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How to feel things with words

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Representation and Everyday Use: How to feel things with words

Eric Laurier

1.

A person X says to person Y 'I'm bored' or 'You annoy me'. Common enough things for someone to say to someone else, and common enough expressions for both to understand, yet professional analysts of language are troubled by what 'I'm bored or 'You annoy me' *means*, it seems of quite a different order to 'this is a tree' or 'if you do not eat meat then you are a vegetarian'. It would not be uncommon for certain logicians or linguists to stay with the words themselves. In staying with the words themselves, cutting away what class, gender or age of person said such words to what other category of person. Cutting away which place, what time period, in which culture and various other elements. Trimming away, then, most of the context and dealing with the words as if their meaning was internal to themselves.

There are two things I should mention about 'I'm bored or 'You annoy me'. Firstly, they are examples used to teach, explore and analyse what *perlocutionary acts* in language are. These are words which are related to action but do not perform that action in saying them. Words which, like indexicals, such as 'it', 'this' and 'you', cause endless troubles for formal logic and for translation software. Secondly, 'I'm bored' and 'You annoy me, while not bizarre instances, in fact recognisably and acceptably ordinary, are made-up examples. Made-up by Stanley Cavell (2005) as cases of locutionary acts aimed at having effects on the feelings, thoughts or actions of others. Cavell put 'I'm bored' and 'You annoy me' to use in order to extend and gently critique Austin's (1962) theory of performative actions in his renowned collection of lectures 'How to do things with words'. Pertinent to this collection, Austin's theory of the performative dimensions of language is an unexcavated cornerstone of NRT (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000), ANT (Pels, Hetherington, & Vandenberghe, 2002) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). For each of the latter there is an emphasis on the always ongoing accomplishment of joint action, the insufficiency of the discursive (or representational) and a rethinking of what makes social order possible. Sometimes the emphasis in NRT appears to be as decontextualised and universalist as that of the linguist mentioned above (E. Laurier & Philo, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). What both ANT and ethnomethodology offer to return to certain NRT analyses is a tone of worldliness. They bring context back to speech through contextualising, though as I will hope to show in what follows not external social scientific contextualisation, rather, contextualising as internal to ordinary conversations. My parallel ambitions in what follows, then, are to re-examine speech in context and context in speech and to use this to return, by the close of this chapter, to Cavell's thoughts on how passionate utterances are related to performative ones.

As a first step in an ethnomethodological direction I would like to shift our attention away from Cavell's examples provided for thinking with, to some words actually said, come upon in looking for something else. As Thrift (1994) puts it in his seminal introduction to his 'Spatial Formations' collection that in some ways launched NRT over a decade ago, this is 'an ambition to move away from doing theory by conducting abstract thought experiments towards a style which attends to the knowledge we already have, and does not assume a common background when this is precisely what is at stake' (Thrift 1994, p3). In a similar manner, Harvey Sacks (1992a&b) throughout his studies of conversation analysis warned his students (and those other colleagues in receipt of his lectures) to avoid beginning with a theory and then, either inventing a suitable example or, looking for a quote from a transcript to pull out to illustrate it. For the former what any member of a given research community views as reasonable provides the limit on suitable examples and, for the latter, why bother with ordinary conversation at all?

In describing to his students why they are looking at a round of introductions in a therapy session Harvey Sacks offers his reasons for labouring over conversations that appear to have no 'lay interest'

People often ask, 'Why do you choose the particular data you choose? Is it some problem that you have in mind that caused you to pick out this group therapy session? And I'm very insistent that I just happened to have it, somebody had found this segment, it became fascinating, and I spent some time at it. Furthermore, it's not that I attack it by virtue of some problem I could bring to it. (Sacks, 1992a) p292

Sacks goes on in the same lecture to say that he has developed a 'counter-strategy' to the concept of 'interesting' data and picks deliberately uninteresting materials. In that way he is avoiding exploiting material that is already assumed to be exciting, important or salacious.

