

Academic Literacy Practices: plausibility in the essays of a diverse social science cohort

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*** *Word Count: 91801* ***

List of abbreviations

AL	Academic literacies
AL/NLS	Academic literacies and/or New Literacy Studies
ANT	Actor network theory
AW	Academic writing
CA	Conversation analysis
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CoP	Community of practice
CR	Contrastive rhetoric
DA	Discourse analysis
DC	Discourse community
EIE	Ethnomethodologically informed ethnography
EM	Ethnomethodology
EM/CA	Ethnomethodology and/or Conversation analysis
FA	Formal analysis
FE	Further education
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
IB	International Baccalaureate
MCA	Membership categorisation analysis
MCD	Membership categorisation device
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NTL	Non-traditional learner (mature student)
SFL	Systemic-functional linguistics
SSK	Sociology of scientific knowledge

Note on references and typography

I have included relevant page numbers for as many references as possible, even where the material is paraphrased and not quoted. I consider this to be the most helpful way of providing referencing information.

All quoted material uses double quote marks “...” in the first instance. Scare quotes are generally indicated by single marks ‘...’.

Note on transcription

I have not used the Jeffersonian convention of transcription in the writing up of interview data and similar. Although this is widely used in EM/CA writing, it is not universally used, and my decision was that it would not add anything to the presentation or analysis of my data.

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Declaration

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Abstract

The University of Manchester

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Doctor of Philosophy

Academic literacy practices: plausibility in the essays of a diverse social science cohort

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This thesis addresses academic writing using two practice-led disciplines, academic literacies and ethnomethodology. It is first concerned to evaluate the possibilities of cooperation between these cognate endeavours, and concludes that where academic literacies provides a locus and set of topics for academic writing studies, ethnomethodology can contribute a sharpening of focus and of analytic tools. Ethnomethodology provides a reassuring message in that it confirms the value of detailed local studies, in this case of literacy. However, it is also the source of critique for those literacy scholars who have tried to site their studies in dualisms. This is seen as a rejection of situated studies. There is therefore a prominent methodological focus in this thesis. These methodological issues are then discussed in regard to how they translate into agendas and technologies for the study of social literacies. It is shown that ethnographic-type methods are necessary for such studies, even where they do not qualify as ‘full’ ethnographies by traditional standards. This study itself took on a quasi-ethnographic or ethnographic-type approach, using a longitudinal method to track the academic writing practices of eight undergraduate students with the aim of ascertaining the social and collaborative ways in which their work is accorded plausibility. Material from the study is presented in the form of interview analysis, and in a series of ethnographic case studies that use a variety of material, including interviews with students and staff, student essays, and various other materials that were accrued throughout the administrative life of the essays. Various methods for achieving or according plausibility, on the part of both students and staff, are discussed and analysed. Although all protagonists involved in essay writing and marking looked for and dealt in conventions wherever possible, the material presented here demonstrates that participants were generally aware of the limits to the possibilities of phenomena, and that there may be cause to locate, challenge, change, and adapt to the things that can acceptably be said and done in essay writing.

Introduction

What this study is about

This study addresses university-level academic writing. Its first aim is to investigate how student writing is socially sanctioned. I employ an avowedly interdisciplinary combination of influences that provides a specific locus, and rigour in the use of empirical data that is new to the study of academic writing. In this sense, this project is just as much about its conceptual *means* as it is about delivering an analysis. As well as the empirical focus, then, there is a methodological investigation that runs throughout. Research-led academic work often speaks, somewhat portentously, about ‘what is at stake’. What is at stake here is not an empirical issue, except inasmuch as empirical analyses will demonstrate the value of a certain *way* of doing things. Where I have cause to argue a case, it will concern a preferable *type of analysis* rather than the *meaning of data*.

What I wanted to do and why

In nearly twenty years of learning and teaching in higher education, I have had frequent cause to be fascinated by the ways in which academic knowledge is connected to a ‘hidden curriculum’ of written convention and presentation. There are certain demands on university students’ written work that are seemingly just as important as the demands on their knowledge:

All that is being demanded is that you manipulate a particular language in acceptable ways... You can think or believe what you want, as long as you can speak this particular language. Nobody is especially concerned about what you say, with what extreme, moderate, radical or conservative positions you adopt, provided that they are compatible with, and can be articulated within, a specific form of discourse... Those employed to teach you this form of discourse will remember whether or not you were able to speak it proficiently long after they have forgotten what you said (Eagleton 1983:201).

The distance between receiving instructions on ‘scholarly values,’ and turning these values into textual features that clearly and demonstrably adhere to this guidance may be wide. Part of the reason for this is that the demands on student writing are classically indexical. This of course assumes that some kind of guidance is forthcoming in the first place; it is possible, although less likely as such issues become more prominent within higher education, that the demands may be entirely implicit.

My point of departure was that these implicit demands did not appear to affect every student equally. As an undergraduate, I saw mature students particularly having problems with writing. As an academic writing tutor working in Europe, I taught Central and Eastern European graduate students who contributed to fascinating dialogues concerning their experiences of writing for UK-awarded qualifications. These were not then episodes only of individual significance, but invoked social and cultural matters.

It was while working in Poland that I first came across, and used in instruction, the writing of Kaplan (1966) and others who had written in the applied linguistic sub-discipline of contrastive rhetoric (CR). It seemed to explain a lot at the time. How else could we account for the fact that writing practices differed on a seemingly cultural basis? However, on researching the proposal for this thesis it became clear that CR authors were employing methodologies that were a long way from my own training in the social sciences. My envisioned research inverted almost every aspect of CR:

Feature	Contrastive Rhetoric	Proposed study
<i>Notion of rhetoric</i>	Rhetoric as limited to the canon of organisation	Rhetoric as dependent upon foundational practices in writing and conduct
<i>Disciplinary focus</i>	Linguistic focus	Sociological focus
<i>Object</i>	Textual analysis	Intersubjective practices
<i>Setting for writing</i>	Undertaken in the composition classroom under controlled conditions	Naturalistic setting with real-world texts
<i>Genre/type of writing</i>	Expository essay	Argumentative essay
<i>Model of culture</i>	'Large' or 'received' model of culture	'Emergent' model of culture
<i>How context is established</i>	Focus on participants; context is 'given'	Reflexive approach to context, both oriented to and achieved
<i>Duration</i>	Synchronic	Diachronic; longitudinal
<i>Methodology</i>	Experimental	Qualitative; ethnographic
<i>Approach to generalisation</i>	Quasi-scientific; to draw out cultural differences and similarities	To find generalisation in rules

Table 1 – Contrastive rhetoric as traditionally undertaken and how it differs from this study

My approach was more faithful to the interactional sociologies that I was familiar with than to what I saw as a psychologised and deterministic endeavour. From the beginning, then, although I had a broad research question – how do students develop and demonstrate their understanding of the demands placed on them – the concern of the project was at least as much a methodological investigation. What would a CR study look like when carried out with an ethnographic methodology and working to social science assumptions?

What I ended up doing

It soon became clear that CR had little to say about how the writer realises cultural mores and local writing conventions. The most modern work in CR replaced a linguistic determinism with a cultural determinism. A little later, I found that, while there would be more than enough empirical material to sustain a doctoral project, it would be difficult to bring about comparisons in a way recognisable to CR. At this point there was a complete mismatch between the kind of data that I was starting to garner and the perspective I was working with.

The most obvious solution was to align my re-specified project with an existing research programme. This was available in academic literacies (AL). AL was attractive in the ways in which it de-psychologised student writing, employed ethnographic-type methods, and foregrounded sociological staples such as identity, power, and meaning. It was something that I could easily position myself within. My initial forays into the AL literature were therefore exciting times.

Although AL provided a locus and a set of topics, I required it to make a good fit with ethnomethodology (EM), which I had already resolved would set the standard for the handling of data. It soon became apparent that AL and EM were genealogically related programmes. This suggested ways of framing a dialogue between them. For a start, perhaps the single most important message of AL is that academic writing is a paradigmatic research site for indexical expressions; EM shows us how this indexicality is practically repaired by competent members of society in bringing about social order. Both AL and EM claim to be carrying out ‘situated’ studies, with practice as the common object. But both ‘situatedness’ and practice are understood in different ways, meaning that while there is a common parlance, there is room to discuss the specificities of such terms.

In short, my research sparked an ‘encounter’ between two affiliated disciplines that not only cohered with my empirical work, but also brought about dialogue concerning how practice-driven academic writing studies could and should be carried out.

A short and speculative academic history

I feel a certain temerity as an anthropologist in using such a technical term as ‘verb’ when addressing a gathering of linguists.
Brian Street, “Culture is a Verb” (1993a:23)

This is how I see the encounter playing out. As the epigraph suggests, the ‘constituency’ for AL/NLS comes from linguistic or educational backgrounds. This has had an extensive influence on how social literacy studies have been implemented.

Lea & Street (1998) cite four influences on academic literacies: the new literacy studies (NLS); cultural anthropology; critical discourse analysis (CDA); and systemic functional linguistics (SFL). CDA can trace its heritage through Norman Fairclough to MAK Halliday, in turn to JR Firth, and thence to the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. From Malinowski, Firth took the dictum that ‘meaning is use’, i.e. a *functional* view of language. This message has percolated through these generations of scholars and their students (Paltridge 1993, Coffin & Donohue 2012). The work of Fairclough and Halliday is still extensively used in AL (Ivanic 1998, Lillis 1997, 2001, 2008, Lillis & Scott 2007, French 2011).

What I see in the likes of Halliday and Fairclough, as well as those writers who use their ideas, is that they not only use a functional approach to language but also bring along with it Marxist and structural-functionalist influences, i.e. explanatory grand narratives, in their approach to context (see Street 1988, Gee 2000, Poynton & Lee 2000). The problem with the ‘context of situation’ is that it “buys into a version of a one-way situation-to-language conception of the relation between language and context” (Poynton & Lee *ibid.*:4), while the ‘context of culture’ provides an idea of context “as what is ‘already out there’, pre-existing any relevant language, rather than being in a relation of mutual constitutiveness with language” (*ibid.*). Street wrote some time ago of the problems with this ‘static’ and ‘functionalist’ approach (1988:62-3). He contrasts this with “recent approaches within anthropology [that] have emphasised the dynamic nature of social

processes and the broader structure of power relations” (ibid.:63).¹ Despite recent developments in adopting more dynamic and integrated approaches (Barton & Hamilton 2005), it could be said that the field of social literacy studies has been slow to react to Street’s anthropologically-driven warnings.

Retracing the steps of the genealogy above, Firth was also influenced by the work of the later Wittgenstein,² who arrived at the same ‘meaning is use’ precept as Malinowski (Gellner 2004, Nerlich & Clarke 1996). Wittgenstein’s later work incorporates a functional view of language,³ but taking on a functionalist viewpoint on context and social phenomena deflects from how context is brought about reflexively through action in the same way that meaning comes about through use. This is not something that Wittgenstein himself would have countenanced.

Wittgenstein has many other progeny, not least in ethnomethodology. These progeny see social phenomena as emergent and contingent, as opposed to reified and objective. Street’s view that ‘culture is a verb’ would be eminently acceptable.⁴

The two strands can be seen as different branches of the same family tree, where small differences can lead to quite distinct outcomes. Like any family, there may be feuds. But there is too much in common to let the relationship slip completely.

Where this study fits with existing research

The line of the genealogy that goes through Firth and Fairclough to Halliday and beyond, taking in CDA and SFL, has been historically attractive to applied linguists and educationalists. It is therefore no surprise that AW research, not least AL, has been subject to this influence.

EM has no such history of academic writing research. There have been occasional studies of instructional and professional academic writing (Anderson 1978, Morrison 1981, Sacks 1999), but nothing in published form on student writing. This thesis is therefore without precedent in its sustained use of EM for the analysis of student writing in HE.

¹ One reading of these passages from Street is that the problem could be remedied by incorporating a consideration of ‘context of culture’ alongside the ‘context of situation’, but this does nothing to provide the ‘dynamism’ of social processes.

² <http://ihjournal.com/michael-halliday-at-80-a-tribute>.

³ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/functionalism/>.

⁴ Cf. this to Sacks’ view that “culture is an apparatus for generating recognisable actions” (1992:226).

Research questions

There is no *substantive* ‘gap’ that this research seeks to fill. Often research is described as ‘timely’ or ‘relevant’, and it seeks to justify this description by emphasising that existing research has not addressed *this* place, *this* time, or *these* people. There is nothing analogous here.

The value of this research can be seen most prominently in these two features: first, it contributes to ongoing investigations by social literacy studies into conceptions of practice. What EM provides is the detail of the practices involved in bringing about intelligibility rather than a theoretical account of preferred behaviours and practices. Second, the substantive material deals mostly with cases of *regular students doing well*. It has generally suited AL’s critical agenda to find non-traditional learners (NTLs) and show them coming up against ‘ideologies’ or ‘dominant practices’. My research therefore addresses the state of the art in a fundamental sense.

On this basis, I have largely worked to the following research questions:

1. How does students’ prior knowledge and understanding of academic culture affect their argumentative essay writing in a UK HE context? How does this knowledge change through exposure to the demands of writing?
2. How do students understand the requirements for their written assessment? How is their work collaboratively achieved as fitting these requirements? What are the methods used in socially establishing the plausibility of student written work?

These questions have remained applicable, but with various shifts of emphasis, I have moved almost entirely to addressing the second set of questions.

Although this can be seen as a research problem in the sense of ‘basic research’, there are no hypotheses or *a priori* arguments. These do not suit the EM mode of investigation.

The structure of this work

This thesis is organised roughly along the lines of most research articles, in that it first outlines a conceptual debate, before prefacing the presentation of data with an outline of the techniques used to obtain it.

The following chapter addresses the reasons for the NLS's turn to a practice approach. It details some concerns that the NLS has taken on in doing so and outlines some of the links to other disciplines that emerge when the NLS is placed in the context of the 'practice turn'.

Chapter 2 outlines the initial 'encounter' between AL/NLS and EM. It demonstrates how many of the same concerns currently facing social literacy studies have also been faced, and solved to its own satisfaction, by EM. The primary aim of this chapter is to outline the affordances of EM for its sister disciplines in literacy studies. It also introduces two critiques of practice that are of relevance to AL/NLS. These relate respectively to the prominent critiques of practice set out by Stephen Turner (1994), and to critiques of the *discourse community* and *community of practice*.

Chapter 3 works out the methodological implications of the preceding chapters. It specifies the issues in designing and bringing about a project such as this. Chapter 4 is a 'warts-and-all' account of what I did over the course of the study.

The remaining chapters are dedicated to the empirical material. The first of these addresses the conversational data from interviews with student participants, drawing out the formal structures of these conversations (Carlin 2009) to show the methods used by students to talk about their academic writing. The remaining chapters are ethnographic case studies that address various specific episodes concerning the writing on three different courses.

Chapter 1

The New Literacy Studies and the practice turn

The New Literacy Studies and academic literacies

The New Literacy Studies came about when some scholars started to argue that what previously been conceived of as the “Great Divide” between oral and literate cultures was better represented as a continuum (Street 1988). Great Divide proponents, such as Jack Goody and Walter Ong, saw literate culture as carrying “the potential to develop abstraction, depersonalization, syllogistic reasoning, even, in some formulations, modern orientations and democratic inclinations”, while oral cultures “tended toward context dependence, associative thinking, and homeostasis” (Brandt & Clinton 2002:339). In anthropology, the dichotomy of oral/literate was paralleled by a series of other dichotomies that fed into a notion of literacy as something that could be thought about in relation to civilisation, development, and the ‘advance’ of culture (ibid.). Literacy was seen as bringing with it various cognitive effects not present in oral cultures.

In the light of various works that challenged this viewpoint (Heath 1983, Cole & Scribner 1981), the anthropologist Brian Street produced his own critique of what he called the “autonomous model” of literacy. His argument was that prior literacy theories had focused on the technical aspects of literacy, supposing them to be independent of the social context instantiations of literacy are found within. The new model posited that “literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles... engaging with literacy is always a social act even from the outset” (Street 2001:8).

As an alternative, Street (1984) posited the *ideological model* of literacy. For Street, the ideological model subsumed rather than opposed the autonomous model by taking into account both the technical *and* cultural apparatus of literacy. Street chose the term *ideological*, as opposed to ‘cultural’, ‘sociological’, or similar, because “it signals quite explicitly that literacy practices are aspects not only of ‘culture’ but also of power structures” (ibid.:60) – Street considered it “quite impossible to address the issue of literacy without addressing also these issues of power” (2001:9). The danger of the autonomous model is that it disguises the power dimension. This is exacerbated by the fact

that supporters of the autonomous model are likely to be those for whom its propagation adds to their own power.

Street also realised that a different conception of literacy would require a new battery of concepts. “It follows...that researchers in NLS employing an ‘ideological’ model of literacy would find it problematic to simply use the term ‘literacy’ as their unit or object of study” (Street 2006:4). Chief among these were the *literacy event* and the *literacy practice*. The notion of literacy event had been used prior to Street’s breakthrough work, not least by Heath, who characterised them as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (in Street *ibid.*:5). Street intended the idea of literacy practices, as the “more robust” of the two concepts (2001:11), to build on this. An early definition (in Street 1988) posited that literacy practices should take in both literacy events and “the social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events and that give meaning to them” (*ibid.*). This became “the conceptions of the reading and writing process that people hold when they are engaged in the event” (1995:133). Another definition spoke of literacy practices as an attempt “both to handle the events and the patterns around literacy and to *link* them to something broader of a cultural and social kind” (2001:11). Many authors have since addressed, and stressed, various aspects of the literacy practice.

This pervading idea of literacy as an “essentially local” phenomenon (Gee 1999:3) was given the title ‘New Literacy Studies’ by James Gee (1990/2008). The developments made by the likes of Barton and Street, allied to research movements that addressed student writing from social perspectives (Hounsell 1988, Lea 1994, Lillis 1997), coalesced from the mid-1990s into a coherent offshoot of NLS research (Lea 2008). Following the publication of a series of notable early works (Street 1996, Ivanic 1998) that tended to have “a sharper post-structuralist edge” (Stierer 1997:4) than related American work, Lea & Street produced a programmatic paper (1998) that set out much of the epistemological orientation and methodology, as well as influences, of the new field.

One of the main aims of the 1998 paper was to supersede previous models of student writing in the academy with an approach that incorporated the NLS perspective on literacy. Lea & Street criticised the *study skills* and *academic socialisation* models for their assumptions, respectively, of atomistic and transferable technical skills, and of a single and homogeneous academic culture. They suggested that the academic literacies model should subsume the necessary parts of these models, but provide “a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices,

power relations and identities” (ibid.:158). As a result, the academic literacies model opened up a series of concerns within academic writing with an almost sociological agenda:

It views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation. An academic literacies approach views the institutions in which academic practices take place as constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power. It sees the literacy demands of the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines. From the student point of view a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes (ibid.:159).

The university is a place where meanings, practices, and identities are negotiated, ‘contested’ or ‘reinvented’.

Although Lea & Street do not mention it overtly, it is clear that they are either inspired by, or implying, ideas related to those of *tacit knowing* (Gourlay 2009; Jones, Turner, & Street 1999). The academic staff that Lea & Street spoke to were found not to be able to articulate in general terms what made student work well-structured or well-argued, and even less so when the work was seen to fare badly in this regard. The staff are described by Lea & Street as talking in disciplinary terms, and since local understanding of these writing requirements can be as diverse as their endogenous settings, “it is not valid to suggest that such concepts are generic and transferable” (1998:162). Staff views such as “I know a good essay when I see it but I cannot describe how to write it”⁵ were very much aligned with disciplinary “ways of knowing” and “[lend] credence to the idea that elements of successful student writing are in essence related to particular ways of constructing the world” (ibid.:163). Academics would fall back on these basic terms to use as feedback when they encountered work that did not adhere to their disciplinary framework.

The students in Lea & Street’s study were generally described as aware that they would need to “course-switch”,⁶ i.e. adapt their writing to various settings. This awareness, though, even when allied to the written guidance available, did not seem to guarantee success nor allay confusion as to what was expected. “Students could assimilate this general advice on writing ‘techniques’ and ‘skills’ but found it difficult to move from the general to using this advice in a particular text in a particular disciplinary context” (ibid.:164). They mention the “telling” case of a history student with a strong background

⁵ Cf. Leki (1994), “I know good writing when I see it”.

⁶ Described as an analogy to “code-switching”, as in Gumperz (1982).

in discursive disciplines. Although this student had received good feedback for a first year history essay, he received severe criticism for an anthropology essay from the same period. The anthropology feedback criticised the way he had structured and argued the essay, and even suggested that the student might want to pursue help through essay writing clinics. The cohesive markers in the essay were not identified by the anthropology tutor as contributing to a recognisable argument or structure, despite a coherence being available. Their conclusion is twofold:

Firstly, the linguistic features of structure and argument are clearly open to interpretation, and what may indicate argument for one person (e.g. cohesive ties, juxtaposition, reference, connectives) may not appear so to another. In this case the anthropology tutor is looking for analysis of each area of content and does not notice the linguistic and structural devices this student has used for indicating 'argument'. Secondly, and following from this last point, what may be at stake is determination of what is involved in a particular discipline – the tutor in this case may see anthropology as requiring different conceptions of knowledge and more to be done with linkage and analysis of concepts (ibid.:167).

Lea & Street suggested that the shift from surface features of writing to those of disciplinarity and epistemology, as an instance of the move from personal to social explanations of writing practices, might provide a new route for inquiry.

Why a practice approach to literacy?

Brian Street's major contribution to the field of literacy studies can be encapsulated in the move from an autonomous to an ideological model. According to Lillis & Scott (2007), the AL epistemology is that literacy should be treated as a social practice; Street writes that researchers in this field "ask what follows if we consider literacy as a social practice rather than [as] a decontextualised skill" (2003b:2825); while Barton & Hamilton go so far as to say that "literacy is best understood as a set of social practices" (2000:8). How do we get from the ideological model to the study of literacy as a practice? What epistemological moves are necessary, and which have been proposed, in this connection? Further to this, how can it be claimed that literacy is "*best understood*" as social practice?

The first thing to say is that the consequences and significances of literacy are necessarily seen in social context. For literacy to be an "enabling factor" implies the influence of "the current political and economic conditions, social structure or local ideologies" (Finnegan, in Street 1984:96). These factors are as important as the technology of communication, and Street (1988:60) has been keen to stress that the ideological model should be seen as subsuming rather than replacing the autonomous model. So the logic of

arriving at practice from the ideological model, in the first instance, “means shifting attention away from the search for universals, ideal types or human development in general terms to more detailed investigation into actual choices in specific societies” (Finnegan, in Street 1984:96). For Street, ‘ideology’ is not to be understood in, for instance, a Marxist sense, but as used in anthropology and cultural studies, “where ideology is the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and individual resistance and creativity on the other” (1988:60).

This is therefore a re-location of literacy from individual to social space. ‘Literacy’ is now to be used as “a shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (Street 1984:1). This means that how the practices and their instantiations in social action are specifically *situated* in local settings is going to be vital; but so is the notion that there must be something recognisable in the setting for that type of literacy practice to be required or carried out. A similar argument is provided by Gee (2008:45):

One has to be socialized into a practice to learn to read texts of type X in way Y, a practice other people have already mastered. Since this is so, we can turn literacy on its head, so to speak, and refer crucially to the social institutions or social groups that have these practices, rather than to just the practices themselves. When we do this, something odd happens: the practices of such social groups are never just literacy practices. They also involve ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing, and believing.

This insight shows how literacy practices are inherently social (Street 1984:10) and are associated with, as Gee suggests, organisations, interest groups and the like (cf. Street 1984:121).

Despite the notion of literacy practice variously taking in events, activities, folk models or cultural schemata, there are many references to ‘actual’ or ‘concrete’ social practices (Street 1984:95, 121; Lillis 2001:34; Baynham 1995:1). Baynham seems to tie this up neatly by suggesting that investigating literacy as ‘concrete human activity’ involves observing not just what people do with literacy, but also what they make of it in terms of values. This “provides a way of linking the cognitive with the social, opening up the possibility of an integrated approach to the study of literacy in use” (ibid.). I see no immediate problem with the first of these suggestions – it is defensible to say that we are studying attitudes, values, and ideologies and still claim that we are dealing with the realm of the concrete if it is shown how they are attached to recognisable material expressions.

However, this begs the question of *how* we propose to bring this about. This dilemma is exacerbated by the recognition that the term ‘practice’ has been used in “two senses indiscriminately” (Tusting et al. 2000:210) in NLS research. The first refers to

“observable, collectable and/or documentable specific ethnographic detail of situated literacy events, involving real people, relationships, purposes, actions, places, times, circumstances, feelings, tools and resources” (ibid.). This understanding is seen to contrast with (but also complement) the presence and use of text in such studies, as ‘practice’ is seen as that which goes beyond the text. The second understanding refers to “culturally recognisable patterns of behaviour” (ibid.), which we can infer from the activities and events that we observe. Tusting et al. argue that it is in this sense of the term that we can include the idea of ‘textual practices’, i.e. “the culturally recognisable patterns for constructing texts” (ibid.), and they suggest that the consensus is with the second definition.

Either conception backs up one of the fundamental tenets of the practice approach to literacy, which is that literacy as a social practice must mean that we recognise, evince, and work with *multiple* literacies (Street 2006, 2008b). This has a number of implications. One is that literacies will, in this model, be dependent upon context, perhaps upon a wider-scale practice. The second is that sometimes literacy can be an end in itself (Barton & Hamilton 2000:11). Further, literacies can be practices in themselves as opposed to being part of the workings of a ‘larger’ practice. This is meaningfully brought out in academic writing: Spinks (in Candlin & Plum 1998:153) is one of many who have pointed out that the organisation of knowledge in disciplines is contiguous with the way that writing is done in those disciplines.

Street (1984) argues that political and ideological factors are prior to the technology of literacy; this means that, despite the various and undeniable ‘enabling’ affordances of literacy, decisions such as who gets to become literate, who the gatekeepers of literacy are, and what counts as socially sanctioned and privileged forms of literacy, are not dependent upon the technology of literacy as a causal factor.⁷ “No one material feature serves to define literacy itself. It is a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes” (Street ibid.:97). In the same way that “Individuals are already always caught up within practices” (Schatzki 1996:172), literacies are always social “from the outset” (Street 2001:8).

The ethnographic method, when allied to theoretical approaches that emphasise “ideological and power processes and dynamic rather than static models” (Street 1988:64),

⁷ This is in line with an argument of Harvey Sacks.

provides a sensitive instrument for ascertaining the variety within and influences on practices and the contexts they take place in. Street (2008b) provides an account from his fieldwork in Iran in the 1970s of how he became aware of exactly this:

Looking more closely at village life in the light of these characterisations [dominant representations of villagers as illiterate], it seemed that not only was there actually a lot of literacy going on but that there were quite different ‘practices’ associated with literacy – those in a traditional Koranic school; in the new State schools; and amongst traders using literacy in their buying and selling of fruit to urban markets...I hear dominant voices characterising local people as ‘illiterate’...whilst on the ground ethnographic and literacy-sensitive observation indicates a rich variety of ‘practices’.

I understand this to be an instance of how research methods and research interests enjoy an essentially reflexive relationship. In this sense, field methods are not necessarily only something subsequent to a ‘research design’, but also determine *what can* be found in the course of the research. “Any ethnographic account of literacy will, in fact, bring out its significance for power, authority and social differentiation in terms of the author’s own interpretation of these concepts” (1988:60).

Although the move of ideological model to practice might seem straightforward, it has not escaped criticism. Reder & Davila (2005:180) point out that rather than the distinction between autonomous and ideological, some writers have preferred a distinction, not quite contiguous, between *situated* and *decontextualised*. In turn, Reder & Davila object that “it is less productive to ask *whether* (or which aspects of) literacy practices are *situated* than to ask about what contexts those literacy practices are situated *in*” (ibid.). They ask, for example, “how do we locate the boundaries of the contexts in which literacy practices are situated? Where are the spatial and temporal margins?” (ibid.). However, although these remain among the questions that we need to ask in establishing what might be local as opposed to remote influences on literacy, it retains a conception of context as a given.

Other critiques are suggested by Third-space theory (e.g. Wilson 2000), which argues that the distinction of autonomous and ideological sets up an unnecessary binary that can be overcome by showing how these discourses when allied to local ones provide a space for new forms of expression. Another is found in Collins & Blot (2005:66), who argue that despite the focus on ideology and power within the NLS, “we still lack an account of power-in-literacy which captures the intricate ways in which power, knowledge, and forms of subjectivity are interconnected with ‘uses of literacy’ in modern national, colonial, and postcolonial settings”.

What, then, of Barton & Hamilton's view that literacy is *best* considered as a set of social practices? NLS work is designed to add "the perspective of practices to studies of texts", according to Barton & Hamilton (2000:9), but "practices remain central and we are led to examine how texts fit into the practices of people's lives, rather than the other way around" (ibid.). I find this to be the case throughout AL/NLS, where autonomous aspects do not make as frequent an appearance as would be expected from a position that 'encompasses' them.

To summarise: how do we get from the ideological model to the study of practices? This question makes sense if we consider the (empirical) study of situated practices as the way of getting at the "social concomitants" (Street 1984:97) that are attached to literacy. To put it another way: in addition to the technology of literacy present, what else do we need to find out in terms of social phenomena that tell us how (and perhaps why) literacy is used in this way, in this setting? Barton & Hamilton (2000:7), for instance, use the idea of literacy as a social practice as a starting point, a perspective that offers "new theoretical understandings about literacy", and, building on Barton's (1994) *ecological approach*, elaborate other propositions – one of which is that "Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and [that] some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than others" (ibid.:8).

The practice turn

The other major influence on this study is that branch of sociology known as ethnomethodology (EM). My contention is that EM is sufficiently consonant in its approach, assumptions, and tools to AL/NLS to constitute a productive partner. Its practitioners have useful things to say on many of the extant debates in AL/NLS. There is a case for saying that certain terms and ideas that have originated in EM – or at least achieved a more radical expression – have been adopted in social literacy studies without full credit being accorded. EM has long experience of being in a similar position to the NLS in terms of trying to gain acceptance recognition from practitioners of mainstream studies: one might say that NLS is to 'autonomous' studies of literacy as EM is to 'traditional' sociology. In this section I will show the common lineage of these two movements in what has been called *the practice* or *social turn*, and draw some conclusions from this common ancestry.

James Gee writes: “Over the last several decades, in and across a wide variety of disciplines, there has been a massive ‘social turn’ away from a focus on individual behaviour (e.g. the behaviourism of the first half of the twentieth century) and individual minds (e.g. the cognitivism of the middle part of the century) toward a focus on social and cultural interaction” (2000:177). Gee lists the NLS alongside several other practice movements (Table 2). The practice turn appeared early in disciplines such as anthropology and linguistics (Ortner 1984), and made its way via philosophy and social theory to education (Peters 2003, Lea 2005, Starfield 2007).

<i>Practice movement</i>	<i>Comments/sources</i>
<i>Ethnomethodology & conversation analysis</i>	Heritage 1984
<i>Discursive psychology</i>	Edwards & Potter 1992; Harre & Stearns 1995
<i>The ethnography of speaking</i>	Hymes 1974; Gumperz 1982
<i>Sociohistorical psychology</i>	Wertsch 1985, 1991, 1998; this follows the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin
<i>Situated cognition & activity theory</i>	Situated cognition in e.g. Lave 1996, and Lave & Wenger 1998; activity theory in e.g. Engestrom 1990
<i>Cultural models theory</i>	D’Andrade & Strauss 1992
<i>Cognitive linguistics</i>	Lakoff & Johnson 1980
<i>The new science and technology studies</i>	Latour 1987, 1991; aka the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK)
<i>Modern composition theory</i>	Bazerman 1989, Swales 1990
<i>Connectionism</i>	Clark 1993; Gee 1992
<i>Narrative studies</i>	Bruner 1986; Ricoeur 1984
<i>Evolutionary approaches to mind & behaviour</i>	Dawkins 1982; Kauffman 1993
<i>Modern sociology</i>	Giddens 1984, 1987
<i>Post-modern and post-structuralist sociology</i>	Bourdieu 1984; Fairclough 1992; Foucault 1973, 1977

Table 2 – movements within the practice turn according to Gee (1999, 2000)

Gee suggests that most if not all of the above movements have started to be cited in social works on literacy. At the time of writing, however, the influence of EM on NLS has not been felt with any seriousness. It has at least not been acknowledged. This is in contrast to

a series of studies, largely Australian, that focus on classroom literacy and adult literacy instruction (e.g. Baker 1991, Freebody & Freiberg 2006, 2011, Freebody & Herschell 2000, Freebody & Wyatt-Smith 2004, Freiberg & Freebody 2009, Lee 1996). In such publications, EM is overtly used and referenced. It is, then, no stranger to employment in literacy studies by those who would not necessarily consider themselves ethnomethodologists. The differences, as I see them, between such studies and those coming out of NLS are two-fold: first, the object of NLS studies is rarely that of 'literacy instruction' *per se*. Rather, literacy appears in all its sociological diversity in NLS work, and I would suggest that it is the ways that literacy events and practices often occur unheralded that contributes to the analytical (and rhetorical) power of these studies. Second, in using the classroom as the common locus of study, the Australian work has been able to deploy an EM corpus of classroom studies, as well as well-known types of analyses such as MCA and CA, that are simply absent from consideration within NLS.

These movements are "reactions against the behaviourism of the early part of the twentieth century and the 'cognitive revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s" (ibid.:180). Elsewhere, we find statements that are similar in their historical sweep. For Coulter, "Practices...displace mind as the central phenomenon in human life" (Schatzki 2001a:20). Wittgenstein, "the philosopher to whom nearly all theorists of practice defer" (Collins 2001:115), led "an assault on unified ontological sites for the psychological, on the idea that mind is a substance, place, or realm that houses a particular range of activities and attributes" (Schatzki 1996:22). Thus, when Wittgenstein-influenced writers such as Coulter come to talk about mind in their own terms, it is as a socially ratifiable object rather than as a location.

In other words, Wittgenstein showed how psychological phenomena were "conditions of life expressed by the human body" (ibid.), not hiding a more fundamental level or expression of the same. Wittgensteinian philosophy and practice movements in general are therefore *anti-representational* – activities in the social, material world stand for themselves, and are not intended to, and should not be understood as leading to conclusions about other realms 'behind' or 'beyond' those of social life. The theory of practice, therefore, "is embedded in the priority of practical engagement with the world, a materialist social ontology and a view of language as practice-based" (Peters 2003:227).

In fact, we can see practice as being anti-dualist across the board. There is any number of -isms supposedly collapsed by the employment of a practice epistemology, among them foundationalism (Schatzki 1997, Lynch 1993) and essentialism (McHoul

1980, Heap 1992). The other pervasive dualism addressed in practice disciplines is that of the individual/totally. Bauman (1992) suggests that any sociological theory that claims to be sufficient for postmodern times will have to reject the problematic notion of totality, and “must instead approach contemporary life through the notion of agency within a habitat” (Schatzki 1996:16). The foundational claims of individualism, meanwhile, were challenged by movements such as those listed above which instead analysed individuals “as products or by-products of social phenomena” (Schatzki 1997:283). The result, according to Scollon, is that “practice can [now] be treated as perhaps the smallest identifiable unit of the social world” (Baynham & Prinsloo 2009:6), the “site, or context, where activity occurs” (Schatzki 2001b:53). It is worth remembering that this ‘basic unit’ of social analysis is the same phenomenon that Barton & Hamilton and others describe as not wholly observable.

It is possible to take this perspective too far, however. Gee (2000) complains that some of the movements listed in the table above, most prominently post-modern and post-structuralist movements, can lead to the ‘death of the subject’. Gee mentions those, such as Foucault, who talk about words or discourses ‘authoring’ the subject rather than the reverse, so that “The person disappears other than as historical and discursive construct” (ibid.:187). This raises questions concerning the importance of post-structuralist approaches to AL/NLS, some of whose writers have claimed such an influence to their work. Whether they intend this label to indicate that they support an approach that removes the subjectivity from the participants in their research is open to question. My second case study addresses this very issue.

A feature commonly implied by practice movements is that of the *practitioner* and *practitioner knowledge* (Peters 2003). This has led, among other things, to writings concerning *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). The term *practice* “has been used to signal the priority of the practical over the theoretical in educational activities” (Peters 2003:223), a position which is sometimes called ‘conservativism’ (Bloor 2001). For McHoul (1980:134), “When a body of thought (a field) becomes theoretical, i.e. when it achieves the status of a science, it automatically breaks with any mundane associations”. This means that from this point on, the science “changes through an entirely internal process” (ibid.). By contrast, a praxiological perspective sees “education activities...[as] primarily engagements-with-others-in-the-world; it implies that learning and teaching are fundamentally social activities, ‘doings’ or performances without ‘inner’ processes” (Peters 2003:223).

We obtain, *inter alia*, constructivist and social theories of learning from these postfoundational writings (Lea 2005). Although Lea (*ibid.*:181) sees these educational discourses, focussing on “the social and cultural nature of learning in any particular context”, as a challenge to a transmission model of learning, this ignores debates regarding how practices themselves are transmitted from one bearer, generation or cohort to another. One of Turner’s (1994) main objections to the idea of practices is exactly this: if we are to look on practice (and learning) as “noncognitive, nonconceptual, and prelinguistic...how can practice be learned or transmitted?” (Peters 2003:222). Social theories of learning have the challenge of establishing what kind of thing we are talking about, how it can be said to be ‘shared’, and how the ‘same’ practice can be passed on.

Turner comes to see practices as “the vanishing-point of twentieth-century philosophy” (1994:1). This involves a simple substitution of basic knowledge or beliefs for practices, which although they may not be a foundation in any strict philosophical sense, are the explanation of last resort (Peters 2003), and Turner suggests that those who talk in these terms are *de facto* ‘closet foundationalists’ (1997, 2007). Practices can be seen as “a surrogate [for foundational explanations] that can be conceived of in a variety of ways, with different properties, and different implications” (Turner 2007:111).

Heap’s conclusion on the possibility of a metaperspective on literacy is that “only disciplines sharing compatible traditions of rational, controlled inquiry can be resources for planning, executing, and evaluating a multidisciplinary research project” (1992:52). But Dorothy Smith’s (1990:156) encouraging message is that investigating textual phenomena “bid fair to break us out of our disciplinary enclaves”.

Chapter 2

AL/NLS and Ethnomethodology – an encounter

Setting the scene

The previous chapter demonstrated that AL/NLS and EM are members of a common movement in the human sciences. The current chapter therefore has a dual function. The first is to show how EM can contribute to many of the extant debates in AL/NLS. In effect, there will be something of the order of a mapping of EM orthodoxy onto current polemics within AL/NLS. This will be carried out in two broad swathes: first, through an account of relevant EM precepts or study policies; and second, through explicating some of the implications of these policies for the study of literacies, broadly conceived. The second aim is to address critiques of practice from an EM point of view.

The extent to which EM's textual studies and AL/NLS are talking about commensurate things can be seen from two statements clearly meant to position their writers:

Educationalists, linguists and psychologists conceptualised literacy as a universal constant whose *acquisition*, once individual problems can be overcome by *proper diagnosis* and pedagogy, will lead to higher cognitive *skills*, to improved logical thinking, to critical inquiry and to self-conscious reflection. The distinction of myth from history, of science from illusion, of democracy from autocracy, of elaborated from restricted code have all variously been attributed to such literacy as though it were a single, autonomous thing that had these consequences *irrespective of context* (1993c:11, emphases added).

Natural science approaches to reading assessment take it that reading *skills* are relatively *context-free*, well-bounded processes that are *possessed* to determined degrees by students. If students 'possess' these skills, they should be able to *transfer* them to any materials or setting where analysts believe that these skills can be used. The test designers' effort is to contrive tasks that will allow these skills to be displayed unequivocally under *controlled stimulus conditions* (1992:40, emphases added).

These passages were written respectively by Brian Street, and James Heap, one of the few ethnomethodologists with a concerted interest in literacy. A single year separates their publication. I have not found a single reference by one of the other, but their common complaint is evident. Literacy is not a unitary, reified object best seen as the possession of an individual. Likewise, it is not something that is measurable to the extent that the measurements will be universally adequate. Literacy can be seen as something as plural as the settings in which it is found.

An EM approach demands that we treat practices as being accomplished in local-historical settings (Smith 1990). These local practices should be addressed on their own terms for how they reveal the accomplishment of social order. This requires a complete shift in how we have understood literacy pre-practice turn. We now have to look to performances of reading, writing, or textual presence with a view to ascertaining how they may be seen as adequate to the purposes at hand within what will normally be discrete settings. Actions and practices face social sanction if they are not agreed by those within contexts of accountability. We therefore have a position whereby there are, with few exceptions, clear and accountable (in the EM sense) standards for what successful reading and writing is in whatever definable setting we are working within, but where these same standards are constantly being established and are open to evaluation and reinterpretation. It is perhaps with something like this in mind that Dorothy Smith wrote:

The discovering of the text as a significant constituent of social relations must be credited to ethnomethodology. Much of Garfinkel's initial formulation insists that organisational records cannot be understood as objective accounts which can be treated (by social scientists) as independent of their organisational uses and contexts of their production and interpretation (Smith 1990:156).

What we can say of the text must also be the case for its writing, or any instance of its reading. Gee notes that 'to read' is a transitive verb, hence we must read *something*. Different types of writing, according to Gee, call for different types of reading and these modes of reading call for a certain background knowledge. Under certain conditions, it makes sense to read the 'something' in a certain way: however, one cannot read a text of type X in way Y unless one is socialised to read these texts in this way, "a practice other people have already mastered" (Gee 1990/2008:45).

Reflexivity, context, and work

Above I suggested that it is possible to find EM-inspired concepts in NLS without attribution and with no subsequent empirical application. Two examples can be found in Gee (2000). The first clearly discusses the ethnomethodological version of *reflexivity*. Gee observes that "If they had not from the outset, sooner or later all the social turn movements came to argue that meaning and context are mutually constitutive of each other" (ibid.:186). Garfinkel writes in *Studies* states that "members' accounts, of every sort, in all their logical modes, with all of their uses, and for every method for their assembly are *constituent features of the settings they make observable*" (1967:8, emphasis added).

Whether this is now an orthodoxy across practice movements is a moot point – and I would suggest not, given continuing ethnomethodological objections to the ‘heroism’ of more orthodox understandings of reflexivity (Watson 1987, Lynch 2000, ten Have 2002) – but more to the point, the implications of this mutuality have not yet been fully adopted within NLS. Gee complains that many of the practice movements he lists, until the supposed shift to a reflexive view, “in saying that meaning is situated in context,...were often appealing to a notion of ‘context’ that was too static” (ibid.). This is the same issue that Street had drawn attention to slightly earlier. However, it is exactly this dual notion of context that has been popular among AL/NLS authors.⁸ There is clearly, then, a need for a concept such as reflexivity in AL/NLS writing. At a recent conference, the notion of indexicality was discussed as a possible ‘bridging concept’ until a suitable notion could be found for the mutually constituting effects of text and context.⁹

Reflexivity is vital to many of the dialogues within this thesis. The EM version makes available at least the following interdependent insights:

1. There is ‘no time out’ from the reflexive or incarnate character of social life (Lynch 1993, Garfinkel 2002) – actions work to explicate and contribute to the context that they are understood to be within.
2. To separate social actions and descriptions of those actions is a species of dualism (Wieder 1974, Coulon 1995), which “generates the issue of the veridicality of the description and, in the context of science, the necessity of literal description” (Wieder op. cit.:224).
3. The same principle applies to texts, which can themselves have a reflexive or structuring effect (Smith 1990). This recognition has been, I think, the reason that some NLS writers have turned to actor network theory (ANT). ANT in fact draws heavily on EM and adds an element of post-humanism.
4. This has implications for the idea of textual mediation (Watson 2009; in e.g. Maybin 2000, Lillis 2001) in that there can be no text separate from the reading of it (Livingston 1995).
5. To espouse the EM, no-time-out version of reflexivity is to study sense- and order-making practices as a topic, an “ongoing practical accomplishment” (Garfinkel 1967:1), and not or not just as a resource (Zimmerman & Pollner 1970, Turner 1970).

⁸ E.g., in Baynham (1995), Ivanic (1998), Maybin (2000), Lillis (2001), and Lillis & Scott (2007).

⁹ Theresa Lillis, “Ethnographies of academic writing in a global context: the politics of style”, Friday 16th July 2010, Open University.

In order to bring about analysis, the analyst must avoid the use both of formal explanatory models, and of lay reifications (Lynch 1993). Rather, the EM analyst looks to “investigate the lay and professional methods by which structures are constructed” (ibid.:148). The EM proposal is “to suspend conventional interest in the *topics* of members’ practical investigations” and instead to place “exclusive emphasis on inquiry into practical investigations themselves” (Zimmerman & Pollner op. cit.:83, emphasis added).

The second example of an EM-inspired concept relates to Gee’s reflections on the ‘new capitalism’ (2000), which led him to think of the notion of *work* – “in the sense of human effort” (ibid.:187) – and which he suggests placing at the centre of NLS endeavours. This work, he suggests, would involve not just how language is used in a setting, but would also involve consideration of actions, interactions, the manipulation of symbols, and (causes of) affective orientations. Gee outlines his notion of work as follows:

Situations (contexts) do not just exist. Situations are rarely static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing *work*. It is the nature of this work that should, I argue, become crucial to the New Literacy Studies (ibid.).

This seems to me to have strong affinities with the programme of ethnomethodological *studies of work* (Garfinkel 1992). Both play on the dual understanding of work as the praxiological, *in situ* effort made by individuals to ‘get things done’, and as located within settings that would satisfy, for example, sociological agendas of labour within industrial capitalist societies (Randall et al. 2001). Psathas (1995:142) suggests that, for example, a 911 call to the police is “‘worked on’ in various ways, coded, analysed, transmitted, made into a record, counted, filed, consulted, etc., all of which are matters endogenous in the work setting but are not performed solely by talk-in-interaction”. EM studies look to present the situated competences employed in carrying out that work. Thus, Psathas is able to distinguish between the “study of work as it is carried out/attempted” (1995:151) by those who belong to a notional ‘organisation’, ‘company’, or ‘bureaucracy’, etc.; and those studies that focus on the haecceities¹⁰ of ‘work’.

¹⁰ A term often rendered as ‘this-ness’.

Accountability, rules and codes

Practice disciplines will need to establish ways of asserting how practices can be located in tokens of social life. As we have seen, practices can be considered the fundamental unit of social life, to the point that practices are *ontologically* prior to actions.

For the EM practitioner, there is a simple and elegant way of finding practices. It is found in various formulations and pervades the EM literature:

It is only through the enactment of recognisable practices that actions and objects come to have mutual intelligibility (Rawls 2009:83).

Interest in the interpretive moment is not in the idiosyncrasy but in those practices presupposed by the idiosyncrasy which belong in a given discursive or organisational document or text as a constituent of social relations also means being interested in the social organisation of its production as a prior phase in the social relation rather than as the work of a particular author (Watson 2009:163).

Instead of a concern with the actual, empirical identity of some action, the situated perspective is concerned with the *possible* identity of that action (Heap 1992:50).

This is to say, if any activity is seen to demonstrate an accountable recognisability for its participants, then the researcher will be justified in concluding that it is (an instance of) a practice. Social actions *must* be recognisable (describable-observable) to those they are oriented to, and so the selfsame work that produces social action is that which makes it available as a *demonstrably understandable* action. This can be seen in instances where there is an evident social order in a setting but where the actions are not recognisable to the observer (Schegloff 1996:162-3).

On this view of practice, then, it can be asserted that there can be no instance or assemblage of social action/s without the presupposition of a social structure inhering in those actions (Sharrock & Button 1991:158). Ethnomethodologists can still therefore retain the idea of actions having formal structures (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970), but formal structures for ethnomethodologists are everyday activities that exhibit the features of uniformity, typicality, reproducibility, have these properties “independent of particular production cohorts” (Garfinkel & Sacks *ibid.*:163), and are recognisable as being independent of the members who orient to them. “They emerge as integral details of constructed in situ events and as practical machineries for the here and now construction of such occasions” (McHoul 1982:114). Having helped to accomplish a setting or recognise a practice through reflexive action, “participants then orient themselves to it as if it had an objective existence prior to and independent of their discourse” (Watson 1992:xx), that is, they appear as Durkheimian objects.

Similarly, practices presuppose a community or culture that can understand them. Indexical expressions and indexical actions find their meaning in how someone competent in that group is liable to understand them. With reference to studies of academic writing, we are clearly dealing with participants who do not have a full understanding of how to “design documents and compose texts with an orientation to how such a design and composition will, and should, be encountered and read by persons, normally” (Heap 1991b:114). This is an instance of Meno’s paradox, i.e. a paradox of learning through enquiry (D. Macbeth 2000, K. Macbeth 2004).

We can draw at least one useful conclusion from this: *it allows us to understand both action and practice as concretely observable within social life*. Accountable actions and practices are homologous. Unusually, I do not recall any typographical way in EM of distinguishing between the *identity* and the *work* of a practice; it is sufficient here to say that the two things are not separable.

One of the implications of the homology of practice and action is that practices inhere in actions carried out by individuals. In this sense, as Brandt (1992) points out, the separation of the individual and the social is not viable. Instead, then, of asking about the interaction of the social and individual in writing, Brandt suggests that we can ask questions such as the following: “What does a writer or reader treat as individuality or individual contribution? How is that publicly displayed? How is it taken to be socially significant?” (1992:325) We might ask, in similar vein: how is convention as opposed to idiosyncrasy recognised by the marker? How are they brought about by the writer? How are they distinguished within the same piece of work? When we can distinguish between *acceptable* and *idiosyncratic* ways of incorporating *originality* or *personal contribution* in academic writing – commonly cited as marking criteria – then we have potentially interesting ways of delineating both *influences* on student writing and what counts as writing sufficient to be seen as adhering to conventions or practices.

For similar reasons, EM abandons the notions of ‘social actor’ and ‘social structure’; “that abandonment of constructivist ambitions means that it is enough for ethnomethodology’s purposes to conceive ‘social actors’ as ‘courses of treatment’, to propose that – from its point of view – persons are neither more nor less than the ways they are treated” (Sharrock & Button 1991:141). The argument is that social order is achieved through entirely endogenous means, and to proceed otherwise imposes analytic categories on this order.

This brings us on to a final point concerning the usages of the terms ‘code’ and particularly ‘rule’ in research on academic writing. My general view is that a greater level of exactitude is necessary from AW researchers of all stamps when using these as technical terms. They are undoubtedly polysemous, and this polysemy incorporates both lay and technical usages. With regard to ‘rule’, the problem of behaviour according with a rule has been convincingly settled in the work of the later Wittgenstein (proponents include Berducci 2010, Sharrock & Button 1999, Lynch 1993, Armour 2000, Lee 1991, Malcolm 1989, Baker & Hacker 2009). The seeming assumption of a set of fixed rules is present in AL/NLS writing (e.g. Gee 2008, Starfield 2007, Sarangi & Candlin 2001, Rai 2004), but of course is far from endemic to AL/NLS (e.g. Ballard & Clanchy 1988, Hounsell 1988, VandeSteege 2004). However, some AL writers have provided accounts that cohere with a Wittgensteinian take on acting (here, writing) in accordance with rules:

A second implicit element of this argument [of low-status writing practices as being unsuccessful attempts to access dominant forms] is a view of the qualities of successful texts as describable in terms [of] a monolithic system of rules, rather than being both highly underdetermined by rules, and highly varied within the complex and subtle conventions of established genres. This is a view of successful texts as inherently and uniquely rational, rather than conventional and embedded in dominant social practices (Pardoe 2000:148).

It is precisely this distinction between a set of distinct and fixed rules, with unambiguous application, and the ‘underdetermination’ of action by rules, that provides the point of departure for how we should be considering whether actions are performed in agreement with rules.

Those who propound a Wittgensteinian line insist that a rule cannot exhaustively contain the extensions of that rule – i.e., it can “never completely or exhaustively define the character or ‘legally possible’ range of conduct of an activity” (Heritage 1984:124), it will never tell us in its *formulations* all the possible ways in which it could be applied or understood (Sharrock & Button 1999, McHoul 1982). The rule does not tell us what to do in particular circumstances; the meaning of the rule is its use, not its (possible) extensions (ibid.). Understanding a rule, for Wittgenstein, is no different from understanding “how to go on” (Sharrock & Button 1999, Malcolm 1989). We can distinguish, then, between action *in accord with* a rule (Berducci 2010), and *understanding* the rule.

It is then possible to speak of an ‘internal relation’ between the rule and actions that are in agreement with the rule. This is perhaps most plainly seen in ‘constitutive’ rules (Berducci 2010), for example in playing chess, where “we need not abide by the rules of chess, but if we do not, we will not be playing *chess* – for the rules are definitive of a

game” (Hacker in Berducci, *ibid.*). Berducci provides culinary principles as an example of nonconstitutive rules, and to this we could add the example of academic writing.

Rules, then, “exist in no essential mode, but rather in a praxiological mode in so far as they are regularly seen to constitute part of the detailed work of accomplishing an occasion” (McHoul 1982:126). As McHoul goes on to note, “rules do appear to occur as ‘appropriate’ to situations” (*ibid.*), and so may *appear* to have a reified character, yet “situations are not merely given but are reflexively constituted by (such things as) following rules”.

One of the problems with talking in terms of rules in an academic writing context, then, is at what level of abstraction it makes sense to do so. As has been seen, Lea & Street’s pioneering research into academic literacies suggested a hyperrelativisation of demands on writing, potentially varying between different tutors on the same course, or the same tutor on different courses. Classically indexical terms such as ‘argument’, ‘analysis’, and ‘criticality’ therefore take on different and even incommensurable meanings (Lea & Street 1998). Stierer (1997) reached some similar conclusions, and also pointed out ways in which successful students could adapt to this challenge:

The most successful students started from scratch, in their attempt to puzzle out the ground rules for academic writing, each time they moved to a new module. Less successful students tried to apply the approaches they developed in one module to subsequent modules. There was little sense of cumulative ‘progress’ in their development as academic writers, except on a very general level of ‘confidence’ and ‘practice’ (*ibid.*:23-4).

However, it is one thing to suggest that students attempted to find out the ‘ground rules’, as Stierer writes here, and another to discover that “the use is not contained in the rule, that the rule does not ‘contain’ its significations” (Coulon 2004:116). The most obvious ground rule to be taken from the Stierer passage is not something along the lines of “Always include an introduction”, rather something such as “Look for the important principles in each specific case”; in other words, the rules that Stierer is talking of are largely ratiocinative rules of conduct, designed to arrive at modes of adaptive social action, as opposed to a manual for writing. What we are doing here is reconstructing (second-hand) the potential ‘rules for finding rules’ applied by students, not looking for evidence of whether there was a ‘consensus of action’ in their writing practices in the eyes of the assessors. The Wittgensteinian approach to rules looks for agreement “not in opinions but in form of life” (*PI*, §241). This suggests something about how ‘everyday’ our ‘academic’ activities can be.

Membership

One question regarding student writing concerns whether we take the position that students are outsiders to academia or are part of a common ‘discourse community’ or the like. EM does not impose such analytical terms. It does, though, make extensive use of the terms ‘member’ and ‘membership’.

According to the famous passage from Garfinkel & Sacks (1970), “The notion of ‘member’ is the heart of the matter. We do not use the term ‘member’ to refer to a person. It refers instead to mastery of natural language” (ibid.:160). This is again a focus on the practices that the individual carries (ten Have 2002, Forrester & Reason 2006, Coulon 2004).

Garfinkel & Sacks understand the mastery of natural language to inhere in the ability to produce and recognise “everyday activities as observable and reportable phenomena” (ibid.:160). Accountable actions therefore imply membership of a *natural language group*. One of the major ways in which this membership is demonstrated is through glossing practices. Garfinkel & Sacks (ibid.:162) say of these:

In the particulars of his speech [sic] a speaker, in concert with others, is able to gloss those particulars and is thereby meaning differently than he can say in so many words; he is doing so over unknown contingencies in the actual occasions of interaction; and in so doing, the recognition *that* he is speaking and *how* he is speaking are specifically not matters for competent remarks.

Before continuing with this discussion, I should specify what I want it to yield: first, to be able to proceed on the assumption that *membership* can be of something other than that of a ‘natural language’ group. Second, to establish that glossing practices occur in writing as well as speech, and that these written glossing practices make a significant contribution to the plausibility of written work.

Accountable actions, then, speak of the general competence of the member. This is, though, “is throughout and without relief an occasioned accomplishment” (ibid.). So it seems that one of the by-products of this discussion is the collapse of another hoary dualism, that of competence/performance – there is no *essential* competence (cf. Fox 2006:439, Forrester & Reason 2006:48).

The argument that needs to be pursued to establish the first point above is that accountable actions can be found within smaller groups within ‘society-at-large’, in other words that these actions are commonplace and common-sense for members of these groups, and that they are generally not fully accessible to others.

What, then, of the ‘mastery of natural language’? How can this be made compatible with the idea of membership of groups more exclusive than society-at-large? The general principle is that “Social actors are, perhaps first and foremost, speakers of natural language” (Hester & Francis 2000:4). Members of more exclusive groups must first be competent members of society, and their professional or esoteric accountable practices are dependent upon everyday competences.

I take it from this that no matter what the cultural status of such membership is among society at large, that this membership must as a first principle be parasitic on the practices of general natural language competence; subsequent to this, the practices of the (here) scientific group become as vulgar and commonsense as those of any other sector of society. Discursive events may be both ordinary *and* discrete; “The two categories do not seem to be mutually exclusive...Only at a superficial level of, say, vocabulary, syntactic construction, etc., and not at the level of discursive resources could we make any generalised distinction” (McHoul 1982:2). This means that distinctions such as those made between ‘esoteric’ and ‘ordinary’ are not distinctions between types of discourse (ibid.; Sharrock & Turner 1980, Schegloff 1996). In Garfinkel et al.’s (1981) paper on the discovery of an optical pulsar, the astronomers’ night’s work (meaning speech and embodied actions) was made up “in institutionally established terms as matters of competent membership in a technical, esoteric, but nonetheless natural language community” (ibid.:141).

There is another aspect to the pulsars paper, however, that does not pertain to the night’s work of discovery, and that is the scientists’ written *announcement of the discovery*. This announcement is noticeable for its orientation to a scientific audience, not least in its treatment of the pulsar as what Garfinkel et al. call an ‘Independent Galilean Pulsar’, i.e. a real and external object that has been ‘found’, as opposed to the ‘Optically Discovered Pulsar’, which emerges only in and through the scientists’ temporally-unfolding work.

