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What is ethnomethodology?

The following studies seek to treat practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study, and by paying to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events, seek to learn about them as phenomena in their own right. Their central recommendation is that the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings "account-able." The "reflexive," or "incarnate" character of accounting practices and accounts makes up the crux of that recommendation. When I speak of accountable my interests are directed to such matters as the following. I mean observable-and-reportable, *i.e.* available to members as situated practices of looking-and-telling. I mean, too, that such practices consist of an endless, ongoing, contingent accomplishment; that they are carried on under the auspices of, and are made to happen as events in, the same ordinary affairs that in organizing they describe; that the practices are done by parties to those settings whose skill with, knowledge of, and entitlement to the detailed work of that accomplishment—whose competence—they obstinately depend upon, recognize, use, and take for granted; and *that* they take their competence for granted itself furnishes parties with a setting's

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distinguishing and particular features, and of course it furnishes them as well as resources, troubles, projects, and the rest.

Some structurally equivocal features of the methods and results by persons doing sociology, lay and professional, of making practical activities observable were epitomized by Helmer and Rescher.[1] When members' accounts of everyday activities are used as prescriptions with which to locate, to identify, to analyze, to classify, to make recognizable, or to find one's way around in comparable occasions, the prescriptions, they observe, are law-like, spatiotemporally restricted, and "loose." By "loose" is meant that though they are intendedly conditional in their logical form, "the nature of the conditions is such that they can often not be spelled out completely or fully." The authors cite as an example a statement about sailing fleet tactics in the 18th century. They point out the statement carries as a test condition reference to the state of naval ordnance.

> In elaborating conditions (under which such a statement would hold) the historian delineates what is typical of the place and period. The full implications of such reference may be vast and inexhaustible; for instance . . . ordnance soon ramifies *via* metal working technology into metallurgy, mining, etc. Thus, the conditions which are operative in the formulation of an historical law may only be indicated in a general way, and are not necessarily, indeed, in most cases cannot be expected to be exhaustively articulated. This characteristic of such laws is here designed as *looseness.* . . .

> A consequence of the looseness of historical laws is that they are not universal, but merely quasi-general in that they admit of exceptions. Since the conditions delimiting the area of application of the law are often not exhaustively articulated, a supposed violation of the law may be explicable by showing that a legitimate, but as yet unformulated, precondition of the law's applicability is not fulfilled in the case under consideration.

Consider that this holds in every *particular* case, and holds not by reason of the meaning of "quasi-law," but because of investigators' actual, particular practices.

[1] Olaf Helmer and Nicholas Rescher, *On the Epistemology of the Inexact Sciences,* P-1513 (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, October 13, 1958), pp. 8-14.

Further, Helmer and Rescher point out,

> The laws may be taken to contain a tacit caveat of the "usually" or "other things being equal" type. An historical law is thus not strictly universal in that it must be taken as applicable to all cases falling within the scope of its explicitly formulated or formulable conditions; rather, it may be thought to formulate relationships which obtain generally, or better, which obtain "as a rule."

> Such a "law" we will term *quasi-law*. In order for the law to be valid it is not necessary that no apparent exceptions occur. It is only necessary that, if an apparent exception should occur, an adequate explanation be forthcoming, an explanation demonstrating the exceptional characteristic of the case in hand by establishing the violation of an appropriate, if hitherto unformulated, condition of the law's applicability.

These and other features can be cited for the cogency with which they describe members' accounting practices. Thus: (1) Whenever a member is required to demonstrate that an account analyzes an actual situation, he invariably makes use of the practices of "et cetera," "unless," and "let it pass" to demonstrate the rationality of his achievement. (2) The definite and sensible character of the matter that is being reported is settled by an assignment that reporter and auditor make to each other that each will have furnished whatever unstated understandings are required. Much therefore of what is actually reported is not mentioned. (3) Over the time for their delivery accounts are apt to require that "auditors" be willing to wait for what will have been said in order that the present significance of what has been said will have become clear. (4) Like conversations, reputations, and careers, the particulars of accounts are built up step by step over the actual uses of and references to them. (5) An account's materials are apt to depend heavily for sense upon their serial placement, upon their relevance to the auditor's projects, or upon the developing course of the organizational occasions of their use.

In short, *recognizable* sense, or fact, or methodic character, or impersonality, or objectivity of accounts are not independent of the socially organized occasions of their use. Their rational features *consist* of what members do with, what they "make of" the ac-

counts in the socially organized actual occasions of their use. Members' accounts are reflexively and essentially tied for their rational features to the socially organized occasions of their use for they are *features* of the socially organized occasions of their use.

That tie establishes the central topic of our studies: the rational accountability of practical actions as an ongoing, practical accomplishment. I want to specify the topic by reviewing three of its constituent, problematic phenomena. Wherever studies of practical action and practical reasoning are concerned, these consist of the following: (1) the unsatisfied programmatic distinction between and substitutability of objective (context free) for indexical expressions; (2) the "uninteresting" essential reflexivity of accounts of practical actions; and (3) the analyzability of actions-in-context as a practical accomplishment.

The unsatisfied programmatic distinction between and substitutability of objective for indexical expressions

Properties that are exhibited by accounts (by reason of their being features of the socially organized occasions of their use) are available from studies by logicians as the properties of indexical expressions and indexical sentences. Husserl[2] spoke of expressions whose sense cannot be decided by an auditor without his necessarily knowing or assuming something about the biography and the purposes of the user of the expression, the circumstances of the utterance, the previous course of the conversation, or the particular relationship of actual or potential interaction that exists between the expressor and the auditor. Russell[3] observed that descriptions involving them apply on each occasion of use to only one thing, but to different things on different occasions. Such expressions, wrote Goodman,[4] are used to make unequivocal statements that nevertheless seem to change in truth value. Each of their utterances, "tokens," constitutes a word and refers to a cer-

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[2] In Marvin Farber, *The Foundation of Phenomenology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1943), pp. 237-238.

[3] Bertrand Russell, *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1940), pp. 134-143.

[4] Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 287-298.

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tain person, time, or place, but names something not named by some replica of the word. Their denotation is relative to the speaker. Their use depends upon the relation of the user to the object with which the word is concerned. Time for a temporal indexical expression is relevant to what it names. Similarly, just what region a spatial indexical expression names depends upon the location of its utterance. Indexical expressions and statements containing them are not freely repeatable; in a given discourse, not all their replicas therein are also translations of them. The list can be extended indefinitely.

Virtually unanimous agreement exists among students of practical sociological reasoning, laymen and professionals, about the properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions. Impressive agreement exists as well (1) that although indexical expressions "are of enormous utility" they are "awkward for formal discourse"; (2) that a distinction between objective expressions and indexical expressions is not only procedurally proper but unavoidable for whosoever would do science; (3) that without the distinction between objective and indexical expressions, and without the preferred use of objective expressions the victories of generalizing, rigorous, scientific inquiries—logic, mathematics, some of the physical sciences—are unintelligible, the victories would fail, and the inexact sciences would have to abandon their hopes; (4) that the exact sciences are distinguishable from the inexact sciences by the fact that in the case of the exact sciences the distinction between and substitution of objective for indexical expressions for problem formulation, methods, findings, adequate demonstration, adequate evidence and the rest is both an actual task and an actual achievement, whereas in the case of the inexact sciences the availability of the distinction and substitutability to actual tasks, practices, and results remains unrealizably programmatic; (5) that the distinction between objective and indexical expressions, insofar as the distinction consists of inquirers' tasks, ideals, norms, resources, achievements, and the rest describes the difference between sciences and arts—e.g., between biochemistry and documentary filming; (6) that terms and sentences can be distinguished as one or the other in accordance with an assessment procedure that makes decidable their character as indexical or objective ex-

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pressions; and (7) that in any particular case only practical diffi-
culties prevent the substitution by an objective expression for an
indexical expression.