In the quote I will begin with the speakers here *are* beginning saying the kind of thing that might be interesting enough to catch the eye of a social scientist with, if not coding in mind, then at least topic:

the vast majority of retailers in Britain

On the basis of such a generalisation it might appear as if someone is about to state their belief or opinion about shops in the UK: "the vast majority of retailers in Britain are encouraging us to overspend". If that were the ending of the quote, while it might be taken as an opinion or statement of belief, it raises a number of questions. The statement still has not shaken off its indexicality nor, indeed, will it ever, nevertheless those persons present when it was uttered 'manage to make adequate sense and adequate reference with the linguistic and other devices at hand' (M. Lynch, 1993)p22. Quite what it could mean will surely require a few more salient details. An early and ongoing solution in cultural geography to dealing with this problem of indexicality was to place the statement in a context of what category of person said the statement. To examine whether it was a man or a woman or child, the Chancellor of the

Exchequer or Nigel Thrift, would help us secure the stability and certainty of what X could have meant in saying “the vast majority of retailers in Britain”.

The prevailing tendency in doing research projects with more ordinary members of society than the Chancellor of Exchequer would be to allocate this person according to one of the social categories which are stock-in-trade of the social sciences: their gender, their class, their race, their age. With the last category we would begin to be more certain about what the phrase means if a ten year old says this, a teenager, twenty six year old, or a seventy year old. So what kind of person said this? It was a man somewhere in his forties, white, middle class and middle management. If we pause for a moment, while a ten year old could have uttered our first ready-made example ‘I’m bored’, by contrast, ‘the vast majority of retailers in Britain’ is not the kind of thing we imagine ten year olds saying at all. With the social categories in hand it suddenly sounds like the kind of opinion that someone occupying those categories could say with no need for special explanation. The point about this is that we start to come upon how, in examining a number of statements, they predicate particular categories of person. A classic example here being ‘I sentence you to ten years in Pentonville Prison.’ It is not the free-for-all that an example like ‘I’m bored’ might seem to imply.

Even though we have the social science categories of this person available to us now, the statement remains pruned of its branches so we do not yet know whether it is opinion or what else it might be. A little more of what follows this speech in the transcript of the conversation it was uttered within will help us make greater sense of what is going on:

A: As with the vast majority of retailers in Britain, I’m afraid.

‘I’m afraid’ in this context is not the equivalent of ‘I’m bored’ of course. It is not an expression of a feeling nor an attempt to have someone act to remedy the dullness of the situation. One thing it does is simply mark A’s turn in the conversation as completed. Here it notes a preceding complaint, so that, for instance were someone to have said ‘I’m bored’, then B Could reply ‘There’s nothing I can do about that, I’m afraid’. So, just as it looked like we were getting somewhere in terms of the linking together of speech and speaker settling disputes over what this phrase means, we find that we cannot make sense of what A, the man in question, is saying because he is not prefacing a statement of his own, he is replying to a previous statement without which we cannot identify what he believes about British retailers. When presented with a statement like this from a respondent in our research, practical solutions during interview situations have then been to, either transcribe what the interviewer had said that A is replying to, summarize it in one way or another, or, indeed, instead of transcribing A simply summarize the whole thing as his opinion. Perhaps, then the combination of social science categories of the speaker and the speech’s replacement in its dialogical context can settle its meaning. Indeed, as it turns out, this move has profound consequence for how we understand

context in that each part of a pair in a dialogue provides the context for the other.