Another instance of such glossing practices is located in Garfinkel & Sacks (1970); this example concerns *anthropological quotes* and how anthropologists use a variety of ‘acceptable shorthands’ in their writing to obviate the need for extended proof of their ethnographic activities. By definition, then, these glosses go to establish the plausibility of their work *for a specific anthropological audience*, that is, they establish accountability with relation to those for whom reading ethnographic research is a commonplace activity and has its own commonsense practices.

Garfinkel and Sacks note that on very few occasions does the anthropologist have to give a description of how the ethnographic information was collected, and how this collection was a reflexive part of the circumstances it is meant to depict; even less frequently are they asked how the notes were written up.

Nevertheless, 'the ways this is done' is treated by all – by writer and colleagues – as contingently accountable over the occasions in which the 'writing' is done and over the occasions in which the report is read and discussed (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970:182).

This paraphrase of what the natives are 'really saying' "is glossed over [in] the report as it is available in an actual occasion through work of *professionally unspecified methods* of authorship and readership" (ibid., emphasis added). The point is that the glosses are techniques for producing the ethnography, but their acceptance as shorthands for certain disciplinary practices is itself one that helps to characterise anthropology as a discipline. The glosses therefore provide us with: some of the *literary* techniques of the discipline; acceptance of the glosses as *epistemological* necessity; and acceptance of the implied *praxiological* activities of the discipline that allow the written ethnography to be supplied at all.

I take it from this is that where there is any group that has recognisably accountable actions, we can talk about there being members; and that the presence of glosses within writing means that we can just as easily talk of membership established by writing practices as we can by speech practices. Further support for this view comes from Watson's (2009) understanding of 'reader' and 'readership' along similar lines to Garfinkel & Sacks' notion of membership. Watson stresses 'readership' as a course of action potentiated by textual features, which "mobilise or activate a set of operations on the part of ('any') reader" interacting with the text (Watson 2009:75). The focus of investigation is therefore what happens at these points.

Ethnomethodology, 'situatedness', and generalisation

Deborah Brandt suggests that "A scrupulous adherence to 'single event sociology'...poses obvious limitations, especially for researchers of literacy" (1992:347). The phrase 'single event sociology' comes from Harvey Sacks (Lee 1991) and has long been a source of contention between EM and formal sociologies (Sharrock & Randall 2004:187). Here, literacy studies *specifically* stand to suffer from Sacks' prescription. Brandt's objections, though, can be overcome by paying closer attention to how EM proceeds in its aims.

Brandt's limitations of EM's single-event perspective can be paraphrased thus:

1. An "infinite regress" can be located in EM whereby we need to explicate the process of the researcher's observation before explicating the observed event. "Would it not be more accurate to say about the field of composition studies, for instance, that it has less to do with the ways that writers and texts work than the ways that certain kinds of researchers work when they study writers and texts?" (Brandt 1992:347-8).
2. Brandt asks, "How do we study the social structures of practices so ingrained as to be unconscious – so extremely scenic as to go unnamed or unnoticed?" (ibid.:348) She particularly mentions practices concerning "gender, race, class, or other prevailing ideologies that may be enacted at levels deeper than conscious verbalising or explicit display might suggest" (ibid.).
3. According to Brandt, EM assumes universally competent membership. However, academic writing is closely connected with both learning and assessment, and tends to polarise experts from non-experts, experts-in-training. Here, the researcher is obliged to ask: how to understand the features of a student's writing? As incomplete, nascent, unconventional attempts? As accountably demonstrating their *understanding* of required writing features?
4. EM focuses on the achievement of social actions *qua* stand-alone events in the here-and-now, and it is not always possible to see where the precedents for action come from. This Brandt sees as a particular problem with regard to writing: "Not only is language so obviously 'forgiven' as Heidegger has said but also texts are not usually made at the scene at all. Rather, many of them intrude upon and often organise or regulate a local event" (ibid.:350).

Although these points can be made out to challenge a single-event approach, we are no closer to why literacy studies should need the inverse in any case. Some reasons might include: a *plurality* of empirical cases can provide us with more representative and/or robust findings. This is then a way of warranting *generalisation*. The use of events or texts *historically prior* to the events at hand is presumably adduced for explanatory value.

My response to these objections is as follows. Point 1 seems an unusual one to make of EM. Similar observations have been made before but here Brandt seems to demonstrate a misunderstanding of EM's take on the 'situated' approach. There are sense-making practices to be found at every stage and to argue otherwise appears to give ground to either a positivist dualism or to a comfortable form of realism.

In point 2: Observable-reportable actions are not constantly being consciously observed or described; in fact, the majority of social life can be said to pass in the flux of events and practices that occur 'normally'. However, they can at any time return to the centre of attention or of the 'field of consciousness'. The value of EM work such as Garfinkel's (1967) study of the transsexual Agnes is to show how the accountable but largely unnoticed practices of achieving, for example, femininity can become overtly observable and reportable when, as in this case, someone comes late to these practices and not only has to learn them from scratch but also has to successfully 'pass' as a woman.

Point 3 has been substantially addressed in the last section, and issues of learning will be discussed in the following sub-section. However, it would be unfortunate indeed if EM could not accommodate situations where instruction and learning are involved. It is reasonable to surmise that newcomers to the academy are nonetheless fully competent members of wider society. Their new status is in relation to membership of esoteric groups; they are not learning to be expert laypersons.

With regard to the last point, Brandt seems to be confusing EM's insistence on rigour in the drawing of conclusions from data with the fact that EM is the study of sense-making practices. It is nonsensical to suggest that all events in the here-and-now are achieved without reference to the actions or events that have already occurred. 'Achieving practical actions' does not entail where texts are involved that these same texts have to be brought about at the scene. EM is more than capable of dealing with the influence of material configurations in the achievement of everyday life (Suchman 2007, Watson 2009, Smith 1990, Heap 1991b). Brandt's objection here can only be justified to someone who wishes to *explain*, rather than *describe*, its data items. The adequacy of actions to their precedents can become clear by observing subsequent events.

It remains to address the ideas of situatedness and generalisation. The assumption that EM cannot be generative or generalise is the result of those who typically employ positivist, theory-driven work, assuming that EM is of a similar kind (Sharrock & Randall 2004). EM looks for a *different kind* of generalisation. Sharrock & Randall quote from Peter Winch, to the effect that the notion of cause will pursue generality by way of empirical generalisations, whereas pursuing the reasons for action involves generality by way of rules. We should therefore not look for the same kind of generalisation in all disciplines (*ibid.*:193).

The thinking behind the notion of generality as employed by EM is made absolutely clear by Coulter (1999:179):

... ethnomethodological studies do not, when best accomplished, simply result in inductive, empirical, quasi-statistical, distributional generalities. They have, when well-argued and documented, a 'theorem-like' status. They reveal to us the 'superficial essences'...of our ways of living together, ways of living within which we naturally deploy the ordinary language resources of motive, intention, hope, thought, recollection, forgetting, understanding, and the rest.

This points to conceptions of particular and general that are different from those employed in variable analysis or theory-driven sociologies (Benson & Hughes 1991). As Benson & Hughes note, the adequacy of the description is not dependent upon how frequently a phenomenon is encountered (*ibid.*). What we want to get at is how adequate is our characterisation of the 'machinery' that allows the phenomenon to occur in the first place.

If the 'machinery' has been used at all, it is a part of our culture, our methods, for producing action. Once the 'machinery' is described, any more instances do not provide any more evidence for the description. What more instances do is provide yet another example of the method in action, rather than securing the warrantability of the description of the machinery itself (*ibid.*:131).

EM does not generalise in the sense that statistics – and case studies – have, that is to move from observed cases to covering laws, “since it does not acknowledge the separation of particular and generality that is its prerequisite” (Sharrock & Button 1991:158).

Although Brandt's use of the single word 'scenic' recalls that both EM and AL/NLS claim to produce 'situated' studies. An initial gloss would suggest that 'situated' is more or less synonymous with 'contexted' or 'contextualised'; pertaining to the ideographic as opposed to the nomothetic (Sharrock & Randall 2004); considered for contextual features rather than considered for their 'essential' features, etc. There is currently debate in AL/NLS as to how wide the net should be cast for the contextual features of literacy events and practices (Reder & Davila 2005). A quick survey suggests that literacy practices can be linked to discourses that 'situate' them (Bartlett & Holland 2002, Baynham 1995, Gee 2000); that context can be linked to Malinowski's (or Fairclough's) context of situation and context of culture (Lillis & Scott 2007); or that the *situated* can be opposed to the *decontextualised*. In one passage Gee (2000:186) states that: “The NLS is based around the idea that reading, writing and meaning are always *situated* within specific social practices within specific Discourses”. However, elsewhere (2008:3) he states that Discourses are themselves *socially situated identities*.

That people assume a context is there, by which we can surmise that they act in accord with this assumption, is very much of a piece with the EM position that context is in fact achieved by participants in an interaction. Context and (big-D) Discourse alike can

be seen as built up reflexively through the activities of members. These lessons are quintessentially demonstrated in Wieder & Pratt's (1990) paper on achieving 'real Indian' status.

However: for Randall et al. (2001:39ff.), there are three distinct ways of defining 'situatedness' or 'context':

1. As a members' category;
2. As analytically driven by *a priori* categories;
3. As driven by relevance to practical issues.

The first of these is the approach taken by EM studies. It attends to how context is brought about by participants and what they see as relevant to its constitution. The second can denote any conceptual or theoretical construct.

Brandt's mention of the 'scenic' would seem to arise from a particular notion of the 'visible'; that "available data results from presumptions about the 'here and now'" (Randall et al. *ibid.*:37). I am sure that Brandt would not limit her understanding of ethnography in the same way that these understandings of context have been limited, that is to a very basic understanding of what the 'local' can be. However, Randall et al.'s critique of Jordan & Henderson (1995) certainly inverts the usual mode of criticism. This critique inheres not in the lack of ethnographic materials that they collect, but rather in "the absence of what we would term an ethnographic 'sensibility' from both the data itself and from the analysis" (Randall et al. *op. cit.*:37). Jordan & Henderson's 'interaction analysis' presents an 'ethnographic' background against which a detailed analysis of interactional data is carried out. The problem is that the 'background' and the interactional data are meant to inform one another, but there is little evidence from the analysis of how this is so. If anything, the ethnographic detail is provided simply as a way of *framing* the interactional data and accompanying analysis. Randall et al. complain that Interaction Analysis and ethnography may well inform one another, but that we need first to establish the proper relationship between them:

...what seems to be missing here is some conception of an 'organisational context'. It might be presumed that such an appeal is to approaches which are distant from all forms of ethnomethodology, but that is not the case. We are arguing precisely that the skills, knowledges and competencies that members possess, and which enable them to orient to various here and now problems of work-in-organisation may not be directly visible in the here and now, given that some set of (unspecified) procedures has produced this particular context as the relevant context for analysis, but will be visible in other contexts within the organisational setting – contexts which the proficient ethnographer will have investigated and analysed (*ibid.*:38).

For now, it is sufficient conclude that EM is a way *par excellence* of demonstrating the mutuality of ‘ethnographic context’ and instances of interactional/communicative data. “Formal methods just cannot get at these because they focus purely either on the data or on the processes, Ethnography can, in contrast, identify such features because it is ‘motivated looking’” (ibid.:33).

In conclusion, I would say that the compatibility of the arguments in this section with a NLS approach can be seen in the first of Barton & Hamilton’s six propositions concerning literacy (2000:8): *Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts*. One way of acting on this proposition is to investigate the social order that the practices presuppose, as embodied in here-and-now events that can be apprehended by a now-coding (Heap 1991b), ethnographic methodology.

Approaches to learning

According to Barton & Hamilton (2000:13), “any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning”. One way of understanding this assertion is to suggest that, as literacies *must* be learned, ascertaining *how* they are learned will tell us something important about them.

An EM approach to learning is to provide detailed descriptions of events in *any* setting where learning and/or instruction occurs. This approach to learning has an obvious attraction. Rather than attempting to explain a manifold of factors involved or purportedly involved in learning, we need only to pay close attention to interactional data. Attempting to *explain* learning, at least prior to prominent social theories of learning, has typically involved characterising individual transformations at the psychological or cognitive levels. In its most developed form, any such theory will need to explain both the social events *and* the individual change, but more than this, provide some kind of transformative mechanism whereby the former can effect the latter. However, it is particularly the social or ‘situated’ theories of learning that have come in for particular criticism from both EM and AL/NLS writers.

A good way to start is to return to a longer version of the quote above:

Related to the constructed nature of literacy, any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning. *Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making as well as formal education and training*. This learning takes place in particular social contexts and part of this learning is the internalisation of social processes. It is therefore important to understand the nature of informal and vernacular learning strategies and the nature of situated cognition, linking with the work of researchers influenced by Lev Vygotsky, such as Sylvia Scribner, Jean Lave and

colleagues... it is necessary to draw upon people's insights into how they learn, their theories about literacy and education, the vernacular strategies they use to learn new literacies. We start out from the position that people's understanding of literacy is an important aspect of their learning, and that people's theories guide their actions. It is here that a study of literacy practices has its most immediate links with education (ibid.).

A constructivist view of literacy is being pursued here. My problem with this is the same as with any constructivist pursuit: that it unnecessarily intellectualises or rationalises social life and individual actions, and provides a general, causal account (Francis 2005). It has become such a commonplace to claim that a given phenomenon is 'socially constructed' that it has detracted from cases where it is worth saying (Lynch 1993, Hacking 1999, Coulter 2001). Most actions are brought about "non-ratiocinatively, without prior reflection, although not thereby 'thoughtlessly', and on those occasions when it genuinely makes sense to say that the way he or she thought about something was related to what he or she subsequently did or said, the connection is not necessarily (nor even empirically generally) one of a prior action guiding a consequent one" (Coulter 1999:174, emphases deleted).¹¹

Barton & Hamilton appear to emphasise, in sympathy with Lave, Wenger, and others, the role of informal settings for learning as opposed to formal educational settings. I do not want to labour this point, but if it is the case, then Barton & Hamilton would be subject to the same criticism that has been made by ethnomethodologists of social learning theorists almost from the outset: that 'formal' and 'informal' learning settings cannot be made out to correspond to 'inauthentic' and 'authentic' knowledge respectively (Macbeth 1996, Heap 1989, Hemmings et al. 2000).

Further, Barton & Hamilton suggest a link with various Vygotsky-inspired writers. Closely following Coulter (1999), I would like to suggest that there are two anomalies, for our purposes, in looking to Vygotsky (and Piaget) for inspiration. The first is that Vygotsky was essentially a psychologist, and it is hard and perhaps pointless to avoid 'mind' being the end game when talking psychology. Coulter suggests that any ground ceded to cognitivist reasoning will remain ceded. His Wittgensteinian counter-position: "the essential point is being missed in all of this: namely, that 'cognition' is intersubjectively ascribable and *ratifiably* avowable" (ibid.:165). Second, one of the central Vygotskian tenets, at least from a social literacy studies point of view, is that

¹¹ EM critiques of constructivism are legion (e.g. Lynch 1993:xviii, 101-2; Coulter 1999; Hester & Francis 2000:1, 11-14; Liberman 1990:190; McHoul 1982:1; Sharrock & Button 1991:141; Lee 1991; Heap 1991a:30; Heap 1991b; Lynch & Bogen 1997:120, Armour 2000).

literacy develops ‘higher forms’ of cognition. This is exactly the sort of thinking that the NLS was originally conceived to counter.

However, in 2005 Barton & Tusting published *Beyond Communities of Practice*, an edited collection aimed specifically at critiquing Etienne Wenger’s flagship concept. Concerns had evidently been raised that the ideas in *Communities of Practice* (1998) did not meet the needs of the NLS (Barton & Tusting 2005:6): “Our own interest as linguists is that framings provided by theories of language, literacy, discourse and power are central to understandings of the dynamics of communities of practice, but they are not brought out in Wenger’s formulations”.¹² What Barton & Hamilton (2005), and others, attempt to do in this collection is *de facto* to look for *structural* explanations ‘beyond’ practices: “To understand particular literacy practices, we need to look beyond the observable social relations to broader social patterning” (ibid.:19). This might seem to signal more of a concern with structure than with practice. The question is, does this contribute to a critique of communities of practice as a theory of learning, rather than simply as a ‘theory of the middle ground’ that can pertain to literacy? If so, it works by adding ‘macro’ or structural influences as factors that can purportedly further explicate learning (ibid.:12).

If we are simply to describe practices as institutionally-inspired clusters of occurrences, this tells us more about the structures than the practices. This moves further away from a ‘practice’ endeavour than I can recognise. Barton & Hamilton’s example is that “Complex forms and procedures are handed down to be locally negotiated and appropriated. Whilst this is a recognisable scenario, it is a particular and ahistorical vision of relations of power and authority within an organisation” (2005:20). This seems close to saying that the most important thing is to note *that* forms and procedures are locally negotiated, not *how* this is done. To take an example from a similar setting, Garfinkel’s (1967) discussion of two graduate coders found that, despite strict actuarial coding rules and “[n]o matter how definitely and elaborately instructions had been written” (ibid.:21), that various *ad hocing* practices were necessary to code a folder’s contents. These practices were vital in allowing the coders to establish the nature of their instructions. As Garfinkel memorably noted, “To treat instructions as though ad hoc features in their use were a nuisance, or to treat their presence as grounds for complaint about the incompleteness of instructions, is very much like complaining that if the walls of a

¹² The Lancaster group also came as a body to a talk by Wenger in 2006 organised at the University of Manchester to discuss his own ideas regarding the critiques in *Beyond Communities of Practice*.

building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was keeping the roof up” (ibid.:22).

Thus, I am not sure that this recourse to macro theory or phenomena does much for *situated* investigation into how learning takes place. EM, however, has produced further critiques of social learning theories on their own terms (Fox 2006, Macbeth 1996, Hemmings et al. 2000). Macbeth talks of the ‘rediscovery’ of the situated in educational studies. His critique of Brown et al. (1989) centres around his perception that in their work, “situatedness would be had for the enforcement of a moral order” (1996:271). Their argument is that classroom instruction provides an ersatz version of the ‘authentic’ activities of a practice. According to Brown et al. (in Macbeth 1996:269), “Many of the activities students undertake are simply not the activities of practitioners and would not make sense or be endorsed by the cultures to which they are attributed”. For Macbeth, though, situatedness is a “unifying formulation” (ibid.:274), and so contrasts between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ cannot be decided through situatedness, otherwise we would have events and contexts that are more or less situated.

Although Hemmings et al. suggest that social theories of learning are “useful as the basis of a critique of cognitivist theories of learning” (2000:229), Fox (2006) presents a sceptical view of whether these theories have in fact jettisoned cognitivism at all. Fox points out that it is the *theoretical* attempts to “transcend the division between abstract mind and concrete practices, [that] replicates the dualism when it seeks to *mediate* the two” (ibid.:429). An EM approach to learning has much in common with social learning theories; the difference is that EM will “not attempt to *theorise* its way out of Cartesian dualisms but will determinedly focus upon practical social action, not seeing cognition as a separate realm from the action” (ibid.). EM studies of education or learning will “seek to recover and exhibit the details of the competent performance” (ibid.:439), although to this we must surely add details of *less than competent performance*, where it occurs, and how any performance is socially ratified as such. In contrast, social theories of learning have generally sought to discover how performance, “as a manifestation of prior learning” (ibid.), can be construed as shared, distributed cognitive structures, and provide ways of explaining how this learning was acquired or adapted.

While listening to people’s theories, strategies, or insights concerning literacy may be interesting, it cannot be said that this will give us anything like a full or accurate picture of how they have learnt a particular literacy. It should not be confused with logical-grammatical means for arriving at how learning occurs. Moreover, the majority of learning

occurs pre-theoretically, as far as the learning subject is concerned, predominantly through being placed in certain situations where certain responses or outcomes are expected. A learner comes to “adapt her behaviour to norms without recognising that her behaviour is normatively guided” (Williams 1994:179); knowing and learning both come about by participating in a form of life (Roth 1997). Social interaction is basic to learning (Hager 2005, Koschmann et al. 2005). Concepts rely upon a background technique for their correct usage; this technique is not expressible as further concepts or rules, so it must be established praxiologically.

Learning, as socially ratified, will be evident in interaction sequences. These sequences can be found just as much in writing (e.g. Heap 1991a) as they can in speech, but it is of course possible that they will be encountered multimodally. Koschmann suggests that we look to find “trajectories of understanding” (2007:3) and cites some questions asked by Moerman & Sacks (1988) to pursue this, of which this question (adapted by Koschmann to reflect multimodal research and reproduced verbatim here) seems pertinent: What forms of social organisation get participants to occasions of text [textual (and non-textual) interaction] to do the work of understanding the [text (and talk)] of others in the very way and at the very times at which they demonstrably so that work?

EM contributions to text and literacy

The first sub-section here will take up the issue of ‘text in context’, as it has been addressed by ethnomethodologists; it will include matters of how far we should cast the net for ‘context’, and how ethnomethodologists have dispensed with the micro/macro and local/global dualisms, the ‘macro’ and ‘global’ being two places commonly mined for ‘context’. The subsequent sub-section will outline how EM has approached the analysis of literacy, with special reference to the work of James Heap.

i. Text in context

The question of how much or to what extent to include ‘context’ in the analysis of text continues to be asked by AL/NLS researchers. It was also discussed, and disagreed on, by participants at the First International Conference of the Discourse Analysis Research Group (1989) that led to the publication of *Text in Context* (Watson & Seiler 1992), a collection of essays on text written from EM perspectives.

The ‘problem’ of text in context generally from an EM point of view comes, at least in part, from the idea that EM is commonly seen as working exclusively with processes. Fox follows Garfinkel in saying that an utterance (or text), as well as its substantive meaning, reveals “features of the *operational structure of common understanding as a process* of production or accomplishment rather than as a product” (2006:434). A text, however, typically confronts its reader with an object that is in some ways fixed or immutable; its meaning is of course relative to the reader, but the object itself and what we might call its ‘signifying potential’ can persist through time and space. Moreover, the *work* that went into the production of the text is most often not available and not recoverable by readers.

What can be done with a process approach when confronted with what is essentially a product in the form of a completed text? To take an example (Lynch 1993:289-90), one of Garfinkel’s students presented the following data: a video of a typist’s hands, accompanied by her running commentary voiceover of ‘what she was doing.’ The result is a pair of ‘intelligible documents’: the real-time video sequence, and the typed page that

can be read, copied, and analysed independently of the real-time sequence. On the videotape, the typed page can be seen as the product of a course of work, but when the page is read as a disengaged text, its coherent semiotic features implicate a different order of ‘authorship’. The completed sentences stand as documents of a coherent set of ‘ideas’, ‘intentions’, ‘grammatical competencies’, and so forth, which no longer display the local history of production documented by the videotape (ibid.:290).

For Garfinkel, the two documents stand in a relation of ‘asymmetric alternation’. It is possible to use the videotape to recover the typed text, but we cannot carry out the reverse operation, i.e. find details of the work extrinsic to the typing itself.

However, there are occasions where lived work is not amenable. For example, Sacks’ study of Weber’s sociological reconstruction of features of Ancient Judaism (1999, Schegloff 1999a) is a case where a method is brought to bear for a reconstruction that cannot observe the phenomenon it addresses. Schegloff suggests that this paper should be seen as comprising part of the same project as another of Sacks’ works, *Notes on Police Assessment of Moral Character* (1972): “Both articles... are addressed to the problem of the methods used to do practical theorising: to bring to bear formulatable procedures on a set of observables so as to arrive at assertions grounded in them which are not otherwise accessible” (ibid.:15). Sacks notes that Weber “assure[s] the competence of his readers” (1999:37) by omitting the materials analysed, and by transforming biblical idioms into sociological ones; the result is that he limits his possible audience to those who have a

familiarity with the Old Testament, its commentaries, and with sociological analyses. Weber’s enterprise is comparable in its essentials to that of the police: “Sacks is concerned with the ways in which the deployment of these methods is constrained and warranted, and how the outcomes of their application are assessed” (Schegloff 1999:15). Schegloff schematises this as follows (ibid.):

	<i>Source</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Criterion</i>
<i>Police</i>	appearances	suspicion	incongruity	reasonableness
<i>Weber</i>	document	reconstruction	interrogation	recognisability

Schegloff’s aim in this juxtaposition is to “make explicit the treatment of Weber as a practical theorist, as object of inquiry rather than as scholarly precedent, colleague and resource, as engaged with common-sense knowledge and inference, even if – [as] with the police – in a specialised corner of the mundane world of everyday life” (ibid.:17). Thus, the same writing practices that Weber uses to limit his audience to the technically adept also appeal to the practical understandings and methods recognisable to that audience.

A number of possibilities therefore present themselves depending on the aim of the study:

1. If the work cannot be observed, then a standard is needed for judging the work that has gone into the product (in this case, writing).¹³ In Sacks’ case, this was to reconstruct the methods used to get from the original data (Old Testament) to an analysis. This exercise is one of an inference from the text to those activities that must have gone into its production.
2. In cases of ‘ethnographic’ studies of academic writing, the writing itself may well not be amenable but various other relevant ethnographic details will be (cf. Button 2007:623): accounts from the writers, accounts from the assessors or readers, supporting literature, general observational data, works in progress, and so on.
3. Alternatively, topics can be chosen where the lived work is available (cf. Sacks 1999).

In short, EM will always look to find the process, and there is always a process to be found (Sharrock & Ikeya 2000, Carlin 2007, Heath & Luff 1996). EM solves the text in context problem by removing ‘text’ as a reified object and placing it “within the midst of what goes on” (Button 2007:623). Moreover, although we can talk about the ‘production

¹³ Wes Sharrock, personal communication.

career' and 'production problems' of a written artefact coming into being, it is "locally evolved" in this course (Watson 2009:19); so in text generation, the use of the terms product/production only signals stages in the processual ways that the text, or reading thereof, comes into being.

One major fault-line between the contributors to *Text in Context* was between those who wanted an overtly macro-theoretical consideration of, for example, power to be taken to account in EM analyses; and those for whom an EM position already takes this into account or allows such consideration by virtue of, for instance, power being bound up in the reflexive relationship that text finds itself in and contributes to. EM frequently seeks to demonstrate that issues such as power can be seen in its analyses when used as a scenic members' term, and it can claim to have an important role to play in such analyses as it is well placed to demonstrate *how* settings that incorporate evident power imbalances are achieved.

Watson describes this in typically EM fashion:

Having constituted 'the system', participants then orient themselves to it as if it had an objective existence prior to and independent of their discourse. Thus constraints are to be found not in such reified entities as rules, structures, or class interests, but in the practices of participants. Since constraints are to be found in the very practices of participants, the macro-micro dichotomy is false (or, rather, it is an artefact of conventional social science reasoning), and the search for the link between macro and micro, the preoccupation of the social sciences, throughout the 1980s, is a futile quest (ibid.:xx).

In my view, this formulation is a clear challenge to the kind of endeavour that AL/NLS has begun to investigate, i.e. "that it is productive to link these perspectives with more macro-level social theory, such as actor network theory and by bringing in the work of theorists such as Scollon, Smith, Holland and the continuing work of Lave, which theorises the complexities of relationships between social structure and agency" (Barton & Hamilton 2005:32). The temptation of such an endeavour is understandable, not only given specific criticisms of AL/NLS for focusing on the local (Brandt & Clinton 2002), but also the sociological imperative that local findings must somehow be linked to a wider context. My view is that faith in the 'macro' is ill-placed as a way of substantiating the importance of local empirical studies, and that this is not only to downplay the significance of these studies but potentially also to risk losing that which makes them 'practice' studies in the first place. Even if one is determined to take this course, then actor network theory (ANT) is probably not a good place to start, seeing as *all* the major figures of ANT have disowned the micro-macro distinction (Law 1992, Callon & Latour 1981).

For Blommaert (2005), ethnography would seem to provide all the context we could need. He suggests, and I agree, that ethnography gives us access to more than small-scale, local and contingent events. “It is, and always has been, an approach in which the analysis of small phenomena, is set against an analysis of big phenomena, and in which both levels can only be understood in terms of one another” (ibid.:16). However, I think he reaches the right conclusion via the wrong route. Local participants are more than capable of building up the macro in their local interactions. This view is common to ANT, EM, Foucault, phenomenology and constructivism (Fox 1999, 2008). Blommaert talks of the ‘macro’ as providing the *ultimate explanation* for instances of discourse. For example, he cites as an *a priori* maxim for the study of discourse that “We have to conceive of communication events as ultimately influenced by *the structure of the world system*” (op. cit.:15). Elsewhere, inequality and history are cited as sample macro ‘issues’, and some idea of the accessibility of the macro is found when Blommaert talks of the “general idea of invisible or only partly visible (macro) discursive systems imposing constraints on what people can do with language” (ibid.:102-3). It seems that Blommaert is guilty of recourse to Watson’s ‘reified entities’, especially when inequality and history – both locally ‘achievable’ – are cited as macro-level influences. Most of all, though, the idea of ‘invisible systems’ brings to mind the argument that it is perfectly licit to look for macro influences on actions, but it becomes difficult when one tries to warrant them.

Brandt & Clinton adduced ANT in their critique of NLS (2002) as a way of *expanding* perspectives on literacy as a social practice, due to their perception of NLS as giving precedence to local literacy events. In their view, the emphasis on the local in NLS retained a number of standard dualisms that they suggested are collapsed in the work of Latour. Brandt & Clinton expect that stressing the influence of literacy beyond the ‘local’ will be palatable to those who work within the social practice paradigm, but that it has been insufficiently considered in NLS. They want to work with the idea that there is a mutual connection, and possibly common influence, between local instantiations of literacy and distant contexts. The second major ANT-inspired proposal is that literacy itself be considered an actant,¹⁴ in that it “participates in social practices in the form of objects and technologies, whose meanings are not usually created nor exhausted by the locales in which they are taken up” (ibid.:338). In this way, they wish to reintroduce some autonomous aspects of literacy without recourse to the autonomous model in its entirety.

¹⁴ The term used within ANT for an object that has ‘agency’ in a given social context.

In the wake of this article, Brian Street responded severally (2003a and b) to these points. He agrees that many are ‘important caveats’ against an overemphasis of the local in NLS studies, and he is at pains to point out that the best-conceived NLS work in fact focuses on the relationship between the local and the ‘distant’. However, despite noting that “We need conceptual tools that can deal with the local and the distant” (2003a:2826), Street insists that in characterising the shift from “observing literacy events” to “conceptualising literacy practices” (ibid.:2827), NLS can provide “both a methodological and empirical way of dealing with this relation and thereby...[take] account of Brandt and Clinton’s concern with the ‘limits of the local’” (ibid.).

Street has reservations about several of Brandt & Clinton’s suggestions. Foremost, he points out that the “features of distant literacies are actually no more autonomous than those of local literacies” (ibid.:2826), though they may be seen as ‘distant’, ‘new’ or ‘hegemonic’ by local users. Another is “the apparent suggestion that distant literacies come to local contexts with their force and meaning intact” (ibid.:2827). Street prefers to show how literacy practices are appropriated and made suitable to local circumstances. A third objection is seemingly found in the proximity of objects as ‘actants’ to the technological determinism that Street was trying to avoid in his original critiques of the autonomous model. In my view, these points cohere almost completely with this defence of EM by Suchman (2007:16):

There is in my view no inherent conflict between an ethnomethodological approach to studies of situated action and an interest in cultural historical continuities and their effects. The commitment to situated action orients us, however, always to the question of just how, and for whom, culturally and historically recognizable formations take on their relevance to the moment at hand. With respect to the durability and reach of established social orders, the dichotomies of ‘micro’ and ‘macro,’ ‘local’ and ‘global,’ are replaced by questions of location and extent.

I think the lesson for situated studies is clear: we need to study the local to have anything to say about what is beyond it (Latour 1983, Latour & Woolgar 1986).

To conclude, the notions of text in context, and textual communication that mediates/propagates communicative and other practices currently pursued by NLS analysts, are commensurate with the EM idea of finding the social order in a given setting. In terms of how far we need to look for context in order to explicate or describe a text, we should generally look to the context as being already always available and to hand. The idea of studying practices should itself go a long way to solving this problem, as much as it is a

solution and not simply an agenda for studies. The question of what we want to look for should influence the question of where and how we look.

ii. *EM approaches to reading and writing*

An EM approach to any kind of data contrasts radically with the approaches of formal analysis. Rather than demonstrating, so to speak, ‘this is what you get when you use *this* theory on *this* data’, EM has it that the answers are already present.

For this reason, there is little point in providing a survey of EM studies of writing in terms of the general features of analysis. The nearest thing to a programme of studies appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Anderson 1978, 1986, McHoul 1980, Morrison 1981, O’Neill 1981). The aim of this ‘programme’ was to show how science was as much a result of textual practices as it is practical laboratory practices (ibid.).

Although O’Neill mentions the ‘textual analysis’ necessary for an understanding of scientific papers, he is well aware of the desirability of other data to explicate them. As well as laboratory observation, for instance, at the very least we would need to find out how the indexicality of the text is repaired, or repairable, by a reader. O’Neill writes that “we consider the pragmatic and rhetorical functions of scientific language to require study by social scientists and we do not think this task can be legislated as literary work only” (ibid.:116). In addition, the pragmatic aspects of disciplinary reasoning, refutation, use of evidence and textual accountability, to name but a few, need to be pursued. With this in mind, although some EM treatments of text can at a cursory glance look like a mode of text analysis, the matter for EM is not the inherent features of the text itself, but what can be gleaned from it in terms of revealing or eliciting writing and reading practices.

Without wanting to suggest a typology of EM studies of reading and writing, then, it is possible to suggest a few themes that sooner or later all hark back to the accountability of reading and writing. Some studies address the *accountability of the text*, using apparatuses such as those of CA (Anderson 1978, Lury 1982, Sharrock & Ikeya 2000). Very much related to this are studies concerning the ‘*how*’ of *reading* – how the reading done by members gets carried out given the relevance of an aspect of identity, including academic identity (Sacks 1999, McHoul 1980, Anderson & Sharrock 1984). We can include in this theme discussions of the text/reading pair (Livingston 1995) and gestalt contextures of reading (Watson 2009). Again, only analytically different is the idea of reading and writing in structuring communication, e.g. as *textually mediated*

communication (Garfinkel 1967, Smith 1990, Heath & Luff 1996, Lynch & Bogen 1996). The ‘programme’ mentioned above addressed the *transformation from embodied practices to written accounts* for a community (Garfinkel et al. 1981, O’Neill 1981, Eglin & Hester 2003). Finally, we can mention the work of James Heap, the only ethnomethodologist to overtly address literacy, who has written about the *sanctionable identification of reading and writing* in their broadest understanding (1991a & b, 1992, 2000). I will briefly outline some of the major themes within Heap’s work, as I believe that not only these can be cast in a way that makes them clearly sympathetic to some of Street’s own premises for the NLS, but also provide a series of useful concepts.

Most notable among these themes are Heap’s insistence on the need for multiple disciplinary perspectives in the comprehensive study of literacy (1986, 1990, 1992); critique of cognitivist or individualist theories of reading and writing; the consideration of ‘boundary problems’ in the study of reading and writing, that is, when some activity can reasonably said to count as ‘reading’ or ‘writing’; and the role of the normative in both theories of reading and writing, and in situated judgements. Although these themes can be stated as I have just done, analytically, they are closely bound up.

A good place to start is with Heap’s rejection of the possibility of a ‘metaperspective’ on literacy research (1992) in favour of an ‘ecumenical’ (Brandt 1992:317) inter- or multidisciplinary approach. Heap repeatedly draws a distinction between the natural and human sciences (1986, 1991a, 1992), and their differences in loci of interest and in ‘domain assumptions’, i.e. what they allow us to ‘see’ (1992). Heap suggests that “there is no single conception of science that each relevant discipline shares. The most and best we can hope for is multidisciplinary research on literacy within each, or any, conception of science on which researchers involved can agree” (ibid.:35). Natural science apprehends, *inter alia*, “theoretically posited objects...[which are] based upon empirically observable, measurable events, occurrences, and phenomena” (ibid.:37). These properties make the objects easily transferable across contexts, so that natural scientists can say that they are observing and measuring the same things. Similar approaches can be found in psychology (1990) and traditional approaches to sociology (1991b).

In the *Metaperspective* paper, Heap posits two other types of science that each “assume a domain of objects meaningful to the actors whose actions and activities are studied” (1992:37). He distinguishes between social science (which studies the normative grounds of persons’ actions) and cultural science (which studies the “constitution of action and activities with respect to their normative content and rational properties of their

organisation” [ibid.]). By this definition, both EM and AL would be subsumed under the latter heading.

Cultural science inquiry uses “a situated perspective derived from theorising in phenomenology, existentialism, and ordinary language philosophy” (ibid.:50). Heap says a number of interesting things about this ‘situated’ approach. For a start: “Instead of a concern with the actual, empirical identity of some action, the situated perspective is concerned with the *possible* identity of that action...insofar as members themselves could determine that identity, because all that members themselves have to go on in their interactions is what the actions of others look like, what they likely mean” (ibid.). This represents a divergence from the subjective, individual interpretation of sociologies such as symbolic interactionism. Cultural science recognises that there are social and historical constraints to “what anyone can mean by saying something” (1990:55). The same thing applies to literacy: “the objectivist perspective tells us what reading is; the situated perspective orients to what counts as reading in the settings where persons understand someone to be reading” (ibid.). The recognition of an activity as reading or writing, its value and its suitability, will all be established in “the context of social relations, rather than [in] any [inherent] properties of reading or writing acts” (1995:579).

Heap’s work is therefore replete with discussions of ‘event recognition’ (1992, 2000), i.e. where actions and events are said to have been recognised (or recognisable) as instances of reading or writing. Many of these are classroom studies where there is a teacher leading the class and a clear source of sanction or censure. When we are studying, for example, fluent reading or error, the objectivist position of natural science or normative social sciences will potentially provide us with “errors which were not reacted to” (1990:58). Within the situated perspective, the normative order does not define error; rather, “persons *use* normative orders (correctly and incorrectly) to define error” (ibid., emphasis added). An error is defined not by context-free attributes, but when “an event is made public *as an error* by someone’s reaction to it, in some context” (ibid.:59).

The drawing up of such boundaries is a constantly-giving source of material which Heap taps in order to critique natural scientific and *a priori* approaches to literacy. Reading and writing are, though, if nothing else *cultural* activities (1991a) and there are cultural restraints upon what can be considered as reading or writing (1991b). Thus, when decisions concerning the boundaries of reading/writing are made on a daily basis, it is perhaps to be expected that theories of either will easily take on a normative character. The problems with these theories that Heap pursues seem therefore not to reside overly in

the fact that they are normative *per se*, rather in the *a priori*, cognitivist leanings of many of these theories that become the source of how reading/writing ‘should be’ done:

The dual, reflexive character of cognitive theories of writing take it for granted that persons will decide what is writing-relevant, i.e., what will make a difference in and to the composition process. In this way, such theories appear to sidestep the problem of relevance: they simply leave the problem of relevance to the agents, the members of society who write, somehow. In so doing, however, they fail to note that *deciding* relevance of scenic phenomena *to* writing is *part of* writing itself. If a comprehensive theory were possible, it would have to model how members decide the relevance of scenic phenomena to writing (2000:83).

The presence of Cartesianism in these cognitive theories posits a single subject as the agent of the writing processes, whereby everything outside the writing subject needs to be ‘represented inside the skin’ (2000).

However, in any given case of writing, “it is an *empirical issue* as to whether there is a single, solitary author” (ibid.:87, emphasis added), not a conceptual starting point. It is possible that in the majority of cases, texts are co-authored in the broadest sense of this term. Heap here makes two other points as to the social and normative nature of writing. First, it is not just ‘the author’ who decides the relevances and saliences of writing. Other/s can contribute by not only providing scenic features as saliences, but also an audience for the writer to orient to (1989), and can be a source of restraint, resource, or censure (ibid.). “Second, the boundary between writing and non-writing events is dynamic and unstable because it involves others making courses of action conditionally relevant, and possibly consequential” (2000:86). The upshot of these points is that “it is no longer sensible to ask how the relevance of events outside the skin of the writer is recognised” (2000:87):

Others make certain events and issues salient. ‘The writer’ is thrown into circumstances, certainly in the classroom, of being with others. And ‘the writer’ as a term of identification can include those others, in ways made manifest solely through members’ culturally possible ways of organising their activities (ibid.).

In cases where writing is said to be publicly available, what counts as writing is agreed upon socially and it is not a question of how these ‘external’ relevances are modelled. In the ‘boundary problem’ pointed out by Heap within these cognitive models, then, it appears that the issue of what counts and does not count as writing is of a piece with its socially achieved nature.

The difference between descriptive and normative theories for Heap is that the former can be said to consist of a series of logical elements, the presence of which constitutes X and the lack of which, not-X. Any *normative* element within either a theory or ‘on the

ground' will need to bear in mind not only a general conception of writing, but also the circumstances of writing; moreover, speaking in normative terms, judgements are available that allow X to be evaluated along the scale 'X-done-well-to-badly' as well as 'not-X' (2000). I have found this distinction to be useful in the characterisation of student work, especially when dealing with writing that is on the boundary of counting as acceptable work in given circumstances.

Thus, the normative approach that Heap sees as inherent to the cultural sciences is sympathetic to Street's ongoing concerns with definitions of literacy evidently inspired by natural science methodologies and descriptive-normative theories. In similar vein to Street, Heap hints that it is possible to talk about the *skill* of reading and writing, only not as separate from its cultural, social, and normative aspects (1991a:14, 1990:55, 1992:41). Heap's account of the dual, reflexive nature of writing theories mirrors a distinction that I have thought useful for some time – that of the difference between the *contextless normativity* of traditional approaches to literacy, and the *situated perspective to normativity* as set out in Heap. Ironically, the first type of normativity would commonly go by the name 'ideology', which might suggest that the ideological model of literacy has been mis-named.

Academic literacies and theories of practice

Both AL and NLS characterise themselves as *practice* approaches to literacy. Although it can hardly be said that writers inspired by the NLS have treated the notion of practice as unproblematic, they have not been overly concerned with its fullest theoretical and philosophical expression.¹⁵ In particular, I am thinking of Stephen Turner's swingeing attacks on practice (1994, 2001, 2007, 2012). Turner's influence on those who consider themselves as working within the practice paradigm has been far-reaching, and, even though his criticisms have been rejected by many (Wenger 1998, Schatzki 1996, 2001a & b, Barnes 2001, Swidler 2001, Collins 2001, Rouse 2001, Pickering 1997, Lizardo 2007, Bohman 1997), his are pervasive comments. The effect of accepting or distancing oneself from them is to genuinely clarify a position with regard to the study of practice.

Despite the severe and wide-ranging nature of Turner's critique of practice in *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994, hereafter *SToP*), Turner's criticisms do not seem to have

¹⁵ In a recent discussion of Bourdieu's influence on literacy scholars, Baynham & Prinsloo (2009) append Schatzki's views to those of Bourdieu. Schatzki commonly sets up his Wittgensteinian papers in opposition to Bourdieu and Giddens (1996, 1997).

had a lasting effect on EM. This is due in part to two papers by Mike Lynch (1995, 1997), who points out some inaccuracies in Turner's characterisation of EM/CA, but otherwise draws a fairly sympathetic picture of what Turner is trying to achieve. In the first of these papers, Lynch applies what I have come to call the 'Turner Test' to the papers in an edited collection (Chaiklin & Lave 1993). I carry out a similar exercise in this section. First, I will draw out some of the key features of the Turner/Lynch critiques. Having drawn up a set of criteria, it will be experimentally applied to representative studies from the AL canon.

i. The 'Turner Test' and beyond

In *SToP*, Turner critiqued various implications of practice. Despite practice approaches ostensibly being anti-foundational, 'practice' phenomena are irreducible and therefore themselves foundational to social life (ibid.:9). Turner addresses a large family of similar concepts – presuppositions, ideologies, worldviews, tacit knowledge, frameworks – even 'culture'. One of the questions that inspires Turner's investigations relates to the possible ontological status of practices and cognate concepts:

These are not everyday objects. And they are given additional, mysterious properties – they are said to be 'shared', or 'social'. How seriously should we take this language? Are there really objectifiable things that we should think of as being shared or inherited? Or are these merely figures of speech?... What do they stand for that enables them to play this kind of central role in our thought? (ibid.:2)

These questions hint at the major problems which are addressed in successive chapters of *SToP*: practices as causal; as shared; and the transmission of practices from one person or cohort to another. These characteristics can be summarised as follows.

Turner asserts that either "a practice is an object with causal properties, powers of adaptation and the like, or it is solely a descriptive term, used to identify a set of things with a common feature, ...[but] which has no causal powers or structure of its own" (ibid.:15). The 'set of things' could be, for example, the repetitive behaviours of an individual; these behaviours do not necessarily qualify as *habitual*, but where they do, Turner suggests that this requires a mental component that acts as a cause, and that "claims about it are a matter of causal inference from its observable manifestations" (ibid.). This reasoning is replicated, and sharpened, at the collective level. Where cause cannot be imputed to 'human nature' or similar, i.e. where there are differences in the

same activity between groups or categories, the 'cause' for the difference must be otherwise imputed, e.g. to culture, or practice.

The idea of 'shared' practices supposes both that what is shared is in some way 'the same', and that it can be transmitted in more or less unadulterated form so that subsequent performances can be recognised. A definition of 'practices' in this understanding would be, then, "those nonlinguistic conditions for an activity that are *learned*" (2001:129); a practice, "an activity that requires its genuine participants to have learned something of this tacit sort in order to perform" (ibid.). As Turner sees it, there is a "need...to connect the stuff of thought to the world of cause and substance" (1994:37). The attractiveness of this way of thinking is that practices or presuppositions provide more "continuity than the words or acts which exhibit the practice or presuppositions" (ibid.); *something* must be seen in the enduring of uniform behaviours that explains their reproduction. A *causal* view of practice is a neat way of warranting interpretations of future behaviours as the same. But what Turner objects to is that they then become quasi-objects, or non-public collective objects (1997:345) with assumed mental content: "Put crudely, if people get the same things in their heads, they need to get in there in some way. But it isn't so easy to imagine a way of them getting in there in such a way that the key property of these theoretical objects, their sameness, can be preserved" (ibid.:346).

The deceptive explanatory power of this understanding of 'practice' comes from its identifying uniformity in behaviours as the result of a non-visible cause. Problems occur when, in speaking of 'shared' practices, we have to establish ways of explaining what is common when people come to be competent in something considered 'the same' via diverse routes. Because "such hidden collective objects (for example, tacit 'agreements' on how to interpret explicit rules) are 'realized' through a variety of situated actions, one is left with the question of how they can be 'transmitted' from person to person, and in different practical contexts, without losing their conceptual coherence" (Lynch 1995:584).

This polemic has been ably met, on EM's part, by Mike Lynch. His complaint is that Turner casts too widely for his targets:

At times, his expository 'translations' seem appropriate, but at other times they seem out of place. Many Wittgensteinians, phenomenologists, ethnomethodologists, and pragmatists also reject the idea that 'practices' are some sort of 'stuff' that exerts mechanical force on human behaviour, but for some reason Turner barely acknowledges this (1997:342).

Turner provides a clear choice to students of practice: "either we reiterate explicit conceptions of overt practices, thus saying nothing unfamiliar, or we abstract from the

overt cases to postulate ‘tacit’ practices that somehow govern the way persons co-ordinate their activities” (Lynch, *ibid.*). While those writing in EM/CA would almost uniformly see themselves as belonging to the first group, *SToP* places them in the second. .

Lynch’s view is that Turner’s target “is a kind of collective cognitivism” (1995:583) of the kind that EM itself habitually disowns. However, Lynch suggests that Turner’s criticisms do not necessarily apply only to “ambitious theoretical attempts to develop general social and cultural explanations”; they can apply equally to substantive studies of practice. Lynch uses the other work reviewed (Chaiklin & Lave 1993) to demonstrate this. He focuses on Lave’s introduction, and one ethnographic study, by Minick.

Lave’s account starts by critiquing “‘conventional’ cognitive and social theories of learning” as they appeal to “‘decontextualised’ conceptions of knowledge” (Lynch 1995:586). This is seen as a contradiction in terms, and is cited both to undermine these theories of learning, and to deflate “a debilitating feature of classroom discourse and other formalised instructional and evaluative situations” (*ibid.*:586-7). This feature is that people often learn by participation in practical activities, and that these same skills are better learnt in the practical situation than in a formal or classroom analogue. But for Lave, the same theories of learning that prioritise decontextualised learning and have distanced themselves from learning in everyday contexts have taken on this same ‘folk status’ through assuming “a taken-for-granted role in the actual production of classroom activities” (*ibid.*:587).

Lave therefore wants a theory of situated knowledge that is distinct both from positivist, scientifically-informed theories of decontextualised learning, and from unreflective folk practices. Her solution “is to locate an ‘epistemology’ within the actual circumstances of situated practice” (*ibid.*:588). This epistemology is directly inspired by the same philosophical views confronted by Lave, with the result that conventional academic pedagogies of decontextualised theories of learning and knowledge find an expression in professional teaching and instructional practices. “From the perspective of an alternative theory of situated learning, such practices are misguided because the educators...adhere to a theory of decontextualised knowledge. Although erroneous, this theory itself is ‘contextualised’ in formal educational settings” (*ibid.*). Thus, what Lave calls the ‘Euro-American practices and worldview’ is manifest in the classroom and able to cause real damage in tangible situations.

Lynch suggests that, following Turner, “we should be alert to the way Lave’s argument has submerged ‘situated practices’ in schools and other concrete settings within

a familiar kind of ‘hidden abstract object’” (ibid.:589), the worldview or ideology. The question is whether this ‘situated’ analysis avoids the problems of overtly ideological analysis. Lynch finds an opportunity for this investigation in Minick’s chapter; Minick “tries to show how they [classroom episodes] embody a global, background ‘ideology’ associated with the production of ‘representational meanings’” (ibid.). In Turner’s terms, Minick has discovered a ‘hidden collective object’.

Lynch finds that the ‘discovery’ of an ideology behind the actions is far from inevitable. In contrast to those who work under the auspices of EM, SSK, Wittgensteinian-inspired philosophy and similar, “Lave and Minick insist on delving beneath the surface of an action to expose the ‘cultural underpinnings of the world in which we live’. Their strategy for doing this preserves the grand dichotomies of social theory at one step removed” (ibid.:594, emphasis deleted). The most unfortunate result of this enterprise is that the task of these ostensibly ‘situated’ studies becomes one “of revealing not that the grand dichotomies correctly describe the world, but that participants selectively ‘construct’ their situated activities in terms of such schemes” (ibid.).

Lynch notes that Turner’s arguments allow us to “question the cogency of imputing a global worldview” (ibid.:595) to those involved in Minick’s data. Minick did not attempt to obtain the teachers’ views of his analysis of their actions. Rather, for his argument to work it requires the collaboration of the reader in assuming that the teachers’ actions were either caused by or in accordance with a characteristic, ‘dominant’, collective ‘worldview’, and Lynch finds it easy enough to read the same data without falling back on theoretical explanations. In Minick’s data and Lave’s arguments, we can see ‘moral orders’ related to those that Macbeth (1996) found in Brown et al.’s influential work (1989).

Lynch’s conclusion is that while Turner’s arguments are serious critiques of both theoretical treatments of practice and “theoretically informed descriptions of singular episodes” (ibid.), they do not apply to studies or approaches that describe local practices without seeking recourse to grand theory in order to ‘explain’ them. Lynch defends such studies against accusations of being uninteresting or insignificant, something that is premised in Turner’s work (2001:136). This approach may not endear these studies to those who indeed seek wide-ranging solutions to contemporary theoretical problems;

What they should realize, however, is that a declared opposition to ‘positivism’ in favour of one or another theory of ‘situated practices’ guarantees very little. The often-cited ‘heterogeneity’ of situated practices raises immense trouble for any theory that would link such practices to static, schematic

conceptions of ideology, discourse or structure lying ‘beneath’ the apparent surface of action. Even when a cultural analyst supposes that the relevant theoretical reduction is ‘inscribed’ in the field of practice as the result of pervasive metaphysical beliefs, a familiar burden remains – namely, to demonstrate that the ‘myth’ in question indeed operates in the situation described (ibid.:596).

Since the publication of *SToP* (1994), and partly in reaction to it, other accounts of practice have emerged that largely avoid the problems Turner set out. He now characterises the concepts he addressed in *SToP* as ‘classical’ practice theories and suggests they can be represented as follows (2007:111-2, verbatim):

SOCIAL	NON-SOCIAL
<i>Cognitive/Social</i> Paradigms, <i>Weltanschauung</i> , presuppositions, structures of consciousness or meanings, collective consciousness, systems of collective representations, tacit knowledge, the ‘rules’ in conversational [sic] analysis, the Searle of <i>Speech Acts</i> , etc.	<i>Cognitive/Non-social</i> Artificial intelligence rule and symbolic Representational model without sharing of rules.
<i>Sub-Cognitive/Social</i> Skills, habitus, mores, ‘forms of life’ and life-world, etc., conceived as ‘collective’ (perhaps in an Oakshottian sense, probably in Shils’s sense), Kripke’s rules, collective intentions.	<i>Sub-cognitive/Non-social</i> Habits, skills, etc. as the ‘tacit’ part of an ensemble in which there are explicit parts (activities, rituals, performances, etc.) that the Individual adjusts to.

Table 3 – Stephen Turner’s typology of practice theories

More recent accounts of practice (‘post-classical practice theories’) are described by Turner as being literally outside the box. Two of the most prominent accounts have been developed by Joseph Rouse and the Wittgensteinian Theodore Schatzki. Turner notes that both Schatzki and Rouse reject the idea that practices are causal (ibid.); rather, they are *normative*. Schatzki is able to solve Turner’s problems of *externality* and *continuity* (2007:115) with the idea “that ‘integrative practices’ themselves operate on practices producing coherence and ‘orchestration’ between individuals, which in turn produces the ‘field of possibility’ of the lifeworld” (ibid.). Thus, practices are not reducible to individuals, and are not ‘shared’. Rather, they cohere or ‘hang together’. I would argue that these features have long been available in EM.

To recap, I have sequestered criteria for evaluating purportedly ‘situated’ studies. Problems may surface if any of the following apply:

- **Non-public** or **hidden collective objects** are cited as **causes of** or **explanations for** situated phenomena;

- This includes **theoretical explanations** that seek to explain visible phenomena by reference to the **non-visible**, whether these are underlying **structures, discourses**, or **ideologies**; or posited **cognitive** or **psychological features** attributed as **essences** or **possessions** of the individual;
- Practices are considered to be **shared** or have been **analogously transmitted** by virtue of some **theoretical (mental) construct** rather than by reference to situated data;
- The account **overintellectualises** descriptions of action by ascribing **constructive, ratiocinative** processes where none are evident.

ii. *How practice appears in AL analyses*

Before going on to test examples of AL writing against these criteria, a few other comments are necessary. If we were to provide the most frequent ‘family resemblances’ in describing practices, we might say that they were “typical, uniform, repetitive, cohort-independent ways” of carrying out activities (Heap 1991a:25). They have coherence across space and time, and are praxiological – it is necessary to *carry out* actions (Peters 2003). This is all seen in Baynham & Prinsloo’s discussion (2009).

However, Baynham & Prinsloo are right in pointing out that there is “some slippage between issues of scale” (ibid.:6) in social literacy studies. They cite the usages of ‘practice’ given by Tusting et al. (2000:210, verbatim) to this end:

- a. To refer to observable, collectable and/or documentable specific ethnographic detail of situated literacy events, involving real people, relationships, purposes, actions, places, times, circumstances, feelings, tools and resources.
The term ‘practices’ in this sense often contrasts with, and hence complements the term ‘texts’, since it refers to those other aspects of literacy which go beyond the text itself.
- b. To refer to culturally recognisable patterns of behaviour, which can be generalised from the observation of specifics.
The term ‘practices’ in this sense often includes ‘textual practices’: the culturally recognisable patterns for constructing texts.

Tusting et al. note that ‘practice’ allows the linkage of ethnographic data and theory, but that the term is potentially confusing because of indiscriminate usage of these two understandings. Moreover, “There was some feeling that...[usage of ‘practice’] should be reserved for the second [definition]” (ibid.).

It may appear that, in light of Turner’s critiques, the preference for the second definition may in fact be a preference for the ‘wrong’ one. However, it is a definition that could readily be made to work if operationalised at the level of *accountable* actions. Moreover, both Tusting et al. and Maybin (cited in Street, 2000) are clear that identifying this kind of practice starts with inference from ethnographic data, as opposed to positing invisible entities and then looking for ‘evidence’ in data to act as ‘proof’ of their existence and influence. The division of (a) and (b) above seems to be unnecessary one, not least given the ethnomethodological challenge laid down by Sharrock & Button: “*show that you can collect a corpus of data which is comprised of instances of ‘social action’ without presupposing the organisation of a ‘social structure’ in the assembly of that very collection*” (1991:158). One may talk about the ethnographic detail of specific events, but it would be an odd kind of ethnography that did not seek generalisable practices. The same kind of argument would also appear to call into doubt the utility of a distinction between the visibility of literacy events and the non-visibility of constituents of literacy practices (Hamilton, op. cit.).

The second feature of usages (a) and (b) is whether literacy practices are to be found within texts, beyond texts, or both. Part of the problem here comes from the fact that ‘textual practices’ can only really be understood in one way, the same way perhaps that ‘sexual practices’ can only really refer to “the sexual behaviours and acts a person performs” (Schatzki 1996:85), which again suggests a synthesis of usages (a) and (b). ‘Textual practices’ in terms of the *features* of a text must surely take in both the recurrent, etc., characteristics of the text as compared with other texts, *and* those features that allow the text to be comprehended.¹⁶

¹⁶ Turner (2001) hits upon an awkward point with regard to ‘linguistic practices’. He begins by defining practices as “nonlinguistic conditions for an activity that are *learned*” (ibid.:129). Linguistic practices “are not sufficiently different from other practices to regard them as likely to have a radically different character” (ibid.:130). This includes “the non-linguistic learned conditions for the use of the language” (ibid.). This begs a series of questions, not least: how can there be linguistic practices at all when we have said that practices are non-linguistic preconditions? This would seem to be a *reductio ad absurdum* to the conclusion that we can only talk of linguistic practices in terms of such preconditions.

iii. *Practice in AL: Turner (1999), and Lillis (1999)*

These papers appear in the same volume (Jones et al. 1999), and indeed in the same section on “Mystery and Transparency in Academic Literacies”. Turner and Lillis are concerned to demonstrate that practices around academic writing that ostensibly privilege literal, transparent meaning and “the possibility of absolute clarity of representations of knowledge” (Turner *ibid.*:151), are in fact part of a ‘value system’ that works against groups that have typically had less access to higher education. The frequent usage in these papers of terms such as ‘ideological inscription’, ‘institutional practice’, ‘dominant practice’, ‘discourse of transparency’, ‘configuration of conventions’, and the like is immediately redolent of the family of terms that is the subject of Stephen Turner’s critiques. Joan Turner’s paper, moreover, contains frequent references to the ‘western intellectual tradition’ similar to those in the Lave and Minick papers. These two works, then, seem *prima facie* fair game for the kind of Turner-derived critique that Lynch proposes. With reference to another EM-inspired assessment of ‘situated’ studies (Macbeth 1996), it is clear that ‘moral orders’ are being drawn upon in both Turner and Lillis; the question is, to paraphrase Macbeth, are they aware of their ‘analytic commitments’? Do they present an ideological analysis, or are their approaches tenable as a marriage of situated and critical concerns?

