



Innovation and Reduction in Contemporary Qualitative Methods: The Case of Conceptual Coupling, Activity-Type Pairs and Auto-Ethnography

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Abstract

During the course of this paper we mobilise an ideal typical framework that identifies three waves of reduction within contemporary qualitative inquiry as they relate to key aspects of the sociological tradition. The paper begins with a consideration of one of sociology's key questions; namely how is social organisation possible? The paper aims to demonstrate how this question moves from view as increased specialisation and differentiation in qualitative methodology within sociology and related disciplines results in a fragmentation and decontextualisation of social practices from social orders. Indeed, the extent to which qualitative methods have been detached from sociological principles is considered in relation to the emergence of a reductionist tendency. The paper argues that the first wave is typified by conceptual couplings such as 'discourse and the subject', 'narrative and experience', 'space and place' and the second by 'activity type couplings' such as 'walking and talking' and 'making and telling' and then, finally, the third wave exemplified through auto-ethnography and digital lifelogging. We argue each of these three waves represent a series of steps in qualitative reduction that, whilst representing innovation, need to reconnect with questions of action, order and social organisation as a complex whole as opposed to disparate parts.

Keywords: *Social Order, Discourse, Narrative, Mobile Methods, Auto-Ethnography, Reflexivity, Innovation, Qualitative Methods*

Introduction

1.1 During the course of this paper we explore a number of forms of reductionism in qualitative enquiry. These can be understood to be expressed through types of analytic gaze that are characterised by a binary conceptual coupling that reduces the complexity of the social (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2008, 2009, Housley, 2009) and thus underplays the multiple and interconnected character of contours of culture (Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008). We do not object to binaries *per se* but note that such forms of relational pairings are often mobilised as a means of reducing the complexity of social processes which has the consequence of obscuring disciplinary questions and principles (see Mills, 1959).

1.2 This paper is an attempt to consider the range and character of this proliferation of analytic pairings that are often touted as the new totems of methodological innovation. We aim to consider these analytic formulations in terms of both ethnography and our concern with social organisation. Furthermore, we argue that this process of innovation can be interpreted to represent a move from more general modes of practice description to increasingly specific forms of practice description that are often removed from the organisational specificities of their situated production. We argue that whilst on the one hand this is problematic it may also represent a reductionist move that may ultimately provide the grounds for the rediscovery of member's methods and practices as a fulcrum for understanding both social process and the situated accomplishment of orders of action and contours of culture. To this extent we present an account of analytic types that move from the general to the particular in ways that describe practices and methods without recourse to first principles and questions. Indeed, the growth of qualitative methods across the social sciences represents a space through which innovation and post-disciplinary collaboration is promised; however it also serves to obscure disciplinary logics and thereby facilitate analytical accounts for phenomenon for which there are no questions. In the case of *sociology* such questions would relate to how social organisation is possible, why do societies change over time and what form of 'identity-type' is promoted within a given social form (C. Wright Mills: 1959:6). In this paper we take questions of social order and organisation to be a key concern and use it to illustrate the ways in which certain forms of post-

disciplinary qualitative 'social scientific' innovation serves to detract focus from *sociological* understanding(s).

A Typology of Reductive Couplings: From the General to the Particular

1.3 The relationship between social order and action is one which is at the heart of modern sociological theory. Social organisation has often been concerned with matters relating to social structure and macro forces of social reproduction whilst action has been understood in relation to micro-practices. To this extent order and action represent one form of sociological relation that underpins the macro-micro dichotomy. Of course, the relationship between order and action has also been understood as a process which transcends the distinction between the 'macro' and the 'micro'. This is particularly salient within ethnomethodological and interactionist forms of sociological enquiry (Atkinson and Housley, 2003) although it also features in what Alexander (1998) has described as the 'new synthesis' sociology as represented in the work of Giddens (1981 and 2004) on structuration, Elias's figurative sociology and Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1984 and 1989). The claim in this paper is however, that whilst theoretical developments in sociology have been characterised by an attempt to generate levels of analysis and thence account for complexity betwixt social organisation and social action, certain strands of qualitative methodological enquiry have embarked on a converse project: one associated with specialisation, fragmentation and reduction.^[1]

The First Wave of Reduction: Conceptual Couplings

2.1 Within the context of what we identify as the first wave of reduction in contemporary qualitative methods, issues concerning social organisation become reconfigured through a conceptual diversification that appeals to a requirement to tackle 'complexity' and identify criteria that are allegedly overlooked within so called traditional forms of inquiry. In this section, we identify three reductive couplings associated with what we are choosing to describe as 'wave one'. These are 'discourse and the subject', 'narrative and experience' and 'space and place'.