B: Your stuff's shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well

A: As with the vast majority of retailers in Britain, I'm afraid

In fact the statement, now that we can see it as a response in a dialogue between two speakers, becomes all the more intriguing and puzzling. Settling an individual's speech into conversation displaces the importance of A being white, male and middle class. The talk, in this case, is not generated from a more or less formal interview, it is, to adapt a phrase of Ed Hutchins (1995), 'talk in the wild'. As such the repetitive standardization of the interviewer-interviewee disappears, to be replaced by a multitude of possible dialogical pairings: doctor-patient, parent-child, teacher-student, (on the phone) caller-called, teaser-teased, driver-passenger. The shift from orphaned statements to unfolding conversations is a further step in an ethnomethodological investigation of the social ordering at source in our everyday talk. Common to both ethnomethodology and conversation analysis is that the problem of meaning which fascinates cultural studies is subsumed by the problem of doing. From what people are doing emerge potential roles, characterizations, responsibilities, motive and, indeed, meaning, for them. To grasp what is being done during any action or interaction gives us, and participants in the original situation, resources for settling on who is doing it. As such conversation analysts ask themselves 'what is this word doing? What is this preface doing? What is this response doing?' and so on, often before they check to see what type of person was saying it. Trying to express meaning, or, indeed, repair misunderstandings (e.g. 'what I meant to say was...'), is one amongst a range of possibilities. As likely, there are more practical purposes afoot: complaining and responding to a complaint.

From the two halves of this dialogue - a complaint and its response - it would appear that they predicate the members of a category-collected pair (Hester & Eglin, 1997): buyer and seller. Or, if we use the categories at source: customer and retailer. B, as a customer, is making a brightly colored complaint about the items on sale and the customer service. He sounds angry as hell. Is A joking with him by saying that we, the retailers of the UK, are almost all like this? Actual dialogue is full of puzzles like this. We, and A, have to make sense of what B is saying is happening by reference to what is happening - [complaining]. A's response could be taken to accept that, yes, their products are of poor quality, as is their customer service. However that is not what a complaint with the force and directness of A's would expectedly require. Such a charged complaint as one half of a pair of conversational parts, would surely solicit an apology and an explanation:

B: Your stuff's shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well

A: I am terribly sorry that you have had such a bad experience with our company. We can replace your item or offer you a full refund.

That would be the training-manual response by A to B's complaint which quickly accepts the complaint as legitimate and offers a standard way for a retailer to right their wrong. Responses to complaints as they are actually produced show a number of ways of handling a complaint: defences, denials or acceptance with attribution of the fault elsewhere (Dersley & Wootton, 2001; Edwards, 2005; Sacks, 1992b). A's acceptance with its humour might further enrage B if he fails to or refuses to enjoy A's wit. Indeed not only is A witty, he aligns himself with B in that his response identifies a common awful situation that they will have to endure together. There is no inevitability in how we respond to complaints, indeed the meaning, consequence and force of B's complaint is open to local adjustment by A (Latour, 1986). In what A says as the recipient of the complaint, by his wit he can try and show that while he accepts the complaint, the fault lies with a more general problem with UK retailing and that the 'your' which is the basis of the complaint is not 'ours', it is a misdirected complaint. If A is a retail manager then speaking so seems a curious way of righting the wrong that is the basis of the complaint (as was the case in the training-manual response).

Other well-worn social science categories of person of who B might be are perhaps of assistance here. He is also white, male, middle class, if a few years younger than A and this mutually recognisable match between them might provide the underpinnings for trying out a witty response. And yet, A is not in the business of social science theorising and if we try and pick out his remark to support an argument we would like to make about his opinions it misses what he is doing in saying what 'as with the vast majority of retailers in Britain, I'm afraid', for a start he is not offering it as his opinion nor anyone else's (e.g. by ending his response with 'according to the Daily Telegraph'). His generalisation would be part of deflecting the complaint so that rather than customer/retailer we are two men of the world who appreciate the steady decline of UK retailing over the last few decades. And his deflection could be ignored, questioned, challenged or taken as provocation by B. He might then show his understanding of its tone by saying 'don't patronise me!'

2.