Features of indexical expressions motivate endless methodologi-
cal studies directed to their remedy. Indeed, attempts to rid the
practices of a science of these nuisances lends to each science its
distinctive character of preoccupation and productivity with meth-
odological issues. Research practitioners' studies of practical activ-
ities of a science, whatever their science, afford them endless
occasions to deal rigorously with indexical expressions.

Areas in the social sciences where the promised distinction and
promised substitutability occurs are countless. The promised
distinction and substitutability are supported by and themselves
support immense resources directed to developing methods for the
strong analysis of practical actions and practical reasoning. Prom-
ised applications and benefits are immense.

Nevertheless, *wherever practical actions are topics of study* the
promised distinction and substitutability of objective for indexical
expressions remains programmatic in every *particular* case and in
every *actual* occasion in which the distinction or substitutability
must be demonstrated. In every actual case without exception, con-
ditions will be cited that a competent investigator will be required
to recognize, such that in *that* particular case the terms of the
demonstration can be relaxed and nevertheless the demonstration
be counted an adequate one.

We learn from logicians and linguists, who are in virtually unan-
imous agreement about them, what some of these conditions are.
For "long" texts, or "long" courses of action, for events where
members' actions are features of the events their actions are ac-
complishing, or wherever tokens are not used or are not suitable
as proxies for indexical expressions, the program's claimed demon-
strations are satisfied as matters of practical social management.

Under such conditions indexical expressions, by reason of their
prevalence and other properties, present immense, obstinate, and
irremediable nuisances to the tasks of dealing rigorously with the
phenomena of structure and relevance in theories of consistency
proofs and computability, and in attempts to recover actual as com-
pared with supposed common conduct and common talk with full
structural particulars. Drawing upon their experience in the uses

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of sample surveys, and the design and application of measurements of practical actions, statistical analyses, mathematical models, and computer simulations of social processes, professional sociologists are able to document endlessly the ways in which the programmatic distinction and substitutability is satisfied in, and depends upon, professional practices of socially managed demonstration.

In short, wherever studies of practical actions are involved, the distinction and substitutability is always accomplished *only* for all practical purposes. Thereby, the first problematic phenomenon is recommended to consist of the reflexivity of the practices and attainments of sciences in and of the organized activities of everyday life, which is an essential reflexivity.

The "uninteresting" essential reflexivity of accounts

For members engaged in practical sociological reasoning—as we shall see in later studies, for staff personnel at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, for staff users of psychiatric clinic folders at U.C.L.A., for graduate student coders of psychiatric records, for jurors, for an intersexed person managing a sex change, for professional sociological researchers—their concerns are for what is decidable "for practical purposes," "in light of this situation," "given the nature of actual circumstances," and the like. Practical circumstances and practical actions refer for them to many organizationally important and serious matters: to resources, aims, excuses, opportunities, tasks, and of course to grounds for arguing or foretelling the adequacy of procedures and of the findings they yield. One matter, however, is excluded from their interests: practical actions and practical circumstances are not in themselves *a* topic, let alone a sole topic of their inquiries; nor are their inquiries, addressed to the tasks of sociological theorizing, undertaken to formulate what these tasks consist of as practical actions. In no case is the investigation of practical actions undertaken in order that personnel might be able to recognize and describe what they are doing in the first place. Least of all are practical actions investigated in order to explain to practitioners their own talk about what they are doing. For example personnel at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center found it altogether incongruous to consider seriously that they be so engaged in the

work of certifying mode of death that a person seeking to commit suicide, and they could concert their efforts to assure the unequivocal recognition of "what really happened."

To say they are "not interested" in the study of practical actions is not to complain, nor to point to an opportunity they miss, nor is it a disclosure of error, nor is it an ironic comment. Neither is it the case that because members are "not interested" that they are "precluded" from sociological theorizing. Nor do their inquiries preclude the use of the rule of doubt, nor are they precluded from making the organized activities of everyday life scientifically problematical, nor does the comment insinuate a difference between "basic" and "applied" interests in research and theorizing.

What does it mean then to say that they are "not interested" in studying practical actions and practical sociological reasoning? And what is the import of such a statement?

There is a feature of members' accounts that for them is of such singular and prevailing relevance that it controls other features in their specific character as recognizable, rational features of practical sociological inquiries. The feature is this. With respect to the problematic character of practical actions and to the practical adequacy of their inquiries, members take for granted that a member must at the outset "know" the settings in which he is to operate if his practices are to serve as measures to bring particular, located features of these settings to recognizable account. They treat as the most passing matter of fact that members' accounts, of every sort, in all their logical modes, with all of their uses, and for every method for their assembly are constituent features of the settings they make observable. Members know, require, count on, and make use of this reflexivity to produce, accomplish, recognize, or demonstrate rational-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes of their procedures and findings.

Not only do members—the jurors and the others—take that reflexivity for granted, but they recognize, demonstrate, and make observable for each other the rational character of their actual, and that means their occasional, practices while respecting that reflexivity as an unalterable and unavoidable condition of their inquiries.

When I propose that members are "not interested" in studying practical actions, I do not mean that members will have none, a

little, or a lot of it. That they are "not interested" has to do with reasonable practices, with plausible argument, and with reasonable findings. It has to do with treating "accountable-for-all-practical-purposes" as a discoverable matter, exclusively, only, and entirely. For members to be "interested" would consist of their undertaking to make the "reflexive" character of practical activities observable; to examine the artful practices of rational inquiry as organizational phenomena without thought for correctives or irony. Members of the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center are like members wherever they engage in practical sociological inquiries: though they would, they *can* have none of it.

The analyzability of actions-in-context as a practical accomplishment

In indefinitely many ways members' inquiries are constituent features of the settings they analyze. In the same ways, their inquiries are made recognizable to members as adequate-for-all-practical-purposes. For example, at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, that deaths are made accountable-for-all-practical-purposes are practical organizational accomplishments. Organizationally, the Suicide Prevention Center consists of practical procedures for accomplishing the rational accountability of suicidal deaths as recognizable features of the settings in which that accountability occurs.

In the actual occasions of interaction that accomplishment is for members omnipresent, unproblematic, and commonplace. For members doing sociology, to make that accomplishment a topic of practical sociological inquiry seems unavoidably to require that they treat the rational properties of practical activities as "anthropologically strange." By this I mean to call attention to "reflexive" practices such as the following: that by his accounting practices the member makes familiar, commonplace activities of everyday life recognizable *as* familiar, commonplace activities; that on each occasion that an account of common activities is used, that they be recognized for "another first time"; that the member treat the processes and attainments of "imagination" as continuous with the *other* observable features of the settings in which they occur; and of proceeding in such a way that at the same time that the member

"in the midst" of witnessed actual settings recognizes that witnessed settings have an *accomplished* sense, an accomplished facticity, an accomplished objectivity, an accomplished familiarity, an accomplished accountability, for the member the organizational hows of these accomplishments are unproblematic, are known vaguely, and are known only in the doing which is done skillfully, reliably, uniformly, with enormous standardization and as an unaccountable matter.

