognised that newsgroup participants – through their quoting practices – produce a 'single turn unit'. Once formed this object could be engaged with in a progressive manner while remaining a returnable to object. The mutual elaboration of research practice and participant practice comes in to focus when we realise that talking about the 'contingent history' of a message enabled us to see this activity. Formalising the 'contingent history of a message' manages the reflexive propensities of such a move. We can experience such moves contingently when we realise that the notion of 'returning to an immutable mobile' is the practical strategy employed here in our discussion of token moments of objectification. Just as participants create objects through practical means, so do we.

### *Sequential integrity and rhetoric*

Finally, the sequential integrity conception of Internet newsgroup interaction works in an R-circular manner; such that for inductive-reasoning to work – in this case – it too must express sequential integrity. It must work logically, temporally, sequentially through observation, argument, and finding. While possibly a generic feature (or so we might claim), it is understandable here because of the mutual relationship of phenomenon and method. That we found sequential integrity to be an underlying property of newsgroup interaction, allows us to see – in a documentary fashion – its import for getting analysis of its propensities done. Sequential integrity is a practical matter existing in the practices of participant and researcher alike: the way we see, and what we see, exist in the hermeneutic spiral.

These token moments of objectification and mutual elaboration are examples of how we did what we did. Of course, that we have described them here, make them one more example of the documentary method. They stand as examples of sense-making for all practical purposes, and their formulation is consistent with pragmatic ethnomethodology.

What inductive language does is turn observation into discovery, such that the objects were there all along. Systematic observation provides for repeated experience of the same object<sup>83</sup>, through segmented reification of the hermeneutic spiral.

The ultimate success of inductive reasoning is its *proactive* application to the progression of the hermeneutic spiral. That is, in the way it reflexively construes the incessant documentary processes of meaning making as segregated steps towards greater understanding, it successfully introduces 'stops' in the process of meaning. The subtlety of this point should not be lost: Only through the hermeneutic spiral of meaning is it possible to introduce particular indexicality and reflexivity management practices that effectively obfuscate such moves; the hermeneutic spiral is a necessary contingency for inductive reasoning.

### **Pragmatic ethnomethodology as reflexive induction**

What we study and how we study it are intimate matters. That these two things remain (apparently) separate is a matter of practical accomplishment. Inductive reasoning is a reflexive practice, for-all-practical-purposes for doing this. That pragmatic ethnomethodology claims to incorporate such practices in its own accomplishment is one more token moment in the hermeneutic spiral.

\*\*\*\*\* (Goffman 1974)

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### **Author's footnote: Two token moments**

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#### **A gloss on Sacks**

Our project started with a simple idea. In the proposal stages of the PhD it was reasoned that newsgroup text would provide the perfect research focus for (broadly conceived) discourse analysis. Where else, it was reasoned, could we find a better social scene for applying (again



broadly conceived) constructivist understanding of society than here. Talk at the time was of 'virtual environments' (Rheingold 1991; 1995), and a range of approaches was intent on measuring, mapping and moulding this new territory (Hauptman and Motin 1994; Jones 1995; Poster 1995; December 1996; Newhagen and Rafaeli 1996<sup>84</sup>). Newsgroup data appeared the perfect rational vehicle through which to enter this perceived climate of theoretical excess<sup>85</sup>. Ethnomethodology seemed the perfect way to approach the data that matched the researcher's question about how people did what they did<sup>86</sup>.

The point of this reflection is that in many senses the data – newsgroup text – chose, and structured, the approach (admittedly based upon a sociological mentality developed at undergraduate level). Having a persistent phenomenon also resulted in a particular take on ethnomethodology. The mutual elaboration of phenomenon and interpretation was engendered in the project at the outset, as was the empirical intent.

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### Wrighting the thesis

This thesis started with a simple idea, that is 'intractably hard' to describe. While the initial commitment was simple, complexity came when the author tried to follow through this commitment, i.e. the difficulty is in the writing. The idea is quite easy to explain as well (as long as explanation means getting the point over): all activity is a matter of sense-making, including this one. That this activity construes (and for all instances of construal read 'in an R-circular manner') the activity we are talking about, is one example where reflexivity should be a problem, but is not. Ethnomethodology recognises that all activity is a matter of contingent accomplishment, and therefore that ethnomethodology is a matter of contingent accomplishment. That ethnomethodology construes the activity of construal is another example where reflexivity should be a problem, but is not. *How* it is not a problem is what ethnomethodology takes to be ethnomethodology. And therefore the activity of construal, which manages to make the problem not a problem, is what ethnomethodology construes. That ethnomethodology construes the activity of construal, which makes the activity of construal not a problem, is not a problem. This thesis attempts to construe ethnomethodology as construing the activity of construal that makes the activity of construal not a problem, and it does so by not making it a problem – so notifying the reader that this is the only recourse. (\*in breath\*) The problem, with not making it a problem, is that if you do it too convincingly you come across as a naïve realist, and then you have to end