Even with two halves of a pair in the dialogue we are still not all that much closer to what A could be meaning with his "as with the vast majority of retailers in the UK, I'm afraid". As Bruno Latour puts it when reviewing the close analysis of laboratory scientists' conversations 'one has the same feeling as reading a newspaper with a microscope' (Latour, 1986 p545). The solution surely is to zoom backwards and sideways and take in the preceding newspaper column inches. We can look at how this conversation has produced a preceding and emerging context for this moment of confrontation (for a similar move see also Schegloff 1992):

B: Out on my, my bike last night. Another puncture
 A: Same tyre
 B: Nah. Front this time
 A: You'll need to get the same done for the front then ((laughing))
 >> B: Nahh, so I'm taking it back tonight and just giving it over
 A: A bit of feedback
 B: A whole load, yeah. Aye, a whole pile of feedback
 A: Yeah?
 B: Yeah
 A: Didn't spend 350 quid for bla bla bla bla bla
 B: Your stuff's shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well
 A: As with the vast majority of retailers in Britain I'm afraid
 B: Ts, yeah I was most unhappy.

With a wider angle of perspective on the conversation, everything seems to change. As we read down the transcript, with now the beginnings of the upcoming topic of this conversation, a bicycle tyre puncture and its consequences, it becomes apparent that A and B are not seller and buyer. A's joke is not what we had thought it was nor is B's angry complaint. In fact, the shift in perspective on B's complaint is reminiscent of a classic narrative device in film where we discover we are hearing a dry-run of a line rather than the line's delivery to its recipient. A's 'as with the vast majority ...' is not a witty response to try and defuse an angry customer. B's complaint seems to be an angry expansion upon both the suggestion of and rehearsal by A (e.g. 'didn't spend 350 quid for bla bla bla bla'). The whole description of what is going has been turned upside down. Wait a moment though, not as much changes as we might at first imagine: there remains a complaint from B in what is happening and A is still its recipient and his response is still a little puzzling.

We learn that A has been party to previous puncture reports by his saying 'same tyre'. Had A responded by saying 'what a pain' he would have been sympathetic but not registered that he remembered that B had had a puncture before. In one sense, this quick response shows that A's mind is with B (Sacks, 1992a), while at the same time it can be heard as the beginning of a diagnostic sequence. The diagnosis being offered in the line before ">>" where, while chuckling, A offers that whatever fixed the puncture on the rear can be done to the front. At the marked line, B tells A of his planned response to 'another puncture' which is that he will not be repairing it. By his use of 'taking it back', rather than 'taking it to', B primes A that the party that will receive the puncture has an ongoing connection to the bike. From the 'retailers' remark from A we know that it is a retailer that will be getting the bike back.

Even though zooming out and back puts A's speech in a new context, in this longer run of the conversation the context does not stabilise, quite the contrary we begin to get a feel for context in flight as it is ongoingly being achieved by the parties to the conversation. The episode begins with the preliminaries of what is not the first (e.g. it is 'another') and might be a longer stretch of *troubles*, 'another puncture' by B, which presents A with a problem of how to appreciate this recurrence of trouble, with sympathy or not? A common

feature of descriptions of troubles such as punctures is to provide an assessment as the thing emerges (e.g. 'another bloody puncture' or by laughing while saying 'another puncture' (Goodwin, 1992)). That a trouble, in whatever form (punctures or divorce or a stock market crash), requires an appreciation of what stance to take on it, is all the more marked because A laughs while offering the diagnosis of what to do about a puncture in the other tyre. His initial treatment is that the recurrence of punctures is one of those annoying, though potentially humorous, misfortunes of riding a bike. Punctures being laughable in ways in which the bike being stolen, for instance, would not be. B's prefatory 'nah' makes clear A's error and he goes on to show a departure from dealing with punctures by repairing them himself, the implications of this puncture are not to be a basin of water and a puncture repair-kit, it will be taken back and given over to the retailers to fix.

