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Douglas W. Maynard; Steven E. Clayman

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# THE DIVERSITY OF ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

*Douglas W. Maynard*

Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706

*Steven E. Clayman*

Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90024

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## *Abstract*

Our purpose is to review the enormous range of ethnomethodological research from the past three decades. Periodically, scholars have produced review articles, monographs, and position papers that usually promote or critique the work of a particular ethnomethodological subfield. Also, textbook and other accounts of ethnomethodology sometimes impose a homogeneity on the field that neglects the various theoretical and methodological strands. We attempt to articulate the diversity each of the subfields represents, to clarify distinctions between them, and to demonstrate assumptions they share. The areas we discuss include theory, phenomenology, cognition, conversation analysis, research in institutional settings, studies of science, and applied research. While debates about proper topics and methods of research will no doubt continue, underneath such debates are a shared orientation to an extant, achieved orderliness in everyday activities and a commitment to discovering organizational features of direct interaction.

## INTRODUCTION

From the time that Harold Garfinkel's pioneering *Studies in Ethnomethodology* was published in 1967, the enterprise it started has been steeped in both external and internal controversy. Despite external criticisms and partly

through internal contentiousness, however, ethnomethodological scholars have produced a substantial body of work over the past 25 years. In fact, ethnomethodology has spawned a variety of distinctive subfields, and it is more accurate to say that there are several bodies of work, rather than a single enterprise. Years ago, for instance, Zimmerman (1978:6) noted "the increasing diversity among ethnomethodologists, with respect to choice of both problem and method." However, commentators often still treat ethnomethodology as a unitary perspective; in review articles and monographs, they may promote or critique the work of a particular ethnomethodological school or subfield. In an *Annual Review* article three years ago, Atkinson (1988:459) aptly remarked that ethnomethodology "is not a homogenous field"; he himself, however, mainly described and critiqued just two subfields—the recent studies of work and conversation analysis.

Previous reviews have thus been limited by design, whereas our purpose is to articulate, to the extent possible in a limited space, the range and variety of ethnomethodological subfields, to clarify distinctions between them, and to identify fundamental assumptions they share. We do this by showing how, in addressing a range of theoretical and methodological questions, different areas of inquiry take up discrete ethnomethodological themes. These include considering whether the proper topic of investigation is perception, cognition, talk, or embodied behavior; how to conceptualize the relation between interaction and social structure; and what role ethnography should play in the study of situated activities.

## ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND THEORY

Although in the preface to *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Garfinkel (1967:ix) acknowledges his intellectual debt to Talcott Parsons (and Alfred Schutz, Aron Gurwitsch, and Edmund Husserl), the exact placement of the enterprise with regard to general social theory has remained elusive over the years. This may be why theory textbooks and other secondary sources tend to pigeonhole ethnomethodology in three characteristics ways.<sup>1</sup> First, they see ethnomethodology, concerned with how people construct meaning or "definitions of the situation," as a version of symbolic interaction. Second, because definitions of the situation emerge from how persons announce and impart sense-making perceptions and perspectives to one another, ethnomethodology is said to be individualistic. Third, ethnomethodology is understood to have emerged as a critique of traditional ways of doing sociology. In Alexander's (1987) terms, it was a "reaction" against functionalist sociology that soon assumed a "rebellious and even revolutionary thrust."

<sup>1</sup>We reviewed several theory textbooks to discern these patterns. These include Alexander (1987), Collins & Mankowski (1972), Johnson (1981), Ritzer (1983), Turner (1986), and Wallace & Wolf 1980.

Two recent theoretical reflections on ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1988, Heritage 1984: Ch. 2) should lay these misconceptions to rest. These contributions make it abundantly clear that while ethnomethodology stands as a contrasting and alternative sociology to that of action theory, its subject matter is partly defined in relation to the Parsonian distinction between concrete actions and the analytic apparatus through which such actions are hypothetically ordered and explained. Rather than examining those intrinsically organized particular actions and courses of action that comprise the experience of everyday life, Parsonian theorizing addresses a prespecified analytical construct—the unit act (Heritage 1984:20–21, Schegloff 1980:151). In Parsons' (1937) view, that is, theory at the most basic level employs a descriptive frame of reference to order the raw stream of experience. Then the theorist can make empirical generalizations and derive analytical laws to explain phenomena that description has isolated. Thus, for the analyst, raw experience has no organization until it is apprehended interpretively through a stipulated frame of reference.

Ethnomethodology's "incommensurate" (Garfinkel 1988) theoretical proposal is that there is a self-generating order in concrete activities, an order whose scientific appreciation depends upon neither prior description, nor empirical generalization, nor formal specification of variable elements and their analytic relations. From an ethnomethodological standpoint, "raw" experience is anything but chaotic, for the concrete activities of which it is composed are coeval with an intelligible organization that actors "already" provide and that is therefore available for scientific analysis. Central to the achievement of this organization are practical activities through which actors produce and recognize the circumstances in which they are embedded. The principle aim of ethnomethodology is to investigate the procedural accomplishment of these activities as actual, concerted behaviors. Plainly, this is not a critique, reaction, or rebellion against other forms of social theory, but rather a positive respecification of how investigators might approach sociology's most awesome phenomenon—the objective, immortal reality of social facts (Garfinkel 1988). Sociologists can rigorously explicate that phenomenon as an accomplishment of actors' concerted work in making social facts observable and accountable to one another in their everyday lives.

This is, in a nutshell, the heart of the ethnomethodological enterprise. If the substantive concern of ethnomethodology is the achieved intelligibility and organization of everyday activities, it can be appreciated that social order does not come about because individual actors bring their own cognitive definitions of the situation into some kind of convergence or common agreement. The focus in ethnomethodology on what are called, interchangeably, "procedures," "methods," and "practices" runs contrary to a cognitive-interpretive solution to the problem of order, wherein actors produce patterned courses of action because they share internalized frames of reference and value systems

that enable common definitions of situations. Moreover, these procedures do not represent the solitary resources that singular souls impose upon one another; they are systemic resources that members of society concertedly enact. Thus, ethnomethodology avoids inferences about how otherwise separated actors abstractly think and negotiate definitions for joint projects and instead investigates how members are from the outset embedded in contingently accomplished structures of social action consonant with their acting and reacting to one another in real time.

As theory, then, ethnomethodology proposes an extant orderliness in concrete activities that is impervious to formal analytic derivation and that therefore requires a different form of analysis. Because of its unique stance, this subfield has come to occupy its own place in social theory (Boden 1990a). Moreover, some ethnomethodological theorists (e.g. Hilbert forthcoming, Maynard & Wilson 1980, Rawls 1989a, b, Wilson 1982, forthcoming; Wilson & Zimmerman 1980), have demonstrated distinctive solutions to old problems, thereby forging linkages between ethnomethodology and the classical writings of Durkheim, Weber, Mannheim, and Marx. Others develop linkages with, or may critique contemporary theorists such as Bourdieu on "habitus" (Ostrow 1981), Collins on "interaction ritual chains" (Hilbert 1990), Giddens on "agency" (Boden, 1990a, Wilson 1990), Goffman on the "interaction order" (Rawls 1987), and Habermas on "communicative action" (Bogen 1989).

## PHENOMENOLOGY AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Ethnomethodological proposals about indigenous social order represent a common backdrop to conceptual and empirical developments for studying the organization of everyday life. However, the investigations that Garfinkel's corpus spawned are extremely varied and take independent directions that depend on which aspects of the work serve as a springboard for further inquiry. Thus, whereas numerous commentators have equated ethnomethodology with phenomenology (e.g. Best 1975, Rogers 1983), it is more accurate to say that a phenomenological sensibility is expressed in ethnomethodology than that the latter is or should be a phenomenological sociology (cf. Anderson et al 1985, Heap & Roth 1973:363–65, Garfinkel in Hinkle 1977:9–15). Here, for purposes of tracing this sensibility, we can give only the briefest exposition of phenomenology. At a very basic level, phenomenology helped open inquiry into the world of everyday life as a "universe of significance" and a "texture of meaning," to use Schutz's (1962:10) words. Beyond this, we suggest that the phenomenological sensibility expressed in specific ethnomethodological studies has three aspects.