'Discourse and the Subject'

2.2 The case of discourse and the subject as an analytical coupling that reduced the complexity of the social has been discussed in a number of recent papers (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2008, 2009, Housley, 2009). Basically notions of discourse derived from multiple readings of Foucaultian post-structuralism have generated an analytical method that frames data (e.g. interview material, transcribed talk and observation) in terms of prevailing discourses and the constitution of subject positions. This represents a form of dual analytical gaze that utilises discourse on the one hand and the subject on the other. As stated previously (Housley 2009: 69-70):

subjectivity, more often than not, is tied to a second concept whose 'turn' has already been and gone. The complementary concept of 'discourse' provides the second component of a dual analytic gaze through which social phenomena can be interpreted. The analytic payoff from this gaze has been the interpretation of the social world in terms of the various constitutions of subject positions within various settings and their relationship to prevailing discourses in relation to power/knowledge (for example, Willig, 2000) and/or circuits of political economy (for example, Appadurai, 1990). This analytic choice depends on whether studies are oriented towards materialistic or idealistic explanations, or indeed a mixture of the two. There exists a distribution between studies of the material and ideas within so-called critical analyses of subjectivity.

2.3 Furthermore, Housley (2009) goes on to consider the role of interaction in relation to aspects of interiority and relationality currently being entertained within psycho-social approaches. Activities such as passing (Garfinkel, 1967), people processing (Goffman, 1961) and degradation ceremonies (Garfinkel, 1958) locate the performance and accomplishment of self and/or membership within routine observable activities that contribute to the generation, maintenance and circulation of what Goffman (1983) describes as the 'interaction order'. The importance of which is discussed by Rawls (1987) who demonstrates how the ubiquitous character of this production order involves a diverse set of everyday resources, methods and mundane practices over and above those standardly characterised as 'discursive'. As Housley (2009:71) states:

Interactionist sociology has a more complex view of the social; it is not merely 'discursive' (Atkinson and Housley, 2003; Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008). In some respects 'discourse' and the 'subject' is a legacy of post-modern theorizing that fails to provide a sufficiently complex account of social relations, action and organization. The importation of literary devices into conceptual domains that have traditionally sought to account for social phenomena is not without problems. Perhaps, the most significant of these problems is the signature neglect of social organizational matters in the service of diagnosing different discursive terrains and associated subject position(s). In one way [that is commensurate with concepts that were put to good use in deconstructionist narratives] the concepts of 'discourse' and 'the subject' reduce the social to a text; the neglect of other orders of action and organization reflect a reductionist tendency in such forms of world view and explanation (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2008). The textual and discursive characteristics of the social are merely one order of multiple and complex orders of social organization. From an interactionist perspective, self-as-subject has to be understood in terms of situated practices through which enablement and constraint, structure and agency are bound up within the ubiquitous contingent conditions of emergent interaction.

Thus, it is our contention that whilst the analysis of discourses and subject positions may well produce insight into the 'discursive construction of subject positions' it represents a form of reductionism if left to its *own devices* as a stand alone analytical coupling within the context of sociological concerns and questions.

'Narrative and Experience'

2.4 Developing at a similar time and along a commensurate trajectory to our previous type of qualitative reductionism is the conceptual coupling of 'narrative and experience'. Emerging from the misappropriation and abstraction of foundational disciplinary traditions, this reduction is also symptomatic of the reification of the individual and the personal and, in this case, a de-contextualisation of methods developed within the long and established tradition within anthropology, sociology, and the systematic study of folklore.

2.5 To clarify our position, we are not questioning the established and valuable contribution of narrative analysis; rather, we are identifying a process of decontextualisation in which the contribution of narrative analysis, and indeed of the social organisation of narrative practices, are obscured. What is lost is a connection with the interrelation between narrative structures and lived cultures and the sense that social action and its representation (within 'ethnographic', 'scientific', or 'everyday' accounts) bears a distinct narrative organisation (Atkinson, 1990; Atkinson, Delamont, and Housley, 2008). Narratives should never be treated *sui generis*, nor should the analysis of narratives and accounts produced by members be treated as a window on personal experience; for example, the oft repeated analytical gloss that 'X is a life changing event' simply because the informant accounts for it as such in an interview, diary, or other data form. What *is* of sociological interest and significance is the way in which the informant constructs the narrative of X drawing from available resources, normative structures of storytelling, recognisable categories, and relevancy constraints (Sacks, 1995) in accordance with the setting and situation in which the narrative is produced. This topic of inquiry is obscured by a reduced and abstracted analytical coupling of narrative and experience that can be understood as predicating the current fetishisation of the personal account of the researcher as an analytical lens within 'seventh moment' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) auto-ethnographies that epitomises the third wave of reduction discussed later in the paper.

2.6 Our primary concern with the isolation and reification of narrative analysis, removed from the analysis of the possibility and achievement of social organisation in situated contexts, is that it fails to recognise and consistently connect to wider issues of social organisation *in the context in which the narrative is produced*. In the case of narrative and the reporting of experience the part (in this instance the personal experience) is processually and reflexively linked to the whole in both the organisation of the experience (Goffman, 1974) and the way in which it is reported and rendered report-able (Garfinkel, 1967). The recognition of this ordering relation is of primary importance in both the analysis of narrative as members' practice; however, in terms of locating such analysis within wider sociological inquiry; we observe a de-construction of narrative forms of social action without a necessary re-contextualisation within the social.