As Edwards (2005) notes the word 'complain' or 'complaint' is seldom used when a person makes a complaint. One reason being that if speakers are not making a complaint they can then try and characterise what they are doing as reporting in a neutral manner on observations they have made. A second related reason being that they care about their dispositions in various ways, not least in terms of their character for others (Edwards, 2006). In any particular episode that could be found by others to be a complaint, the public character of the person so doing, is at risk. They are open to what they are aggrieved over being attributed to their character as someone who is 'always' complaining about this or that, is difficult or unreasonable in their affairs. To avoid having what one is doing being straightforwardly taken as a complaint is one way of handling how one's actions are appreciated. So it is, then, in making available his revised appreciation of 'another puncture', A not only correctly anticipates what B will be doing in returning his bike he formulates it as 'feedback', rather than a complaint. Feedback being what businesses specifically ask for and, as such, A's selection of 'feedback' rather than 'complaint' plays up firstly, the positive aspects of what B is doing in that he will be helping the business improve, secondly, that 'feedback' is not seen as self-interested or motivated by other personal problems in ways in which a complaint is. A's delivery is yet more artful than that, he uses the diminutive 'a bit of'. In keeping this minor key he allows B to then respond by either staying with this business-like tone or more satisfyingly, as he does, inflating it significantly:

A: A bit of feedback

B: A whole load, yeah. Aye, a whole pile of feedback

What we need to bear in mind here is that this as an *indirect* complaint (Drew 1998, Sacks 1992). As distinct from the first analysis ventured earlier where we pursued A responding to B's direct complaint, we can now pursue what A does in response an indirect complaint. A's task is working out how to hear the complaint in similar ways to hearing the 'trouble' as it first emerged. In doing so A needs to work out how seriously B is taking his complaint, how justified

he feels it will be, whether it will succeed in getting his wrong righted and more. What he ventures is a second stab at what B could say couched, once again, in a low-key business-like manner about what sort of expectations a customer should have when they spend three hundred and fifty pounds on a bicycle:

A: Didn't spend 350 quid for bla bla bla bla bla

B: Your stuff's shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well

A leaves B to provide the details of what is wrong with the bike by saying 'bla bla bla bla'. A's rehearsal of the line to be delivered on handing the bike over is responded to with a second upgrading by B with his angrier, blunter and more confrontational set of assessments. What B accomplishes in his outraged 'feedback' is both producing speech hearable as of a more general nature 'stuff' thus bringing the fault not on this particular bike. Were it the particular bike the fault might lie with the manufacturer and not the shop that sells it. Moreover rather than asking for some form of recompense as would be the case with a complaint, he tells the retailer to correct their 'stuff'. 'Correct' predicating a mistake or an error rather than a broken or defective object. This is not the speech of a bleating sheep or grumpy old man. What is not available from the transcript is the calm tone with which B delivers his line to A, one which rather than sounding outraged as one might expect, is controlled. If it were more exaggerated A might have heard it as ironic in some way (Edwards, 2000).

What we can see in the two pairs above is a produced similarity in structure where, in each, A is allowing B to pump himself up (if you'll pardon the pun) for the return of the bike that night. The planned line that emerges from this inflation sequence is highly unlikely it will actually be delivered. Were B to walk in and deliver that line to a sales assistant their first response might justifiably be 'calm down sir, what is actually wrong with your bike?' While A has helped B to get pumped up and, in doing so, express his genuine annoyance with the agency that sold him the bike he has also taken him to the highest step in this step-wise progression. A suggested small complaint begets a final huge complaint. The expectations of spending that sum of money are elevated to problems that beset the whole company. What would B do after that or as the consequence of that? Shut down the company, punch the shop assistance, or, in ultimate desperation, write a letter to the Daily Mail?

3.

Just when all the contextualising work of the conversants is beginning to display its ongoing sense and sense-making I want to use the Latourian microscope against us. We will move it again and add a perplexing visual element to our close reading of the transcript.

A: As with [picture] the vast majority of retailers in Britain, I'm afraid



A and B are in a car when A says “As with the vast majority...”. That seems a pretty fundamental absence. One of the uses of supplying the missing context is the murder-mystery moment where, by supplying the missing information, suddenly the speech makes sense (Schegloff, 1992). To reveal that A and B are in the car surely changes everything, though in the opposite way, the speech makes less sense. The shift in perspective is disorienting. In a geographical *denouement* we could argue that the space of the car is central to our understanding of what is happening. Well, is it?