*Gestalt-Contextures and Embodied Activity*

The term *phenomenology* became a technical one within the history of philosophy with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, but Edmund Husserl's investigations (e.g. 1960, 1970) have infused the expression with the philosophical meanings it manifests today. Recognizing that science presents itself as a self-contained enterprise, Husserl argued that its objects and achievements rest upon a vast prescientific foundation of unclarified presuppositions, which Husserl termed the *Lebenswelt* or life-world. He further asserted that the job of philosophy is to discern and elucidate these presuppositions in a progressive way until the ultimate grounds of knowledge are reached (Kockelmans 1967:25–27, Gurwitsch 1964:158, Gurwitsch 1966). This concern with presuppositions has meant according consciousness a privileged status for phenomenological investigations, because it is, in Gurwitsch's (1964:159) words, "the universal medium of the presentation of objects." However, where traditional investigations regard consciousness as the place where external stimuli imprint coherent sensations in the mind of actors, phenomenology performs a "suspension" or "bracketing" of belief in independent objects as the source of perceptual experience. It is not that the reality of objects and the world is denied; simply, the strategy is to see how members experience the world and all its manifestations as real through identifiable acts of consciousness. Central to this process is *intentionality*, which, in phenomenology, is neither a motivational nor psychological backdrop to consciousness (Heap & Roth 1973:355–56). Instead, it points to acts of perception that refer to one another and to some connected whole, where that apperceived whole simultaneously makes sense of those singular acts of which it is comprised (Merleau Ponty 1962:7–8). One aspect of the phenomenological sensibility in ethnomethodology, then, is this notion of the perceptual field as intentionally assembled in the manner of a gestalt contexture (cf Gurwitsch 1964) or what Zimmerman & Pollner (1970) have called an *occasioned corpus* of features to a social setting.

The explication of local scenes of social action as assembled contextures is present in the work of Husserl's student, Alfred Schutz, whose writings had a large bearing on Garfinkel's early work especially. Schutz (1962) compared gestalt contextures to phenomenological concepts such as "noema," which is a perceived intentional object that carries implications through its "inner" and "outer" horizons for how each detail of the object achieves its coherence in relationship to that very object as it is formed within the stream of experience. The most transparent connection between phenomenological conceptions of gestalt contextures or noematic relations and ethnomethodological orientations is in Garfinkel's (1967) well-known discussion of "the documentary method of interpretation." By way of the documentary method, members consult presumed, institutionalized features of the society as an "underlying

pattern” to make sense of particular behavioral displays, and also employ these displays, in turn, as evidence that the infinitely elaborate normative features of the collectivity are in place. The idea that social settings and their constituent elements are contextually coconstitutive by virtue of members’ methodic sense-making activities is a clear debt to phenomenological themes.

While the phenomenological orientation to contextual embeddedness is important, Garfinkel nevertheless deemphasized Schutzian regard for perceptual knowledge as a mental process or activity, because of an emerging concern for “embodied” activity and the practical production of social facts that emerges in the very details of talk and action as endlessly contingent manifestations of real-worldly conduct. As Anderson et al (1985) have argued, Garfinkel’s interest in Schutz was methodological in the sense of using the Schutzian corpus as teachings about how to reduce theoretical categories and objects to fundamental constitutive activities. This movement away from the phenomenological accent on consciousness has been noted before (Heap & Roth 1973:364, Heritage 1984:71, 102, 110, Livingston 1987, Psathas 1980, Wieder 1977), but it is not like behaviorism, which denies the existence of consciousness; it is a rejection of the mind-body dichotomy in an effort to make sociological analysis answerable to the corporeity of so-called subjective behavior. In Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) terms, the body lives things, objects, and features of the world in general before they can be conceived.

### *The Relationship of Rules to Human Conduct*

Other than the ethnomethodological studies of work (discussed below), the research of Wieder (1974) and Pollner (1987) has extended the phenomenological sensibility in ethnomethodology most explicitly. Often quoted in the secondary literature is Wieder’s (1974) study of a half-way house (Handel 1982:92–95, Heritage 1984:198–209, Leiter 1980:194–200, Mehan & Wood 1975:137–42). A key point of the study is a long-standing ethnomethodological concern: the relation of rules to conduct. Early on, ethnomethodologists (e.g. Zimmerman 1970) argued that the conventional sociological preoccupation with rules (norms, roles, etc) as explanations for patterned human conduct is misguided. Instead, rules can be treated as topics and as features of the very settings they are taken to organize.

With reference to the “convict code,” a set of maxims specifying proper conduct for residents of the half-way house, Wieder demonstrates this principle elegantly. In a traditional approach, the code could be used to explain why residents repeatedly engaged in behaviors that undermined the rehabilitative goals of the house. However, Wieder transforms this explanatory approach wherein rules are exogenous and context-free determinants of behavior by reembedding the code as a lived feature of the settings in which it is “told.”

That is, the emphasis is on how people use codes, rules, and roles (Halkowski 1990b, Hilbert 1981, Maynard 1985:21–23, Watson, 1978) for various ends. Thus, a maxim such as “don’t snitch,” when a resident actually refers to it, may be a way of showing solidarity with other residents, or it may exhibit defiance against the staff. Staff, for their part, would use the code to exculpate themselves for their own lack of knowledge regarding resident conduct, for justifying changes in the program, and for defending themselves against complaints from the residents. In Wieder’s (1974:175) terms, the code is a “*method* of moral persuasion and justification,” operating via the documentary method of interpretation, to provide members with a sense of pattern and of a constrained order in their everyday lives (see also Zimmerman & Pollner 1970), quite independently of any underlying moral orientation to it. The phenomenological sensibility thus has a second aspect: A sociological preoccupation with “rule-governed” behavior can be supplanted with an understanding of rule-usage as an aspect of members’ repertoire of practical actions.

### *The Accomplished Objectivity of the World*

In Pollner’s (1987) work, the phenomenological sensibility is expressed as an appreciation of the grounds upon which both everyday and sociological discourse depend. By adhering to a set of “idealizations,” actors maintain an assumption that “reality,” which awaits discovery and grasp, is something objective and exterior to themselves. While continuously enacting this assumption, and as a condition of making the objective world possible, actors perpetually hide their own idealizing work. This is not to say that people create reality; it is to suggest that actors are participants in the very forms and practices that render the world as having its definitive features.

The idealizations that Pollner (1987:ch. 2) discusses include anticipations of (a) object determinacy—i.e. that the details and pieces of some confronted scene are but partial developments of matters that can be fully explicated, (b) object coherency—that these details and pieces will come together in an intelligible whole, (c) noncontradictoriness—i.e. that these details and pieces are congruent and harmonious with one another and are consistent with the overall whole of which they are a part. A “crisis” (Pollner 1987:53) of mundane reason occurs when contradictory accounts of some real-world event emerge. Nevertheless, mundane reason always provides a solution, such as finding fault with the subjectivity or perception of one or more participants in the crisis, so that the sense of an external and objectively knowable world is preserved.

There are lessons here not only for ethnomethodological investigations of everyday settings, such as traffic court that Pollner (1987) investigates. In the fact, members of scientific settings rely on similar idealizations and practices for constituting objects of inquiry. Thus, in a series of demonstrations,



McHoul (1982:Chapter 4) confirms how misguided it would be to search for a presuppositionless inquiry in sociology or any other science. Rather, the strategy for ethnomethodological inquiry is to analyze mundane reason in such a way as to understand its organizational contribution to inquiries of every kind, even those involving itself. This requires, according to Pollner (1991), a radical reflexivity, a willingness to confront primordial presuppositions, including those which permit one's own sustained investigation in the first place.