with some text that attempts to explain that you didn't mean this at all. Construing the problem as not a problem, was an 'acting-out' of it not being a problem, and the text didn't mean to say that there wasn't a problem, but that the problem is construed not to be a problem – Because that is the only way *to do* ethnomethodology.

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### Addendum – pragmatic ethnomethodology as ethnomethodological pragmatics

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Pragmatic ethnomethodology (PE) was not, in the first instance, meant to be 'an approach'; rather its formulation was meant as a comment on ethnomethodology as currently construed in the radical works program, on one hand, and a recognition of CA as 'the application' of EM, on the other. Specifically, the re-introduction of 'the Problem' by Garfinkel (and Wieder) in the asymmetric incommensurability article was viewed as a step too far, and it was felt that ethnomethodology needed to be drawn back toward its original emphasis and realisation of the documentary nature of meaning. Which, in the view of the author, had been lost in the move to establish a distinction between (amongst other things) EM, CA and ESP. By applying its own understanding in on itself, with a reflexive move, the idea was to force a realisation of its inclusion in the apparently 'blooming confusion' of the everyday world, as one more world or language game (Wittgenstein 1953). Forcing the view toward an acceptance of formalism – as an 'essentially uninteresting' matter of sense-making – was meant to challenge presuppositions about what ethnomethodology was, what it could do, and how it could do it. Formalism in this case is construed as a concerted remedy for indexicality - just like Goffman's quotation marks and Garfinkel's asterisk – merely an explicit formulation of unavoidable practical matters of sense-making. By recognising CA as underpinned by a specific practice-set of such methods, EM's relationship to CA was re-engaged.

The term 'pragmatic' was envisioned as a prefix to ethnomethodology (i.e. *pragmatic* ethnomethodology) that denoted an (imagined) epistemology, or 'analytic mentality', which in the round could be compared to 'what ethnomethodology was' and be seen to be 'what it was all along'. It was meant to be a purposeful irony.

But then a strange thing happened: pragmatic ethnomethodology started to make sense in and of itself. Construed as a reflexive formalism, it seemed to embody an answer: taken to its logical conclusion (at least in ethnomethodological terms) reflexivity is not 'a Problem' at all. As Collins says if a problem is everywhere, it ceases to be a problem (Collins 1983). Its total consequence is a knowing look nothing more: magic is magic, precisely because it can be explained – that we know there is an explanation doesn't stop us being convinced by it.

It was never the intent, but the potential of ethnomethodological pragmatism came into view – and there waiting was the linguistic approach of pragmatics and other social oriented studies of language. Pragmatic ethnomethodology involves a programmatic quality – wherein emphasis is found in how it does research rather than its 'position' – that makes it potentially applicable in other approaches.

### **Convergence of programmatic ethnomethodology and linguistics<sup>87</sup>**

The relationship between CA and pragmatics has been in evidence for many years: Levinson's (1983) work forms part of the reading list of CA scholarship; More recently Mey's (1993) work includes substantial sections on CA.

Much of Schegloff's work has been moving towards a particular form of linguistics in recent years. This is in evidence in his writings and attendance at many Interactional Linguistics conferences. Linguistics too has moved toward CA in the areas of interactional grammar (Ochs et al 1996) prosody (Cooper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996; 2001) prosodic collaboration (Szczepek 2001). What pragmatic ethnomethodology brings to these areas is a sociological interest in research in context; it completes the circle of use of [pragmatic] research language in the understanding of pragmatic language use.

The question is whether an approach that has described itself as the 'waste basket of linguistics' (Mey 1993:12) can benefit from a sociological approach that is adept at approaching issues of context by being mindful of its own practices?

Pragmatics has its own take on context that stands in contrast to much traditional linguistics. The ambiguity of language 'exists only in the abstract' (Mey 1993:8) and not when people actually use it. Context is a dynamic, ongoing matter of action and it is the 'development of conversation that gives us the clues to understanding' (p. 9). Here we find links to CA.