Certainly we have a new set of categories to bring into consideration, alongside the usual suspects of the social sciences which may or may not be relevant to what is happening, the locally produced complaint-maker and indirect recipient of the complaint now we have ‘driver’ and ‘passenger’. Equally alongside these categories we have the activities that generate them: [complaining] and the parallel activity of [driving]. Why though should the context not serve as a stable background? Is the activity ‘driving’? It could also be characterised as travelling, journeying, racing and commuting. It can be broken down into an array of skilled practices: cornering, reversing, overtaking, hill-starts, dodging potholes and so on.

In fact to close the microscope back in on the action:

B: Your stuff’s shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well

((B drives along stretch of road with a gentle curve requiring small turning of steering wheel))

A: As with the vast majority of ((looks slightly to passenger side, then returns to looking ahead out of front window)) retailers in Britain, I’m afraid

((B puts on indicator)) B: Ts, yeah I was most unhappy.

While there are times when unfolding events on the road lead to more or less significant re-arrangements of the organisation of conversation, here there are only a few events worth remarking on. One is A turning his head slightly

before going on to say 'retailers'. The second is that the turning on of the indicator appears to offer a way for B to return to 'another puncture' and finally delivering his, by this stage, unsurprising stance on it. Both of these potentially driving-related functions require one more element that has been an ongoing entity of interest for conversation analysis and ethnomethodology. An entity that turns many of us toward the transcendental or at the very least seems as if it marks the limits of language. Silence.

Let's put the silences back in (in brackets in seconds):

A: Didn't spend 350 quid for bla bla bla bla

B: Your stuff's shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well

(3.0)

A: As with the vast majority of (2.0)



retailers in Britain I'm afraid

(6.0)

B: Tsk yeah I was most unhappy

These apparent absences of speech from the transcript in fact are one more part of what we need to supply to any conversation to make sense of it. Silences are not the limits of language rather they are at the heart of our speaking. The silences play out in language along with pauses, serving all manner of purposes: silences that speak volumes, calm silences, studied silences, dramatic pauses, marks of seriousness, poesis, displays of understanding, displays of misunderstanding (Michael Lynch, 1999). We are missing the myriad uses of silence when we think of silence in opposition to speech, or between speech acts. Sometimes 'the occasions of silence are extremely dangerous to all persons present' (Sacks, 1992a) and sometimes, as in the car or out fishing, they are not. Where silences are dangerous or could be taken the wrong way it may be the speaker's task to mark out a pause with an 'uh' before leaving a gap in speech (Sacks, 1992b: 547). If we return to the complaint, we have a pause of some length between B's 'is pish as well' and A's response 'as with the vast'. There is

a remarkably long pause between 'I'm afraid' and 'tsk yeah'. And with A's speech around which this chapter has revolved there is a pause mid-way through.

In the consideration of what pauses are doing and indeed their very analysability by those talking together the car returns as a particular setting for speech (Brown, et al., 2006; Laurier, 2002). The car journey is almost the opposite of talk-radio where a silence is 'dead air', in the car there is always the other activity as safety net - driving in the car together. Pauses and silences are less noticeable, or better, less threatening to the talk itself. So pauses and silences can safely be put to use in the car, so that the last pause above of six seconds between 'I'm afraid' and 'tsk yeah'.

