WHEN THE MEDIUM
BECOMES THE MESSAGE: THE CASE
OF THE RATHER-BUSH ENCOUNTER

Steven E. Clayman
University of Wisconsin

Jack Whalen
University of Oregon

In recent years the television news interview has emerged as a central vehicle for the dissemination of news and public affairs information. Technological developments now enable anchorpersons to conduct live interviews with correspondents and newsmakers from around the world, and this capability is increasingly being exploited on a wide range of programming outlets. Plainly news of this kind is generated through spoken interaction; through what is, in essence, a form of talk. Yet media analysts have generally ignored the interactional foundations of news messages. This is no doubt because of the tendency to view the process of interaction as a neutral conduit or transmission medium through which preexisting information and opinion is communicated to the viewing audience. It is important to recognize, however, that forms of interaction—like the interview—are themselves governed by strongly institutionalized routines and conventional practices that necessarily leave their imprint on news output.

Moreover, when interview participants depart from these conventions, this can itself become news, and can even overshadow the substantive matters that originally served as the impetus for doing the interview in the first place.

A case in point. On January 25th, 1988, Dan Rather interviewed George Bush on the CBS Evening News. That nine minute encounter stimulated a profound reaction from political insiders, informed commentators, and the viewing public in general. They did not react to the substance of what was said so much as how the interaction unfolded. To many who were watching, Bush appeared surprisingly forceful and aggressive, and was widely felt to have dispelled his "wimp" image. For example, Time magazine, in its February 8 cover story, characterized the encounter as "video high noon," and described Bush as follows.

> Bush had shot down the legendary media gunslinger from Black Rock. It was the new George Bush. Not Bush the perpetual stand-in, but Bush the stand-up guy. Bush unbound. Bush unwimped. (Time, 1988a, p. 17)

Rather was seen as unusually argumentative and at times rude, qualities that are incompatible with journalistic standards of neutrality and professionalism. Newsweek (1988b, p. 23) quoted an unnamed CBS correspondent as stating, "We were stunned and embarrassed . . . . [Rather's] style was abominable." The interaction as a whole was variously characterized by terms like "shouting match," "slugfest," "clash," and "row." In short, it was generally recognized as an extraordinary and consequential encounter in which the parties failed to comport themselves in a manner that had come to be expected of those engaged in public discourse within the framework of a news interview. It was a case where the interactional medium became the primary news message, greatly eclipsing the thematic content of what was said.

In this paper, we shall attempt to understand the basis for these reactions. More specifically, we will examine the Rather-Bush encounter for the purposes of explicating how it came to take the distinctive trajectory that it did. This is in contrast to analyses in the popular press that focused on the hypothesized plans (e.g., the "weeks

of backstage political moves and countermoves" by both the Bush campaign and CBS News, each "carefully plotting ways to surprise the other side" (Boyer, 1988, p. 4A)) and personality traits of the participants (e.g., Rather's alleged "combativeness" and "volatility"), suggesting that the "slugfest" outcome was virtually predetermined.[1] Instead, we will examine the details of the interaction itself to describe how it unfolded turn by turn. The intent of such an analysis is to determine how the participants shaped the encounter from within; that is, to isolate the specific social practices they employed in its development. Since contributions to interaction are contingent upon the independent actions of others, they cannot be treated as the straightforward behavioral realization of preplanned political strategies or psychological predispositions (Schegloff, 1981, 1988). Whatever prior agendas or predispositions there may have been, the actual course of the encounter must be treated as an emergent and fundamentally interactional achievement. Accordingly, if the encounter's trajectory differed from most ordinary news interviews, we want to arrive at a technical understanding of what those differences consisted of, and how they were methodically produced.

In pursuit of this aim, we will be drawing on the methods, concepts, and findings of conversation analysis. Conversation analysis has been concerned with describing the turn-by-turn or sequential organization of naturally occurring spoken interaction.[2] Recent research from this perspective has focused on the news interview as a distinctive form of interaction with its own institutionalized speaking practices (Heritage, 1985; Greatbatch, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, forthcoming; Clayman, 1987, 1988, forthcoming a, forthcoming b; Heritage and Greatbatch, forthcoming; for an overview, see Heritage, Clayman, and Zimmerman, 1988). This existing body of knowledge concerning the organization of interview talk is an important resource for the present study, because it serves as an analytic foundation against which the special properties of the Rather-Bush encounter can be clearly specified and understood.

Our larger aims are threefold. Our primary goal is to shed light on this particular encounter as a distinctive interactional event. We want to understand in concrete terms "what happened" between Rather and Bush, grounding our understanding in the methods they actually

employed to shape the interaction as it developed. We will also offer some tentative observations regarding audience reactions to the event, paying particular attention to how the details of the interaction could have figured in the impressions and character assessments that viewers apparently formulated. Finally, we hope to arrive at an understanding of news interview discourse more generally by pointing out how such a routinized form of interaction can be transformed into something quite different. A central principle of conversation analysis is its steadfast commitment to addressing the details of interaction as it naturally occurs, including segments of talk that run contrary to our basic analytic understandings (cf., Whalen, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 1988). By coming to terms with the mechanisms used to produce this extraordinary exchange, we hope to learn more about the speaking practices that constitute the news interview as it is routinely and unproblematically accomplished.

THE TURN-TAKING SYSTEM FOR
NEWS INTERVIEWS

News interview discourse has a familiar organizational form, and its distinctive features can be grasped most clearly by contrasting it against casual or mundane conversation. Most importantly for our purposes, these forms of speech-exchange differ in terms of the turn-taking systems on which they are based. Conversation is an essentially locally managed system where the order, length, and content of its constituent turns are not predetermined (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Rather than turns being preallocated to speakers according to some prearranged format, decisions about when turn transfer may propery occur, who may properly speak next, and what each speaker may properly say remain to be determined by the parties themselves within the occasion of interaction.

Against this backdrop, news interview talk is distinctive in that it places restrictions on turn construction and allocation. Research in both England and the United States has shown that news interview discourse is structured as a series of questions and answers which are preallocated to interviewers and interviewees, respectively (Greatbatch,

1988; Clayman, 1987, pp. 46-105, 1988). Hence, interviewers ordinarily restrict themselves to producing turns that are at least minimally recognizable as "questions," while interviewees restrict themselves to the task of "answering" questions put to them by interviewers.

This characterization of interview talk should come as no surprise to anyone who is at all familiar with the conventions of broadcast journalism. However, this simple form of turn-type preallocation has a range of nonintuitive consequences for the conduct of interview participants. In particular, interviewers gain certain extended speaking rights as a cnsequence of this system. To understand how this occurs, we must first consider the interviewees' position within this system. If they are to confine themselves to answering questions, they must monitor the interviewer's turn during its production for the completion of a question, at which point they may begin to speak. This is significant because questions are not always immediately forthcoming in news interviews or, for that manner, in interaction more generally; interactants frequently find it necessary to produce some nonquestioning talk as a way of leading up to a question (Schegloff, 1980, this volume). When interviewers produce such intervening talk, interviewees cannot yet begin to speak without producing something other than an "answer." Accordingly, within this distinctive turn-taking system, interviewees should withhold speech across nonquestioning grammatical units until the interviewer can complete a question (Greatbatch, 1988:409-413; Clayman, 1988:479-480). And as an empirical matter, such withholding routinely occurs, as indicated by the arrowed points below.