That accomplishment consists of members doing, recognizing, and using ethnographies. In unknown ways that accomplishment is for members a commonplace phenomenon. And in the unknown ways that the accomplishment is commonplace it is for our interests, an awesome phenomenon, for in its unknown ways it consists (1) of members' uses of concerted everyday activities as methods with which to recognize and demonstrate the isolatable, typical, uniform, potential repetition, connected appearance, consistency, equivalence, substitutability, directionality, anonymously describable, planful—in short, the rational properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions. (2) The phenomenon consists, too, of the analyzability of actions-in-context given that not only does no concept of context-in-general exist, but every use of "context" without exception is itself essentially indexical.

The *recognizedly* rational properties of their common sense inquiries—their recognizedly consistent, or methodic, or uniform, or planful, etc. character—are *somehow* attainments of members' concerted activities. For Suicide Prevention Center staff, for coders, for jurors the rational properties of their practical inquiries *somehow* consist in the concerted work of making evident from fragments, from proverbs, from passing remarks, from rumors, from partial descriptions, from "codified" but essentially vague catalogues of experience and the like how a person died in society, or by what criteria patients were selected for psychiatric treatment, or which among the alternative verdicts was correct. *Somehow* is the problematic crux of the matter.

What is ethnomethodology?

The earmark of practical sociological reasoning, wherever it occurs, is that it seeks to remedy the indexical properties of members'

talk and conduct. Endless methodological studies are directed to the tasks of providing members a remedy for indexical expressions in members' abiding attempts, with rigorous uses of ideals to demonstrate the observability of organized activities in actual occasions with situated particulars of talk and conduct.

The properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions are ordered properties. These consist of organizationally demonstrable sense, or facticity, or methodic use, or agreement among "cultural colleagues." Their ordered properties consist of organizationally demonstrable rational properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions. Those ordered properties are ongoing achievements of the concerted commonplace activities of investigators. The demonstrable rationality of indexical expressions and indexical actions retains over the course of its managed production by members the character of ordinary, familiar, routinized practical circumstances. As process and attainment the produced rationality of indexical expressions consists of practical tasks subject to every exigency of organizationally situated conduct.

I use the term "ethnomethodology" to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life. The papers of this volume treat that accomplishment as the phenomenon of interest. They seek to specify its problematic features, to recommend methods for its study, but above all to consider what we might learn definitely about it. My purpose in the remainder of this chapter is to characterize ethnomethodology, which I have done by presenting three studies of the work of that accomplishment together with a concluding recitation of study policies.

PRACTICAL SOCIOLOGICAL REASONING: DOING ACCOUNTS IN "COMMON SENSE SITUATIONS OF CHOICE"

The Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center (SPC) and the Los Angeles Medical Examiner-Coroner's Office joined forces in 1957 to furnish Coroner's Death Certificates the warrant of scientific authority "within the limits of practical certainties imposed by the state of the art." Selected cases of "sudden, unnatural death" that

were equivocal between "suicide" and other modes of death were referred by the Medical Examiner-Coroner to the SPC with the request that an inquiry, called a "psychological autopsy," [5] be done.

The practices and concerns by SPC staff to accomplish their inquiries in common sense situations of choice repeated the features of practical inquiries that were encountered in other situations: studies of jury deliberations in negligence cases; clinic staff in selecting patients for out-patient psychiatric treatment; graduate students in sociology coding the contents of clinic folders into a coding sheet by following detailed coding instructions; and countless professional procedures in the conduct of anthropological, linguistic, social psychiatric, and sociological inquiry. The following features in the work at SPC were recognized by staff with frank acknowledgement as prevailing conditions of their work and as matters to consider when assessing the efficacy, efficiency, or intelligibility of their work—and added SPC testimony to that of jurors, survey researchers, and the rest:

(1) An abiding concern on the part of all parties for the temporal concerting of activities; (2) a concern for the practical question *par excellence*: "What to do next?"; (3) a concern on the inquirer's part to give evidence of his grasp of "What Anyone Knows" about how the settings work in which he had to accomplish his inquiries, and his concern to do so in the actual occasions in which the decisions were to be made by his exhibitable conduct in choosing; (4) matters which at the level of talk might be spoken of as "production programs," "laws of conduct," "rules of rational

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[5] The following references contain reports on the "psychological autopsy" procedure developed at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center: Theodore J. Curphey, "The Forensic Pathologist and the Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Death," in *Essays in Self-Destruction*, ed. Edwin S. Shneidman (International Science Press, 1967), in press; Theodore J. Curphey, "The Role of the Social Scientist in the Medico-Legal Certification of Death from Suicide," in *The Cry for Help*, ed. Norman L. Farberow and Edwin S. Shneidman (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961); Edwin S. Shneidman and Norman L. Farberow, "Sample Investigations of Equivocal Suicidal Deaths," in *The Cry for Help*; Robert E. Litman, Theodore J. Curphey, Edwin S. Shneidman, Norman L. Farberow, and Norman D. Tabachnick, "Investigations of Equivocal Suicides," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 184 (1963), 924-929; and Edwin S. Shneidman, "Orientations Toward Death: A Vital Aspect of the Study of Lives," in *The Study of Lives*, ed. Robert W. White (New York: Atherton Press, 1963), reprinted in the *International Journal of Psychiatry*, 2 (1966), 167-200.

decision-making," "causes," "conditions," "hypothesis testing," "models," "rules of inductive and deductive inference" in the actual situation were taken for granted and were depended upon to consist of recipes, proverbs, slogans, and partially formulated plans of action; (5) inquirers were required to know and be skilled in dealing with situations "of the sort" for which "rules of rational decision-making" and the rest were intended in order to "see" or by what they did to insure the objective, effective, consistent, completely, empirically adequate, *i.e.*, rational character of recipes, prophecies, proverbs, partial descriptions in an actual occasion of the use of rules; (6) for the practical decider the "actual occasion" as a phenomenon in its own right exercised overwhelming priority of relevance to which "decision rules" or theories of decision-making were without exception subordinated in order to assess their rational features rather than *vice versa;* (7) finally, and perhaps most characteristically, all of the foregoing features, together with an inquirer's "system" of alternatives, his "decision" methods, his information, his choices, and the rationality of his accounts and actions were constituent parts of the same practical circumstances in which inquirers did the work of inquiry—a feature that inquirers if they were to claim and recognize the practicality of their efforts knew of, required, counted on, took for granted, used, and glossed.

The work by SPC members of conducting their inquiries was part and parcel of the day's work. Recognized by staff members as constituent features of the day's work, their inquiries were thereby intimately connected to the terms of employment, to various internal and external chains of reportage, supervision, and review, and to similar organizationally supplied "priorities of relevances" for assessments of what "realistically," "practically," or "reasonably" needed to be done and could be done, how quickly, with what resources, seeing whom, talking about what, for how long, and so on. Such considerations furnished "We did what we could, and for all reasonable interests here is what we came out with" its features of organizationally appropriate sense, fact, impersonality, anonymity of authorship, purpose, reproducibility— *i.e.*, of a *properly* and *visibly* rational account of the inquiry.

Members were required in their occupational capacities to formulate accounts of how a death *really*-for-all-practical-purposes-

happened. "Really" made unavoidable reference to daily, ordinary, occupational workings. Members alone were entitled to invoke such workings as appropriate grounds for recommending the reasonable character of the result *without necessity for furnishing specifics*. On occasions of challenge, ordinary occupational workings would be cited explicitly, in "relevant part." Otherwise those features were disengaged from the product. In their place an account of how the inquiry was done made out the how-it-was-actually-done as appropriate to usual demands, usual attainments, usual practices, *and* to usual talk by SPC personnel talking as *bona fide* professional practitioners about usual demands, usual attainments, and usual practices.