The first pause is after B's rehearsal of what he will say when he takes the bike back with the puncture. As we have noted already A is the indirect recipient of B's complaint, and the pause of several seconds after the pumped-up complaint before 'As with the vast majority of' serves to give some distance between that last voicing of the complaint and a further remark. While in an earlier analysis of the conversation Barry Brown and myself felt that A was missing the point of B's complaint. In a later examination with Ignaz Strelbel we came to the sense that having taken A to the highest step in his beef with the shop that sold him the bike, A offers B a way out. He picks up on the generalisation made by A in 'stuff' and 'customer service' and takes that a step higher into the national sphere. A sphere which is clearly beyond the remit of even competent managers like A and B to deal with. In closing his generalisation with 'I'm afraid' he marks out the excusability for such poor service and quality of goods. In other words he is sorry to have to be the one to remind B of the low quality of the UK retail sector and thereby blunt, but not ironise, B's exaggerated feedback (e.g. Edwards 2000, p365 onwards). In doing so we are taken back to our earlier point that appeared to have been rendered irrelevant when we considered the longer sequences of the conversation. The earlier point noting the shift toward generalisation of the complaint by A does indeed deflect the anger being directed at the particular shop. A is contextualising B's complaint where the contextualisation is part of getting them both to a point of agreement on the basis of their general world views. In other words, this generalisation would be where their conversation touches upon what they care about and are responsible for. As managers, they reproduce and reshape organisations and indeed spend a great part of their time discussing how their respective sectors (private and public) function and malfunction. We begin to see that not only are we contextualising A's speech, the conversation itself has been contextualising 'another puncture' throughout in a journey that has taken us from a puncture to the state of one economic sector of the UK.

What I have been trying to bring us towards here is not the application of 'context' rather it is the ongoing work of contextualising. This form of, and occurrence of, contextualising is not the analyst's privilege rather it is a common resource for analyst and member and analyst as member. Equally

quite how much context is required is related to whatever activity is underway because 'actions and their contexts are inter-articulated' (Coulter 1994, p694). As such we begin to see what Thrift might have been gesturing toward in his brief remarks:

These four obsessions ('time-space, practice, subject, agency' (author's insertion) are coded in nearly all of my work as concern for the *context* of the situation... By 'context' I most decidedly do not mean passive backdrop to the situated human activity. Rather, I take context to be a necessary constitutive element of interaction, something active, differentially extensive and able to problematise and work on the bounds of subjectivity'. (Thrift 1994, 3)

4.

In this final section, I want to return to J L Austin's (1962) idea of performative speech, an idea which, as noted at the outset, has led via de Certeau (1984) and Butler (1990; 1996) amongst others into cultural geography's current interest in performativity. Yet Austin's idea has been at the same time the target of an unexpectedly impatient reading by Derrida (Coulter 1994; Cavell, 1995; Derrida, 1977), for its reliance on analyses of 'a context exhaustively determined' (quoted in Coulter 1994, 693). There is in Derrida's critique a failure to realise that context need not be exhaustively determined in Austin's idea of performatives. So what are performatives?

Austin used examples such the bride saying "I do" at the correct point in a marriage ceremony, or "I name this ship" by the appropriate person on the launch of a vessel to argue that there are forms of speech which do not *represent* anything in their utterance, they *do* the thing. That is, they marry you to another person, or, they name the ship. The target of Austin's argument was a branch of philosophy that saw numerous parts of our ordinary language as compromised in their logic and meaningfulness because they could not be demonstrated to be either truths or falsehoods. Austin showed that performatives were essential parts of our speech that were certainly not nonsense and underlay the very possibilities of proving things true or false. Rather than truth, or falsity, performatives' conditions of success or failure were found in what Austin called their felicity or infelicity. Austin went on to specify a number of conditions that had to be met for a happy performance, most of which rested on convention, such as p26 'there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances'. In looking at how we do things with words Austin's aim was to 'lift the non-descriptive or non-assertional or non-constative gestures of speech to renewed philosophical interest and respectability' (Cavell, 2005: 159). While Austin delighted in reminding philosophers of the details of what would allow 'I name this ship' to successfully name a ship, this did not entail that a pre-given list of contextual details need be assembled or checked-off before a ship could be named. In an Austinian spirit we can examine, and have examined here, when we do offer contextualisations for an event (or our actions).