What such a position does is manage context by making it a speaker's concern (seen in the way speakers develop their interaction). What pragmatic ethnomethodology introduces is the essential 'how' question of the management of context, not only in the phenomenon under study, but also in the rationale of research research.

Already, we see hints of the hermeneutic spiral in Mey comments on context:

'A context is *dynamic*, that is to say, it is an environment that is in steady development, prompted by the continuous interaction of the people engaged in language use, the uses of the language. Context is the quintessential pragmatic concept; it is by definition *proactive*, just as people are. (To live in the 'here and now', the classical *hic et nunc*, is philosophical abstraction)' (p.10)

What pragmatic ethnomethodology does is extend this 'proactive' understanding to context of research.

By way of example the following is a Pragmatic Ethnomethodological position on the 'nature' of newsgroup messages that was written during the Postgraduate period.

### **The question of what newsgroups are: writing or speaking?**

In the writing of the thesis a large period of time was spent in looking through materials, which addressed the *nature* of newsgroup messages and other related Internet textual interaction (IRC, MUDS, MOOs etc.). Broadly speaking this material asks whether newsgroup interaction (for example) is like face-to-face talk or more akin to the written word.

This material was initially included at the writing up stage as a 'wrong turn' – conceived as a set of unnecessary preconceptions. However, when pragmatic ethnomethodology is worked through, and taken seriously as an approach, this material comes back into focus. Pragmatic ethnomethodology addresses the issue of the mutual elaboration of approach and phenomenon. In this regard it has something to say about the relationship of theory to research outcome.

There are a number of examples of the application of linguistic techniques to electronic language in its various forms. Callot and Belmore (1996) apply Biber's 'multidimensional-multi-feature model' (MD-MF) that characterises texts in terms of the relation between communicative function and linguistic feature. They succeed in finding a 'distinctive set of linguistic features' for electronic languages having as it does 'unique situational features' (p. 18).

Simeon J. Yates (1996) compares spoken, written and CMC discourse by focusing on textual, interpersonal and ideational aspects of language use, which includes the examination of pronoun use. Christopher C Werry's (1996) – a description of IRC (Internet Relay Chat) – uses Ferrara's (1991) notion of 'interactive written discourse' and looks at issues of 'addressivity', abbreviation, prosody (the rhythm of language) and gesture.

'Participants tend to play with language, to produce hybrid, heteroglossic forms that incorporate all manner of communicative styles...Participants produce a bricolage of discursive fragments drawn from songs, TV characters, and a variety of different social speech types' (58).

In the ethnography of communication Brenda Danet (1996, 1997a, 1997b) has written a number of articles about newsgroups that address issues of culture, performativity and language, in which the notion that email language is part speech and part writing is proffered. Moran and Hawisher's (1998) assert that

'in [email's] gene pool are all former and current modes and styles of human communication, written and spoken... Email (and by implication other electronic languages including newsgroup language use) is new 'in the sense that one might say a child is new' (p. 80).

These materials presume to theorise language use in these 'new' media before observation occurs. A Pragmatics approach would look to understand whatever language use it found as a contextual matter. Similarly our study of newsgroup data found 'written-ness' and 'spoken-ness' to be a contingent matter. Pragmatic ethnomethodology offers an additional reflexive element, which might explain the wide range of discrepant answer (Biber 1986) to the 'nature question'. By starting with a theory, and then studying these data in terms of it, interpretation and phenomenon mutually elaborate one another. The outcome is as much a product of the practices of research as they are the activity under study. Rather than an abstract definition, pragmatic ethnomethodology

offers inductive means to understand language use in these media, which, at the same time, recognise their own 'proactivity'.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> 'Token moments' is a term we will use in a number of places to define something like 'example'. However in that they are 'real' instances of the moment-by-moment development of the activity, they are not meant to seem somehow removed and commented upon.

<sup>2</sup> Also described by Woolgar as 'the problem of description' (1981b), 'problem of fallibility' (1982) 'fundamental, omnipresent (methodological) problems (1981a), 'problems of interpretation and inference (1979), 'the monster (1982), the methodological horrors (1981a, 1982), methodological dread, a Pandora's box of horrors (1983) (quoted in Ashmore, 1989:170).

<sup>3</sup> If the world and everything in it is made sensible by our understanding, this is just more self-reflection after all.