2.7 As Sacks (1984) demonstrated, even when narratives and accounts are concerned with reporting of personal experience, they display clear organisational and 'ordinary' features which can be subjected to systematic analysis revealing the social and cultural organisation of such reports rather than a more simple resource use of an account of 'what-it-is-like-to-be-X' (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2008). As revealed by the application of narrative analysis within sociological inquiries (e.g. Mishler, 1984 and Butler, 1999) accounts and narratives of experience are not a simple externalisation of the 'internal worlds' of our informants; rather, they are analysable sites of social (in this case, spoken) action in which *social* meanings are constructed and negotiated, thus providing an insight in to the mundane, practical organisation and accounting of affairs by members. As Blumer (1969), summarising the interactionist position, argued, social action, and thus the social situation, is not an externalisation of human character but it is through social action that human character is formed. The situated and social nature of the narrative in relation to recipient design and vocabularies of motive mean that:

For the most part people tell stories to do something – to complain, to boast, to inform, to alert, to tease, to explain or excuse or to justify... Recipients are orientated not only to the story as a discursive unit, but to what is being done by it, with it, through it; for the story and any aspect of its telling, they can attend the 'why that now' question (Schegloff, 1997:1)

2.8 In the case under consideration, analytical reduction occurs when that-which-our-informants-tell-us about their 'personal experiences' comes to dominate in an as sociological analysis of the accounting of those worlds. This stripping of sociological value is further compounded when 'narrative analysis' is pursued as a 'specialist' domain of inquiry rather than providing a significant contribution within disciplined and disciplinary inquiry (Atkinson, 2009).

2.9 Building upon previous observations discussed further below (Atkinson, 1997; Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Atkinson and Delamont, 2006), Atkinson (2009) notes the reductive tendency we are discussing here in contemporary treatments of 'illness narratives' and identifies a paradoxical state of affairs in which this occasioned use of narrative by 'medicalised subjects' is promoted as something especially significant whilst, simultaneously, the narrative material itself retains an ambiguous status within the analysis. The problem for Atkinson, as it is for us, is that the 'illness narrative' is simplistically tied to the 'illness experience' which is then counterposed to the 'medical narrative'; thus, the narrative is invoked in the research as the 'personal' voice of the subject against the 'impersonal' discursive formations and enunciative modalities of the medical domain; in short the social is collapsed to the personal and the personal is often simply re-presented in an analysis with scant regard for social ordering and organisation.

2.10 In this mode of reduction, narratives become individuated, and of the individual, as 'qualitative researchers', often operating in 'methodological vacuums' (Atkinson, 2009) tied to specific and specialised arenas of inquiry, develop and 'roll out' innovative methods with the promise of increasingly accurate and

effective means of elicitation and analysis as providing windows on experience; endeavours discussed in our second wave of reduction. To this extent we note Travers recent paper (2009:176) that reflects on the production and circulation of mass market social science texts and strategies associated with securing funded research that may promote conditions where the emphasis on innovation is at the expense of 'acknowledging the difficult debates that constitute social science'. Within the conceptual coupling of narrative and experience the reification and specialisation of narrative as tied to the personal not only reduces the social but also, in our view, obscures any meaningful consideration of the organisation of experience itself.

2.11 Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully cover even the various sociological perspectives concerned with the organisation of experience and situation, our aim here is to demonstrate the emergence and legacy of a generic 'qualitative' approach to the ordering of everyday life which increasingly isolates the 'individual'. It should be axiomatic to the discipline that the concept of 'individual' is a construct, a product of social formation and structures, and as such should be conceived of as embedded within particular orders of action. We find an early point of departure and debate in the process of the conceptual coupling of narrative and experience and the elevation and celebration of the individual in a published exchange between Denzin and Keller (1981) and Goffman (1981) regarding the foundations and implications of Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis*.

2.12 Treating *Frame Analysis* as a summation of Goffman's work, a definition which Goffman (1981) disputed, Denzin and Keller (1981) proceed to critique Goffman's application of the notion of 'frame' to the analysis of the organisation of experience. Beyond definitional moves (for example locating Goffman's work outside of the tradition of Symbolic Interactionism), the central thrust of Denzin and Keller's criticism lies in their interpretation of Goffman as presenting a 'structural analysis of selected and (to our way of thinking) peripheral aspects of everyday experience' (1981: 53). For Denzin and Keller (1981) and for the line of qualitative researchers who follow, it appears that that which does not form a conscious part of a research participants' experience, and is accounted as such, falls outside of the remit of those with an interest in analysing interaction and everyday life.