One of several titles (relating to mode of death) had to be assigned to each case. The collection consisted of legally possible combinations of four elementary possibilities—natural death, accident, suicide, and homicide.[6] *All* titles were so administered as to not only withstand the varieties of equivocation, ambiguity, and improvisation that arose in every actual occasion of their use, but these titles were so administered as to *invite* that ambiguity, equivocality, and improvisation. It was part of the work not *only* that equivocality is a trouble—is *perhaps* a trouble—but also the practitioners were directed to those circumstances in order to *invite* the ambiguity or the equivocality, to invite the improvisation, or to invite the temporizing, and the rest. It is not that the investigator, having a list of titles performed an inquiry that proceeded stepwise to establish the grounds for electing among them. The formula was not, "Here is what we did, and among the titles as goals of our research *this* title finally interprets in a best fashion what we found out." Instead titles were continually postdicted and foretold. An inquiry was apt to be heavily guided by the inquirer's use of imagined settings in which the title will have been "used" by one or another interested party, including the deceased, and this was done by the inquirers in order to decide, using whatever "datum" might have been searched out, that *that* "datum" could be

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[6] The possible combinations include the following: natural; accident; suicide; homicide; possible accident; possible suicide; possible natural; (between) accident or suicide, undetermined; (between) natural or suicide, undetermined; (between) natural or accident, undetermined; and (among) natural or accident or suicide, undetermined.

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used to mask if masking needed to be done, or to equivocate, or gloss, or lead, or exemplify if they were needed. The prevailing feature of an inquiry was that nothing about it remained assured aside from the organized occasions of its uses. Thus a routine inquiry was one that the investigator used particular contingencies to accomplish, and depended upon particular contingencies to recognize and to recommend the practical adequacy of his work. When assessed by a member, *i.e.* viewed with respect to actual practices for making it happen, a routine inquiry is not one that is accomplished by rule, or according to rules. It seemed much more to consist of an inquiry that is openly recognized to have fallen short, but in the same ways it falls short its adequacy is acknowledged and for which no one is offering or calling particularly for explanations.

What members are *doing* in their inquiries is always somebody else's business in the sense that particular, organizationally located, locatable persons acquire an interest in light of the SPC member's account of whatever it is that will have been reported to have "really happened." Such considerations contributed heavily to the perceived feature of investigations that they were directed in their course by an account for which the claim will have been advanced that for all practical purposes it is correct. Thus over the path of his inquiry the investigator's task consisted of an account of how a particular person died in society that is adequately told, sufficiently detailed, clear, etc., for all practical purposes.

"What really happened," over the course of arriving at it, as well as after the "what really happened" has been inserted into the file and the title has been decided, may be chronically reviewed as well as chronically foretold in light of what might have been done, or what will have been done with those decisions. It is hardly news that on the way to a decision what a decision will have come to was reviewed and foretold in light of the anticipated consequences of a decision. *After* a recommendation had been made and the coroner had signed the death certificate the result can yet be, as they say, "revised." It can still be made a decision which needs to be reviewed "once more."

Inquirers wanted very much to be able to assure that they could come out at the end with an account of how the person died that would permit the coroner and his staff to withstand claims arguing

that that account was incomplete or that the death happened differently than—or in contrast to or in contradiction of—what the members to the arrangement "claimed." The reference is neither only nor entirely to the complaints of the survivors. Those issues are dealt with as a succession of episodes, most being settled fairly quickly. The great contingencies consisted of enduring processes that lay in the fact that the coroner's office is a political office. The coroner's office activities produce continuing records of his office's activities. These records are subject to review as the products of the scientific work of the coroner, his staff, and his consultant. Office activities are methods for accomplishing reports that are scientific-for-all-practical-purposes. This involved "writing" as a warranting procedure in that a report, by reason of being written, is put into a file. That the investigator "does" a report is thereby made a matter for public record for the use of only partially identifiable other persons. Their interests in why or how or what the inquirer did would have in some relevant part to do with his skill and entitlement as a professional. But investigators know too that other interests will inform the "review," for the inquirer's work will be scrutinized to see its scientific-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes as professionals' socially managed claims. Not only for investigators, but on all sides there is the relevance of "What was really found out for-all-practical-purposes?" which consists unavoidably of how much can you find out, how much can you disclose, how much can you gloss, how much can you conceal, how much can you hold as none of the business of some important persons, *investigators* included. All of them acquired an interest by reason of the fact that investigators, as a matter of occupational duty, were coming up with written reports of how, for-all-practical-purposes persons-really-died-and-are-really-dead-*in*-the-society.

Decisions had an unavoidable consequentiality. By this is meant that investigators needed to say *in so many words,* "What really happened?" The important words were the titles that were assigned to a text to recover that text as the title's "explication." But what an assigned title consists of as an "explicated" title is at any particular time for no one to say with any finality even when it is proposed "in so many words." In fact, *that* it is proposed "in so many words," *that* for example a written text was inserted "into the file of the case," furnishes entitling grounds that can be invoked

in order to make something of the "so many words" that will have been used as an account of the death. Viewed with respect to patterns of use, titles and their accompanying texts have an open set of consequences. Upon any occasion of the use of texts it can remain to be seen what can be done with them, or what they will have come to, or what remains done "for the time being" pending the ways in which the environment of that decision may organize itself to "reopen the case," or "issue a complaint," or "find an issue" and so on. Such ways for SPC'ers are, as patterns, certain; but as particular processes for making them happen are in every actual occasion indefinite.

SPC inquiries begin with a death that the coroner finds equivocal as to *mode* of death. That death they use as a precedent with which various ways of living in society that could have terminated with that death are searched out and read "in the remains"; in the scraps of this and that like the body and its trappings, medicine bottles, notes, bits and pieces of clothing, and other memorabilia—stuff that can be photographed, collected, and packaged. Other "remains" are collected too: rumors, passing remarks, and stories—materials in the "repertoires" of whosoever might be consulted via the common work of conversations. These *whatsoever* bits and pieces that a story or a rule or a proverb might make intelligible are used to formulate a recognizably coherent, standard, typical, cogent, uniform, planful, *i.e.*, a professionally defensible, and thereby, for members, a *recognizably* rational account of how the society worked to produce those remains. This point will be easier to make if the reader will consult any standard textbook in forensic pathology. In it he will find the inevitable photograph of a victim with a slashed throat. Were the coroner to use that "sight" to recommend the equivocality of the mode of death he might say something like this: "In the case where a body looks like the one in that picture, you are looking at a suicidal death because the wound shows the 'hesitation cuts' that accompany the great wound. One can imagine these cuts are the remains of a procedure whereby the victim first made several preliminary trials of a hesitating sort and then performed the lethal slash. Other courses of action are imaginable, too, and so cuts that look like hesitation cuts can be produced by other mechanisms. One needs to start with the actual display and imagine how different courses of actions could have

been organized such that *that* picture would be compatible with it. One might think of the photographed display as a phase-of-the-action. In any actual display is there a course of action with which that phase is uniquely compatible? *That* is the coroner's question."

The coroner (and SPC'ers) ask this with respect to each *particular* case, and thereby their work of achieving practical decidability seems almost unavoidably to display the following prevailing and important characteristic. SPC'ers must accomplish that decidability with respect to the "this's": they have to start with *this* much; *this* sight; *this* note; *this* collection of whatever is at hand. And *whatever* is there is good enough in the sense that *whatever* is there not only *will* do, but *does*. One makes whatever is there *do*. I do not mean by "making do" that an SPC investigator is too easily content, or that he does not look for more when he should. Instead, I mean: the *whatever* it is that he has to deal with, *that* is what will have been used to have found out, to have made decidable, the way in which the society operated to have produced *that* picture, to have come to *that* scene as its end result. In this way the remains on the slab serve not only as a precedent but as a goal of SPC inquiries. *Whatsoever* SPC members are faced with must serve as the precedent with which to read the remains so as to see how the society could have operated to have produced what it is that the inquirer has "in the end," "in the final analysis," and "in *any* case." What the inquiry can come to is what the death came to.