It is clear from the summary in Table 4 that there are similarities among the authors mentioned there. As well as the imputations to a pervasive western worldview or tradition, there is a common argument: that essentially positivist approaches to language are practiced by those who work in formal education. This works along the lines that language and meaning are transparent and representational, literal, and linear.

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Moral order</i>	<i>Role/definition of the 'situated'</i>
Brown, Collins, Duguid (presented in Macbeth 1996, with Macbeth's criticism in parentheses)	The 'situated' is 'authentic' by virtue of being in its 'real' context. Classrooms generate 'ersatz' knowledge through presenting the knowledge of one culture through the framing of another. Real-world 'communities of practice' provide correspondingly real knowledge.	Activity and perception are prior to representation; language, meaning, and action are all indexical; the interdependence of these leads to enculturation; the situated completion of tasks and enculturation therefore become foundational for teaching and learning.
Lave, Minick (presented in Lynch 1995)	Conventional educational theories privilege the ahistorical and acontextual. They support education based upon notions of representational language and literal meaning. These notions are sustained and propagated in formal educational practices. Learning that takes place in everyday contexts is not subject to the 'Euro-American worldview', which downgrades 'situated' understandings.	'Situated' learning is that which takes place in informal contexts. It can therefore be opposed to learning theories with those attributes in the 'moral order' box. Although classrooms are situated too, formal educational contexts use theories of decontextualised learning.
Turner (1999), Lillis (1999)	Academic discourse supports western intellectual ideas of language as transparent. This allows assumptions of "the possibility of absolute clarity of representation of knowledge", of which the autonomous model of literacy is part. Academic writing conventions are likewise viewed as transparent, which works against those less familiar with these discourses, making communication uni-directional and losing the 'voices' of the less privileged.	Situated investigation of text production and practices surrounding it requires ethnographic studies (to address writing in practice, people's understandings of what they are doing, their meaning-making, etc.). These local studies are an antidote to theories of literacy that stress its acontextual or cross-situational aspects.

Table 4 – comparison of three sets of 'situated' studies

In all three cases, there is the suggestion that the 'situated' is in some sense superior to the hegemonic literal, representational, acontextual approaches present in formal education. In AL, the advantage of situated studies is that they allow access to understandings and meaning-making beyond the scope of the autonomous model. While Turner's paper is pitched at an abstract level, Lillis provides sufficient empirical data in defence of her argument to allow for alternative interpretations.

One way of attempting a charitable reading would be to find a way of understanding Lillis' 'institutional practice' as other than a hidden collective object; as published guidance, perhaps, or as recurrent behaviours within the same HEI. I do not think these can be the case, though. Lillis herself describes the confusion in academic writing experienced by all of her participants "not as an individual student phenomenon but as reflecting a dominant practice in HE" (op. cit.:142), while Turner talks of the marginalisation this causes as symbolising "an abiding trace of the value system

constructed by the institution of the university” (op. cit.:151). This practice is moreover “ideologically inscribed” (Lillis op. cit.:127). So while we would ideally want to stop short of claiming that teachers, lecturers, etc. act consciously and purposely as agents of reproduction and marginalisation (Lillis 1997), these same people are being said to share a ‘practice’, a ‘value system’, and an ‘ideology’ which I suspect few of them would espouse. However these studies are situated, they are not situated in the understandings and meanings of the instructors.

The most obvious method of evaluation, though, is to examine Lillis’ data to see whether there are interpretations available other than to say that it shows ideologies at work. The most important aspect of Lynch’s reinterpretation of Minick was that he was able to read the data as demonstrating, not the promotion of a literal, representational conception of meaning within language by the teacher, as posited by Minick, but rather as a successful attempt by the teacher to react to the exigencies of classroom responses. The teacher’s management of the class depended on her evaluations of *possible intended meanings of language* bearing in mind events in the classroom (pupils’ contributions) that had occurred in the preceding moments. It was not a literal but an evidently situated use of language, adequate to the purpose at hand.

An initial snippet of data involves a discussion that Lillis had with her student, Anna, on the directive ‘Be explicit’. Lillis points out that there is no obvious, straightforward notion of explicitness in academic writing, and provides a series of possible meanings: e.g. ‘avoid vague wordings’, ‘make clear link between claim and supporting evidence’, ‘show that you understand key terms’, and so on. These demonstrate that “explicitness is not a unitary text phenomenon” (op. cit.:130). Lillis further notes that each explication of the phrase ‘Be explicit’ suggests further questions, each of which requires its own explanation. It is not entirely clear, though, whether this directive was encountered as a comment in written feedback, or as an a priori maxim for writing generally. If the former, one would imagine that the positioning of the comment at a certain point in the text would enable the student writer to select the correct gloss. However, the latter is more likely, and the problem seems to come about where the gap between tutors’ and students’ understandings of academic writing conventions is meant to be ‘fixed’ by generic written guidance. It is easy to see how the ‘mystery’ can occur if this guidance, where conventions may be presented as “autonomous and discrete phenomena” (ibid.), is consulted prior to seeing similar directives and terminology used with specific meanings in feedback.

However, what we do not have in this discussion are any examples of truly grounded usages of such terminology, which may be found to be adequate to their context.

We do though have the opportunity for this kind of operation a few pages on, where there is one of a number of accounts of attempts “to make sense of tutors’ demands *and the conventions therein*” (op. cit.:132, emphasis added), in this case a student who received negative comments on part of an essay. The essay was written on the following question:

“Working class children are underachieving in schools. How much of this may be attributed to perceived language deficiencies?”

The student decided to focus both on monolingual and bilingual children for this task, thus allowing her to draw on insights from a previous course. However, she did not get the desired response (ibid.:134):

Opening section of Nadia’s final draft	Tutor written comment
Throughout this essay I will be focusing on the types of underachievers.	Your beginning section moves away from the essay title.
Firstly the working class bilinguals and the misleading intelligence tests, of which bilingual children are expected to do.	Need to organise your thoughts more carefully and adhere to the essay title more clearly.
Secondly the working class monolinguals which are underachieving.	
Thirdly I will seek information on how much of this may be attributed to perceived language deficiencies.	

Table 5 – Nadia’s essay and feedback, from Lillis (1999)

Subsequently, the student obtained face-to-face feedback with the tutor in an attempt to understand the comments (ibid.):

She didn’t like it one bit...She said not all bilingual kids are working class. And I turned round and said not all bilingual kids are middle class. She said the question wasn’t about bilingual kids.

Following Lynch’s example, we can ask whether it is possible to read this case study in a way other than as a manifestation of an underlying ideology. I think it is, although the way in which the ‘moral order’ goes to undermine the idea of situated studies is perhaps not quite so clear-cut as it is in the critiques of Lave, Minick, and Brown et al. A further caveat is that this is still a very small fragment of what Lillis describes as a larger body of data (ibid.:129). However I think these comments are defensible for what is presented.

The initial written comments are provided as a response to the opening section of the essay, which is seen as needing work. There is clearly an issue from the tutor's side as to the introduction's adequacy in terms of addressing the task set out in the title, but it is noticeable that bilingualism is not mentioned at this point and there is no written advice that suggests omitting this as a topic. For reasons unclear, a specific way of changing the introduction to fulfil this criterion of relevance is not suggested.

It could be at this stage that the order of the propositions does not suggest enough weight is being given to the central exigency of the essay, as suggested by the title. Language deficiencies, for example, are mentioned *after* the types of children affected, the definition of which is also stated by the student as an aim of the essay. Through stating this aim at the very beginning of the essay, primacy is given to 'who' ("I will be focusing on the types of underachievers"), whereas the question in the title asks 'how much'. It is not until the fourth sentence that this is mentioned, thus potentially giving the impression that this is the lesser of two considerations in the essay. The tutor's comments could easily be read as addressing this; there is no mention of bilingualism in the comments and one could also read them as addressing the organisation rather than the substance. One would not immediately associate bilingualism with 'deficiency', but I find it likely that there could be sufficient differences between ideas of working class and middle class bilingualism for it to be considered as a deficiency – certainly a 'perceived deficiency'.

It is not clear in what context the subsequent conversation between the student and tutor took place; one reading suggests something of a fixation on the idea of bilingualism on the student's part. It could be a case of the student asking questions that turn out to be contingently 'wrong' in terms of scope for including the student's choice of investigation. The point, though, is whether the tutor's comments can be understood as adequate to the situated communication between her and the student.

This is where the distinctions become quite fine. We might say, for instance, that the tutor's comments are meant to push the student in the 'right' direction without, as far as we can gather, spelling out the exact preferred approach. *Prima facie*, the comments work as situated responses insofar as they are meant to be feedback on work-in-progress. Moreover, one can see in the written comments various of the conventions of *essayist literacy* (ibid.:131) made easily available to the student. Lillis says that this is a privileged practice, and not one that is taught to the socially underprivileged, or to those who are not already familiar with it. The 'institutional practice of mystery' is presumably a mechanism for denying those groups the knowledge that would allow them to succeed. But there is

evidence that some of the conventions underlying the practice of essayist literacy are being made available to the student.

The problem, it seems, is one of warranting the argument of ideological analysis. As Lynch (1995:596) writes,

Even when a cultural analyst supposes that the relevant theoretical reduction is 'inscribed' in the field of practice as the result of pervasive metaphysical beliefs, a familiar burden remains – namely, to demonstrate that the 'myth' in question indeed operates in the situation described... the history of social theory should give us little confidence that social theories of practice will solve the familiar equivocalities associated with imputing ideological 'beliefs' to actors in concrete situations when the actors do not explicitly express or acknowledge them.

As in Minick's study, there is no-one to say, "Yes, I happen to believe that meaning can be fully encoded in language forms" (Lynch, *ibid.*:595). The warranting problem, then, occurs when there is an attempt to explain the data rather than describe it. Lillis' and Turner's papers both posit the kind of abstract object that comes in for scepticism from Stephen Turner and Mike Lynch.

However, as Lillis notes, there is a real-life aspect to this: "What is at stake is the nature of their participation in HE" (*op. cit.*:144). Moreover, the source of the confusion was the nature of their contact with teaching staff, the very people who we are told embody and instantiate the 'practice of mystery'. Is this so very different from drawing conclusions about concrete practices that have been located within situated data?

From the point of view of situated studies, there would be at least two reasons to omit an ideological analysis. First, it is quasi-explanatory. There will be no means of proving or disproving such an argument, and most if not all data could be made to agree with it. Second, an ideological analysis is not required for Lillis' paper to provide powerful conclusions concerning how certain students come to feel marginalised. It is possible to closely describe how marginalisation or disadvantage occurs without recourse to "quasi-causal 'discourses', 'practices' and 'epistemes' which seem to hover in a theoretical space above the mundane conduct they are said to determine" (Lynch 1995:584).

Communities and practices

One final task in this chapter involves briefly taking into consideration the ways in which practices have been aligned with types of group. Prominent efforts have been characterisations of the *discourse community* (DC) (Swales 1990) and the *community of practice* (CoP) (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). The first of these has very obvious applications to academic writing in higher education, with Swales' genre analysis of the research article being the paradigmatic case. Communities of practice, for Wenger, can potentially be found anywhere there is work or learning to be done, and the implications have started to be discussed with regard to academic writing (Barton & Tusting 2005). As I see it, the point of both of these concepts is to bring out not only some of those features of the practices necessary for membership, but to help define membership itself. In both cases, we have some measure by which to ascertain whether a person is a 'full member', a peripheral member, or an apprentice-in-training. The concepts (especially CoP) are also meant to provide some insight as to the learning processes that take place in becoming a member.

The ethnomethodological influence of this work means that it would be tenable to dismiss these concepts out of hand on the grounds as theoretical constructs. Both in this study and others (e.g. Cooper 2001), university students have not recognised themselves as studying or writing within a *community*, let alone as members of more specific groups. To do this by fiat, though, would be to overlook some promising avenues for exploration.

I will proceed by selecting relevant criticisms of the DC and CoP, including the very notion of 'community'. I will then present some ways of understanding CoPs from both EM and applied linguistics that appear to be more defensible than mainstream work.

i. Community

One difference between the discourse community (DC) and the community of practice (CoP) in relation to academic writing is that the former can easily be characterised as completely analogous to academic disciplines, whether local or dispersed.¹⁷ It is then straightforward to cast academic staff as full members of the DC, with students those who wish to share in its purposes and modes of communication. This provides a perspective whereby any contact between members and non-members of the DC can be seen in terms

¹⁷ Swales (1998) distinguishes between *place discourse communities* and *focus discourse communities*.

of communicative practices that are or are not sufficient or explicable in the terms of that community. By contrast, the CoP does not need to respect this divide. They can occur at any time, by chance or by design, and can involve students and staff equally. Whereas the DC at its most recognisable reflects formal organisations (Macbeth 2004:2), the CoP has been described as identical to the informal organisation (Gourlay 1999).

The DC has been described as a foundational notion, “an ideology whose primary assumption is that truth is not a judgement made in an immediate social situation but is rather grounded in external standards” (Cooper 1989:202). It appears also that the idea of *community* is often used not as a literal category but as a metaphorical usage of convenience, sensitising concept or similar, a useful shorthand for intuitively describing a collectivity. Macbeth (2004:3) paraphrases Casanave’s (1995) critique as follows:

The metaphor breaks down... once applied to actual settings, which will always show complex, locally situated, interactions. The closer we look, she says, the more ‘units’ of meaning come into view, each embedded within another: ‘We find sub-communities within communities, and multiple embeddings of micro-societies within sub-communities, and finally a great diversity of a small number of individuals in the innermost circle’ (p. 86).

The foundational qualities of the DC – and, it seems, the CoP (Barton & Tusting 2005:7) – are well demonstrated in the hope by its proponents that it will provide criteria for comparison across settings. Prior (2003:7), for example, writes that

when you look at the lists of examples of DCs, or CoPs, or activity systems, they inevitably seem to be named social entities (physics, company employees, the family, city government, the military, drug dealers, bikers, garage bands, jocks). In the typifications of our languages, these communities are truly always there. There is nothing new under the sun of this concept.

Another criticism of both the DC and CoP is that they encompass the problematic term *community*. One cannot escape references to Raymond Williams’ well-known observation that community is a “warmly persuasive word” (in Cooper 1989:203), and one that moreover carries with it positive connotations. It is frequently pointed out informal organisations often display distinct characteristics in terms of lack of consensus, asymmetry of power relations, and lack of shared repertoire, and as such are not recognisable as the ideal-typical CoPs that Wenger describes (Barton & Tusting 2005:6, Barton & Hamilton 2005:25, S. Gourlay 1999). There is some doubt as to whether the term ‘community’ is a suitable choice for these compound terms. Fox (2005) cites Benedict Anderson’s work on the idea of the nation as an ‘imagined political community’, to suggest that any community larger than those which deal in face-to-face contact must be

imagined. This brings to mind the distinction made by Tonnies between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as basic modes of social formation (Schatzki 1996:176ff). The idea of *Gemeinschaft* “conceptually enshrined a form of life that was disappearing amidst the incisive transformation in human coexistence wrought through industrialisation and modernisation” (ibid.). Not only, then, was community threatened by the same forces in which CoPs are said to flourish – work-based contexts in late capitalism – but the features of this kind of community are clearly designed to be those of an *organic* mode of coexistence. However, the idea of CoP seems to indicate something that does not correspond entirely either to *Gemeinschaft* or to *Gesellschaft*; rather it is something that should appear somewhere between these two ideal types. In this view the usage of ‘community’ as either a members’ term or a technical term seems to be a misnomer.

ii. *Beyond communities of practice*

I will now argue the case that DCs or CoPs should be rejected as unnecessary ways of describing the features of ‘imagined’ groups. Writers from various backgrounds (Rawls 2009, Prior 2003, Scollon 2001, Canagarajah 2002, Gee 2008, Barton & Tusting 2005) have recognised that members’ real-life interactions admit of more complexity than these concepts are able to account for. Increasingly prominent network research has also contributed to a weight of writing coming to similar conclusions (Fox 2005, 2008). I will discuss two works that have explored these notions: first, Prior (2003), who sustains his critique to a point but whose conclusions are attenuated by some throwbacks to applied linguistic orthodoxies. The second paper is by Anne Rawls (2009), who writes from an EM- and Durkheim-inspired point of view and whose conclusions I find more satisfactory.

Prior’s central argument is that “our notions of the social are informed by an underlying model” (ibid.:3), a nationalist model that identifies ‘imagined communities’ as related to the nation on an almost universal basis. Prior therefore asks, “Should we wonder that people whose imaginations have been so saturated with the ideology of nationalism would tend to view any social entity in terms borrowed from it?” (ibid.:8) The same representational tools are used “as we attempt to make visible the discursive landscapes of our academies and societies” (ibid.). Members of society want to describe all groups in the same terms and in the same ways that the nation is seen to pull together; “in the typifications of our languages, these communities are truly always already there...DCs are as much folk sociology as folk linguistics” (ibid.:7). Prior’s view is that work carried out

under the auspices of DC research represents only a partial break from Chomskian and Saussurian paradigms, as it “continues to assume that there is some level where shared rules and knowledge govern performance, where variation can result from only three sources – error, participants’ level of expertise in the community, and competing community norms (whether between or within participants)” (ibid.).

Prior suggests that similar conclusions can be drawn for the CoP as for the DC. The CoP has had the effect of foregrounding learning, diversity, “the centrality of participation and practice” (ibid.:10), while relegating issues “surrounding class, gender, race, sexual orientation and so on” (ibid.:10-11). It has allowed for more heterogeneous considerations of ‘discursive space’, although still within homogeneous discourses. Another implication here is that the idea of CoP as set out by Wenger (1998) has been to “analyse and promote new capitalist work practices” (ibid.:10). Prior cites James Gee, who suggests that “the emergence of communities of practice as an organising concept for both schools and workplaces is a symptom of, and tool for, the establishment of practices and people tuned to mobile global capitalism” (ibid.:8).

Prior’s basis for an alternative way of addressing the phenomena of language-in-use, “literate activity and social formations” (ibid.:12) is the sociohistorical theory of Voloshinov, Bakhtin, Vygotsky and others. This approach that has some considerable advantages. For instance, it rejects the notion that “language resides in some neo-platonic realm of dictionaries, grammar books, [or] books of social etiquette” (ibid.:13), asserting instead that “language only lives in *chains of situated utterances*” (ibid.). He also draws upon Latour to point out the diversity of networks in time and space, “networks that critically do not respect reified ethnosociological boundaries and categories” (ibid.). He therefore comes to the conclusion: “To say that practice and discourse are historical then is to say that they are profoundly and fundamentally heterogeneous” (ibid.).

However, having said this, Prior then suggests that this “concrete historical view of practice also requires a theory of production” (ibid.:14). Having cleared the ground for a programme of situated studies, he sells out this position through the perceived need to find theoretical bases to account for what are by Prior’s own reckoning, concrete, historical practices.

Prior goes on to ask: “Does this kind of sociohistoric perspective leave us unable to account for commonality? What produces regularity and reach if it is not shared stuff of some kind? What is the alternative to continuing to rely on shrunken structuralist accounts?” (ibid.) He adduces the notion of centripetal force as “a force that is unifying at

some level” (ibid.), and which is “about *quasi-sharedness*, not sharedness” (ibid.). It is a force that drives people together and compels them to achieve an understanding of each other, no matter what their backgrounds. The presence of Stephen Turner again hangs over this discussion; Prior appears unable to completely jettison this idea of a ‘shared stuff’.

Prior’s conclusion is that, despite the ‘folk’ understandings of community which serve as a foundation for the notions of DC and CoP, what we should be tracing is a “rhizomatic network spread through time and space, a Latourian network that does not respect our ethnosocial maps, and activity that is distributed among people and a variety of material-semiotic artifacts” (ibid.:19). Prior’s sociohistoric approach posits the need to

Follow the concrete sociohistoric trajectories of actors, practices, and artifacts through heterogeneous spatial-temporal worlds, to unanchor the formation of our objects from the typifications offered up by our languages...What I am arguing is that DCs, CoPs, activity systems, Discourses, contact zones, whatever terms we turn to will continue to slip toward that underlying structuralist matrix unless we very consciously wrest them away and carefully stake out alternative theoretical grounds (ibid.:20).

Anne Rawls’ (2009) paper might have seemed incongruous if it had not been read in the light of this passage from Prior. Entitled *Communities of Practice vs. Traditional Communities*, it uses a terminology that ethnomethodologists have seldom adopted. However, one can read in Rawls paper another attempt to respecify the idea of CoP. Her project is comparable to Prior’s, but she brings with her the influences of EM and modern Durkheimian sociology. Rawls does not refer to the likes of Lave and Wenger and her conception of CoP owes little debt to them.

Part of the reason for this is that the CoP is not a new idea for sociology (Gourlay 1999). For instance, Rawls writes of Durkheim, “Since organic solidarities are held together by situated practices, the job of sociology hence-forward would be to focus on situated practices, or ‘communities of practice’ as they are now coming to be called” (op. cit.:90). The first thing to note is that we meet a divergence between these two terms – which are nonetheless meant to be synonymous – in terms of the object being ‘practices’ in the sociological version, and the object being collectivity (Scollon 2001) in the other. Thus, the focus of CoPs is properly the situated practices brought to bear on a setting by the participants. For Rawls, the point of departure for both Durkheim and Garfinkel was “that the coherences of practices lay, not in rules, or more formal aspects of organisation, but rather, in the ability to produce social forms for one another that are recognisable in their details” (ibid.:81).

The difference between CoPs and ‘traditional communities’ in this Rawlsian version is that the latter allows a context in which traditional ideas of reason, morality, social order and so forth are tenable. It allows for conceptions of ‘the reasoning individual’ and recognisable *a priori* motives for action drawn from shared values, beliefs, experiences, and the like. For Rawls, this is something that we are losing in the ‘context of globalisation’:

In the more fluid and unfamiliar context of global exchange relations, the individual confronting the need to interact in unfamiliar situations with relative strangers increasingly relies on practices with which they can make sense in the absence of shared beliefs and values. In this context, situated practices provide possibilities for ‘seeing’, for those who learn to look, and whose competence to do so can be trusted, that are closed to more traditional belief based approaches (ibid.:82-3).

Likewise, reason, morality, and motive are now seen to be sequences of action within “developing contours of sequences” (ibid.:82; cf. Prior on ‘chains’ or ‘trajectories’). Competent members are obliged to see, and carry out, “a next move as a possibility in a sequential series of moves” (ibid.). Traditional sources of motivation may still exist as an ‘agenda’, but they do not provide the interactional wherewithal (practices) for carrying out this achievement.

For Rawls, the logical necessity for studying practices in conditions of modernity comes out nowhere better than in the study of work. In the global society, the requirement for the study of situated practices becomes exacerbated by the prevalence of advanced communication technologies, which increases the number of interactions in which situated practices for comprehension must be arrived at. The design of all such technologies “must be integrated into the recognisable contours of practice” (ibid.:83; cf. Prior op. cit.:10).

A particularly interesting insight with regard to the study of AW is that certain types of conceptual analysis function to explain *troubles*, i.e. they “inevitably highlight what went *wrong*, not what went *right*” (ibid.:85). Retrospective and interpretative views “will therefore produce the *appearance* that social interaction involves ongoing interpretation in a context of *contingency* in which detail is unimportant” (ibid.). Rawls suggests that the work of Garfinkel and his followers finds the work of ‘communities of practice’ to be “orderly in ongoing detailed and recognisable ways” (ibid.), that is, most interaction does not require ratiocination or interpretation. There “appears to be more contingency and interpretation than there actually is” (ibid.). However, “Meaningful practices require a great deal of coordinated order at all points” (ibid.).

Rawls' view of practices as essentially concrete, observable events "produced by, for, and in the presence of others, to be 'seen' and 'heard' by those others as having the recognisable 'gestalt' properties of interactional 'moves' of various sorts" (ibid.:92) undermines the idea that they can exist wholly "as systems of concepts and interpretive frames" (ibid.). It would not be fair to suggest that AL/NLS writers are guilty of the full excesses of what Rawls calls 'the fallacy of misplaced abstraction', but this marks another argument in favour of a synthesis of Tusting et al.'s (2000) two definitions of practice. And it certainly calls into question the idea that abstract cultural models alone are either a reason for or an explanation of action.

The upshot is a respecification of what kind of information is relevant to the social sciences (ibid.). "Demographic information about populations, for instance, is not relevant in a context in which the only thing that matters about people is their competence to engage in a particular situated practice" (ibid.:96). Rawls' conclusion (ibid., emphasis added) is that

What persons need to know about one another in orders constituted through practice is whether they have the competence to produce and recognize practices and whether they can be trusted to do so. *It is not necessary to know about beliefs and values except in so far as they affirm or deny a general commitment to orders of practice.* What sociology needs to know is what those practices are and to know them in their sequential details.

Similar concerns regarding the adequacy of 'community' for explaining communication are well documented (Gee 2008:12, Canagarajah 2002:65ff, Barton & Hamilton 2005:25). Prior's arguments, as I have shown, mirror Rawls' to a large extent. However, I wonder whether his call for the analysis of actions rather than discourses (Canagarajah 2002:68) imagines something quite as radical as the EM-inspired agenda set out by Rawls. We can see Rawls' argument as a response to Prior's call to action, but one that diverges notably from Barton & Hamilton's (2005) proposal to fuse 'mid-level' practices with macro-level theory.

Conclusions

- AL and NLS have affinities with other practice-led disciplines. They are susceptible to the same criticisms but also able to benefit from the insights of these other disciplines.

- One such discipline is ethnomethodology, which has addressed the shortcomings of ‘traditional sociology’ – and been criticised in its turn – in a way analogous to the NLS polemic against the autonomous model of literacy.
- EM’s radical respecification of the social sciences involves many elements which would be beneficial to AL/NLS, not least in that it provides solutions to many of the problems that AL/NLS has addressed.
- AL/NLS are already familiar with some of the terminology and analytical approaches of EM, but their usage of these tends not to recognise the radical nature of the EM departure from the traditional social sciences.
- The implications of an EM-inspired AL include the rejection of vestigial Cartesian and cognitivist influences. This collapses a number of unnecessary dualisms. The praxiological approach of EM means that there is no requirement for divisions such as local/global and micro/macro.
- The EM view of ‘situated’ phenomena insists that the researcher must be faithful to the material in drawing conclusions, but also that there must be limits to the conclusions that can possibly be drawn and still render coherent intersubjective sense.
- This approach also precludes theoretical and ideological analyses, which remain in most AL/NLS work.
- An EM approach to practice undermines the distinction between ‘underlying’ ‘cultural’ practices and those observed praxiologically or empirically. This goes for ‘textual practices’ as much as it does for ‘texts within practices’.
- AL/NLS have a critical/transformatory agenda; this can still be served by an approach such as that outlined above, not least in rendering the detail of *how* the occurrence of disadvantage takes place.
- The value of EM to AL therefore resides in its ability to free up the researcher to undertake close empirical studies of literacy practices without becoming encumbered by discussions of their ‘significance’ outside the setting in which they take place.

Chapter 3

From theory to methods

This chapter aims to draw out the methodological implications of the first chapter. The challenge is to draw out the implications of an approach to AL that is substantially informed by EM, such that it is recognisable in terms of relevance and rigour to the practitioners of both these disciplines.

I will aim to use these insights to develop a set of principles that outline how an ethnomethodologically-informed methodology (*pace* Crabtree et al. 2000) for social literacy studies would proceed in principle – given that “the only sensible way in with methods can be discussed, at least in qualitative research, is by treating them as heuristic possibilities that need to be adapted to local circumstances and project-specific purposes” (ten Have 2004:1).

Methodological implications of an ethnomethodologically-informed AL

EM and AL are both strongly qualitative programmes. However, if ‘methods’ are not just a stand-alone, alienable technology, but are rather expressions of the very aims and assumptions of disciplines, then differences do in fact occur at a fundamental level.

To quote Wittgenstein (in Hacker 2010:1): “If we use the ethnological approach, does that mean we are saying that philosophy is ethnology? No, it only means that we are taking up our position far outside, in order to see things *more objectively*”. By way of parallel, to take on an ethnomethodologically-informed approach ‘only’ means a focus on “sense-making in real time”; and that phenomena are “best understood as ongoing accomplishments rather than predetermined social facts” (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh 2010:9, 12).

The previous chapter addressed a variety of debates that in many cases have very clear methodological implications for the conduct of research. I will now discuss these in more depth, with the aim of establishing a more fully worked-out ‘EM-influenced’ AL. This will necessarily involve some discussion of ‘methods’, although I prefer the term ‘technologies’ as more in keeping with EM provenance.

Designing an EM-influenced AL study

Power, multimodality, identity, (the negotiation of) meaning, and epistemologies go to make up the locus of interest of academic literacy studies. EM can address any of these (Button 2007) as long as relevance to analysis of the scene is warranted by the members' knowledge or activities of either the researched or the researcher. The value of EM-influenced studies is in identifying and describing instances of these considerations in detail; this would be, to use a common EM locution, 'the work of *doing* power, identity', etc. (Randall et al. 2001:40), not to mention 'culture'.

I have found it helpful to think about the design of such a study using the set of headings that follow; these do not follow in a strictly linear fashion but are rather 'rhizomatic' – there are many possible entry points and ways of proceeding from one sub-heading to another. The reader is therefore invited to read this chapter in any order. Many of the headings implicate or entail many of the others, so that some form of repetition is encountered. I do not see this as a redundancy, more as exhibiting the fact that the same conclusions can be reached from a number of different starting places. It will also be noted that these headings address a combination of research technologies, methodologies for interrogating data, and general axioms for research.

i. Ethnography and quasi-ethnography

In social studies of literacy we find the idea that ethnography is *the* appropriate means of apprehending plural literacies (Szwed 1981). According to Szwed, ethnography has the advantages of keeping the study of literacy within the logic of everyday life, avoiding acontextual analysis, abstractions and reductionism, as well as making gains from "the strength of evidence that comes with being able to examine specific cases in great depth and complexity" (ibid.:21). The ethnographic method, implicated in the theoretical approaches of AL/NLS (Street 2001), is presented as an inevitable development.

There is something to be taken from a consideration of how close to an ethnographic study, conventionally conceived, an academic writing study influenced by EM can possibly be, given that ethnography is becoming a label of convenience, doing little more than specifying qualitative rather than quantitative research (Crabtree et al. 2000).

a. *Ethnographic method, perspective, & sensibility*

As Street (1995:51) points out, it now makes as much sense to talk of ‘ethnographic methods’ as it does to talk simply of ‘ethnography’:

A number of disciplines in recent years have begun to employ ethnographic methods, developing beyond the particular meanings and uses of them assumed within the discipline of anthropology in which they originated. Anthropologists tend to see ethnography in terms of ‘participant observation’, involving detailed descriptions of small groups and of their social and cultural patterns... Educationalists have taken over the term in recent years to refer to close, detailed accounts of classroom interactions, with perhaps some attention to the lives and roles of students outside the classroom setting.

However, if ‘ethnography’ is to be distinguished from ‘qualitative research’ (Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999:46), some criteria need to be applied, given that ‘ethnography’ can be tacked as a means of providing ‘context’ to linguistic material (Blommaert 2005:239). The distinction made by Street above is between ‘ethnography’ (as a technology) and ‘ethnographic’ (as a perspective) (Street, personal communication). The most productive way of approaching this issue would therefore seem to be to bypass the nominalization ‘an ethnography’, and to focus on the significance of the modifier ‘ethnographic’, since it appears to denote something less than a “full-scale ethnography” (Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999), but perhaps something more than qualitative research.

We can see ethnographic methods in classroom ethnographies (Street, op. cit.), while Ramanathan & Atkinson cite Shirley Brice Heath’s use of the term to apply to “approaches including microethnography and the ethnography of speaking” (ibid.:50). Heath’s view is that such approaches will only achieve their potential “when they are combined into something approximating a total description of a culture” (ibid.), and thus provide some *holistic* view of the social entity they are addressed to, whether the idea of holism employed is that of a bottom-up characterization of an entire community or society, or where holism is seen rather as a way of considering a unit of analysis *analytically* as a whole (Ramanathan & Atkinson op. cit.).

However, this does not get us any closer to saying what it is that researchers will *do*. While it is tempting to say that a study will qualify as an ethnography if it fulfils certain minimal criteria (O’Reilly 2005), ethnographies have a family resemblance whereby it is difficult to point out any single feature or set of features that are always present. For instance, we might say that all ethnographies involve an extended period of time ‘in the field’ (Cooper 2001), but this feature alone is not sufficient for identification as

ethnography if there is insufficient participation in the social life of the milieu, or record-keeping, etc.

One ‘seminal statement’ on ethnography in education (Green & Bloome 1997, in Heath & Street 2008) notes that there are three possible takes on ethnographic research: doing ethnography, adopting an ethnographic perspective, or using ethnographic tools (ibid.). Heath & Street suggest that, in this order, “the three reflect greater to lesser degrees of orientation to theories from anthropology” (ibid.:121). Doing ethnography, for Green & Bloome, involves “meeting the criteria for doing ethnography as framed within a discipline or field”, by carrying out those activities that support “broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group” (in Heath & Street ibid.). Adopting an ethnographic perspective involves carrying out less than a full ethnography in order to focus attention on particular aspects of a given group, and employing theories from anthropology, sociology, or another applicable discipline to guide the research. Using ethnographic tools means adopting methods usually associated with such fieldwork, but without any necessary use of cultural theories. My view is that these distinctions are tenable as sensitizing concepts or rules of thumb, but they in no way provide hard-and-fast criteria, and thus do not undermine the family resemblance argument. Green & Bloome’s definition of ethnographic perspective moreover does not make any clear delineation between ethnographic and non-ethnographic qualitative approaches. Last, the examples of ‘ethnographic tools’ adduced by Green & Bloome are in some instances rather unfortunate – particularly interviews and document content analysis, both of which, when used in isolation, have been opposed to ethnographic approaches (Rhodes 2011, Hewings & North 2010; and ten Have 2004, Lillis 2010, respectively).

One idea that is variously mentioned is that of *ethnographic sensibility* (Blommaert 2005, Leung 2005, Lillis 2008, Randall et al. 2001). To approach a study with this sensibility would among other things i. avoid a reduction of ethnography to any of its component stages, and avoid treating ‘ethnography’ as a “shorthand for ‘contextual background’ to linguistic material” (Blommaert op. cit.:239); ii. have “a particular vision of what constitutes the ‘visible’” (Randall et al. 2001:37) in that the skills, methods and competences employed in the here-and-now will only be revealed to their fullest extent by considering them in an organisational context (ibid.); iii. find a balance between emic and etic perspectives, such that “the dynamic interplay between emic and etic is used as a productive heuristic in terms of the research process – the researcher must work at making

the strange familiar and the familiar strange – and in terms of analysis – the blending of distinct lenses and categories of description” (Lillis 2008:372).

b. Can a study of AW be a genuine ethnography?

What is written above calls into question the *possibility* of an ethnography of academic writing. To begin with, studies of AW would fail the ‘holism test’ if we used the more established of the two views of holism mentioned above. By definition, even a qualitative study of AW will not aim for an account of an entire society or culture but rather focus on local literacy practices therein – even though it may be fruitful or necessary to pursue lines of enquiry that are not obviously related to writing (Street 2001:11).

However, even if we make the conceptual move from ‘ethnography’ to ‘ethnographic’, it is likely that there will be some common features that are simply not present in an AW study. Among these are stock ethnographic issues such as gaining access to the ethnographic setting, staying in, getting out, the ‘working principle of uncertainty’ (Barton & Papen 2010), making the familiar strange, gaining access to informants (Crabtree et al. 2000) – even participant observation. Moreover, many of those who undertake studies of AW will be those who have a practical or other interest in it and so may well have a greater degree of familiarity in the context, and of competence in the activities that they are intending to study, than their protagonists.

But the crux of academic writing (and academic writing research) seems to lie not in the *process* of writing, but in the very sociological aspects of writing that AL has concerned itself to address: the negotiation of (possible) meaning, students’ grasp of genre and disciplinary epistemologies, the boundaries of form and content of course work, and so on.¹⁸ To analyse student writing along these lines requires information concerning the interaction among the various parties to the writing. Moreover, they tend to address themselves to the *product* of writing activities, rather than the process. Academic staff turn out to be highly competent at ascertaining, for their own practical purposes, the technical and cognitive processes that *must* have gone into a given piece of work, given the circumstances surrounding it. Thus, we need to find the sites where practices are assessed, made accountable and identified (Lynch 2000).

¹⁸ Swales (1998:190) provides an argument and examples to the contrary.

The data sources in Lea & Street's early study (1998:160) call attention to exactly those points where writing practices may be perspicuously divulged: they conducted participant observation of group sessions, and carried out analyses of student essays, feedback on the essays, and written guidance on completing course work; i.e., *they focused on exactly the sites where the researcher is most likely to find information of interest in terms of the intersubjective meeting of practitioner and student writing practices*. Lea & Street claim this as 'ethnographic-based' or 'ethnographic-style' research, although the "short length of the project limited the in-depth ethnographic approach which such research could warrant" (ibid.).

An AW study carried out with the aim of investigating literacy practices would necessarily have to adopt such an eclectic approach. If we are pursuing the investigation of practices, we are then looking at the socially distributed parts of the writing 'process'. This means that a study that can maximise the amount of data (or maximise the *opportunity* to obtain this data) that are obtained through attention to such perspicuous sites can properly claim to be an ethnographic one.

In *Other Floors, Other Voices* (1998), John Swales worked to a method that he called 'textography'; i.e. "something more than a disembodied textual or discursal analysis, but something less than a full ethnographic account" (ibid.:1). He implemented a "deliberately circumscribed investigation", focusing "more on particular individuals within the building than on its entire collectivities, and...[building] its arguments through a close analysis of individual *textual* extracts" (ibid.:2). A textography will seek to analyse texts but will also adopt certain aspects of ethnographic method to explain why texts take on the characteristics they do; however, it consciously stops short of Van Maanan's idea of ethnography as "an intense epistemological trial by fire" (ibid.).

If we say that an ethnography must incorporate some kind of observation, in addition to the collection of interview and documentary data (ten Have 2004:107), this begs the question of what is 'ethnographic' about textography. A case can be made; first, *OFOV* is very much site-based, and by Swales' own account, one of the successes of the book is that it provides a sense of place and "a feeling of the academic personalities" (ibid.:141). Moreover, although the study was largely based around text analysis, "illuminated on occasion by text-based interview data" (ibid.), these interviews could in some cases be seen as ethnographic interviews, in that they would arise from naturally-occurring everyday conversation rather than from planned discussion. Third, Swales can claim some measure of the validity offered by observation (Ball 1998). Although he says himself that

OFOV “is not a work that can compare with the major ethnographies of modern US academic and research life” (op. cit.:191) as it does not “[capture] the full social and cultural complexity” (ibid.:142), it does benefit from an ecological validity that comes from the focus on the suitability of written work to its immediate setting.

One principle relevant emphasised within EM research is that of ‘unique adequacy’ (Pollner & Emerson 2010), whereby researchers are required to participate in and acquire “indigenous skills and knowledge as means of capturing the lived order” (ibid.:123). This emphasis has gone hand in hand with a divergence from ‘making the familiar strange’ in everyday settings to the research of “technical or otherwise esoteric” settings (ibid.). Such a prescription suggests two further topics with regard to the perspicuity of an ethnography of academic writing. First, it presupposes that we see AW in its esoteric or technical aspects, with all the corollaries. Second, the idea of unique adequacy generally assumes the priority of the members’ expertise, as opposed to that of the analyst. This is understandable enough, but the empirical practicalities of research settings in HE at least are that the researcher is likely also to be a practitioner (teacher and/or researcher) within HE, and therefore already possessing the unique adequacy of the practices under study. The point is then not to study an existing expertise but to ascertain how this expertise comes to pass, and how it is socially ratified. This was certainly the case in the present study.

c. Ethnography is ‘motivated looking’

Assuming that we are using ethnography and/or ethnographic methods *not* for the purposes of addressing ‘educational issues and needs’ (ibid.), we then must be carrying out an ethnography *of something* (Stanley 1990). Perhaps the best way of describing this is to say that ethnography is ‘motivated’ (Randall et al. 2001:33, Anderson 1994:158). That is, ethnography must take into account how local users, members, or participants “understand and appreciate such things as management of organizational contingencies, the taken for granted shared culture, social relations and locally specific skills” (ibid.). As Randall et al. continue, “Formal methods just cannot get at these because they focus purely on either the data or on the processes” (ibid.).

At first glance, this might seem like a counter-intuitive position for EM/CA to take. Randall et al. (ibid.:38), however, argue that this is not the case:

We are arguing precisely that the skills, knowledges and competencies that members possess, and which enable them to orient to various here and now problems of work-in-organization may not be directly visible in this here and now, given that some set of (unspecified) procedures has produced this particular context as the relevant context for analysis, but will be visible in other contexts within the organizational setting – contexts which the proficient ethnographer will have investigated and analysed. To put this another way, construing the relevant analysis as a matter of understanding ‘interaction’ is one thing; construing it as a matter of understanding this interactional data is quite another...Construing the analysis as being a matter of understanding ‘a job of work’ which takes place in the context of various organizational relevancies, and seen by members in those terms, entails seeing a range of other possibilities, including for instance how members define and orient to an organizational context.

In short, carrying out ethnomethodologically informed ethnography (Hughes 2001; henceforth EIE) requires that we see relevancies beyond the immediately visible, but made available by ethnographic methods and/or sensibility (Randall et al. op. cit.) and that, where this is warranted by the members themselves, aim to find out how actions are adequate to/within an organizational context. Lea & Street (1998:160) were able to trade on their own familiarity with higher education contexts both general and specific, enabling them to “move away from the focus on transcribed interview material to a more eclectic approach, merging the importance of understanding both texts and practices in the light of staff and student interpretations of university writing”. That the EM and AL methodologies can be said to be commensurate here comes down to them similarly working out the implications of ethnography being motivated looking.

EIE reflects EM/CA’s general atheoreticity. Although Street’s (anthropological) view is that ethnography provides a sensitive instrument when allied to suitable *theoretical* approaches (1988:64, 2001:6), we do not need to broaden this terminology out too much; as Crabtree et al. write, “ethnography is a gloss on various and different *analytical frameworks* and EM is one such analytic framework” (op. cit.:670, emphasis added).¹⁹ In EM and EIE, as for any other conceptual enterprise where ethnography may be employed, it is all about the ‘analytic possibilities’ (Anderson 1994, Randall et al. op. cit.).

d. *Emic/etic*

Social scientists such as Weber, Schutz and Malinowski have famously propounded conceptual and field methods that pursued the ‘actor’s point of view’. The problem of what an emic perspective can be is intrinsically linked with how it can be represented in the ethnography *qua* text (cf. Stanley 1990). The uses to which description is put moreover

¹⁹ Stanley (1990) cites three traditions of ethnographic work: social anthropology as exemplified in the Manchester School; the Chicago School of sociological research; and EM/CA research.

betray an ethnographer's theoretical principles and assumptions (ibid.). In this vein, Stanley writes:

Almost invariably sociological research, whether in surveys, interviews, ethnographies and theorisings, analyses description as a resource which provides 'information about' whatever is the sociological topic in hand... An alternative approach, however, uses such descriptions as a topic for analytic investigation, not as a resource providing data about something outside of the description itself (ibid.:618).

Here, Stanley employs the ethnomethodological distinction between topic and resource. The strictly empirical tendencies of EM mean that it tends to conflate appearance and reality (Randall and Sharrock 2011:14), so that descriptions in EM mode are approached not for what they are 'about', but for what they afford as instances of communication in their own right. The EM focus is on the use of descriptions in achieving a social order.

This has implications for an EM view of the emic. The temptation is when speaking of the emic that the ethnographic researcher must look to native accounts and mine them for 'content', ideas that express meanings endemic to the culture under scrutiny. An AL/NLS expression of this comes from Street (1995:133), who asserts that an emic view of literacy practices needs to identify meanings as well as observe behaviour. In its least sophisticated understanding, though, this would fall foul of the problem of representation.

EM has pursued the 'actor's point of view' without having any requirement for the concept of 'social actor' as such (Sharrock & Button 1991). However, the 'actor's point of view' is a concern dear to the heart of EM. But this inheres in considerations of scenic phenomena as opposed to the demographics of the individuals who populate the scene.

Reconstructing the actor's point of view... involves taking into account the various contingencies faced by any actor in attempting to produce recognisable practices... The basic requirements of recognisability must be able to take on the endless contingencies of the actual recognizable reproduction of practices, not the contingencies of individual differences... Garfinkel's approach to objects as oriented features of local orders also led to talk about the phenomenal field properties of objects, instead of the phenomenal properties of experience (concepts). Thus in an important sense the actor's point of view and the achieved meaning of social action no longer had to be thought of as belonging to individual actors. In Garfinkel's view, intelligibility is achieved in and through the enactment of recognizable practices, not through interpretive processes in the minds of individual actors. Therefore, empirical studies of observable practices *could* reveal the actor's point of view (Rawls 2002:24, 60).

According to Sharrock & Button (op. cit.), this is where EM diverges from the Schutzian project "to derive the fundamental properties of the actor's experience from those of pure consciousness". A properly sociological project will first identify actions within a social order, and second, recognize that "procedures for describing those actions are themselves

integral to the organization of the social setting within which those actions occur” (ibid.:157).

And what of the ‘etic’? One of the attractions of EM is that it places the focus on ‘naturally occurring discourse’ and the ability of competent members to successfully recognize and bring about social orders (Macbeth 2003). At the same time, the analyst brings *analytic concerns* to any study. However, the point of view of the analyst under EM auspices can in no way be seen as being superior to the point of view of the competent member. Perhaps for this reason, I lack the feeling of ‘productive tension’ between emic and etic in EM work that Lillis suggests is present in linguistic ethnography.

EIE denudes but does not dissolve the emic/etic dualism. The analyst, as well as the protagonists, is to be seen as sufficiently competent to find the social meaning of literacy practices from the available setting. That the analyst has the competence to find the order in settings does little else than confirm that order is there to be found for any competent member.

e. Revealing the ‘machinery’ through EM-influenced ethnography

One of the canonical EM principles is that of revealing the ‘machinery’ through which the achievement of accountable actions and social order are possible. So, “the ethnomethodologist does not seek to explicate patterns per se, but the social practices – the cultural machinery as it were – in and through the accomplishment of which patterns, structures, processes, and the rest, are produced” (Crabtree et al. 2000:672). This is a divergence from traditional modes of ethnography in which ethnographers “address their inquiries to the very structures to which members’ inquiries are addressed” (Zimmerman & Pollner 1970:92). The first step is to find a behaviour that is recognisable to any competent member and then ascertain how it could have come about: “So, in characterising some action, some setting, the description is warranted by showing how the ‘machinery’ being described can ‘reproduce’ the data at hand” (Benson & Hughes 1991:132).

However, I think that some issues of suitable and/or sufficient data under the auspices of such a study will remain to some readers. This is brought to a head by defining principles that come respectively from EM and AL. EM/CA has long been noted for its attention to mere ‘scraps’ of data; with ‘order at all points’, it takes very little in the way of material for the skilled practitioner to find methods that allow for that order. At the same

time, ethnomethodologists often talk of a 'collection of data' (see below); Sacks spoke of finding "a whole bunch of its products" in order to find the machinery that produces them (in Silverman 1998:41). Anderson & Sharrock (1984:115) talk of "the world under research" as "a corpus of researchable materials". Analysis should find the organisation that allows and systematically produces "the observed features of the researchable world" (ibid.). The question becomes something like: when we can draw out the ethnomethods both from 'mere scraps' of data *and* from ethnographic collections of data, at what point are we going to think that 'this is enough' for the machinery we want to get at? Of course, EM does not open itself up to arguments surrounding the *amount* of data. It seems the problem can be solved by considering the materials at hand as 'data', rather than data of a specific type; one can then work to extract the machinery generating these materials no matter what they are. Likewise, if one *a priori* wants to carry out a 'full' ethnography of academic writing, then there is no obvious reason why it should not be amenable to this kind of analysis. However, such analyses are most obviously manageable in conjunction with something like an 'ethnographic case study' (q.v.). And it remains the case that most EM 'collections' are rather small.

The second conundrum comes out of AL. One of its theoretical cornerstones is that superficially similar AW settings can in fact present very different challenges and operate under very different assumptions. But if we are concerned as a matter of theoretical fiat to point out the differences between the practices in these settings, how are we able to treat these as instances of the 'same' phenomenon (e.g. Hine 1994)? As Hine writes, "It seems that the effect of conventional ethnography may be to gloss over the amount of work which goes into construing data as relating to the same phenomenon, in turning a collection of data into a phenomenon within the ethnography" (ibid.:9). The classic examples in Lea & Street (1998) are intended to show that the 'same' approach to writing elicits different practical outcomes and so helps to reveal underlying disciplinary assumptions. But this is focused on the writing practices in a 'surface' sense, and not on the practices that *allow* writing to be produced and comprehended. One EM way of approaching the same data would be by means of Lynch's *epistemics* (1993), whereby the researcher investigates the empirically constituted, ethnographically apprehended "themes from epistemology and general methodology" (ibid.:280) as worked out in commonplace activities.

f. Perspicuous settings and telling cases

Lynch (2000:107) describes a perspicuous setting as “a researchable organisation of activity in which participants raise, address, and locally explicate problems, topics, and conceptual distinctions that have a central place in academic philosophy, social theory, and methodology”. Garfinkel & Wieder (1992:186) suggest that in order to *find* a perspicuous setting, the analyst should seek to locate, “as of the haecceities of some local gang’s work affairs, the organisational *thing* that they are up against”. The aim is first to learn how to describe or carry out such activities as if a full member of this group; and then to ‘discover’ an order or ‘machinery’ that goes to “demonstrate the constitutive role of the ‘discovered’ features of quotidian social life in the production of social order” (Lynch 2000:108). A paradigmatic example of a perspicuous setting might be law courts (Garfinkel 1967, Lynch 2000, 2007), in that they are not only ‘natural’ “in the sense that they recur as routine constitutive activities in the societies social scientists study” (Lynch 2000:109), but they are also formal institutions that conduct investigations, scrutinise evidence, emphasise the importance of procedure, and so on (ibid.).

The first point to make is that the perspicuous setting could be part of a wider setting/s, so that, in contrast to law courts, we could find certain aspects of our ‘AW context’ and ascertain that they are perspicuous settings. Second, an irony of academic writing research is that at the same time that students and academics are trying to carry out the practical aspects of their activities, they are also concerned, literally, with the concerns of philosophy, theory, methodology and the rest as topics. Their concern is the practical accomplishment of a classical theme (Lynch 1993).

Classic AW studies (Bartholomae 1985, Ballard & Clanchy 1988, Lea & Street 1998) provide us with the idea, as mentioned above, that students need to reason out the requirements of their work at the very same time as mastering the content of the subjects they are studying. We can therefore look at student essays as sites of practical as well as academic reasoning. The use of such perspicuous settings is one way, then, in which we can reduce ethnographic-type data to manageable levels.

ii. Case studies

My approach at the outset of the empirical stage was to use the case study as a ‘selection strategy’ (Walters 2007:92). However, it quickly became clear that selecting cases at the

outset did not entail a commitment to establishing findings about that same category of cases.

a. Cases of what?

One of the first questions that the researcher undertaking case study research will ask is: ‘what is this a case of?’ (Ragin 1992:6) This question should moreover be iterative. It presumes there are other things that are ‘the same’ as the case under examination. In most instances, EM analysts will trade on members’ knowledge to ascertain this. Moreover, we want the case to be illustrative of a given principle or phenomenon; but the aim is first to show the way in which things work as they are before us (Wittgenstein 1958:§126), rather than to build and test theories, even if this is through analytic as opposed to enumerative induction (Lloyd-Jones 2005:79, Heath & Street 2008:64, Mitchell 1984:237-8).

I find that the approach to case studies developed by the Manchester School of ethnography is one friendly to EM. The case study can be of “a nation, a people, a district, a village, a family or some particular set of actors” (Mitchell 1984:240) – or perhaps even limited to a single person (Benson et al. 1993). Case studies have traditionally been thought of as ‘bounded’ (Walters 2007) or ‘small-N’ (Gerring 2007). Generally, the main source of information will be the people encountered under the auspices of the case study (Mitchell op. cit.). However, in saying this, and in contrast with survey research in which “the person is replaced by the trait as the unit of analysis” (Mitchell 1956/2006:27), Mitchell does not intend that the individual becomes the unit of analysis.

The object of the case study approach is social processes (Mitchell *ibid.*). Whereas ethnographic statements are general, “in effect summary statements reflecting modal or molar forms of behaviour or belief”, case studies are “concerned with the imponderabilia of everyday behaviour” (Mitchell 1984:237). The case study was instrumental in moving anthropology away from structural functionalism to a view “in which the social was pre-eminently a matter of *practice*” (Evens & Handelman 2006:3). *Situational analysis* suggests something different from the contemporary prescription that cases must be situated and described *within* a context (Walters 2007:93). As Mitchell (1956/2006:37) writes:

The characteristic uniqueness of each case is largely due to the fact that the particular events described in the case are usually presented in the first instance at a fairly low level of abstraction. The observer provides a detailed account of who the *dramatis personae* were, what they did and how they reacted to

the events (and their social relationship) in which they were involved. The particularities of the context, of the situation and of the actors, then, are important features of case studies.

Rather than settle on the object of the case study, situational analysis provides a praxiological consideration of *events* in all their aspects. There is a definite affinity in this regard with EM.

b. Ethnographic case studies

Evens & Handelman suggest that situational analysis creates an ethnographic praxis. “In other words, the very practice of situational analysis produces, procedurally, a theory of practice, one that, given its situationalism, comprehends praxis (including ethnographic praxis) as an ongoing, open-ended dialectic, rather than a completed synthesis” (2006:5). Every new setting, or visit to a setting, provides new case material in which this ‘open-ended dialectic’ can occur. In some sense, the ethnographer ‘makes’ the cases come about.

In its existential aspect, we can adduce the low level of abstraction of case studies in their incarnation as situational analysis, compared to general ethnographic writing (Mitchell 1984). However, case studies have also been employed to do this by most social science traditions as means of developing theory. Generalities from case studies can be arrived at in different ways according to theoretical or conceptual bent: whether through analytic induction, ethnographic praxis, or the grammatical approach found in perspicuous representations.

In situational analysis, cases must be found in ‘local’ settings in that they are local to the ethnographer. ‘Ethnographic’ case studies, though, must by definition take into account “the culture, the interactions and the context around them” (Walters 2007:96). It amounts to saying little more than case studies, while locally apprehended, must take into account necessary contextual features that could have their basis in other settings or other times, in order to be ‘ethnographically adequate’.

iii. Naturalistic data

EM tends to limit its focus to naturally occurring data (Macbeth 2003). This does not mean that other data are not usable. For instance, interviews, as well as addressing states of affairs, are also forms of talk in which members’ methods are used (ten Have 2004:76;

Carlin 2009). The interview can then be used by the ethnomethodologist, but for purposes other than analyzing the ‘what’, or content, of the interview:

The ‘reality’ to be studied in ethnomethodology is a local accomplishment of members’ practices. One can, of course, ask people to answer questions or tell stories in an interview context, but what is then made available for study is ‘answering questions’ or ‘telling stories’ (ten Have op. cit.:75).

One of the effects this approach has is to limit the effect of the interviewee being ‘dislocated’ from the circumstances of their ordinary life. EM’s interest in the practical methods used to create order in any setting means that non-naturalistic data such as interviews are useful as *topics* (for locating practices) but not as *resources* (trouble-free representations of meanings).

Paul ten Have uses the distinction between *factist* and *specimen* perspectives to make this point (ibid.:73). EM points out the fundamental reflexivity that is part of all interaction, so that every description of a setting is part of that setting. So, data ostensibly generated through non-naturalistic means can be seen as naturalistic if considered from the specimen perspective. Interesting, Hammersley (2006) suggests that there are two possible reactions to the critique of interviews based on realizations of the ‘socio-cultural construction’ of identities: the first, characterised by CA, insists on the use of naturalistic, *observational* data (ibid.:10). The second, Hammersley to be typical of certain forms of discourse analysis, is that “interviews may be used as sources of data, but only in order to explore the discursive strategies and resources deployed there” (ibid.). Hammersley considers *neither* of these strategies to be “true to the spirit of ethnography” (ibid.).

He does not, however, mention early EM critiques of ethnography (Ball 1998, Anderson 1994), which pointed to the ‘unaccountability’ and ‘just so’ nature of anthropological ethnographies. An improvement to ethnography was possible not least through the procedures of CA, which “[set out] to make a topic of language use, treating it as social action, whilst offering rich descriptive treatments of stored audio materials, which the writer shares with the reader” (Ball op. cit.:119).

The second point is that the ‘reality under study’ should include all descriptions as part of that same reality. For the purposes of studying AW, this means, rather than treating writing separately from descriptions of it – in other words, considering texts as separate from accounts of them – all related material goes to build up this same reality (Watson 2009:27). One implication of this is that accounts of essays, and/or the circumstances

surrounding the writing of essays, cannot be separated from consideration of the essay texts themselves.

a. Interviews and ‘talk around text’

Lillis (2008) distinguishes between ethnography as method, methodology, and ‘deep theorising’ (replicating arguments made by Stanley 1990:621). For the purposes of AL research, ethnography as method (technology) is often conflated with the technique of ‘talk around texts’ (Ivanic 1998, Lillis 2008, 2009). Talk around text involves the researcher and the writer-participant discussing a text “that the writer is writing or has written” (Lillis 2009:171). The text should be ‘real’, i.e. written for genuine educational purposes; and the discussion should not be “a one-off interaction between researcher and writer but is embedded in a ‘longer conversation’... relating to people’s life and literacy histories” (ibid.).