2.13 Here we are not 'taking sides' in a broad 'interpretive' vs 'structural' interactionist debate (although it is perhaps clear where we would stand if pushed), but rather we are positioning this debate as indicative of a point of departure in qualitative sociology in which the analysis, and use in analysis, of wider, deep, organisational features of social action and interaction are submerged or sidelined within inquiries which place the *individual*, rather than social action, as a locus of analysis. Questions relating to the possibility of social organisation, the role of the interaction order (Goffman, 1983; Rawls, 1987), and the ethnomethodological re-working of Durkheim's aphorism (Garfinkel, 1996, 2001) are sidelined.

Space and Place

2.14 Although we do not offer a full discussion of this conceptual coupling in this paper (it is worthy of a paper in its own right) we also observe this form of analytical reduction within contemporary qualitative methods in relation to the so called 'spatial turn' in the social sciences (Cresswell, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005)^[2]. The coupling of space (thought of as a concept or theoretical abstraction) and place (considered as related to action, meaning and experience) has in a relatively short period come to be a key concern within contemporary qualitative sociological inquiry. In our third conceptual coupling the reduction that occurs is complex in that, when discussed from the void of post-disciplinarity, we find that both terms often act as a gloss for social processes whilst simultaneously offering a deterministic and causal explanation device. Furthermore, just as with the 'interview society' we too find that the reification of spatial and place concerns is not just the stuff of the approach of social scientists but is also found in urban planning discourse and practice in the pursuit of strategies intended to design out deviant behaviour and regulate morality through architecture and the built environment (e.g. <http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=2%2C2870%2C3139%2C3159%2C5738>).

2.15 We also find the sudden 'spatial turn' to be a curious claim. Granted there has recently been an increased emphasis upon the way in which social life is *emplaced* but this is not really news. 'Everything happens somewhere' has become a tagline for the spatial turn in which it is argued that sociological research has mistakenly and consistently treated place as 'container in which social life simply happens'. This claim (which of course needs to be made if one is making the following claim for a corrective 'turn') represents a miscomprehension of the use of the term 'setting' in early environmental psychology and interactionist, ethnomethodological, and anthropological research. From these perspectives 'setting' never entailed a simple backdrop but rather indicated arrangements of resources, cues, and conditions for behaviour and conduct (see Wright and Barker, 1950). This understanding was elucidated in its most recognisable terms in the work of Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963, 1974) and yet it is still largely unrecognised that Goffman's notions of back stage and front stage and furnished frame are not linguistic metaphors but refer to the organisation of everyday spatial practice. Further, more recently there has been a renewed interest in spatial arrangements, membership, and what we might call ethno-spatial competence (see Crabtree, 2000; Laurier, 2003; Mondada, 2009). In this sense, the often abstract theorisations of human, social and cultural geography are of less significance than the sense making practices of members.

2.16 Of course, it is worth noting that these are not the only conceptual pairings currently occupying a central position within qualitative research methodologies; more recent first wave type conceptual couplings may include 'Embodiment and Affect' and 'Representation and Display', all of which are significant and valuable areas of inquiry but none of which warrant abstraction as analytical specialism. Following the conceptual couplings and specialisations identified in the first wave we now intend to discuss examples of methodological innovation in which we find the operationalisation of first wave type reduction in a further two waves which further obscure a concern with social organisation and everyday practice.

The Second Wave of Reduction: Activity Type Pairings

3.1 The second wave of reduction involves a shift from forms of conceptual coupling to praxiological coupling; this shift involves the identification of 'activity types' that are presented as novel, innovative or increasingly epistemologically refined and efficient ways of 'capturing' or 'documenting' various lifeworlds.

3.2 What is lost within this particular wave of reduction and de-contextualisation is an engagement with the ethno-methods employed in the navigation, reporting, and accomplishment of everyday life. Practices which should feature as a significant topic of sociological enquiry are, instead, treated as a resource which may be 'tapped in to' with the forms of 'innovative methods' described below. We also observe that, rather ironically, the very ethno-methods employed by members in their day to day lives and routines are seized upon by professional sociologists as new ways in to the very lifeworlds in which these practices are regularly, routinely, and ritually, mobilised and there is rarely an accompanying sociological analysis of the accomplished practices themselves. The two examples that we have chosen to discuss are 'Walking and Talking' and 'Making and Telling'.

Go-Alongs: Walking and Talking

3.3 The so called 'spatial turn' in the social sciences has been linked to a recent and sustained interest in 'mobile methods' which are increasingly centred upon gaining access to the 'co-ingredience' (Anderson, 2004) of space, place, and social action. This has also been described as a 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry, 2006) where mobile methods are able to capture some of the theorised networks, movement and flows associated with complex social forms (Urry, 2003). Recent work by Spinney (2009) and Fincham et al (2009) have explored mobile methods in relation to the study of mobilities within the changing urban cityscape. This has provided an opportunity to reflect and develop methods that are, it is claimed, commensurate with the study of social practices 'on the move'. However, perhaps the most popular 'methods on the move' can be found in the contemporary fashion for pairing the activity types of walking and talking as a strategy for generating data (Kusenbach, 2003, Moles, 2008). Specifically, we are thinking of methods in which participants are invited to take researchers on guided tours of a given location whilst being asked questions by the researcher. Again, we are not critical of this method *per se* but do question the extent to which walking interviews and 'go-alongs' can be said to really offer any insight to wider questions related to the social organisation of place.