PRACTICAL SOCIOLOGICAL REASONING: FOLLOWING CODING INSTRUCTIONS

Several years ago my co-workers and I undertook to analyze the experience of the U.C.L.A. Outpatient Clinic in order to answer the questions "By what criteria are its applicants selected for treatment?" To formulate and to answer this question we used a version of a method of cohort analysis that Kramer and his associates [7] had used to describe load and flow characteristics of patients in mental hospitals. (Chapters Six and Seven report further aspects of this re-

[7] M. Kramer, H. Goldstein, R. H. Israel, and N. A. Johnson, "Applications of Life Table Methodology to the Study of Mental Hospital Populations," *Psychiatric Research Reports of the American Psychiatric Association*, June, 1956, pp. 49-76.

search.) Successive activities of "first contact," "intake interview," "psychological testing," "intake conference," "in-treatment," and "termination" were conceived with the use of the tree diagram of Figure 1. Any path from first contact to termination was called a "career."
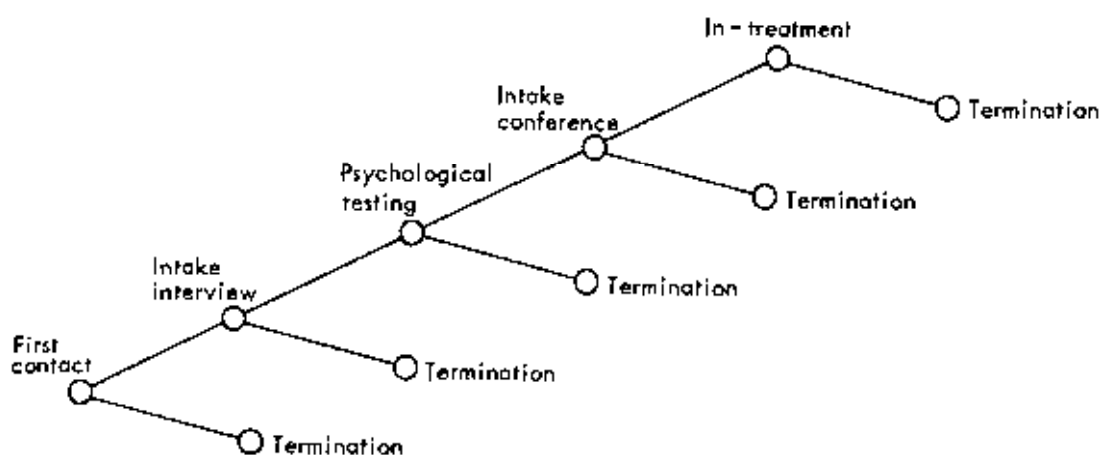

FIGURE 1. Career paths of patients of a psychiatric clinic

We wished to know what characteristics of patients, of clinical personnel, of their interactions, and of the tree were associated with which careers. Clinic records were our sources of information, the most important of which were intake application forms and case folder contents. In order to obtain a continuing record of patient-clinic case transactions from the time of a patient's initial contact until he terminated a "Clinic Career Form" was designed and inserted into case folders. Because clinic folders contain records that clinic personnel provide of their own activities, almost all of these sources of data were the results of self-reporting procedures.

Two graduate students in Sociology at UCLA examined 1,582 clinic folders for the information to complete the items of a Coding Sheet. A conventional reliability procedure was designed and conducted with the aim of determining the amount of agreement between coders and between successive trials of their coding. According to conventional reasoning, the amount of agreement furnishes one set of grounds for lending credence to coded events as actual clinic events. A critical feature of conventional reliability

(marginal text, left column)
with the- nich on." rtic- abil- ding ccid- *this* and. *ever* here ; too ould. *that* ; de- uced ι this : as a with so as what id "in death

ze the nswer treat- ersion ι[7] had nental his re- ications iations," ι, June,

assessments is that the agreement between coders consists of agreement on the end results.

To no one's surprise, preliminary work showed that in order to accomplish the coding, coders were assuming knowledge of the very organized ways of the clinic that their coding procedures were intended to produce descriptions of. More interestingly, such presupposed knowledge seemed necessary and was most deliberately consulted whenever, for whatever reasons, the coders needed to be satisfied that they had coded "what really happened." *This was so regardless of whether or not they had encountered "ambiguous" folder contents.* Such a procedure undermined any claim that actuarial methods for interrogating the folder contents had been used, no matter how apparently clear the coding instructions were. Agreement in coding results was being produced by a contrasting procedure with unknown characteristics.

To find out more about the procedure that our students used, the reliability procedure was treated as a problematic activity in its own right. The "reliability" of coded results was addressed by asking how the coders had actually brought folder contents under the jurisdiction of the Coding Sheet's item. Via what practices had actual folder contents been assigned the status of answers to the researcher's questions? What actual activities made up those coders' practices called "following coding instruction"?

A procedure was designed that yielded conventional reliability information so that the original interests of the study were preserved. At the same time the procedure permitted the study of how any amount of agreement or disagreement had been produced by the actual ways that the two coders had gone about treating folder contents as answers to the questions formulated by the Coding Sheet. But, instead of assuming that coders, proceeding in whatever ways they did, might have been in error, in greater or lesser amount, the assumption was made that *whatever* they did could be counted correct procedure in *some* coding "game." The question was, what were these "games"? How *ever* coders did it, it was sufficient to produce whatever they got. How did they do it to get what they got?

We soon found the essential relevance to the coders, in their work of interrogating folder contents for answers to their questions, of such considerations as "et cetera," "unless," "let it pass,"

and "factum valet" (*i.e.*, an action that is otherwise prohibited by a rule is counted correct once it is done). For convenience let me call these "*ad hoc*" considerations, and call their practice "*ad hocing.*" Coders used the same *ad hoc* considerations in order to recognize the relevance of the coding instructions to the organized activities of the clinic. Only when this relevance was clear were the coders satisfied that the coding instructions analyzed actually encountered folder contents so as to permit the coders to treat folder contents as reports of "real events." Finally, *ad hoc* considerations were invariant features of the practices of "following coding instructions." Attempts to suppress them while retaining an unequivocal sense to the instructions produced bewilderment on their part.

Various facets of the "new" reliability study were then developed, at first in order to see if these results could be firmly established, and after it was clear, to my satisfaction, that they could, to exploit their consequences for the general sociological character of the coders' methods of interrogation (as well as contrasting methods) as well as for the work that is involved in recognizing or claiming that something had been done by rule—that an action had followed or had been "governed" by instructions.

Ad hoc considerations are invariably relevant considerations in deciding the fit between what could be read from the clinic folders and what the coder inserted into the coding sheet. No matter how definitely and elaborately instructions had been written, and despite the fact that strict actuarial coding rules [8] *could* be formulated for every item, and with which folder contents *could* be mapped into the coding sheet, insofar as the claim had to be advanced that Coding Sheet entries reported real events of the clinic's activities, then in every instance, and for every item, "et cetera," "unless," "let it pass" and "factum valet" accompanied the coder's grasp of the coding instructions as ways of analyzing actual folder contents. Their use made it possible, as well, for the coder to read a folder's contents as a report about the events that the Coding Sheet provided and formulated as events of the processing tree.