[1] [*Nightline*, 7/22/85: 4-5]

((The IE is Herbert Beukes, the South African ambassador to the United States. He is explaining why the South African Government declared a state of emergency; he claims it is to achieve peace necessary for negotiations to begin.))

IE: ...if you do not have that uh .hh uhm the circumstances an' thuh conditions: in which a peaceful dialogue can take place ( ) you cannot start that- this process. An' this is what the:- these measures are intended to do. =

IR: =Tch as Peter Sharp said in that piece it is a lot easier
  to impose a state of emergency than it is to lift it.
→ .hh You still have the root cause when you lift it.
→ And black leaders in that country have made it very
  clear .hhhh that this kind of situation there's no way
  of stopping this kind of situation unless there is an
  end to apartheid.
→ It seems to me .hh that by doing this by eh imposing
  I guess this kind of repression you- .hh you really set
  up uh system where you can do nothing it seems to me
  .hh when you lift it except to change the system
  that exists there
→ (.) the basic system.
→ .h h h Is that unfair? er
IE: Uh I- I would think it's unfair what is being said...

Notice that in addition to delaying the onset of a substantive response, the interviewee wholly refrains from producing acknowledgement tokens (e.g., "uh huh," "yeah"), news receipts (e.g., "oh," "really?"), assessments (e.g., "that's great"), or any other receipt items (Heritage, 1985; Greatbatch, 1988, pp. 406-407). This withholding continues even though the interviewer has not done any special work to indicate that an extended turn is in progress, or that a question is forthcoming (cf., Schegloff, 1980). Accordingly, so long as the interview turn-taking system is operating, news interviewers have the opportunity to produce statements and other nonquestioning turn components provided they are done as preliminaries to an eventual question, and thus they retain the floor until a question is delivered.

One important function of this turn-taking system is that it provides for the maintenance of a formally neutral or "neutralistic" posture for interviewers (Clayman, 1988; Greatbatch, 1988; Heritage and Greatbatch, forthcoming).[3] While interviewers make evaluative statements that can be heard to express a point of view, these are not allowed to stand as self-sufficient actions in their own right, for they are coupled with questioning-turn components. Moreover, such statements are used to prepare necessary groundwork for and thus lead up to the subsequent question. By means of this turn structure, interviewers propose a certain analysis or understanding of their more contentious assertions: namely, that they are mere "background

information" for a developing question. And since questions are officially designed to solicit the views of the interviewee, rather than to express a viewpoint in themselves, they enable the interviewer to maintain a neutralistic posture.

It should be clear, however, that while this posture may be commonsensically attributed to the interviewer or the interviewer's actions considered in isolation, its achievement is contingent upon the active cooperation of the interviewees. As a purely physical matter, it is the interviewees' practice of withholding speech that enables interviewers to produce turns having this structure. Moreover, by declining to speak at specific junctures, the interviewees demonstrably treat each statement as indeed the preliminary component of a not-yet-completed action. They are thus engaged in continuously ratifying, if only in an implicit and provisional sense, the neutralism being proposed through this turn structure. Accordingly, the successful achievement of a neutralistic stance is an interactional matter involving the concerted action of all parties to the encounter (Clayman, 1988). More generally, the maintenance of a stream of talk as "news interview talk" is similarly an achievement, the outcome of continuous collaborative work. It is in part by organizing their talk in just this way, so that it unfolds exclusively as a series of questions and answers, that the participants take on the identities of "interviewer" and "interviewee," and thus constitute the occasion as one in which "news interviewing" is taking place.[4]

Plainly the Rather-Bush encounter departed from an interview framework in significant ways. Yet this does not mean that the interaction became disorganized: neither does it mean that the interview framework was simply abandoned outright in favor of a more "conversational" form of exchange. Close examination of the opening stages of the interview indicates that the parties moved progressively away from the provisions of the interview turn-taking system, and the means by which they did so can themsleves be described in formal terms. Accordingly, we will analyze the turn by turn process by which the framework of the interview was weakened and, eventually, transformed. We will then reconsider popular reactions to the encounter in light of our own analysis, and suggest how they may be understood in light of what transpired.

A SEQUENTIAL ANALYSIS OF THE
RATHER-BUSH "INTERVIEW"

1. The Taped Background Report

Before proceeding to the analysis, it will be necessary to briefly outline the taped report prepared by CBS News that preceded the encounter. That report called attention to contradictions between what Bush had said about his role in the Iran-Contra affair, and conflicting evidence derived from other sources. The report ended by describing contacts between Bush's national security aide, Donald Gregg, and Contra middleman, Felix Rodriguez. Evidence was presented to suggest that Bush himself may have known about the affair through meetings with Gregg and Rodriguez; claims to the contrary by Bush and his aides were also reported.[5] The final segment of the report unfolded as follows.

> Rodriguez came to Washington for a series of meetings, including one with Mr. Bush and Donald Gregg. A briefing memo prepared for the Vice President listed the topic as "Resupply of the Contras." Bush and his aides claim the subject never came up. By summer relations between North and Rodriguez grew tense. North asked Gregg for help, telling him, "You're the only one who can control Felix." Gregg and Rodriguez met in the Vice President's office that August. Rodriguez told him North was supplying the Contras with arms. But Gregg claims he never told Bush because the information was "not Vice Presidential." Today, Donald Gregg still works inside the White House as Bush's trusted advisor.

2. The Initial Exhange:
A Turn-Type Departure and
its Sequential Consequences

The first exchange between Rather and Bush exhibited many of the standard properties of interview talk. Rather's initial question concerned Bush's national security advisor Donald Gregg; it is reproduced below, together with Bush's response.

[2] [Rather Bush:1-41]