<sup>4</sup> We have to start with a caveat. Parts of the following commentary are premised on an article attributed to Harvey Sacks called 'Notes on Methodology'. Sacks did not write this article himself; instead it 'consists of a series of programmatic/methodological considerations,' of Sacks, 'culled primarily from his lectures,' by Jefferson (Sacks 1984:21 footnote), introduced and prefixed by Schegloff. The formulation of this article was in response to the lack of such foundational material in Sacks' writings and it is a source of interest and discussion that Sacks did not set out such programmatic statements.

<sup>5</sup> The lack of formal description of CA by Sacks could be attributed to his untimely death in 1975. However, Hutchby and Wooffitt note that Sacks was keen that there should not exist a specified methodology – or 'formal rules of research method' – for conversation analysis (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:93). Instead, Schenkein (1978) talks about the 'analytic mentality' of conversation analysis, which '... involves more a cast of mind, or a way of seeing, than a static and prescriptive set of instructions...' (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:94). Silverman (1998) prefers to talk of 'Sacks's aesthetic for social research'. However these attitudes have not stopped various authors – including Hutchby and Wooffitt strangely – to formulate ways of going about CA, typically through example. For example, Drew lists a set of 'methodological precepts' (Drew 1995). More recently, ten Have (1999) has produced a document that reads like a practical manual.

<sup>6</sup> Without practices that remedy the essential indexicality of language, it would be impossible to do a number of things. One of these things is science. As Garfinkels says 'a distinction between objective expressions and indexical expressions is not only procedurally proper but unavoidable for whosoever would do science...' and 'without the distinction between objective and indexical expressions the victories of generalizing, rigorous, scientific inquiries – logic, mathematics, some of the physical sciences – are unintelligible, the victories would fail, and the inexact sciences would have to abandon their hopes' (Garfinkel 1967:5). Let us be clear here, Garfinkel is not saying here that there is one set of expressions that are indexical and another that are objective. This would deny the indexicality of all meaning making action. What he is saying is that there are certain practices that construe indexical assertions, utterances and meaning making practices *as objective*. Objectivity, and consequentially scientific 'fact', are the product of particular ethnomethods.

'With practical activity the methods by which this substitutions occurs are matters for the activity, they are accomplishments of that activity, 'wherever practical actions are topics of study the promised distinction and substitutability of objective for indexical expressions remains programmatic in ever *particular* case and in every *actual* occasion in which the distinction or substitutability must be demonstrated' (Garfinkel 1967:6).

<sup>7</sup> They compare favourably with the 'Alternative literary style' of SSK and other writings that aim to disrupt a simple reading, and single interpretation or aim to convey the reflexive nature of language through concerted literary breaching strategies.

<sup>8</sup> Etcetera

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that Schegloff applied a very similar argument to analysis that Zimmerman carried out in 1975 with Candace West. In an analysis of talk between men and women Zimmerman and West found that men interrupted women more. This formed the basis of a commentary on gendered language. Schegloff (1987) pointed out that this analysis relied upon categorising a range of interactional activities as 'interruptions' and that when analysed in detail this categorisation was a simplified version of what happened (Lynch 1996).

<sup>10</sup> The idea of moving to this position is engendered in the interaction itself; as a number of 'meta' comments and suggestions of how EM might deal with the issues involved through a form of self-analysis. These include 'Do not try to solve all life's problems at once – learn to dread each day as it comes' (12 September 2000 11:44), and 'I wonder what Goffman would have made of the recent 'GET ME OUT OF HERE' episode – or am I just trying to be ironic?' (26 September 2000 23:36), there are a number of comments on the discussion itself, including 'Examples, please! More actual examples! Fascinating discussion.' (18 September 2000 21:42), and 'The recent discussion of the relationship of EM to Constructive Analysis has raised an issue in my mind I'd dearly like to discuss...' (21 September 2000 22:48).

There are also programmatic comments on how to *do* listserv interaction with regard to quoting text, 'hi, just a short note: in his last post, [name 1] reacts to [name 2]'s big bone, first by selectively quoting from Andy's mail, which is a very efficient procedures, as you can then compare the two arguments. But after that he sends us [name 2]'s mail again in full, plus his own mail to which [name 2] reacted. Is this a way to enlarge big bones, or just oversight which fills up our IID's? so please delete any automatically quoted parts that are nor relevant/helpful for current readers...' (12 September 2000 20:55).

<sup>11</sup> Those readers who receive the ETHNO emails will undoubtedly recognise these exchanges, and will hence know who participated in the discussion. However, while ETHNO is in most respects public, requiring registration, the direct naming of the individuals involved has been avoided on politeness grounds and because it is only the issues involved that are of interest.