Ordinarily researchers treat such *ad hoc* procedures as flawed

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[8] David Harrah's model of an information-matching game was taken to define the meaning of "strict actuarial method for interrogating." See David Harrah, "A Logic of Questions and Answers," *Philosophy of Science*, **28**, No. 1 (January, 1961), 40-46.

ways of writing, recognizing, or following coding instructions. The prevailing view holds that good work requires researchers, by extending the number and explicitness of their coding rules, to minimize or even eliminate the occasions in which "et cetera" and other such *ad hocing* practices would be used.

To treat instructions as though *ad hoc* features in their use were a nuisance, or to treat their presence as grounds for complaint about the incompleteness of instructions, is very much like complaining that if the walls of a building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was keeping the roof up. Our studies showed that *ad hoc* considerations are essential features of coding procedures. *Ad hocing* is required if the researcher is to grasp the relevance of the instructions to the particular and actual situation they are intended to analyze. For every particular and actual occasion of search, detection, and assignment of folder contents to a "proper" category—which is to say, over the course of actually coding—such *ad hoc* considerations have irremediable priority over the usually talked about "necessary and sufficient" criteria. It is not the case that the "necessary and sufficient" criteria are procedurally defined by coding instructions. Nor is it the case that *ad hoc* practices such as "et cetera" or "let it pass" are controlled or eliminated in their presence, use, number, or occasions of use by making coding instructions as definite as possible. Instead *ad hoc* considerations are consulted by coders and *ad hocing* practices are *used in order to recognize what the instructions are definitely talking about.* *Ad hoc* considerations are consulted by coders in order to recognize coding instructions as "operational definitions" of coding categories. They operate as the grounds for and as methods to advance and secure researchers' claims to have coded in accordance with "necessary and sufficient" criteria.

Ad hocing occurs (without, I believe, any possibility of remedy), whenever the coder assumes the position of a socially competent member of the arrangement that he seeks to assemble an account of and, when from this "position," he treats actual folder contents as standing in a relationship of trusted signification to the "system" in the clinic activities. Because the coder assumes the "position" of a competent member to the arrangements that he seeks to give an account of, he can "see the system" in the actual content of the folder. This he accomplishes in something like the way that one

must know the orderly ways of English usage in order to recognize an utterance as a word-in-English or know the rules of a game to make out a move-in-a-game, given that alternative ways of making out an utterance or a board play are always imaginable. Thereby, the coder recognizes the folder content for "what it actually is," or can "see what a note in the folder 'is really talking about.'"

Given this, if the coder has to be satisfied that he has detected a real clinic occurrence, he must treat actual folder contents as standing proxy for the social-order-in-and-of-clinic-activities. Actual folder contents stand to the socially ordered ways of clinic activities as *representations* of them; they do not describe the order, nor are they evidences of the order. It is the coder's use of folder documents as *sign-functions* to which I mean to be pointing in saying that the coder must know the order of the clinic's activities that he is looking at in order to recognize the actual content as an appearance-of-the-order. Once the coder can "see the system" in the content, it is possible for the coder to extend and to otherwise interpret the coding instructions—to *ad hoc* them—so as to maintain the relevance of the coding instructions to the actual contents, and in this way to formulate the sense of actual content so that its meaning, even though it is transformed by the coding, is preserved in the coder's eyes as a real event of the clinic's actual activities.

There are several important consequences:

(1) Characteristically, coded results would be treated as if they were disinterested descriptions of clinic events, and coding rules are presumed to back up the claim of disinterested description. But if the work of *ad hocing* is required to make such claims intelligible, it can always be argued—and so far I do not see a defensible reply—that the coded results consist of a persuasive version of the socially organized character of the clinic's operations, regardless of what the actual order is, perhaps independently of what the actual order is, and even without the investigator having detected the actual order. Instead of our study of patients' clinic careers (as well as the multitude of studies of various social arrangements that have been carried out in similarly conventional ways) having described the order of the clinic's operations, the account may be argued to consist of a socially invented, persuasive, and proper way of talking about the clinic as an orderly enterprise, since "after all" the account was produced by "scientific procedures." The **account**

would be itself part of the actual order of the clinic's operations, in much the same way that one might treat a person's report on his own activities as a feature of his activities. *The actual order would remain to be described.*

(2) Another consequence arises when we ask what is to be made of the care that nevertheless is so assiduously exercised in the design and use of coding instructions for interrogating actual contents and transforming them into the language of the coding sheet? If the resulting account is itself a feature of the clinic's activities, then perhaps one ought not read the coding instructions as a way of obtaining a scientific description of the clinic's activities, since this assumes that the coding language, in what it is talking *about*, is independent of the interests of the members that are being served in using it. Coding instructions ought to be read instead as consisting of a grammar of rhetoric; they furnish a "social science" way of talking so as to persuade consensus and action within the practical circumstances of the clinic's organized daily activities, a grasp of which members are expected to have as a matter of course. By referring to an account of the clinic that was obtained by following coding instructions, it is possible for members with different interests to persuade each other and to reconcile their talk about clinic affairs in an impersonal way, while the matters that are really being talked *about* retain their sense, for the "discussants," as a legitimate, or illegitimate, a desirable or undesirable, an advantaged or disadvantaged state of affairs for the "discussants" in their occupational lives. It furnishes an impersonal way of characterizing their affairs without the members relinquishing important organizationally determined interests in what the account, in their eyes, is "after all" all about. What it is all about is the clinic order whose real features, as any member knows that Anyone Knows, are always none of somebody-else-in-that-organization's business.

PRACTICAL SOCIOLOGICAL REASONING: COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Sociologists distinguish the "product" from the "process" meanings of a common understanding. As "product," a common understanding is thought to consist of a shared agreement on substantive matters; as "process," it consists of various methods whereby some-

thing that a person says or does is recognized to accord with a rule. With his concepts of *Begreifen* and *Verstehen*, each with its distinct character as method and knowledge, Weber provided sociologists an authority for this distinction.

An analysis of students' experiences in reporting commonplace conversation suggests that for either case, for "product" or process," a common understanding consists of an inner-temporal course of interpretive work. Their experiences suggest some strange consequences of the facts that *in either case* a common understanding has necessarily an operational structure.

In Chapter Two research is reported in which students were asked to report common conversations by writing on the left side of a sheet what the parties actually said, and on the right side what they and their partners understood they were talking about. The following colloquy is reported there:

HUSBAND:	Dana succeeded in putting a penny in a parking meter today without being picked up.	This afternoon as I was bringing Dana, our four-year-old son, home from the nursery school, he succeeded in reaching high enough to put a penny in a parking meter when we parked in a meter zone, whereas before he had always had to be picked up to reach that high.
WIFE:	Did you take him to the record store?	Since he put a penny in a meter that means that you stopped while he was with you. I know that you stopped at the record store either on the way to get him or on the way back. Was it on the way back, so that he was with you or did you stop there on the way to get him and somewhere else on the way back?
HUSBAND:	No, to the shoe repair shop.	No, I stopped at the record store on the way to get him and stopped at the shoe repair shop on the way home when he was with me.

WIFE: What for?   I know of one reason why you
                                          might have stopped at the
                                          shoe repair shop. Why did you
                                          in fact?

HUSBAND: I got some new shoe   As you will remember I broke a
             laces for my shoes.   shoe lace on one of my brown
                                          oxfords the other day so I
                                          stopped to get some new laces.

WIFE: Your loafers need   Something else you could have
             new heels badly.   gotten that I was thinking of.
                                          You could have taken in your
                                          black loafers which need heels
                                          badly. You'd better get them
                                          taken care of pretty soon.