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01   DR:  Mister Vice President, thank you for being with us
02        tonigh:t, .hh Donald Gregg still serves as your
03        trusted advisor, he was deeply involved in running
04        arms to the Contras, 'n 'e didn't inform you. .hhh
05        Now when President Reagan's ( ) trusted advisor:
06        Admiral Poindexter: ( ) failed to inform HIM::,
07        ( ) thuh President ( ) fired 'im. ( ) Why is
08        Mister Gregg still:: ( ) inside thuh White House
09        'n still a trusted advisor.
10   GB:  Because I have confidence in him, ( ) 'n because
11        this matter Dan:, as you well know:, 'n your editors
12        know:, has been looked at by .hh thee ten million
13        dollar study by thee: (.) Senate 'n thuh Hou:se, .hh
14        it's been looked at by thuh Tower Commission, .hh thuh
15        Rodriguez testimony thet you put on here, I jus' think
16        it's outrageous, because he was totally vindicated,
17        .hh swore under oath thet 'e never talked to me about
18        .hh thuh Contras, 'n yet this: (.) report you're
19        making which you told me:: er your people did, you
20        have a Mister Cohen thet works for you, .hh was gonna
21        be a political profile. .hh now if this is a political
22        profile fer an election, .hh uh: I have a very
23        different opinion ez to what one should be:. (d—)
24        Don Gregg w- worked for me:, .hh because I don't
25        think he's done anything wro:ng. .h an' I think if
26        'e ha:d, this exHAUstive examination, .hh that went
27        into: thet'd gone into by thuh Senate, ( ) 'n by thuh
28        House, ( ) would've showed it. ( ) And you've impugned
29        the: .hh eh my integrity by suggesting with one o'
30        your little boards here, .hh that I didn't tell thuh
31        truth w- bout what—what uh Felix Rodriguez. .h ya
32        didn't accuse me of it, ( ) but you made that
33        suggestion. and oTHer people in thuh media, =including
34        Mister Nick Brady, ( ) and HE 'as said thet—(.) my
35        (.) version is corre:ct, .hh and so I find this tuh
36        be ay rehash .hh and a li:ttle bit (.) if you'll excuse
37        me ay misrepresented- tation on thuh part of
38        CBS who said yer doin' political profiles .hh
39        on all thuh candidates, .h and then you- (0.2) come
40        up with something thet 'as been exhaustively looked
41        into.
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Observe that while Rather produces a series of statements as preliminaries to a question, Bush waits for the completed question before taking the floor. To this point, the interaction has unfolded canonically.

However, the first signs of trouble appear within Bush's response, as he uses his turn space to produce somewhat more than an answer to Rather's question. While his first utterance (line 10) is directly responsive to Rather's inquiry about Gregg, and he returns to the Gregg issue later on in the turn (lines 24-28), he also registers a series of complaints about the content of the preceding taped segment (lines 15-18, 28-33) and the overall agenda of the present encounter (lines 18-23, 35-41). Concerning the taped segment, Bush strongly objects to the Rodriguez connection proposed in the report (lines 15-18); he calls it "outrageous, because he was totally vindicated, .hh swore under oath thet 'e never talked to me about .hh thuh Contras." He then complains that as a consequence of this misinformation CBS has "impugned... my integrity by suggesting that I didn't tell thuh truth" (lines 28-33). The other major complaint is perhaps more fundamental, for it calls into question the very agenda that is being pursued. Specifically, he accuses CBS personnel of having misled him to believe it would be something broader (a "political profile") than it now appears to be (lines 18-23). He concludes the turn by explicitly accusing CBS of misrepresentation (lines 35-41), this time actually using that highly charged term, although he does so with marked caution: "and so I find this tuh be... a li:ttle bit (.) if you'll excuse me ay misrepresented–tation..."

To the extent that Bush does not confine himself to simply answering the question, he has departed from the strict provisions of the interview turn taking system. This move belongs to a broad class that Greatbatch (1988, pp. 417-418) has termed "turn type departures" (see also Clayman, 1987, pp. 88-91). This particular instance is comparatively mild in the extent to which it moves away from an interview framework. Although Bush engages in a nonanswering type of action, he does this *in conjunction with* answering. This stands as an alternative to doing something *instead of* answering; that is, to reject matters raised by the question in favor of embarking on a wholly independent line of talk. Greatbatch (1986) has shown that,

in Britain, news interviewers sanction the former option far less than the latter, suggesting that this distinction is indeed a significant one for interview participants. By choosing the former course of action, Bush departs from the question-answer framework only to a degree, and continues to honor its constraints while introducing additional unsolicited information.

While Bush's initial departure is mild in this respect, it could potentially lead to further violative talk. Since Bush has directed several accusatory complaints at Rather and CBS News, he has established the relevance of a denial, admission, or an account of some kind, these actions constituting the second part of an adjacency pair (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). In essence, Bush has produced the sequential "first" in addition to answering, and by doing so he has invoked a sequencing organization that could, if dealt with on its own terms, lead to further non-interview talk (see also Heritage and Greatbatch, forthcoming). But this is contingent on the status of such sequential mechanisms within the framework of a news interview, and whether Rather chooses to fully honor the implicativeness of the complaints (e.g., by defending CBS News, apologizing, etc.), or whether he moves to reinstate the interview turn-taking system (by proceeding to the next question.

As it turns out, Rather takes the latter course of action, but only after he briefly acknowledges Bush's final complaint (see lines 43-45 below). While this acknowledgement does not qualify as a full-fledged second pair-part, it nevertheless stands as evidence of the continuing power of adjacency pair organization even when it runs contrary to conventional speaking arrangements in special "institutional" settings like the news interview.

[3] [Rather-Bush:43-48]

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43     DR:  Mister Vice President what (.) we agreed to or didn't
44          agree to I think – you will – agree fer thuh moment,
45          .hh can be dealt with )in another way.(
46          Let's talk about thuh record. You say that
47          we've misrepresented your record...
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However, by merely acknowledging the final complaint, Rather avoids dealing with it substantively and quickly attempts to reassume the role of questioner (lines 46-47). At least he seems to; his call to "talk about thuh record," while not itself a question, is a "pre-pre" or action projection (Schegloff, 1980) which portends some intervening talk prior to an eventual action, the most likely in this context being another question. Accordingly, further violative talk is forestalled, at least for the moment, in favor of an apparent move toward reestablishing the interview framework.

We must examine more closely how this reorientation is managed, for it will soon become problematic. While Rather might initially seem to be avoiding Bush's complaints, the move toward questioning is itself designed to at least appear to be responsive to them. In his preliminary utterance (lines 46-47) Rather paraphrases Bush and incorporates a key word ("misrepresented") taken from what is perhaps Bush's primary complaint concerning the agreed-upon agenda (recall that Bush accused CBS personnel of "misrepresentation" when they led him to believe that this would be a political profile). However, Rather uses a form of this word in a different context apparently to acknowledge Bush's *other* objection (that his integrity was impugned by the suggestion that he didn't tell the truth on Iran-Contra): "You say that we've misrepresented your record." And this seems to be a way of leading up to further questioning on Iran-Contra. Hence, Rather's projected return to questioning is made to appear to be generally responsive to Bush's objections, although the central complaint concerning the present agenda is acknowledged in spirit only, for it is the one complaint that would preclude this line of questioning. As we shall see, Bush resists this line of questioning, and he begins to do so before much of line 47 is actually voiced.

3. Turn-Space/Turn-Type Departures and Their Consequences

How does Bush respond? In his next turn (line 48 below) he initiates another departure from the interview turn-taking system. It is a form of turn-type departure, but this instance is qualititively different

from the first one we examined. Instead of producing nonanswering talk *after* Rather had delivered a question, here Bush produces such talk *before* a question is completed; that is, in response to the prefatory component of the turn.

[4] [Rather-Bush:46-48]

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46        DR:  Let's talk about thuh record. You say that
47             we' ⌈ ve misrepresented your record⌉
48        GB:       ⌊ Let's talk about thuh whole rec⌋ ord.
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Recall that interviewees ordinarily refrain from speaking across such prefatory items until a question is finished; Bush, however, starts up at a demonstrably earlier point.