Heretofore, that sort of radical inquiry is what guided the phenomenological sensibility and aided the discoveries we have itemized above. That is, at least three aspects of this sensibility remain as an intrinsic part of ethnomethodological work. These include, firstly, the idea that the experienced social world is composed not of discrete "variables" of one sort or another but of gestalt contextures that are assembled in and through actors' intrinsic ordering activities. This intrinsic ordering activity includes the lived way in which percipient bodies initially bring the world into being and only secondarily conceptualize it. Secondly, the ordering of the world does not occur through following rules or roles or other abstractly formulated proscriptions. Such proscriptions are themselves usable resources for "doing" nameable activities and providing for a visible, sensible social environment. Finally, the experience of an objective world, whether in everyday or scientific settings, depends upon practical adherence to a set of idealizations or presuppositions that require a radical investigative stance for proper inquiry.

## ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND COGNITION

Because of early ethnomethodological interest in phenomenology and its emphasis on consciousness, the social organization of cognition would seem a natural topic of inquiry. Indeed, from at least two sources, Garfinkel (1967) developed a concern for "commonsense knowledge of social structure." He followed Kaufmann (1944) in distinguishing normative rules of social life (mores, folkways) from those fundamental or "basic" rules that enable actors to identify concrete behavioral displays as specific actions. For instance, by way of the basic rules and their "constitutive accent,"<sup>2</sup> participants can see a mark on a piece of paper, orient to a regulation such as "place your X or your O within the square," and derive an awareness of playing tic-tac-toe. As Garfinkel (1963:195) states it, "the basic rules provide a behavior's *sense* as

<sup>2</sup>The constitutive accent refers to expectancies (a) that the basic rules are to be followed regardless of a party's purposes, desires, and circumstances, (b) that the rules are binding upon the other party as well as oneself, and (c) that the other party holds the same expectations as does ego.

an action." When some behavioral display (putting an X on the line) breaches the basic rules, it is not like the violation of a norm, wherein a player can be seen as deviant within the order of the game. Rather, such a breach violates the game as a meaningful order of activities, causes confusion, and invites an altered sense of what game is underway. Then, Garfinkel (1963:210–14) observed that the basic rules and their constitutive accent are comparable to the components of what Schutz (1962) calls the attitude of daily life, a set of assumptions or presuppositions whereby participants achieve the "perceived normality" of their ordinary social environments (Garfinkel 1963:210–14).

### *Cognitive Sociology*

Given the importance of assumptions and presuppositions, and thus the references to the subjectivity of actors, it would seem relevant to develop further suggestions about the role of cognition in social life. The early work of Cicourel (1974a), who developed the metaphor of "basic rules" by referring to interpretive procedures and comparing them with "surface" or normative rules, has this character. Interpretive procedures enable the actor to "assign meaning or relevance to an environment of objects" (Cicourel 1974a:30) and to decide what norms and roles are operative in a given social situation. Employing Schutzian (1964) categories as well, Cicourel (1974a:34–36) formulated interpretive procedures in terms of the component assumptions of the attitude of daily life, which include idealizations to the effect that a speaker and hearer can change places and nonetheless experience social objects in a common way, that the speaker's and hearer's biographies will not interfere with the assignment of meaning to everyday activities, and so on. Furthermore, Cicourel drew an analogy between the assumptions of the attitude of daily life (as interpretive procedures) and the "deep structure" of transformational grammar (Chomsky 1968).

Cicourel's synthesis of Schutzian and Chomskyian concepts and metaphors resulted in an emphasis on interpretive procedures that are essentially minded or mental phenomena. The cognitive accent also derives from Cicourel's (1981:90) reading of the philosophy of language, particularly speech act theory as articulated by Austin (1962), Grice (1975), and Searle (1969). Thus, Cicourel (1981) makes reference to "information processing," "mental processing," and "screening" activities whereby actors "match" or "link" prosodic and paralinguistic speech clues with background expectations and social structural knowledge to interpret what a speaker intends with a given utterance. Furthermore, drawing on Rumelhart (1977), Cicourel (1981:98–102) argues that sociologists, to fully handle the problem of meaning in everyday life, need "schema theory" and "cognitive linguistic concepts" that deal with information storage, organization, and retrieval. The main analytic topics in Cicourel's oeuvre include typifications, such as those employed in

the processing of juvenile delinquents (Cicourel 1968); commonsense knowledge, as utilized by children, for instance, to arrive at both “right” and “wrong” answers on intelligence tests (Cicourel et al 1974); processes of memory, such as “selective attention,” “filtering,” and “abductive reasoning” in the conduct of medical interviews (Cicourel 1974b), and related matters.

### *Epistemic Sociology*

Early on, the work of Cicourel seemed almost definitive of ethnomethodological approaches to cognition. That is, commentators often cited his work as exemplary. While the tie to early ethnomethodological preoccupations with basic rules, commonsense knowledge, and the like is clear, more recent ethnomethodology departs from the mentalistic emphasis. The divergence derives partly from the influence of another stream of thought in the philosophy of language, particularly Ludwig Wittgenstein’s examination of language practices—how actors employ words and sentences in concrete situations. In *Philosophical Investigations* and other posthumous publications, Wittgenstein (1958) argues that language—rather than being a vehicle for naming things, or conveying information, or even enacting intentions according to rules of (what is now called) speech act usage—is an “activity” or “form of life” in its own right. As an example, to analyze a single word in the language—such as “description”—and propose that there is a single definable class of phenomena to which it refers is to neglect that descriptions can be a wide variety of things depending on the various roles the word plays in a multiplicity of “language games” (Wittgenstein 1958:para. 24). To discover the meaning of a word, it is not possible to rely on ostensive definitions; it is a matter of examining contexts of use to discover similarities that Wittgenstein (1958:para 67) called “family resemblances.” It is in the actual practice of employing words that such resemblances can be traced and the lexical and other components of language appreciated as a form of life.

One form of life in which people participate is making attributions about their own and others’ cognitive states. Such attributions have been subject to Coulter’s (1989:16) “sociology of cognition” or “epistemic” sociology, a set of inquiries concerned with the internal logic or forms of orderliness implicit in actors’ own assessments of subjectivity. Drawing directly from Wittgenstein’s (1958, para. 373) arguments, Coulter (1989:50–51) refers to these forms as *grammars of cognition*, by which he means the linguistic frameworks, circumstances, and systems within which cognitive concepts and expressions are appropriately applied or used in everyday life.

Examining grammars of cognition implies avoiding what Ryle (1949:16) has called the “dogma of the ghost in the machine,” which perpetuates the dualisms of personality theory to the effect that body and mind are separate entities, one being public, the other private, one external, the other internal,

one physical, the other mental. Like Wittgenstein, Ryle took on an array of cognitive and psychological concepts, debunking the assumption that they have essentially subjective referents. These concepts include willfulness, emotions of various kinds (feelings, agitations, moods, wants, etc), self, self-knowledge, sensation, imagination, and intellect. Consistent with both Wittgenstein & Ryle, then, Coulter (1989:58) argues that all of these ghosts “are, in fact, mundanely and routinely avowed, ascribed and observably presupposed in practical social life.”

What this means, empirically, is explored most fully in Coulter’s (1979a) *The Social Construction of Mind*. As one example, consider the phenomenon of *presupposition*, a seeming consummate aspect of individual subjectivity. Coulter (1979a:52) suggests that actual, spoken utterances are sometimes treated in situ in a way that shows what they might conventionally presuppose. Here is an example from a brief argument between two children (Maynard 1985:15):

1. Tom: Darn it
2. (0.2 seconds silence)
3. Mike: .hhh hhh! You said darn it Tom, Tom you said a naughty word
4. Tom: That’s not a naughty word

At line 3, Mike notices Tom’s line 1 expletive by producing an inbreath/outbreath gasp and then reporting on what Tom has said. The basis of this noticeability and reportability is supplied in Mike’s next utterance, where he characterizes the words as “naughty.” Now Jefferson (1974:192) has noted that parties distribute items of talk, such as expletives, in terms of appropriate environments. Thus, Tom’s contradiction of the “naughty word” characterization (line 4) exhibits explicitly what he may have presumed in saying the expletive, that it was not improper or offensive in this situation. Mike’s line 3 opposition disallows that presumption and in that way makes it observable. As Coulter (1979b:174) remarks, “presuppositions are usable as a hearer’s argumentative device,” and such usages are both socially organized and public in character.