Lillis suggests that talk around text can, or should be analysed in at least three ways (Table 6): for the analysis of the literal context of the emic accounts (treating talk as transparent/referential). Second, as “indexing-specific discourses about self, writing, academia, etc.” (2008:366). This is *prima facie* redolent of work in EM/CA concerning membership categorization. Third, talk around text can be investigated for its performative or relational aspects (ibid.); i.e., for what is revealed as an interactional event.

Three Ways of Viewing Talk Around Academic Texts (Lillis 2008:366)

1 Transparent/referential

Insider accounts/perspective on texts (part of a text), practices including information about the writer—for example, about the person—age, languages spoken, number of papers published, number of assignments written, etc.

2 Discourse/indexical

As indexing-specific discourses about self, writing, academia, etc.

3 Performative/relational

Researcher and researched performing research, identity, power, specific practices at specific moment/place in time

Table 6 – Theresa Lillis on ‘talk around text’

One problem with employing these approaches *en masse* is that not every analytical tradition will recognize them all as legitimate methods, and especially not in concert. For example, EM would tend to focus on the third of these approaches. Carlin talks of the gestalt switch necessary if moving from an analysis of interview as conduit, to interview as collaborative interaction (2009:336). Further, as Lynch (1993) points out in his discussion of the topic/resource distinction, it is easy to subvert the assumption that there is no analytical ground external to fields of practical action. This subversion is readily carried out in AL through the simple operation of adducing theoretical apparatuses.

One objection is that ‘performative’ analysis is not *about* AW as such; if anything, it is *about* the interaction of researcher and participants. This is perhaps inevitable when working within a discipline that makes representation as problematic as EM does. What might be said to these researchers? One approach might be to point out that, taken as a collection of data, we might find performative analysis of talk around text supports findings from other sources, including written work.

Another point is that, prior to carrying out analysis, the researcher is first of all required to demonstrate that there is some properly intersubjective material to work with, i.e. they will have to present some of the ‘insider accounts’ and circumstantial information mentioned in method 1, *even if there is no subsequent method 1 analysis of this data*. In order to carry out most EM or any other analyses, we first need to talk about things.

A third method of rendering interview or talk around text data as more recognisably ‘about’ its topic can be found in Edward Rose’s ‘ethno-inquiries’ (Carlin 2009). Rose’s methods draw out findings by treating them as “collaborative interactions between the parties to the interview” (ibid.:336) rather than “conduits to meanings and interpretations, as furnishing information or ‘data’ for study” (ibid.). Carlin writes of interviews under the auspices of ethno-inquiries:

In taking the interviews as data rather than conduits to a person’s worldview, a particular approach to methods of information-gathering is exhibited. This approach makes visible some formal properties or structures of talk [on particular topics], whereby features of accounts are explicated rather than conflated within a ‘big picture’.

Following Garfinkel & Sacks (1970), formal structures are the “recurrence of ordinary conversational activities in talk” (Carlin op. cit.:342). In his interviews concerning the 1996 IRA bombing of Manchester city centre, Carlin observes a number of formal structures that are most of all *relevant to a particular topic* (i.e. the bombing): common-

sense methods of temporal measurement; conversational prefacing devices to eliminate dispreferred versions of events; evaluating contested versions. Extending this method to the study of AW, we can see how the recurring structures of ‘the ways people talk about academic writing’ would be amenable to both EM and topic-driven analyses.

b. *‘Scenic phenomena are part of writing’*

For practice disciplines, writing is conceived not as “a solitary, freestanding, psychological production of the individual but as one which occurs in a very specific social setting and comprises the author’s (or authors’) situated activity, capitalizing on all kinds of ‘scenic’ resources in that setting” (Watson 2009:18). One of the ways in which this principle unfolds in academic writing specifically is through discipline- and even course-specific understandings of what counts as writing/literacy, and which are used as resources for evaluating texts.

As explained above, Heap (2000) critiques the cognitive psychological theory of writing posited by Flower & Hayes in that it fails to provide a way of deciding how scenic phenomena pertain to activities judged to be writing. Writing should not be seen as limited to inscription (Kress 1993, Scott & Turner 2009). Rather, it is best seen as a largely ‘externalised’ and socially distributed activity. No part of the scene should be omitted from consideration: “The entire list of resources and tools, no matter how long and in what details, represents an open field of potential persons, events, acts, and materials that may, or may not, be consequential for and in the composition process in real time” (Heap op. cit.:84). In fact, there can even be writing without inscription; in Heap’s data there are no obvious points at which Melissa, the main protagonist, in fact writes anything – rather, it is a very public process of composition, which sanctionably counts as writing for the teacher.

A difference between this example of writing and most of what will be available to the AW researcher is that Heap’s was a classroom setting in which composition processes in real time were available. AW research generally deals with products, and even if these are not finalised written products that have been through the administrative processes of marking and feedback, they may require written form before they are available as research objects. What we need to do is establish ways in which Heap’s prescriptions are just as much the case for written products as they are for settings where writing *qua* composition is findable.

Of the classroom writing context, Heap writes: “Theoretically... they are also writing events because within the task environment module of writing, the events are potentially consequential, in situ, for the processes of composition, technically conceived” (ibid.:85, emphases removed). There are therefore both normative and empirical aspects in the classroom to what counts as writing: the teacher is the arbiter of what counts as licit activity in the writing centre. The logical step to AW is that while the normative aspect of writing appears only at the stage of assessing a product, and the empirical aspects of composition are often not available to the researcher (and generally immaterial to the assessor), we cannot assume that scenic phenomena are not part of AW. To do so would be to revert to the idea of composition as a cloistered and private thing.

The EM idea of reflexivity needs to be pursued for these purposes, and it is within these ‘courses of action’ that it can gain purchase. Heap (ibid.:86) asserts that

Rather than seeing these [writing] processes as running only on the fuel of rhetorical assignments, writing plans, and long term memory, we need to see that the writer is always *thrown*, in Heidegger's sense (1962). He or she is always in the midst of projects, with interests which animate action.

Courses of action surrounding writing are reflexive because instances of writing go to help elaborate the same settings that describe them. In short, reflexivity in the EM sense helps to collapse the boundary between naturalistic and non-naturalistic data for AW research. *Post facto* accounts of writing are reflexive to the context in which they were written and assessed.

iv. Reflexivity

The ‘strong’ notion of reflexivity is a cornerstone of EM approaches. Here I will outline what taking on the EM version of reflexivity would mean for the conduct of an EM-inspired AL.

First, it must not be confused with the ‘heroic’ notion of reflexivity that pervades a lot of other qualitative social science (Watson 1987, Lynch 1993, 2000).

Second, it must be recognized that there is ‘no time out’ from the incarnate or reflexive character of social phenomena (Lynch 1993, Garfinkel 2002). This applies to the researcher as well as to the researched (Watson 1987). All accounts, descriptions, and actions are influenced by and built for a setting, but they also always go to make up that setting.

Third, the reflexive character of social actions is of a piece with their *indexicality*, their *accountability*, and (for Heap 1991b), the *orientation* of members to objects brought about in these ways. These are interdependent study policies (Heap *ibid.*, Garfinkel 2002).

In terms of the conduct of research, the investigator will look for what the accounts, descriptions, actions and so on *do* as least as much as what they *say* (Silverman 1998:48). The topic/resource distinction must be honoured; the object would be not literal descriptions of social order or structure, “but rather...the ways in which members assemble particular scenes so as to provide for one another evidences of a social order as-ordinarily-conceived” (Zimmerman & Pollner 1970:83). For EM/CA, “whatever humans do can be examined to discover some way they do it, and that way would be describable” (Sacks, in Silverman *ibid.*).

As implied above, the ‘strong version’ of reflexivity implies a kind of naturalism. Settings need not be limited to what is at hand, and what could be considered as naturalistic *and* non-naturalistic sources both contribute to reflexive understandings of that setting.

v. *Textual analysis*

What has been written so far rails against the idea of a unitary ‘text analysis’ in favour of studying ‘practices’. However, texts still need to play a part in writing research, especially given the range of meaning of ‘textual practices’.

While it would be incommensurable for EM to undertake a unitary text analysis for the ‘inherent features’ of texts or to establish a *tertium comparationis*, the features of texts-as-perceived can be considered for how they reflexively structure ongoing courses of action, and/or for how they provide a basis for reconstruction.

a. *‘Challenging the textual bias’*

For Lillis (2001:31), challenging the textual bias is one of the outcomes of abandoning a study skills model in favour of an AL approach. “It involves a shift away from thinking of language or writing skills as individual possession, towards the notion of an individual engaged in socially situated action; from an individual student having writing skills, to a student doing writing in specific contexts” (*ibid.*). Writing is not an individual, individually-owned, or even usually private activity, but is “undertaken using socially

learned and shared practices” (ibid.:198). When the practices become the object, ascertaining textual features ceases to be an end in itself.

Lillis suggests that text and context can be collapsed in the idea of *practice* (2008:374). The eradication of discrete analysis of texts can be seen as one of the by-products of modes of examination that take as their point of departure the transitivity of reading and writing. Wherever possible, then, the AW researcher can mine ethnographic work for the gestalt contextures (Watson 2009) of both texts-as-read and the presence of scenic phenomena within writing. The reflexively structuring effects of texts within course of action (ibid.) would seem to derive naturally from such considerations.

b. How to get practices out of products

Paul ten Have (2004:32-3) outlines four strategies for undertaking EM studies. The last of these he describes as “the study of ordinary practices by first mechanically recording some of their ‘products’” (ibid.:33). I have noted above that AW research may provide materials that have no ‘context’ to accompany them. In such cases, the practices that contributed to the production of those texts can be reconstructed.

Works that have brought out the transformation of texts into other texts include Hak (1992), Heath & Luff (1996), and Pontille (2010). A much-analysed example is Sacks’ essay *Max Weber’s Ancient Judaism* (1999). Schegloff (1999) shows how Sacks’ work on Weber, no less than his work on police procedures, can be rendered as a sociological ‘method for X’, a way of getting to a desired point through the employment of certain practices. Weber “addresses questions to the Old Testament, and treats what he finds in the Old Testament as ‘answers to his questions’” (Sacks op. cit.:35). Weber’s reconstructive methods are Sacks’ focus. His interest in the Old Testament and *Ancient Judaism* is that it allows him to find the *practices* incipient in Weber’s text.

When transferred to the domain of AW research, student texts and the supporting documentation that surrounds them offer many opportunities to undertake and/or examine such reconstructive work. As with Sacks’ Weber example, there are layers of texts on texts that may be examined at each point for the reconstructive methods therein, depending upon their purpose and aim. Even texts that have gone through their administrative life course can be the subject of rumination as to their broader meaning and significance.

c. *Text gestalts and repair*

When addressing a text separated from its original context, we need to find out how the text is repaired, or repairable in principle by a reader. Student texts will be written for someone of putatively greater specialist expertise. The reader will therefore need to decide to what extent desirable textual features are findable. Both expert and neophyte writers in a field have the same challenge: to present plausible work for their audience. Although with different outcomes at stake, both kinds of writers have practical purposes to achieve.

Given that, “far from discovering society, the social sciences trade upon a presumed knowledge of society for the sake of their particular findings” (O’Neill 1981:111), it becomes incumbent on the researcher dealing with texts to “extend these [ethnomethodological] findings from conversational and organizational settings to the discovery of the literary correlates of reasoned argument, and of reader/writer relations of topical co-orientation, recipient-design, closure and repair” (ibid.:112-3). All or none of these features may be findable in texts depending upon their type and occasion, but O’Neill also envisages “studies of the sequential order, logic, categorizations and contrastive structures” (ibid.:113). Hence, he wants to find how a given text achieves its status as a *plausible text* (Anderson 1978).

O’Neill stresses that the devices in social science writing are first and foremost “interactional resources whereby each of the categorizations of author, reader and subject or study are framed in a recipient-design of relevantly communicable, competent knowledge of experiences differentially distributed between what any of us knows in general” (op. cit.:113). For instance, a research report cannot be fully interpreted without access to disciplinary-specific traditions and technologies. This contributes a series of ‘modes of practical reasoning’ in social and natural science writing, but also in reading. Anderson demonstrates how “the sociological reader produces at least some of whatever order and plausibility he [sic] finds” (Anderson 1978:116). The accomplishment of order and plausibility is carried out through the *reading* of a text that is written in such a way as to afford the possibility of recognizing these features.

vi. *Breadth and rigour*

We need to work with enough material to i. make it clear that what is being carried out is a study of academic writing, and with whatever other focus is specified; ii. justifiably claim

that the study is ethnographic. A case must be made, even if implicitly, for 'being there' (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970), and sufficient data must be presented for alternate analyses to be possible. At the same time, EM studies live or die by the detail of their analysis. Anderson (1978:116) was aware of this in the research for his study of sociological paper on youth: "In trying to analyze enough data to please... sociologists and retain enough analytic rigour to please ethnomethodologists we have almost certainly upset both". The concern, as ever, is to present material in such a way as to be recognisable to its audience.

a. 'One thing that looks interesting is...'

Anderson (1978) notes that Sacks selected items for analysis in a fashion that might look 'cavalier'. We find locutions such as that in the heading. "Why", Anderson asks (ibid.:117), "should choice of items not be more systematic?" Items for sociological research are likely to have many potential identities which may not become clear prior to analysis. They may be tokens of many different categories which require the analyst to choose 'generative material'. Moreover, a large collection of items may not be reducible to a small number of types.

Here, I am working with a design broadly recognisable as an ethnographic case study approach. To say that disparate bits of data 'hang together' is less a theoretical choice and more as a commonsense orientation to materials. Student written work, written responses, and staged and unstaged conversation *involving or not involving the researcher* may all be used in discussion of the same case. These items are linked not just through their status as an arbitrary collection on a topic, but also through their mutual links in a relationship of what Macbeth (2001) calls 'constitutive reflexivity'.

b. Choosing features of texts

AW studies can be concerned with ideas of practice that i. address texts within and structuring courses of action, ii. texts as embedded within 'wider' practices (Schatzki 1996, Smith 1990), and iii. texts themselves as accountably interactional artefacts. All of these understandings seem reasonable, but they each draw upon a distinct understanding of 'practice' (*literacy or textual*). It seems to me that all three of these aspects must be addressed for the idea of literacy practices to be fully developed.

The selection of textual features or aspects, then, needs to support such analyses. Academic texts are fairly long documents, are surrounded by other documentation that addresses them, are used in disparate times and places, and are not entirely what Heap (1991a) calls ‘enabling texts’ (one whose function is fulfilled by the text enabling another action beyond the act of reading it). Thus, a first principle is that only those parts or aspects of a text that are warrantably relevant to the intersubjective achievement of social order should be considered.

vii. Generalisation

EM studies do not aim for inductive, deductive, or grounded theories (Sharrock & Button 1991), and their findings are hard to disprove by the same means. EM studies are generalisable in as much as they reveal something of the essence of our ways of doing social life (Coulter 1999).

In fact, it has often been observed that the EM findings are *induction-proof* (Schegloff 2007a, Silverman 1998). First, different versions of generalization do not operate with commensurable standards of proof. Winch (1958) argued that natural phenomena are understood in terms of cause, whereas social phenomena are understood in terms of motives and reasons for action. Furthermore, “whereas the category of cause involves generality by way of empirical generalizations, that of a reason for action involves generality by way of rules. And these notions – of generalization and of rule – differ from each other in important logical respects” (ibid.:xi). Both Coulter (1999) and Lynch (2000) cite Wittgenstein (1958:§ 122), who pointed out the essential form of ‘perspicuous representations’ as opposed to “inductive, empirical, quasi-statistical, distributional generalities” (Coulter op. cit.).

Second, Winch observes that in the social sciences, the recognition of the same phenomenon in disparate events is not a matter of technical knowledge or scientific method; “The criteria for the identity of events observed are not those deriving from the researcher’s theoretical allegiances, but those taken from within – learned from – the social setting itself” (ibid.). Social scientists trade on the same rule-governed behaviours in their professional activities that any competent member does.

Last, it is possible to find empirical support for rule- or category-based practical generalisations through membership categorisation analyses. Briefly put, a membership categorisation device is a collection of membership categories plus their rules of

application (Baker 2000). Among other things, given categories of members have *co-selections* of actions and behaviours (and rights, obligations, knowledge, attributes, etc. [Hester 1992]) ‘predicated’ to them. If a member behaves contrary to the predicates suggested by their membership, “then people do not revise that knowledge, but see the person as ‘an exception’, ‘different,’ or even a defective member of the category” (Schegloff op. cit.:469).

AL is in fact quite apt to all this. Although Lea & Street (1998:160, 165) talk about a form of induction in their study, this was “not based on a representative sample from which generalisations could be drawn but rather was conceived as providing case studies that enabled us to explore theoretical issues and generate questions for further systematic study” (ibid.:160). It was therefore in the tradition of anthropological case study work and a form of *analytical induction* rather than a statistically-driven *enumerative induction*. My assumption is that EM’s use of perspicuous studies in its own analytical, *but atheoretical*, manner will be usable by AL practitioners.

viii. Situated studies

The EM idea of situatedness is that all social actions are local, embodied, and practiced (Macbeth 1996); pre-theoretical and pre-conceptual. They occur in specific times and places but they also reflexively go to build up these contexts in real time. Social actions are rule-governed but in the sense that the rules are only realised and evoked through the work of accountably behaving in accordance with them (Sharrock & Randall 2004:191). Social order is accordingly created *in situ* (Macbeth 2001:51), and is praxiologically accomplished. It eschews explanations originating from individual-cognitive, general-theoretical, conceptual, causal, or enumerative provenances.

One defining characteristic of EM’s situationalism is its focus on the *possibilities of phenomena*, as taken from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1958: § 90). As we have seen, “the situated perspective is concerned with the possible identity of...action” (Heap 1992:50). We acquire from this EM’s anti-essentialism in that actions take on their identity through their embeddedness in practice. The various EM study policies are also implicated in its situationalism, meaning that it provides us with immediate access to both culture-in-action and to social structure.

However, this is not the only way of understanding ‘situatedness’, and it is necessary to provide some idea of how conceptions of the ‘situated’ might diverge. Each discipline

undertakes ‘situated’ studies according to its own orthodoxies for the conduct of research, so situationalism can be used as a point for divergence rather than convergence.

In this way, it is possible to find statements on EM/CA’s situated studies that see it on the one hand as operating a radical situationalism (Lester & Hadden 1980:5), and on the other hand, as not considering the situatedness of data at all (Blommaert 2005:64). Part of the problem, I think, comes from the common reduction of EM to CA by ‘outside’ researchers who are only familiar with the latter, which has been co-opted as a means of analysing ‘discourse’ (Seedhouse 2007). CA evinces little interest in what has been called ‘distal’ context (Blommaert *ibid.*), but that is not its point: CA aims to find what it can solely by interrogating, typically, fragments of conversational data.

This main distinction might be seen as the use or otherwise of the locution ‘situated *in*’.²⁰ Adding the preposition suggests, it seems, that local practices are located in supralocal bodies. Thus we get this kind of statement (Blommaert 2005:67):

It is remarkable that whenever we say that text is ‘situated’ in discourse-analytical terms, we seem to refer to forms of strict locality: the unique, one-time, and micro-situatedness of text. From this individual situatedness, larger structures, patterns, or ‘rules’ can then be deduced, but these generalisations do not involve higher-level situatedness: discourse seems to lose context as soon as it is raised above the single-text level. This different degree of situatedness – large, general, supra-individual, typical, structural, and higher than the single society – should have a place in any form of critical study of discourse.

The kind of situationalism revealed here is that which sees local practices as situated in a wider setting that gives meaning to it. As such, it seems to reinstate a dualism. The idea of ‘level’ introduces another way of having ‘degrees of situatedness’, which again is not commensurate with EM’s “rigorously naturalistic program for studying [social order and structure]” (Macbeth 2003:242).

As I have discussed, under CDA auspices, naturally occurring data becomes “the occasion for demonstrating the practical purchase of theorised structure in ordinary experience” (*ibid.*:249). CDA is therefore sceptical about what the ‘natives’ can know, given the invisibilities of power and social structures. This reinstates a deficit model that becomes almost ironic given AL statements about the abandonment, in principle, of deficit models in academic writing.

²⁰ A quick review suggests the basis of an interesting pattern: Macbeth (1996) and ten Have (2004), representing EM, use ‘situated’, not ‘situated in’. Blommaert (2005, CDA) and Barton & Hamilton (2000, NLS) frequently add the preposition.

Conclusions

I consider these points to be the most important conclusions to be taken from the discussion above:

- The overarching aim of studying social literacies is to capture their ‘real-world character’, and this is best achieved through technologies broadly understood as ‘ethnographic’.
- The focus of such work, given the chosen analytical framework, will be on sites where the intersubjective work of sense-making is achieved. Analysis of all types of data must be carried out on this premise.
- The different data types are interrelated and interdependent.
- Naturalistic data should be pursued but taking the EM notion of reflexivity to its logical end renders all admissible data as interactional events.
- With all material, including text, we need to describe the social order involved, or the machinery for how these data could have come about.
- The texts will generally be involved in *courses of action* that can be considered case studies. There may be actions that are relevant to writing and composition that do not involve inscription.
- These are praxiological studies. Practices are seen as accountable actions, adequate for the setting. They are not to be identified inductively or deductively as patterns of behaviour. This will involve texts in a variety of ways, all of which can be exploited.
- ‘Situativeness’ is achieved as much as it is given. The danger of situating phenomena in abstract levels of analysis is that the available detail may be lost or overlooked.

Last, I should reiterate two EM principles. First, that all conclusions should be entailed by the data. Second, that the data and analysis should be transparently presented.

Chapter 4

How the research was carried out

This account of my empirical research displays some marked differences from the preceding picture of an ‘idealised’ study. However, I take encouragement from the overall proximity of my work to ‘the study that might have been’, given my last several years of reflection and research. Here, I also defend the various changes made to the approach taken, as these have not only been formative for me but have contributed to the overall coherence of the project.

Matters of research design, analytical perspective, data collection, and analysis are bound up with each other. Once the dust has settled on activities ‘in the field’, attention can turn to the materials. Although we should expect the same contingency that characterises fieldwork to appear in subsequent analyses, following the preceding discussion I feel it is reasonably clear how the data can be interrogated given my analytical choices. A lot of what appears above comes from extended reflection on my own field activities, and reflects what I had to do, what I could have done, and what now seems axiomatic strong precepts for carrying out any similar kind of research. It is not meant to be a case of ‘do as I did’.

Prior to the start of the empirical phase, it was suggested to me that I should investigate the literature on academic literacies, another approach to studying writing with an applied linguistic provenance, but one more in keeping with my own sensibilities. This turned out to be the catalyst for a much clearer vision of what I wanted to do in my research. In academic literacies there was a research agenda and a small body of work that addressed academic writing in a way intelligible to somebody with a sociological background.

My intention from the outset was to carry out research that was inter- or multidisciplinary, and the ethnomethodological influence was also there from the beginning. I therefore concur with Berry (2003) that it is easier and more productive to carry out a dialogue between cognate disciplines. Gee (2000) has located both AL/NLS and EM/CA as disciplines within the practice turn. A large part of what has appeared above concerns the fact that, while AL/NLS and EM/CA both stress their ‘situated’ studies, they come to this in different ways. For those who choose to carry out EM or related research, they do so simply because it appears more philosophically satisfactory to

them. From this point on, the methodological discussion between AL and EM became one of my main research objects.

In fact, by most measures this discussion would make this study what is known within EM as a 'hybrid' study (Lynch 1993, Garfinkel 2002). Garfinkel refers to hybrid studies as those "in which the analyst is uniquely and adequately competent to teach practitioners the production and natural accountability of the phenomenon" (2002:126). Assuming Sacks' work with the Los Angeles police to be the paradigmatic case (ibid.:186, Garfinkel & Wieder 1992:185), the analyst is first instructed by the 'work group' and then becomes sufficiently competent to turn details of the instructed actions back to that group. The intended outcome would be "to develop hybrid disciplines in which ethnomethodological studies of, for example, lawyers' work would contribute to legal research" (Lynch 1993:274). In this case, although the analogy is not precise, the intention is that the outcomes of the study are recognisable to practitioners of social literacy studies for its praxiological and pedagogical analyses.

The main difference in moving from a CR- to an AL-influenced design was that there were no obvious prescriptions in terms of which, or how many students should be approached to participate. A CR approach would normally take a sample of students of two 'distinct' ethnic-national-linguistic groups, and administer the same writing task to them. It would then examine the writing for differences according to a pre-determined textual analytic device designed to address a given aspect of the text.

In contrast, I wanted to find out how students argued their cases in their essays, drawing not just on the structures of their written arguments, but also on factors beyond the text that influenced how they wrote. There was no need to isolate a 'representative sample' for this, but it was agreed that it would cause no harm to find a set of participants that represented at least overseas as well as home students. The initial idea was to recruit and work with around twelve students, four of whom would be 'home' (with UK citizenship) students, four Chinese, and four from India or Pakistan. The aim would not be overtly to compare these groups, but to consider each student individually as a case. If it turned out that comparison along national lines was warranted, then that could be accommodated.

I advertised for participants at the beginning of the academic year 2006-7 by sending email messages to mailing lists, working from personal contacts, and requesting participants during academic induction. This process turned up nine students that were willing to participate: five of them 'home' students and four of them, for university

purposes, 'overseas'. One of the home students I quickly lost touch with, leaving a nicely symmetrical body of eight participants. One of the overseas students transferred at the end of his first year studies to a Canadian university, but remained in the study through email contact. I understand my data, then, as having been generated through cooperation with these eight students.

At the beginning I made it clear to the participants what would be required from their cooperation in the research: to undertake two semi-structured interviews every academic session; to provide copies of the essays that they had submitted; to send me copies of other comment they had received on the same; and to contact me whenever they had any comments or anecdotes concerning academic writing either general or specific. My side of the bargain was, first, to maintain confidentiality; and second, to provide advice on their works-in-progress if they so requested. I produced and asked the students to sign a consent form (see Appendix 1).

I consider this a straightforward and unproblematic study with regard to its research ethics. The participating students were all over eighteen and had entered the university as adults. Despite this, I applied for, and received, an enhanced CRB check. My concern was therefore not with the inherent vulnerability of the participants. If there was an overriding ethical concern, it was with keeping the students' accounts of their courses and instructors confidential. There should be no question of compromising their work or results. The consent form was designed with these possibilities in mind; as it will be clear from the sample in Appendix 1, this form was as much informative and a covenant on my behalf as it was an agreement on the student's part. As it happened, some conversations concerning the student participants did take place with the staff participants (see below), but these were largely after the students had graduated. In all other cases, there was no breach of confidentiality. My general aim was to instil confidence in the students that their participation in my research would be kept separate from any matters that tangibly affected their studies. This was particularly important given the extended period open for empirical research.

The international students who took part were European, with a distinctly Western European bias. Moreover, three of the four overseas participants had taken the International Baccalaureate (IB) as their pre-university qualification. The general impression of the participants as a body was of a group of people who were confident, generally well-equipped to approach their university studies, competent at expressing

themselves in English, unworried about revealing aspects of their identity, and happy to talk about themselves and their work at length.

Longitudinal research

The period dedicated to empirical research was two years. This was afforded by my status as a part-time research student, and there were many reasons to consider it an advantage. Most prominent was the opportunity to track progress and changes in writing practice on an intra-case basis. This was initially a design choice attached to the notion of a fairly formal mode of textual analysis. Changes across the student cohorts could then be linked to, among other things, evidence of learning.

The longitudinal design also allowed the opportunity to gather data from students in all three years of undergraduate study. The intention was to recruit an equal number of students who were in their first and second years at the time the research commenced. A two-year period would therefore mean that the first cohort would be at the end of their second year when the field work was due to finish, while the second cohort would be graduating. Most importantly, it allowed me to follow up substantive and personal matters with individual participants.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured in that, while I had a set of questions to ask in each case, there was room for the participants to set their own agenda. Although I wanted the conversation to gravitate around academic writing, this topic can be arrived at from a number of routes and so I encouraged the participants to talk around such subjects as were of interest to them. The first interview with each participant was organised within the opening weeks of the academic year. The initial interviews were introductory in nature and were designed as much as anything to perform a 'getting-to-know-you' function, and to demonstrate to the participants what form the interviews would take. In these first interviews I asked the participants about their educational background, essay writing experience, exposure to different academic disciplines, and their expectations for what would happen at the university. With the first year students, one focus was on their transition to higher education, whereas with the second years there was scope to go into their first year experience retrospectively.

The second interviews were held in early 2007 when the participants all had experience of writing essays and receiving feedback comments on them. This allowed variations of the 'talk around text' method, usually concerning texts that had already been completed. Concentrating efforts on finished texts was a conscious choice, and it meant that they qualified as natural occurring data sources, while also removing any concerns about research ethics. It was also very much more convenient to obtain them. Moreover, the participants could talk about their experiences of writing the essay, receiving comments on it, and, importantly, making sense of all aspects of the administrative life of the essay. Introducing the texts to the interview schedule at this stage seemed to allow each participant to take on a very individual 'research identity', as they all had very particular comments and issues, largely based around aspects of their writing. Increasingly, my approach to providing the 'grist' for the interviews was to i. locate general concerns that I wanted to pursue with all participants, ii. take up issues that were personal to each student and which seemed would be conducive to ongoing discussion; iii. allow the participants to suggest their own topics.

Many of the participants followed up with email communication and there was also a degree of informal face-to-face contact with some of them. This allowed for fairly brief but useful exchanges of information. For this reason, I decided that a single interview with each participant was sufficient in the second year of research. The students continued to send me their written work in the same way as before, adding comments in various modes. A fourth interview was deemed necessary in one case, in order to follow up what seemed like particularly propitious sites for enquiry.

The interviews were held in various small classrooms on the university campus. They ranged in duration from about half an hour for the initial interviews to well over an hour in the second and third rounds, when there was more material to discuss. Interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participants, on a cassette Dictaphone for the first set of interviews and thereafter on a digital Olympus voice recorder. All of the interviews were one-on-one, although there was often some discussion about other participants that the interviewee at the time was friendly with.

The interviews were therefore conducted on a fairly formal basis, in that they were planned, premeditated and semi-structured. Over time, as I had further informal contact with academic staff members whose courses were involved as settings for the essays that the students were writing, it became evident that these staff members had things to say about the students and the student writing on their courses. It occurred to me that I should

make a record of some of this information, and to this end I conducted four face-to-face interviews, one each with four different academic colleagues.

These were conducted in a manner largely identical to the interviews with the students, although in some cases the interviews were really more like opportunities to continue and record ongoing conversations that I was already having. The staff interviews predictably yielded very interesting insights, and in the case of the contact with my closest colleagues from those interviewed, if anything piqued their curiosity even more about matters concerning their teaching and the outcomes of the students involved, whom in many cases were known to us both by name.

As I conducted these staff interviews after most of the student interviews had been completed, I felt at liberty to share some of the topics that had come up in the latter with the staff. I did not feel that there was any kind of ethical problem in doing this, especially as the student participants were very positive about their academic tuition and support; both students and tutors seemed to use the interview setting as an opportunity to reflect on their respective practice. This was of course very useful for me, and indeed a characteristic of this element of the empirical research was that there was little evidence of participants holding back information or refusing to go down certain directions in conversation.

Plausibility

When I began this project, my intention was to investigate argumentative essays. *Essays*, because this is the genre of writing most often used in assessment; and *argumentative*, because they represent sites where the very exigency of having to argue a case in credit-bearing assessment provides for a rhetorical context. The student writer not only has to pay attention to the structure of their argument but also needs to take into account the requirements of the setting. I concur with the sentiments of Nystrand (1982:5), who claims that: “writing in the absence of a rhetorical context is not really discourse; it is the bloodless, academic exercise of essay-making, dummy runs, and pedagogical artefacts such as the five-paragraph theme – in short, a degeneration of rhetoric” (1982:5). Because of what is at stake, university essay writing is very much a rhetorical exercise.

It was this articulation between argument *per se* and rhetoric that led me to pursue the latter as opposed to the former; this, and the fact that CR had reduced the five Aristotelian canons of rhetoric to the single canon of *arrangement* (Connor 1996:31). The result was that I came to pursue an understanding of rhetoric that was sensitive to real-world

reasoning, encapsulating not only the forms of argument as set down in writing, but also any and every wider factor that contributed to the rhetorical piquancy of the work. In this way the desired concept was very much more a sociological one than purely formal-rhetorical.

Another problem I had with the idea of rhetoric is that it is generally thought of as the means used to *persuade* or *convince* a listener (or reader) that a given state of affairs is the case (Perelman 1982). Rhetoric is meant to be transformative, i.e. to bring about changes of mind in the recipient. In university essay writing, it seemed to me unlikely that student writers would convince or persuade their assessors of anything that they did not want to be convinced or persuaded of – at least, this would be an exceptional rather than commonplace occurrence. It is eminently possible that a lecturer may not be convinced of the *case* that a given student has provided in their written work, but still convinced of the same student's *academic credentials*, as per the quote from Eagleton in the introduction.

For these reasons I needed a category wider than rhetoric, and preferably one with a social science provenance. I came across the idea of *plausibility* in a paper by Digby Anderson (1978). Although this idea also has a background in many other disciplines (e.g. informal logic; Walton 2001), Anderson's paper treats plausibility as being established at a fundamental level. His chosen field for the analysis of plausibility is the sociology of youth, through which he shows that the according (or withholding) of judgements of plausibility is due not just to presenting a technical argument that is formally accurate or otherwise compelling: "we might expect to find sociological accounts accredited in much the same way as commonsense accounts are namely, that their accreditors use the contextual and presentational particulars to judge plausibility for their professional-scientific-practical-purposes" (ibid.:115). Moreover, "Believing a description seems intimately related to reading the description as an orderly product. The orderliness is some sort of necessary condition to the plausibility, if no more...[we] restrict our meaning of plausibility to 'believable' rather than 'believed' so that our concern is not to judge accounts credible or not, but to provide for their credibility insofar as they can be found to be credible" (ibid.).

To put it differently, a sociological argument must first be *seen and recognised as accountably sociological*. Anderson addresses a few of the myriad ways in which this accountability is produced by writers working in the sociology of youth. By extension, student work will have its own accountable features that make it plausible; so in one sense both argument and rhetoric can be seen as features of student essays that contribute to the

overall plausibility of the same. However, the first concern is to make the essay accountably appear as something that can (possibly) be believed and understood as a certain *order of thing* (Heap 2000). What I am concerned with here is how students make their work appear plausible; and with the local, collaborative achievement of student work as plausible. Plausibility should therefore be understood to subsume argument and rhetoric, in addition to any other factors that can possibly pertain to the design and reception of the text.

Textual analysis

It was only fairly late on in the study that I came to the conclusions set out above regarding the redundancy of a unitary textual analysis (cf. Fairclough 1992). Prior to this, I spent a lot of time and effort constructing a heuristic for textual analysis that I have since abandoned. The work of putting together this heuristic was carried out in a more or less grounded fashion, by finding features of essay texts that appeared to support a general impression of them as contributing to the plausibility of that essay. One set of coding categories incorporated an adapted version of Toulmin's (1958) model of argument, while the other top-level categories addressed various kinds of rhetorical accompaniment to the argument. However, I was not able to reconcile EM influenced approaches and formal textual analysis to my satisfaction. Moving to a more holistic mode of analysis was not only more ethnographically satisfactory, it also allows the local (in whatever sense) as opposed to global consideration of texts (in the sense expressed by Ivanic, 1998:118).

As it stands, every aspect of the study can be considered with techniques from the same tradition. I would consider this a superior position to that of, for example, Candlin et al. (Candlin 1998), whose research used an alliance of methodologies: "linguistic and discursive description (for texts), hermeneutic and ethnomethodological interpretation (for participants and processes), and sociologically and ethnographically grounded accounting and explanation (for practices)" (ibid.:3). A few things occur. Texts, processes, and practices are analytically divided here, where there is no obvious need for this were the intention, as Candlin goes on to state, to consider the *integrative* ways in which these things are considered both by laypersons and analysts. This passage makes it sound as though practices were not to be found in texts, and would seem to have a blind spot in omitting the processes involved in carrying out linguistic and discursive description.

Moreover, the mention of EM in conjunction with ‘interpretation’ is not that common, and suggests a series of methodologies arbitrarily tacked on to each other.

Quasi-ethnography again, and ‘hot-spots’

I would describe this as a quasi-ethnographic study. It depends upon a particular conception of the case study to provide structure and trajectory to the data. The research was carried out on and around my workplace, and it was an index of my professional obligations that it was a practical impossibility to do much in the way of ‘hanging around with the natives’. In my view, there was insufficient opportunity for consistency of focus, and time spent in location, for this study to qualify as an ethnography in the strict sense.

A full list of the sources of data would incorporate: semi-structured interviews with students; semi-structured interviews with academic staff; the students’ essays; the feedback on their essays; email contact between me and the participants; relevant institutional documentation; and informal ad hoc contact with all participants and other relevant parties. My notes are largely thematic or pertain to the sources above, as there was little opportunity or cause to record events outside the auspices of my cases.

It was agreed from the outset that the participants would constitute case studies, but that the eventual cases would be reached through these initial cases (Walters 2007). It became clear as the research progressed that there were points where various items of data intersected – for instance, where more than one student participant wrote the same essay for the same course in the same year, where I could get each of them to talk about this, where I could also speak with the course convenor, and collect the essays. These points were considered to be particularly rich in interesting material and they have formed the basis for case studies as presented here. After a suggestion from one of my supervisors, they were given the colloquial title ‘hot-spots’, and they constituted a useful way of arriving at and thinking about case studies. The final step in the development of the cases thus conceptualised was to consider, along EM lines, the various interactional events in the cases as incorporated within and reflexively contributing to courses of action. The highest degree of relativisation that can be considered in tertiary academic writing is that of a given student writing a given assignment for a given tutor in a given course at a given time. I have dubbed this scenario the *minimum epistemological unit*, and it appears to have utility in stressing the haecceity (Garfinkel 2002) of the writing setting.

The setting for the study

This study takes place in a large research-intensive university in the north-west of England. Bearing in mind the central messages of AL, it seemed to me that my place of work provided a potentially rich site for such a study, in the form of the degree programme I work with most closely. My professional position was as a staff member that has some responsibility for generic instruction on this programme, and as much understanding as anyone about the challenges that face its students. I start here with an account of both the programme and the student body.

The degree programme

All of the students involved were reading the same social sciences degree programme. This is by some way the largest programme at the university in question, and certainly one of the largest in the UK: at the time that the study took place, the total cohort over three years numbered nearly 2,000 students.

The programme is a multidisciplinary one: students can study a wide array of disciplines, ranging from the classical social sciences (sociology, social anthropology, politics) to applied numerate disciplines, as well as composite disciplines (development studies, business studies). After a liberal arts-style first year, students must choose a joint or single honours pathway. What this means in practice is that all students must study and write within a number of disciplines over the course of their degree.

There is a large overseas contingent on this programme, at least 40% of any cohort at the time that the study was conducted. The diversity of the student body is very high with little ascertainable patterning in terms of background, interests, prior expertise, and disciplinary affiliation. The audience for what I call the 'classical' social sciences tends to be found among the students of UK and European origin. One corollary of this is the necessary variety of entry qualifications, and subsequent diversity of performance and perceived ability in terms of academic writing. Historically it has been assumed that the larger groups of overseas students may well have deficiencies in their academic writing and related academic skills. There are constant discussions concerning what remedies or support might be put in place to improve the standard of writing overall.

Formal changes over the course of the research

A number of formal changes were made to the conditions that the students worked in over the course of the empirical phase of this study. I briefly set out these changes here.

i. Feedback policy and policies

During the research, there was a school-wide movement to make arrangements around feedback and assessment maximally transparent, and, most of all, more uniform. Historical disciplinary quirks began to be eradicated.

At the time, online feedback was still in its inception, so the predominant method was to return the student a feedback sheet (either electronically or in hard copy), on which there was a series of marking criteria, often grouped into related clusters. It was noticeable that these marking sheets, although specific to the department, did not really reflect in any obvious way the epistemologies or distinctive features of those disciplines. These ‘tick boxes’ were seemingly unpopular with students, for at least the following reasons: 1. they were not sufficiently connected to specific locations within the text; 2. many of the key terms (e.g. ‘analysis’) took on disciplinary nuance; 3. perceived inconsistencies between markers; 4. a perceived hierarchy or weighting of criteria that was not made explicit to students; 5. lack of clarity between the marks for the criteria and the final grade.

In the second year of empirical study, this system was largely replaced in favour of online feedback.

ii. New degree regulations and marking

A second major change was the introduction of new undergraduate degree regulations. The school had for many years had what it considered a healthy balance of classifications awarded. The new regulations, according to some projections, were seen as likely to lead to a greater concentration in the middle classifications, with fewer fails, thirds, and firsts. The result was that academics, particularly in the ‘softer’ disciplines where marking was more affected by individual and local preferences, were asked to ‘mark across the range’. A ‘change of marking culture’ was mentioned on many occasions. At the top end of the scale, this was addressed by dividing first-class marks into lower and upper firsts (Appendix 5). Projections showed that increasing a mark by only a few percentage points across the board would make a difference to a student’s final classification. It was

recognised that the ‘glass ceiling’ that afflicted some disciplines could at least be raised to the extent that students under the new regulations would not be ‘disadvantaged’.

iii. Academic support

There was an increasing perception on the part of the students that more academic support should be provided. A telling request came from a philosophy student who opined that, if the philosophy department was going to assess students almost exclusively by means of essays, then it was incumbent upon them to provide tuition in essay writing; preferably, with a specific focus on what it was to write a *philosophy* essay. A mature student suggested that her essay writing development had stalled through lack of instruction and feedback and was still at the same level as her pre-university writing.

Students viewed academic support as something that should be offered at the local, i.e. discipline level. A somewhat different view was held by academic staff. One reason adduced at the time was that many academic staff are unlikely to consider any more than basic essay writing support as something within their capabilities. Other reasons could be found: time constraints; not wanting to ‘baby’ students; a washing-of-hands perspective, perhaps encouraged by the perception that general skills are best learnt at school. The situation, then and now, is that there is no universal formal support provided by the school for students in essay writing.

iv. Anonymisation

As the study took place the final touches to a policy of anonymised submission and marking were being made. Essentially, this meant that students increasingly submitted their course work with their personal identification numbers rather than names visible, and that markers carried out their assessment of the work ostensibly ‘blind’ to student identity (Appendix 6). Looking back over the data, the differences between the feedback returned in the two years of empirical research were quite telling. The earlier model of addressing the student by name (e.g., “well done X, another good essay”) was completely absent in the second year of research. However, it cannot be said that anonymous marking was policed rigorously. It is easy for someone armed with a student registration number and access to the university database to find the identity of the person whose work one is marking. There are, and were, also a range of practical get-outs (dissertation supervision,

mixed assessment, sheer familiarity) that meant my discussions with staff more often gravitated around particular names rather than ‘your student’.

The student participants

The student participants feature in no particular order here. These were the main *dramatis personae* of the study. Some at-a-glance information is provided in Appendices 2-4.

Tim

Tim was in his second year, having taken a gap year before his university studies. His specialisation at the outset was in anthropology, but this changed during the year to politics and economics. He had a broad interest in social sciences and did not seem worried by having only studied one of these disciplines at A-level at a grammar school. He was a Londoner by upbringing and although he had dual citizenship, he held only a UK passport. Tim’s main concern, as we took up our cooperation, was how to transform his consistent 2:1 marks into first class marks. He was a phlegmatic presence and extremely articulate, although sometimes seeming a little distant. From the second year on, Tim lived with Jens.

Iwona

Iwona was a Polish student who had come to English straight from completing the International Baccalaureate (IB) in Warsaw. She was taking the rather unusual combination of sociology and business studies, neither of which she had studied for her IB. In our first meeting, during Iwona’s second year of study, she was able to bring examples of work with her that had gained first class marks. She spoke interestingly of perceived differences between her writing experiences in her earlier days of her Polish education and the more Anglophone approaches of the IB. Iwona was one of many students on the study that had travelled extensively or lived in many different countries at an early age.

Jens

Jens was a German student who had come to the UK for his undergraduate studies after taking the standard German *Abitur* at the equivalent of a grammar school. In common with

Tim, he specialised in economics and politics, of which he had studied only the former before entering higher education. Jens was a polite and pleasant interviewee and prefaced each meeting with the customary German handshake. He felt a need to improve his writing, and seemed, more than any of the participants, to use the study as an opportunity to reflect on his writing practices. With the ostensible disadvantage of not being a native speaker of English, he took the opportunity to have Tim, who took many of the same courses, look over his work. Jens was aware that the quality of writing would be a central factor in his academic achievement and gave the impression that he closely attended to his written output.

Rose

Rose entered the university in 2005-6, but because of illness could not complete her second year in full and was obliged to sit a number of exams in 2007-8 without otherwise attending. She returned for her final year in 2008-9, when we picked up our collaboration again. By this time she had switched to a specialisation in politics. Rose had not taken any discursive social sciences at A-level, but she had taken geography, which she described as having given her essay-writing practice. She brought with her an interest in politics; in particular, the opportunity to argue.

The remaining students were first years when they started their collaboration with me in 2006-7.

Susie

Susie was born locally to the university to a Polish father and an English-Russian Mother. She took three A-levels at a college located within a mile of the university. Two of these were in politics and sociology, and this very combination was her specialisation throughout the degree. Susie chose courses not out of interest in or affiliation to a particular discipline or disciplines, but so that she could pursue an interest in gender and sexuality from the perspective of as many disciplines as were available. At the time of this study, however, Susie had started to choose courses from whatever disciplines allowed her to obtain the conceptual and substantive wherewithal to follow up what could justifiably be described as a nascent research interest.

Ville

Ville was, strictly speaking, a Finnish Swede. He was born in Finland to minority Swedish parents, so his mother tongue was Swedish but he held a Finnish passport, and considered himself Finnish. He had completed the IB at a school in Sweden, where he had lived for five years, and applied to the university after a gap year during which he worked in Germany and then carried out his national service. He had applied to take politics and economics. Despite taking neither of these subjects during the IB, he had completed the IB's extended essay on a related subject. In his view, politics and economics were the disciplines that afforded a "power perspective" on "how the world works". He arrived at the university with a libertarian perspective on social and political life that he seemed determined to pursue both in life and in his written assessment. He saw personal development as one of the purposes of a liberal education, and he did not seem overly worried that this may be seen as self-indulgent. Ville was a gold mine of polemics, extempore theories, and uncompromising principles. Looking at the transcripts, the proportion of his speech to mine is greater than for any other participant.

Marie

Marie was the third student to take the IB. Her mother was French, her father English, she held both UK and US passports, and had a French ID card. She referred to herself as French. She had been to primary school in the UK; to secondary school in the USA; and had taken the IB in Switzerland. After some prevarication, I categorised her among the international students by virtue of her paying international university fees (although she was later re-classified). Marie specialised in politics and sociology, the same as Susie, whom she knew well and was friendly with. She had taken neither discipline during the IB, but had some experience through her IB dissertation of writing for a politics audience. Her US secondary education had given her, she felt, a strong background in essay writing.

Cathy

Cathy was the token mature student in the study, having completed an Access course at a local college. It was interesting to compare her to the other participants, who were uniformly confident and seemingly well equipped to carry out higher studies. Cathy was 28 at the time that the study began, and had two children. She was taciturn in our first

discussion, and it was hard to see why she had volunteered for the research. She was born in South Africa, but was a British citizen and had resided in the UK for some time. Cathy entered the programme initially to take criminology and sociology, but switched to criminology in the second year. Much of her early conversation concerned the Access course and the comprehensive academic support that she received. Cathy was initially very obliging in providing written material to me; however, she did not appear for the second round of interviews later on in the 2006-7 academic session, and I assumed that she had lost interest in participating.

The staff participants

Various lecturers and tutors were interviewed at various stages. The following are the staff that appear in the material presented here.

JS – was a senior member of staff, one of the acknowledged experts on the degree programme. He was a senior lecturer in economics, and taught economic theory and political economy. I had frequent informal contact with him during and after the study, during which we frequently discussed his teaching, those of the participants we both knew, and various ideas that had come to the fore with him and the students on his course.

PS & AP – (male and female respectively) were both sociology tutors on a course in gender and sexuality. I spoke with PS rather later than AP, at the time that PS was due to take over lectureship of the course having tutored it for a number of years.

There were occasional mentions of some of these tutors by the student participants. These lecturers and tutors taught on courses that were a centre of gravity for writing activities (or literacy events) that coalesce to make up case studies, some of which are presented here.

What follows

The following chapters present data gathered during the empirical research according to the precepts given above. It has been selected for its facility in demonstrating how the plausibility of student written work is socially achieved. I do not expect the presentation or analysis of the data to *persuade* anyone of the approach I have taken is the ‘better’ one.

This kind of battle is generally conducted at the conceptual level. Any researcher's affiliations are a matter for their personal sensibilities and aptitudes, and they are hard won. The test of this study is first, whether I have faithfully carried out the kind of undertaking that I have described thus far; and second, whether it is possible to *convince* the likely audience that EM and its intellectual affines have utility for modes of social literacy analysis.

Chapter 5

Formal structures: how students talk about academic writing

I will first present some of the formal structures from the interviews carried out with the student participants. This builds on the linguistic ethnography of Edward Rose as set out and illustrated by Carlin (2009).

Rose's ethno-inquiries approach sees interviews as being a stand-alone technique, not "in the service of a larger project" (ibid.:336). The idea of carrying out and analysing interviews in the ethno-inquiries fashion is "to provide readers with a sense of the 'richness' from interviews in which interviewer direction is minimised" (ibid.:342). The participant-driven and recorded interviews are then interrogated for 'formal structures' (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970), or recurrent conversational activities in discussing a topic: "This moves us towards explication of people's practical activities in talking about [the topic] – how situations are defined – rather than trying to achieve thick description" (ibid.:331).

When approaching interview data for 'how situations are defined', we are getting close to using this data for *how* things are talked about, as opposed to, in Carlin's words, a 'conduit' for a person's worldview or indeed any ostensibly hidden phenomenon. Interviews are "collaborative language practices produced by the interviewer and interviewee... In the respecification of a methodological apparatus, I was not wishing to identify a person's 'definition of the situation'... but *how* the definition of a situation is realized" (ibid.:336, 341, emphasis added). Thus, formal structures are ways in which interlocutors make it clear to interviewers how they understand and make comprehensible the 'situation' discussed. The conversation must have content; for those involved the conversation has referential force as well as force as types of speech acts. We would not have conversation as the object of study for finding methods of *doing* conversation if we did not first talk about states of affairs.

Carlin's comments regarding the status of interview data are largely accurate, but only inasmuch as they pertain to *how* conversational objects get talked about. Given the topic at hand (academic writing) and the approach to studying the same that I have set out, it seems that other sources of data, particularly texts, are necessary to the analysis, but this does *not* undermine the status of interviews *qua* data.

AW studies provide us with the opportunity to see that *all* sources of data do their own particular kind of work in ‘defining the situation’. All accounts are reflexive accounts; they go to make up the context they describe. What occurred practically was that each stage of research was fed into the subsequent one; so that, for example, the conversations with student were discussed in the conversations with the tutors, sometimes with demonstrable effect. This shows as much as anything that the role of the researcher is not a neutral one. There is a clear sense of retrospective-prospective sense-making (Garfinkel 1967) as the various episodes build up. *All* sense-making is done in the context of *all other* available accounts that have gone before. The formal structures from the student interviews play an integral part in this.

Formal structures are most easily located when interviewees are free to speak at length with minimal prompting (Carlin op. cit.). One does not find formal structures everywhere. Interviews tend to take a while to get going and the early stages are a series of scene-setting formalities. The longer stretches of discourse in which we tend to find formal structures occur when the opening conversational exchanges have been got out of the way. The adjacency pair structure of [short question-short answer] is liable to reduce the possibility of formal structures appearing in interviewee talk, and interviews need to be managed with this in mind. This account of formal structures is not intended to be exhaustive of all the conversational techniques used in the interviews. Those features have been sequestered which most clearly address how talking about academic writing gets done. Some conversational structures are presented here as not obviously separable from formal structures. Similarly, although Carlin mentions the use of membership categorization analysis (MCA) in interviews conducted under the auspices of the ethno-inquiries (2007, 2009), the current state of play in EM/CA is that MCA cannot be separated from the techniques of CA more generally (Schegloff 2007a & b).

Looking for the formal structures of interlocutor talk in interviews allows them to be treated as a variety of naturalistic data (Carlin 2006). The conversational structure obliges the participants to talk about their writing without prior planning; their conversational techniques, and the terms in which they talk about writing, are applied endogenously and in real time.

To identify and highlight some of the formal structures of conversation about AW, much will be made of locutions such as ‘X talked in terms of Y’, ‘the way in which X talked about Y’, and similar. The arbiter for shared agreement in interviews is, in the first instance, the interviewer. For reasons of space, not all identifiable formal structures are

accounted for here. I have retained those that were most frequently identified, and most easily identifiable.

In this chapter, the student identity and interview number are specified. I appear as P in exchanges; the student as S.

i. Abduction

One of the most frequently encountered structures was a mode of reasoning about academic writing that I will call ‘abductive’, after the type of inference described by the pragmatist philosopher CS Peirce (1998). The most important characteristics of abduction *qua* practical reasoning are that the protagonist is confronted with a ‘strange fact’ or ‘complex phenomenon’ that needs explaining; and that the explanation is brought about by a guess or conjecture that acts as a hypothesis to guide subsequent action. Thus, Peirce writes: “Any synthetic proposition, whether it is a nonobservable entity or a generalisation, in so far as it is for the first time entertained as possibly true, it is an hypothesis arrived at by abduction” (in Fann 1970:33-4). Abduction involves generating “a Rule such that, if it were true, and if the Result were considered a Case of that Rule, the Result would no longer be strange, but rather extremely reasonable” (Eco 1994:157).

I am *not* suggesting that students go through a full process of ratiocinative hypothesis generation and testing to explain ‘strange facts’ that confront them. Nor do they need to interpret all utterances according to the processes of ‘inference to the best explanation’, as relevance theory would have it (Sperber & Wilson 1985, Hobbs 2004, McRoy & Hirst 1993). Such an assumption would seem to generate one of Garfinkel’s ‘just-so stories’ (Lieberman 2012), a formal analysis based on an *a priori* isomorphism between a theoretical account and states of affairs. Even a modern and simplified version of abduction, as found in Walton’s argument scheme, assumes too much idealised behaviour for our needs:

Walton’s argument scheme for abduction (2001:162):

F is a finding or given set of facts.

E is a satisfactory explanation of *F*.

No alternative explanation *E'* given so far is as satisfactory as *E*.

Therefore, *E* is plausible, as a hypothesis.

Students tended to talk of being presented with problems related to academic writing that were strange or complex, and of needing to find workable explanations. I do not propose this as a method of investigation on the part of students, but a recurrent way of talking about it in conversation and as a way of presenting an occasioned reasoning. This is not laying down any commitment to what the ‘background’ reasoning practices of students are. Rather this is an attempt to usefully extend our language of how they talk about academic writing.

Finding abductive structures is not a surprise. The history of academic writing research is replete with arguments concerning the reasoning challenges, for example the Meno paradox, that students face (Bartholomae 1985, Ballard & Clancy 1988, Lea & Street 1998, Read et al. 2001).

From this we can draw conclusions about how students structure discourse within the ‘language game’ of ‘talking about academic writing’. I note that in my examples, the interviews were treated by the participants both as occasions for demonstrating prior thinking, and as occasions for reasoning in themselves. In the various works cited above, there are many similar passages. These passages often reveal interesting reasoning practices that allow students to get to the point of talking in abductive terms to start with: for example, in assuming that general rules or practices are available (hence the need to explain discrepancies); or the use of *ceteris paribus* clauses, where they talk of the marking being ‘different’, or talking in terms of ‘doing the same things’ across essays, thereby removing aspects of personal performance as potential explanations. There are many references to ‘working out’ and ‘finding out’. (We could easily consider abductive structures in conversation to be a sub-set of the documentary method [Garfinkel 1967].)

Below I provide a (non-exhaustive) list of the characteristics and linkages of abduction, with those adoptable to matters of describing practical reasoning and formal conversational structures given in **bold**. My suggestion is that the first three are the vital components, so that where interlocutors talk in terms of one of them, either individually or in combination, then we can say that they are talking in abductive terms.²¹ This list draws on sources including Cooke (2003), Deutscher (2002), Eco (1994), Fann (1970),

²¹ EM or Wittgensteinian studies will not seek to *explain* what protagonists do; but of course people will practically seek to explain things that for them need explaining (“Forming and testing a hypothesis” is specifically cited as a language game in *Philosophical Investigations*; Lynch 1993 cites explanation as one of his ‘epistopics’).

Feibleman (1970), Goudge (1950), Hookway (2000), Misak (2005), Rescher (1978), Semetsky (2005), and Walton (2001).

Abduction involves the search for a plausible hypothesis or explanation; a mode of reasoning that aims to (1) **find**, not test, these **explanations** of (2) **strange facts** or complex phenomena. Abductions appear in the form of a (3) **guess or conjecture**. The conjecture should (4) **explain the facts**, be testable, and display economy of effort. The teleology of abduction is that it should result in (5) '**adaptive behaviour**', i.e. that practical courses of action should result from the adoption of a plausible hypothesis. The use of abduction to its utmost extent in scientific experiment is really the logical end-point of an inherent human capability. To this end, Peirce distinguished between (6) *logica utens* (or **logic in use, anybody's idea of good reasoning**) and *logica docens* (the full expression of scientific indagation). Abduction in its fullest expression suggests an explanation or hypothesis which is testable through a deductive stage, and then verified or rejected through an inductive stage. Peirce therefore asserted that abduction was ampliative, or generative. Despite this, it is (7) **dependent upon existing experience** as a source of conjectures, and so is synthetic, often characterised as 'sideways reasoning' or 'working from known to unknown'. Abductive reasoning will (8) **suggest or look for sites of explanation** based on what is known. Abduction is characterised by Peirce as (9) **fallible** or **defeasible**. It has low *security*, and relatively high possibilities of being superseded by subsequent explanations: it suggests that something *may be*, not that it *must be* (deduction) or *is* (induction). Finally, abduction is seen to involve an act of (10) **generalisation**; if we are to cite a general rule or explanation, the *explanandum* must be seen as a token of a class.

Instances of abduction

Rose 3

S: I probably know more now [of] what I need to put into an essay...to [remark] more on the theory and the analysis. I think that was part of the problem with the French essay because there wasn't any theory as such as to why it generally happened, which is usually what you've got involved in politics essays, it [was] kind of "describe and explain" those specific changes, and there's no real general theory or concept that you can discuss, or agree or disagree with.

Rose 4

P: ...So can you remember what exactly made it tricky to come to terms with?