And it is not just any point. Although it is interruptive, the specific point of onset exhibits some close monitoring on Bush's part of his interlocutor's talk in progress and what it projects. Observe that while Rather has completed an initial action projection ("Let's talk about the record"), it is only after he has clearly indicated that he is going on to deal with something that Bush has said ("You say that we...") that Bush starts to speak. Moreover, what Bush then does is to offer a correction, not of the current utterance in progress, but of the prior "Let's talk..." utterance; he repeats that initial utterance but substitutes "whole record" for Rather's "record." If Bush has some compelling reason to object to Rather's use of "the record, then this interruption would be explicable. Bush would then have a motive for making the correction then and there, before it can be incorporated presumptively into subsequent talk, even if that means interrupting (cf., Jefferson, 1986, p. 160; see also Jefferson, 1983a, pp. 12-13).

And indeed, the interaction thus far suggests that Bush had such a motive. Recall that he had earlier objected to the present focus on Iran-Contra, claiming that it was supposed to be a broader "political profile" of his candidacy. While it is not yet certain at the point of interruption that Rather is going to return the Iran-Contra affair, this is at least a plausible scenario, particularly since he previously seemed to side-step Bush's complaint when it was initially raised (see Extract

[3], lines 43-45 above). Hence, given that Rather's proposal to talk about "the record" can be heard to be at least possibly referring to Bush's record on Iran-Contra, which would flout Bush's central complaint, Bush's strategy is to forestall this possibility by reanimating his original complaint; he thus calls for a broader agenda.[6]

The structural consequence of this action is a further move away from the interview turn-taking system. In a variety of ways, this represents a more dramatic departure than the previous example. For in addition to the fact that Bush is doing something other than answering a question, his action is also an incursion into Rather's turn-space. We shall refer to this type of action as a turn-space/turn-type departure. An action of this kind can diverge from the interview framework in a dual sense, because in addition to its own nonanswering character, it can also function retroactively to constitute the *interviewer's* action as a turn-type departure as well (see Clayman, 1988:480; Heritage and Greatbatch, Forthcoming). By starting up early, an interviewee can inhibit the completion of a question, and can propose that the antecedent statement is a contentious action in its own right, rather than mere "background information" within a developing question.

However, in this particular case the consequences are less dramatic than they might otherwise have been. One reason is that Rather's prefatory item ("Let's talk about the record. You say that we've misrepresented your record") is not a substantive assertion or assessment, and is plainly preliminary in character; so although he has not yet asked a question, he appears to be moving in that direction. Correspondingly, Bush does not disagree with Rather substantively; he is countering Rather's version of what the present agenda is to be. Furthermore, Bush's interjection is limited to a single utterance (line 48). This brevity permits rather to pursue subsequently his own line of talk until he completes the question, or at least something very much like a question (see lines 50-53 below).

[5] [Rather-Bush:46-59]

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46    DR:  Let's talk about thuh record. You say that
47         we' ⌐ ve misrepresented your record ⌐
48    GB:    ⌊ Let's talk about thuh whole rec ⌊ ord.
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49              ( )
50    DR:  Let's talk about thuh record. If ⌐ we've  ⌐ )misrepresented=
51    GB:                                   ⌊ Yeah  ⌊
52    DR:  =yer record in any way.( (.) here's 'uh chance tuh set
53         it straight.
54    GB:  Right. ⌐ I just set it straight on one count, because=
55    DR:         ⌊ Now (fer—)
56    GB:  =you impli::ed, from that .hh uh:m little (.) thing,
57         I'd—I have a little monitor sitting on thuh side
58         here, .h that I didn't tell thuh tru:th. Now .h this
59         'ez all been looked into.
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After Bush calls for a broader discussion of "thuh whole record" (line 48), Rather repeats his earlier call to simply talk about "thuh record (line 50), implicitly resisting Bush's attempt to shift the agenda (cf., Jefferson, 1983b), and moving again toward an inquisitory action (lines 50-53).[7] Although the utterance completed at line 53 isn't grammatically formatted as a question, it can be construed as functionally similar; namely, as an invitation to Bush to "set [the record] straight." And Bush treats it as such by replying at that point (line 54). Notice, however, that Rather gives some indication of having intended to continue (line 55), perhaps to complete a "proper" question, but he drops out in the face of Bush's reply. Nevertheless, in this case Rather is able to complete a virtual question in spite of Bush's pre-emptive attempt to shift the agenda at line 48.

However, in other instances Bush's turn-space/turn-type violations successfully pre-empt the question's completion, resulting in a more substantial departure from the interview turn-taking system. The following exchange begins about one minute further into the interaction. We shall focus on the trajectory of strategies used by Bush to pre-emptively interject, and Rather's attempts to resist this outcome.

[6] [Rather-Bush:92-125]

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94         ...I've answered every question put before me. =Now if you
95         have a question, .hh ⌐ (what is it.) ⌐
96    DR:                       ⌊ I     do ha ⌊ ve one.
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 97   GB:  Ple ⌈ ase ⌉
 98   DR:      ⌊ Ah- ⌋ I have one. .hh ⌈ hh You have said that – if yo ⌉  ud =
 99   GB:                              ⌊ Please fire away heh-hah       ⌋
100   DR:  =had know::n, you said tha' if you had known this was
101        an arms for hostag ⌈ es sw ⌉ ap, .hh that
102   GB:                     ⌊  yes  ⌋
103   DR:  =you would've opposed it. .hhhh you
104        also ⌈ said thet- ⌉    ⌈ that you did NOT KNOW thet y- ⌉
105   GB:       ⌊ E x a c t ⌋ ly  ⌊  (m-  may-  may I-)  may  I  ⌋
106        answer that.
107        (0.4)
108   GB:  (Th ⌈ uh) right ( )- ⌉
109   DR:      ⌊ That wasn't a  ⌋ question. = it w ⌈ as a statement eh- ⌉
110   GB:                                          ⌊ Yes  it  was    a ⌋
111        statement ⌈ and I'll answer it. Thuh President ⌉ =
112   DR:            ⌊ Let me ask thuh question if I may first ⌋
113   GB:  =created this program, .h has testified er s:tated
114        publicly, (.) he did not think it was arms fer hostages.
115        .hh ⌈ and   it   was   only   later   thet-  and  th ⌉ at's me.
116   DR:      ⌊ That's thuh President Mister Vice President  ⌋
117   GB:  (.hh) ⌈ Cuz ⌉ I went along with it because =
118   DR:       ⌊ We- ⌋
119   GB:  =ya know why Dan? .hh because I:
120        ⌈ worried      when      I      saw      Mister: ⌉ =
121   DR:  ⌊ That wasn' thuh question Mister Vice President. ⌋
122   GB:  = .hh Mister Buckley, (.) uh: heard about Mister Buckley
123        being tor:tured tuh death. later admitted (as a)
124        CIA chief. .hh so if I erred, I erred on thuh
125        side of tryin' tuh get those hostages outta there.
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In response to an invitation by Bush (lines 94-95), Rather indicates that he has a question and projects that one is forthcoming (lines 96, 98). He begins by quoting Bush to the effect that he would have opposed an "arms for hostages swap" had he known about it (lines 98, 100-101, 103). He then proceeds to quote Bush on a related matter (lines 103-104), but Bush interjects shortly after that second utterance is begun (line 105).[8] Rather presses on in the face of Bush's overlapping speech and raises his voice (line 104), but Bush actively competes for the floor (line 105) by repeatedly recycling the initial segment of his turn (Jefferson and Schegloff, 1975) until Rather stops talking, at which point Bush completes his utterance in the clear (line 106).