Furthermore, we draw a clear distinction between ethnographic research concerned with walking as practice, with informants who are already 'walkers', outreach workers for example, (see Housley and Smith, forthcoming), and research in which the walk is conducted purely within the context of the research situation. In the latter case the examination of walking as a social practice or method, as part of an array of other ethno-methods or performative resources that are utilised in space, is distinct from the quest for novel forms of data generation. Thus, the walking is tied to a specific relational activity; namely 'talking' and a normative frame of instruction e.g. walking to 'informants' places of significance in terms of their daily round as a means of eliciting biographical accounts that suggest a micro-geographical presentation of 'self'. We see this is an interesting avenue for research although the concept of the 'geographical self' provides an analytical resource for an asociological glossing of ubiquitous interactional order(s).

3.4 We also note that for research concerned with place, community and locality then walking tours may, for example, be preferable to interviews conducted in the private sphere of the home. A number of studies have suggested that the two forms of interview strategy differ in relation to topic of conversation; the former being far more concerned with personal relationships and the latter with area and place (Jones *et al*, 2008). We understand this finding to be tied to the way in which members routinely build accounts mobilising available visual resources (see Hester and Francis, 2003; Smith, 2009; Housley and Smith, forthcoming) and suggest that whilst the mobility of the interview may provide an influence on topic selection and sequential organisation we argue that situated interviews conducted within the setting being accounted for would yield similar outcomes despite being stationary. It is perhaps ironic that in the use of this method we see both the complexity of place *and* social organisation reduced to an analysis of accounts which are located simply in 'space'.

3.5 The problematic nature of this potentially insightful method is, we feel, further compounded when analytical inference is made from the routes taken by the participants. As with any other data, issues arise in the conditions of their production that impact upon their status for claims making and, as such, a route taken by a participant on a given occasion is tied to the research situation and thus reveals little about the way in which the informant uses and navigates the setting in the course of routine activity let alone what we might call the 'navigational methods' utilised to achieve this. In this sense, the activity-type coupling of 'walking and talking' is seldom recognised as an organised and organising practice as demonstrated in Ryave and Schenkein's (1974) paper.

3.6 Ryave and Schenkein's (1974) classic study of walking identifies what they refer to as the 'navigational problem' with regard to walking on a busy pavement. This study, an early example of the affordances of first order video data, provides technical access to the way in which walking is organised by the recognition-production order of members engaged in the continual accomplishment of the 'pavement order'. Observable phenomenon such as a hand-holding couple, a group of friends, a woman walking alone, the 'correctness' of walking on the pavement as opposed to the road and so on, are mutually recognised, produced, and maintained by those in the business of the concerted and orderly achievement of walking on the pavement. The examination of the 'just how' of walking as an integral aspect of the spatialised ordering activities of social actors connects with ethnomethodologically informed studies of the accomplishment of space (e.g. Watson, 2005, Manzo, 2005) crossing busy roads (Livingstone, 1978), and navigating a walk to the supermarket (Hester and Francis, 2003).

3.7 If the activity type coupling of 'walking and talking' is related to the specialised requirement of

accessing people's knowledge of place as enacted in space then our second activity-type coupling sheds further light on how contemporary mobilization of these types within qualitative methodological innovation reproduces the drive to elicit participants 'experiences' at the expense of answers to questions relating to social order and organization. It is to an exploration of this type that we now turn.

Mock-Ups: Making and Telling

3.8 A more recent reduction in qualitative methods comes in the form of another 'methodological innovation' which sees members invited to construct models intended to represent a material narrative of the participant's lives and or identity. Again, we note that these analysts' methods are intended to achieve transformations in the researcher-researched relationship and, moreover, to provide the researcher with greater access to the participants' 'worlds' and 'identities'. Such a concern can be seen as an extension of the increasingly narrowed focus upon the subjective and the experiential and is grounded in an attempt to secure more refined authentic approximations of identity and social experience. In one sense a focus on identity and associated forms of membership are reasonable sociological objectives; however personalized narratives of experience can (if read in isolation) detract from the 'relationality of the subject', or in our terms, the routine accomplishment of membership within situated and ubiquitous orders of ordinary and (sometimes) extraordinary action (Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008; Housley, 2009).

3.9 A relevant example of 'making and telling' is the 'Lego identity' project (Gauntlett, 2007) and whilst we recognise that this research does not strictly fall within Sociology the method has been recognised as an innovation in 'qualitative methods' in social science. Gauntlett (2007) describes a methodology in which participants are invited to construct Lego 'metaphors' that represent their identity. Gauntlett (2007) argues that in research situations where participants are engaged in more than simply talk, as in the interview situation, one elicits a more 'truthful' response regarding insights in to the identity of the participant. This claim is based upon the assertion that the participants are engaging other parts of the brain, are participating in a less formalised situation than the standard interview, and partake in an embodied process. We find the creative methodology an interesting and indeed promising innovation and Gauntlett (forthcoming) extends this methodology to a wider discussion of the social nature and 'connectedness' of everyday creativity, an important contribution. Our concern, however, lies in the way in which this methodology may be taken up in making claims about the social; here we use the Lego project as an example of the activity type coupling of 'Making and Telling' in which the potential analytical reduction occurs.