- S: Well I think the thing was that we just didn't feel that there was any real argument, you know, any sort of debate, either within the title or even within the content of what we were discussing. I didn't feel as if there was any way to bring a climax towards what you're talking about, it just seemed to be, account for a period of time, and that's it.
- P: Right. Because the way I would read it would be, "outline" – so that's "describe" – what the changes are.
- S: Describe and explain.
- P: Yeah – yeah, so then "account for", so "give reasons for".
- S: But there doesn't seem to be any debate within the reasons.
- P: Ah.
- S: It just seemed to be – say what happened, this is why it happened. It wasn't, some people feel this and some people feel that, and that [one of them] is more valid. When I was doing all the research, it just felt that it was a lot of consensus on why things happened.
- P: This is what I thought, because if you say to someone, "account for something", by saying "these are the reasons", that's an argument.
- S: I see what you mean.
- P: But if there's no kind of controversy, everyone ends up writing the same stuff, I'd imagine.
- S: And she even says, "it ends up sounding a bit like it tends to the narrative". I don't really think I could have done anything different, like...considering the amount of reading I did for it, I expected to finish it a lot sooner than I did, I ended up being finished a bit rushed [sic]. I was trying to find this extra dimension to talk about, and I just couldn't seem to find it.

These examples came out of a discussion about a 'strange fact' that Rose encountered in writing French politics essay. The essay was described by Rose as "not hard, but weird", in that it presented a descriptive task and an analytical task, but without making available an obvious site for argument or exigency. Rose felt she had improved her writing in politics generally through the application of a rule that can be expressed something like, 'find the exigency, or the point in the theory or concept that you can agree or disagree with', which in turn assumes principles such as 'an exigency will be findable', and that the rule is generally applicable. When the applicability of this rule was cast into doubt, then, some explanation was required. This was 'not what should happen', according to experience. What Rose says suggests she has a refined 'feel for the game', for what *should* be happening, as we can see in passages such as "it just felt that it was a lot of consensus on why things happened". She carefully 're-sites' or 'shifts the footing' of the conversation at one point ("But there doesn't seem to be any debate within the reasons") (Silverman 1998:168; Schegloff 1972), allowing her to demonstrate not only that she is aware of what the essay's instructions words are asking, and that she is familiar with

suitable material, but also that care has been taken in ascertaining the non-applicability of the rule that has served her well. This practically takes away from us the possibility that the expected exigency was available in this case.

It is notable that this abduction stops at presenting the ‘strange fact’, and providing detail as to why it is strange. Rose does not provide any kind of explanation for why this may have come about, nor does she give any account of ‘adaptive behaviour’ that might have resulted from such an explanation. In fact, throughout these two conversations the abduction does not move beyond pointing out that the task does not conform to the configuration that can normally be expected. No explanation is suggested and no adaptations of approach are stated.

In interactional terms, this lack-of-explanation is no less significant than explanations given in practice. Rose sets up this account as a situation where one ‘cannot do otherwise’. There is a series of implicit ‘despite’ or ‘even though’ clauses available to the listener that go to point out the inevitability of the outcome and which support the presentation of Rose as a competent student. Thus, she says, “I just couldn’t seem to find” the “extra dimension”:

- despite “doing all the research”
- despite “the amount of reading I did for it”
- despite the time spent on it and the subsequent rush
- despite the result “tending to the narrative”
- despite her reservations about the lack of exigency
- (as we see from a comment immediately following the second passage above) despite the importance of the events described not being reflected in the essay title.²²

Rose describes herself as having improved her writing, and sets herself up here as someone who knows what to expect in writing politics essays. Having accounted for most if not all of the things that a serious student should be doing when confronted with such a challenge, Rose downplays the possibility that the criticism of her essay “tending to the narrative” is attributable to any of her own practices.

²² Rose: “it was an important shift in French politics, but it’s not something that’s really explored in the essay title”.

Marie 2

S: ...it was the same with spelling when you have a spell-check and that kind of thing...I don't know whether it was to do with the good use of paragraphs...I mean "clear", they said it was a well-written, thoughtful essay, but yet clear, that's a three...so it seems with things like that it's not always...it doesn't always work – I mean, "grammatically correct", I've been writing essays for a long time and...it would be nice to get the underlined essay and see "oh, actually this isn't grammatically correct".

This is one of many examples of students wrestling with the messages in their feedback, not least in terms of the use of numbers in feedback. In this case, various criteria have been marked on a five-point scale. These marks are indicative only and bear no overt or obvious relation to other aspects of the feedback. The criterion being discussed is simply called "clear", i.e., to what extent the student has written clearly.

Marie has received comments on her essay that she would be forgiven for thinking positive: "well-written, thoughtful". She has tied (q.v.) these comments, understandably, to the criterion "clear". She received a mark of 3, and Marie evidently sees a disjuncture (Pollner 1976) between the comments and the mark. The distance between the presented coherence of the information provided and her understanding of what it *could* mean constitutes an *interpretative asymmetry* (Coulter 1975). This asymmetry is occasioned by her expressing the view that the terms "well-written" and "thoughtful" in conjunction are not a proper gloss for the numerical mark "3", given that these comments as well as the number are to be tied to this criterion. Even though the number cannot be linked to an exact verbal expression, Marie talks as if there is an agreement in the *object* or *event* that is being 'measured' by the award of this number (Lynch 1991); her problem is with how the outcome has been achieved given that there is such an agreement.

The combined use of criteria terms, numbers and verbal comments in the context of feedback works to provide refined but highly indexical meanings for each of these components. The context of 'academic feedback' and the complicating factor of having these three components in conjunction would seem to provide the feedback sheet as a whole with the appearance of incorporating *esoteric* knowledge (Sharrock & Turner 1980). In this specific language game, it seems that it is equally licit to draw upon more mundane understandings of chosen terms ("clear", "well-written") to call into question their employment as mutually elaborating glosses. The grammar of possibilities of the terms *when used in conjunction within the specific context* seems, to Marie, to have been contravened.

Marie does not provide a conjecture to explain this event. She does, though, make the disjuncture of these tied elements available to the listener as an example of a practice that ‘doesn’t always work’. This relies upon the *possible* meanings of ‘3’ when considered as a gloss on evaluative comment, and how the terms “well-written” and “thoughtful” can be understood given that they are read as supporting a numerical gloss on the scale 1-5. It contravenes what Sacks called our ‘usualness measures’, i.e. some measure that relies upon “a competent sense of what one ‘usually’ or ‘normally’ can observe under the circumstances” (Lynch op. cit.:93). Marie’s presentation of the disjuncture as easily discoverable and the feedback as therefore ineffective is that of a transparent inference; it makes available an anomaly in reasoning according to *logica utens*, or in EM parlance, ‘what everybody knows’.

Tim 2

In this passage, I am speaking with Tim regarding an essay which received a mark of 68% (i.e. just short of first class). As with Marie, we were discussing how the feedback comments and the constellation of ticks against criteria cohere with the mark (see Appendix 8).

P: I’m just looking at this, on the tickboxes, where there are maybe 15 criteria and you’ve got the maximum [5] for all of them except two...

S: And those two are the important ones!

P: Well, that’s the conclusion you could make, isn’t it?

S: Well, not really...well, you could say that but it just seems like...to me it doesn’t seem too easy to [say], “oh, I’ll just give four out of five for these two” [with those being] the criteria for a first. And I won’t give 69 because that’s too close to a first, so it’s 68.

The strange fact here is that the mark seems unusually low given the way that the ticks have been arranged. The two criteria for which he received 4 out of 5 were on the polar scales “critical-uncritical” and “shows independent thought-does not show independent thought”. The configuration of marks for individual criteria is such that he could only have improved, as far as this representation of feedback is concerned, by scoring the maximum 5 in one or both of these criteria. As it stands, Tim achieved the maximum 5/5 in sixteen out of eighteen criteria. The inference that anyone would make on this basis is that had Tim achieved the maximum mark in all criteria, then this must have corresponded to a first class mark.

In the exchange above, Tim interjects with an explanation of what seems to us an unusual outcome. He does not first need to point out the ‘strange fact’. This interjection acts as an abductive proposal that would explain this outcome. The idea that “those two [criteria] are the important ones” hints at an informal weighting of certain criteria over others. This sounds like a plausible explanation. However, despite my agreement, Tim immediately seems to have reservations. I read this not as a withdrawal of his abduction, more as unease as to what must have gone into the marking and feedback given that his conjecture is accurate. There are not many explanations available for the situation at hand and accepting this explanation implies marking practices that appear dubious to him. His first-person reconstruction of how the marking may have been carried out serves to undermine the marking practices that would have resulted in this outcome, and to demonstrate his lack of commitment to his own conjecture.

A recurring feature of the conversations was the protagonists’ search for a site of explanation for marks or comments on their work. A frequent practice was to omit personal considerations from this list of explanations. Students did not seem to have problems with describing their work across disciplines and over time as ‘doing the same things’.

ii. Attribution & ascription

Pardoe (2000) talks of the ways students *attribute* their learning from experience. He sees attribution as “an important issue in any context of ‘learning from experience’, both within and beyond education” (ibid.:126). It arises “when students are attempting to develop some general understanding from a particular case” (ibid.). In short, how students learn is in part dependent upon how they find significances in experience. For students learning in philosophy tutorials, to take one of his examples, this can work as follows:

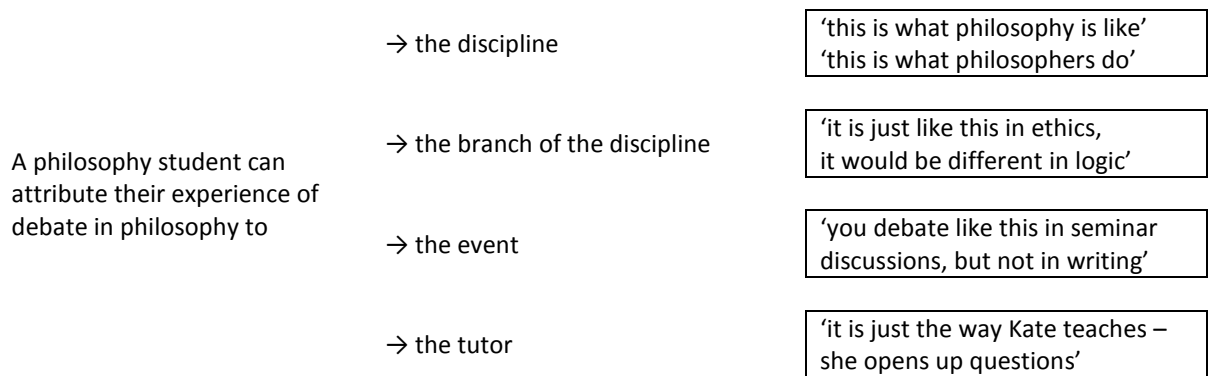


Diagram 1 – Pardoe on the structure of attribution

The ‘grammar’ of attribution, then, works by:

Explaining an outcome (A) in terms of the general features (B) of somebody or something

There are similarities here to abduction as a formal structure (q.v.), not least in the fact that students may find their answers to an abductive formal structure in conversation in the form of an attribution in the ways described here, so there is room for the two structures on occasion to broadly overlap.

Attribution was one of the most frequently encountered formal structures. Attributions were made *inter alia* to lecturers, tutors, courses, motives, personal characteristics, and academic disciplines. Attribution provides the student with a way of explaining an outcome; but they are also ways of getting things done in interaction. As I have noted with abduction, attribution appears to work as a subset of the documentary method (Garfinkel 1967). Although documentary reasoning in other forms was present in the interviews, I take it from the predominance of abduction and attribution that they are particularly important as ways of talking about academic writing.

The first extract provided in the section on abduction above (from Rose 3) is a good example of the potential overlap between abductive and attributive structures. The explanation in this case draws upon a discipline-related attribution of general characteristics; the problem arises when this characteristic is absent from the case at hand. This is then an exemplar of the problems of learning from experience that Pardoe talks of. In interactional terms, as I have argued above, the comparison of this essay title with the general characteristics of (the demands of) politics essays works to emphasise the ‘strange fact’ status of this essay; Rose’s account of trying to come to terms with the difference supports the general impression of her as a plausible token of a ‘good student’ type, and of her work as suitable work given the riddle she has been set. A similar thing happens in the

example from Marie below. This extract follows a discussion in which she talks about the mode of argument she developed during her pre-university studies on the IB being consonant with that demanded on politics courses. She finds through this commensurability, heightened by what she perceives as greater demands in her second year, a way of justifying the fact that she has kept to the same overall approach that she came to the university with.

Marie 3

- S: But I have stuck to my way of doing it, and in this one I do have some counter-arguments to what I am saying. But again, ultimately my conclusion was, this is the thesis that I've [decided on].
- P: Has that developed since last year?
- S: Um, yeah, I think that with it being second year, the politics modules are a bit more demanding, they're not quite as vague. It's a step up. I get the feeling that, right, this is the second year, you need to do better on these essays. And I'm more interested in the topics that I'm doing, I find they're a bit more specific.

An attribution of motives

The participants occasionally employed narratives as a means of focusing attention on matters important to them. The narratives were not necessarily extended and uninterrupted stretches of discourse, and the main defining characteristic seemed to be their status as relating events only indirectly related to the production account of the essay itself, but having some importance as background conditions.

One such account came from Ville in our discussion of the feedback he received on a particular essay. His first year marks were lower than he might have hoped and he talked of receiving some uncompromising feedback on them.

Ville 2

- S: ...because I know who graded it, I'm not taking it as much to heart, just because I know what kind of character she is. I fundamentally disagree with what she believes in, because – I mean fair enough, I approached the essay from a very economical [sic] point of view, and I didn't exactly give the socialist ideas enough credit... she [is] in love with socialism and that's what she wants to hear, she won't hear laissez-faire capitalism economic arguments. So of course I'm not going to take everything she says as much to heart, but because of her my politics exam looked a lot different, it was more focused on morality and focused on more issues pertaining to political thinking instead of the wider scope of social sciences. She did affect me in that sense and it was good, but I still wouldn't exactly believe in the way that her version's right. I mean, just to take one example, Hayek, he talks about equality and stuff and he's a very sort of pre-capitalistic in that sense, pro equality of opportunity but not pro equality of outcome. She did not go through anything that he wrote in any of our tutorials, even though he's on the reading list as [one of] the few things we had to have read. Instead she just went through Rawls or someone who [shares] her very sort of socialistic perspective, which is what she wants... Of course it

would probably improve my grades a lot, what she said, but I just don't think it's entirely right the way she's trying to make political theory so focused on just incredibly left-wing ideology.

P: All right, but these are kind of content questions, aren't they?

S: Another point: one of our main lecturers, he's a rational choice theorist, basically an economist, and he's the professor of the whole programme, and when he speaks he does a lot of economical, rational and behavioural calculations which is a lot more like what I would have argued for in economical terms. And the first point she makes is that no-one really believes what this guy goes on about, this rational choice theory isn't really that popular within political thinking. So that's outlined the way she was grading my essay and grading any essay that's not exactly in line with her view.

Ville was fully aware that his preferred approach to writing essays was more about entertaining himself and pursuing a specific 'theory of education' (q.v.) than about ascertaining what is required and adhering to those requirements. The comments here can be seen as the meeting ground of two separate confrontations: of his own laissez-faire views with the socialist views of his politics tutor; and of a view of education that stresses experimentation and breadth with one that emphasises the exposition of whatever 'party line' is communicated.

Ville's explanation of the outcome associated with the essay is therefore attributed to both his own style or writing and choice of content (and perhaps his own intransigence), and to what are seen as the ideological biases of the tutor. He gives her some credit for the broadening of his perspective in the corresponding politics exam. However, he also describes instances of the tutor's behaviour that would seem to be unsuitable predicates for the category 'tutor' (membership categorisation, q.v.). She "won't hear laissez-faire capitalism economic arguments". She ignores key reading as included on the reading list if it does not conform to her own ideological principles. She dismisses a senior academic colleague. Reversing these behaviours provides a set of characteristics that conforms much more to what a tutor *should* do: listen to the ideas and arguments of her tutees; conform to the reading list, no matter what its ideological orientation; respect senior colleagues.

Abstracting from Ville's model, he is permitted to be chauvinistic because he is a student, and does not have any of the tutor's obligations predicated to him. The tutor is supposed to be more open-minded, and even-handed. For this reason, even though Ville takes some of the responsibility for the reception of his essay on himself, he accords the majority to the prejudices of his tutor. The tutor does successfully address some of the omissions in his work, but given that he is able to present evidence for doubting her motives, he can work up a basis for casting her marking of his work as inevitably biased. He has no reason to give her the benefit of the doubt as her own biases are observed in the

light of behaviours that do not conform to what should be expected of somebody in her position. If we reconstruct Ville's version of the tutor's motives according to the latter three terms of Burke's "grammar of motives" (1945), it is possible to see that the *agent* involved is in a superordinate position to the subaltern students, that the *agency* (means) inheres in the tutor's ability to evaluate (pass judgement on) the subaltern's work with relative freedom, and that the *purpose* fulfilled is the furthering of her own ideological preferences. This can readily be worked up as an 'abuse of power'. In this way, Ville sets up the tutor as someone whose motives are doubtful.

iii. Availability & descriptibles

The participants to varying degrees traded on the extent to which definable items or isolatable principles (glossing and gestalts, q.v.) were either potentially describable or obviously available. For Sacks, "whatever humans do can be examined to discover some way they do it, and that way would be *describable*" (in Silverman 1998:48, emphasis added). If the *ways* are describable, then they will likely be predicates of activities that are equally definable and describable. For Dorothy Smith, "What is obvious is what may be plainly seen or understood by anyone"; it is therefore "available to anyone" (1990:28). Where we are nonetheless talking about the adoption of implicit principles, features that are available and/or describable assume importance.

The effect of these structures in their use by participants was to demonstrate and find distinctions between what is known by them and explicable about writing to them; and what remains to be known. They also contributed to participant ideas of what *should* be divulged by those in a better position to recognise them; and to suggest the implications of circumventing these features in their writing.

Rose 1

S: I don't know, I think...I generally try to think about, like, what kind of structure I want to include, what I want to talk about then I write an introduction, em... and then I'll read some more after that...and then I'll just write it...can't analyse how I do an essay, I just think of a rough structure and what I'm going to say, and then I'll get a sheet of paper and write an introduction...and then I'm going to bullet-point my essay almost to the [conclusion]...

Here, I have asked Rose how she 'produces' an essay – an intentionally vague question. She provides a series of activities that go to make up the writing, or 'production' of her work. One way of reading this is to see the same account of essay production given

twice in very similar forms, separated by the comment, “can’t analyse how I do an essay”. Despite the detail she provides, this set of activities does not count for Rose as ‘analysing’ how she writes. An analysis of how she produces an essay appears to reside at a level of explanation that is not available to her, for whatever reason, and which she cannot make explicit. At the centre of this is the fraught term ‘analysis’ (Lea & Street 1998). ‘Writing an essay’ is a describable for Rose, but it does not capture whatever she means here by ‘analysis’.

On occasion, the ‘availability’ of facts was given as instructions for hearing (or reading). For instance, in Marie’s account of a rather rushed essay:

Marie 3

S: ...there were just some sentences that I thought, “that doesn’t even make logical sense”. There were a couple of sentences – or I put a word in sort of wrong, which never looks good when the examiner’s reading an essay. There was – I can’t remember what it. When you read it you’ll see. There’s a couple of bits where you just sort of think, “she obviously wasn’t paying attention when she wrote that sentence”. And even if that’s not necessarily what I was marked down on, I’m sure that if you’re an examiner reading that you think, “hang on a second, that’s not a logical sentence”. I think it probably straight away sort of has an impact on the way you read the rest of the essay.

This account is a conversational instruction for a projected reading, and is presented as making available what ‘any reader’ would make of the problematic passages. It therefore gives credence to the kind of account that Marie is trying to provide, of the essay *qua* rushed piece of writing. Although these errors are described as particularly problematic where examiner reading is concerned, this is founded upon these errors being available to anyone. It is a projection of what ‘could be said’ of the described sentences. It recognises a standard way of understanding these passages, which makes available not only the errors, but also reasons for the errors, and a basis for evaluating the essay: although “that’s not necessarily what I was marked down on”, she makes available to the listener a criterion for evaluation.

Instructions for hearing were given in interviews with Rose and Cathy. Both were in regard to comparisons of pre-university education with higher education. For Rose, pre-university “I don’t think I really do it any differently though; I mean obviously pre-university you don’t have to read widely, you know I didn’t really quote so much”. This availability of a contrast between two modes of education is something that was *not* available to Cathy, who said that on the Access course, “we were always told we need to put at least twenty references”, and who complained of not having been told any different

at the university. Cathy spoke in terms of explicable and divulgable principles that are available to the indexical and unspecified “they”, presumably the teaching staff as a body.

‘Lay theorising’ on learning and education

Available and describable principles were often communicated through general principles expounded through ‘lay theorising’ of learning and education. These principles acted as premises and/or justifications for other aspects of participant discourse. They moreover often worked as moral principles outlining the kinds of things that *should* be done. The idea of ‘theorising’ comes from the notion that personal experience is being delivered as documenting a generally accepted pattern. Not only are these principles delivered grammatically as generalities, they tend to employ the second person ‘you’ in such a way that it is clearly intended to subsume ‘I’ (i.e. the student).²³ All parts of these utterances go to communicate the generally accepted status of the principles described. E.g.:

Tim 2

S: I think they could they discuss the essay in the tutorial, what you might write about, you know, just tell people... I mean there are often a number of ways you could write an essay that are equally valid...

Iwona 2

S: Well, yeah, but also all the sociological courses in my second year were related to media, I didn’t do media in my first year so it’s sort of very on a different thing, so you can’t really compare first and second year – there were both sociological subjects but they were dealing with completely different things. So it’s basically just – you don’t sort of like build up on what you’ve already learnt...[there’s no] absolute minimum base that you’ve got to have to like study all these different subjects, but from there, you sort of [encounter] all these different topics.

iv. Auto-characterisation of essential selfhood

Participants provided idealised characterisations as ‘essentialised selves’, i.e. ‘this is the person I really am’. These worked as modes of explanation for general approaches or specific outcomes. There was a strong intersubjective component to these auto-characterisations that assumed equally stable and predictable characteristics on the part of others, and placed the participants in a relationship of alignment or confrontation with them.

²³ Wes Sharrock, personal communication.

Ville 2

- S: Would I feel happy doing that, or would I be denying myself. I mean I don't think I'm some kind of *ubermensch* character or anything, it's just that I like experimenting with different things I can do, because quite frankly I find it incredibly boring just giving another tutor or exam person just the kind of essay everyone else writes. I've always been a bit quirky, been creative my whole life whatever I do, so I just would actually find incredibly boring, almost detrimental to who I am, [to say] OK, I know that everyone's going to write these kinds of points and I'll do that just because I know it's what you're supposed to do.

Although participants talked of themselves in these essentialised ways, they were nonetheless aware of the increasingly diverse 'horizons' that could be presented to them through their academic work. Although these involved the possibility of development or change, these changes or improvements in terms of writing practices were not talked of as threatening the sense of essential identity. In the passage below, Ville talks about adapting his writing behaviour to suit hypothetical circumstances, but doing so with instrumental aims in mind.

Ville 2

- S: Well I thought about that and what I should probably do for the rest is in fifteen minutes write down everything that I want to write and really just limit myself, just reading this one book or something, and don't go off on anything else. But it's not what I would want to do. I still feel the need to express myself. But hypothetically if I was purely concerned with the grades then obviously I would take all this into account and work with that instead. I can honestly tell [sic] that whenever I do exam situations or quicker than I get a lot more focused and use that approach instead of trying to find my own words, losing the point by going off tangent.

This is something that Ville would do "if I had to". Ville talks about adapting his 'personal' mode of writing without making it sound as though he is changing 'in essentials'. He does this in a number of ways. First, it is clear that the adaptation of style is a conscious choice to obtain a given instrumental outcome. Second, another style – imposed by exam conditions – has become available to him almost by accident. It does not challenge what he wants to do or thinks he should be doing. He has various criteria that change according to which mode of writing he adopts: limiting himself (or not); reading what he is supposed to read; allowing himself to go off on tangents. Thus, although Ville may well present a different "discoursal self" and "authorial self" (Ivanic 1998) when writing in 'exam mode', this is not evidence of corresponding changes in identity.

For the majority of the participants, then, there was little evidence of what Ivanic calls "identities in a state of flux" (ibid.:237ff.); rather they tended to present stable *essential* identities that were nonetheless subject to different 'horizons' in the

phenomenological sense, and exposed to educational episodes and opportunities that might force or guide them to doing things in different or dispreferred ways. It is this phenomenological sense that allows us to characterise Iwona's description of data-driven writing below as something more than a spatial metaphor ("when you do your analysis it sort of puts you in a different place"), rather as an additional horizon in which she must assume different things about others in her dealings with them.

Iwona 3

P: So is it the case that because you're making data as it were, or collecting your own data, you've got a more authorised position to talk about what you're doing?

S: Well it definitely gives you a more personal view to it, so, it makes you a specialist in your area, doesn't it? You can say it's your data, so...you know. Whereas if you look at other people's data, I know you feel like – the person who did the data [sic] and did the analysis – they obviously know much more about the subject than you do, just from reading their analysis, so when you do your analysis it sort of puts you in a different place.

v. Formulations

Iwona 2

S: I'm basically arguing for the fact that we do have a neo-Baroque aesthetics.

Ville 2

S: [I tried to] compare it with what we have now and that we have a much higher rate of unemployment. It was a bit [divorced] from the whole points of the job seekers' allowance and how that motivates people but I'm just trying to grasp another point which [was] why would you need motivation and compare historically.

Marie 2

S: I don't know, I would guess that it can't hurt, but yeah, I probably could have stayed more on the topic, but if it's relevant there's no reason why it couldn't have gone in. I just felt that having that was a better read than just [giving that back] to someone who knows about it, but it also shows how much I know about it. And as well as knowing NATO, whatever, [I can] also show that I know about sort of – I've been to lectures, that I was there, and that there is a sort of theoretical background to it, which was needed to be incorporated instead of making it more, not a history but a more sort of current events type of essay, rather than an international politics one.

P: So...

S: I'm showing that I understand the concepts and the syllabus.

On occasion, the participants used summaries of their writing activities that appeared to be doing more than just summarising. My discussion here relates chiefly to the exchange with Marie.

At the outset Marie gives an articulate account of choices related to the writing of a recent essay. The account is outlining how she sees the essay in terms of what it ‘tells’ the marker. With little prompting, she summarises her account in the ‘formulation’, “I’m showing that I understand the concepts and the syllabus”.

While not a formulation of the conversation in the way that Garfinkel & Sacks describe (1970), this utterance is still clearly doing a ‘double duty’ (Anderson et al. 1987:151, Heritage 1998:10). It provides in the first instance a summary or ‘gist’ (Watson 2009) of recipient design aspects of the essay, which is inseparable from its similarly being a gist of a section of the conversation. It does a summary job for, but not of the discussion.

Moreover, this gist is, in the EM senses, reflexive and accountable. In all three examples, the formulating sentences are in the present progressive tense, despite reporting events in the past. Although it is possible for stories to be told in present tenses, this has the effect of emphasising the immediacy of the account: we note that Marie did not say, “what I *was trying* to do was...”. This is a reflexive utterance not least because it simultaneously works as instruction for how to go about understanding the previous account, contributes to an ongoing understanding of the essay-writing context in the present, and can be seen as a self-explicating description. Not only is Marie describing herself as someone who “understands the concepts and syllabus”, this formulation has the effect of exhibiting her as such a person.

It is also important to note that this formulation is a type of gloss (e.g. Watson 2005:4, 2009:64). It is sufficiently similar to the formulations originally described by Garfinkel & Sacks to say of it that such formulations do not make up the vast majority of everyday utterances. Rather, formulations are reserved for quite specific interactional purposes; we rarely need to spell out in so many words what we are saying (Garfinkel & Sacks op. cit.). There are specific conversational reasons for Marie to say in so many words what she has already done, and I would suggest that such a formulation can be used to reflexively contribute to an original context of production. This is kind of gloss that could *not* tenably be used in its original context. Student essayists are not permitted to say what they are doing, like this, in their essays. Such a formulation would not even be

permissible as so-called ‘meta-text’. To do so would be to take a reflexive stance (in the non-EM sense) to such an extreme that it would be unacceptable in most genres of writing.

vi. Glossing and gestalts in occasioned reading

Although the ‘talk around text’ element of the interviews was perfunctory, in many of the later interviews hard copies of participants’ essay texts and feedback were present for either me or the participant to use as required. The use of these documents during the interviews was not a requirement and their use by students in the discussions was nearly always initiated by them rather than by me. Generally, they should be understood as picking up the essay or feedback sheet of their own accord and using it in an *ad lib* manner. These uses of texts-to-hand brought out examples of formal structures such as *glossing* practices (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970), sequestering of textual items in a *gestalt* (Lynch 1993), particularly the figure/ground structure (Goodwin [1994] outlines the idea of “highlighting” the figure against the ground), and the accountable display of “expert vision” (ibid.) and esoteric knowledge (Sharrock & Turner 1980).

Tim 3

- P: [We look at an essay and read through the comments.] “My only real criticism concerns your remarks at the top of page 5” – what was that?
- S: [He looks] That’s where I was...I can’t really remember. Something about how private property is introduced from a state of nature. Sort of private property [and its existence]. Right, and then he’s saying that, in Grotius, private property is understood as an agreement, it’s conventional, which I don’t really say. And that’s important, because it justifies the right of necessity as a sort of exception to the right of private property...
- P: So that criticism was linked to a specific content-based piece of information and your understanding of it.
- S: Yeah.
- ...
- S: Well, that’s everything. It says here, “very good essay – thought a lot about it”. I’ve done a lot of reading. And the thing at the front, “excellent introduction, interpretation, structure”, and so on. Yeah, other than that, it’s just, I think he’s just clarifying his point there. [Looking at another annotation] Yeah, to me that’s just linked to the one point.

Iwona 2

- P: ...Do you have a kind of argument that goes through this essay?
- S: I’m basically arguing for the fact that we do have a neo-Baroque aesthetics. I think what I’ve also done here is, I think my last paragraph is...a competing view. I remember I wanted to add one, I don’t remember if I did that in the end. Let me just see. [looks] I might have. But when I was reading the literature what I encountered was that there was this one person who was really really against the idea

that we live in a neo-Baroque aesthetics, basically thought that it's sort of a continuation from what was in the past...

...

P: But it's your argument that we do live in it, and you found one main source that says we don't?

S: It was a book but I couldn't borrow it because it wasn't in the library. But yeah. There is one book, a whole book, about she does not think that we live in the neo-Baroque [sic]. But I couldn't get my hands on it, so... basically, just mentioned a paragraph of her competing, why she thinks it's a competing view. Oh there we go, hold on, I think I have that actually. Here in my second paragraph. [searching through text] No. [looks] Yeah, I see. So basically I have the introduction first. Then I start off with the competing view. And then I try to argue my way through the essay, that what she said was actually wrong, and that we do live in the age of neo-Baroque so I could do that first but – what I said before, explaining what neo-Baroque is, how it differs from Baroque, and then go through all the different features of neo-Baroque...

The use of texts in this fashion often incorporated a plurality of such practices. Tim and Iwona have addressed – on my request – essays that had already gone through the proper cycle of composition, marking, and feedback. Understandably, their familiarity with them had waned. Both protagonists have had to step back, after stating that they “don't remember”, in order to find more certain ground on which to respond. In Iwona's case, there is discernible scanning of the pages in an attempt to pick up the thread of the argument sufficiently to be able to provide a ‘gist’ of it. In Iwona's case, she does not immediately recall the structure of her argument, and in speculating aloud, she reveals two candidates for this structure in her joint speculating and finding activity: compare

S: I think my last paragraph is... a competing view. I remember I wanted to add one, I don't remember if I did that in the end.

with

S: Oh there we go, hold on, I think I have that actually. Here in my second paragraph. [searching through text] No. [looks] Yeah, I see. So basically I have the introduction first. Then I start off with the competing view.

Iwona provides two accounts of the argument structure: one before and one after she locates the passage on the “competing view”. It does not seem to matter to the essentials of her argument *in the telling* which of these was the structure used in fact.²⁴

These extracts show the protagonists combining the embodied activity of scanning and interrogating a physical text with searching for an expression, and expressing its semantic, epistemic or topic-based outcome. Tim and Iwona cannot go through *recovering the lived work* of writing the essay to provide an idea of what the criticism or argument

²⁴ This brings to mind Garfinkel's “gap” in writing “between the work of composing a text and the retrospectively analysable properties of the resultant document” (Lynch 1993:289).

was – this is no more available to them than to us (Lynch 1993:290; although Tim makes a ‘false start’ near the beginning that could qualify as attempting such a recovery) – the sense is rather recoverable through the here-and-now lived work of finding the looked-for objects as a first-time-through exercise (Garfinkel et al. 1981) for situated purposes.

Tying practices

The use of documents occasioned various tying practices among the participants (Sacks 1992). Of these, Sacks writes: “There is a very large range of tying techniques, and a very large group of specifically tying terms, where the presence of such a term in certain positions in an utterance signals that the utterance is tied to some other utterance” (1992, vol. 1:716). Sacks noted that utterance pairs were ordered, very often as ‘adjacency pairs’, but also that this order could be broken up and re-ordered in different places in discourse through different techniques. We can see similar things happening in many of these examples, when we use the same tools “pragmatically adjusted for texts” (Anderson 1978:118). One of these ‘pragmatic adjustments’ involves considering texts as commenting on each other. Given the institutional uses of texts required in HE, these interactions are likely to be multimodal, with tying carried out both in writing and in spoken interaction.

Thus, Tim looks at his essay to see the extent of the feedback comment, “My only real criticism concerns your remarks at the top of page 5”. Although the lecturer has already sequestered a fairly specific location in the essay, “remarks” and “top of page 5” are still indexicals, and do not obviate the need for tying if these feedback comments are to be read and made sense of. One way of reading it is to hear him trying to recover a vague gist *of* and *from* that part of the essay, before resuming with more confidence by glossing (q.v.) the marker’s comments and their relation to his own text. The criticism here relates to an *omission*, i.e. something that is not in his essay text, and it takes a little while before Tim is able to ‘see’ this omission. In substantive terms, it is notable that Tim presents different accounts of private property – from “how private property is introduced from a state of nature” to “in Grotius, private property is understood as an agreement, it’s conventional”. As soon as Tim is able to see this as what might be called an ‘unfilled content space’ – that “which I don’t really say” about private property – he is in a position to tie the feedback to a particular segment of text. Given the location of the problem as specified by the marker, he is also able to tie summative comments to the same location.

He strips away the possibility of other understandings of this passage through a rapidly conducted, situated reading.

In the example from Rose below, the tying is much more conditional. Our conversation concerns her problem with finding the argument or analytical ground. Rose knows what was missing from her essay – by virtue of both personal sensibility and marker comments – although she is still unsure as to what could be done to fill this gap. She points out one location where she attempted a more analytical discussion, with the point of departure being “the sort of implications that these [events] had for future French politics”. But as with Tim and the “top of page 5” comment, Rose first has to decide what part of the text is being shown approbation; she then needs to ascertain what criterion or what kind of thing is being approved. Given the number of criteria applied to marking essays, some ‘elimination procedures’ are necessary to understand the message of something as indexical as a double-tick. Her conjecture is that the ticks address an instance of such analytical/argumentative writing. The reason for the presence of the ticks, then, does not seem to be as simple as confirming that the passages adjacent to them show suitable technique or content; they become a way of finding instances of what she ‘should be doing’. The evaluative significance of the ticks, for someone as Rose who is looking for ways of incorporating certain features in her writing, goes beyond the immediate location and becomes the token of a criterion that can be improved – in this case along lines specified both by Rose herself and her marker.

Rose 4

- S: I mean I just – this essay does kind of lend itself to being narrated quite a bit. I mean I tried toward the end – that might be where she double-ticked it – to say [sic] the sort of implications that these had for future French politics. But the problem is I didn’t want to go too far down that route because I felt I’m then going away from what the question was actually asking. So I don’t know whether she wanted to have more on those future effects.

Glossing practices

Glossing practices are defined by Kessler & McKenna (1978:18-9) as: “to let the meaning of something become clear as the process of interaction proceeds, without explicitly stating (and without being able to state) what it is that is meant”. The EM view of glossing takes in occasioned explanations, re-formulations, summaries, all manner of indexicals and indexical repair, assuming ‘what everybody knows’, finding convenient cover-alls or overarching categories, and doing more than one can say in so many words.

Good examples can be found in the gists or summaries of essays or arguments given by Tim and Iwona above, as well as in the formulations section (q.v.). Another example from those parts of the interviews that involved the direct use of text is below. It recalls the conversation with Marie above, in which she discusses her frustration with the perceived incommensurability of numbers and textual descriptions. This extract, with Susie (below), is similar. We can see glosses at work both in the marker's use of a pre-established scale of 1-10, and in Susie's own rendering of what a given number might 'mean' for a certain criterion, given that it is not specified in advance. As with Marie, the student has to come to terms with an overall mark based on the traditional classification scheme which is in itself a gloss on the quality of the essay.

Here, the feedback for the essay used the ten-point scale. As we note, only 1 and 10 are given verbal glosses – “entirely unsatisfactory” and “exemplary”, respectively. This means that marks occupying any other position on the scale need to be glossed in relation to these two points. It is not necessary for students to formally know what every point on the scale ‘means’, as long as they are able to gloss the scale to ‘see how it works’. One would expect students to ask, among other things, where the ‘positive’ indicators on this scale begin. In accordance with, for instance, Sacks’ description of the contingent production of a ‘round’ (Lynch 2001:143), the principles of understanding the scale are only apparent when occasion demands it. Thus, the interview with Marie occasioned her assertion that some principle had been transgressed, on the basis that evaluative terms tied to the mark for a criterion were not a proper gloss for that mark. Her own gloss contingently produces a disjuncture between the marks and comments as encountered, and as what they could *possibly* mean.

Susie produces her own methods for coming to an understanding of the scale. First, she treats it as a full scale, and discusses the possibility of 10 being awarded. With the scale then being assumed truly scalar, she answers my question of what a mark of seven might mean by ascertaining how the middle of the range (five) might be glossed verbally, and then suggesting a gloss for seven that would seem to fit semantically between five being “good” and ten being “exemplary”. The numbers here are meant to be indicative (Appendix 7) and so the glossing here is certainly occasioned; but one that we can see is available to Susie. Considering the gestalt properties (q.v.) of the feedback sheet, one concern that students will look to address is whether the suite of indicative marks for specific criteria cohere with the overall mark. In Marie’s case, this coherence was called into question.

Susie 3

- S: Most useful is when you see the comments at the bottom, which is [obscured by paper shuffling, but is heard as “most useful”]. I think these are useful for getting a rough guide, like I think, great, my reading and research was on target. But then at the same time, you say, well, “quality of spelling – 8”, I don’t think there’s anything that wrong there, because I checked it all, so what would I need to do to get it up to a ten? Or, quality of bibliography is an eight, well, what do I need to do to get it up to a ten? It doesn’t give you much except how you’re done, really, it’s not very helpful.
- P: So – because it says here “1 is entirely unsatisfactory and 10 is exemplary” – you got a lot of sevens, so what would be seven in one word or two words?
- S: I’d say “reasonably good”, I don’t know! [laughs] If we say five is good, then pretty good, we’ll say pretty good.

Gestalt structure: figure/ground

James Heap (1991a:18) writes:

I find it useful to distinguish between two objects denoted by the term materials. One is the document, the physical object bearing signs and symbols. The other is the text, the meaning (qua sense and reference) that is realized through acts of reading the document...Whatever sense is made, or reference is understood, is the meaning, the ‘text’ of the ‘document’.

According to Heap, we see the document component first, never the text. “How it appears, and the degree of familiarity with the type of document we recognise it to be, can strongly affect our expectations regarding the text” (ibid.). I suggest that this distinction becomes necessary when discussing aspects of the text. There were instances in the interviews with participants where both the relationship between text and document became evident, and where this relationship had an evident bearing on the gestalt structures of the essays observed and handled as paper documents. The horizon afforded by the essay is a synthesis of document and text.

Essays present gestalt features through *intertwining* of document design and textual features, in terms of their content and the semantic messages they carry. For instance, essay features such as ‘introduction’ and ‘argument’ are often adduced as parts or aspects of essays; essays are marked on the quality of such features, and so it is common to see them mentioned in proximity as evaluative criteria, necessary parts of an essay, and so on. But an ‘introduction’ is as much a part of a document as it is of a text; if one asked a layperson to find the introduction of an essay, they could probably make a decent job of it by heading to the very beginning of the document. An argument, on the other hand, is an emergent feature. It is notable from some of the extracts immediately above that even students interrogating their own older essays had trouble in finding the arguments quickly,

hence the amount of ‘filler’ utterances in the interviews as they tried to ‘find’ and produce a gist of what they were arguing. That they could still do so fairly quickly suggests not only vestigial familiarity with the content, but also some kind of “expert vision” (Goodwin 1994) in *how and where* to look.

We would expect the participants to be proficient in the language of evaluation and feedback (Lea & Street 1998), as indeed they were. One such proficiency involves glossing (q.v.) various aspects of writing and bringing them to the foreground for the purposes of discussion even where they are only analytically separable from other aspects:

Jens 1

S: So I did an essay plan for the second one, the second semester, which I think like, in general like was better...but then again like, you can see it here and here I didn't like focus that much like on theory, I was just writing about what I think, making some sort of, like laying some foundations.

Jens assumes that I (or any academically proficient reader) am able to read, or see, the passages he is indicating for what he is describing they are ‘doing’. I am expected not only to notice the presence of some feature, but also the absence (Sacks 1992, Lynch 2001) of another. Both the present and absent features – but especially the present ones – are very much ‘textual’ features. Again, “laying some foundations” appears to be a contingently arrived-at gloss by way of characterising these locations in the text/document. The significance of these passages is in part due to what he is doing *as opposed to something else* that he could be doing. This being the case, if we have access to the text, we can focus on the present features i. as instructed, in contrast to what it is not there; ii. as against any other features that would be available to view but which are temporarily part of the background, the characteristics of which are bracketed.

vii. Membership categorisation

Given Carlin’s mention of membership categorisation analysis (MCA) in his work on the ethno-inquiries approach to interviewing and interview analysis (2006, 2009), there was far less evidence of membership categorisation devices (MCD) than might have been expected.

The only candidate for developed MCD status appeared in the two interviews with Ville. This qualified as a “locally assembled corpus” (Baker 2000:101), and the collection could be given the title, ‘Academic denizens at various stages of development’. It is then

not a primordial device, such as ‘family’, perhaps more what Sacks would call an institutionally-relevant identity, but it is a hearable one. Elements of this device span both interviews. In the first interview, Ville implicitly sets himself up in the category ‘university student’. This is set up in opposition to the category “40-year-old famous guy”, which is heard as being obviously tied to an academic role.²⁵ The implicit category ‘university student’ is understood as being bound to (and bound *by*) various expectations and obligations (Hester 1992) in its work, including strict but unspecified limitations on “what exactly they want to hear”, and in particular the requirement to back up work with existing published ideas. This requirement is characterised by Ville as attenuating the possibility of producing original work: “sort of redoing what they are saying just on a different level”. Although these are clearly activities that may be fulfilled by the most senior type of academic denizen, they are *not required* of them.

Ville 1

S: ...I was going to go over my own points, [but they always asked you to] analyse critically, they want[ed] you to write in a specific framework, and sometimes I would follow it sometimes I would write more my own thing, and my English teacher recognised it, because she knew me, but still she would try to guide me back in the framework and tell me when I am at university to start experimenting, and now that I am here I realise that they are still pretty strict with what exactly they want to hear, so I wasn't for example too happy knowing that you have to have a massive amount of quotes just to support an argument just because you are not some 40-year-old famous guy saying it. But I guess you have to... Personally I would want to sort of have more [of a] free hand and just approach it from more of an ideological basis and argue for it instead of quoting like half a dozen people all the time, who have already thought similar things and sort of redoing what they are saying just on a different level.

The second extract more explicitly develops Ville's point in talking in these terms. Ville is trading on predicated activities and especially predicated obligations (Hester *ibid.*) and questioning the fact that they are so predicated in order to draw attention to a preferred ‘theory of education’ (q.v.) (Baker 2000). This is what Hester & Eglin (1997) call the ‘production problem’, i.e. to what end is the person putting the use of a MCD as a formal structure. This preferred theory also trades on the same device, but rather than adhering to the usual accepted predicates, the argument is that young, inexperienced writers need to ‘have their head’ and be able to make mistakes (cf. ‘an attribution of motives’, q.v.), so that they know ‘what works’ in all of the three senses that I identify in a question to Ville below.

²⁵ I do not see this as a “standard relational pair” (Silverman 1998) because of the possible trajectories of academic roles and seniority.

Ville 2

- S: It depends on how...I don't think I'm personally...It depends on what topic is going to come up and if I want to acquiesce and do exactly what I'm told and just, read these ten sources, I read the ten sources and that's it, and take out the most obvious points and write a typical essay which will probably still get a decent mark, or if I actually try to make something special. I mean I'm not naïve in the sense that I actually think I'm going to create something amazing, I'm only 19 years old, but I'd like to try, the first essay I did tried to push the boundaries and [see how] far I could take certain things. Just testing the water.
- P: If we look at this as trying to push boundaries, as you call it, or experimenting or any other type of phrase, what are you experimenting with exactly? Are you trying to see what you can do, or are you trying to see what comes out of what you are writing, or trying to find what's best received by markers?
- S: All of it. My own personal problem is writing essays, I'm still at a very early stage (...), the more I write the more I can focus on my thinking and I basically try out different [approaches] and see the response I get...

Conclusions

The formal structures used in these interviews were fairly wide-ranging and I have not been able to provide an exhaustive account of all of them. In providing a conclusion here the challenge is to find some points of departure that cover all of the formal structures described; taken individually, they tend to speak for themselves. The emergence of formal structures is bound up with other conversational methods that come under the aegis of CA.

One point of departure that appears to relate to all the formal structures here to varying extents is that they pertain to the possibilities of practical reasoning on behalf of 'thinking subjects'. The conversations focussed largely on the presence of writing requirements both general and specific. The formal structures exhibit reasoning that concerns the nature of these writing requirements, how students meet them, the obstacles that prevent them from doing so, and the question of how the distance between the nature of the requirements and the available reasoning around them can be narrowed. Occasionally, there were justifications for why the criteria for writing, although known or knowable, were circumvented. The student participants as thinking subjects were able to adduce convincing ways of explaining and justifying how their actions, as contributing to events discussed *post facto*, had been carried out and oriented to the pedagogical demands on them. In doing so, they put on display their ways of coming to terms with what become variously epistemological, normative, pedagogical, and moral issues.

Chapter 6

Case study I: Cathy, Susie, and the Gender Essay

Introduction

At the beginning of the second year of empirical research, I emailed all the participants to remind them that the project was ongoing and to arrange further interviews. I was pleasantly surprised to be contacted, by return, by Cathy, whom I had not expected to hear from again. She assured me that her lack of communication in the latter parts of the previous year were due to a memory problem rather than her lack of interest in continuing with the study.

This case study addresses Cathy's experiences on a course that she and Susie both attended. I see it as demarcating a perspicuous site for the kind of study that I have set out. First, it is replete with instances of practical reasoning. Second, it illustrates the divergence between two modes of analysis that I have explained above, i.e., to paraphrase Macbeth (2003), the analysis of naturally occurring discourse, and the critical analysis of discourses. It seems to me that while CDA would have a great deal to say on this collection of data, there is also a great deal to be missed if the structural details are not fully taken into consideration. This chapter will therefore proceed in the following way. First, the materials will be presented. Next, I will provide a version of a CDA-type analysis. Finally, I provide an alternate analysis, based upon the situated principles of EM research.

Accounts of writing

Cathy and Susie both wrote on the same essay title for a third year sociology course on gender and sexuality. The essay title was:

“As far as gender and sexuality are concerned, nature has ‘nothing to do with it’” (Weeks, 1985). Discuss this statement with reference to gender and/or sexuality.

Their experience of writing this essay was very different. For Susie, this gave her the opportunity to pursue her own special research interest: social theories of gender and sexuality. For Cathy, it presented her with a specific and very acute crisis of identity. This

first came out, completely unbidden, when we were talking about whether she felt she was being given the opportunity to put her own views and opinions into her writing.

S: Yeah, I just don't know how! I don't know how you're supposed to do it, so I just – especially in my Gender essay, because I really struggled with that course anyway because of my faith and some of the issues that were coming up. And I didn't feel like I could put my opinion in, because I didn't – obviously I had the Bible to back it up, but I didn't know how, or – basically I went to see someone at the church who is the head teacher and he said, just leave it out, because that's not what they're expecting to see anyway, so I just left it out. But I did feel that I wanted my opinion to be in but I wasn't sure of how to go about that. So I kind of went around it, and did a quite broad context really.

P: So what you ended up with was a broad discussion...

S: Yeah, I kind of mentioned the Bible and stuff like that, but I didn't really put my opinion in, because I didn't know how to back it up really.

Cathy's first contribution here was delivered slowly and thoughtfully, with a number of restarts. It included a lot of new information that she had not told me before. Divulging this was clearly a big effort for her. Various things began to make sense as we talked: her faith and identity as a born-again Christian; her status as a recovering alcoholic and the memory loss problems that she associated with it; and her tentative ambition of working with Christian organisations connected to youth crime. This is the longest stretch of uninterrupted speech by Cathy in the conversations we had. One way of reading the transcript is that the struggles she had with 'including her opinions' in her work were sufficiently acute to bring these other sensitive issues to the surface.

A little later in the same conversation we came back to the essay and its provocative title:

P: Did you come down in favour of this – because it's quite a flat statement, isn't it – did you come down in favour of that or against it, or neither?

S: Against what it's saying. I don't believe nature has nothing to do with our sexuality.

P: And did you manage to find any kind of authors or, you know, ammunition that backed you up in that [view]?

S: In terms of my faith, I believe that nature...I mean I believe that God created us, so...I really can't remember in depth. I've done five more [essays] since then.

I had obtained, but not yet looked systematically at the essay before we had this discussion. It was therefore difficult to determine from these exchanges alone to what extent Cathy had used Biblical passages and her faith in general as sources of argument in this essay – not least because of her 'managed refusal' as a way of "topic closing" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973). I think it is likely that the majority of sociologists would say

that she had received good practical advice from her ‘head teacher’ at the church; but it is not immediately clear what the anaphoric “it” is in the phrase “he said, just leave it out”. It could be mention of her faith generally; or the use of scripturally-derived arguments that constitute her ‘opinion’. It seemed from these passages that while her faith was the source of something approaching an essentialism in her thinking, that this was not overtly developed into a set of premises from which arguments were generated in the essay.

In her attempt at the same essay title, Susie felt that she was given the space to include her own thoughts and opinions in her academic writing, and gave the following account of how it worked:

S: What I wrote, I didn’t read, I didn’t go in with an idea that I’d read. I went with an idea that I thought about. I’m sure someone’s done it before and whatever, but it was my idea...what did I write? It was just a bit of a different...it wasn’t like a for-and-against, it was a bit more, a bit more of a kind of different take on the title.

P: Can you say more about that?

S: The title was “As far as gender and sexuality are concerned, nature has nothing to do with it. Discuss this in reference” [sic]. And I didn’t argue that nature has something to do with it or nothing to do with it per se, I argued that nature has something to do with it because nature is an entirely socially constructed idea... So therefore it has everything to do with it, but not in the way that you would assume nature to be. That’s the line of argument I took.

Subsequently, I received a copy of the feedback on Cathy’s essay, and the marks on both Cathy’s and Susie’s essays. Whereas Susie received a very high first class mark, Cathy’s essay was given a third class (pass) mark. One can compare essays in terms of their marks only on a *ceteris paribus* basis. And if we recall our adaptation of Heap’s (2000) distinction between X and not-X, it is clear that both of these essays qualify as X, i.e. their marks tell us that they are tenable as essays written for this course. While it is easy to argue that Susie’s effort is X-done-well, it is not even that clear that Cathy’s essay counts as X-done-poorly, given the many shades of grey available in marking.²⁶

The unabridged version of Cathy’s essay appears as Appendix 9, but below are some of the most relevant passages given the matters that Cathy raised. They are taken from various parts of the essay, so the line numbers are for the purposes of analysis and not meant to be reflective of the original.

²⁶ For instance, it is not even clear that a fail mark would qualify an essay for not-X status. Speaking from practical experience, not-X seems to be reserved for pieces of work that are seen to warrant comments from the marker that call into question the student’s ability to write something close to what they would recognise as writing for that purpose. Marks are an index of this. At this university, there was a system of ‘compensatable’ fails where marks below 30% could not count for progression purposes.

The introduction ends with the following passage:

1 We are going to
2 look at the historical roots of gender and sexuality and explore how sexology has been
3 influential in constructing meaning to gender and sex. Furthermore, we will look at the
4 statement put forward by Weeks and develop his view, with reference to gender and
5 sexuality, that nature has nothing to do with the formation of our sexuality and gender.
6 Does nature in actuality have nothing to do with it? Could it be an amalgamation of both
7 nature and nurture? Do cultural values and morals impact the configuration of ones
8 gender and sexuality?

The next passage immediately follows the introduction:

9 Looking back through the history of sexual behaviour we notice that it was moulded
10 primarily by Christianity (Giddens, 2006, p. 443). Whilst the Bible was not intended as a
11 history or scientific text book we can, however, use it as a starting point of understanding,
12 as Christians believe the creation of man and woman. Adam and Eve, who were created
13 in God's own image, were blessed by God and were told by Him to "Be fruitful and
14 increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 27-28).
15 The view of the Old Testament could therefore be interpreted that sex was created for
16 man and woman to reproduce within marriage. Thus we could presume that any sexual
17 behaviour outside of this would be seen as being wrong. We see this in the book of
18 Leviticus. However, we must look at the book of Leviticus in context. The main message
19 of Leviticus is the holiness of God and its focus was on behaving differently to other
20 civilizations around. Its purpose was to outline the duties of the priests and Levites in
21 worship and a guidebook for living differently for the Hebrews. In the New Testament,
22 Jesus' teachings do not focus on sex, outside of marriage, as being a bigger issue than
23 other sinful behaviour we adhere to. In fact he taught the opposite, he could do this
24 through his claims of being the Son of God. It is true to say that throughout the history of
25 the Church (people who follow Jesus Christ) many have interpreted scripture without
26 taking into account the context of the time which may possibly have been seen as Church
27 being out of line with reality. These Biblical narratives set out the ways in which our
28 gender and sexuality were created from the beginning of time. Although for nearly two
29 thousand years Western attitudes towards sexual behaviour were based on the teachings
30 of the Church, many people ignored or reacted against them. The idea that sexual
31 fulfilment can and should be sought only through marriage was rare (Giddens, 2006,
32 p.443).
33
34 With a decline of Christianity, attitudes of sexuality signal a shift in authority from
35 religion to science.

The essay subsequently moves from surveying essentialist to constructivist arguments. In fact, it follows some of the course content in its moves from the Christian context,²⁷ through sexology and psychoanalysis, to socio-biology, and finally to the constructionism of Jeffrey Weeks. This is one way of understanding what Cathy means by the "broad context" she talks of – it is likely to mean either that she provides a general survey of literature relevant to the course, or that the passage comprising lines 9-35 above is not

²⁷ This was not mentioned at all in the course unit outline but was mentioned unprompted by the lecturer PS.

The general comments recap some of the remarks above:

You indicate a basic understanding of the issues & some familiarity with relevant literature, theories and debates. However, your essay is weakened by an over-reliance on basic introductory sociological texts, and limited engagement with the wealth of work we have covered on the course. More reading of appropriate literature would improve the essay and analysis considerably.

These comments are reproduced here in the same order that they appear on the feedback sheet. It is interesting to read the faith the marker has in the therapeutic possibilities of reading and engaging with “appropriate literature”. The assumption is certainly a reasonable one: read more of the right kinds of things, and show that you’ve thought about it, and this will implicitly or explicitly work its influence on the other aspects of the essay. By his/her own assessment, though, the essay would require this reading to culminate in *arguments* that are better produced. The arguments as they currently stand are “obvious” ones that suffer from the proximity of conclusions of one bent with a discussion of the problems with that same conclusion. One thing that needs to be done with the argument, then, is to make it more *coherent* and more *concerted*. Another is to produce arguments that are not “obvious”. This could constitute a number of things: arguments that are deeper, more developed, more complex, based on more reading. It could also be read, though, as questioning the very line of ‘innatist’ argument in the essay. This need not, then, be understood as a matter of coherence; it could also be that the innatist or essentialist side to the argument is being dispreferred.

What can be written on the gender course?

Given the very different receptions given to their essays, and their opposing stances on the proposition in the essay title, I started to think about the extent to which these outcomes might have been inevitable. To put the question generally: what were the *possible* messages that could meaningfully be communicated in work for this course? To put it specifically: Susie had produced an essay that had received high praise, and she had argued not only that gender and sexuality were socially constructed, but also that the very idea of ‘nature’ was likewise constructed. Cathy had seemingly provided a fundamentally innatist argument, combined with some tentative constructivist ideas, and had received a low mark. I came to wonder whether ‘essentialist’, ‘universalist’, or ‘innatist’ approaches to gender and sexuality were part of the course; and to what extent arguments based on

these ideas could have any kind of currency. It seemed that there was more to be made of arguing for nurture rather than for nature.

Informed by these thoughts and documentation such as the course outline, I arranged interviews with AP, a tutor for the course; and with PS, who had been a tutor on this course and a third year analogue, and who was about to take over as course convenor. I was interested to hear AP complain about the lack of facility of many of her former students to connect with the main messages of the course, which she saw as *designed* to engage them with theoretical accounts of gender and sexuality:

AP: ...students really feel that if they see a picture of a man or woman, they can describe what is masculine, what is feminine about them just by looking at the picture, but they don't realise that [this course] is actually pretty theoretical. For them it's just fun, you know, talking about sex, lesbians, homosexuals...they don't really connect with the theoretical challenge, which is more important on a sociology course.

In fact many of the students presented essentialist viewpoints in their writing,²⁸ which AP associated with written work that was homogeneous and basic. She saw her challenge as helping students 'cross the Rubicon' into social-theoretical territory, which was largely contiguous with guiding them into analyses of how nurture and social influence work, rather than trading on descriptions of universal givens "as if description was the theory itself".

My conversation with PS was rather longer and more detailed. As I will go on to show, it admits of various modes of analysis.