Bush exhibits some orientation to the improper or violative character of this first pre-emptive move, and he does so in two ways. First, he refrains from launching directly into his story, choosing instead to request permission to speak (Greatbatch, 1988, pp. 419-420; Clayman, 1987, pp. 93, 94; see also Schegloff, 1980). Hence, even though he flouts the question/answer framework and selects himself to speak, he continues to honor that framework by seeking permission to speak further. Moreover, within the request he formulates his projected action as an "answer," thereby attempting to furnish it with at least a veneer of propriety.

After a brief pause Rather attempts to deny permission (line 109) by countering the definition of the situation implied by Bush's request. He names his action-thus-far as "statement" rather than a question, thus indicating that this is not a point at which Bush may properly speak. Bush, however, rejects this denial and proceeds anyway (lines 110-111), agreeing that Rather's action-thus-far is a "statement," but naming his own upcoming action (somewhat perversely) as an "answer."[9] Rather attempts to block this move by indicating that he has a question to deliver (line 112), thus overlapping Bush's continuation, but Bush pursues his own talk through overlap and eventually gains the floor (lines 111, 113). Bush's victory in the battle for the floor is achieved by means of a different technique than the one he employed at line 105. Instead of recycling turn segments, here he continues to speak without a break. He even refrains from taking an in-breath at the sentential completion point, proceeding instead to the next sentence without delay. The "missing inbreath" is deferred until the end of the next phrase (line 113), after Rather has dropped out. At this point, Bush is into the substance of his story, and although Rather interjects two more times (lines 116, 121) — the latter chiding Bush for speaking too soon — Rather does not succeed in regaining the floor.

With respect to this exchange, two points demand special emphasis. First, although Bush has successfully truncated Rather's turn in order to pursue his own interactional agenda, it should be clear that the interview turn-taking system has not been abandoned entirely. In a variety of ways, Bush's initial pre-emptive moves continue to attend to that system as the one that should properly be operating.

Recall that he first requests permission to speak, and names his own action as an "answer." It is only later that he pursues more aggressive measures. And for Rather's part, even though he fails to complete his turn, he is plainly in the course of producing a question when he is interrupted. His subsequent efforts to regain the floor involve references to the activity of questioning, and thus constitute an appeal to reestablish an interview framework. Indeed, he eventually sanctions Bush for being uncooperative (lines 126,129-132), although Bush continues to resist Rather's chosen agenda (lines 133-137).

[7] [Rather-Bush:126-137]

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126    DR:   Mis ⌈ ter Vice President, you set thee::⌉ =
127    GB:       ⌊ an thuh who:le story 'ez been    ⌋ =
128    GB:   =⌈ told to thuh Congress. ⌉
129    DR:   =⌊ you set thuh rules fer this ⌋  :: this talk here. =I
130          didn' mean to step on your line there, .hhh
131          but you insisted thet this be li::ve,
132          an' you ⌈ know that we have a limited amount of time. ⌉
133    GB:         ⌊ Exactly.     That's      why        I- ⌋
134          that's why I wanta
135          g ⌈ et m ⌉ y share in here ⌈ on something ⌉ OTHER=
136    DR:     ⌊ Now- ⌋               ⌊ Thuh President- ⌋
137    GB:   =than what you wanta talk about.
```

So while we have witnessed some conduct that rather dramatically diverges from the interview turn-taking system, we also see the parties attempting to honor and reinstate that system. Accordingly, the talk at this juncture is done as "talk that is departing from the interview framework," rather than "talk that is wholly ignoring the interview framework."

This brings us to the second point, which is that the truncated question in Extract [6] is an intrinsically local, collaborative achievement. Even though Bush initiates the pre-emptive moves, he does not unilaterally determine their outcome. That is contingent on Rather's behavior as well, and on how both parties choose to conduct themselves from the point of interruption. For example, they may compete for the floor in various ways, or one may drop out, yielding the floor to the other party (Schegloff, 1987, p. 216). Moreover, even

though Rather may initially drop out, he has the option of restarting the question after Bush stops talking; we observed just this outcome in Extract [5].

Consistent with this argument, in the next sequence the outcome of a pre-emptive move is exactly the reverse. Rather shortly restarts the very same question that was previously pre-empted in Extract [6], but this time he successfully brings it to completion in spite of numerous pre-emptive moves by Bush (lines 158-160, 162-163, 165, 176-177, 179, 181).

[8] [Rather-Bush:154-187]

```
154    DR:   Now. (  ) ⌈ You've said that if you'd known it was an
155          arms for hostages swap you would've opposed it. You
156          said thuh first you knew it was an arms=of=hostages
157          swap was in December of Nineteen Eight Six. =
158    GB:   =When ⌈ thuh whole ⌉ thing became briefed to me by=
159    DR:         ⌊ c'rrect?    ⌋
160    GB:   =Senator Durenburger, =
161    DR:                     =Exact ⌈ ly
162    GB:                            ⌊ And thuh proximity
163          of arms tuh hostages .hh m:uch closer.
164    DR:   But Mist ⌈ er Vice President, you went to Israel in ⌉ =
165    GB:           ⌊ than we had thought (.) on the (      ) ⌋
166    DR:   =July of Nineteen Eighty Si ⌈ x, .hh and- a member of=
167    GB:                               ⌊ Yes,
168    DR:   =your own staff Mister Craig Fuller ((swallow)) tch
169          has verified. =and so did the only other man the:re.
170          Mister Ni:r, Mister Amiron Nir, .hh who's the Israeli's
171          .hh top antiterrorist man. .hh ⌈ h th ⌉ ose two men were=
172    GB:                                  ⌊ Yes  ⌋
173    DR:   =in a meeting with you 'n Mister Nir not once but
174          thr:ee times. three times underscored with you that
175          this was a straight out arms fer ⌈ hostages swap. ⌉
176    GB:                                    ⌊ What THEY:::  ⌋
177          were doing. =
178    DR:           = Now ⌈ how d'you- how ⌉ d'you ⌈ reconc-          ⌉
179    GB:                 ⌊ Read thuh memo. ⌋       ⌊ Read thuh me ⌋ mo.
180    DR:   ⌈ I have s- ⌉
181    GB:   ⌊ What the:y ⌋ were doing.
182    DR:   How can you reconcile, that you were there Mister Nir
183          eh—underscored three: separate occasions .hh that it
```