Another apparently quintessential psychic entity Coulter (1979a:59) points to is memory. An excellent example of how a grammar of cognition can elucidate the social organization of recollection and forgetting is Goodwin’s (1987) article on “Forgetfulness as an interactive resource,” which shows how, in a multiparty setting, a husband’s asking his wife about a third party’s name works to modify the interactants’ participation framework. Briefly, the “display of uncertainty” or forgetfulness occurs at a moment when the wife has begun an utterance that is competing with her husband’s, and the display solicits her attention in such a way as to dislodge her from her own line of

talk. Thus, his “forgetfulness” is analyzable as a public, behavioral, socially organized matter with discrete interactional aims and consequences. Similarly, Drew (1989) shows how a display of forgetfulness can be the product of a socially organized “testing” scenario, or one in which a speaker manages to “expose” something about a recipient and hence the recipient’s competence, relationship with the speaker, and other matters.

Ethnomethodology, then, has promoted interest in the sociology of cognition, but in at least two very different ways. Drawing from Schutz, Chomsky, and ordinary language philosophers who lean toward a concern with internal mental structures that underlie and make discourse possible, Cicourel’s version is traditional in the sense of remaining with the ghosts in the machine—the contents of attention, memory, knowledge, typifications—and how they influence interaction. Coulter, in comparison, is indebted to Ryle, Wittgenstein, and others who rehabilitate the ghosts in the machine as part of the vocabulary, practices and routines—i.e. social organization—through which actors avow, display, and ascribe various subjective qualities to one another in everyday life.

## CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Conversation analysis, a field originating in Harvey Sacks’ collaborative inquiries with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, has emerged as perhaps the most visible and influential form of ethnomethodological research. A number of edited books (Atkinson & Heritage 1984, Button & Lee 1987, Psathas 1979, 1990, Schenkein 1978, Sudnow 1972) and special issues of journals (Beach 1989, Button et al 1986, Maynard 1987, 1988, West & Zimmerman 1980) have featured conversation analytic works. Moreover, as Heritage (1984:233) notes, conversation analysis independently influenced disciplines cognate to sociology, including anthropology, communications, linguistics, social psychology, and cognitive science. Because a number of excellent secondary accounts of conversation analysis exist (Atkinson & Heritage 1984, Boden 1990b, Goodwin & Heritage 1990, Heritage 1984: Chapter 8, Lee 1987, Levinson 1983: Chapter 6, Zimmerman 1988, Whalen, forthcoming), we only touch upon topics that are well summarized in this literature. At the most general level, conversation analysis is concerned with the methodical construction in and through talk of member-productive and analyzable social action and activity. Exemplary topics include the organization of sequences (as perhaps the identifying mark of most conversation analytic studies), the structure of repair, the “preference” for certain conversational forms (agreement, for example) as an organizational rather than psychological phenomenon (Pomerantz 1984), the primacy of ordinary conversation and its relation to social structure and institutional environments

(Boden & Zimmerman, forthcoming, Clayman 1989, Drew & Heritage 1991), the interrelation of vocal and nonvocal activities (M. Goodwin 1980, C. Goodwin 1981, Heath 1986) and others. Moreover, research in this area has been cumulative, with early studies providing a basis for the exploration and analysis of concerted activity in new domains and for the explication of "single episodes" of interaction (Clayman & Whalen, 1988–1989, Schegloff 1987a, 1988–1989, Whalen et al 1988).

As this volume of work, its cumulative character, and its influence on other areas attest, conversation analysis is an endeavor with a momentum and trajectory separate from ethnomethodology (Schegloff 1989). Other influences on Sacks include, most prominently, Erving Goffman, with whom Sacks studied at Berkeley, and a wide range of nonsociological intellectual developments, which include Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy, Chomskian generative grammar, Freudian psychology, anthropological field work, and so on (Schegloff, 1988, 1989). Still, the relationship between Garfinkel and Sacks was clearly crucial to conversation analysis, and bonds between the two areas run deep. Secondary accounts often suggest that conversation analysis emerged as a "kind" or "form" of ethnomethodology but fail to explicate precisely how it emerged and what specific form it entails, although ten Have's (1990) thorough review suggests that conversation analysis is a strategy or method for dealing with the "invisibility of commonsense." In the interest of explaining the diversity of ethnomethodology, we wish to make two other observations about its relationship with conversation analysis. One observation deals with *indexical* expressions and the other concerns a contrast between conversational procedure and talk as an embodied activity.

### *Indexical Expressions and Sequential Organization*

A natural place to start is with a collaborative article by Garfinkel & Sacks (1970), entitled "On formal structures of practical actions," which is concerned with the phenomenon of natural language. All natural language is indexical, which means that the understandability of any utterance, rather than being fixed by some abstract definition, depends upon the circumstances in which it appears. Even the verbal products of "practical sociological reasoning," wherein laypersons or professionals theorize about society, are indexical in character, despite the best efforts to render these propositional phrases as objective, context-free, and universal as possible. Hypotheses, ideal types, interview schedules, coding formats, and so on, all show the effort to employ abstract expressions that will prevail over the contingencies inherent in the situations where such expressions are meant to apply. Yet we know that they never do cover all the exigencies of interaction in particular settings; our best laid descriptions, categories, and explanations always leave something out, need fudging, or are replete with inconsistencies. Moreover,

because any linguistic usage is invariably indexical, the effort to remedy the circumstantiality of one statement by producing a more exact rendition will preserve that very feature in the attempt. Thus, there is no time out from the phenomenon. Instead of approaching indexical expressions as a methodological nuisance (in the way that conventional social theory and research often does), therefore, an alternative is to examine their constitutive properties. This is the tack of Garfinkel & Sacks (1970:341), who argue that the properties of indexical expressions are ordered and socially organized; such orderliness, moreover, "is an ongoing, practical accomplishment of every actual occasion of commonplace speech and conduct." Indeed, rather than being a problem in need of remedy, indexical expressions can be a resource for broadly social ends.

This, then, raises a question as to what social activities comprise the orderliness of indexical expressions. As one instance, Garfinkel & Sacks (1970) discuss "formulations" through which members describe, explain, characterize, summarize, or otherwise "say-in-so-many-words" what they are doing or talking about. The use of formulations is a socially organized one in that, for instance, formulations may arise at a point where the "determinate" gist of a potentially multifaceted conversation has become problematic, and they regularly invite confirmation or denial (Heritage & Watson 1979). As another instance of the orderliness to indexical expressions, Garfinkel & Sacks (1970) discuss "glossing practices" and a collection of examples. One of these is "a definition used in first approximation." At the beginning of an article, an author may offer a loose definition of some term, subsequently developing arguments and exhibits to support the definition. At the end, the author will supply a second and more precise definition of the term, which formulates the features and connections among the exhibits, arguments, and definitions (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970:364).

Neither formulations nor glosses, which are themselves indexical, provide the essential means for rendering conversational activities intelligible, however. Sacks (1967, lecture 11: 10) takes up this very problem in his unpublished lectures.<sup>3</sup>

If . . . somebody produced an utterance and you figured that a way you would show that you understood it was to produce an explication of it, then that explication would pose exactly the task that the initial utterance posed. And you could see how rapidly it would become an impossible procedure. And in any event would involve some sorts of constant and possible indefinitely extended "times outs" in a conversation.

While it is impossible to accomplish mutual understanding by explicating utterances i.e. through formulations or glosses, Sacks argues that the mech-

<sup>3</sup>The previously-unpublished lectures of Sacks are making their way into print. Early lectures (1964–1965) are in Sacks (1989), and the full corpus is being published as Sacks (1990).

anism of *tying* one utterance to another through “pro-terms” is an economical way of achieving intelligibility (cf Watson 1987). Pronouns, which, in any given utterance, may refer to some other noun or category on whose behalf they stand, are characteristic tying devices, as are what Sacks (1967, #11:1) calls “pro-verbs”:

So, for example, in a sequence like: “I got injured a bit, too,” “You *did*?”, then “You did” is tied to the prior utterance.