<sup>12</sup> This phase is expanded upon and explained by Participant Two by saying “In a way’ means this: if work analysts are to address the missing ‘interactional what’ of occupational studies everywhere then they need to immerse themselves in the phenomenal field of practical action in question – theorising the matter and administering compliance documents of whatever sort will not do. ‘Immersion’ means this: that they analyst must learn and thereby gain an adequate mastery of work-practice as a condition of their studies. ‘Adequate mastery’ means this: that the analyst can recognise as members recognise what is ‘going on’ in the phenomenal field (the workplace) and how it is ‘getting done’. In such a way the analyst may develop a vulgar competence in the object of study and may, as such, undertake the writing of corrigible praxiological [sic]accounts’.

<sup>13</sup> What is interesting here is that the written text of the participant is placed on the same level of evidence as the academic reference. That the person ‘said’ this, that the text was conversational, is ignored; instead the person’s conversational language is open to direct scrutiny.

<sup>14</sup> Notice that this formulation has a particular shape. By numbering the elements the separation is underpinned with a dual structure of writing. The ‘model’ is complete, it works in relation to its own logic, and results in an ‘answer’ to the question. The text format, aids and structures the argument.

<sup>15</sup> Note, this commentary follows the messages chronologically.

<sup>16</sup> This is telling because this formulation could feasibly be used to shut down the issue addressed.

<sup>17</sup> One might say a foundational example.

<sup>18</sup> . It could be argued that transcripts in CA a product of the conceptual priority of the analysis, and the Vertical transcription format one is ‘locked-in’ to seeing turn-taking and sequence wherever you go. CA transcripts do not have to look the way they do. The CA researcher, like the newsgroup participant chooses to construe the textual elements in a particular way. Here are three examples, taken from Edwards and Lampert, (1993:11-12) of differing transcription styles with regard to their textual layout.

#### (5) VERTICAL:

A: Did you just get [back]?

B: [Yes], or rather 2 hours ago. It was a great film.

A: Really?

#### (6) COLUMN

Speaker A

Speaker B

Did you just get [back]? [Yes], or rather 2 hours ago.

It was a great film.

Really?

#### (7) PARTITURE

A: Did you just get [back]?

Really?

B: [Yes], or rather 2 hours ago. It was a great film.

A CA transcript *could* look like the third example (or the second for that matter). The PARTITURE style is, according to Edwards and Lampert, better at representing the temporal relationship between utterances.

<sup>19</sup> These observations are drawn from a series of working papers written during the PhD period (see further footnotes).



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<sup>20</sup> Features of newsgroup messages means that this is not an easy matter. Not least is the intertextual and ongoing nature of content; finding the beginning of any conversation, for example, is often difficult. Content is often highly self-referencing, and relies upon knowledge of the group and the chosen topic.

<sup>21</sup> For example, a search strategy was employed to look for other instances of the OTP acronym (see later), across the whole range of newsgroups. At the time of early observation, uk.media.tv.friends was virtually the only group using such an acronym; replication of the search two years later revealed its widespread use.

<sup>22</sup> 'Newsreader' applications allow 'key-word' searches, as do online archiving services such as deja.com (formerly dejanews.com).

<sup>23</sup> The large-scale corpus is made up of four 'different' newsgroups: uk.media.tv.friends (u.m.t.f), talk.philosophy.humanism (t.p.h.), rec.sports.pro-wrestling.fantasy (r.s.p-w.f.), and soc.rights.human (s.r.h.). The total corpus is contained in the Appendix and the accompanying CD-ROM.

<sup>24</sup> Some of the data segments convey this by replacing 'real' names with pseudonyms.

<sup>25</sup> Even if the names were changed, messages still contain a large number of identifying features, including the date, the message ID, the newsgroup name, the title of the message etc. All of which can be used as the basis of a search. Even a portion of the message text can form the basis of a search. Any realistic anonymity strategy would have to remove every bit of the message.

<sup>26</sup> The topic of the newsgroup 'talk.philosophy.humanism' is an intellectual discussion of humanistic philosophy, while uk.media.tv.friends' is a discussion of an American situation comedy. The first twenty messages encountered by the researcher were taken from each group on 23 February 1998. The full text of these messages – as well as graphical 'screen prints' showing their relationships to one-an-other – are contained in the appendix.

<sup>27</sup> The methodology and observations were presented in a doctoral paper entitled 'A comparison of two newsgroups....' The observations cover a wide range of issues including, topic adherence, participation patterns and group specific language use and activity.