```
184        was an arms fer=hostages swap, and to:ld you wur
185        dealing with thuh most radical elements (.) in Iran.
186        you were dealing straight away with the Ayatollah
187        Khomeini
```

It is now apparent that Rather was (in Extract [6], lines 98-106) in the process of producing a puzzle/contrast form of question-delivery procedure when he was previously interrupted (Clayman, 1988, p. 478). He succeeds in Extract [8] when he juxtaposes Bush's account of his involvement in Iran-Contra (lines 154-157) with conflicting evidence from other sources (lines 164-175) as a way of leading up to a question regarding the apparent contradiction (lines 178,182-187). And Bush's interjections are methodically fitted to these successive parts of the contrast in such a way as to resist their damaging implications. He first confirms and strengthens his own version of the events (lines 158,160,162-163), then he attempts to counteract the damaging implications of the conflicting evidence (lines 176-177,179,181). Nevertheless, Rather persists over and above these interjections until he delivers the question. Hence, Bush's actions are only potentially pre-emptive. They serve to initiate a move away from the interview format, but their success in over-turning that system is contingent on subsequent interactional events.

Although Rather's question is finally completed, it has been something of a struggle involving two discrete attempts, each of which faced persistent pre-emptive resistance. Furthermore, in this latter instance Bush also inserts acknowledgement tokens or "continuers" ("yes") (lines 167,172) in response to specific preliminary statements. Continuers are quite common in ordinary conversation to mark that a turn is being "passed," (Schegloff, 1981), but they are ordinarily withheld by interviewees, in part because turn transition only becomes relevant in this context when a question is completed. Thus, to actively "pass" a turn by means of such continuers is redundant in an interview context (Heritage, 1985; Greatbatch, 1988). That they re-emerge in this sequence can be understood in light of Bush's growing resistance to the interview framework. Bush is ongoingly treating each successive utterance completion as a place where he has the option to speak, an option that he is now actively "passing." This

is one further way in which the encounter—and particularly Bush's participation in it—has moved away from a strict interview framework, although that framework has not yet been abandoned entirely. But that final step is not far away.

4. The Interview Framework is Abandoned

After Bush answers the above question, the interaction becomes much more conversational in its turn-taking structure and overtly argumentative in tone. In his answer, Bush invoked the principle of confidentiality to account for his unwillingness to discuss Iran-Contra, and the following exchange ensues.

[9] [Rather-Bush:205-227]