Notice that the relation between the pro-verb (“did”) and its reference (“got injured”) partially depends upon the contiguity of the two utterances. From observations like these, it is not too far distant to consider what is perhaps “the most powerful device for relating utterances” (Sacks, Spring 1972, #4:1)—the adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks 1973). Among other tasks, this device allows phrases and clauses (“because I wanted to,” or “to get home”), which otherwise are not grammatical sentences, to be comprehensible conversational utterances as second pair parts or answers-to-questions (Sacks, Spring 1972, #1:23).

Stated differently, the work of tying and adjacency-pairing suggests the overall importance of positioning utterances for purposes of intelligibility. This operates in two ways. On the one hand, interactants comprehend utterances by considering them in relation to preceding talk. Correspondingly, they display their understanding through tying their own utterances to previous ones (Sacks et al 1974:728–29). The devices of tying, placing, and positioning pieces of talk generalize to a proposition that the sequential features of conversation are pervasively operative in the analysis of any given utterance (Sacks, Fall 1967, #13:10). Therefore, if talk is indexical, as in the use of pro-terms, phrases, and other clauses whose meaning is contextually derived, it is a phenomenon accomplished as participants build utterances in a sequential fashion to make them intelligible and to show understanding in precise ways. In such fashion are the indexical properties of talk ordered.

This accomplishment, moreover, implies a social organization that is local and for itself, rather than, say, operating on behalf of some externally based social structure, such as class, gender, or ethnicity. In that participants tie one utterance to another, a recipient who wishes to speak to whatever topic is on the floor is required to listen not just to some utterance-in-progress, but to the spate of previous talk, for it is in terms of this previous talk that the current utterance itself makes sense. Additionally, when taking a turn of talk, a current speaker is required to demonstrate its relationship to an immediately previous utterance and, via the practice of tying, to the utterances preceding it (Sacks, Fall 1967, #11).

Indexical expressions are a window, then, through which to gaze upon the bedrock of social order. Actors achieve all manner of relationship, inter-



dependence, and commitment (Rawls 1989a), and perform an infinite variety of social actions, through the precise placement of single turns of talk in relation to surrounding vocalizations and nonvocal gestures as well (Goodwin 1986). Thus, one bond between conversation analysis and ethnomethodology resides in the extensive exploration, provided by conversation analysis, into one profoundly ordered property of indexical expressions, that is, their sequential organization.

### *Conversational Procedures and Talk as an Embodied Activity*

Sacks' insight into tying and consequently into the temporal and sequential organization of conversation was a brilliant one for sociology, yielding a fundamental understanding of social order. From this insight, we can see the development of the interest in turn-taking as a basic device involving sequential organization as it is described in one of the most theoretically and empirically important pieces of ethnomethodologically related research (Sacks et al 1974). However, the analysis of turn-taking has been subject to complaint for its formalism (cf Liberman 1985, Lynch 1985: Ch. 5, Molotch & Boden 1985, Peyrot 1982). For instance, Livingston (1987:73) argues that descriptions of disengaged and objective rules for turn-taking miss the embodied work by which conversationalists exhibit and ensure their talk is accountably being done turn-by-turn.

While this might be one reading of the paper or of some of its offshoots, the analysis of turn-taking does show a deep concern with turn-taking practices as achievements rather than as causal and disembodied rules (cf Schegloff, forthcoming). That is, participants enact the turn-taking system in no mechanical fashion; instead they compete, often sharply, to be able to talk, and respond to the moment-by-moment emergence of enormously consequential and diverse exigencies, including gaps, overlaps, hesitations, false-starts, errors, topical trajectories, and so on. For example, Goodwin (1981) has shown that when the speaker of a turn-at-talk notices a recipient's gaze wander, that speaker will recycle the turn-so-far, effectively requesting recipient to return gaze to speaker. What may then appear (on an abstracted transcript of the interaction) as some accidental utterance restart is involved in the assembly of a turn-of-talk during which the recipient will have been in ocular attendance to the speaker. The interaction therefore consists not just of some sort of "adherence" to turn-taking procedures, but of systemic moves wherein it is witnessable that one and just one "speaker" is talking to a "recipient" who is listening. Conversational turn-taking is organized not like a system of rules or syntax of language, but in and as the particulars and details comprise talk in its spoken, real-time actuality. On a moment-to-moment basis, turn-taking is a concerted, interactive achievement.

This point can be extended with the juxtaposition of conversation analytic

and ethnomethodological investigations of a most mundane event in daily life, a telephone call. Schegloff's (1968) study of telephone openings revealed a significant property of ringing phones, namely that they are summonses, and as such require an answer. Together, a summons and its answer comprise an adjacency pair whose use helps coordinate entry into conversation. Schegloff (1968) arrived at this characterization through examining a corpus of 500 telephone calls and, at first, formulating a "distribution" rule to the effect that "the answerer speaks first." However, one case, in which the caller spoke first, did not fit the pattern. This prompted a more finely-grained analysis, in which Schegloff (1968) proposed that a telephone ring and its answer form a summons-answer sequence. Furthermore, because summons-answer sequences have the property of conditional relevance, when someone produces the first item of the sequence (a summons), the second part (an answer) is thereupon expectable and, if absent, it is noticeably absent and subject to repair. With regard to a ringing telephone, this means that if someone picks up the telephone but says nothing, a caller will regularly reissue a summons and thereby "speak first" by saying "hello."

The conditional relevance of an "answer" to a summons is clear to anyone who has heard a ringing phone and has felt compelled to withdraw from some current engagement or activity to answer it. The sequential organization of first pair parts and second pair parts is very powerful, and Schegloff's (1968) elegant analysis demonstrates an achieved, unitary solution to the problem of coordinated entry that operates across a variety of settings, across vocal and nonvocal activities, and even across the duration of a single conversation. Nevertheless, there is a further orderliness to the process of summoning and answering than this analysis provides. That is, the study of sequences raises the question of how sequential components (e.g. summonses and answers) are recognizably constituted. For example, Schegloff (1986:118–21, cf 1968) himself notes that persons in the environment of a ringing phone engage in various analyses to determine just who should answer, and how and when. That is, the summons is itself a socially assembled object in terms of how it implicates a recipient's responsive action. Ethnomethodological demonstration of this point is in Garfinkel's "summoning phones" exercise. Students are asked to gather tape recordings of ringing telephones that are (a) hearably summoning just them, (b) hearably summoning someone else, (c) simulating hearably summoning just them, (d) simulating hearably summoning someone else, and (e) just ringing. A full explication of this exercise is now published; it demonstrates how "methodic procedures" render lived experience and its intrinsic orderliness into "signed" objects whose interpretation necessarily loses a grasp of such orderliness (Garfinkel & Wieder 1991). In this regard, we wish to raise only two prominent points.