3.10 The metaphorical Lego model produced, and the accompanying account provided by the producer, acts as a resource for analysts' accounts and it is in this way that it is similar to one of the types of *glosses* which concerned Garfinkel and Sacks (1970:362). In this paper, Garfinkel and Sacks refer to communicative 'glossing practices' in which 'persons, in the same ways that they recognise or understand each other as knowing how to speak, are engaged in concertedly meaning differently than they can say in just so many words'. One type of glossing practice identified in the discussion is that of the 'mock-up' which, for Garfinkel and Sacks, is analogous to a plastic model of a working combustion engine:

It is possible to buy a plastic engine that will tell you something about how auto engines work. The plastic engine preserves certain properties of the auto engine... it will show how the pistons move with respect to the crankshaft; how they are timed to a firing sequence, and so on. (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970: 363)

3.11 Thus, for Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) the 'mock-up' represents a form of communication in which members form an account of an observable-reportable situation. Importantly the 'mock up', the plastic engine or Lego model, contains features that allow some access to the actuality of the situation, thus some information may be gained regarding its structure and form; however, equally importantly, they note that the plastic engine, the 'mock-up', will also make 'specifically and deliberately false provision for some of the *essential* features of that situation' (1970: 363 original emphasis). Of course, for Garfinkel and Sacks this typification and definition serves to re-specify glossing practices as part of the mutually achieved world of members (Garfinkel, 1967) and a facet of the machinery of seeing and telling (Sacks, 1995); yet we note that the mock-ups produced in such creative research methods, whilst acknowledged as a *resemblance*, are taken as standing for the identity or situation more closely than the informant may ordinarily be able to achieve with talk; the solely linguistic and verbal 'mock-up' is seen to be of a lesser degree of authenticity than when accompanied by their material counterparts. Indeed, if interview talk is constrained by relevancy, situation, and socio-cultural speech codes, then the creative process involving the construction of models is tied to the affordances of the medium and instruction provided. Lego, by its very nature, is designed to be cohesive, to fit together in particular, materially defined ways. The provision of verbal instructions regarding the construction of models that reflects ones thoughts, feelings or experiences in relation to particular designated topic relevant categories provides further routine grounds for the production of a situated 'Lego-bound' method of interpretation. For us, it is unfortunate that the rich data produced in such sessions are not utilised to investigate *how* members first produce and then account for the models in relation to the search 'for underlying patterns' (Garfinkel, 1967).

3.12 In the case of 'Making and Telling', we observe a similar epistemological distinction as exhibited between 'walking as practice' and 'walking as research method' with regard to creative practices. If one is interested in the way in which people formulate and express identity, membership, and belonging through creative methods then does it not make more sense to analyse this being done in practice by those in the business of doing so? A relevant example from the anthropological record is to be found in Babcock's (1986) discussion of Helen Cordero's 'Modelled Selves' and the way in which clay figures are made significant through their active enrolment within kinship and associated relations of meaning. Besides, 'identity' is a matter of situational contingency within various parameters of constraint and commitment (Foote, 1951; Vryan *et al*, 2003) and, in this sense at least, the form of material manifestation (spoken, performed, made, built, sketched and so on) makes little difference.

3.13 Here we have discussed two examples of the way in which everyday practices as 'activity-type couplings' are taken up as 'scientific' practice via their extraction from everyday life and their contextualization in the reductive conceptual couplings we discussed as representing the first wave (e.g. discourse and subject, narrative and experience). In the final section of the paper we discuss the third wave of reduction that is a logical extension of innovation that fails to orientate social scientific qualitative methods to questions of social organisation and the ordering of relations (Law, 1994).

The Third Wave of Reduction: From the Social to the Researcher

4.1 The third wave of reduction from the social that we identify in this paper involves a turning of the reflexive gaze upon oneself as a socially scientific coherent and valid enterprise in its own right; we understand this as a form of reflexive reduction. One's own thoughts, experiences and practices become a fulcrum from which knowledge about the *social* can be feasibly generated. Two examples that are readily identifiable are 'auto-ethnography' and the emergent digital cultural practice of 'lifelogging'^[3] (Byrne et al 2008) in this paper we will focus on auto-ethnography as this remains the most developed at this moment in time.

4.2 For us, this recent 'moment' in qualitative research represents a curious revalorization of members' practices that are turned upon a reflexive examination of the researchers' lifeworld and perspective in place of any examination of the interaction order or participants' social settings. Of course, such practices of research may promise phenomenological insight but, if left in isolation, miss the *social* character of the categories of experience that are reported upon (Delamont, 2009).