```
205     DR:  President himself 'ez said he wants
206          all thuh facts out. .hhh He gave up
207          such things ez even 'is own diary.Every principal
208          including [ :: Secretary s- Schulz            ]
209     GB:            [    He did not give up his own  ] diary,
210          's [ diary (was briefs )] ( )
211     DR:     [ He gave up some of it. ]
212                   (.)
213     GB:  Well, [ Dan, let's be careful he  [ re because .hh=
214     DR:        [ ( )                        [ ( )
215     GB:  =[ yer    (creating)     a        political    profile, ]
216     DR:  =[ Yes sir I want you to be careful Mist' Vice President ]
217          be [ cause thuh problem here ]
218     GB:      [ I will be carefu ] l, .hh but
219          [ I wanta get my side o' this out         ]
220     DR:  [ (But) thuh PROBlem HERE: IS: that you ] repeatedly sat in
221          thuh meetings, .hhh you sat in thuh meeting: in which
222          Secretary Schultz .hh in thuh most forceful way: .hhh
223          rai- registeh his objections.
224          [ 'n then you said you NEVER HEARD ANYBODY REGister object-
225     GB:  [ I never ('s there) if it was thuh most forceful way.-
226          if it was thuh most forceful way, I've heard George
227          Schulz be- ( ) be uh .hh very very forceful....
```

Here Bush repeatedly speaks in what are clearly nonquestioning environments, yet he never orients to his own actions as improper or violative. Unlike the previous examples, he does not request permission to speak, nor does he apologize for interrupting, or attempt to name his action as an "answer," or perform any other type of remedial work (cf. Goffman, 1971). And Rather, for his part, does not sanction Bush, nor does he push to complete a question over Bush's utterances. Consider, for example, the first exchange (lines 205-211). After Bush disputes one of Rather's points (lines 209-210), Rather responds in kind (line 211), countering Bush instead of proceeding to a question. A similar pattern of point/counterpoint is repeated throughout this exchange. Accordingly, with this sequence the interaction has taken the form of an ordinary conversational argument in which the parties are directly confronting one another without even atempting to package their actions as questions and answers. Indeed, it is a particularly combative dispute in the sense that both parties actively compete for the floor when they find themselves speaking simultaneously.

It should be emphasized, however, that even though Rather's turns contain direct assertions, they could have been produced to precede a question of some kind. That is, Rather may have originally intended these statements to serve as "background information" for an upcoming question, a question that was eventually pre-empted. But unlike some of the previous examples, where Rather's statements were plainly question-preliminary when they were responded to, here there is no such evidence that a question was intendedly in progress. Hence, whatever was in Rather's mind at the time, as a public matter of fact he is shown to be making a variety of substantive assertions, argumentatively responding to Bush and soliciting further argumentative moves in response. Space does not permit us to analyze the remainder of the interaction in detail, but it seems fair to say that much of it takes this form.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis indicates that the primary initiative in moving the interaction away from an interview framework and toward a more conversational mode was taken by George Bush. Bush pursued a

somewhat different agenda than the one that Rather was pursuing through his questions; in the process the Vice President began to chip away at the question-answer turn-taking system, first with a simple turn-type departure, and then with a series of departures that also involved incursions into Rather's question-delivery space. Considered as a collection, Bush's actions exhibit a gross trajectory of intensification in the degree to which they depart from the interview framework.

This should not be taken to imply that full responsibility rests with Bush. Although Rather initially resisted Bush's moves to overturn the interview turn-taking system, he eventually collaborated to make the interaction more conversational in its turn-taking structure and more overtly confrontational in its substance. Both parties thus had a hand in producing the "shouting match" that viewers witnessed. However, since popular reactions to the encounter tended to focus on the conduct of Dan Rather, it is important to recognize that it was Bush who first set the interactional trajectory in motion.

In making this point, we do not mean to allocate blame for what happened. From the outset, Bush's actions are accountable as a response to what he saw as objectionable and unfair aspects of the present situation. At least by his own account, he had "good reasons" for acting as he did. But questions of fairness and justification are beyond the scope of this analysis. We simply wish to make the point that, as a structural matter, the interview framework was first altered by Bush, whose moves were initially resisted by Rather, after which the interview framework was eventually abandoned by both parties.

We shall now reconsider popular reactions to the encounter in light of our analysis. We will then turn to broader issues concerning the news interview in general and its interactional foundations.

The Rather-Bush Encounter and Audience Reactions

Thus far, our analysis has been an exercise in news production research. That is, we have been describing the orientations and practices of the onscreen participants as they coordinated their actions so as to produce a particularly newsworthy encounter. We have not

yet examined how specific audience members may have analyzed and understood what took place. But we do believe that the speaking practices described in this paper played a central role in the process by which viewers formulated judgements of the encounter and its participants. One advantage of examining an extraordinary encounter like the Rather-Bush exchange is that it was news in its own right; hence, it became the focus of much discussion and debate as numerous commentators went on record to express their views of the encounter. Their reactions can reveal how departures from the interview turn-taking system may be analyzed and used by audience members to assess the performance of journalists and their guests, and to pass judgement on their motives and character.

Of course, there is always a danger in attempting to correlate specific speaking practices with global audience reactions. Our analysis has been far from exhaustive, and much more took place than the turn-taking practices we have examined. Moreover, audience members do not formulate judgements as isolated, atomistic observers. Widely witnessed events like the Rather-Bush encounter are scrutinized for their newsworthiness by other members of the media, who then re-frame and re-present the event to readers and viewers, who then have an interpretation of "what really happened" which they can use in making out what occurred. Their conclusions are subsequently polled, the results of which are further interpreted and reported in the media, to be read and heard by the public, thus providing more grist for the interpretive mill. We leave the study of this hermeneutic process to others. But with these limitations in mind, we offer the following observations.

George Bush repeatedly engaged in activities that appeared to pre-empt Rather's developing questions. These behaviors are themselves morally neutral. It is up to the audience to pass judgement on such conduct, to see it in either a favorable (e.g., showing "toughness," "agressiveness") or unfavorable (e.g., "stepping out of line," "being rude") light. Bush himself took steps to secure a favorable analysis by presenting his own actions as a response to unfair journalistic practices by CBS News. His avowed aim was, as he put it, "To get my side of this out," and to pursue the broader agenda he was promised. Moreover, it seems likely that the larger political and

cultural climate worked to Bush's advantage. Bush had a public persona prior to the encounter that was widely regarded as "wimpish." His wimp image was frequently reported as a problem for his candidacy; it was something that he "had to overcome." And in contrast to Rather, whose own reputation was contrastingly "tough" and to some "arrogant," Bush could be perceived as the interactional underdog in the encounter. In this context, it becomes clear how Bush's actions could be seen by many as a morally justifiable display of "aggressiveness" that worked to enhance his public image. And when the interview framework was dropped althogether, his overtly confrontational conduct exhibited similar qualities. For many who were watching, Bush showed himself to be a "stand-up guy;" he had been "unwimped" (*Time*, 1988a, p. 17).[10]

Rather's behavior may also be assessed differently by different viewers, depending on whether they choose to see things from Rather's or Bush's perspective. Insofar as audience members could tell that Rather was leading up to a question when he was interrupted, they could choose to take his perspective and see him as properly trying to do his job. Alternatively, viewers could also analyze what Rather was "really" doing from Bush's perspective. By starting up when he did, Bush could be understood as proposing that Rather's statements were contentious actions in their own right, rather than mere "background information" for an eventual question. Bush was in effect treating Rather as having departed from the role of questioner. The situation later became less ambiguous when Rather gave up even attempting to pursue questions, eventually participating in an unmitigated argument with Bush. At that point, Rather was shown to have clearly abandoned the formally neutralistic posture that interviewers ordinarily achieve through the question-answer framework. Criticism along these lines came not only from the public, but—as we noted earlier—from many members of the media, who claimed that "Dan Rather overstepped the boundaries" (as the president of one CBS affiliate put it) (*Newsweek*, 1988b, p. 23). *Time* (1988b, p. 25) put it this way: "Even Sam Donaldson, the pit bull of network correspondents, contended that Rather went 'too far.'" And the *Los Angeles Times'* TV critic, Harold Rosenberg, compared Rather to Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny* and caustically wrote about his

prosecutorial style: "There was no excuse for him assuming the roles of judge and jury in a newscast.... Who appointed him America's shrieking ayatullah of truth?" (quoted in *Time*, 1988b, p. 26).

Moreover, these speaking patterns occurred in the context of a growing public impression of Rather as the most arrogant of the network anchors, ongoing accusations of liberal bias, and a more general cultural suspicion of media power. As *Time* (1988b, p. 24) noted, "No TV anchorman has ever aroused such passions. For conservatives who remember his days as President Nixon's nemesis, Rather is the very embodiment of what they perceive as the media's liberal bias." In this context, it is easy to see how most public criticism fell to Dan Rather. While there were some who staunchly defended him, arguing that he was simply doing his job, pressing hard—and legitimately—for answers, these reactions tended to be overshadowed at least in media discussions of the event by the more critical responses.[11]

In short, we believe that the behaviors examined here can be subjected to divergent moral judgements by different viewers. To the extent that media pundits and others exhibited some consensus, we believe that it was strongly conditioned by the existing reputations of both parties, and by the larger cultural and historical milieu. In another era, with a different journalist and politician involved, the public reaction could well have taken a different turn.

Reflections on the Interview as an Institutional Form of Talk