First, in making a "ringing phone" the circumstance for further action,

parties are engaged in primeval social, compositional activities. Thus, that a phone is ringing depends upon an actor foregrounding some high-pitched frequency from a heretofore differently constructed background that immediately has the character of silence out of which the just-now hearable phone-ring emerged. Moreover, that a phone is hearably summoning one or another or nobody in particular is the outcome of participants' activities which on singularly distinguishable occasions provide for just how the phone is ringing. This includes that it is "just another ringing phone" of which many have been heard and that it is nonetheless soliciting some particular someone's answer, in part because of the "direction" from which the ring may be heard (Garfinkel & Wieder 1991). The organization of summons-answer sequences can be decomposed to appreciate that any comparability of a "ringing phone" across settings, rather than residing in the nature of phone rings as uniform and context-free stimuli, is the outcome of situated work as an embodied presence in settings of social action wherein exists an *in vivo* coherence to the phenomenal details of which the object ("ringing phone") originally consists.<sup>4</sup>

Second, as an example of other aspects of order that can be unraveled from an accountably summoning phone, consider that "who" a ringing phone is summoning depends upon how an actor, in concert with others, further forges the social environment in which that event occurs.<sup>5</sup> This process can include: (a) how one categorically orients to the environment—as one's own office or home, as someone else's office or home, as a public domain, and so on; (b) the informings that are available prior to or during the phone-ring, such as "Jane should be calling soon," or "That's Jane"; (c) whether one is using a phone and calling someone else, such that the ringing represents an "outgoing" summons and is on the other end of the line, or in a place where an inert phone can suddenly commence with a bell or other type of noise that represents an "incoming" summons; (d) the expectations that result from relationships through which parties construct an understanding that the other

<sup>4</sup>Along these lines, Schegloff (1968:1090) has said, "The activity of summoning is . . . not intrinsic to any of the items that compose it; it is an assembled product whose efficacious properties are cooperatively yielded by the interactive work of both summoner and answerer." See also Schegloff's (1986:118) discussion of how an apparently mechanical and standardized telephone ring is, in fact, a "socially and interactionally shaped product." Finally, a more exhaustive treatment of these matters can be found in Schegloff's (n.d.) revised dissertation chapters.

<sup>5</sup>The following list of examples derives, in part, from taped and written comments of participants in an ethnomethodology seminar when Harold Garfinkel was a visitor in the Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Spring 1990. Also compare this list to Schegloff's (1986:118–20) remarks on how the phenomenal properties of a ringing phone are interactionally produced.

will call one just here, just now—for example, “my wife’s parents call every Thursday night about this time”; (e) the spatial positionings and activities of members of an office or household vis-à-vis one another and the telephone—for instance, the nearest to a ringing phone may be the “summoned” party, or the one who is not presently “working” or otherwise engaged; and (f) how each of the above—(a) through (e)—are themselves in situ accomplishments in detail.

In general, Garfinkel (1967) long ago offered the possibility that every feature of a setting is an endogenous, concerted achievement. This means that there is embodied work to the production of even those features that sometimes are discussed as “rules,” “resources,” “first pair parts,” “second pair parts,” and the like. Turn-taking as a kind of sequential organization might be a “resource” for the production and understanding of indexical expressions, for instance, but it is important to see such organization as itself a part of the activity for which it is both a resource in the production and understanding of indexical expressions, and itself an orderly achievement. Summonses might be first-pair parts that make answers conditionally relevant and thus serve to initiate a conversational sequence through which participants can coordinate and make accountable their entry into conversation; those summonses are also phenomena of orderly achievement. The lesson here is that any principle, including sequential organization, by which it is possible analytically to order the phenomenal detail of every life, including talk, is a detail of order that recursively permits appreciation as itself an organized accomplishment.

We have specified two possible intersections between ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.<sup>6</sup> One intersection derives from how Sacks’ concern with the tying and positioning of utterances (and ultimately with sequential organization) relates to Garfinkel’s (1967) and Garfinkel & Sacks’ (1970) proposal that indexical expressions have ordered properties. Conversation analysis, then, is like an extended treatise on a major, socially accomplished and organized resource for the production and understanding of indexical expressions. A second intersection is recognized and adumbrated in conversation analytic studies and relates to an ethnomethodological concern for “embodied production.” The issue concerns how conversational objects, procedures, and practices, while involved in the assembly of sequences, speech exchange systems, and other structures of talk, can be further decomposed as orderly phenomena.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of another relationship between ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, see Heritage (1984: chapters 4 and 5) and Goodwin & Heritage (1990). In terms of moral sanctionability, there is a connection between (a) adhering to the Schutzian (1962) “attitude of daily life” and general sense-making procedures, and (b) orienting to adjacency pair and other sequential frameworks.

## ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL STUDIES OF INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Many of Garfinkel's initial investigations were carried out in casual arenas of social life rather than in the institutional settings around which so many sociological subdisciplines have developed. The well-known "breaching" experiments, in which students were asked to act like boarders in their own homes, or to question the taken-for-granted meanings of ordinary remarks of family, friends, and acquaintances, exemplify this analytic tendency. Even when examining clinics, juries, and the like, Garfinkel's (1967) early work was not so much about medicine, law, or other specialized occupational practices as it was concerned to portray an order of phenomena not previously studied within sociology: namely, the methods used by societal members to render their circumstances orderly and intelligible. As one example, Garfinkel's (1967:Ch. 3) experiment with student counseling was designed to investigate the properties of the documentary method of interpretation rather than the work of counseling. The phenomena of primary interest were those practices essential to the accomplishment of coherent social interchange wherever it occurs.

We refer to this interest as institutionally indifferent (cf Garfinkel & Sacks 1970), in the sense of disregarding prior theoretical and other specific characterizations upon which such studies might aim to improve. Cicourel's early work was similarly focused on structures of interaction *per se* rather than the specific arenas in which it occurred. Thus, empirical studies of juvenile justice (Cicourel 1968) may have shown how aspects of that particular system worked, but they also revealed the role of actors' theories and language in making categories (such as "delinquent") available as a sense-making device. Theoretical statements about children's acquisition of social structure (Cicourel 1970) were not about socialization traditionally conceived, but about the background expectancies by which children as competent members of society participate in the work of sustaining normal forms of social interaction. Much conversation analysis has had a similar stress. As Sacks et al (1974) have noted, there was no special interest in particular settings. Rather, in developing a "naturalistic, observational discipline," they discovered conversation to have properties that were analyzably involved in accomplishing mundane activities of various sorts (Schegloff & Sacks 1973).

Nevertheless, ethnomethodological inquires have also illuminated role-based, task-oriented, or otherwise institutional activities. Researchers have ventured into a wide range of bureaucratic and occupational settings—e.g. classrooms, courtrooms, medical clinics, police departments, public welfare agencies, and elsewhere—to produce findings that are institutionally sensitive. These studies explicate the processes through which participants perform

official tasks and in an ongoing way constitute formal systems, institutions, and organizations. Such institutionally sensitive research has employed both ethnographic and discourse analytic methods; we shall examine exemplary studies from each tradition in turn.

### *Early Ethnographic Studies*

Using ethnographic techniques of research, many of Garfinkel's early students and colleagues examined methods of practical reasoning employed by bureaucratic workers in the course of their official duties. A theme runs through studies of various institutional settings, including criminal and juvenile justice (Bittner 1967a,b, Cicourel 1968), plea bargaining (Sudnow 1965), hospital wards (Sudnow 1967), correctional facilities (Wieder 1974), and public welfare agencies (Zimmerman 1969, 1970). Following what we have called the phenomenological sensibility, they demonstrate the inadequacy of formal rules and official procedures for capturing the detailed work that is necessary to perform competently the tasks that each setting poses. The most elaborately codified rules and procedures cannot exhaustively enumerate the range of situations to which they should apply; they inevitably require judgmental work which cannot itself be specified by rule, for it is the foundational process through which rules of all sorts are implemented. For example, police officers must subordinate strict enforcement of the law to such broader concerns as keeping the peace (Bittner 1967b). Staff in a welfare agency follow bureaucratic intake procedures only when they facilitate an orderly flow of clients, and they suspend or deviate from such procedures if that is necessary to sustain a smoothly running office (Zimmerman 1970). Still, while rules and procedures fail as literal descriptions of institutional practice, they are not irrelevant to understanding those practices. Actors use them to make sense of their circumstances and invoke them as rhetorical and accounting devices in dealing with others and getting their jobs done. By these means, actors may provide themselves and others with a sense, after all is said and done, that organizations and institutions are "rational" concerns.