PS, independently of AP, described the course as one that aimed to change the views of those who took it. He also described the students as typically coming with the kinds of existing attitudes that provided plenty of material to work with:

PS: Its aim is to change people's thinking. A lot of students arrive with the attitude that there's something natural to gender and that ultimately they are natural qualities, something inherent. It's a very sociological or cultural studies project in that it seeks to encourage students to investigate the idea that these things we take as natural are in fact constructed, the results of human interaction.

PS: It is part of the agenda about practices rather than solid, fixed identities that never change, i.e. "you are a homosexual", "you are a heterosexual", or whatever. It recognises the fluidity and changeability of those categories. It looks at what people do, and the meanings attached to it, rather than what people are ...But I guess as well as challenging essentialism or determinism [the course] also aims in part to look at how these categories are enmeshed or co-constituted.

²⁸ At the time I spoke with AP, the assessment for the course consisted of an essay plan worth 10% of the mark, and a final essay worth 90%. One of AP's tasks would have been to change the course of work that was not conforming to expectations at an early stage.

As I pointed out to PS, the course outline from 2008, when Cathy and Susie were both enrolled on this course, made a number of mentions of essentialism and similar ideas, often set up in a seeming dualist opposition to constructivism. For instance, for the week one lecture, under the heading, “Getting Started: key terms and concepts”:

The first issues to be tackled have been summarised as the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate. To what extent are the characteristics of masculinity and femininity born with us, or to what extent do the markers of gender vary over time and between societies? Is sexuality innate or socially constructed or a combination of the two? Can we separate gender from sex? These debates will be framed in the context of essentialism and social constructionism.

For the week six lecture, under the heading, “Sexual liberation and sexual identities”:

It will consider influential work on lesbian and gay identities, and explore essentialist and social constructionist assumptions that underpin these.

So essentialism and related ideas were clearly present in the delivery of the course. In this vein, PS talked about the radical feminists of the 1970s and 1980s as espousing essentialist ideas of womanhood and femininity. He also noted the possibility of a sociologism, or social determinism, if considerations of biology and physiology were jettisoned completely.

Eventually I managed to express my enquiry succinctly:

P: ...You talked of radical constructionists, so to speak. I can imagine a radical essentialist may not have any kind of sociological ground.

PS: Sorry, you’re right. Maybe that’s one of the things we struggle over, really, because most of the biological essentialists will be coming from the natural sciences. I also wonder how many of them will now be around, because even these people who were wedded to scientific realism, or to positivism, there’s a kind of acceptance that society does have an impact upon the people that we actually become. I think sometimes we’re fighting against a kind of straw man, this kind of person that we’ve built up that probably doesn’t really exist and who we find so easy to knock down.

PS presents a picture of the gradual channelling of all – from both the sciences and humanities – into a single orthodoxy or paradigm. This seemed to incorporate the theoretical affiliations of the local sociology staff:

P: In your view, is that [constructivism] the dominant perspective within the sociology [department]?

PS: There’s certainly a kind of...I think any kind of essentialism is really to be avoided [laughs], and that’s not just within the [department], that’s the same at any kind of sociology or cultural studies oriented conference. It’s something that dare not speak its name [laughs]. Unless you invoke it as a point of criticism, you define yourself against it...So I’d say it is a fairly dominant paradigm... It’s probably not quite so hegemonic in sociology as it is in humanities.

The methodological “eclecticism” of the sociology discipline as mentioned more than once by PS seems to be one that takes forms of essentialism as an insuperable boundary, and uses the panoply of constructivist and post-structuralist influences. Thus, PS mentioned that “a lot of people warm to Stevi Jackson because she realises that while nothing is essential there is at least a kind of semi-permanence to experience of gender and sexuality”. Jackson is part of a movement that brought back some element of materiality to post-structuralist writing on gender; so while there was a reaction to Foucauldian writing that had, in PS’s words, “evaporated the material body”, this is a dialectic with materialism rather than essentialism as its antithesis. Moreover, once this dialectic is resolved, the resulting synthesis still seems to be defined by the sociality of its objects.²⁹ PS talked also of the utility of “strategic essentialism” for those who have some kind of minority status; for instance, unitary ‘black’ or ‘homosexual’ identity can play a useful role in civil or micro-politics. This same kind of move did not seem to be available to Cathy. It was clear that the lessons of the eminent theorists were taken by PS as premises for conceptual investigations, and that the political or pragmatic use of strategic essentialisms was not understood as reflecting the social scientific truth of the situation.³⁰

PS’s account of his instruction demonstrated a conscious understanding of the socio-historical context of contemporary higher education:

PS: When I came back to academe I noticed how things had changed and how it was very much now about – and there’s a merit to it – but it’s not so much about you telling pupils what you believe or what you think the right answer is or putting forward a political point of view, but it is more about facilitating their learning. More about getting them to explore whether they’re Marxist, or conservative, or post-structuralist, or whatever. It’s really about you providing them with the intellectual tools that they can then make decisions about themselves.

PS was at pains to point out the wide variety of tools made available by social theory as applied to matters of gender and sexuality. The state of the art, the “newer tools” that PS mentions, is in varieties of various post-structuralist, constructivist, and praxiological enterprises. Despite this, and despite the statements that the course was intended to be transformative of the attitudes that students tended to enter with, PS did not see his role as that of a pedagogue; “we’ve never said this is the way you have to think about it. You

²⁹ This could be seen as the reversal and then re-inscription of a Derridean hierarchy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/derrida/>.

³⁰ PS: “Stuart Hall said in relation to blackness, that although there was no essential blackness it was a useful political category around which people could mobilise during the civil rights movement in American in the 1960s”.

cannot do that, that would just not be healthy on a degree course where you're encouraging young people to become autonomous as thinkers".

However, the kind of autonomous thinking looked for was one that should be tempered by sufficient contact with sociological theory. PS encouraged a mode of enquiry that was individual and independent, but that came to terms with the relevant theories rather than giving too much prominence to personal experience.³¹ The effective use of personal experience in written work was seen as something that presented risks to the student writer:

PS: If you go too far down that line, it could in some cases tip into a kind of, not egocentrism, but it could become anecdotal and a little too self-oriented and detached from broader experience and broader ways of theorising common experience as well.

PS's own experience with student writing in both FE and HE had led him to the conclusion that the use of personal experience as a starting point for written work could lead to the production of something idiosyncratic and theoretically unsophisticated. Assuming that a student could produce a piece of work inured in sociological theory and presented in a suitable way, PS spoke in terms of a sentiment that will be familiar to many who work in higher education: "it's about making a reasoned argument for a particular viewpoint, with evidence from social science texts, and if you can do that then I will disagree with it violently but nonetheless you will get a much higher mark, you will be rewarded for it".

A few last comments made by PS are worth providing for scrutiny. They both relate to ways in which the 'possible meanings' on the course were seen to be encouraged in student writing and behaviour generally, and how tokens of student writing in turn dynamically contributed to these meanings. The first is related to the paucity of strong religious views communicated in PS's tutorials:

PS: It may just be that the kind of people who sign up for that particular course either observe the kind of power dynamic and are maybe reluctant to speak out. Also it's not just the power dynamic between student and teacher. I guess anybody who might express that particular view, whether it's religious or secular, they might be just as afraid of vocalising that because of peer pressure. They might calculate that people who elect to do this course might be more likely to have more liberal views about sexuality...it's part of the academic doxa that this course really is attuned to people with liberal beliefs and attitudes, isn't it, and invites that way of thinking.

³¹ I very much like noting the reversal at play in a comment such as: "they [students] need to get to know what the debates are, what the issues and what the paradigms are before they start doing anything as sophisticated as using their own experience".

The second concerned a change to the essay title Cathy and Susie had written on; since 2008 the title had changed to directing students specifically to discuss a choice of two post-structuralist theories. PS thought that the change was no bad thing.

PS: ...this course is constructed for a particular purpose, with the idea that this is valuable cultural and sociological knowledge that students need to show competence in, in order to gain a mark that counts towards their degrees, basically. I guess it becomes rather canonical, then, doesn't it? It reproduces the canon.

On this account, students are 'thrown' into an epistemological context where their actions are seen to reproduce this form and content of knowledge.

Notes on a critical discourse analysis

It seems to me that there is a powerful set of conclusions available to AL here if it proceeded in its frequent CDA-influenced mode. These conclusions are moreover accompanied by a set of ironies that go to strengthen them. What I present in this section is not a full-blown critical analysis, but some idea of the extent of the materials that such an analysis could trade on.

The findings are something like this. Cathy has experienced a real and profound dilemma in trying to locate, and present, a way of writing substantive ideas that could strike a compromise between the Christian aspect of her identity and overt requirements of the course. This dilemma has not been identified, her starting point not marked, and the progress she has made in resolving this dilemma through her writing has not been taken into account. These are all considerations for an AL-informed pedagogy (Lea & Street 2006, Lillis 2003, Lillis & Scott 2007, 2009, Wingate & Tribble 2012). Moreover, there is an ideology or discourse at play that not only leaves largely unsaid the preferred *ways* of communicating knowledge (Lillis 1999), but also imposes a strict *orthodoxy* of content, of things that can meaningfully be said (Creaton 2010:63; Foucault 1970). Cathy's dilemma was at once existential and academic, but she was not assessed on the unity of this experience. It is hard to see how Cathy can 'win' out of this. As long as Cathy is not prepared to completely jettison her Christian identity, her writing, it seems, will be attributed some deficit that is couched either in terms of relevance or in terms of study skills.

In addition, the following set of ironies can be applied. They are ironic not least because of the type of course and its espoused aims. In no particular order and with some overlap:

1. The resolution of the social/natural dialectic always seems to be an uneven synthesis with the emphasis on the social. There are therefore still traces of the sociologism disavowed by PS.
2. The course deals with practices as per Gee's (2000) 'baker's dozen' of practice disciplines; but discourages too close attention to their own experience and practices. It does not take into account its own reflexivity; it ignores the conditions of possibility that it brings about.
3. This is a course that recognises and studies 'discourses', but still allows one discourse, or many, to work through it; it studies the same things, at a distance, that we find at play in the contexts it brings about itself.
4. A course that has a preoccupation with a constructivist view of the world does not take into account the reflexive construction of meaning undertaken as background work by its students. Sexuality and gender are addressed as practices, and therefore social and distributed; the writing that constitutes assessment for the course is not, and is allowed to be cloistered and individual.
5. PS talks in terms of the "hegemony", "canon", and "doxa" of the course and of academic disciplines in general, so there is awareness of this, but this awareness does not inform the way that students are assessed.
6. The course is designed and delivered to change people's minds, we would hope in an emancipatory or liberating fashion. In this case, Cathy's mind has not been changed. There is no evidence that Susie needed to change her mind, more that she was apt to the 'discourse' from the very beginning.
7. In keeping with Lea & Street's (1998) earliest AL findings, Cathy's unwillingness to frame arguments that were wholly palatable either to her or to the marker leads to a diagnosis of study skills problems by PS. That her writing in this essay is in fact the result of identity- and epistemology-generated problems is not looked for, acknowledged, or addressed.
8. One of the main research priorities of the sociology department in which all these events took place is that of "critical inequalities". The above points to an outward-facing rather than a reflexive criticality.

I do not have the scope here to hypothesise on the scale or origin of the ideologies or discourses that may be at work. It is sufficient to establish that such an analysis would be made possible by the data presented. In the common CDA locution, ‘institutional discourse’, it is not always clear what the ‘institution’ is. In this case, we could suggest a disciplinary or departmental ideology; but PS also pointed out that in post-positivist science, propounding the idea of social influence on ‘natural’ phenomena is really preaching to the converted. This suggests a very widely held set of beliefs, and is perhaps closer to the level of abstraction in Lillis’ (1999:127) “institutional practice of mystery” than it is to the ideologies of, for instance, a single HEI. At this level it is possible to pull in more invidious discourses: Larson & Witham’s (1999:91) article in *Scientific American* cites the sociologist Rodney Stark, who suggests that in research universities, “the religious people keep their mouth shut”.

It is notable in the interview with PS that there are as many accounts of his tactical encounters with students and texts as there are mentions of abstract discourses, doxa, and the like. Even if we were minded to do so, then, we would not find any clear-cut conclusions from what he says as *representing* states of affairs. Paraphrasing Lynch (1995) and Turner (1994), I do not think we can seriously expect to conclude that gatekeepers such as teachers or academics are working in line with a ‘big-D’ Discourse even if they profess it, i.e. *because they say they are*. Besides, it is difficult to conclude here that PS is operating as a *dupe* of ideology; this is self-professed, but on the basis that it is ‘not hidden enough’, it may well be that it is outside the locus of CDA interest.

As documented in previous chapters, analyses that use the presence of discourse or ideologies as premises rather than the outcomes of scrutiny have long been the target of EM/CA writers (Lynch 1995, Macbeth 2003, 2011, Schegloff 1997, 1999b; cf. Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000, Billig 1999a & b). The EM/CA view of such analyses points out that they sell out a ‘situated’ project by offering “a decontextualised analysis in the name of contextualisation” (Macbeth 2003:255), a move which “inverts the ethnographic premise: For the critical analysis of Discourse, it is precisely what the natives do *not* know that organises the analytic program” (ibid.:248). CDA and CDA-influenced programmes claim to be explanatory rather than descriptive (ibid.). “‘Discourse’ is understood as the formal governor of ‘discourse’. It yields an analytic program in which the vernacular expressions of actual worlds are made out on behalf of autonomous structures” (Macbeth 2003: 249). To do this not only removes the agency of the participants; it misses what accounts were “demonstrably about in the first instance – for the parties” (Schegloff 1997:178, emphasis

deleted). In Macbeth's words, situated discursive practices are "the first analytic practices on the scene" (2003:251), easier to warrant than a "hidden abstract object" (Lynch 1995:595) available to the analyst but not to the participants. From the EM point of view, that meaning demonstrably unfolds in interaction (Macbeth 2011:81).

As argued by Schegloff and Macbeth, analyses 'situated' in EM style will still be able to find instances of power and the exercise of authority. As Macbeth writes, of his classroom ethnographies, "For most children schooling is a mandate, and classrooms have their impositional orders...[the problem is that] disengaged versions of autonomous power obscure the structure and power that we may find there" (2003:255). There should be no problem is finding in given data "what is going on there" (Schegloff 1999a:567) as long as this is "demonstrably relevant to them [participants] as embodied in their conduct" (Schegloff 1997:183). The same applies in the academy.

It might seem as though only a theoretically-motivated enquiry could bring coherence to this collection; it is assumed that these items are related in some way. After all, what was the purpose of conducting interviews with teaching staff after the collection of the naturally-occurring data, and after speaking with the authors of the essays? This is, though, the kind of collection that an ethnographer of any stripe could have gathered. There is a relevance of one source to another in terms of the 'occasioned sequence'; each item provides interactional data; the sense of the relevance of previous items is present in all subsequent items. In all cases the actors are oriented to carrying out interactions, and as Macbeth says (2003:252), we cannot decide in advance the relevancies for the participants. In EM and formal modes of analysis, we are really dealing with two incommensurable programmes (Garfinkel & Wieder 1992, Macbeth 2011). The notes on a critical discourse analysis above are meant to show that it can come to interesting and piquant conclusions when understood on its own terms; this is no straw man. The point is, rather, to insist on the detailed treatment of empirical data as the only warrant for substantive conclusions.

A situated analysis

What remains, then, is to carry out a situated analysis in the EM understanding of the term that aims to adhere to the principles set out above. Macbeth (2001, 2011) mentions 'sequential analysis' extensively, as a way of expressing and approaching the unfolding, real-time and generally discursive achievement of meaning in interaction. This is normally

understood through conversational practices such as turn-taking (Sacks et al. 1974), where the focus is on the immediate and observable interaction.

There is no reason, though, why this cannot be extended to the analysis of disparate but ordered interactional events (e.g. Garfinkel 1967, Garfinkel et al. 1981, Lynch 2007, Slack et al. 2007, Smith 1990, Wieder 1974). Protagonists find that they need to make sense of the outcomes from previous events and the accounts or commentaries thereof, where they are aware of them, and accountably design their own behaviours and commentaries in view of and to align with these prior events. They may need to do so either in view of a single event, or a collection. In the latter case, there are potential complications in terms of achieving or ‘seeing’ a top-down coherence in the set of events, or of members finding a situated coherence in the collection.

Another way of stating this problem draws on some unlooked-for obstacles presented by the availability of an ethnographic overview. An ethnographic view of things tends to see a set of events – as here – as related, sequentially (in their chronological order) and cumulatively (in the perceived sum of their ‘effects’ or ‘outcomes’, with a view to explaining this totality). Once collected together in this way, there is a compulsion to seek and find logical relations between the collection of events. Only when these relations are established can an encompassing ethnographic perspective or approach be claimed, or can the ethnography claim to have informed a theoretical approach.

However, it seems to me that taking too much of an ethnographic overview detracts not only from the ethnomethodological project, but also from the endogenous methods that members use to bring about and make adequate to the setting at hand (cf. Crabtree et al. 2000:668). In this sense, any logical relations that go to tie all the disparate events together as a collection are superfluous for a consideration of each event singly in its interactional features and its adequacy. Here, no one episode is carried out because of, in light of, or with a view to addressing *all* of the others. Likewise, no one action is carried out and judged as intersubjectively adequate in view of all the others. Most actions (including utterances), as CA has taught us, are designed to be adequate to the purposes and demands of those other actions and utterances that directly precede or succeed them. In fact, much of the time an action or utterance ‘opens up a space’ for a subsequent one.

A theme of this particular set of data concerns what protagonists know and what they do not know as they take on their practical activities. As the analyst, I have some kind of oversight of events here. However, this should not be confused with a “universal observer” role or “god-view” (Mair et al. 2012). There are some events that the protagonists had

access to that I did not. This is a sequence of disparate events, with no party common to all of them. The protagonists proceed only in that manner which is suitable given what they are faced with, and what is relevant at the time.

In chronological order, the events that contributed to this case were:

1. *Cathy's meeting with her church teacher*. This is known only from her second-hand account in her conversation with me in 3 below; therefore, we are reliant upon Cathy's *representation* of the meeting for own knowledge of its content and significance. This is a "worked-up" account (Smith 1990:101). The conversation listed as 3 below is therefore first used for an account of another event, and subsequently for its own interactional features.
2. *Cathy's essay and the feedback on it* – the feedback being the *point of interaction* between the writer and the marker (Creaton 2010).
3. *Cathy's interview with me*. In this interview she talked about the episodes above.
4. *My interviews with the tutors AP and PS*. As these discussions post-dated the other events, and the concerns they raise are more conceptual, I will revisit these.

Table 7 below shows what interactions and information were available to the main protagonists in this case study. It assumes that the church teacher that Cathy consulted was not involved in the writing of the essay in any empirically demonstrable way. It also assumes that PS was not the marker of the essay: for a variety of reasons, this seems unlikely. Isolating who has had what access to what preceding events helps us to more properly characterise the accountable actions of the interlocutors.

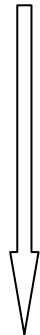
		Protagonist					
		Cathy	Me	Marker	PS		Prior events taken into account
Chronological order 	Event						
	Conversation with church teacher	✓					
	Lived work of writing the essay	✓				Considered here in conjunction	Written in light of conversation with church teacher
	Available product of essay (text/document)	✓	✓	✓			
	Feedback	✓	✓	✓			Provided on the essay
	My interview with Cathy	✓	✓				Discussed all of the above
My interview with PS		✓		✓		Discussed the interview with Cathy, the essay and the feedback	

Table 7 – Interactions and information on interactions available or made available to the main parties involved in this case study

Situated coherence within available items of data

There is no scope to carry out a full textual analysis of Cathy's essay, and I have argued against the utility of doing so. There is an easily justifiable way of limiting attention to aspects of the work that assume importance in view of the discussion above, namely, to issues of opinion and the presence of Biblical influence in the essay. The same problem as presented by the narrative account in the interview still applies, though – to come to an understanding of how the essay coheres with the accounts and descriptions of it provided in person by Cathy.

To understand this coherence, however, it is not inevitable that we look strictly to the chronological order of events in Table 7 above to provide ideas as to 'what led to what'. It is tempting to say that the essay was written in a certain way because of the discussion that Cathy had with her church teacher. The interests of an EM situated study will be on the ways in which intelligibility is brought about "at worksites from the contingencies at hand" (Rawls 2008:704). In such a study, "individual interests and attitudes are irrelevant...because each action, in order to be meaningful, must exhibit order regardless of any particular individual motivations" (ibid.). Equally, "organisational constraint, while relevant at the level of accounts, and oriented toward managing the accountability of actions, does not order action; its function is retrospective" (ibid.). Accounts or narratives in the present, then, not only have to be adequate to an organisational context of accountability where relevant, but also have a place within the interaction at hand.

What this means is that the idea of the essay cohering with the account of its writing is less about the latter causing the features of the former and more about the account itself being adequate as a description of the conditions the essay was written in. As a matter of ethnographic principle, I only had access to the events surrounding the composition of the essay through Cathy's account of them. I had not read the essay in detail at the time of the interview and could not have seen the lived work that went into it. To paraphrase Lynch (1993:290), one document (the oral account of conditions around the essay's composition) helps in the recovery of the other (the essay), but the reverse is not the case; "the written text's analysable field no longer retains a trace of the surplus details of [composition]" (ibid.). What we do have as analysable items are the *physical essay text*, the *feedback*, and the *recorded account* of an episode concerning its composition.

Cathy and the church teacher

We start with Cathy's anecdote about the meeting with the head teacher at her church. To recap the account:

S: ...basically I went to see someone at the church who is the head teacher and he said, just leave it out, because that's not what they're expecting to see anyway, so I just left it out. But I did feel that I wanted my opinion to be in but I wasn't sure of how to go about that. So I kind of went around it, and did a quite broad context really.

We rely on Cathy's account for the details of this meeting, so for now we have to provisionally allow its veracity. This narrative shows the lengths that Cathy has gone to in order to find an argument, or way of expressing her opinions, that would be acceptable to her academic audience. We gather from this short narrative at least the following:

- that she knows she needs to include her opinions, and that she wants to do this;
- that she is aware there might be problems in presenting the substance of her opinion *qua* personal views as the opinion *qua* driving argument in this essay in particular;
- she has had no guidance on how to incorporate opinions into essays from academic staff;
- she has sought guidance from the head teacher at her church with regard to this particular essay;
- she has been left unsatisfied in terms of both being able to express her position in writing, and in terms of the extent of the help she has received in achieving this end.

So the narrative has a conversational or interactional value. It effectively sites Cathy as someone who is asking all the right questions, but is in need of guidance.

What can be taken from this stand-alone narrative? Needless to say we are limited to comments on the 'structure of the telling' (Smith 1990:101). Cathy does not specify the order of events with any exactitude, but I read this consultation as occurring at some point before or during the composition of the essay. Likewise, a strong candidate reading is of Cathy initiating a visit "to see someone at the church" exactly *because* "I really struggled with that course...because of my faith and some of the issues that were coming up". There are "issues" in the plural, but it very much seems as though one of the prominent issues is connected to her writing for this course. Third, she goes to the church for advice, and not the university.

The anaphoric “it” used by Cathy speaks of a concerted discussion between her and the church teacher about whatever “it” was. Given the way that the anecdote proceeds, there are a few candidates for what this could be:

1. The use of scripturally-derived argument that would constitute Cathy’s ‘opinion’ for the purposes of this essay. This is the most likely candidate, given the presence of “opinion” both as the overall topic of our conversation and as mentioned just before the church teacher mentioned “it”.
2. Mention of her faith generally.
3. Any mention of Christian/Biblical issues at all.
4. Any of Cathy’s personal opinions no matter how they were aligned with the issues coming up in the course.

Cathy’s narrative has her taking this matter into her own hands, by initiating the contact with her church teacher. It is notable that the way she describes her reason for the visit is elliptical – we understand that she has gone for advice, not least given that the relationship is glossed as one of ‘authority figure’ (“head teacher”) and ‘layperson’. She also omits the questions that she asked or issues that she raised, but the most likely reading, of course, is that it concerned the issue of ‘opinion’, which is what elicited this account in the first place.

The story is presented as a telling instance of a general problem: Cathy generally does not know how to incorporate opinions in her work, and this is *especially* the case in the Gender course, because of “some of the issues that were coming up”. Here, “I didn’t *feel like I could* put my opinion in”, as opposed to ‘not being able to’; some element of morality, compulsion, or limitation is at work. In the idea that “obviously I had the Bible to back it up”, there is an opinion *supported* or *supportable* by the Bible, which will not be the case for all opinions in essays. ‘Backing up’ is moreover described as something like a necessary component of presenting opinions: “I didn’t really put my opinion in, because I didn’t know how to back it up really”. It is not immediately clear whether this is a problem with the relevance of scriptural support, or with Cathy’s professed technical inability to handle the issue of ‘backing’.

There is room to understand Cathy’s problems with incorporating opinion as carrying weight outside the Gender course. The matter is exacerbated in this case because for Cathy, there is no opinion that does *not* involve backing from the Bible. Thus, having been advised to “just leave it out”, taking up this advice would involve Cathy omitting her

views on the basis that an opinion-based-on-scripture is completely isomorphic with her opinion-as-it-pertains-to-the-essay-title. In other words, leaving out scriptural “backing” – a strong candidate for “not what they’re expecting to see” – leaves an opinion, or argument, without a necessary component.

Some of the uncertainty over the identity of “it” can be dispelled by considering it alongside a subsequent utterance, “that’s not what they’re expecting to see anyway”. Whatever “it” is, then, does not conform to what we can only surmise is academic convention, broadly conceived. Given that ‘academic convention’ is indeed the sticking point, we can return to the list of candidates for the anaphoric expression and suggest, drawing on lay understandings of what academic convention might involve, that the following is the case in terms of permitted actions:

Providing opinion	–	yes
Opinion-based-on-scripture (claim) ³²	–	no
Opinion-backed-by-scripture (data)	–	no

Cathy does not provide any inkling that she opposed this advice; on the contrary, by her account she used this advice in her composition: “so I just left it out”. According to Cathy, *there are ways* to include opinion (thus, “I don’t know how you’re supposed to do it”), but these ways are not available to her. It is easy to hear the teacher’s advice as given in Cathy’s best interests: omitting that which “they’re not expecting to see” cuts out a probable source of criticism on her work. Two further assumptions seem to be at play here: that such opinions as marked ‘no’ in the schematic above are not renderable as “what they’re expecting to see”; and that the omission of such views is not an insuperable problem for the identities tied to them. Identities, it seems, can be bracketed for the purposes of dealing with an incommensurable ‘form of life’. However, given the topic that Cathy is writing on, removing opinions generated in this way effectively means that she is left without a way of expressing her personal views at all, which in this instance has a direct bearing on her positioning within theoretical sociological debates. The course of action suggested by the teacher is an adoptable one, but it comes at a price.

Having received the sought-for advice, Cathy describes acting in accord with it. The utterance, “But I did feel that I wanted my opinion to be in but I wasn’t sure of how to go about that” reads more as a repetition of the overall point rather than as a contradiction of

³² The usage of ‘claim’ and ‘data’ here follows that of Toulmin (1958).

the advice she has received – it is after all a fairly frequent occurrence to act on advice despite having reservations about it. I return later to this anecdote as a worked-up account.

The essay and feedback

In considering Cathy's essay, I have used a paper by Fuller & Lee (1997) that combines a broadly CDA approach with some of the virtues of a situated perspective. In describing the "textual collusion" between student writers and markers, Fuller & Lee are not concerned with "simple conspiracies with forces of oppressive power and false consciousness"; rather, collusion "is about moving around inside relations of power" (ibid.:410). Rather than characterising power at too abstract a level, Fuller & Lee suggest the inevitability of the signifying power of texts: "The vagaries of this collusive space are the conditions of possibility of textual/institutional practices. For literacy, there is no outside of this space" (ibid.:411).

Fuller & Lee prefer a non-referential rather than realist approach, in which language functions to provide people with ways of positioning themselves through language "in relation to each other and to bodies of knowledge" (ibid.). To this end, they replace 'interpersonal' with 'intersubjective', to reflect the notion that textually mediated interaction occurs between "a 'series' of shifting positioned practices negotiated over the course of the text" (ibid.).

Fuller & Lee's analysis of two student writers shows them presenting subjectivities in ways that resonate with Cathy's own methods for this. The successful student manages to use the first person both to present a feminist collusion with her reader and to demonstrate herself as able to engage with the writing of others "as if she is performing an act of dialogue with a community of scholars" (ibid.:418). Thus, this student is able to present herself successfully as a *liberal feminist subject* and as a *literate subject*. The other student "never becomes the literate subject, marshalling her sources in the service of an argument, but remains within the textual imagining of a pedagogic subject whose personal learning experience is primary" (ibid.:420).³³ The manner of learning that this student exhibits is therefore one that is not linked to a conceptual grounding or core disciplinary concerns.

A consideration of Cathy's essay allows us to locate some very similar findings. She avoids, or uses few, first person expressions in the singular. In fact, all of them are to be found in these passages:

³³ Cf. this with PS's "anything as sophisticated as using their own experience".

36 Therefore, I would say, there is evidence to suggest that there is definitely a biological
 37 basis to our gender and sexuality.

38 My opinion would be that our
 39 sexuality and gender are innate, although society influences the decisions we make in
 40 regards to our sexual orientation.

The first clause at lines 38-39 is the most overt and strongly phrased expression of Cathy’s views on this topic; it is also the one that, given the topics and emphases of the course, would need the most justification. One would expect that a ‘literate subject’ would link this claim to prevailing concerns and theoretical apparatuses encountered on the course. If we recall PS’s disclaimer that a reasoned argument inured in social science writings will be rewarded in the marking even if he takes exception to the direction of that argument, the two comments at lines 36-40 alone afford some insight into the subjectivities made available to readers of Cathy’s work. The limitation of personal engagement as signalled by the lack of first person singular pronouns (Appendix 9), and the support for views contradictory to those generally propounded on the course, mean that Cathy can be afforded a subjectivity neither as someone who colludes with the instructor on acceptable meaning nor as someone who, in Fuller & Lee’s terms, has made the transition from pedagogic to literate subject. Given such a binary logic, the interaction of subjectivities here allows a truth table such as the following to be constructed:³⁴

	Literate subjectivity YES	Literate subjectivity NO
Discursive collusion YES	Result as per the successful case in Fuller & Lee; someone who has control of subjectivities	Alignment with key discursive messages without evidence of personal engagement
Discursive collusion NO	Someone arguing coherently against the course’s dominant assumptions, as per PS’s disclaimer	Result as per Cathy or the unsuccessful case in Fuller & Lee

Table 8 – Truth table on subjectivity

³⁴ ‘Discursive collusion’: a student subjectivity that concurs with the main or dominant messages on the course.

The 'grammar' of marking academic work makes available a whole series of features to be observed, described, and oriented to. Some of these are linked to subjectivities, which will become more or less prominent over the course of the marking. It is the ways in which these subjectivities are available that allows the marker to carry out the work of marking.

Fuller & Lee's analysis is piquant, and I see no problem in allowing, as they do, that the manifold features of texts means that any analysis will leave most of these features unaddressed. Similarly, they keep careful track of where the marker has addressed certain stretches of the text. However, while features such as the various types of subjectivity outlined are certainly available to the expert reader, in the absence of participants speaking in these terms to 'get things done' this term is an analytical imposition on the data. In this case, the feedback on Cathy's essay is available in full.

The situated perspective provides various possibilities for addressing the feedback. One is retrospective and would be a reconstruction of the methods used to get from the essay text to the response. Following Sacks (1999), we might ask: if we had the essay text in one hand and a blank piece of paper in the other, what instructions would have to be written on the paper to arrive at the feedback? Another method would be to interrogate the feedback itself for its accountable and recipient design features. A third would be to observe how the feedback is oriented to in subsequent interaction. I will conflate the first two methods into some brief comments before returning to the interview with Cathy.

To begin with, I note that the first two methods are only analytically separable: the "methods used to do practical theorising" (Schegloff 1999:15) as discussed in Sacks' Weber article are contiguous with those used to present the outcome itself as an accountable action. As Schegloff notes, these methods have criteria that must be met to ensure their intelligibility; to reiterate, "Sacks is concerned with the ways in which the deployment of these methods is *constrained and warranted*" (ibid., emphasis added). A fair, recognisable and/or plausible outcome in terms of feedback speaks of suitable production procedures. It will be recalled that practical theorists employ 'formulatable procedures', such that they interrogate a *source*, using a *method* according to a certain *criterion* in order to originate an *outcome* (ibid.). The source in this instance is the essay, which the marker has to address in order to provide an *evaluation* (outcome). There are many candidates for the headings 'method' and 'criterion', but my suggestions are that the method is one of *correspondence*, with the criterion being *locatability*. That is, the features or aspects mentioned by the marker must be findable within the text. Given that the marker is using a marking sheet by way of a prompt, he or she can decompose the essay

according to glosses of certain features. There is a degree of repetition in the criteria on the marking sheet, and the comments are likewise repetitive. Far from being a fault, this is an invitation to keep finding the same things, which are subsequently found. Most of these criteria index many of the others.

The feedback's accountability, then, comes from the observability of its procedures and the visibility of the items that it describes. When a student can 'see' what the marker means, they are in a position to learn something of that vision. The feedback requires not only adequacy to a prior document, but also an internal cohesion. A reader can use various methods, 'skip tying', retrospective-prospective methods, re-reading or iterative reading techniques, to come to an understanding of the general 'message' of the document. The students in this study had few problems in recalling and summarising the main points of the feedback they received; also in locating the deficiencies in their work given the findable 'gist' of the feedback.

The loci of the feedback above could be said to be the summarising comments and the comments on "relevant literature". With this in mind, we can make the following observations about the first two comments. The inverted commas around 'illustrations' in the second comment suggest that there is limited illustrative value in the passages from the Bible and from "introductory source materials" (Heath & Luff 1996; Creaton 2010:64). Given the second part of this sentence, which makes this point, one has to ask why the inverted commas have been added; perhaps to stress that these (kinds of) sources do not provide suitable illustration at all. However, if the marker is expecting "more advanced" illustration, this kind of scalar evaluation would seem to be better tied to the use of "introductory source materials" than to Biblical examples, which is perhaps better thought of in a binary relationship of relevance (i.e. relevant/irrelevant). More importantly, we can note the co-location of these two types. When considered in light of the summing-up comments, both types of illustration can be seen as 'basic', 'inappropriate', and 'demonstrating lack of engagement with the "proper" types of reading'.

Similarly, given the problems that Cathy told me she had with expressing her opinions and the subsequent lack of assertions in her work, it is necessary to ask whether there are any feedback comments that can be tied to the essay that reflect this. It is notable in the first instance that there are no comments that are overtly connected to the use of opinion, for instance, whether or not Cathy 'has control of the argument'. However, the few assertions in her essay can be connected to some of the comments, as already cited:

You repeat the 'obvious' arguments in favour of 'innate' elements of sexuality and gender after discussing the problems with this – so therefore this is quite weak.

...you do well to incorporate Weeks, but you have mostly engaged with only basic and general sociological introductions. This is a 2nd year degree module – and we covered a range of literature on complex theories and debates. But you do not appear to have engaged with these.

These comments do not require much thought from someone in Cathy's position to connect them to her problems with expressing opinion. The distance from lack of engagement with "complex theories and debates" to lack of opinion is easily superable.

Interview with Cathy, revisited

Returning to the interview with Cathy, we are now in a position to take stock. In particular, I return to the narrative that we started with. This is clearly a worked-up account, i.e., a *version*, one designed to be adequate to events that have gone before it, as well as to the interaction at hand. The narrative was initiated in response to a question regarding the possibility of including personal opinion in essays. The details of the case thus far have set out the context of accountability in which Cathy produced her essay for the Gender course, and demonstrates why this was replete with problems for her.

Above I also demonstrated some features of the anecdote which made it adequate conversationally. It works effectively to place Cathy in an organisational context where specific demands are being placed on her. She is aware, to paraphrase Garfinkel & Wieder (1992), that she is up against some kind of 'organisational thing'. She is willing to address her lack of facility in accommodating this thing, but there is a deficiency in terms of institutional support. Prior to this in the interview Cathy compares the university unfavourably to newer universities and the academic support that she received on the Access course. She describes herself as responding to this lacuna by seeking help; also as responding to the advice she received by writing the essay with a conscious design. The veracity of the account and its manifest verifiability by the essay (a copy of which was present during the interview) contributes in no small measure to an understanding of her work as plausible student work, inasmuch as it is designed for a purpose.

Conclusions

Going by previous studies that have addressed similar material from a CDA perspective (Fuller & Lee 1997, Sutton & Gill 2010), it is clear that these are analyses that have scope

and explanatory power. My foray into CDA shows, I think, that the approach has purchase on the material presented here.

However, that has not been my primary concern. We can find here a tension between two perspectives, one that attempts to explain textual features and wider literacy practices in terms of an abstract object with causal powers, and one that endeavours to describe how events are carried out for and by the participants (Shotter 1993, Schegloff 1997). The usual arguments apply. I feel that there is something additional, though. This relates not least to the notion of ethnography that is used in regard to this collection of data. On the one hand, there is a view of ethnography that would suggest this is a collection with a *prima facie* connection, and that can be explained by a single theoretical mechanism, that of the 'Discourse'. All events and accounts here can therefore be subordinated to this mechanism. The situated perspective, on the other hand, seeks to find the practices or methods within these events that make them coherent and intelligible *qua* instances of interaction. The unsatisfactory outcomes for Cathy are completely explicable by reference to the situated ordering and reasoning practices employed by the protagonists.

There are clearly things going on here with power relations and the defence of academic convention, albeit as naturally occurring data (Macbeth 2003). The key reservation is how a CDA analysis would be warranted in this case. A lot depends on the definition of discourse that one works with. If the point of departure is that discourses are supposed to be hidden from the non-analyst, then we are left with a squarely theoretical exercise that makes it difficult to give meaningful judgements on the adequacy or otherwise of any analysis. Schegloff (1997:183) writes of critical discourse analysts that they are

addressed to different issues, and not to the local co-construction of interaction. If, however, they mean the issues of power, domination, and the like to connect up with discursive material, it should be a serious rendering of that material. And for conversation, and talk-in-interaction more generally, that means that it should at least be compatible with what was demonstrably relevant for the parties – not necessarily their sequentially directed preoccupations, but, whatever it was, demonstrably relevant to them as embodied in their conduct. Otherwise the critical analysis will not 'bind' to the data, and risks ending up merely ideological.

Here, this is an ironic usage – “merely ideological” (cf. Street 1984). 'Ideological', for Schegloff, as being directly opposed to 'situated'. One thing that AL will need to do in the future, on this premise, is to tease out exactly how *ideology* is meant to fit with *situated* studies.

We can ask, in this regard, how we can reconcile the fact that PS talked so openly about ideology, doxa and the like. I reiterate that it is highly problematic to expect PS's professional academic surmises to be taken as clearly representing a state of affairs when they are *post facto* and accompanied by other descriptions of his tactical dealings with students. If we are saying that discourses *qua* ideologies are contiguous with PS's ways of running of the Gender course, we can ask what the imposition of discourse does that a consideration of his reasoned and defensible local pedagogical practices does not. If the ideologies are over and above these, we can ask how they are being accessed and identified.

We can see the outcome for Cathy as being the result of a series of interactions and instances of practical reasoning that are all completely reasonable in their own terms. The advice she took from her church teacher was sensible. The essay, despite the mark earned for it, achieved the aim of compromising her personal convictions with the extrinsic, institutional demands on her. The feedback accountably carries out a procedure of practical theorising that meets with no disagreement from Cathy. It is possible to see these events working cumulatively. When the researcher gets involved, there is the possibility of seeing all these events, in addition to Cathy's account, as providing her work with a plausibility of sorts. In this instance, the plausibility is a social and distributed achievement, and it concerns more than the status of Cathy's work – it is inseparable from the fundamentals of her identity.

Chapter 7

Case study II: Reclaiming the ‘author function’

Introduction

One of the problems commonly identified with post-structuralist approaches is the ‘death of the subject’, as noted by Gee (1990) above. One antidote to this is to realign subjectivities with the artful and concrete work of members or ‘real people’. It is something like this that I attempt in this case study.

Tim and Jens took the same final year course in economics, convened and taught by the lecturer JS. This was a course with some unique features, which were much commented on in interviews with the two participants. Despite this, it provides an interesting case of revealing what can happen when ‘typical’ students do well; that is, in ‘regular’ cases that might not attract the attention of those research agendas that focus on the ‘special case’.

As I have already noted, many AL studies have focussed on non-traditional learners (NTLs), in particular NTLs doing badly, so presenting a ‘worst possible case’ scenario that can be attributed to influences, mechanisms or practices of the analyst’s choosing (e.g. Ivanic 1998, Lea 2004, Lillis 2001, 2003, Leung & Safford 2005). These studies can explore the boundaries between acceptable and non-acceptable writing. They can explore and illuminate the detail of student and instructor collaboration in arriving at conclusions that reveal the distance between the mode of writing produced and that demanded. In this sense they allow us an occasioned way into what is and is not acceptable performance or behaviour. This would make them amenable to EM study. Such cases lend themselves to explanatory as opposed to descriptive conclusions, as well as – perspicuously so in the case of AL – offering justification for a critical and/or transformative approach in praxis (Lillis & Scott 2007).

The point of departure of most EM/CA studies, however, is not only to find and make visible the details of the specific case, but also, in most cases, to do this within everyday, mundane cases of interaction. While some studies have addressed manifestly unusual or historically significant sources of material (e.g. Lynch & Bogen 1997), this makes no difference as to the order or category of sense-making practices that are findable. When

the agenda is to find ways in which ‘social life gets done’, it makes no difference where one looks for data.

In seeking a point of departure for the analysis of materials that form this case study, it seems to me that they are potentially most instructive in how they reveal the local and collaborative achievement of *Tim as an author*. Before presenting the data and analysis, I should make it clear what I see this contributing in relation to related work on authorship.

Foucault’s essay “What is an Author?” (1969/1984) introduces the term “author function”. He argues that the ‘author’ is not a personal agent³⁵ but is rather a literary construction, a corollary of the ‘work’ attributable as the output of that author. The idea of the author can only come to pass when certain social conditions have been met; McHoul (1988a:216) quotes Williamson as follows:

Foucault’s main proposition is that the author is not an origin but a function of discourse. The point of introducing the term ‘author-function’ is this: it is not a property of texts that we find in them an authorial meaning and origin; on the contrary, textual authorship arises and is recognised only under certain discursive and historical conditions. The author is thus constructed through a number of discursive and social functions or procedures.

This explication already evokes some well-rehearsed debates as to the extent to which Foucauldian discourses are formal, deterministic (Macbeth 2004), or causal (Turner 1994) forces. Elsewhere, McHugh (1996) notes Foucault’s parting remarks: “What difference does it make who is speaking, so long as we know the conditions of the discourse?” (ibid.:37; in fact this is McHugh’s paraphrase). McHugh is concerned to point out that leaving out the ‘who’ is in fact omitting a great deal (ibid.:38):

Rather, a who that is speaking is the one who works through the always ambiguous flux of sign-signified relations, across the whole spectrum of meaning, limitation, morality, and so on in any one encounter.

So: a who not only has a life in life, but now in theorizing too, as a one (collective, person) that labors as the specific and visible embodiment – the what-embodier – of the conditions of discourse and their various realizations in conduct, and thus a one who can be said not only to produce and make whatever any actual discourse turns out to be but to demonstrate the need for whatness that turns up in any and all whatever. Only through life-speakers speaking and through the implicit histories and traditions this speech embodies (such as the need for interpretation), will “the conditions of discourse” be realized... it is the who that actually *do* this relation in the world.

So, “speech-in-the-world, whatever its mode, must be practiced, and practiced by speakers” (ibid.:37). It should be noted that for all this it does not seem as though McHugh is pointing out a deficiency in the consideration of personal agency. Rather, he is emphasizing a contingency; that of “how any practical speech will connect with such

³⁵ Although there is an agency involved in the author function, this is not a *personal* agency.

relevances as problematic collective interests, problematic individual interests, problematic particular relations among speakers, problematic collective histories” (ibid.), and so on. We can get at the conditions of discourse only through the ‘who’ that is the ‘what-embodier’.

There is not any huge distance between this approach and that of EM. For the majority of EM work, it again does not particularly matter *who* is carrying out an action beyond a social identity or categorization as it pertains to a given instance of interaction. For EM agency inheres in the production of accountable actions, i.e., actions that communicate a general intelligibility. And there are those who see advantages in cooperation between the architectural principles of EM and the genealogical principles of Foucault’s work (McHoul 1986, 1988a & b). Even here, though, Foucauldian discourses can be characterized as abstract objects – hence, we might say, the need for such a cooperation or dialectic in the first place.³⁶

Thus, although “a course of action, such as discourse, can be independently theorized” (McHugh op. cit.:37), this does not displace the need to ground such findings. While we would not wish to fetishise empirical work, it would seem that we are left with few other choices if we wanted to put into practice (no pun intended) the response that McHugh and McHoul put to Foucault. The time-honoured way of many practice disciplines, EM included, is to find real-life examples of practice, whether they are interrogated for their own structures or whether they are used as instantiations of discourse, the ‘doing of relations in the world’, or similar. Moreover, rather than getting entangled in the kind of debate outlined above, which is tangential at best, we can circumvent it by using empirical materials to find examples of the achievement of *that work in practice*. The employment of these practices might subsequently be used as evidence of ‘big-D’ Discourse, but it would be for those with such interests to ascertain these empirical findings and judge for themselves. For these reasons, I do not see this case as contributing to that conceptual debate any more than any other empirically-driven discussion would. My concern here has been to establish a space for empirical study of the “pragmatic level of everyday reasoning”, to quote McHoul (1988b:349-50; and see the footnote above).

³⁶ Thus, McHoul (1988b:349-50) writes of Wittgensteinian ethnomethodologist Jeff Coulter that he “provides a crucial complement to Foucauldian theory which would allow it to operate not simply, as it does at present, on the abstract conditions of possibility of discourse, but also at the pragmatic level of everyday discoursing”.

What I am about to investigate, then, is something approaching the ‘author function’ as instantiated in a set of empirical details. Before I do so, I will make clear what I consider the relevance of such an endeavour. First, with regard to the overarching aim of this research, we can point out that the *plausibility* of student work in this case is not established exclusively through the work of reading a student text, and finding either the plausible characteristics of the text (as in Anderson, 1978), or the characteristics of the text-as-read or the gestalt contexture of the reading (Watson 2009). Here, the plausibility of the text is brought out as a much broader set of interactions; a set of local, collaborative achievements of Tim as a certain kind of writer, many of which had little immediate relevance to the official, institutional processes that contributed to the assessment, evaluation, and administration of his essay *per se*. To put it another way, Tim’s author-status as established in my experience *qua* researcher had little to do with knowing the essay text or the feedback.

Second, it may be asked what relevance this case has to prospective work in academic literacies. If I am right about this, it is not overstating the case to say that this kind of investigation is of *paramount* importance to AL. One comment concerning the author function already to be found in AL work is provided by Creaton, who suggests that while it may be useful in “highlighting the social and historical specificity of scientific claims to truth”, this poststructuralist approach runs the risk of seeing “categories such as gender and race...as simply discourses to be deconstructed rather than as the source of real inequality and oppression” (2010:100).

Elsewhere in academic writing research, Stygall’s US-based study (1994) found the author function alive and well in the written interactions between basic writers and their postgraduate tutors. Author status was craved by the tutors but denied to the basic writers, for whom the presumed features of such writers were consistently oriented to, despite conscious attempts to avoid doing so (*ibid.*:322ff.). The tutors, but not the basic writers, inhabited a ‘discourse’ in which the author function was at play. Thus, “my [postgraduate] students’ best intention toward basic writers – to resist privilege – could not overcome the discursive practice of the author function” (*ibid.*:326). Stygall’s conclusions appear to cohere with the transformative agenda of AL: “By challenging the principles on which the author function rests, by exploring the lived experiences of our basic writing students, by agreeing to rethink our own positions, we can begin to resist the reinscription of power and collaboratively redefine the author” (Stygall 1994:339). Stygall’s conclusions are supported by those of Carter (2006), who asserts that basic writers are generally identified

by the autonomous model of literacy; and Fuller & Lee (1997:412), who cite a ‘pedagogy of deferral’ “in the sense that literate subjects become social agents only when genres have been mastered”.

Stygall’s formal analysis, though, deals in *a priori*s and leaves available other interpretations of the data at the same level of abstraction. It assumes a hegemonic discourse within the academy and that members of society obligingly reproduce it. Here, the utility of the fine-grained analysis and fidelity to data brought by EM should be obvious.

Finally, university policies of anonymous marking, as well as increasing practices of digitisation and multimodality, can only sharpen these author function-related issues. Universities seem to be perspicuous settings in that all such factors can be encountered simultaneously. Thus far, there is little or no evidence of AL work that has addressed all of these elements in conjunction.

When is economics not economics?

JS taught a third year economics course that he had developed out of long-standing research interests. It was only recently that this course had managed to find a ‘home’: he worked in an economics department but was by sensibility a political philosopher, and had struggled to find a way of incorporating his research interests into undergraduate teaching. It was, by his own characterization, an anomaly – a course in economics for those final year students who needed to do more of the subject but did not have the background to take something more mathematical. An institutional push towards interdisciplinary research and teaching had finally provided the opportunity to offer this course to undergraduates. So it was that when Tim and Jens took this course, they were only the second cohort to have had it available.

The content of the course was based around C17th and C18th theories of ownership and distributive justice, including the works of Grotius, Locke, Hume, and Smith. The course was therefore highly philosophical in its content. Although there were no formal limits on who could take the course, there was also no obvious way of preparing for it by taking related courses at a lower level. Moreover, many of the central works were centuries old and written in an idiom unfamiliar to most of the students. This was felt particularly keenly by the international students with English as a second language, and although it presented difficulties, it was never alluded to as a problem.

JS also clearly insisted on certain very specific ways of researching and writing the essays. These seemed to have been impressed on the students, as Tim and Jens both rehearsed these features in some detail and in essentially identical form. How exactly this guidance was communicated in the classes can only be conjectured, but both Tim and Jens conveyed the requirements of the course in terms of contrasts with the ‘regular’ features of scholarship and writing as found on all other courses with discursive assessment. Despite these contrasts and despite the comprehensive guidance given by JS, they both also emphasised the space that was left for their own interpretations, arguments, and creativity.

Thus, despite Jens telling me that the students on JS’s course were ‘told *how* to use readings’, he still spoke favourably of the opportunities for individual analysis:

S: ...But [in] Distributive Justice he told us how he wanted us to use readings...

P: I’m not surprised...

S: Writing and everything. He was quite instructive, but then he just left us quite a lot of room for analysing.

P: Was that by word of mouth?

S: Yeah.

P: I know it’s a bit of a challenge, but can you remember any of what he said?

S: Well, the course is based on primary readings, really. [...] He wanted us to focus on what all these philosophers said themselves rather than getting secondary stuff of people from today who wrote on them. He said read that [secondary material] for guidance, and he said, well, in the end, discuss the theories but I don’t want you to question them, he said it more or less like that, Grotius and Locke and everything. So he wanted us to adduce primary sources; and in the end he said, I don’t want you to have a bibliography of fifteen references, or whatever. He said do the primary research, show me that you’ve done the primary research, and then add a couple of secondary readings which you may read and include, but it’s really based on primary readings.

P: That’s quite an interesting model of doing it, isn’t it.

S: Yes.

P: You know, on these kinds of people, Locke and Hume, there must be a massive secondary literature. But really what he’s saying is, give me your [view].

S: Yeah, in a way, [it’s] different from the other courses. It’s somehow quite opposite, with the readings and everything. Often you can’t, I think, have a really original opinion. Even if you’re writing your own stuff, you’re just reproducing the opinion of someone else, or the opinions of readings, whereas if you do it with primary readings, it’s more interesting because you’re actually thinking about it, because you’re thinking about your own opinion put onto paper.

Likewise, Tim made the following comments over the course of our final conversation:

- S: I think the way he wants you to do it is base it on your own interpretation quite a lot, which means you have to read it, read the primary texts very carefully and sort of think about them a lot. Which is pretty hard compared to reading secondary sources.
- ...
- P: And does he also encourage you to, you know, follow your nose in terms of what you write?
- S: Yeah, within reason though. He's not asking you to come up with a theory of justice or anything.
- P: Right. Did he say anything at the beginning of the course or in terms of essay guidance to you?
- S: Yeah, he sort of did it throughout. He made it clear, that sort of independent thought. Because the lectures are quite sort of open-ended, he doesn't say "they said this", he leaves quite a lot of space for you to try to make the most of.
- ...
- P: Have you gone beyond the reading list?
- S: Yeah, there's some secondary reading [points them out], and they're both [JS's] articles that he wrote himself.
- P: And how important is that secondary reading?
- S: In this course, you're sort of expected to engage with the main disputes a bit, but the focus was basically on how you interpret the original, not on the important debates of what people have said.
- P: So in that case I presume that a *bit* of secondary reading would be good, too much secondary reading might deflect you from your interpretation.
- S: [Noises of assent]
- P: OK. So do you think you've got a good balance – was that a conscious thought of yours when you were writing this?
- S: It was, yeah. Because I think normally for an essay, [you're] engaging with the ideas of the author, and so the secondary readings are almost more important than the primary, but for this one it was the other way around.

Again, we can only surmise at what was said by JS; one imagines from these sentiments that the guidance was unequivocal and frequent ("he sort of did it throughout", "He went through the kind of essay to write"), and we need to be careful in suggesting which points were re-communications of JS's own advice. We can, for example, see Tim saying that JS himself outlined the requirement that a personal interpretation of the key texts was preferable to providing an exhaustive account of the secondary literature. However, the contrast structures that the two students used to bring out the differences between 'this course' and 'all other courses' are not attributable to any input from JS. These structures provide a clear idea of the kinds of writing features that are normally desirable, but not in this case:

Prefer primary reading	-	Prefer secondary reading
Interpretation	-	Engagement with debates
Read intensively	-	Read extensively

It can be seen that this was somewhat counter-intuitive to Tim and Jens, no doubt a result of using the second model of writing so extensively during their time at the university to date. Although it is of little interest to an EM approach *how* such a distinction became available to these students, the sheer detail available to the students in forming these contrasts is again worth pointing out: not only are they able to outline two distinct ‘models’ of writing, they are also able through the contrast with JS’s distributive justice course to attribute the characteristics of the second model to academic writing in general.

The students append to this new model of writing for JS a significance in terms of the opportunity they have to provide their own interpretations and analysis. This was *despite* the level of guidance provided by JS as suggested by both students. Jens, for example: “he told us how he wanted to use readings...writing and everything. He was quite instructive”; but “then he just left us quite a lot of room for analysing”. So, in some way, Tim and Jens come to see the level of prescription not as impinging upon but as *allowing* them the opportunity for analysis to the point that they can see this as a model directly opposed to that generally required in writing. The idea that they should carry out copious amounts of secondary research becomes associated, not as we might expect with the untrammelled activity of the independent researcher, but with the limitations of extensive paraphrase. ‘Analysis’ here is presented as something that is outside of or additional to proprietary methods of reading and writing.

The order of events

My interest in JS’s course came first from the two students, Tim and Jens, who described their experience of it as above. The subversion by Tim and Jens of a ‘normal’ mode of writing, as well as the distinct contrast with other available courses in economics, meant that the distributive justice course became a provisional focus of closer investigation.

I was often visited by JS himself. For occasionally professional and more often conversational reasons we came to talk about these two students by name, particularly Tim. These conversations began during the academic year 2007-8 when Tim and Jens were taking JS’s course, and continued afterwards, when Tim and Jens had both graduated. The conversations were given substance thanks to some distinctive assessment practices that JS had put in place.

The distributive justice course ran for the entire academic session in the year that Tim and Jens were students on it. During this year, JS used a system of essay submission

whereby students could submit final essays for assessment at two points in the year. These essays were redeemable, i.e. the student could choose whether the essay counted towards the final mark or whether their mark was determined only from the final examination. The highest mark of the two counted towards their final grade, and so a degree of economic behaviour went on around this: in Tim's case, his earlier essay, during the first semester, received a very high mark. He had worked very hard for this essay and his intention was to approach the second more casually. Jens's mark for his first effort was not as high as he had hoped for, so he was determined to better this with his second essay.

Once it became obvious that JS's visits were becoming an interesting source of information in their own right, and that they could not practicably be recorded other than in occasional cursory 'field notes', I asked JS if we could formalise our conversations by taking up the same topics in an audio-recorded interview. The resulting interview was held in the academic session after Tim and Jens had graduated, and covered similar ground to that which the two students had volunteered of their own accord in those discussions. The key parts of the interview with JS, for the purposes of this case study, were those that addressed Tim and his first essay. It is necessary, though, to provide some sense of how this part of the interview was approached.

Speaking with JS I had the opportunity to hear more of the same from the instructor's perspective:

JS: Now, for one thing if you pick up these books [Grotius, Locke] and read them, they're very, very hard, and wouldn't make sense to most people. They're writing about obscure things. One of the things I have to do in the lectures, first and foremost, is to help them to make sense of them. What I try to do is do it in such a way that they can see that these people were really on to something, I mean, they had an approach to reasoning that we just don't have any more. People currently writing about distributive justice adopt a very different kind of reasoning. But this kind of careful, almost scientific, logical, deductive thought that you find in people like Locke is absolutely fascinating – well it is for me, so what I do is try to convince them also in the lectures that it's fascinating.

To this point JS was sufficiently persuaded that enough of the students who took his course did indeed come to share something of this fascination. However, he had some reservations about the difficulty of the course and the implications for his delivery of it:

JS: They find it quite hard, but...the only thing is, I sometimes wonder if I do a little bit too much of the work for them, in doing the interpretation: saying, "this is what he means when he says this"...I'm just a bit worried that they might founder if I don't set them in the right direction.

In line with what Tim and Jens had said earlier, for JS the main aim of the course was for students to read these primary texts, to come to their own interpretations, and to "make

up their own minds”. As such, the core readings for the course were these primary texts.³⁷ According to JS, this made the course more challenging, but also more engaging. Students were rewarded for their knowledge of, and engagement with, the primary texts above all. Those who based their essays around secondary reading and interpretations would struggle to receive a 2:1 mark. Students who were able to demonstrate both a thorough knowledge of the texts and a command of secondary interpretations would certainly meet JS’s criteria for a first class mark.

It had taken my attention that JS had awarded a number of first class marks to the group (including Tim) that, going from experience, were on the outskirts of what it would be ‘possible’ to award to an essay in the discursive social sciences. If this hints at the operation of a ‘glass ceiling’ on marking, it is no accident. At the time that this interview was conducted, the School was about to award its first set of degrees under new university degree regulations. These regulations had precipitated a response from the School that had necessarily addressed marking practices, and the link between the highest of the marks awarded by JS and the proposed new marking practices was an easy one to make:

P: In terms of the marking, was your marking influenced by the new regulations at all?