Students filled out the left side of the sheet quickly and easily, but found the right side incomparably more difficult. When the assignment was made, many asked how much I wanted them to write. As I progressively imposed accuracy, clarity, and distinctness, the task became increasingly laborious. Finally, when I required that they assume I would know what they had actually talked about only from reading literally what they wrote literally, they gave up with the complaint that the task was impossible.

Although their complaints were concerned with the laboriousness of having to write "more," the frustrating "more" was not made up of the large labor of having to reduce a mountain with buckets. It was not their complaint that what was talked about consisted of bounded contents made so vast by pedantry that they lacked sufficient time, stamina, paper, drive, or good reason to write "all of it." Instead, the complaint and its circumstances seemed to consist of this: *if*, for whatever a student wrote, I was able to persuade him that it was not yet accurate, distinct, or clear enough, and *if* he remained willing to repair the ambiguity, then he returned to the task with the complaint that the writing itself developed the conversation as a branching texture of relevant matters. The very *way* of accomplishing the task multiplied its features.

What task had I set them such that it required that they write "more"; such that the progressive imposition of accuracy, clarity, and literalness made it increasingly difficult and finally impossible;

and such that the way of accomplishing the task multiplied its features? If a common understanding consisted of shared agreement on substantive matters, their task would have been identical with one that professional sociologists supposedly address. The task would have been solved as professional sociologists are apt to propose its solution, as follows:

Students would first distinguish *what* was said from *what* was talked about, and set the two contents into a correspondence of sign and referent. *What the parties said* would be treated as a sketchy, partial, incomplete, masked, elliptical, concealed, ambiguous, or misleading version of *what the parties talked about*. The task would consist of filling out the sketchiness of what was said. What was talked about would consist of elaborated and corresponding contents of what the parties said. Thus the format of left and right hand columns would accord with the "fact" that the contents of what was said were recordable by writing what a tape recorder would pick up. The right hand column would require that something "more" be "added." Because the sketchiness of what was said was its defect, it would be necessary for students to look elsewhere than to what was said in order (a) to find the corresponding contents, and (b) to find the grounds to argue—because they would need to argue—for the correctness of the correspondence. Because they were reporting the actual conversation of particular persons, they would look for these further contents in what the conversationalists had "in mind," or what they were "thinking," or what they "believed," or what they "intended." Furthermore, they would need to be assured that they had detected what the conversationalists actually, and not supposedly, hypothetically, imaginably, or possibly had in mind. That is to say, they would need to cite observed actions—observed ways that the parties conducted themselves—in order to furnish grounds for the claim of "actually." This assurance would be obtained by seeking to establish the presence, in the conversationalists' relationship, of warranting virtues such as their having spoken honestly, openly, candidly, sincerely, and the like. All of which is to say that students would invoke their knowledge of the community of understandings, and their knowledge of shared agreements to recommend the adequacy of their accounts of what the parties had been talking about, *i.e.*, what the parties understood in common. Then, for anything the

students wrote, they could assume that I, as a competent co-member of the same community (the conversations were after all commonplace) should be able to see the correspondence and its grounds. If I did not see the correspondence or if I made out the contents differently than they did, then as long as they could continue to assume my competence—*i.e.*, as long as my alternative interpretations did not undermine my right to claim that such alternatives needed to be taken seriously by them and by me—I could be made out by the students as insisting that they furnish me with finer detailing than practical considerations required. In such a case, they should have charged me with blind pedantry and should have complained that because "anyone can see" when, for all practical purposes, enough is enough, none are so blind as those who *will* not see.

This version of their task accounts for their complaints of having to write "more." It also accounts for the task's increasing laboriousness when clarity and the like were progressively imposed. But it does not account very well for the final impossibility, for it explains one facet of the task's "impossibility" as students' unwillingness to go any further, but it does not explain an accompanying sense, namely, that students somehow saw that the task was, in principle, unaccomplishable. Finally, this version of their task does not explain at all their complaint that the way of accomplishing the task multiplied its features.

An alternative conception of the task may do better. Although it may at first appear strange to do so, suppose we drop the assumption that in order to describe a usage as a feature of a community of understandings we must at the outset know what the substantive common understandings consist of. With it, drop the assumption's accompanying theory of signs, according to which a "sign" and "referent" are respectively properties of something said and something talked about, and which in this fashion proposes sign and referent to be related as corresponding contents. By dropping such a theory of signs we drop as well, thereby, the possibility that an invoked shared agreement on substantive matters explains a usage.

If these notions are dropped, then what the parties talked about could not be distinguished from *how* the parties were speaking. An explanation of what the parties were talking about would then consist entirely of describing how the parties had been speaking; of

furnishing a method for saying whatever is to be said, like talking synonymously, talking ironically, talking metaphorically, talking cryptically, talking narratively, talking in a questioning or answering way, lying, glossing, double-talking, and the rest.

In the place of and in contrast to a concern for a difference between *what* was said and *what* was talked about, the appropriate difference is between a language-community member's recognition that a person is saying something, *i.e.*, that he was *speaking*, on the one hand, and *how* he was speaking on the other. Then the recognized sense of what a person said consists only and entirely in recognizing the method of his speaking, of *seeing how he spoke*.

I suggest that one not read the right hand column as corresponding contents of the left, and that the students' task of explaining what the conversationalists talked about did not involve them in elaborating the contents of what the conversationalists said. I suggest, instead, that their written explanations consisted of their attempts to instruct me in how to use what the parties said as a method for seeing what the conversationalists said. I suggest that I had asked the students to furnish me with instructions for recognizing what the parties were actually and certainly saying. By persuading them of alternative "interpretations," by insisting that ambiguity still remained, I had persuaded them that they had demonstrated to me only what the parties were supposedly, or probably, or imaginably, or hypothetically saying. *They took this to mean that their instructions were incomplete; that their demonstrations failed by the extent to which their instructions were incomplete; and that the difference between claims of "actually" and "supposedly" depended on the completeness of the instructions.*

We now see what the task was that required them to write "more," that they found increasingly difficult and finally impossible, and that became elaborated in its features by the very procedures for doing it. I had set them the task of formulating these instructions so as to make them "increasingly" accurate, clear, distinct, and finally literal where the meanings of "increasingly" and of clarity, accuracy, distinctness, and literalness were supposedly explained in terms of the properties of the instructions themselves and the instructions alone. I had required them to take on the impossible task of "repairing" the essential incompleteness of *any* set of instructions no matter how carefully or elaborately written they

might be. I had required them to formulate the method that the parties had used in speaking as rules of procedure to follow in order to say what the parties said, rules that would withstand every exigency of situation, imagination, and development. I had asked them to describe the parties' methods of speaking as if these methods were isomorphic with actions in strict compliance with a rule of procedure that formulated the method as an instructable matter. To recognize *what* is said *means* to recognize how a person is speaking, *e.g.*, to recognize that the wife in saying "your shoes need heels badly" was speaking narratively, or metaphorically, or euphemistically, or double-talking.

They stumbled over the fact that the question of how a person is speaking, the task of describing a person's method of speaking, is not satisfied by, and is not the same as showing that what he said accords with a rule for demonstrating consistency, compatibility, and coherence of meanings.

For the conduct of their everyday affairs, persons take for granted that what is said will be made out according to methods that the parties use to make out what they are saying for its clear, consistent, coherent, understandable, or planful character, *i.e.*, as subject to some rule's jurisdiction—in a word, as rational. To see the "sense" of what is said is to accord to what was said its character "as a rule." *"Shared agreement" refers to various social methods for accomplishing the member's recognition that something was said-according-to-a-rule and not the demonstrable matching of substantive matters. The appropriate image of a common understanding is therefore an operation rather than a common intersection of overlapping sets.*

A person doing sociology, be it lay or professional sociology, can treat a common understanding as a shared agreement on substantive matters by taking for granted that what is said will be made out in accordance with methods that need not be specified, which is to say that need only be specified on "special" occasions.