Ethnomethodological understanding of institutional processing has further implications for how institutional products should be understood. First, institutions and organizations generate official designations such as "crimes," "juvenile delinquents," "qualified welfare recipients," "dead patients," and so forth. Studies reveal that such designations do not result from workers consulting clearly defined necessary and sufficient criteria for each case. In the same way that actors adapt rules to situational exigencies, they apply labels in relation to commonsense methods of experiencing and handling troubles and problems. Since many of these studies concern the work of law

enforcement and criminal justice, they have important theoretical implications for the constitution of “deviance” as a social fact. The ethnomethodological slant on the constitution of deviance, in showing detailed ways in which the “politics of experience” occurs and how categories can be ex post facto justifications for decisions already made, is, however, distinctive (Garfinkel 1967:14, Mehan et al 1986:156–7, Pollner 1987:Ch. 4).

In regard to institutional products, a second and related contribution of ethnomethodological studies is in the sociological understanding of official statistics. While sociologists have long recognized the problems with such data, ethnomethodological researchers have documented the reasons such statistics do not reflect some “real” rates of deviance in the society. Garfinkel (1967:14–18, 208–61) and others (Atkinson 1978, Cicourel & Kitsuse 1963, Cicourel 1968, Douglas 1967, Meehan, 1986, 1989, Smith 1974) have shown how practitioners employ commonsense knowledge of the society’s workings for making decisions about what “counts” as an instance of the thing being tallied. Inevitably, then, the quantities of suicide, or juvenile delinquency, or mental retardation in the society reflect the interpretive work of professionals in the field, who assemble the particulars of any case according to their typifications of people, motives, and situations.

### *Discourse Studies*

Much work in institutional settings is discharged through the medium of discourse or spoken interaction. Trial examinations, plea negotiations, medical interviews, citizen calls to the police, business meetings, and news interviews are just some arenas in which talk is a ubiquitous presence. Inevitably, talk and interaction shape the very institutions and organizations in which they are embedded. Nevertheless, ethnomethodologists have different positions regarding how institutional discourse should be studied. One strategy emphasizes the importance of supplementary ethnographic investigations, including observations of organizational environments and interviews with participants (Cicourel 1981, 1987). An argument can be made that earlier encounters affect any given interactional episode; therefore analysis of such episodes should incorporate an understanding of the contexts that surround it. In Mehan’s (1991) terms, interviewing participants to reveal their patterns of commonsense reasoning is a device that can show the relation of organizational and other “distal” contexts to “local” or “proximal” patterns of language use in institutional settings.

Conversation analysts take a different approach to institutional talk, concerned that using terms such as “doctor’s office,” “courtroom,” “police department,” “school room,” and the like, to characterize settings and warrant

contextual investigations is a vernacular practice that can obscure much of what occurs within those settings. In doing the work of the institution members also use "casual talk," "repair" mechanisms that aid understanding, preference forms (e.g. agreement) and other devices that are fundamental to all conversation, not just that in work and professional settings. Hence, background information obtained ethnographically is unlikely to be of help in elucidating concrete language practices that accompany and underlie various business or professional tasks. For this reason, conversation analysts rarely rely on ethnographic data and instead examine if and how interactants themselves reveal an orientation to institutional or other contexts (Sacks 1972, Schegloff 1987b, Wilson 1991).

Conversation analysts who study occupational settings are thus primarily concerned with the sequential organization of the talk in them, and this concern has taken a variety of forms. One strategy has been to explicate the turn-by-turn assembly of particular activities, including requests for police assistance (Zimmerman 1984, Whalen & Zimmerman 1987), accusation sequences in trial discourse (Atkinson & Drew 1979), bargaining sequences in plea negotiations (Maynard 1984), agenda-setting in business settings (Anderson et al 1987, Boden 1991), questions and answers in job (Button 1987) and news interviews (Clayman 1988, Greatbatch 1986), the delivery of diagnostic news (Maynard 1989a), and other phenomena.

Another conversation analytic strategy is to describe the distinctive turn-taking systems that organize such institutional settings as trials (Atkinson & Drew 1979), classroom lessons (McHoul 1978, Mehan 1979), news interviews (Greatbatch 1988), mediation hearings (Garcia 1988), and congressional hearings (Halkowski 1990a). These studies are indebted to Sacks et al's (1974:729-30) observation that ordinary conversational turn-taking is a baseline among speech exchange systems, against which other forms of talk can be compared. Closely related to these descriptive studies of turn-taking are those that analyze how modifications of the system serve to accomplish various bureaucratic and occupational functions, including "shared attentiveness" in courts and other multiparty settings (Atkinson 1979, 1982), "neutrality" in news interviews (Clayman 1988, Heritage & Greatbatch 1991), and designing talk for an "overhearing" mass media audience (Heritage 1985, Heritage & Greatbatch 1991).

Still another strategy of conversation analytic studies has been to examine how discrete sequence types from conversation become specialized, simplified, reduced, or otherwise structurally adapted for institutional purposes (Heritage 1984:239-40). Thus, Heritage (1984:280-290, 1985) has compared question-answer sequences and the distinctive third-turn responses they evoke in various casual and institutional settings, demonstrating that the specific



type of setting is recurrently honored and displayed by variations in these humble receipt items. Correspondingly, educational testing is in part accomplished through alterations of a basic three-part "pedagogical sequence" (Marlaire 1990, Marlaire & Maynard 1990). In a slightly different vein, Whalen & Zimmerman (1987) describe how police call openings are specialized and reduced, vis-à-vis their conversational counterparts, to accomplish a focused order of business. Also, Clayman (1989) shows how news interview closings are specialized to enable interactants to achieve termination at a prespecified point in time. As one last example, Maynard (1991) identifies a "perspective display series" that occurs in both ordinary conversation and clinical informing interviews, but which appears to have a rigid structure in the latter context owing to an institutionally based impetus to deliver a diagnosis. Across these studies, comparative analysis with ordinary conversation enables investigators to identify what is distinctive about institutional discourse and what is generic to interaction as such.

In general then, ethnomethodological investigators traditionally have conducted research in institutional settings, but their analytic strategies differ along several lines. Some studies, revealing basic phenomena of order, are indifferent to prior theoretical depictions of the setting under scrutiny. Other studies are institutionally sensitive and aim to contribute not only to ethnomethodology but to general sociological understanding of traditionally defined arenas of law, medicine, media, and so on. Early ethnomethodological studies, showing a bedrock of organizational activities beneath surface processes and products of institutional settings, relied in methodology almost exclusively on ethnography. More recent research places spoken interaction in the foreground, and differences revolve around the role of ethnography as an analytic tool. While Cicourel (1987), Mehan (1989), and others argue that comprehending locally produced pieces of talk necessitates attention to the wider setting of which it is a part, conversation analysts argue that the wider setting is itself best grasped in terms of the momentary production and modification of conversational sequences. Rather than seeking background knowledge of the context, these investigators compare talk and interaction across settings to illuminate what is "interactional" and what is "institutional" about a given situation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>We have only scratched the surface of issues surrounding ethnomethodological studies of institutional settings and on the role of ethnography. For a more thorough consideration of issues regarding institutions, see Drew & Heritage, forthcoming; for another perspective, see Bogen & Lynch (1989). For discussions of ethnomethodology and ethnography, see Emerson (1983), Emerson & Pollner (1988), Maynard (1989b) and Sharrock & Anderson (1982). For discussion of conversation analysis and ethnography, see Goodwin (1990), Maynard (1984, 1989b) and Moerman (1988).

## STUDIES OF WORK: THE DISCOVERING SCIENCES

While other ethnomethodological scholars have been studying cognition, describing the perceptual assembly of gestalt contextures, explicating mundane reasoning, analyzing conversation, or exploring the local organization of institutional settings, Garfinkel and his close colleagues (Lynch et al 1983) have turned to examine highly technical competencies that comprise aspects of mathematics (Livingston 1986) and the natural sciences, including astronomy (Garfinkel et al 1981), biology and neurology (Lynch 1982, 1985, 1988), and optics (Bjelic & Lynch 1991).