Auto-ethnography: Me, Myself and Us?

4.3 The dislocation and abstraction of practice and action from questions of social organisation reaches its zenith in the recent emergence of auto-ethnography as a form of sociological qualitative inquiry. In this form of inquiry we are presented with the ultimately 'authentic' account of the research detailing, often in excruciating detail, aspects of their personal lives and various experiences that they have lived, and are living, through. Despite the myriad concerns regarding the analytical shortcomings and ethical dilemmas that this approach engenders the method is growing in popularity, is frequently published, presented at conferences, and has found its way on to post-graduate methods courses.

4.4 Whilst we acknowledge the argument that society is always experienced and encountered through the self (a claim central to the genesis of symbolic interaction and associated forms of sociological enquiry) we reject the notion that this is a sufficient instrument for the study of society.; indeed it is the ultimate form of social reductive method that obscures the distribution of relations through the lens of individuation; this is the supplanting of autobiographical reflexive awareness in fieldwork with the 'narcissistic substitution of autoethnography for research' (Delamont, 2009). Rather than salient features of the research experience forming embryonic research questions, avenues of inquiry, and reflexive checks and balances on analysis, they are seized upon as data. We suggest that within this analytical moment the 'natural attitude' and commonsense renderings prevail as the underpinning shared assumptions and structures of experience and society identified by Husserl, (1999) Schutz, (1953) and Pollner (1987), among others, remain unchallenged and are further incorporated in to sociological knowledge. The simultaneous collapse of the social (the whole) in to the personal (the part) and the decoupling from questions of organisation are displayed in the extract below:

The autoethnographer functions as a universal singular, a single instance of more universal social experiences. This subject is "summed up and for this reason universalized by his [her] epoch, he [she] resumes it by reproducing him [her] self in it as a singularity" (Sartre, 1963, p. ix). Every person is like every other person, but like no other person. The autoethnographer inscribes the experiences of a historical moment, universalizing these experiences in their singular effects on a particular life. (Denzin, 2003: 268)

4.5 In the case of auto-ethnography, as defined in the aphoristic quote above, we observe a simultaneous reduction and conceptual inflation. The experience of the individual (and not just any individual but the generalized ethnographer) is reified to the highest degree whilst the organisational and distributive contingencies, framings and stratifications at play are sidelined. In our view, the link between social actors (the part) and society (the whole) is not revealed by simply extrapolating self as a form of analytical lens but, rather, through a sustained incorporation of matters of situated process, organisation, and emergent social formations (Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008).

4.6 In this sense, one can envision a meta-analysis, and subsequent respecification, of the pages of data that are currently being produced by the auto-ethnographers revealing particular mechanisms employed in production, acceptance, and circulation of social scientific knowledge. This is of interest as, in many ways, auto-ethnography removes the established anthropological gloss (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970: 364-365) in which the 'product' of the professional report is (was) disconnected from how fieldnotes were 'collected, expanded, analysed, revised, and otherwise used' which are, in turn, disconnected from 'field circumstances as constituent features of those circumstances'. Here the experience, field, analysis, and report are entangled, often purposefully presented as 'mess'. We are not against 'messy description' as a means to analyse, treat, and represent complexity but find the methods with which people produce 'unmessy' reports of their everyday lives of far greater significance than the potential pitfalls of sustained self-reportage.

Conclusion: Eliciting the 'Authentic Subject' and the Recycling of Ethno-methods?

5.1 As qualitative methods proliferate across disciplinary divisions and fields of inquiry we observe, as

noted above, the construction of a post-disciplinary void from which to practice and develop qualitative methods without recourse to first questions. We note a commonality across the second and third wave innovations in the way in which each method is, ultimately, concerned with ways in which to elicit 'deeper', more 'truthful', increasingly 'personal' and thus 'authentic' responses from participants whilst at the same time retreating from questions of organisation in servicing the characteristics of a reductionist conceptual apparatus. Tied to this observation is that each method inexorably returns to the analysis of talk as the primary, if not only, form of analysable material or, at the very least, explanatory conduit. It would appear then, that rather than a move away from the interview toward 'the visual paradigm', 'the mobility paradigm', 'the multi-sensory paradigm', the 'multi-modal paradigm' and so on and so on, what we are actually witnessing is an expansion and proliferation of the 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997) in an ever increasing range of elicitation devices.

5.2 Atkinson and Silverman (1997) observed an ethos within qualitative research in which attempts to really 'get to know' informants via various interviewing methodologies were hailed as being increasingly successful in revealing the subjects' 'genuine voice'. This claimed Romantic achievement was often tied to a removal of various communicative constraints; for example, the 'levelling' of power relations between researcher and researched discussed above. We note in the current argument that, just as the in-depth interview was seen to be a means for the revelation of the subjects' voice, then many contemporary methodological innovations can be understood as searches for authenticity whilst at the same time appealing to the unique character status of the mode of elicitation promoted. In this sense the project of qualitative innovation can provide the grounds for treating such activities as a resource rather than as a topic of inquiry in their own right.