Finally, this analysis should stimulate an appreciation of the interactional foundations of the news interview and, by implication, other "institutional" forms of talk. The occurrence of a news interview is not determined by the "objective" characteristics of the setting or its participants. The fact that a journalist and a public figure were involved, the fact that it took place before the cameras, and the fact that it may have been referred to as an "interview" at various junctures—even this weighty combination of circumstances cannot ensure that an interview will indeed be actualized. It is instead

achieved from within the occasion, through practices of talk in interaction. The nature of that achievement is only grossly captured by observing that interviewers ask questions while interviewees answer them. As we have seen, this turn-taking structure is itself the outcome of detailed, continuous, and collaborative work. That work involves the participants specializing their talk to engage in these actions only, while at the same time withholding a wide range of other conversational practices in the service of this outcome. An "interview" is thus a framework of accountability that inhabits action and is sustained through it, rather than a preconstituted situation that exists outside of action or determines it.

As an accountable organization of activities, the news interview exists alongside a wide range of other activity frameworks, which are as broad and open-ended as a "conversation" and as specific as an "argument." A course of talk sustains the special features of an interview only insofar as the parties hold such alternative practices at bay at junctures where they might otherwise be relevant and natural. Alternatively, to engage in "conversational" practices is to transform an interview into a discriminably different framework of activities. Hence, what we have been calling "turn-type departures" and "turn-type/turn-space departures" are properly conceived as "departures" only from within an interview framework. From the standpoint of ordinary conversation, many such practices are normal, natural, and utterly routine. When someone like George Bush "departs" from the interview framework by, for example, responding to the preliminary component of a question-asking turn, that "departure" is performed by engaging in an ordinary conversational practice of turn-taking. Accordingly, as a form of interaction, the interview is an intrinsically malleable state of affairs, and it may be transformed into something quite different by those who previously upheld it.

This does not mean that journalists or their guests are free to flout or ignore the interview framework at will. The maintenance of a situation as a normal interview is a collaborative matter, so attempts by either party to realign the activity structure may be resisted and/or sanctioned by a co-participant. Moreover, any such actions will be visible to the viewing audience and subject to their interpretive and judgemental frameworks. There is always the possibility that

viewers will take a dim view of those who appear to be stepping out of line. And if so, as in the Rather-Bush encounter, "what could have been just another conversation between two talking heads" can turn into "a collision with a resonance far out of proportion" (*Time*, 1988a, p. 16) to the brief minutes of time actually taken up, and the words actually exchanged.

NOTES

1   Both *Time* and *Newsweek* devoted considerable space to discussion of the personalities of both men, and called particular attention to Rather's allegedly "combative and high strung" nature (*Time*, 1988b, p. 24) and his "propensity for bizarre and controversial incidents" (*Newsweek*, 1988b, p. 23). The CBS News anchor was also described as "lightning in a bottle—brilliant and dangerous," with "a reputation for volatility that at times approaches instability" (*Newsweek*, 1988b, p. 22). But it was the the strategic planning and maneuvering by both sides in the weeks and hours before the interview that dominated most press explanations. Similar to the account by the *New York Times'* Peter Boyer cited in the text above, *Newsweek's* (1988a, p. 20) story began with a detailed description of the "war-gaming" preparations of Bush and his media consultant, Roger Ailes. Bush's advisors anticipated that Rather might "get tough on Iran-Contra," the story reported, so they planned to "have the Vice-President control the atmosphere" by going on the attack, thus "turning the tables." *Newsweek* (1988a, p. 20) also reported Rather's own "elaborate preparations, which rivaled those of any presidential candidate before a debate." *Time's* report on Rather's preparation was very similar. "We knew it was going to be a brawl," a producer from CBS's Washington bureau is quoted as saying (1988a, p. 18). "We prepared with that expectation." Rather, it noted, participated in three "rehearsals," and "was coached as if he was a candidate preparing for a debate or a pugilist preparing for a fight, rather than a journalist going into an interview" (1988a, p. 18). And *Time's* "The Ambush That Failed" cover page headline pointed directly to a carefully prepared trap by CBS that "backfired": "the Bush people had planned a sally of their own" after they "kept getting reports that it was going to be a secret ambush" (*Time*, 1988a, pp. 17,18) and the would-be ambushers were themselves "Bushwacked!" (which was the headline used on the story itself).

2   For overviews of the conversation analytic approach, see Heritage (1984, Chapter 8), Lee (1987), and Zimmerman (1988).

3   By characterizing it as a *formally* neutral or *neutralistic* posture, we mean to distinguish our descriptive analysis from attempts to pass judgement on interviewers' neutrality in a *substantive* sense. Interviewers use certain formal speaking practices to avoid overtly expressing an opinion, and thus propose that they are being neutral, but whether

this would hold up "in court" in light of all other aspects of program content is a matter we do not claim to be addressing. It can be argued that "bias" enters in through a whole range of other channels: through the selection of topical agendas and interviewees, through differential treatment given to different interviewees, through facial expressions and tone of voice, and so on. Nevertheless, it is possible to isolate specific speaking practices that appear to figure in the maintenance of a neutralistic posture, without passing judgement on interviewers' neutrality in an absolute sense. For complementary analyses of "objectivistic" practices in other arenas of journalistic practice, see Tuchman (1972), Fishman (1980: Chapter 5), and Robinson and Sheehan (1983).

4   Schegloff (this volume) offers a cogent argument along similar lines.

5   For a detailed analysis of this report, including a discussion of just *how* it worked to challenge Bush's version of events, see Pomerantz (this volume).

6   Consider that Bush starts up his turn in line 48 right in the middle of Rather's "we've." Given that "we" does not necessarily project "we've" as its completion, and given that Bush may have been gearing up to speak at that point and may not have heard the sound particle "we," it may be that Bush only used the preceding portion of Rather's utterance ("you say that") to analyze what the talk was doing. But even that portion would have been sufficient to indicate that Rather was about to build on his prefatory remark. Having just said "let's talk about the record," "you say that" hearably projects talk about something Bush was on record as having said, and a likely topic in this context—perhaps the most likely—would be the Iran-Contra affair.

7   The matter of "the record" comes up two more times, and in each case the issue is framed very much like it was in lines 46-48: Bush corrects/challenges what he takes to be Rather's narrow and unfair focus on Iran-Contra, insisting that he expected to talk about the "full record," the "whole record." [See Nofsinger, this volume-Ed.]

8   Notice that Bush again interrupts precisely when it becomes evident that Rather is about to quote him on another matter ("you also…"), but he does so officially to respond to the previous quotation. This may be explicable in light of what is projected by the second quotation-preliminary fragment. Prior research on news interviews has shown that one common question-delivery procedure involves the production of contrasting items that pose a puzzle when they are juxtaposed; moreover, such contrasts frequently work to criticize or undermine the interviewee's viewpoint (Clayman, 1988, p. 478; cf. Drew, forthcoming). Hence, Bush's early onset may be an attempt to head off a potentially damaging contradiction before it can be developed. And there is evidence that Rather was building toward just such a damaging contrast. The second part of the contrast is not completed in this extract, but Rather later re-starts the very same turn, and then it becomes clear that a contrast structure was being developed. See Extract [8].

9   We say "perversely" because Bush appears to be openly self-contradictory when he first confirms that Rather has only produced a statement at this point (and not a question), but then characterizes his own response to it as an "answer," thus treating Rather's utterance as a "question" after all. But it would be premature to conclude that Bush's displayed "perverseness" is willful or intentional. An examination of the details of their overlapping talk suggests that the appearance of "perverseness" might have a quite "innocent" basis. Although Rather's "That wasn't a question" occurs in the clear, his "it was a statement" is overlapped by Bush's incoming "Yes it was." At the start of his

interruptive turn, then, Bush has not yet heard the "statement" descriptor, and at that point he appears to be disputing Rather's "That wasn't a question" assertion, countering it by saying "Yes it was [a question]." Indeed, Bush's subsequent "and I'll answer it" is just the kind of utterance one would expect to follow this counter-assertion. But while Bush is in the course of producing his counter-assertion, Rather continues talking and positively characterizes his action-thus-far as a "statement." Rather completes this characterization just as Bush finishes the phrase "yes it was," after which Rather drops out. If the analysis to this point is correct, then it is possible that after hearing Rather say "statement," Bush modifies his turn in mid-course by retrieving that descriptor from overlap and embedding it within his own utterance. This modification would display a recognition on Bush's part that Rather was not yet finished, that he added a second turn component, and that this more recent addition requires a response. Schegloff (this volume) demonstrates that interactants have the ability to monitor the simultaneous speech of their interlocutors, and that one party may modify an utterance to respond to what another is saying in overlap. In the present case, since there are no hitches in Bush's utterance, it is less clear-cut that such an in-course revision has occurred. But this would account for the odd, seemingly contradictory shape of Bush's utterance as it was finally produced.

10 This initially worked to enhance Bush's image and persona, at least in media discussions of the encounter. However, since many news media later used the incident to pursue the very same questions raised by CBS concerning the Vice President's participation in the Iran-Contra affair, the overall, long-term consequences are perhaps more ambiguous.

11 Polls taken a few days after the event revealed that public opinion was divided fairly equally on the question of "Did Rather do a good, tough job of questioning or was he too aggressive?" This confirms our assertion that such turn-taking practices can be subjected to divergent moral judgements, even though media commentators in this instance exhibited a high degree of consensus that Rather had indeed gone too far.

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