If the study of these specialized domains seems to represent a departure, it also resonates with several themes and topics of long-standing ethnomethodological interest, including the concern with taken-for-granted methods of reasoning-in-action or situated rationality (Boden 1990a, Garfinkel 1967: 262–83). In this vein, Garfinkel's initial studies probed the managed accountability of inquiry in several work or occupational settings—i.e. coroners determining cause of death (1967:11–18), jurors deliberating guilt or innocence (1967:104–15), and medical personnel keeping clinical records (1967:186–207). The current research on scientific work describes with more precision those courses of practical reasoning and embodied action that are integral to the achievement of some of the great technical discoveries of mathematics and science.

This line of research has a philosophical antecedent in Husserl's phenomenology, but with crucial differences. As we pointed out earlier, Garfinkel deemphasized matters of consciousness to bring forward the orderliness of concrete activities. Correspondingly, he rejected Husserl's philosophical and introspective method of analysis and substituted a commitment to naturalistic observation grounded in a deep familiarity with and, preferably, bona fide competence in the discipline under scrutiny. Current studies of work thus probe the details of "shop work and shop talk" that form the tangible fabric of scientific practice (Lynch et al 1983:233).

Prior to these initiatives, the domain of concrete scientific reasoning and scientific practice had remained largely unexamined. Because scientific disciplines ordinarily require practitioners to carefully document their own methods in sufficient detail to permit replication, this may seem surprising. However, scientists' descriptions of their practice are notoriously incomplete (e.g. Kuhn 1970:136–43, 187–91, Gilbert & Mulkay 1984, Knorr-Cetina 1981, Knorr-Cetina & Mulkay 1983, Latour & Woolgar 1986). There is always "something more" to methodological practice than can be provided in even highly detailed instructions and formalized guidelines (Lynch et al 1983:207), and that "something more" "delimits a field" of previously un-

investigated phenomena.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, while a great many biographical, historical, and sociological accounts of scientific development exist, virtually none explore the routine “workbench practices” that are the stuff of technical competence as a lived experience in conducting laboratory experiments, proving mathematical theorems, and deploying other technical skills (cf Suchman 1987). Accordingly, ethnomethodological studies of science chart largely unknown territory.

A distinguishing feature of scientific disciplines is that they generate discoveries about the properties of physical or mathematical objects, and ethnomethodological studies analyze the foundations of discovering “work.” For example, Garfinkel et al (1981), using a tape recording of astronomers at work, explicate the courses of inquiry and action through which astronomers discovered a pulsar. Instrument readings, which initially had an indeterminate sense, came to indicate this independent physical object through organized courses of inquiry. That is, the pulsar’s availability to competent astronomical observation, its objectivity and public verifiability, rested upon an array of situated natural language and bodily practices. Similarly, Lynch (1982, 1985, 1988) studied biologists preparing, working with, and talking about various forms of biological and neurological data. The character of such data, and conclusions about their usability or artifactuality, result from constitutive forms of shop work and shop talk that accomplish specific tasks. These tasks are assembled not according to plans or written accounts, but as ways of meeting circumstances, handling trouble, paying attention to other matters, using formulae, and so on, that make of competent task performance an invariably unique achievement. Further still, in describing the lived work of proving mathematical theorems, Livingston (1986, 1987:86–137) demonstrates that schedules of equations and diagrams represent only one part of a mathematical proof. Proofs consist of the pairing of such formulae with embodied courses of inference and action that are essential to the proof’s intelligibility, coherence, and technical adequacy.

Such “pairing” of abstractions and embodied activity is difficult to appreciate without participating in the scientific work itself. A paper by Bjelic & Lynch (1991), however, enables readers to experience that sort of technical work. Rather than describing a workplace competence—in this case, a prismatic demonstration of color phenomena—and perpetuating the limitations endemic to all abstracted descriptions of situated action, Bjelic & Lynch (1991) provide a minimal set of instructions and allow readers, armed with their own prisms, to work through the demonstration for themselves. Readers thus acquire a first-hand, indeed *handed*, acquaintance with the practical

<sup>8</sup>See the special issue of *Human Studies* on “Representation in scientific practice” (Lynch & Woolgar 1988).

skills (e.g. in manipulating and seeing through a prism, generating color displays in a specific sequential order, and so on) that alone achieve an objectively workable demonstration. Moreover, by going through two inconsistent theories of color (those of Newton and Goethe), readers are able to grasp intimately the way in which phenomena consistent with alternative spectral realities may be produced through appropriate manual, visual, and textual procedures.

In an intriguing way, this recasts the very nature of scientific discovery. If worldly objects of technical inquiry are irremediably intertwined with embodied practices, then scientific discoveries may have a dual character. In addition to being discoveries of physical or mathematical objects, they require innovative, contingently accomplished, and particularized courses of practical reasoning and embodied action through which scientific objects may be made demonstrably available and intersubjectively accountable. A radical character of these ethnomethodological investigations is that, if adequately specified with detail and precision, they may eventually yield findings that represent recognized contributions to the scientific disciplines under examination, even as they further sociological understanding of the depth of detail involved in social organization and order.

## CONCLUSION

“Ethnomethodology is here to stay,” as Boden (1990a) has put it, and has even moved to the suburbs (Pollner 1991), although the practitioners often remain more ghettoized than suburbanized. Nevertheless, we are seeing increased numbers of ethnomethodologically inspired studies in prominent journals, edited collections, and monographs. These studies are influencing various streams of sociological theory, social psychology, the sociology of science, law and medicine, the sociology of social problems and deviance, and other substantive areas in a wide variety of disciplines.

Still, old labels die hard. Conjectures about whether ethnomethodological studies are idealistic or empiricist, subjective or neopositivist, conservative or liberal (or even radical), symbolic interactionist or phenomenological or atheoretical, and so on, no doubt will persist.<sup>9</sup> So will the belief that ethnomethodology is individualistic and rebellious. It is not only that such conjectures miss the mark, but that they impose a uniformity on the area that simply does not exist. We have shown the theoretical, methodological, and empirical diversity within ethnomethodology, and highlighted what its prac-

<sup>9</sup>For summaries and citations to articles that pose these labels for ethnomethodology, see Boden (1990a), Heritage (1987), Maynard (1986), and Rawls (1985).

tioners see as crucial issues. Our own categories have necessarily left out some streams of research, condensed intricate arguments, and refined nuanced portrayals of the orderliness to everyday life. As just one further piece of the ethnomethodological fabric, consider how ethnomethodologists have applied their expertise to extend previous theory and research that is ethnomethodologically based into new domains such as gender relations (West & Zimmerman 1987) and feminist inquiry (Smith 1987), political oratory (Atkinson 1984, Heritage & Greatbatch 1986), ceremonial activities (Mulkay 1984), social problems (Maynard 1988; Holstein & Miller 1989), survey interviews (Schaeffer 1991, Suchman & Jordan 1990), and to professional settings, such as education (Heap 1990) and medicine (Frankel 1983, Beckman & Frankel 1984), where remedies to the troubles people experience (Jefferson 1988, Jefferson & Lee 1981) may be sought or offered.

Thus, ethnomethodology transcends disciplinary boundaries and runs the gamut from pure to applied research. Overall, as ethnomethodology constitutes and reconstitutes itself, and further informs and influences a range of social science inquiries, it seems clear that the diversity of ethnomethodology will continue to proliferate. Surely, the theory of an already extant and yet achieved orderliness to everyday activities, the phenomenological sensibility, the concern for language use, and other themes, will be shared among those under the widening ethnomethodological umbrella. Just as surely, debates about the role of cognition in ordinary interaction, the differences between ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approaches to talk, the use of ethnography, the relation of discourse to its institutional context, whether studies in institutional settings are properly indifferent or sensitive to traditional ways of understanding such settings, and other issues, will also endure. Garfinkel's work (e.g. 1988) may then provide a reminder that there are always "more and other" aspects to the phenomena of everyday life, aspects that, in abstract dialectics cannot be argued, imagined, or hypothesized to exist, or even reduced to "practices" and "methods" of whatever sort. Organizational features of everyday life are only *discoverable*, and thus require enduring contact with society's members, an appreciation of the courses of action they inhabit, and studied involvement in their mundane tasks.

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