<sup>28</sup> Please see footnotes for labelling convention.

<sup>29</sup> Initially the labels applied to these data use the following convention: [initials of newsgroup] [date message was recorded] [message number/number of messages] an example is T.p.h. 23/2/98 1/ – T.p.h. refers to talk.philosophy.humanism. These conventions developed as various data collection strategies were employed.

<sup>30</sup> The 'screen prints' were generated using a computer program called Printscreen 95 V4.0. By saving the image as a bitmap file, it was editable using the Microsoft Paintbrush computer program.

<sup>31</sup> Various notational schemes were tried. One notation was an attempt to identify within a message, which pieces of text came from which participant. The technique of drawing lines to the right of the text, along with the names, was developed as a way to denote who actually wrote the original text. It was felt that this sort of transcriptional convention would be helpful when dealing with extended, deeply textured (i.e. with multiple quoting elements) messages. However such devices were found to be unhelpful, as analysis developed. It was realised later, that matters of 'who's text that was originally' became issues *for the participants*. So, for example, one thread of discourse revolved around the contested identity of the writer of a particular text. Further to this, it was realised that such confusion (if there was any, and if it was ever important) was experienced by the participants, just as much as the researcher. To 'work out' who wrote what, was to add an additional – or 'meta' – layer of interpretation, that might feasibly obscure participant's behaviour.

<sup>32</sup> A copy of these messages is found in the Appendix under 'Additionally sourced material'.

<sup>33</sup> Premised upon a naïve user's question, the 'answers' soon became non-serious with suggestions such as "Orange Telephone Pagent", 'Ohmigod Teddy's Pastit' and 'On The P\*ss' [sic].

<sup>34</sup> Aspects of this analysis were presented in paper entitled 'Being 'OTP' in an 'OTP' (Off The Point in an Off Topic Post) at the Social Psychology Section Annual Conference, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> When carrying out a 'reply command' the computer application copies the full subject line of the previous message into the new message.

<sup>36</sup> On this point, the notion of 'flaming' has gained a deal of attention (Dery 1994; Lea et al 1992).

<sup>37</sup> The following discussion is presented in Reed, D. (forthcoming) 'Newsgroups and the Telling of Netiquette' in D. Penrod 'Webtalk'. A copy of the chapter is contained in the Appendix.

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<sup>38</sup> This message was sourced through a search medium. The date relates to the date in the message, rather than when the message was recorded. Also there is no message number as this has no meaning in this case.

<sup>39</sup> The data for this time-plot are contained in the Appendix.

<sup>40</sup> For example messages 17baaaa, 17baaab and 17bbaa of the fourth participant, which have the time stamps 5426, 5424, 5426 respectively, were probably sent at the same time.

<sup>41</sup> An intriguing observation made by De Rycker (1985) about letters in correspondence is the internal reference to the mechanisms of turn taking. This stands in contrast to verbal interaction.

[With face to face conversation] [o]nly rarely is explicit reference made to the turn-taking organization of the interaction itself, to the fact that conversation discourse proceeds through a sequence of turns. In contrast, correspondents are much more explicit in connecting their individual turns with reference to be more consciously aware of the fact that their interactive encounter is arranged locally by turns' (De Rycker 1985:627).

A feature of newsgroup messages is that there is a lot of text turned towards the activity of message writing, sending and the like. Participants seemed to express a view of themselves, the actions of others, and the appropriate means, mechanisms, practices of the members of their newsgroup. The participants have a peculiarly *reflective* perspective on the activity in which they were taking part.

<sup>42</sup> The reflexive insight provided by which will be considered later.

<sup>43</sup> We have chosen to present systematic observation of a message that we have already seen. The rationale behind this is that it provides for continuity and conveys the deepening analysis, as well as emphasizes the development of terms, interests and approach.

<sup>44</sup> In addition the presentation of this text was the result of using a particular 'newsreader' computer application called 'FreeAgent'. This application allows for the reading of the total header information. It is possible to cut down the number of lines seen, and indeed some newsreader applications show relatively little of this information. The lines that are always present are the 'From' line, the 'Newsgroups' line, the 'Subject' line, the 'Date line'. The 'Message-ID' line and the 'References' line are normally shown also.

<sup>45</sup> Please see Appendix 4.1. 'Complete observation of single message'.

<sup>46</sup> We do not have space here to follow the consequences of this, but it can be seen that a 'thread' is not created by the continuation of the subject line i.e. the computer application does not recognise one message's relationship to another by way of the subject line. Instead such relationships are plotted in terms of the 'References line' i.e. the computer application recognises the message ID of the previous message, and places the current message in a directly subordinate position to it.