JS: I think I’ve always been ahead of that. I always like to think that the regulations have followed me, because I’ve always given high marks. I’ve never been squeamish about giving high marks.

P: So there wouldn’t have been any changes then.

JS: I wouldn’t have needed to, no. When these new regulations came in I just used that as a way of justifying what I do, and exhorting other people to do the same. But they did say to me – these students who were used to studying politics on politics courses – they said, “we would never get 80 for that”. And one of them said that she was told by a politics lecturer, “you’ll never get more than 70. Only a university lecturer can get more than 70”. It was unbelievable.

A lot of these discussions concerning regulations and marking of course went undetected by the students; there is one brief passage in the final conversation with Tim where he suggests that he is aware of something happening with regard to marking, although he does not know what or why. On JS’s part, though, he was able to articulate in some detail the kinds of performance that he looked for in awarding a ‘high first’; these involved criteria both of substance and of form. The following passages are themselves only samples of what JS said about writing for the distributive justice course.

³⁷ The course had only been made possible, JS said, through the presence of the complete works of many of these authors being fairly recently made freely available on the internet.

JS: You can say up to a point what you're looking for, because in a kind of interpretative thing, there are so many different levels upon which you can read a text. You can start off and say, well Locke says this, then he says that, and that's his argument, and so on. OK, so that's what you can do. And then you can say, so why is Locke doing this? So then you can say, he was doing this – this is like the second level of [analysis] – because he was generally interested in the question of legitimate government, and he was interested in that because he was looking in the last half of the seventeenth century in England, when there was this revolution and blah-di-blah-di-blah and he was interested in providing a justification for revolution... and some students just won't get that. They'll get it at one level of simplicity, "well he says this", which you'll get from one level of reading. But then the others will say more, and they'll talk about things you'd only get from knowing more about the book, the context and the purposes for which it was written and so on, and that really gives you the meaning, you see, you can't really get the meaning from the superficial. You can only get the meaning from saying, why did he say that, what was he attacking by saying that?

JS: Sometimes people can say something, but they're just kind of using words; they've heard these words, and they might almost be the right words, and somebody else might say, in terms of content it's hard to distinguish, but it's put in such a way that you think, the impression's given that this is the result of thought and reflection.

What is evident from the above is the number of layers of analysis and the nicety of evaluating textual presentation that are available to JS, and their availability both in terms of modes of analysis of the primary texts and as ways of evaluating the students' work. To paraphrase JS, the more layers of analysis were present in a student's work, the more he could award it high marks. JS's comments on Tim's essay constitute some of the most telling contributions to this case.

JS: He wrote that brilliant essay, which was a very good essay in terms of content but it was extraordinarily good in terms of its writing. I mean he is just a naturally gifted writer, which you can't be unless you think clearly as well. I thought he was a good student.

P: You only gave him 78, so obviously there was...[laughs].

JS: Did I?

P: Something like that.

JS: Well anyway I remember it as being something of a model for how students should write essays. [laughs] Very, very clever ones, anyway.

I asked what was so good about the essay; to what extent was it an "exemplar" of writing for the course?

JS: It was that, very much so... because he didn't get a mark of 95 or something like that, there's obviously more to be said about the subject [laughs], that students could *conceivably* be expected to know. So I wouldn't say it was perfect in that respect, but what set it above the others was that he – he wrote in a way that you would only expect to find in somebody who had been doing that kind of work for some time. He would write about – I forget what the essay was about now, probably about Locke and Grotius – but he wrote about them as if he was very familiar [with them], he was very comfortable in the way he quoted them and said what they were on about. Which, you know, is a difficult thing to do. Most students who have only come across this stuff for the first time, the majority are going to seem like they are in unfamiliar territory – writing about things that they only have a faint kind of grasp of. And it was just very accomplished.

For JS, this quality was not something that he was sure he would see when he began teaching the course in 2006-7. Nor was it something that he had seen much of in the class he was teaching at the time of the interview in the 2008-9 session. It was from Tim and other students in the second year of delivery that he had developed a sense of what the highest level of achievement might consist of:

JS: ... I have some sense of what's possible from those students. Now I am teaching the course, I have some sense of what's possible. So I know that students can do this kind of stuff. So when I see it I will throw marks at it.

In this cohort, he had had some “exceptionally bright people” who had “helped me to see things, think of things in a particular way”. JS talked very much more in terms of learning what could be expected from students and so what the criteria *could be* rather than applying a fixed set of criteria by fiat.

This discussion of Tim's work segued into one of his personal aptitudes:

P: ...do you see him as an academic of the future, is he of that type, or is he just a good writer?

JS: I don't really know enough about him, because he was a writer rather than a speaker. He didn't say much. Very quiet in tutorials. And he never came to see me in my office. I had other students, you couldn't shut them up, and they always used to come and see me and talk to me in my office hours. And sometimes they'd all come at once. Once I spent all day there because they'd keep coming... They're, the other ones, the ones I think are going to be academics. Tim seemed too introspective. To be honest, I would have guessed, in the tutorials, that he wasn't that interested. He didn't say much, he'd wander in a bit late eating a sandwich or something, you know, a bit laid back. And so I was a bit surprised when I first saw his essay. I thought, “bloody hell, this is great”. I wasn't expecting it. So some people can write, but they're not so comfortable talking... if you were to say, judge on what you do know, I would say probably not.

The exchanges with JS did not end with this recorded interview. We continued to have cause to meet professionally, and where these encounters allowed, the marking for his course in general and Tim in particular continued to be raised. This was typically in my office, with one or two other mutual colleagues present and in easy earshot – the assumption seemed to be that any discussion of marking and assessment was open to all academic and related staff to participate in. On one occasion JS's opening gambit, before I was even aware of his presence, was “I've had an essay that was even better than Hardy's”.³⁸ He then provided the details of a student whose written expression equalled Tim's but who had bettered his essay content. This pattern continued for quite some time, with JS unfailingly informing me of his latest top students, changes of assessment, and marking practices. It strikes me that there are several important features in this ongoing

³⁸ JS often referred to Tim by his surname; as with all first names, this has been changed.

contact: it was nearly always initiated by JS; it was carried out in naturalistic settings with others involved in the conversations; the discussions stretched over an extended period of time; Tim was nearly always involved as a marker or figure for comparison. It was plain to me that JS used these comparisons as elicited by our ongoing discussions to provide further input to his teaching and assessment work.

Analysis

The main focus of the materials presented above will be, to reiterate, how Tim is locally and collaboratively constructed as an author. At this stage, though, the term ‘author’ should be understood in its lay sense. In Foucault’s more technical understanding, such literate products as private letters, contracts, posters or graffiti have writers, but not authors (op. cit.:107-8). In everyday usage, it is acceptable, perhaps a little flowery, to describe these items as being ‘authored’. This is not so much an argument against Foucault as it is a way of pointing out that in the data, something more is happening than according simply ‘writer’ status to Tim (see Geertz 1988 on Barthes’ distinction between ‘author’ and ‘writer’). This need not be accepted by those who make it their interest to deal in technical definitions. My main concern is to provide and describe the available structures of the data, with the common, structuring thread being what and how Tim wrote.

It is imperative to note here the role of the researcher as someone who is fundamentally and reflexively involved in creating settings (Wieder 1974). An ethnography is nothing so much as it is a set of experiences (Carrithers 1988). The ethnographer gives an account of those events that he or she is thrown into, clings to, or initiates. In this (reflexive) sense ethnography is largely a collection of events that the ethnographer has helped to bring about. When we talk of Tim being ‘locally, artfully, collaboratively construed’ as an author or anything else, the temptation is to hear this as a description of other people’s activities. But in fact, this practical ‘achievement’ is largely that of Tim, JS, the researcher, and a few minor *dramatis personae*. If this sounds like something limited in scope and importance to the production of ethnography itself, then the reader should bear in mind the purposes served as these events unfold.

We can start by observing that the institutional policies on anonymised marking must in some way have been bypassed in the assessment of students on the distributive justice course. It could have come about through JS’s intransigence, as a result of assessment policy, or sheer guesswork and familiarity with a small group of students. However it

came about, the transition is clear: an institutional diktat specifically intended to separate written work from its originator has been elided, to allow a situation in which ownership and attribution of this work is reinstated to a subject. This afforded a situation where rather than simply being able to talk about ‘student essays’, JS was in a position to talk about ‘Tim’s essay’. Moreover, he knew Tim sufficiently before marking his work to have preconceptions about what he might encounter (“I was a bit surprised when I first saw his essay”).

Thus, while JS’s elision of the institutional policy on anonymity can be said to have been the primary event here chronologically, at the time that I first spoke with Tim about writing for the distributive justice course his essay had already been written, submitted, marked, and returned to him. His professed aim throughout the research had been to consistently turn out essays of first class quality. Both the practical outcomes in terms of assessment output and results, and the topics and structures employed in conversation, contributed to a view of Tim as an accomplished essayist who was striving for the top level of achievement. It was therefore no great surprise when he produced the work so vaunted by JS.

At the point that JS enters events, Tim begins to be talked of not as a student whose work over time and across various courses and disciplines speaks of potential, but as one whose work in a particular setting is frequently and extensively noted for its high quality. It is this that not only elicits the scheduling of an interview with JS, but also structures all exchanges about writing for the distributive justice course by serving as a point of reference around which the conversation can turn. From this point on, the telling work is carried out by the intersubjective exchanges between JS and me.

The best record of this comes in the audio-recorded interview, where JS uses a number of techniques to emphasise and make plausible the significance of Tim’s writing for his own understanding of the course. In the order they occurred, they can be described something as follows. The first two methods are best understood as ‘scene-setting’ practices, outlining a context in which Tim and his writing can then be placed.

First, JS talks of only recently being able to make a “satisfactory” link between his teaching and research. The course on distributive justice is a new one, made possible only by sympathetic line management, institutional agendas of interdisciplinarity, and the easy availability of previously obscure material on the internet.

Second, there is a series of worries that JS holds about students being able to cope with the rigours of the course if it is not delivered correctly. Most of all, it’s difficult. The

political philosophers he addresses “wouldn’t make sense to most people”; they are “writing about obscure things”. Further, there are many complexities available for those who know how to look for them. These complexities correspond to layers or levels of analysis; these in turn become isomorphic with something like ‘criteria’ for marking. When layers of analysis are added to the quality of writing (and standard criteria), there is a plethora of specifiable criteria to hand. Perhaps because of these complexities, JS worries that the students might founder if he does not “set them in the right direction”. This brings with it the possibility that it might entail him doing “a little bit too much of the work for them”. At the same time, he does not feel that he can tell them, propositionally, about the homology of his criteria for marking with the analysis that he wishes them to carry out for fear of confusing them. His intention is that students will learn from the teaching process itself: “There are lots of signals in how I analyse the text”. JS exhibits the kind of ‘tacit knowledge’ described by Lynch (1997:340-1); that is, not a form of ineffable knowledge, but that which is withheld; here, for pedagogical reasons.

Third, Tim’s essay is seen as “something of a model” for essayists on the distributive justice course, at least in terms of the *quality* of writing. The content is spoken of by JS here as separable from the written expression, and in terms of the former, he can identify points that are not present in Tim’s work, things “that students could *conceivably* be expected to know”. So Tim’s pre-eminence as a writer for JS was based most of all upon his ease and confidence of expression:

JS: ...he wrote in a way that you would only expect to find in somebody who had been doing that work for some time...he wrote about them as if he was very familiar [with them].

If I could be forgiven one foray into post-structuralist language here, it could be pointed out that JS is not only ascribing *authority* to Tim’s writing, in terms of a seeming expert command of the political philosophers under study, but also *author-ity* (author status). For instance, Geertz (1988:18) cites Barthes’ distinction between author and writer, in that “the author performs a function, the writer an activity”. In more ethnomethodological language, the person is being aligned with what he does, or has done.

This can only be fully explicated by reference to a fourth method used by JS. Tim in particular, along with a few other unnamed students, is talked of in terms of allowing JS to ascertain the *possibilities of phenomena* (Heap 1992:50) in the context of the distributive justice course. JS only ‘sees’ a full picture of the possibilities of writing on this course once he sees the presence – and absence – of features that for him count as performance of

the highest level that could reasonably be expected of a student writer. This performance, and JS's 'expert vision' of it, allows him to structure a scale or continuum that i. still leaves room at the top to mark higher, hence the things "that students could *conceivably* be expected to know"; ii. designates a level of *possible* performance which he can describe as a "model" for others, not least in that it corresponds to the available layers of analysis of the technical material; and which iii. structures the performance of cohorts that are not performing as well as the top students in Tim's cohort did. The latter groups can now be evaluated in terms of what they are not doing that the best students can do, the scale can be extended and they can be marked accordingly; and this iv. allows JS to talk of any level of performance in terms of the substantive, expert-locatable features of this possible performance.

That JS is talking about the possibilities of phenomena comes out most clearly in this passage:

JS: ... I have some sense of what's possible from those students. Now I am teaching the course, I have some sense of what's possible. So I know that students can do this kind of stuff. So when I see it I will throw marks at it.

In this class, he had had some "exceptionally bright people" who had "helped me to see things, think of things in a particular way". The clear message is that JS is learning about what is possible as much as the student writers are. These possibilities are being described as just as contingent for JS as they must be for the students.

These sentiments, though, are propositional. JS is here talking *about* the possibilities of phenomena. Although we cannot mistake the propositional meaning of an account for what it pragmatically achieves in and for its setting, the distinction between semantics and pragmatics here can be seen to be rather slight (Segerdahl 1996). I see JS using these ideas as a way of emphasising the importance of Tim's work. The importance, given what he has previously said about the scheduling, delivery, and assessment of his course, is to allay his fears that the desired features of writing for the distributive justice course will be beyond the abilities of undergraduate students. Tim's essay therefore does not only have value in its own right as a response to a context of assessment – it also allows JS to ascertain that he can reasonably expect the top-achieving students to produce work that reflects the subtleties and complexities of expert writing on the same subjects. Tim's work is thus set up conversationally by JS as having a structuring effect; it makes a difference, and does work for ongoing understanding of student writing. This example of student

writing performs a function; it is not a regular piece of writing that reveals nothing about the course, its students or their capabilities. We can therefore see how mention of Tim's writing is used, interactionally, to carry out a purpose. In Barthes' terms,³⁹ this would make Tim an *author* as opposed to simply a *writer*. What we can conclude from the latter two methods, then, is that in the unfolding context of the interview JS attributes a dual authority to Tim's writing: the authority appended to expertise in his control of the material and his expression of this control; and the 'author-ity' expressed by Tim's notable place in the history of delivering and assessing the course.

All this, though, concerns Tim's work more than it does Tim himself. Early on in the interview, JS refers to Tim as "a good student". He is "a naturally gifted writer, which you can't be unless you think clearly as well". This leads us into a discussion of the merits of Tim's work, which provides us with the structures and methods outlined above. Towards the end of the conversation, Tim's personal attributes are also discussed in conjunction with his writing. This gives rise to further techniques that are important in establishing Tim as a plausible author-figure.

The important features of JS's rendering of Tim's personal attributes are as follows: Tim does not by his general comportment strike JS as a potential future academic; the personal attributes of future academics can be seen as cohering with their ability as essayists; the intelligibility of this juxtaposition is salvaged by JS as not presenting a problem to a consideration of Tim as a noteworthy essayist. JS manages Tim's personal attributes so that they do not conflict with the possibility of his author status. To put it another way, he does not allow the idea of Tim-as-person to interfere with the idea of Tim-as-author.

The first method for achieving this (let us call it 5a) is another incidence of the implicit 'even though' or 'despite' clause as used by Rose in Chapter 5. Tim is seen to be able to write an essay with the significance already established above despite a certain number of personal features and idiosyncratic behaviours that deflect from an 'academic persona'. JS does not see Tim as a potential academic, as he does not conduct himself as JS expects such a person might. On this basis, JS describes himself as being initially surprised when he first saw Tim's essay. This is an essay that was produced to high

³⁹ Barthes' idea of an author in the essay *Authors and Writers* (1960/1983) is comparable to Foucault's when he speaks of Marx and Freud as those who set the possibilities of a discourse. Tim's example is on a different scale to these discourse-progenitors; but we can 'creatively misread' the *bon mot* (not even a proposition or axiom) that "the author performs a function, the writer an activity". We can see here that Tim's work does indeed perform a discernible, interactionally-significant function.

standards *even though* its author did not conform to what might be seen as modes of conduct that could be predicated to future academics. A second method (5b), completely contiguous with 5a, is the association of these modes of behaviour with other students on the course. By this account, these students do things that cohere with the category ‘potential academic’: they come to office hours, get involved in discussion, are not introspective, and so on. So we hear this as: for future academics to be identifiable at this stage, they should write in suitable manner; but they must also make their aptitude evident in other ways.

From this position JS needs to salvage the idea of Tim as someone who writes (or wrote) in a way worth taking note of. For this he employs a third technique (5c), which is to *type* students according to aptitude. JS introduces types in order to be able to categorise Tim as a person who is not a potential academic but is nonetheless able to produce work of similar quality. Tim is of a type who “was a writer rather than a speaker”. His written work demonstrates his intelligence and that he can “think clearly”, but he does not make a show of this in spoken forums, nor does he pursue these discussions. This typing allows sense to be made of the mild disjuncture between his behaviour in class and his written output. JS manages these different sets of attributes in such a way as to communicate an idea of Tim that coheres with the excellence of his essay.

In these ways, JS successfully negotiates his way past both the policy on anonymity and what familiarity he has with Tim’s personal characteristics to practically establish him as a ‘milestone’ essayist. This was not the end of the story. JS remained a regular interlocutor on the subject of writing for the distributive justice course, and such discussions were universally initiated by him. These discussions incorporated reflexive descriptions that were not only accounts of the writing of subsequent students, but also contributed to the ongoing achievement of the writing context. In the discussions, specific students from JS’s current cohort, and his former student, Tim, were rendered as ‘historically significant’ for understanding student work on the distributive justice course. This historical significance further contributes to the idea of Tim as an author and is brought about by further interactional techniques in my conversations with JS.

To begin with, we can use the example of JS’s opening gambit on one occasion: “I’ve had an essay that was even better than Hardy’s”. It is not too great an exaggeration to say that this is an indexical expression that, at the time of its utterance, could be meaningfully glossed only by me *qua* ethnographer and by JS himself. This is one instance of a frequent technique used in these conversations: the mention of Tim (or the interactively achieved

idea-of-Tim or of his work) used as a shorthand or structuring figure that facilitated interlocution. This idea-of-Tim-as-author worked as a means of economy in conversation, immediately telling us something about the level and the characteristics of performance of the contemporary students. In this instance, we know that any student bettering Tim's performance would be further exploring the possibilities of phenomena, as far as JS is concerned, in student writing on the course. Although JS rather than his students remains the arbiter of these possibilities, the use of Tim's name carries out some manner of 'author function'. It carries out a function as Foucault describes – although I would imagine in a different way to that he intended – when he writes that “The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set” (1984:107); it “finds a discursive construct and its very particular mode of being” (ibid.). The mention of 'Tim' and comparison with this identity brings with it not only notions of quality but also of practical significance. It educes many of the features and characteristics brought out in the interview, prior and subsequent conversations with JS.

One accompanying feature of the use of Tim as a structuring or pivotal figure for subsequent conversation is that his personal or autobiographical attributes (cf. Ivanič 1998) are no longer adduced; nor do they need to be explained away, or rendered acceptable form. Rather, individual characteristics are i. treated as separable from his “discoursal self” (ibid.); ii. practically stripped away from discussion of his writing. They are not relevant here. Tim initially and throughout the JS interview appears very much as an individual. He is quiet, introverted, would come in late and so on. He would not seem to be suited to an academic role in the future. He doesn't seem to be interested. He provides enough evidence of his character for JS to be surprised when his written work turns out to be of exceptional quality, enough that JS has to invoke 'types' of people who are good at writing but not so good at speaking. Later on, Tim has left the university, but has already been associated with a mode of writing. His personal attributes become attenuated by the distance of time, and so the author function switches from something largely relevant to Tim as a person to something relevant to us in deciding what counts as discourse in this case.

A Foucauldian postscript

I have outlined some of the situated, occasioned practices to be found in the materials making up this case study. As I mentioned at the outset, the findings of this analysis could be put to many uses depending on one's theoretical inclinations. My concern has been simply to demonstrate some of the practices available for analysis in these materials, how they contribute to the intelligibility of the scene and how this requires Tim to be set up as an 'author figure'. Whether or not Tim can be said to qualify as an author in the terms set out by Foucault or Barthes was not as important for these purposes as it is to show how Tim's writing, and conversation thereof, had a reflexive structuring effect on the sense of the writing context as collaboratively set out by my interactions with JS.

However, one way to end this chapter neatly might be to put the findings above back into something like a Foucauldian context, asking: how would they be understood if we were to use the features of the author function, as Stygall does, as a frame for analysis? Stygall's use of the author function allows a discussion of how it *can be used*; she sees a benefit in applying these principles to her material on basic writers. It also allows some further insights into ways of understanding the data presented above. I will provide some brief comments, following Stygall's use of the four characteristics of the author function.

First: for Foucault, when texts began to have authors, they began to reflect the fact that discourses can be transgressive (op. cit.). Stygall points out that "the right to transgress conventions is reserved for authors" (1994:324), which is a status that does not incorporate basic writers. They are archetypal apprentice writers who carry out "pseudo-writing" (ibid.). Tim, although a finalist, is an undergraduate student. However, he operates at the top of the scale, and is instrumental in exploring, for JS, what the possibilities of student writing are on the distributive justice course. It is hard to say that Tim's writing is transgressive, or subversive, because there is no need to subject it to sanction. Stygall suggests that in the marking of basic writing, it is overwhelmingly "negative" or "pedestrian transgression" (ibid.) that is found, and rejected. It is fair to say from the material presented above that Tim expands the possibilities of writing for JS; but he does not write outside convention. Further, the ownership of Tim's text is clearly attributed to him, which Stygall suggests is often in doubt for basic writers: "teacher commentary often appropriates and redirects the student's texts" (ibid.). The lack of sanction means that ownership of the text is unproblematic.

Second: for Foucault, the importance of the author function varies across discourses. Stygall addresses literature students, both basic writers and post-graduate tutors, and literary studies, where the author function obtains high importance. This “results in a principle of limitation operating for nonauthors” (ibid.). I would argue that for social science writers the author function obtains to nearly the same extent as for literature. The value of writing is enhanced by and seen in individual achievement. A problem for basic writers is that the production of a quality of writing close to that reserved for authors may be met with accusations of malpractice (ibid.). Tim’s essay was not regulated in this way. I think one problem here is ascertaining the size of a discourse; Foucault and Stygall tend to talk in terms of very ‘large’ discourses (literary, scientific, etc.). It is easy, though, to talk of discourses that may be seen as subsets of these and other overarching categories. This begs the question of ‘how far down’ we can go and still be talking of ‘discourses’. If we are able to talk sensibly of the distributive justice course as being a ‘discourse’, then it allows us much more easily to speak of Tim as an author in these terms.

Third: “the pairing of an author to a particular discourse” involves “the social construction of a ‘certain rational being’” (Stygall ibid.). However, basic writers are ever at risk of having errors, perceived or otherwise, being attributed to reasons “embedded in the author’s intent or milieu” (ibid.:325). This invites the reader to construct a non-logical or pre-conceptual writer, that is to find reasons for the ‘errors’, rather than accepting these as transgressions brought about by conscious authorial choice. As the assessor, such a construal was available to JS; but this was far from being his/our concern. We were dealing with somebody defining the top of the range. The point of this case study has been to show that, and how, JS ‘constructs’ Tim as this ‘certain rational being’. One very attractive conclusion from an EM perspective is that the author function is not only attributable to conditions of discourse but is also due to the details of the local work of interactants such as JS.

Fourth and last: the author function acknowledges “several selves of the same author, framed by processes of ‘evolution, maturation, or influence’” (ibid.:324). Stygall argues that the dominant approach in composition studies has been “to silence multivocality and to unify self-presentation in students’ texts” (ibid.:325), something we also see in the majority of assessment practices. The materials I have presented above provide an insufficiently diachronic collection for this. If anything, the evolving significance of Tim’s ‘work’ is a result not least of other students submitting work for the same course. There is,

though, a plurality of selves or subjectivities identifiable in the course of this work. My ethnographic approach presents sources that identify how these selves come about.

Conclusions

Leaving aside any hard and fast pronouncements on what an author is, what I have shown in this case study is how Tim's work is accorded a situated and historical local significance. This is brought about collaboratively, sequentially, cumulatively, and reflexively. The author function attributable to Tim, the idea of Tim-as-author, is developed and extended long after he has fulfilled the formal functions and obligations of writing and assessment. The use of ethnographic materials has, I hope, a self-evident importance. This case study was not a process of discovery (in its sense of 'uncovering') but followed a set of materials that were set in train and helped to develop by the researcher. In all these methods, the plausibility of Tim's work is brought about and entailed by his achievement as someone who is not only a talented essayist, but who in this case is also able to contribute to the possible meanings within a 'local discourse'. In this sense it diverges from the previous case study in that, in this case, the most successful student writers cannot have their activities reduced to 'reproducing the canon'. Readers who come to this case study from an AL background will find a case of *successful* student writing – they will see a case that concerns *possibility* more than it does *sanction*. Despite this, the idea of criteria being decided locally, in what I have called here a hyperrelativised setting or *minimum epistemological unit*, will be very familiar. And, as I have suggested, there are connections to be made regarding educational policy and pedagogical practices. Similar matters can be taken up in any comparable setting, and one question that can be asked both technically and pedagogically is: to whom or what is the author function being attributed? It may be that there are some disconcerting answers.

Chapter 8

Case study III: Notes on an unfinished essay

Introduction

In the course of the study, I came across one item of data that is certainly a candidate for a potentially interesting analysis, but which does not qualify *prima facie* as one that can be subject to an *ethnographic* consideration – at least not if we employ an idea of ethnography that purposefully uses all of the contextual sources available to it. This item of data requires, for want of a better term, a *textual analysis* to be applied to it. However, a number of provisos need to be attached to this operation.

As I have discussed, the ideas of textual analysis and textual mediation are somewhat problematic for EM/CA. These notions tend to reify texts, and to assume that they can be considered in isolation from their contexts of production or even of use. This leaves us with the question of what we do when encountered with text-only data, as in this case. Thankfully the groundwork for how to approach such an item ethnomethodologically has long since been done.

For Anderson, textual analysis results if the argument of an academic text is artificially removed from “literary expression and context” (1978:134). In order to retain a natural language sociology, he uses the “tools and features of conversational analysis pragmatically adjusted for texts” (ibid.:118), in which the interactional features of sequence, membership, and recipient design are omnipresent. Similarly, in his early article on Weber’s *Ancient Judaism* (Sacks 1999, Schegloff 1999), Sacks carries out a “praxiological examination” of Weber’s account of Old Testament texts (Watson 2009:4). As Schegloff (1999) notes, what Sacks brought about in the Weber paper was not a textual analysis in the sense that it explicated the features of the text in and of themselves; it was a way of ‘interrogating’ the text so that its purpose – in bringing about another text – would yield its methods. It is nonetheless a ‘reconstruction’ because there are no ways of verifying through observation or the like anything about a society that is not present.

As Schegloff, Anderson, and Watson make clear, these are not methods that are specific to academia, but they do make its work possible. For Watson, the contextures involved in the production, reading, and use of texts as analysed for the explication of social order are a proper topic for sociological investigation; so that, even though its usage

as terminology may hardly be avoidable, 'textual analysis' may eventually be 'abolished' (to paraphrase Watson) by this more catholic and sophisticated approach. In short, we can use exactly the same approaches where texts are involved as for any other forms of interactional data: we look for the social order, and the methods with which this is accountably achieved.

The material

The material spoken of here is a draft essay composed by Tim in his second year for a course in anthropology. My record of ethnographic material reveals very little about this essay; it is not even possible to say what course it was written for or who the marker was. The only mention of this essay comes at the beginning of my final conversation with Tim, where he briefly stated the line of argument that he had employed. The only thing we can take from this is that Tim thought highly of the feedback that was provided. When asked what was useful about it, his response was: "Well, they responded specifically to what I'd written, rather than just making general comments about how good the analysis was". This is well worth bearing in mind when we consider the exact form of the document in question.

The document, then, is a three-page draft essay as submitted by Tim for formative feedback. It is provided in full as Appendix 12. At the time of conducting empirical research, many anthropology courses observed a practice of providing feedback on draft essays on the understanding that summative feedback would be curtailed. Tim's essay was submitted for this purpose. As a draft essay, Tim submitted about half of the two thousand word limit of the final submission. One direction of investigation, therefore, is how the marker could judge the draft to be adequate when half of it, at least in terms of wordage, is not present. It is nonetheless still seen as a plausible piece of work, and feedback has been provided on that basis. What methods does the marker use to recognise this? And what is the perceived design of the writing that allows it?

Another direction comes from an important and easily recognisable feature of the document: the feedback is collapsed into the one document through the use of the 'comment' function in Microsoft Word. As such the essay and feedback appear on the same pages, and can be read in conjunction – this, of course, is the intention of the marker. So, we can ask questions such as: what features of the *jointly-produced* document allow both the marker to orient to them, and also allow the essayist to make sense of the

marker's comments? What are the implications of this collaborative document production? It is important to note that many assumptions about practices in the production and usage of documents can be questioned given the contemporary role of computers and other, especially digital IT in producing and consuming information.

A third direction is provided by the recipient design features of the essay itself. This is really a consideration secondary to those above, not least because in the co-located essay and feedback we have an interesting way into an interactional exchange found in a single document. Nonetheless, as Anderson (op. cit.) and others have shown, it is eminently possible to locate recipient design features in more traditional forms of text.

What I will do here, then, is analyse the most obviously interactional aspects of this document, i.e. the feedback as a response to the essay text. The feedback I see as initiating a case of indexical repair, whereby the feedback *inter alia* seeks to repair the 'missing' text and evident 'unfinished-ness' of the essay. I will then provide some comments on the essay itself, limiting these to the introductory passages. As will be shown, the marker has only needed to comment minimally and on a small proportion of the number of available features of the draft essay to i. render it interactionally as a plausible attempt at academic writing; and to ii. accountably provide a successful idea of what the feedback is and hopes to achieve. Demonstrating the richness of plausible features within the introduction will, as much as anything else, make clear the extent of the glossing that goes into feedback comments.

Last, I would reiterate that this is a study of practices surrounding intelligibility, not of texts as such. The practices do not inhere in the preponderance of coded events, nor in their explication by abstract forces. These are practices that allow the coherence and intelligibility of sequences of actions, even though they may be 'textually mediated', and carried out at a distance. Likewise, the item of data here brings us back to two EM principles that were mentioned earlier as being claimed for AL/NLS (Gee 2000), but less often demonstrated in use: *reflexivity* and *work*. Taken as a single document (but containing two texts), this essay-with-feedback is a self-explicating artefact. As I will go on to show, the feedback comments do not just describe what is there in terms of the structure and content of the essay, but constitutes it as an object at the same time. The *work* of doing this can be reconstructed, at least in part, from the comments themselves. There are matters "endogenous to the work setting" that "are not performed solely by talk-in-interaction" (Psathas 1995:142). We can include in this our own reading of the document.

The problem: indexical repair

In terms of the problem suggested by this piece of data (the text and its reading), let us first describe it as factually as possible. The student writer has provided a short piece of writing that is submitted exactly for the purpose of obtaining feedback on it. The eventual outcome should be an anthropology essay 2000 words or so in length. The writing provided is half that length. The (feedback) comments on the page comprise three very short ‘comment boxes’ (as afforded by Microsoft Word) and a short paragraph summarising the feedback at the end of the piece. I will first address the feedback on the essay.

To clarify what I mean by indexical repair, Digby Anderson writes: “When they [members] accomplish orderly and continuing interactions it is through the practical repair of what they ‘know’ of the situation and of each other” (1978:116). Not all of these things need to be expressed or overtly brought to attention, and any competent member of society will fill in the ‘gaps’ accountably, using their own knowledge. Where sense *can* be made, it will be made by reference to one implicit rule or another. Competent members of society therefore have a multitude of ways of coming to terms with and making sense of indexical actions and expressions, i.e. those that are context-bound or referentially incomplete. They trade on the understanding that this is an instance of ‘what everybody knows’. Garfinkel’s early studies highlight the lack of an objective and exhaustive referentiality to language use; but language users are none the poorer for all this. How do these sense-making practices manifest themselves in this material?

The indexical repair that I have in mind here is not only that of the incompleteness or contexted nature of expressions (Garfinkel 1967), nor of the ethnomethodological observation that technical descriptions trade on commonsense categories (Sacks 1963). Both of these are present in the data. In addition, though, in this material there is a type of indexical repair that is demonstrated in the reading, which attempts – successfully, it seems – to find purpose, structural features, and even the prospects for this piece of work despite half of its material being ‘missing’. How is this repair carried out? What are the reader’s methods or practices for filling in the gaps? The ways in which we get from the essay to the reading (comments) are of interest to us.

The comments are evidence of a local reading having taken place. In the space available, I want to point out a few features of this reading that can potentially be pursued. As Anderson notes of Sacks’ approach to phenomena, this may not strike one as a

systematic way of apprehending topics, but it seems to me that these are likewise generative and irreducible features.

The first feature that I would like to draw attention to comes out of the fact that we do not have access to the original physical reading of the document, a phenomenology of reading or the reading-in-progress. What we have in effect is another text; the textual comments stand as proxy for ‘a reading’. As with any reading, it is clearly motivated or a ‘reading for a purpose’ (Heap 1991a). Given that it is a reading that is *textually accomplished* (in a sense), it is reasonable to ask whether and what features of recipient design the comments themselves exhibit.⁴⁰ Despite the brevity of the comments, it is possible to draw out such design features.

First, let us consider the three comments provided in text boxes. As follows:

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Good intro. Covers a lot of ground.  
Again- well put- good summary.  
Once again- this is very clear and well argued.
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These comments appear in this order in the text; that is to say, if one follows the text in a conventional fashion (Heap 1991a, Sharrock & Ikeya 2000) from top to bottom and left to right, then this is the order in which they will be encountered. Further, the comments are designed to be read in this order, which we can see from the adverbial phrases “Again” and “Once again”. One might also say, if asked to put these comments, randomly provided, in order, that the comment that mentioned the “intro” would come first due to the introduction being whatever comes first in most genres.

This ordering of comments suggests a linear reading, top to bottom, of the text for two distinct reasons, the first of which is of more interest to us here.

1. *The reading of the text by the marker.* The comments are written and produced as if the reading of the text proceeded in a certain way. This way would be what might be termed a ‘close’ reading, in Digby Anderson’s terms, a “‘proper’ reading where the propriety [of that reading] derives from a reading to find and follow the argument” (1978:118). The characteristics of this kind of reading would be that the piece of writing is read in the aforementioned linear fashion, from beginning to end, carefully and closely, reading every word and with a view to finding the argument, the evidence, and any other

⁴⁰ Sacks et al. (1974:727) write: “By ‘recipient design’ we refer to a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants”.

devices that support its argument or its overall plausibility. Both Anderson and James Heap point out that “there are recognisable, sanctionable, standard ways of writing and reading written language that persons can and do depend on and expect” (Heap 1991b:115), and in terms of reading academic texts, our “legitimation of critical rights” (Anderson *op. cit.*) depends upon a reading such as I have just described. It is not such a leap to suggest that this is also the case for markers reading student texts, and even less of a leap to suggest that where the findings of this reading have to be communicated back to the student, that these features of the reading must also be communicated.

However, very few instances of reading – as in ‘the act of’ reading – in fact proceed in this way. Quite aside from the focus needed to carry out this ‘close’ reading on even a short student essay, the experienced marker develops a set of ‘tricks of the trade’ to facilitate and inform their reading. These techniques are referred to in academic works, in pedagogical guides and in the press: a recent THE article⁴¹ suggested that “Academics start reading assignments from the back”, i.e. with the list of references. Many other methods may be adopted and may even be necessary, as when dealing with footnotes or endnotes. The point is that, even though we cannot reconstruct or verify the form of the ‘lived work’ of the reading in this case, we can see from the recipient design features of the comments that a certain manner of reading is oriented to, and that this reading is one that conforms to the organisational features of most conventional academic texts. To put it another way, we have moved here in something like post-structuralist style from ‘reading’ to ‘a reading’. The comments provide ‘a reading’ of the essay, a worked-up reading, in Dorothy Smith’s words. This example of ‘a reading’ provides a version of the essay that may have little discernible connection with the initial act of confronting the text.

In short, the comments have design features that more likely reflect the ‘statusful’ reading that might be expected of the marker than they do the actual reading process. One way of demonstrating this is through a small experiment that I tried when analysing the materials. For this, we need to note that the first comment is placed at the end of the first paragraph, and the comment delineates this as the “intro”. One way in which this delineation could be brought about is by simply characterising whatever content is in the first paragraph as the ‘introduction’, hence the comment.⁴² However, ‘opening paragraph to an essay’ and ‘introduction’ are not identical categories, and material generically suited

⁴¹ <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=415107>, Tara Brabazon, Feb 9th 2011.

⁴² But see Sharrock & Ikeya (2000:276).

to an introduction can appear beyond the first paragraph. I wanted to get at the ‘work’ needed to establish the limits of the introduction, without planning too much; just reading this as any assignment that I would mark. The method that I used for establishing the introduction was therefore as follows: read the first paragraph; start the following paragraph, looking for definitions, intentions, etc. (i.e. skimming and not reading closely); decide that the following paragraph had moved beyond the introduction; move back to the first paragraph and decide upon its adequacy (making any comments, etc.). This same experiment could be carried out by anyone in a clear moment, to read the beginning of this text and establish the exact work that goes into deciding the extent of the introduction.

2. *The reading of the comments by the author of the text.* Assuming that the author of the text is interested in reading the feedback on it, the comments suggest a reading in this order. The writer will therefore have to find the order of the comments and follow the text as it is attached to the comments. The nature of this reading will need to involve at least a reading of the comments with checks to ascertain how the text relates to them. It is not out of the question that the student writer will look to the final comments first, but the comments structure both their own reading and the comparison of the text in juxtaposition with them. *This replicates the ostensible reading of the draft by the marker as in 1 above.*

So far we have noted a design feature that it might be argued is a desirable *general* feature of a reading intended to culminate in meaningful feedback: that is, it demonstrates a linear reading where the aim is to find the argument. However, where there is a reading, we can say there is a *local* reading, and the last two comments are themselves rich in indexicals:

Once again- this is very clear and well argued.

This is fine- what there is of it! There isn't much to add- you clearly get the main points of the readings. I would just say to make sure that you have a detailed discussion of the problems of defining the very concepts of childhood and labour in a non-ethnocentric way, as we discussed in the tutorials. With more detail this is clearly a 2:1 or even better.

It seems clear enough that the deictic “this” in the final comment refers to the entirety of the draft thus far. “This” in the final comment box is a little more puzzling, as there is no prior reference to argument or arguing. However, this comment, which I read as referring to a two-paragraph stretch between this and the previous one, includes the phrase

“very clear”, which could be tied to the phrase “well put” in the second comment. This would have the effect of dividing the first two pages between introduction / summary / argument, with ‘clarity’ being a feature of the latter two.

It is tempting, on the basis of the end comments especially and in contradiction to Anderson,⁴³ to conclude that there is a *co-orientation* on the part of the writer and the marker in this data. The co-location of the two texts in the same document is instrumental in this perception. It is quite easy to look at the texts and conclude that they are somehow ‘on about’ the same thing, or that they are addressed to achieving the same thing. We might also say that the feedback text only gains its intelligibility from its co-location with, and strategic placement in relation to, the essay text. Others might say that this is a tenuous argument given that the essay is not exactly oriented to *this* feedback.

However, it is still surely justifiable to see this as an interactional event. What we do *not* have access to in this data is the classroom discussion and possibly other contact between writer and reader that would help us make more sense of these deictic expressions. In effect the ‘missing’ thousand words is repaired not least by an appeal to what seem to be common objects of knowledge: the “main points of the readings”; what exactly “the readings” are; the concepts “discussed in the tutorials”. The writer is treated as someone who is not only knowledgeable of the content and competent as an author of (student-level) academic work, but also someone who is cognizant of the implied contextual details; i.e. as someone who generally understands what these deictic expressions refer to. This essay is a transaction between a particular writer and a particular reader, not a readership, with certain contextual features known to them both.

The second feature that I would like to discuss has already been hinted at. It is that the comment boxes orient to the document design at least as much as they do to the textual content. They do this in a number of ways, for example: through the strategic placement of the comments in the topography of the text; through the labelling of sections of the text as delineated by the comments; through assumptions that the comments do in fact coherently delineate specific and recognisable parts of the text (through the clear visual principle that the text comments delineate a ‘section type’ that extends up to the marker extended by the comment); through the provision of attributes to these sections; and through the omission of specific comments on the content, i.e. ethnographic details or lines of argument. This

⁴³ Anderson was considering traditional texts, although he describes reading as an “interactional event” (1978:119). We would need to decide where co-orientation can happen, seeing as all texts are dialogical anyway (Fuller & Lee 1997:411), and bearing in mind contemporary digital and multimodal practices.

perhaps should be no surprise: the text is recognisable as a *draft* essay. James Heap (1991a:20) suggests that our reading “is carried out in terms of our beliefs and knowledge as to the type of document we have encountered, the genre of the text represented, and the open-ended, possibly changing, circumstances of our reading acts”. Put in this way, one of the most quickly recognisable features of the reading is that it orients to a genre; the essay. Recognition of and orientation to a genre, though, are contingent practices. Recently I had cause to make a series of such judgements: having given a group of students a draft essay assignment and having instructed them to “make the drafts as full as possible”, I then had to make decisions about the results of this exercise as to which efforts constituted a draft and which were still in note or plan form. Of course, if requested I could have sequestered features of the drafts that made them essays, but the point is that this was the ongoing ‘work’ of ‘doing genre’. I suspect that this work would be amenable to a Wittgensteinian analysis of the ‘family resemblances’ of instances of a genre; each instance will contain sufficient features for a situated judgement to be made, but *not all of* the analytically isolatable features. It seems, going both from this experience and from the data presented here, that there is some kind of ‘Reader’s Maxim’ at play here (cf. Sacks’ listeners’ maxims and Grice’s speakers’ maxims), which we could summarise, *pace* Sacks, as something like:

“If you can find generic features within a text, assume the genre is identified and conditionally orient to those features”.

This is a not dissimilar point to Sharrock & Ikeya’s (2000:276) when they suggest that reading practices are frequently conventionalised or ‘canonical’, and “that in many respects they have a ‘ceteris paribus’ application”. The essay genre is a ‘frame’ for reading things in the broadest sense. Things are placed in a relationship to this format, and the reader looks to orient to it whether the format was ‘intended’ by the writer or not (like behaviour in accordance with rules). Anderson & Sharrock (1984:106) argue that sociological readers will “assume the standardised character of some piece of work” on trust, until such time that the standardised character of the work needs to be called into question. Assuming that the work can be seen as standardised, “The work of localising the descriptions being offered provides resources whereby such a presupposition can be sustained” (ibid.). More than this, once a single part (or attribute) has been identified through the work of reading, further indications are achieved for what other or subsequent parts (or attributes) can possibly be. In this case, once the “intro” has been identified and

commented on, the marker is able to move on and identify subsequent parts, that “discuss” or “argue”.

Heap further draws a distinction between *text* and *document* (1991a). He says that “Theories working with a restricted, abstract notion of materials will not account for how *text* genres are encountered and recognised based on *document* organisation” (ibid.:21). These abstract text genres “do not draw direct attention to the document, as the formatted signs that must be read” (ibid.). However, it is exactly this kind of encounter and recognition ‘in action’ that we see in the comment boxes. This is evident, as I have shown, from the localised comments. The end comments, though, tell us something as well. The comment boxes reflexively constitute the ‘structure’ of the essay, and set out the terms for its description. The end comments say nothing about the structure or organisation of the essay specifically; rather they focus upon content, pointing out an omission that can be amended and including a rather teasing comment concerning the extent of the draft. The comment “with more detail this is clearly a 2:1 or even better” provides the message that the generic conventions are considered already to be in place, that the writer has provided one tenable way of addressing the question, and that the missing detail is held ‘in abeyance’. The assumption is that detail will be added to the argument/structure, not that the argument/structure will be changed by virtue of having additional detail added to it.

In short, we can make the following points:

1. The first thousand words is seen by the marker as including important organisational and design features. The next thousand words is ‘detail’.
2. The design of the comments has its own Recipient Design features; these can be seen to contribute to and adhere to what a reading ‘should be’, normatively, in this setting.
3. Other design features have only a local significance and assume that the student is co-oriented to, and probably competent in addressing, the topics and discussions brought to bear in the written work.
4. The ‘readers’ maxim’ builds upon expertise in recognising genres and in orienting to document design. This is the necessary basis for comments upon content.
5. We can easily find uses here for the EM concepts mentioned at the beginning.

However, most of all, I would say that we can gain ideas concerning the ‘work’ of bringing about this reading.

Plausibility in the essay introduction

The first paragraph of the essay, assuming that we ‘tie’ the first comment of the marker to this paragraph, is then understood to be the ‘introduction’. The tying, incidentally, is justified by observing the location of the text box provided to be at the end of the opening paragraph. The obvious way to read this is to say that the text that appears up to the point of this comment is the introduction (i.e. understood as being the introduction according to the marker). It makes sense to say that some text must be addressed before feedback is given, so the naming of a ‘part’ of the essay is a gloss of ‘the text up to this point’. The paragraph is moreover understood as a unit, and so the heading ‘introduction’ applies to the paragraph in its entirety. Admittedly these comments come up against a lack of potential rivals.

The introduction, then, contains a number of interesting features. These are features that contribute to the plausibility, i.e. the believability or applicability of the writing for the purpose for which it is intended. Recall that we are looking “not to judge accounts credible or not, [but] to provide for their credibility insofar as they can be found to be credible. Given the problematic interpretational status of each and every...descriptive statement, how is a collection of statements read as a comprehensible and orderly whole that might be believed?” (Anderson 1978:115). In this case, of course, there are feedback comments which let us know how credible the whole and this part were considered by the marker, which is important as an instance of naturalistic, textually-mediated interaction. However, the comments leave to be revealed the methods by which this ‘virtual production account’ was arrived at. As ever, the ‘actual production account’ is far from being fully explicated. We know only that the features of the introduction allowed the marker to comment that the introduction was “good”, and that it “Covers a lot of ground”. These comments have been addressed above. Although these features may not be seen as the be-all and end-all of introduction writing, these comments are clearly positive. There are many isolatable features within the introduction, and as any description will be partial, in both senses (Schneider 2002:183), it is not possible with the data as is to state categorically what features elicited the marker’s comments. Even to speak in such terms may be misleading given the gestalt properties of reading (Watson 2009). It is difficult to comprehensively reconstruct the reading when the evidence of the nature of the reading is so slim. It is this very indexicality and the requirement of quite a serious job of work in repair and reconstruction that makes this item of data so interesting. What we can do is draw out

some of the possible plausibility-inducing points. So we are concerned with availability of plausible features as opposed to the reception of the essay in fact; that is the virtual production account as opposed to the actual production account (Francis & Hart 1997:150).

The preface to any comment is a consideration of the title, which works as an instruction for reading what follows (Anderson *op. cit.*). What does the title instruct us to do? There are a few things that must be involved in the essay to ensure its relevance: anthropologists/anthropology; ‘work’; and children/child labour. Second, the task of anthropology to *redefine* ‘work’ is presented as non-optional: anthropologists *need* to do this, and the question is ‘how’ they can do this as opposed to whether they should. The question of the value of this operation is therefore cut out from the start. Third, the title suggests the need to ‘redefine’ rather than ‘define’ work, so we are led to the understanding that there is a prior or extant definition of ‘work’ that is not doing its job insofar as an analysis of child labour is concerned. We are not made aware of the provenance of this existing definition, but imagine that it will become clear in the business of redefinition. Fourth, that there is such a thing as child labour that is not best approached through this existing definition of work.

One first operation on the introduction that comes to mind follows Anderson’s (*op. cit.*) appropriation of membership categorisation analysis for the purposes of analysing writing. If we search the introduction for its ‘population’, we find:

States
Children
Anthropologists
Levine (whom we presume is an anthropologist)
Adults (grouped with children, so ‘adults and children’, although not obviously ‘family’)

However, at the very beginning there is something that grammatically appears to take on the status of a non-personal actor, i.e. the ‘discourse of the universal rights of children’. This *discourse* is given the appearance of an actor through its incorporation in a common syntactic structure, thus:

[“a discourse...” SUBJECT] [“advocating” VERB] [“rights to a protected childhood...” OBJECT]

In other words, the discourse is written of as something that can carry out activities in the manner of a human agent. In this instance, the verb used is “advocate”, which is normally

only used for the activities of human actors, and collective bodies. It is notable that, at this stage, the discourse is not mentioned in conjunction with any tangible agents. This is the case later on, when the UN and UNICEF are both mentioned. But within the introduction itself, the discourse is talked of *sui generis* and, as explained, grammatically as an agent able to carry out actions.

The term ‘discourse’ is here manifestly used as a technical term, thus ‘assuring an audience’ (as in Sacks’ paper on Weber). Of course, ‘discourse’ is an example of an everyday word that has had several technical meanings foisted upon it. Nonetheless, we should expect a competent reader in the discipline to understand the majority of technical terms, no matter what their provenance. In this case, a critical, perhaps Foucauldian understanding of discourse is available. This technical usage is discernible in the first instance by the use of the indefinite article, so that the author writes of “a discourse”, rather than “discourse” alone, which would suggest the sociological rather than linguistic usage.⁴⁴ In addition, there is the idea that this discourse is, as it must be, pervasive: by definition, one imagines that a discourse must be widespread, iterative and distributed over time and space (hence ‘discursive formation’ and so on elsewhere). In this instance, not only is there the very idea of a pervasive discourse, but this same discourse also propounds a message of “universal rights”. The discourse propounds the same message for every time and location, in the same way, for the same ends.

Although we are far from lay understandings here, there is no sign that tying the predicate of “advocating rights to a protected childhood...” to the discourse as an activity that the latter can carry out as a quasi-agent is an illicit move on the part of the writer. We would expect that empirical and conceptual errors of whatever kind would be picked up by the feedback. (Of course, at the end of the draft the initial feedback comment opens with “This is fine”, by which we understand that the deictic “this” to refer to the entirety of the draft, as opposed, for instance to the section of writing between this feedback comment and the previous feedback comment.) There is also no objection to how the activities of the other party in this introduction, namely anthropologists both individually and severally, are presented. Anthropologists and the “discourse” are the only agents that do things in the introduction.

⁴⁴ That is to say, this usage is to be understood not as referring to stretches of writing or speech longer than the sentence (linguistic usage), but rather as “the operations of power in the delineation and practices of particular ways of producing knowledges and subjects” (Lee 1996:16).

The problem with the message propounded by the universal discourse, according to the introduction, is that despite its being a necessarily distributed and pervasive discourse, and despite its universalising message, the idea being propagated is founded in a viewpoint that is partial, “specifically Western”. Being partial (at least in the sense of being incomplete), this viewpoint is subject to contestation. It is also open to more complicated analyses than are possible by recourse to the discourse alone.

It is at this point that “anthropologists” are introduced, as adding further critiques of the universal discourse. The following comments (lines 8-13) operate a dual function in that they tie activities/predicates to anthropologists, *and* enumerate further anthropologically-derived problems with the assumptions of the universal discourse, as set out. Thus, anthropologists:

Contend [that discourse-driven arguments ignore the details of exploitative child labour]
Argue [that hegemonic anti-child labour campaigns ignore wider inequalities]

They moreover have “much to offer” by virtue of operating a “comparative approach [that] can highlight flaws in the anti-child labour discourse”.

Of course, some of these flaws have already been mentioned in the introduction, but have not at this point been developed. There seems to be plenty of scope for critique based on the lines already mentioned. The point of departure for these critiques is through anthropology. Hence, despite some of the criticisms of the anti-child labour discourse not overtly being attributed to anthropologists or anthropological approaches, the site for exigency is clear: it is through anthropology that (many of) these flaws can be brought out.

Anthropologists are therefore set up by the introduction in opposition to a universalising discourse. A number of comments are possible. First, we understand that anthropologists are *well placed* to take on the assumptions and implications of such a discourse. Their “comparative approach” is set up as the source of insights that are not consonant with, or in fact undermine, the universalising discourse. The discourse is described as universal in ambition, but without either being arrived at unanimously or applicable generally. There is therefore a logical problem with it according to the assumptions of anthropology *qua* a specific epistemological take on the world. That anthropologists use methods that can interrogate this problem sets up the exigency of the essay. We recognise this as a ‘live’ issue because of the increasing prominence of the universalising discourse “in recent years”.

Second, anthropologists are set up in opposition to this discourse, but this is not obviously a *moral* opposition. The universalising discourse, despite its flaws, does propound “universal rights of children”, advocates “rights to a protected childhood”, and sees value in the possibility of promoting “personal development”. It is a matter of both common sense and argumentative expediency that one does not set up in opposition to the morals of organisations or modes of thinking that are seen, at least purportedly, to have good intentions. My view is that such a reading *is* available to those who are sufficiently proficient and theoretically motivated to see, for instance, moral problems in the ability of Western hegemony to promote universalising discourses. This is certainly something that would fall within the remit of a critical anthropology. That reading, though, depends upon a certain kind of reader to bring it with them. There is more evidence to support a reading that anthropologists are set up in opposition to the discourse by virtue of their abilities to find empirical and conceptual flaws in its assumptions. Although the moral and argumentative issues may be of a piece (the very idea of *discourse* being a means of locating them together), it is reasonable to surmise that a student writer will be expected to give more prominence to issues of coherence and comprehensiveness in argument and reasoning. Thus:

1. It is not a case of only opposing “exploitative” work, because “accepted” (we presume, by the agencies that the discourse works through) work in school and for family can also be exploitative. We would assume that this is a point that will subsequently be demonstrated empirically.
2. There may be ‘good’ reasons for “exploitative” child labour; for instance, the phrase “insecure households drive children to work” brings to mind a household that is dependent upon child labour for its very survival. Again, this is a point that can be supported empirically, which of course is the stock-in-trade of the anthropologist’s academy-side work.
3. These two points can be seen as ‘complicating’ factors; and indeed, at least the first is described thus (line 7). They may be seen as ‘it’s not as simple as that’ arguments, which questions the validity of the position being criticised by virtue of some variant of the ‘fallacy of omission’. The idea of complicating an issue generally involves bringing more material to bear on it. The suggestion, and premise, provided by the two points above is that specific examples can work to undermine the universal principles propounded by the discourse. Anthropologists specialise in providing such

specific examples. This is a synthetic approach and outside the terms of the discourse as presented in the introduction; the discourse is seen as working from principle, e.g. “states *should* attempt to restrict ‘work’ to adults”. The counter-arguments hint at the utility of empirical case evidence: “accepted work...*can be* exploitative” [i.e. in certain cases]; “anthropologists have contended that such arguments ignore how insecure household economies drive children to work”, where *how* can be read as either [the fact that] or [the ways in which]. It is not difficult to find oppositional pairs which can be understood as attributes or predicates of the two main parties in the introduction:

Universal	–	Comparative
Pervasive	–	Situated
Idealised	–	Complex
Working from principle	–	Working from data

The assumption is that there is a model in place whereby the first items in the pairs can be invalidated by the second items (perhaps let’s call it an ‘invalidation model’). This therefore becomes an epistemological point, and constitutes a good illustration of part of what can count as argument for anthropology.

4. The conversation concerning exploitative child labour is misleading in isolation and may be productively widened to include “economic inequalities which affect adults as well as children”. This can be seen as the broadest expansion of the issue at hand.

As mentioned, there is room in these introductory points for an articulation between the *morality* and the *coherence* of the universalising discourse position to be developed.

Third, there is an evident in-group activity, or similar, at play here. One should expect no less of a student writing an essay for an anthropology tutor to read such sentiments as “anthropologists have much to offer”. It could be that the student writer finds it advisable to confirm his marker in his or her beliefs. For the purposes of getting the essay done, and coherently so, though, two features already outlined can be reiterated: the affordance of a worthwhile exigency; and the affordance of lines of reasoning that proceed down a path acceptable within the epistemology of the discipline. These sentiments set up the ‘problem’ of the essay in such a way that it is solvable by accepting the modes of argument and nature of evidence specific to anthropology. These modes are introduced and warranted by the invalidation model set out above.

Moreover, there is a venerable kind of academic trope going on here in this encounter of anthropologists and the universalising discourse. The trope works something like this. Social science or humanities academics will come across wide-ranging policies or practices suggested or put in place by bodies such as special agencies, political parties or NGOs. Perhaps because they are aimed at achieving uniform or comparable outcomes in diverse or manifold settings, these bodies will be obliged to work to broad definitions and idealisations, and to look to identify these in practice wherever it can be justified. However, academics can afford to be very much more specific in their aims than this, and can justify a search for detail that is beyond the scope – or the will – of non-academic agencies. Given the invalidation model above, academics can use their findings to point out the ignorance, intransigence, or even hidden agendas of large and powerful agencies. The detail gained from academic modes of study is seen as a necessary addition (or counterpoint) for a consideration of the issue at hand in all its complexity. The assumption is that a consideration of this complexity allows a preferable version of the phenomenon to be arrived at. This is something that only the academic side can see. In this case above, the ‘heroic’ status of anthropologists, coming up against powerful agenda-setting bodies, is assured. We can see this procedure as a variation of the trope that sets up the ‘corrective’ of mundane conceptions by scientists or social scientists (see Sacks’ and Garfinkel’s comments in Hill & Crittenden, 1968:13-5).

The way that the trope works in this case should be familiar to all students of social literacies: at the very inception of the New Literacy Studies was Brian Street’s critique of ‘autonomous’ models of functional literacy propounded by UNESCO (1984, chapter 7)⁴⁵ and assumed by national governments (ibid., chapter 8). The antidote to this, as it seems to be with notions of work and child labour here, is to find ‘situated’ examples of the phenomenon and to see how they work.

Conclusions

I have approached the analysis of this item in a certain way given its unique interactional features; and given the importance of highlighting its properties as document as well as text/s. What we find in the feedback is a manifestation of the *et cetera* principle whereby a potentially huge number of textual and recipient design features are glossed; in

⁴⁵ E.g., “Some aspects of Unesco literacy campaigns...can be seen to involve aspects of the ‘ideological’ model although seldom worked through in the way that I suggest above is happening in some of the academic literature” (Street 1984:183).