Given the discovering character of what the husband and wife were talking about, its recognizable character for both entailed the use by each and the attribution by each to the other of work whereby what was said is or will have been understood to have accorded with their relationship of interaction as an invokable rule of their agreement, as an intersubjectively used grammatical

scheme for analyzing each other's talk whose use provided that they *would* understand each other in ways that they *would* be understood. It provides that neither one was entitled to call upon the other to specify how it was being done; neither one was entitled to claim that the other needed to "explain" himself.

In short, a common understanding, entailing as it does an "inner" temporal course of interpretive work, necessarily has an operational structure. For the analyst to disregard its operational structure, is to use common sense knowledge of the society in exactly the ways that members use it when they must decide what persons are really doing or really "talking about," *i.e.*, to use common sense knowledge of social structures as *both* a topic and a resource of inquiry. An alternative would be to assign exclusive priority to the study of the methods of concerted actions and methods of common understanding. Not *a* method of understanding, but immensely various methods of understanding are the professional sociologist's proper and hitherto unstudied and critical phenomena. Their multitude is indicated in the endless list of ways that persons speak. Some indication of their character and their differences occurs in the socially available glosses of a multitude of sign functions as when we take note of marking, labeling, symbolizing, emblemizing, cryptograms, analogies, anagrams, indicating, miniaturizing, imitating, mocking-up, simulating—in short, in recognizing, using, and producing the orderly ways of cultural settings from "within" those settings.[9]

Policies

That practical actions are problematic in ways not so far seen; how they are problematical; how to make them accessible to study; what we might learn about them—these are proposed tasks. I use the term "ethnomethodology" to refer to the study of practical actions according to policies such as the following, and to the

[9] This note was touched off by Monroe Beardsley's remark in "The Metaphorical Twist," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, March, 1962, to the effect that we do not decide that a word is used metaphorically because we know what a person is thinking; rather we know what he is thinking because we see that a word is used metaphorically. Taking poetry for his case, Beardsley points out that "the clues of this fact must somehow be in the poem itself, or we should seldom be able to read poetry."

phenomena, issues, findings, and methods that accompany their use.

(1) An indefinitely large domain of appropriate settings can be located if one uses a search policy that *any occasion whatsoever* be examined for the feature that "choice" among alternatives of sense, of facticity, of objectivity, of cause, of explanation, of communality *of practical actions* is a project of members' actions. Such a policy provides that inquiries of every imaginable kind, from divination to theoretical physics, claim our interest as socially organized artful practices. That the social structures of everyday activities furnish contexts, objects, resources, justifications, problematic topics, etc. to practices and products of inquiries establishes the eligibility for our interest of every way of doing inquiries without exception.

No inquiries can be excluded no matter where or when they occur, no matter how vast or trivial their scope, organization, cost, duration, consequences, whatever their successes, whatever their repute, their practitioners, their claims, their philosophies or philosophers. Procedures and results of water witching, divination, mathematics, sociology—whether done by lay persons or professionals—are addressed according to the policy that every feature of sense, of fact, of method, for every particular case of inquiry without exception, is the managed accomplishment of organized settings of practical actions, and that particular determinations in members' practices of consistency, planfulness, relevance, or reproducibility of their practices and results—from witchcraft to topology—are acquired and assured only through particular, located organizations of artful practices.

(2) Members to an organized arrangement are continually engaged in having to decide, recognize, persuade, or make evident the rational, *i.e.*, the coherent, or consistent, or chosen, or planful, or effective, or methodical, or knowledgeable character of such activities of their inquiries as counting, graphing, interrogation, sampling, recording, reporting, planning, decision-making, and the rest. It is not satisfactory to describe how actual investigative procedures, as constituent features of members' ordinary and organized affairs, are accomplished by members as recognizedly rational actions *in actual occasions* of organizational circumstances by saying that members invoke some rule with which to define the

coherent or consistent or planful, *i.e.*, rational, character of their actual activities. Nor is it satisfactory to propose that the rational properties of members' inquiries are produced by members' compliance to rules of inquiry. Instead, "adequate demonstration," "adequate reporting," "sufficient evidence," "plain talk," "making too much of the record," "necessary inference," "frame of restricted alternatives," in short, every topic of "logic" and "methodology," including these two titles as well, are glosses for organizational phenomena. These phenomena are contingent achievements of organizations of common practices, and as contingent achievements they are variously available to members as norms, tasks, troubles. Only in these ways rather than as invariant categories or as general principles do they define "adequate inquiry and discourse."

(3) Thus, a leading policy is to refuse serious consideration to the prevailing proposal that efficiency, efficacy, effectiveness, intelligibility, consistency, planfulness, typicality, uniformity, reproducibility of activities—*i.e.*, that rational properties of practical activities—be assessed, recognized, categorized, described by using a rule or a standard obtained outside actual settings within which such properties are recognized, used, produced, and talked about by settings' members. All procedures whereby logical and methodological properties of the practices and results of inquiries are assessed in their general characteristics by rule are of interest as *phenomena* for ethnomethodological study but not otherwise. Structurally differing organized practical activities of everyday life are to be sought out and examined for the production, origins, recognition, and representations of rational practices. All "logical" and "methodological" properties of action, every feature of an activity's sense, facticity, objectivity, accountability, communality is to be treated as a contingent accomplishment of socially organized common practices.

(4) The policy is recommended that any social setting be viewed as self-organizing with respect to the intelligible character of its own appearances as either representations of or as evidences-of-a-social-order. Any setting organizes its activities to make its properties as an organized environment of practical activities detectable, countable, recordable, reportable, tell-a-story-aboutable, analyzable—in short, *accountable*.

Organized social arrangements consist of various methods for

accomplishing the accountability of a settings' organizational ways as a concerted undertaking. Every claim by practitioners of effectiveness, clarity, consistency, planfulness, or efficiency, and every consideration for adequate evidence, demonstration, description, or relevance obtains its character as a *phenomenon* from the corporate pursuit of this undertaking and from the ways in which various organizational environments, by reason of their characteristics as organizations of activities, "sustain," "facilitate," "resist," etc. these methods for making their affairs accountable-matters-for-all-practical-purposes.

In exactly the ways that a setting is organized, it *consists* of members' methods for making evident that settings' ways as clear, coherent, planful, consistent, chosen, knowable, uniform, reproducible connections,—*i.e.*, rational connections. In exactly the way that persons are members to organized affairs, they are engaged in serious and practical work of detecting, demonstrating, persuading through displays in the ordinary occasions of their interactions the appearances of consistent, coherent, clear, chosen, planful arrangements. In exactly the ways in which a setting is organized, it *consists* of methods whereby its members are provided with accounts of the setting as countable, storyable, proverbial, comparable, picturable, representable—*i.e.*, accountable events.

(5) Every kind of inquiry without exception consists of organized artful practices whereby the rational properties of proverbs, partially formulated advice, partial description, elliptical expressions, passing remarks, fables, cautionary tales, and the like are made evident, are demonstrated.

The demonstrably rational properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions is an ongoing achievement of the organized activities of everyday life. Here is the heart of the matter. The managed production of this phenomenon in every aspect, from every perspective, and in every stage retains the character for members of serious, practical tasks, subject to every exigency of organizationally situated conduct. Each of the papers in this volume, in one way or another, recommends that phenomenon for professional sociological analysis.