<sup>47</sup> As always we are indebted to Loughborough Computer Services for their technical insight

<sup>48</sup> Of course, any contrast between 'real' and 'nick' names are based on common-sense interpretation. However, there is a case for assuming this contrast, given the way the names are presented and used.

<sup>49</sup> The 'Organization line' and 'Newsgroups line' are commented on in the Appendix.

<sup>50</sup> All body text is editable, even if it is automatically produced. This is because once a reply is carried out, the produced elements are presented in a window that acts as a word processor. In addition participant are able to change the 'settings' of their application such that particular formats are produced.

<sup>51</sup> While the graphical representation of the newsreader application conveyed the relationship between the messages, it did not proceed beyond three levels. It certainly didn't represent the total thread. Therefore many of the more complicated (and interesting) formations were missing (later versions of the newsreader applications were to develop their graphical representations).

<sup>52</sup> The signature of Barry Somers always contains the text 'Slán Abhailé, bye bye.' This appears to be part of his automatic signature.

<sup>53</sup> The other reference (o.r.) is to 'Al', the person who answers is Alex, so it looks like the other references infers preference for the next turn participant. Also what supports this is that Alex leaves in the o.r. in his text.

<sup>54</sup> In one of the groups it is common to include 'popular' lines from the television series to which the group is dedicated, or other similar programmes in the signature file.

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<sup>55</sup> See 'Appendix, 3.3. 'Descriptive Coding Table sorted by general shape'.

<sup>56</sup> This point works just as well for new text. We have no way of knowing how often the text has been written, edited, rearranged and the like. Neither do we know how long the message took to write, whether the person uses two fingers or ten etc.

<sup>57</sup> This is a special case of that referred to in the previous chapter. While the message ID is the route used by an application to determine which message follows which, at times the application prioritises subject line over message ID – for presentation purposes – by putting the message in a 'new position' in the application window. Sometimes presentation is a bespoke matter and not designed to aid in-depth inquiry. Some applications are better than others. The potential for confusion might be one reason for the development of inter-relationship denotation through quoting.

<sup>58</sup> It lead to an analysis of the cutting of signature files, not presented here.

<sup>59</sup> Other analytic efforts include 'Doing things with quoting mechanisms – the cutting of signature files'; 'Doing things with quoting mechanisms – formulations'; 'Jiles Jovoth and the creation of dissent'; 'rec.sports.pro-wresting.fantasy and how to e-wrestle'; 'Coming out – doing 'really, honestly, believe us'.

<sup>60</sup> This observation lead to an analysis of 'opening messages'.

<sup>61</sup> This extended message provided for an analysis entitled 'Coming out – doing 'really, honestly, believe us'.

<sup>62</sup> Jiles Jovoth was a character created by a small number of participants to do 'rule-telling' work in an antagonistic fashion. Eventually those involved in the hoax admitted the ruse to the group.

<sup>63</sup> to understand why this is a wrong thing to be doing one needs to understand that 'bandwith' [bandwidth] is a measure of the possible data flow at any given time on the internet. The higher the bandwith the greater amount of data can flow at any one time. To 'waste' the bandwith is the squander what is a limited facility.

<sup>64</sup> When negative comments are prevalent, participants are accused of generating 'cheap heat'. This formed the basis of an analytic effort entitled 'How to e-wrestle'.

<sup>65</sup> In MUDS multiple participants interact in real time. With MUD interaction it is possible to use computer commands that literally do things. These commands are preceded by a forward slash ('/'). An example is the 'look command' ('/look'). Here the computer application retrieves a pre-written description file of the person looked at.

<sup>66</sup> What this action, and others like it, conveys is an understanding as to how face-to-face conversation works on the part of message writers. They express this understanding through actively mimicking conversations salient features.

<sup>67</sup> It turns out that 'Jiles Jovoth' is a fictitious participant created to carry out an authoritarian role by three of the participants. His exploits become more abusive and other participants finally realised the ruse. A line of analysis, not included in this thesis, investigated this created character.

<sup>68</sup> These messages are held on the CD-ROM. See 2.2. 'Giles Jovoth data'

<sup>69</sup> Giles Jovoth data, see additional data in Appendix 2.2.