Austin's raising up of performatives hopefully strikes the right chord in this collection on the non-representational in human geography. I wanted to retain his work as a touchstone in this otherwise empirically-guided chapter two reasons. The first being that Austin's work opens up the 'what are these words doing' approach to speaking, acting and convention that is taken up by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (e.g. Sacks 1992a p343). In the conversation:

B: Your stuff's shit. Better fucking correct it. And your customer service is pish as well

A: As with the vast majority of retailers in Britain, I'm afraid

B is 'doing' a complaint. To be a little more precise he is rehearsing a complaint. Or, as we built up to earlier, he is expressing his anger with the shop that sold him his bike. The second reason for introducing Austin is to leave us all too briefly with Stanley Cavell's response and extension rather than Derrida's critique and departure. Cavell is a former student of Austin's and a current philosopher of, not only ordinary language but also, moral perfectionism (Cavell, 1990, 1998 (original 1979)). Cavell has written and reflected extensively on his relationship with Austin's ideas, in terms of his conversion to serious inquiry, his influence and of how one elicits conviction in ordinary language. Austin's anxiousness over emotion in his study of performative utterances has lead Cavell to extend Austin's theories into the study of passionate utterances (Cavell, 2005: chapter 7), or from the illocutionary to the perlocutionary. To make this a little easier to grasp, we are shifting from the *doing* of complaining *in* saying 'Your stuff's shit' to what is *done by* saying 'Your stuff's shit' which is not so straightforward since it could be intimidating, upsetting, annoying, riling and a number of other possible effects on and responses by the other.

What Cavell picks out for us is, that when B expresses his annoyance in 'your stuff's shit' he is doing complaining, we could not say whether he is satisfying, amusing, unsettling or boring A. Unlike 'I bet you', to say 'I bore you' requires disclaimers such as 'do I bore you?' or 'I seem to bore you'. To try and bore someone by saying 'I bore you' could only work were I a talented hypnotist. Quite how you will respond to my doing something to you by my utterance lacks the conditions of felicity or infelicity listed by Austin. Instead Cavell draws out a contrasting set of conditions, an important one being that, with the passionate utterance *there is no conventional procedure involved* that will produce the desired effect for the speaker. To produce our desired affectual effects, imagination and virtuosity are required. Nor are there pre-specified persons (such as bride & groom) that go with passionate acts as there would be with Austin's performatives. Here I can only massively summarise Cavell's remarks and leave you to reconsider their relevance to the dialogue between A & B. Without these pre-given roles the speaker must offer their standing with you and at the same time 'single you out' (Cavell, 2005: 181). Moreover, when I speak from my emotion I must be suffering that feeling and thereby demand a

response from you which you will be moved to offer (Cavell, 2005: 182). Finally, and crucially, Cavell adds a further asymmetry: you may contest any, some, or all, of those elements of my passionate speech.

It is here where Cavell's extension of Austin's 'How to do things with words', returns us to Harvey Sacks and conversation analysis. Beginning as conversation analysis did with all manner of dialogues, it was attuned to the defeasibility and fragility of even a compliment (e.g. Lecture 29 'Weak and safe compliments, Sacks, 1992a) let alone a complaint as made by one to another. In its pursuit of conversation as a joint social action it has traced out ongoingly *how* it is that actions get done, alongside, *what* and *who* gets done by them. Sacks described the asymmetries of expression and response that are allied with joy, boredom and suffering as they are expressed by others and responded to by others. How, in the case we have examined, a complaint is assembled jointly by A and B. How B, after a false start, helps set up the space for A to express his justified passion over yet 'another puncture' in his bike. How B ends up providing a social explanation to calm those passions, one that makes their source an object that can be dealt with by managers. The conventions that underpin many of the methodical ways in which we act are constantly being re-pinned as the affective force of our actions shakes them loose. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis are well known for sharing in Austin's procedural focus and his celebration of the feats of ordinary language. What is perhaps less often appreciated is their sense of ordinary language's constant crumbling, intermittent eruptions and ongoing repair by those who put it to use in their everyday affairs. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis help us see not only 'how to do things with words', they help remind us how to feel sometimes common, and sometimes exceptional, things in the words of ourselves and of others. As such we can also appreciate why it is that affect has become such a topic of concern in both ethnomethodology and NRT.

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