5.3 Thus, the second commonality we observe within contemporary qualitative methods, inexorably flowing from the first, is the way in which practices employed by people in their day to day lives, essentially human practices, are abstracted from their everyday occurrence, isolated from the ongoing flow of activity in which they usually occur, and then re-presented to 'participants' in the guise of an 'innovative methodology'. Again, we find this strange in that there are any number of occasions in which one with an interest in peoples' practices of walking and talking, making and telling, and everyday reflections can satisfy this interest in a range of readily available and accessible settings; our argument being that if one is concerned with place, identity, or affect, for example, then to examine these phenomena through signature human practices repackaged as innovative methods in order to gain a deeper access to them only serves to reduce the complexity of methods through which place, identity and affect are routinely accomplished by social actors. We also recognise that reduction is a central means with which to make either scientific or mundane claims of the world. The narratives discussed in the first wave of reduction are attractive to researchers precisely because of the way in which they reduce the complexity of the situation. Conceptual couplings provide a resource for focussing on particular discrepancies and 'framings' of phenomenon that provide distinct links between persons and identifiable materials of integration and/or control. Furthermore, by avoiding the complexity or mess associated with the social (Law, 2004) singular focus upon 'space', 'narrative' or 'discourse' in relation to the 'formation of subjects', 'the constitution of places' or the contours of 'experience' provide the grounds for second wave focus on activity-type elicitation techniques. However, as this paper has argued the focus on elicitation is at the expense of how the everyday activities identified as suitable resources for enhancing data collection are in themselves uniquely adequate in relation to interaction order. This retreat from a consideration of social organisation as an accomplished activity becomes even more visible in over reliance upon self reportage in the guise of the description of people's practices.

5.4 The retreat from the social to the conceptual couplings of 'discourse and the subject' or 'narrative and experience' or 'space and place' has consequences. For example, in relation to the subsequent focus on 'activity-types' (that flows from the first wave conceptual couplings identified above) this often involves the repackaging of members methods as 'innovative' methods. We may ask the question why not study member's practices and methods from the outset in relation to first principles and classic questions? This reaffirms a point made earlier in this paper namely that the differentiation and specialisation of method is no bad thing. For us, the problem becomes apparent when analyses do not attempt to link the method back to social organisational contingencies. Whether these contingencies are understood as complex, situated and emergent albeit within parameters of constraint (e.g. Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2008) or political, economic and global (e.g. Burroway, 1998) is not of direct relevance to the issue at stake in this paper. Both the strategies of complex ethnography and the extended case method provide a means of reconnecting the parts to the whole. In the case of the extended case method Burroway argues that the field site or setting under observation (and interaction therein) should be understood within the context of historical process and social change at the same time observations made in the field should be used to test and modify existing theory; thus the process of extending the case is achieved through adherence to a set of definite analytic considerations which combine interactional insights with historical and political economic theory. In the case of complex ethnography settings and practices under observation are examined in terms of a number of inter-related orders (e.g. the visual, the discursive, narrative and the use of objects and materials) of action that are assembled, deployed and used in the accomplishment of interaction order and organisation. In turn through a cumulative ethnographic approach this informs how interaction order (and different orders of action) are routinely assembled and circulated as part of an ongoing ordering and reordering of social relations. Thus our concern with the innovations we have identified is that they neither connect to the historical and social-theoretical concerns raised by Burroway nor recognise the social organisational imperative and multiple orders of inter-related social action identified by Atkinson, Delamont and Housley (2008).

5.5 Strategies of reduction are not necessarily bad in themselves; they provide a set of conceptual instruments which are able to unpick particular aspects of action and social organisation. One can imagine how these instruments can be used to analyse 'signature effects' of social organisational matters. However, a retreat into methodological reduction as a strategy of innovation presents serious methodological and theoretical problems that demand consideration in order that they might inform data

Notes

¹We are referring to waves of reduction not as a clear cut set of chronological developments; but as an ideal typical device that provides a means of exploring reductive tendencies within recent strategies of methodological innovation.

²Indeed, we aim to address matters relating to the spatial turn in subsequent work we simply do not have space to address it here. However, a consideration of space and place in terms of interaction order and social organisation can found in Atkinson, Delamont and Housley (2008). For important contributions to the spatial turn see Massey (2005) Creswell (2004) and for the sociological roots of the recent social-spatial turn in Lefebvre (1991).

³Lifeloggging refers to the visual and audio logging of interaction in 'real time'. New forms of software and body fixed hardware (i.e. small compact digital cameras as exemplified by Microsoft's Sensecam: <<http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/um/cambridge/projects/sensecam/>>) coupled with internet access, wi-fi and the increased power of computing. This has afforded new opportunities for the audio and visual documentation of the 'daily round' and everyday mundane activities which can then be replayed and analysed accordingly as a retrievable, empirical and transparent data source.

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