<sup>70</sup> At the time, the 'three part' feature of these textual formulations made them particularly interesting from a CA point of view because it allowed for the engagement of a fundamental analytic mechanism, the 'next turn proof procedure' (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998). In brief this allows the analyst to claim that the indexical nature of the text were a matter for the participants in their ongoing interaction and that the participants themselves manifest accountable practices of meaning resolution. The researcher has direct access to the interpretations of the participants rather than having to stake a claim on their own formulation of the linguistic intentions of the participants.

<sup>71</sup> For this phrase I am indebted to Malcolm Ashmore.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson and Sharrock (1984) identify a similar device in the practical activities of CA analysis. They note the *orogenic processes* in the methodology of the practical reasoning of conversation analysis, which are analogous geomorphology '... when dealing with the aftermath, the debris, of what they term orogenic processes, geomorphologists have to work from the results back to the processes that might have produced them' (Anderson and Sharrock 1984:115). In the same way CA analysis start with the naturalistic observation of talk and 'works back' to a description of the structures that produce these features. Anderson and Sharrock assert this as an methodological move that results in a systematic analytic formulation of the talk. The contingent history of a message is a way of enacting this orogenic mentality.

<sup>73</sup> A copy is held on the accompanying CD-ROM. Appendix 1.2.1.

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<sup>74</sup> People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technology, ESRC, 3 year project, 2001-4.

<sup>75</sup> Further, where else could we discount so many presumed categorical and institutional conceptions as a matter of contingent propensity?

<sup>76</sup> In the 'vertical' formatting of transcripts for example (Edwards and Lampert 1993).

<sup>77</sup> In the 'deadpan appropriation' of traditional narrative structure (introduction, approach, analysis, findings), while simultaneously incorporating its utilisation in our account, for example.

<sup>78</sup> Such exercises are prone to 'unravelling' the narrative.

<sup>79</sup> Further we take the position offered by Goffman: a study of reflexivity is an entirely different exercise, and should not be allowed to displace our current purpose.

<sup>80</sup> For good measure we might add in here 'Sacks's Gloss', although this is a slightly different issue of stable analytic method, rather than analytic object.

<sup>81</sup> We have drawn it slightly differently, but this might relate to Mehan and Wood's night of understanding.

<sup>82</sup> Perhaps 'difference' is to overdraw the matter. Undoubtedly inductive processes are extensions of everyday propensities (See Garfinkel's discussion of indexicality and science, 1967).

<sup>83</sup> This is an orienting understanding for ethnomethodology where moment-by-moment experience amounts to 'every-next-first-time' (Garfinkel 1967).

<sup>84</sup> Additionally see Bruckman 1993; Escobar 1994; Kramarae 1995; Leigh Star 1995; Stoll 1995; Bryce Bjork 1995; Klonoshi 1995; Shimabukuro 1995; Ling 1996; Turkle 1996; Thomas 1996; Brown, 1997; Kiesler 1997.

<sup>85</sup> This paragraph might be termed a 'gloss on Sacks', in his description of tape recorded material.

<sup>86</sup> To this point the researcher had no experience of newsgroup messages, and consequently encountered a confusing mass of text.

<sup>87</sup> Seen not least in the author meeting his future Linguist wife at a CA workshop!

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# Appendix

This is a copy of the html document held on the accompanying CD-ROM.

To access the detailed documents please open 'Appendix.html' in MS Internet Explorer

## 1. Papers

### 1.1. Phd papers

1.1.1. 'Initial Comparison of Two Newsgroups'

1.1.2. 'The Check is in the Post'

1.1.3. 'Newsgroups as a social activity. Exploring the literature on the telephone, the letter and written and spoken language'

### 1.2. Published papers

1.2.1. 'Making Conversation: Sequential Integrity and the Local Management of Newsgroups' HICCS 2001

1.2.2. 'Newsgroups and the Telling-of-Netiquette' in D. Penrod 'Webtalk' [publisher pending]

## 2. Data

2.1. Small-scale sample; screen print of talk.philosophy.humanism data; screen print of uk.media.tv.friends data

2.2. Additionally sourced material: OTP text; OTP screen print; Giles Jovoth data

2.3. Large-scale corpus: rec.sports.pro-wrestling.fantasy; talk.philosophy.humanism; uk.media.tv.friends; soc.rights.human

## 3. Coding

3.1. Key to descriptive coding

3.2. Descriptive Coding Table

3.3. Descriptive Coding Table sorted by general shape

## 4. Additional Material

4.1. Complete observation of single message

4.2. Time-Plot Data Table



**THESIS  
CONTAINS  
CD/DVD**