Anderson's words (1978:121), "there are many cases where participants...co-orient to one descriptor out of several – the several taken as non-problematic". However, the co-location of two texts in this single document brings out the importance of a series of disparate features employed and used in the rendering of this essay as a plausible item of student work. These include the physical organisation of the document; the orienting to generic features; sequence, membership, and recipient design as specified by Anderson; through to the 'myths', tropes, and assumptions of a specific discipline. Indexical repair is carried out here through a glossing of the several non-problematic features and of the 'missing' thousand words.

The features of the essay mentioned by the feedback are available to a certain type of reading. Thus, "information becomes 'information' *as* the practical interrogation of a field; information – what we find – is reflexive to the practices for parsing it" (Macbeth 2011:87). Marking essays involves a number of things, not least reconciling the horizon of the text with the horizon of the document. One invariably finds what is looked for. There is no set procedure for arriving at an evaluation, which we must see as the main aim of most essay reading. The evidence of 'a reading' here clearly supports Anderson's assertion that the argumentative features of academic work are not separable from its literary features. This is made clear not just by the essay text, but also by the feedback text.

I will end by reiterating that Tim spoke positively of this feedback. I think some would be amused by this, given the brevity of the comments. Of course, we cannot be sure of what went on in other contact between Tim and the marker. However, given the 'accountable' character of the 'reading' in the feedback, it might be possible for practitioners as well as analysts to take something from this study.

Conclusions

This thesis makes available a variety of conclusions, conceptual, methodological, and substantive. I will begin by providing an idea of what I consider to be the overall contribution before commenting on these specific aspects.

I have attempted to bring about a systematic encounter of EM and AL. Although EM has been used in studies of adult literacy and particularly in classroom studies of literacy instruction, particularly in Australian educational work (e.g. Baker 1991, Freiberg & Freebody 2009, Freebody & Freiberg 2011), it has not received any concerted attention in the UK from those who write under the banner of the New Literacy Studies. Furthermore, although many of EM's concepts and study policies have passed into the general consciousness of the social sciences, they tend to be used selectively, rather than in concert, when in the hands of non-EM practitioners. Given that NLS and AL are still open to practice theories and approaches to inform their ongoing conceptual work (e.g. Baynham & Prinsloo 2009, Grenfell et al. 2011), I have taken the opportunity in this thesis to show how a more faithful approach to EM would work, demonstrating the use of foundational, sense-making practices in an academic writing context. The study is therefore of interest to EM practitioners for its contribution to work in reading and writing practices; and to NLS for its application of an approach to practice which to date has been overlooked. As a form of social analysis, EM has concluded to its own satisfaction many of the debates that are extant in literacy studies, and it will be interesting to see for how long they remain problematic within the NLS.

Theoretical and conceptual conclusions

With regard to the theoretical and conceptual outcomes, I tend to see this study not least as an empirical rehearsal of the writing of ethnomethodologists such as Lynch, Coulter, Macbeth, and Schegloff in their polemics with the proponents of various brands of discourse analysis. If there is something that connects all of these polemics, it is the ethnomethodological reaction against any kind of dualism or theoretical explanation, and the prominence of fidelity to data in analysis. Going by the logic of the EM situated approach to phenomena (here, literacy), we are looking for those phenomena to be tied to social practices rather than to autonomous structures. Pursuing this logic further suggests

that the *idea* of Street's ideological model is right but its terminology is wrong. Ideology is a notion that has been commandeered by those who work with critical disciplines, and tends to be thought of in this technical sense as being tied to underlying structures available to the analyst but not to the layperson (Mchoul 1988b, Macbeth 2003, Pennycook 1994). This understanding of ideology points to autonomous things, suggesting an idea of power that is *a priori* and too inflexible. The ideological model when tied to these theoretical notions of discourse gives us something just as problematic as the autonomous model. The EM version of situated studies provides a way of avoiding this.

A frequent criticism of EM is that it is not equipped to deal with sociological mainstays such as power relations. There is a case to answer from the point of view of a discipline such as AL with its transformative agenda. On the contrary, as pointed out by the likes of Macbeth and Schegloff, EM studies can be used to find and describe the details of the exercise of power where that is available and relevant to the understandings of the protagonists. The same goes for the other stock AL concerns: identity, meaning, and epistemology. One way in which this has turned out to be a 'hybrid study' (Garfinkel 2002, Lynch 1993) is through its focus on these concerns, where they are there to be found. This has required a particular slant on 'ethnomethodological indifference' whereby I have been sensitised to this set of issues, without reading them into the data.

Similarly, the logic of practice in EM mode is generally to collapse those dualisms that we are told *should* be collapsed in practice studies (Schatzki 2001a). The idea of reflexively accountable actions and the local achievement of formal and pervasive structures dissolves, for the ethnomethodologist, the need for dualisms such as micro-macro, local-global, subjective-objective – and indeed, notions of practice that separate observable action from the 'underlying cultural model'. AL/NLS retain many of these dualisms, not least in the form of problematics, and therefore maintain a less than implicit Cartesianism. This can be seen in the AL/NLS notion of 'situated' studies, as well as in their willingness to adduce theoretical explanation. Any more or less pure EM approach sees these as non-problems. Adducing this ethnomethodological solution may give this study the appearance of a therapeutic exercise, in the Wittgensteinian sense. In response I must again plead ecumenism. I have carried out this study in such a way as to make it recognisable and accessible to an AL audience. Choices regarding the presentation and analysis of material were made with this ecumenical aim in mind. The chances of changing the minds of those with strong sensibilities or ideological commitments are slim; a more realistic ambition has been to put EM into the conversation with regard to arriving

at a robust conception of practice for social literacy studies. Another would be to demonstrate the value of detailed empirical, situated, non-ideological studies.

Technological and methodological conclusions

One of the key methodological problems that I have addressed is the nature of ethnography and what it means to undertake an ethnographic study. Although *ethnographic*, I would not say that this study was an *ethnography*. It has a holistic perspective and relies upon the members' notion of scenic events and features, but it does not qualify as an ethnography in terms of its technological features.

A vital aspect of any given brand of ethnography is its approach to the emic or actor's point of view. EM approaches this matter not by addressing the content of what members say, but by looking for the performative and sense-making aspects of their actions (in Garfinkel 2002:60). In all interactions there are methods to hand, used by members to make their actions accountable. This is the same across what might be initially called the naturalistic/non-naturalistic boundary. I have noted the problem of obtaining naturalistic data in AW research, even of ethnographic type. This is because scheduled and practically observable face-to-face interactions concerning the protagonists of academic writing in higher education can be few and far between. I have argued that the EM version of reflexivity can rescue this situation, through considering interactions initiated by research to be analysed for their contributions to the 'context of accountability'. In this way, both those events initiated by research and prior to it are seen as contributing to the constitution of this same context. This approach has implications for a mainstay of AL research to date, i.e., the 'talk around text' method as used by Ivanic and Lillis. As noted by Carlin (2009), no analysis can simultaneously carry out the many kinds of operation suggested by these two authors. In particular, a gestalt switch is required in the shift from analysing data as topic to considering it as resource. However, my decision to sequester and analyse the formal structures of conversation concerning AW was taken on the basis that this form of analysis would be more recognisable to those familiar with what EM calls 'formal analysis'. This again contributes to the idea of this as a hybrid study.

With regard to the EM side of the study, I have argued that AW can be seen to constitute a 'perspicuous site' in that it lays bare local reasoning practices and scenic institutional features. In all the empirical material, for all protagonists, there is clear evidence of the "organisational thing that they are up against" (Garfinkel & Wieder

1992:186, emphasis deleted). The Meno paradox that confronts most students is just one instance. I have used that of the data which seems to best provide for these purposes, that is, the data that most perspicuously represents the local collaborative achievement of plausibility in student writers and their work.

The ethnographic perspective and the observations of Heap, Macbeth, McHoul, and others, is moreover invaluable in helping us realise that writing is a broad activity and unremittingly social. It goes well beyond the act of inscription, and what counts as writing is always open to social sanction or verification. The scope, variety, and depth of material that contributed to the case studies illustrates this.

Ethnographic observations

A few interesting points came about through the general conduct of ethnographic research. Primarily, all of the students that volunteered for the study, with the exception of Cathy, the mature student, were extremely confident and highly discursive. Cathy provided a distinct contrast that coheres with depictions of mature students in previous research. Her case supports Ivanic's (1998) findings concerning identities being 'in a state of flux' as a result of writing requirements, whereas the remaining students gave every impression that their identity was a stable and inelastic component which partly determined the outcomes of their writing assignments. One feature of the data – and complication – that cuts across the empirical material is that 'unsuccessful' student writing may be a matter of student choice. This can be bound up with identity and prerogatives in complex ways.

Further to this, one result of working with any participant that volunteered and selecting whatever material that suited my purposes meant that the material had a better fit with EM's focus on the 'mundane' case than with AL's preoccupation with students that are a priori most likely to be 'disadvantaged' by the mores of the academy. There is undoubted utility in studying the mundane case as well as the non-traditional or exceptional one.

Substantive conclusions

These substantive conclusions are designed to be faithful to the analysis of data *in this case*. In line with the EM approach to situated studies, they should also reveal something of what makes the practices therein intelligible. The point of departure has been to find

ways in which student work is found to be and made plausible; so these conclusions concern the praxiological and collaborative achievement of plausibility.

The chapter on formal structures showed that the participants were aware of the often complex requirements and conditions for their academic writing. Their use of formal structures in conversation provided ways of demonstrating how they meet these requirements; why on occasion they cannot meet them; why on other occasions they ignore them; and what should be done to close the space between unknown conventions and conventions that can reasonably be guessed at. All of these functions, in various ways, go to position the participants as 'plausible student writers'. The analysis of formal structures was carried out so as to demonstrate the actor's point of view as conceived by Garfinkel (2002).

The first case study demonstrated that the outcome of Cathy's gender essay was all but inevitable, the cumulative result of events that were completely reasonable and intelligible in their own terms. For Cathy, writing opinion was not separable from writing her Christian identity, which she saw as incommensurable with the ethos of the course. Her essay can be seen as proficient in the way that it achieves a compromise between competing demands. The case study suggested that while alternate modes of analysis of the same data are conceivable, it is an exemplar of how critical analyses can 'lose the phenomenon'.

The second case study showed how Tim's work was accorded a local-historical significance that reflexively structured the possibilities of phenomena within the distributive justice course. This significance extended the idea of what plausible work could be within that setting. The structuring effect was a social and distributed achievement continued long after Tim left the university. I concluded that this case study demonstrated how the author function needs to be attached to local and concrete instantiations of 'authors', at least in this kind of context.

The final case study showed how the co-location of two texts in the same document allows them to co-orient. The feedback text oriented to the essay text's document form to demonstrably do the work of recognising genre (among other things). Both texts have their own recipient design features. The essay introduction trades on the myths, tropes and assumptions of the academy in general and anthropology in particular. The feedback provides the impression of a statusful, beginning-to-end reading. The methods identified in the traces of the feedback 'reading' show the work of indexical repair and of the etcetera principle.

Pedagogical conclusions

It would be remiss not include some pedagogical conclusions in a thesis written broadly in education. Some conclusions are available by virtue of AL's transformative agenda as a point of departure.

I remain sceptical of the applicability of AL's transformative ideology in the design of courses and tuition, at least in HE's current guise as a commoditised and increasingly neo-liberal system of mass education. There are two reasons for this. First, it would seem to compete against other institutional demands which outweigh it. One example of this would be anonymised submission. This is implemented ostensibly to protect students and promote fairness. However, the close collaboration with students that is implied by AL course design will not be possible if students continue to be required to submit anonymised work. My argument would be against anonymised submission, but I am in a minority. Second, I suggest obstacles in the form of institutional will, and student willingness. A critical transformative agenda would need by definition to apply across the board, and the younger students in my study gave no indication of requiring or potentially benefitting from this. I wonder if this agenda needs to be extended to education prior to the academy.

Elsewhere, the analysis in the final case study demonstrates that even cursory feedback can meet with student approval if it accountably reflects the kind of reading that students would want to have of their work.

Finally, the focus on practical reasoning in this study hints at the utility of building in more opportunities for students to do just this, i.e., chances to work out what is required of them in their studies. Outside the social sciences, for instance, there are potentially interesting intersections of abduction as a scientific mode of reasoning and as a method of practical adaptation.

Recommendations for the future

While the early days of research in NLS and AL were exciting times and offered up a series of important publications, I feel that AL in particular has lost some of this early excitement through too dogmatic a focus on linguistic modes of analysis such as SFL. The best work in social literary studies retains a strong sociological component, and I think Turner's (1970:197) reservations on linguistic models still holds, in that "it is still not at

all clear that any specifically linguistic properties of talk [or text] can be related to central sociological concerns”. A social or sociological agenda would pursue the “methodical achievement of those activities by socialised members” (ibid.), and this is where EM has a role. Researchers in social literacy studies are not alone in misconstruing CA as a mode of discourse analysis, and it is through emphasising the ethnomethodological origins of CA that both EM and CA could be productively added to the list of sociological approaches to practice currently being mined for insights. They are sufficiently supple to find the methods for producing social order in talk and text.

Similarly, AL/NLS should consider developing stronger ways of warranting critical conclusions or ends from the detail of empirical data analysis. Again, this is contiguous with ongoing theoretical debates in the social sciences.

Finally, I feel it would be profitable for future research to adopt as ‘pure’ an ethnographic approach as possible. As I have taken pains to argue, HE research that adheres to the anthropological ideal of ethnography is hard to bring about. There are contemporary movements in research, though, that focus on text trajectories and text development, which would seem to provide convenient mileposts for the conduct of ethnographic research. There is certainly room for research that prioritises ‘hanging around with the natives’; the only proviso is that the researcher will certainly encounter the usual frustrations in doing so.

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Appendix 1 – Student consent form

Writing, Reasoning & Rhetoric: Argument and Persuasion in the Qualitative Essays of a Culturally Diverse Social Science Cohort¹

Consent Form

In undertaking to be a participant in this research project I am agreeing to:

- Participate over the two years necessary for the fieldwork to be completed
- Be interviewed at intervals over two years (up to six times) for a maximum of about one hour per interview
- Give me permission to look and analyse at the essays they submit for course work and also the comments and feedback on these essays; to be willing to talk about these essays and comments
- Receive ad hoc emails from me on occasion, for example to follow up interviews
- Inform me if your circumstances change, e.g. you change programme or specialisation of study, or drop out of the programme altogether
- Have the interviews recorded and transcribed.

Participants may:

- Approach me at any time, at their discretion, to discuss related matters
- Withdraw from the study at any time (good notice is appreciated)
- Ask about the progress, design, or findings of the study

Other:

- Confidentiality is guaranteed to participants
- All names will be changed
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed but the transcriptions, along with the essays and feedback, will be kept confidential

.....
Paul Vincent Smith
(Researcher)

.....
Participant:
Date:

¹ The title of the project was subsequently changed, but this had no effect on the participants.

Appendix 2 – Student biographies

<i>Student name</i>	<i>National/cultural background</i>	<i>Educational background</i>	<i>Degree specialisation at outset of study</i>	<i>Studied this/these discipline/s before?</i>
Nathalie	Mother French, father English, holds UK and US passports; speaks French and German	UK primary school; US secondary school; pre-university, IB in Switzerland	Politics & Sociology	No
Thomas	UK citizenship but holds two passports	3 A-levels & 1 AS-level at a state grammar school; took a gap year	Anthropology, or Politics & Economics (likely)*	No
Sophie	English of a Polish father and English-Russian mother; UK passport	3 A-levels from a local college	Politics & Sociology	Politics, not Sociology
Monika	Polish	IB from a Polish higher school	Sociology & Business Studies	No
Martin	German	German pre-university qualification from a German grammar school equivalent	Politics & Economics	Economics, not Politics
Sarah	English	3 A-levels and 1 AS-level; took a gap year	Politics & Economics**	Economics, not Politics
Claire	UK, born in South Africa	Mature student: did Politics GCSE and then an Access course	Criminology & Sociology***	No
Andreas	“Finnish Swede” (mother tongue Swedish); Finnish passport	IB at a school in Sweden; took a gap year	Politics & Economics	No, but IB extended essay was on a political theme

* Was unsure of eventual specialisation in first year but eventually stayed on the Politics & Economics pathway

** Switched to a single specialisation in her final year, after a year out

*** Entered on Criminology & Sociology, but changed to a single specialisation in Criminology for the second year

Appendix 3 – Student essays 2006-7

	Year	Course name	Discipline	Essay title/s	Mark
Nathalie	1	Introduction to International Politics	Politics	The Effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as Global Security Institutions*	63
Andreas	1	Introduction to Political Thought	Politics	If we care about equality of opportunity should we care about equality of outcome?	51
		Introduction to International Politics	Politics	How has the emergence of International Political Economy (IPE) brought new issues onto the agenda of international relations (IR)?	42
		Work, Organisations & Society	Sociology	What is unemployment, and how has it changed with the introduction of the Jobseekers' allowance AND/OR Workfare schemes?	N/A**
Sophie	1	Culture & Society	Anthropology	Are there any natural places in which people live? Discuss at least two different perspectives in your answer.**	'High 2.1'
				Is There Such a Thing as a Natural Body?***	63
		Introduction to Political Thought	Politics	Is Consent the Best Available Ground for Legitimate Authority?	62
Sarah	2	Introduction to Comparative Politics	Politics	Compare and Contrast the Pluralist and Ruling Class Accounts of Political Power.	53
		Comparative Politics of East-Central Europe	Politics	Why did the Leninist regimes in East-Central Europe collapse so suddenly in 1989?	39***
		Comparative European Politics	Politics	Compare and explain the political instability experienced by pre-Fifth Republic France during the Third and Fourth Republics, Weimar Germany, and	67

				post-war Italy.	
Martin	2	The Politics of Globalisation	Politics	Explain and analyse the relationship between neoliberal globalisation and entrepreneurial cities.	69
		Comparative Politics of East-Central Europe	Politics	Are the changes of regime in East-Central Europe in 1989 best described as 'revolutions'?	65
		Comparative European Politics	Politics	Compare and explain the political instability experienced by pre-Fifth Republic France during the Third and Fourth Republics, Weimar Germany, and post-war Italy.	63
Thomas	2	Comparative European Politics	Politics	Compare and explain the political instability experienced by pre-Fifth Republic France during the Third and Fourth Republics, Weimar Germany, and post-war Italy.	68
		Introduction to Political Thought	Politics	Do we have some rights simply in virtue of being human?	75
		Comparative Politics of East-Central Europe	Politics	Are the changes of regime in East-Central Europe in 1989 best described as 'revolutions'?	72
		Political & Economic Anthropology†	Anthropology	How do anthropologists need to redefine 'work' in order to assess the nature of child labour?***	'2.1 or even better'
Monika	2	Media Formations	Sociology	Do we live in an age of neo-baroque aesthetics?	64

* Title changed by the student to omit instruction terms

** Unassessed essay/formative assessment, on occasion unmarked

*** Deducted 10 marks for late submission

† Best guess – unclear what course this essay was written for

Appendix 4 – Student essays 2007-8

	Year	Course name	Discipline	Essay title/s	Mark
Nathalie	2	Comparative European Politics	Politics	How useful are the theories of Almond (on political culture and cleavages) and Sartori (on party systems) in explaining the political instability experienced by pre-Fifth Republic France during the Third and Fourth Republics, Weimar Germany, and post-war Italy?	74
		France Under the Fifth Republic	Politics	Outline the main powers of the Constitutional Council and asses its role within the French political system.	57
		Cinema & Society	Sociology	Take two films from the British New Wave of the late 50s and early 60s and discuss how working class masculinity is portrayed.†	80
				Did the Merchant Ivory adaptations of E.M. Forster's work constitute a rejection or an endorsement of Thatcherite values of the 1980s and early 1990s?	85
Andreas	2	History & Philosophy of Economics from Ricardo to Keynes	Economics**	An examination into whether the purported 'new-view' interpretation of Ricardo is a representation of his true position.	84/A- †††
Sophie	2	Comparative European Politics	Politics	How useful are the theories of Almond (on political culture and cleavages) and Sartori (on party systems) in explaining the political instability experienced by pre-Fifth Republic France during the Third and Fourth Republics, Weimar Germany, and post-war Italy?	68

		Gender, Sexuality & Culture	Sociology	“As far as gender and sexuality are concerned, nature has ‘nothing to do with it’ (Weeks, 1985)”. Discuss this statement with reference to gender and/or sexuality.	78
		Political & Economic Anthropology	Anthropology	What can ethnography expose about child labour that journalism cannot?†	61
Claire††	2	Gender, Sexuality & Culture	Sociology	“As far as gender and sexuality are concerned, nature has ‘nothing to do with it’ (Weeks, 1985)”. Discuss this statement with reference to gender and/or sexuality.	48
		Policing & Regulation	Criminology	What do we know about the occupational culture(s) of the police? Why is it important?	68
		Psychology, Crime & Criminal Justice II	Criminology	Discuss the psychology of addiction and it’s [sic] relevance for understanding offending behaviour.	55
Sarah	3*	US Power in the Contemporary World Order	Politics	‘The emerging force of China in the world economy demonstrates clearly the limitations of US hegemony in economic terms.’ Discuss.	64
		The French Left & the Fifth Republic	Politics	Outline and account for the principal changes that took place in the social composition of the socialist and communist parties’ electorates in the course of the 1970s and 1980s.	64
Martin	3	Property & Distributive Justice***	Economics	Compare and contrast the ways in which Grotius and Locke theorise common property in the state of nature. How do their discussions of common property shape their accounts of the right of necessity?	63
				Explain Smith’s distinction between justice and benevolence. What are the implications of this	73

		Latin American Politics	Politics	distinction for the scope of justice and for the treatment of the necessitous poor in particular? Critically assess the concepts of 'functional' and 'dysfunctional' leadership with reference to contemporary Latin America. Use case study material from TWO countries of your choice to substantiate your analysis.	60
Thomas	3	Property & Distributive Justice***	Economics	Compare and contrast the ways in which Grotius and Locke theorise common property in the state of nature. How do their discussions of common property shape their accounts of the right of necessity?	78
Monika	3	Sociology of Family Life & Intimacy	Sociology	There is a great deal of worry about the decline of 'the family' in Britain. Is it reasonable to be so worried?	72

* Deferred the third year until 2008-9

** Course taken at the Canadian university he transferred to after the first year; course unit title suggests the emphasis away from the technical end of Economics

*** Notionally an Economics course but content more consistent with Political Economy/Political Philosophy. Students taking this course could submit a second essay if they were not happy with the mark for the first – the higher mark only counted towards the final grade for the course. Martin submitted a second essay but Thomas, who also took the course, did not

† Unassessed essay/formative assessment

†† Did not provide any essays in the 2006-7 session

††† Mark awarded in both numeric and alphabetic form; unclear how much the essay contributes to the final mark

Appendix 5 – School marking criteria

Marking Criteria

High First Class (75+)

Such answers *fully* answer the question in a coherent manner and can be expected to show *excellence* with respect to the following criteria:

- insight and depth of understanding of the material;
- the exercise of critical judgement along with clarity of analysis and of expression;
- knowledge of the relevant literature.

First Class (70-74)

Such answers are *highly competent* and provide a *near-full* and well-structured answer to the question and can be expected to indicate *some of* the following qualities:

- insight and depth of understanding of the material;
- the exercise of critical judgement along with clarity of analysis and of expression;
- good knowledge of the relevant literature.

Upper-second Class (60-69)

Such answers are *overall competent* and provide a generally well-structured answer to the question and can be expected to indicate *most of* the following qualities:

- a reasonable-to-good understanding of the material;
- clarity of analysis, of argument and of expression;
- at least selective knowledge of the relevant literature;

Lower-second Class (50-59)

Such answers indicate *some understanding* of the issues and provide an adequate answer to the question. They can be expected to show *most of* the following features:

- a basic understanding of the material;
- clarity of analysis and argument, albeit limited in extent;
- some awareness of the relevant literature;

Note: What distinguishes a high Lower-second Class from a low Upper-second Class is greater extent of understanding of material and clarity of analysis and argument, as well as at least some selective knowledge of the relevant literature, not mere awareness of its existence.

Third Class (40-49)

Such answers indicate only a *rudimentary* understanding of the issues and offer *only partial* answers to the question. They can be expected to show the following features:

- sparse coverage of the material with several key topics missing;
- unsupported assertions and little clear analysis or argument;
- important errors and inaccuracies

First and Second Years: Compensatable Fail (30-39)

Such answers fail to deal with the question in a way that suggest more than a fragmented and shallow acquaintance with the subject. They are often error-prone and lack coherence.

First and Second Years: Uncompensatable Fail (0-29)

Such answers fail to demonstrate the ability to engage with the question.

Third Years: Fail (0-39)

Such answers, at the upper end, fail to deal with the question in a way that suggest more than a fragmented and shallow acquaintance with the subject, while, at the lower end, they fail to demonstrate the ability to engage with the question at all.

Appendix 6 – School policy on marking

From institutional policy on marking

Policy on marking

...

Anonymous marking

5. Anonymous marking helps to reassure students and others that marking is fair, and hence work should be marked anonymously wherever possible.

This clearly excludes tasks such as performances and presentations, but is required for all formal written examinations.

For intermediate cases, reasonable efforts should be made to achieve anonymity, for example by having essays submitted with a removable cover sheet, but in all cases the choice of assessment task should be governed by its suitability for assessing the intended learning outcomes rather than its suitability for maintaining anonymity.

...

Appendix 7 – Feedback on Susie’s politics essay

Essay Comment

Indicative Feedback: Markers should provide each assignment a mark on a 1-10 scale, (where 1 is entirely unsatisfactory and 10 is exemplary) for each of the following criteria:

ARGUMENT

Ability to answer question set: 7

Quality of structure: 7

Demonstration of theoretical awareness: 7

Empirical accuracy: 7

Logic and coherence: 7

Analysis over description 7

Demonstration of criticism skills: 7

Demonstration of independent thought: 7

SOURCES AND USAGE

Evidence of reading/research: 10

Effective use of evidence/literature 7

WRITING STYLE

Clear writing style: 8

Good use of grammar: 8

PRESENTATION

Assignment Length: 8

Quality of Referencing: 8

Quality of Spelling: 8

Quality of Bibliography: 8

Markers should also provide substantive comments on the assignment designed to supply helpful feedback for the student.

COMMENTS

You have written a good essay which covered the main points. The argument which you have made is based on independent thought and a clear understanding of the two models and the three country case studies. There is not much that you need to do in order to get yourself into the first category. The biggest problem with your essay in its current format is that your introduction could have been more focussed and structured around your argument.

1st Marker: Paul Copeland Provisional Mark: 68 Date: 14/12/07

2nd Marker: Provisional Mark: Date:

External Examiner: Provisional Mark: Date:

Final Mark:

Appendix 8 – Feedback on Tim’s politics essay



POLITICS ASSESSED ESSAY COMMENT SHEET

Number: 5810000		Degree Programme: BA (ECON)		Course Code: POL120911		
Scale: 5 - excellent, 4 - good, 3 - satisfactory, 2 - poor, 1 - very poor						
		5	4	3	2	1
ARGUMENT:	Answers question	✓				Does not answer question
	Well structured	✓				Badly structured
	Shows theoretical awareness	✓				Shows no theoretical awareness
	Conceptual clarity	✓				Conceptual confusion
	Empirically accurate	✓				Full of empirical errors
	Logical and coherent	✓				Illogical and incoherent
	Analytical	✓				Descriptive
	Critical	✓				Uncritical
	Shows independent thought	✓				Does not show independent thought
	SOURCES AND USAGE:					
	Evidence of reading/research	✓				No evidence of reading/research
	Effective use of evidence/literature	✓				Ineffective use of evidence/literature
WRITING STYLE:	Clear	✓				Obscure
	Good use of paragraphs	✓				Poor use of paragraphs
	Grammatically correct	✓				Grammatically incorrect
PRESENTATION:	Appropriate length	✓				Too long/short
	Good referencing	✓				Poor/inconsistent referencing
	Good spelling	✓				Poor spelling
	Good bibliography	✓				Poor bibliography
Comment: <div style="font-family: cursive; font-size: 1.2em; padding: 10px;"> A very competent essay that shows a good understanding of all the key concepts and a good critical approach. </div>						
1 st Marker: <i>S James</i>		Signed: <i>S James</i>		Date: <i>20/12/06</i>		
2 nd Marker:		Signed:		Date:		
External Examiner:		Signed:		Date:		
Deducted for unexcused late submission and faulty bibliography/referencing:					Final Mark: <i>68</i>	

Appendix 9 – Cathy’s gender essay

I.D 7044322

Gender, Sexuality and Culture.

‘As far as gender and sexuality are concerned, nature has nothing to do with it’ (Weeks, 1985).

Sexuality has become accepted over time, to denote varying forms of sexual behaviour and orientation. (Giddens, 2006, p. 436). In general, sociologists use the word sex to refer to the anatomical and physiological differences that identify male and female bodies.

Gender, in contrast, is related to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not essentially a direct creation of an individual’s biological sex (Giddens, A. 2006, p. 458).

Cranny-Francis et al defines gender and sexuality in their book, Gender studies: Terms and debates as this:

“Gender is the culturally variable elaboration of sex, as a hierarchical pair where male is coded superior to female. Sexuality, she says, is a set of social processes which produce and organise the structure and expression of desire” (Cranny-Francis et al, 2003, chap 1).

In all societies there are sexual norms that support a number of practices whilst discouraging or condemning others. Members of society are taught these norms during the socialisation period. Over the last few decades sexual norms in Western cultures have been related to ideas of romantic love and family relationships. Such norms, however, vary among different cultures. In some cultures homosexuality has either been tolerated or actively encouraged within certain contexts. The ancient Greeks, for example, believed that the love for boys or men was the highest form of sexual love. Accepted types of

1

sexual behaviour varies between different cultures, which is one way we recognize that sexual responses are learnt rather than innate (Giddens, 2006, p. 439). We are going to look at the historical roots of gender and sexuality and explore how sexology has been influential in constructing meaning to gender and sex. Furthermore, we will look at the statement put forward by Weeks and develop his view, with reference to gender and sexuality, that nature has nothing to do with the formation of our sexuality and gender. Does nature in actuality have nothing to do with it? Could it be an amalgamation of both nature and nurture? Do cultural values and morals impact the configuration of ones gender and sexuality?

Looking back through the history of sexual behaviour we notice that it was moulded primarily by Christianity (Giddens, 2006, p. 443). Whilst the Bible was not intended as a history or scientific text book we can, however, use it as a starting point of understanding, as Christians believe the creation of man and woman. Adam and Eve, who were created in God's own image, were blessed by God and were told by Him to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 27-28).

The view of the Old Testament could therefore be interpreted that sex was created for man and woman to reproduce within marriage. Thus we could presume that any sexual behaviour outside of this would be seen as being wrong. We see this in the book of Leviticus. However, we must look at the book of Leviticus in context. The main message of Leviticus is the holiness of God and its focus was on behaving differently to other civilizations around. Its purpose was to outline the duties of the priests and Levites in worship and a guidebook for living differently for the Hebrews. In the New Testament,

Jesus' teachings do not focus on sex, outside of marriage, as being a bigger issue than other sinful behaviour we adhere to. In fact he taught the opposite, he could do this through his claims of being the Son of God. It is true to say that throughout the history of the Church (people who follow Jesus Christ) many have interpreted scripture without taking into account the context of the time which may possibly have been seen as Church being out of line with reality. These Biblical narratives set out the ways in which our gender and sexuality were created from the beginning of time. Although for nearly two thousand years Western attitudes towards sexual behaviour were based on the teachings of the Church, many people ignored or reacted against them. The idea that sexual fulfilment can and should be sought only through marriage was rare (Giddens, 2006, p.443).

With a decline of Christianity, attitudes of sexuality signal a shift in authority from religion to science. In the early nineteenth century religious presumptions in relation to sexuality became partially replaced with medical ones. In the late nineteenth century there was a new preoccupation with the scientific study of sexuality which produced a sub discipline, 'sexology' (Weeks, 1985, p. 64). The founding fathers of sexology, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (he collated explicit details from hundreds of case studies cataloguing 'sexual perversions') and Havelock Ellis (he was seen as Britain's first scientist of sex), (Hawkes, 1996, chapter 4) believed that to comprehend someone's sexual behaviour you had to look at the biological essence of human character (Heaphy, 2007, Lecture 2). In the course of studies by Krafft-Ebing and Ellis sexology came to mean both the study of the sexual impulse and of relations between the sexes, for

ultimately they were seen as the same: sex, gender, sexuality were locked together as the biological imperative (Weeks, 1985, p. 69). Sigmund Freud's work (1856-1939), psychoanalysis, was important in the development of radical theories of sexuality. It was concerned with the unconscious and desire. According to Freud, the learning of gender differences in infants and young children centred on the possession or absence of the penis. Freud's work opened up the door to change and Alfred Kinsey actually moved it on when he studied tens of thousands of subjects on the diversity of human sexuality. Kinsey saw Krafft-Ebing's work as 'unscientific' but in the end he paid tribute to Krafft-Ebing and other pioneers before him as he says: 'They broke new ground' and 'They made our job possible' (Weeks, 1985, p.69). Kinsey became famous through his book written in 1948, *Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male*, where he challenged categories of 'abnormality' and said that sexual activity was a sign of health. He also attacked narrow categories of 'homosexuality' 'heterosexuality' and 'bisexuality'. In 1953 he wrote another book, *Sexual Behaviour of Human Female*, after studying eight thousand females. In this he defends female masturbation and rediscovers the clitoris for female pleasure. William H. Master, Virginia E. Johnson (*Human sexual response*, 1966) and Kinsey emphasised male and female sexuality as essentially the same in capacity for arousal and satisfaction but observed significant difference in experiences of sexual satisfaction between men and women (Heaphy, 2007, Lecture 2).

Sex and gender are now seen by the majority of sociologists as having a distinct difference (Oakley, 1972). Sociological interpretations have taken contrasting positions when looking at the issue of sex and gender. Amongst these views we are going to look at

essentialism and later social constructionism. Until recently a great deal of what we have known has come from biologists, medical researchers and sexologists. Sociobiology was first developed by E.O Wilson (1975) and David Barash (1979) applied it to sex and gender. It is based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Like Darwin, sociobiologists believe that humans and other species develop and change through a process of natural selection. Individuals of a species vary in their characteristics, and from this view point, those which are best adapted to their environment are most likely to survive and reproduce. Since offspring tend to have characteristics similar to those of their parents due to genetic inheritance, the characteristics of a species can change as the fittest survive. But sociobiologists go far beyond his original theory (Haralambos et al, 2000, p. 129).

There is evidently a biological foundation to sexuality seeing that female anatomy and male anatomy are different. Furthermore, it is unmistakable that reproduction is imperative or humans would become extinct (Giddens, 2006, p. 437).

A number of sociobiologists believe that hormones, chromosomes, brain size and genetics are responsible for innate differences between a man and woman. They articulate that these differences can be seen across cultures in one form or other, implying that natural factors are responsible for the differences between genders. For example some sociologists like to draw attention to the fact that in most cultures men rather than women take part in hunting and warfare. This being said indicates that men possess biologically based tendencies towards aggression that women lack (Giddens, 2006, p.459). In the model of the separation of sex and gender, 'sex' is referred to those

biological characteristics, such as chromosomes (XX and XY), genitalia, breast and beard development, that make us female or male. Gender denoted the roles and appearances we enact in our lives that mark us out as feminine or masculine gender, as we grow up. Therefore, while our maleness or femaleness were assumed to be biologically fixed, new ways of being men and women remained possible because masculinity and femininity might be reinterpreted and modified. Ironically although this distinction between sex and gender has gradually become influential outside of sociology it has lost its appeal within the discipline (Delphy, 1993). One reason for this is that the biological distinctions denoted by the term 'sex' are not always as clear-cut as we might think. Chromosomal patterns are sometimes more complex than a simple XY or XX; some people have genitalia that look ambiguous and do not allow an easy classification into either a male or female category. It has been argued that such 'intersexed' individuals demonstrate how the process of assigning a sex to a body is actually a social rather than a biological one (Kessler, 1998), (Mathewman et al, 2007).

Therefore, I would say, there is evidence to suggest that there is definitely a biological basis to our gender and sexuality. However, Bleier (1984) says that sociobiology is ethnocentric as it assumes that all human behaviour corresponds to that in the white capitalist world. For example, sociobiologists merely assert that females are 'coy' and males 'aggressive' without examining different societies (Haralambos et al, 2000, p. 13). Most sociologists currently believe that ones sexual orientation, whether heterosexual, homosexual or something else, results from a complex interplay between biological factors and social learning but some scholars argue that biological differences are the

most important, predispositioning certain people to become homosexual from birth (Bell et al, 1981). Biological explanations for homosexuality have included differences in such things as brain characteristics of homosexuals (Maugh and Zamichow, 1991) and the impact on foetal development of the mother's in utero hormone production during pregnancy (McFadden and Champlin, 2000). These studies, which are based on small numbers of cases, give highly inconclusive results (Healy, 2001).

Instead of seeing sex as biologically determined and gender as culturally learned, some sociologists have argued that we should view both sex and gender as socially constructed products. This is called social constructionism. Theorists who believe in the social construction of sex and gender reject all biological basis for gender differences. They argue, gender identities emerge in relation to perceived sex differences in society and in turn help to shape those differences (Giddens, 2006, p. 462). Oakley (1974) believes that gender roles are culturally rather than biologically produced.

Jeffrey Weeks has researched, taught and written widely on the theory, history and politics of sexuality. He is one of the major writers of sexuality studies from a Social Constructionist view point. Weeks rejects an innate conception of sexuality and any account that presumes a set biological core can explain human behaviour, this is the Freudian 'sexual repression' theory. Firstly Weeks rejects biological essentialism, which is the idea of an unchanging, natural sexuality. Secondly, he rejects identity-based essentialism, which is the presumption of sexuality and gender categories as set eternal that are articulated in a linear fixed stream right through history (Weeks, 1985, p. 6).

Weeks, in his book *coming out*, uses homosexuality to demonstrate that the issue was not the repression of a natural asocial sexuality but the socio-historical production of sexuality and sexualities. He points out that while homoerotic behaviour or 'acts' have 'most likely occurred at all times and places... the emergence of the 'homosexual as a distinct category of personhood is a late-modern Western phenomenon' (Hostetler and Herdt, 1998, p. 249). Weeks' perspective on gender and sexuality has a lot in common with the work of post modern writer Michael Foucault, who is commonly seen as the father of Queer Theory.

Whilst there is obviously a biological basis to human sexuality, we may well articulate that generally sexual behaviour seems to be both innate and learnt. In the West, Christianity has been significant in shaping our values and morals towards sexual attitudes. Attitudes towards sexuality have altered over time from being quite repressive to having a more permissive outlook in today's civilization. A number of sociologists would argue that differences between men and women are genetically determined along with some who believe that gender and sex are socially constructed products that can be shaped and altered in various ways (Giddens, 2006). My opinion would be that our sexuality and gender are innate, although society influences the decisions we make in regards to our sexual orientation. Decisions in relation to what biology 'is' along with where it stops and 'society' starts are affected by social beliefs and norms. Where we draw the line between the two depends on the frameworks of knowledge that guide us in our attempt, because what we 'see' is conditioned by what we expect to see. This is important for a discussion of sex and gender, because it means that judgements about

which attributes 'belong' with (biological) sex and which 'belong' with (social) gender depend on the ways knowledge is socially constructed. Therefore, it is difficult to separate biology from society. In this sense, the gender and sex distinction over-simplify complex social processes. Without a doubt gender is complex. Ideas that 'men and women are different' that 'gender differences are natural' or even that 'everybody knows' what a man or a woman 'is', fail to give a true impression of these complexities (Mathewman et al, 2007).

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Appendix 10 – Feedback on Cathy’s gender essay

Essay Comment

STUDENT ID NUMBER: 7044322

COURSE CODE: SOCY20891 Gender, Sexuality & Culture

OVERALL STRUCTURE

Organisation of content:

Fair - could be better organised to more clearly engage with the issues and improve the flow of argument

Relevance to question:

Much of what you write is relevant in some way, but at a basic level

Range of relevant issues:

The range would have been improved by moving more fully beyond basic introductory sociology texts

ANALYSIS

Quality/Originality:

You over-reliance on basic sociology texts, some lecture notes, and a surface reading of Weeks weakens the quality of analysis

Development of coherent & reasoned argument:

You repeat the ‘obvious’ arguments in favour of ‘innate’ elements of sexuality and gender after discussing the problems with this - so therefore this is quite weak

Accuracy of content:

Fair

Use of evidence & illustration:

You introduce various ‘illustrations’ from the bible and from introductory source materials - but at this level, more advanced use of evidence and illustration is necessary

Relevant literature used:

This is the source of the major weaknesses of the essay - you do well to incorporate Weeks, but you have mostly engaged with only basic and general sociological introductions. This is a 2nd year degree module - and we covered a range of literature on complex theories and debates. But you do not appear to have engaged with these.

COMMUNICATION

Accuracy of referencing/bibliography:

Your bibliography is incomplete, and your referencing is weak because it does not clearly and consistently indicate your sources

Clarity of expression:
Good

Literacy (grammar, etc.):
Good

Presentation of document:
A stronger conclusion was possible

GENERAL COMMENTS

You indicate a basic understanding of the issues & some familiarity with relevant literature, theories and debates. However, your essay is weakened by an over-reliance on basic introductory sociological texts, and limited engagement with the wealth of work we have covered on the course. More reading of appropriate literature would improve the essay and analysis considerably.

PROVISIONAL MARK 48

Appendix 11 – Tim’s unfinished anthropology essay

How do anthropologists need to redefine ‘work’ in order to assess the nature of child labour?

In recent years a discourse of the universal rights of children has become increasingly prominent, advocating rights to a protected childhood in which personal development can take place. Child labour is seen as hindering this process, and states should attempt to restrict ‘work’ to adults. However, this universalised rights discourse reflects a specifically Western notion of modern childhood that is not shared by all. And it is complicated by the fact that even the accepted work of children in education and for family can be exploitative. Moreover, anthropologists have contended that such arguments ignore how insecure household economies drive children to work. Indeed, Levine has argued that the hegemonic form of anti-child labour campaigns displaces attention from the larger sea of economic inequalities which affect adults as well as children (152). As we shall see, anthropologists have much to offer in assessing the nature of child labour. Their comparative approach can highlight flaws in the anti-child labour discourse that might otherwise be overlooked.

Comment [C1]: Good intro. Covers a lot of ground.

The universalised discourse is epitomised by the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Underlying this is an idealised notion of childhood as a period of innocence and vulnerability, and the idea that all children’s self-development should be enabled through provision of education, basic healthcare and protection from abuse and neglect (Stephens, 35). Within this framework, child labour should not “jeopardize... the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play”¹. Stephens argues that the discourse of universalised rights is based on the naturalisation of a modernist notion of childhood that is culturally specific to the West (Stephens, 37-39). As Ariès argued in the 1960s, no such notion existed in medieval times, and the emergence of a concept of childhood (as opposed to adulthood) was tied to industrialisation and capitalist wage labour. These increasingly separated work from the home, separating those too young to work from their parents and necessitating formal education. The universalised discourse is also predicated on the nuclear family as the primary kinship group and basic productive unit, and Ivy contends that as a result many other family forms are counted as deviant (Stephens, 37). In addition, it is ironic that developing countries are told to restrict child labour by the moralising of

¹ <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

groups primarily from the first world, given the extensive use of child labour by the first industrialising countries in the 19th century. In fact, some post-colonial movements, for instance in Madagascar, have regarded child labour as important in the development of an independent culture.

Comment [C2]: Again- well put- good summary.

The problematic nature of child labour is further emphasised as it may be hidden in educational or domestic work otherwise seen as acceptable. Labour for family highlights one aspect of this difficulty. Children helping out with domestic chores or on the family farm or business, for example, is not generally objected to. However, in such cases child labour may subsidise underpaid parents at the expense of education (Levine 149-150). In addition, Helleiner has argued that apprenticeships may present what is essentially unwaged child labour as education. This raises the question of when states should intervene to prevent exploitative or damaging child labour. Certainly, there is agreement that at no point should a child be engaged in work that is harmful or dangerous, nor that interferes with education.

The understanding of work as an exclusively adult activity is further undermined by the harsh realities of the 'post-modern', global capitalist economy. Economic insecurity is prevalent throughout the majority world and significant parts of the developed countries and, as a result, many adults share financial responsibility with their children. Zigman examines the effects of deindustrialisation in undermining the household economy in Kensington, Philadelphia. The area suffers from very high unemployment and adults are sometimes unable to sustain their household economically. A 'reverse dependency' is created as children work to contribute to the household economy and earn a supplemental income outside it.. Furthermore, labour regulation intended to protect children from work has had the ironic effect of forcing such children 'under the law' and into informal or illegal employment, including prostitution (Zigman, 194). A further consequence of the increasing globalisation of production is that the intricate web of social relations involved are concealed. As Klein has observed, child labour is hidden in advertising images and brands. Both Stephens and Levine contend that such political interventions have an important role to play, but only when children's "emotional and physical health is at risk" (Levine, 152). Furthermore, Levine's study of child farm hands in South Africa provides evidence of how the focus on child labour tends to "sidestep adult exploitation" (140), as both are primarily a result of wider economic and social inequalities on a national and global level.

Comment [C3]: Once again- this is very clear and well argued.

In summary, it is important that anthropologists avoid viewing child labour in the simplistic terms of the universal rights discourse. Their comparative approach highlights how it naturalises a specifically Western notion of labour-free childhood, which is in fact far from universal. Whilst there is nonetheless agreement that labour should not be allowed to negatively interfere with a child's development, it is also evident that state action to this end is troublesome. Indeed, Zigman illustrates how blanket bans on child labour may cause as many problems as they solve by forcing children into illegal or marginal employment. Levine joins her in arguing that the most significant factor pushing children to work is economic insecurity, something which labour restrictions do nothing to counteract but may actually exacerbate. Both Zigman and Levine argue the wider issue here is the economic inequality which affects adults and children alike.

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This is fine- what there is of it! There isn't much to add- you clearly get the main points of the readings. I would just say to make sure that you have a detailed discussion of the problems of defining the very concepts of childhood and labour in a non-ethnocentric way, as we discussed in the tutorials. With more detail this is clearly a 2:1 or even better.

Appendix 12 – Tim’s distributive justice essay

Student: 5810000

Compare and contrast the ways in which Grotius and Locke theorise common property in the state of nature. How do their discussions of common property shape their accounts of the right of necessity?

Both Grotius and Locke posit essentially “two stage”¹ accounts of human history that begin with an egalitarian system of common property in a primitive state of nature and culminate with the establishment of a system of private property, wherein natural law shapes a right of necessity. In his seminal “The Laws of War and Peace” Grotius theorises a universal right to use the common that is revived under dire necessity in a system of private property. Locke’s “Two Treatises of Government” builds upon the ideas of Grotius to assign to each a God-granted natural right to subsistence which manifests, under private property, in a right of necessity to the surplus of others. He also asserts a correlative duty of charity on the part of those with more than enough to survive to secure the needs of others. This goes further than Grotius’s right merely to use things in the common. But, as will become clear, both subject their rights of necessity to severe limitation. This has important implications for the consistency of their accounts with natural law.

Whilst the details of Grotius’s and Locke’s arguments contrast, the logical frameworks of their arguments are broadly similar. Both use the notion of humankind’s original position in a state of nature, without political authority or positive law, to help justify innate rights of necessity that also apply after a transition to private property. These in-born rights flow from their conceptions of human nature and history and build on the natural law tradition, asserting moral truths that apply to all people, regardless of place or the agreements they have made.² This, as Buckle argues, results in their understanding of property relations “as a natural response to the changes in human circumstances.”³ Natural law applies throughout history. It reflects human nature and is not specific to certain people at certain times. For Grotius, “proceeding as it does

¹ Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume*, 17.

² “Locke’s Political Philosophy”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³ Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, vii.

from the essential traits implanted in man [by God],”⁴ natural law is underpinned by humanity’s sociable and rational nature. His rather optimistic assessment of human nature sees humankind as distinguished by its “impelling desire for society” that is “peaceful, and organized according to the measure of [man’s] intelligence.”⁵ Locke, writing to “attack ... royal absolutism”⁶ at the time of the English Revolution, attempts in “The Two Treatises of Government” to justify private property as flowing from claims to equality and the Earth as a common endowment. He shares the basic egalitarian notion that “God... gave the world to mankind in common,”⁷ and his state of nature is one of natural freedom and the “equality of men by Nature”⁸ (in the sense of equal moral worth). Thus, both Locke and Grotius aim to make two arrangements which might, on the surface, seem mutually incompatible - common property in the state of nature and, then, private property - consistent with the equitable character of natural law.

Beyond the basic similarities in how they construct their arguments, Grotius and Locke theorise common property in the state of nature quite differently. Grotius posits an original right to use the common, whereas Locke’s account concentrates on mankind’s duty to preserve itself as God’s creation. Drawing on biblical accounts of early humanity, both Grotius and Locke appear to see the state of nature as more than merely an analytical device. They clearly believed that there have been people in the state of nature,⁹ and Locke holds that it existed in many parts of the world (notably America) at the time. Grotius’s state of nature is one of abundance in which “each man could at once take whatever he wished for his own needs, and could consume whatever was capable of being consumed.”¹⁰ Taking from the common does not (at this stage) diminish what is available for others. However, once something is first occupied it implies the

⁴ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, Prolegomena 12.

⁵ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, Prolegomena 6.

⁶ Waldron, *The Right to Private Property*, 149.

⁷ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, I.4.30.

⁸ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.2.5.

⁹ See Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.2.14 – “the world never was, nor never will be, without numbers of men in that state”, and that, “there are still great tracts of land to be found, which... still lie in common” (II.5.45).

¹⁰ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.II.1.

exclusion of others; this is guaranteed by each person's right to personal integrity.¹¹ This "primitive right of user"¹² is common in the sense that everyone has it; however it is not a right to a common possession in the sense of joint ownership.¹³ Grotius cites Cicero's example of seats in the Roman public theatre as analogous to common property in the state of nature.¹⁴ Like the original use right, every citizen has the liberty to take an empty seat - an act which excludes others as no-one can be forced to leave (due to each person's right to personal integrity). But, if the theatre is full, then no-one has the right to remove anyone else. In other words, there is a right *to* the common but no right *in* it. We can therefore view these rights as privileges, rather than claim rights. This illustrates well the contrast between Grotius's negative community with no positive duties and Locke's positive community which combines a right to subsistence with a correlative duty of charity.

Locke's state of nature is defined by man's duties as God's creations to "preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully," and to do "as much as he can to preserve the rest of mankind."¹⁵ As this suggests, it is an inclusive community. One's own preservation comes first, but after that one's principal concern must be the preservation of others - this has priority over all egoistic interests of one's own. Thereby, Locke's positive community entails both a claim right to subsistence and a correlative duty of charity. As we shall see there is, however, controversy over whether Locke in fact wanted positive obligations on the wealthy. Labour is central to Lockean property, as he who "hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own... thereby makes it his property."¹⁶ The use of the term 'mixing' has been subject to much debate, but for our purposes it is enough to state that Locke meant that man had a right to the useful products of his labour. More than this, God "hath also given them

¹¹ Salter, "Hugo Grotius; Property and Consent." *Political Theory*, 29, no. 4 (2001), 542.

¹² Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VI.2.

¹³ Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, 36.

¹⁴ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.II.1.

¹⁵ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.2.6

¹⁶ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.5.26.

reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience.”¹⁷ Man had a duty to labour that was reinforced by man’s weakness - the “penury of his condition.”¹⁸ However, unlike Grotius, Locke outlines strict limits to what men can take from the common, as the state of nature is one of only moderate abundance. One could only acquire by labour “as much as any one can *make use of* to any advantage of life before it spoils.”¹⁹ Any more than that and, without any way to store value over time, things would spoil. “Whatever is beyond this is more than his share, and belongs to others.”²⁰ Taking more than one could use is not only useless, it is effectively theft as it deprives others of their equal right to the same goods. There are, as shall be discussed below, varying accounts of how to extend these conditions to private property.

Having established a common endowment, Grotius and Locke then proceed to explain how private property can also be consistent with natural law. The right of necessity is key here. For Grotius, private property appears in embryonic form as use of the common amounts in some degree to using up, which implies the exclusion of future users. Even in the state of nature “a certain form of ownership was inseparable from use”²¹ and “when property or ownership was invented, the law of property was established to imitate nature.”²² Similarly for Locke, although the fruits of the Earth were given to men in common, “there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial, to any particular men.”²³ An extensive exposition of the emergence of private property is beyond the scope of this essay. But the “kernel” of Grotius’s account is that, as human society expanded, common ownership became increasingly impractical.²⁴ Furthermore, mankind was not content to live in primitive simplicity and innocence forever.²⁵ They choose a more refined way of life. The

¹⁷ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.25.

¹⁸ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.32.

¹⁹ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.31 (*italics added*).

²⁰ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.30.

²¹ Hugo Grotius, *On the Right of Capture*, 228, quoted in Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, 10.

²² Hugo Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas*, quoted in Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, 10.

²³ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.29.

²⁴ Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, 37-8.

²⁵ See Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.II.4. – “men were not content... but chose a more refined mode of life.”

result is that primitive common ownership is gradually abandoned in favour of the more productive system of private ownership. In a similar vein, private property emerges in Locke as the invention of money extends the logic of mixing one's labour, enabling unprecedented levels of accumulation.

Both Grotius and Locke see the development of a system of private property as inevitable (natural) and seek to maintain the natural equity embodied in common property with rights in dire necessity to things which have already become the property of another. For Grotius, supreme necessity has been excepted from all human laws, as:

In direst need the primitive right of user revives, as if community of ownership had remained, since in respect to all human laws the law of ownership included – supreme necessity seems to have been excepted.²⁶

This stems from the “Intention of those who first introduced individual ownership ... to depart as little as possible from natural equity,”²⁷ and ensures that taking when in dire need is therefore not theft. However, the needy must also go to lengths to ensure that the necessity is real – “in no way avoidable”²⁸ – and the right does not hold when the possessor has equal need – “for in like circumstances the position of the owner gives him preference.”²⁹ Grotius’s right of necessity is properly a revival of the original *ius* right. There is an “obligation to restore the things of another used in case of necessity, whenever restoration shall be possible.”³⁰ As we shall see, this right to charity is, in Tully’s term, interpretive, and does not impose binding duties on the wealthy.

By contrast Locke’s version appears, at least initially, as a positive duty of charity correlative to the claim rights of the needy.³¹ The needy have:

²⁶ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VI.2.

²⁷ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VI.1.

²⁸ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VII.

²⁹ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VIII.

³⁰ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.IX.

³¹ Waldron, *The Right to Private Property*, 146-7.

a Right to the Surplusage of his Goods; so that it cannot be justly denied him, when his pressing Wants call for it... As Justice gives every Man a Title to the product of his honest industry... so Charity gives every Man a Title to so much out of another's Plenty, as will keep him from extream want, where he has no means to subsist otherwise.³²

In this formulation, from the First Treatise, Locke's right seems pretty unequivocal. But there is much debate about how far he limits it in the Second Treatise. Indeed, the extent to which the authors meant the rights of necessity to apply against private ownership is the subject of much contention.

It was certainly not the intention of Grotius or Locke to undermine private property, and both their rights of necessity are subject to significant limits, which raise pertinent questions about inequality. It is arguable that they believe that the system of private property increases the productive power of society so much that, by making even the worst off wealthier than the richest in a primitive economy, necessity becomes avoidable for the whole society. Indeed, although Grotius's right of necessity appears as a revival of the original use right - something analogous to a basic, universal (human) right that is superior to property rights - the examples he gives are all in unpredictable, disastrous circumstances: provisions failing on a voyage, fire, and ships caught in nets.³³ Grotius believes his right of necessity is "adequate to maintain natural equity against any hardship occasioned by private ownership."³⁴ But, in contrast to Locke, there is not the merest hint of a general (perfect) duty of charity. Benevolence is a second-order virtue. It is not true "that the owner of a thing is bound by the rule of love to give to him who lacks."³⁵ Rather, it is merely the case that "all things seem to have been distributed to individual owners with benign reservation in favour of the primitive right."³⁶ What emerges from Grotius, therefore, is a right to necessity limited to unfortunate circumstances. There is no general duty of charity, and a significant degree of inequality seems justified.

³² Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, I.4.42.

³³ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VI.3.

³⁴ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.IX.

³⁵ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VI.4.

³⁶ Grotius, *The Laws of War and Peace*, II.II.VI.4.

In a similar vein, Locke argues that the Earth is given to the use of the “industrious and rational... not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.”³⁷ Some take this to deny or marginalise the duty of charity referred to in the First Treatise. Macpherson, for example, concludes that Locke is defending unrestricted capitalist accumulation.³⁸ When the invention of money enabled exchanging the perishable products of the common for longer-lasting things, Locke seems to suggest that unlimited accumulation is possible as long as nothing spoils: “the exceeding of the bounds of his just property lying not in the largeness of his possession, but the perishing of anything uselessly in it.”³⁹ Inequality is then inevitable and justified as a result of men’s “different degrees of industry... apt to give men possessions in different proportions.”⁴⁰ Moreover, he argues that “The invention of money, and the tacit agreement of men to put a value on it, introduced (by consent) larger possessions and a right to them.”⁴¹ Here, Locke appeals to consent to the introduction of money as implying consent to “a disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth.”⁴² This seems a weak justification for the unequal property holdings that result. We are forced to assume that Locke sees low-wage labour and servants as compatible with both the original common and labour as the origin of property.⁴³ In all, although it is not the case that those who have wealth have no social duties, the duty of charity mentioned in the First Treatise is clearly much weakened in light of the Second Treatise.

This has been an in depth discussion of two authors who, on the face of it, attempt the similar task of making common property in the state of nature and private property consistent with natural law. However, this essay has contended that Grotius’s and Locke’s formulations of common property in the state of nature and, later, private property contrast in both how they are constructed and the extent of their implications for the needy. Grotius presents a negative

³⁷ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.33.

³⁸ “Locke’s Political Philosophy”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³⁹ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.46.

⁴⁰ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.48.

⁴¹ Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.36.

⁴² Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.50.

⁴³ See Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.27 - “the turfs my servant has cut”.

community of property characterised by a right of use that is revived under necessity in private property. Locke goes further to propose a right to subsistence with corresponding duties on behalf of the rich. However, it was not the intention of either to undermine the institution of private property – quite the opposite – and both go on to limit the right of necessity. Grotius severely restrains the needy's right of use to disastrous circumstances, and is silent about inequality. Whilst Locke's initial account comprises a more extensive right to subsistence, this too is partial. It has been shown that these limitations are justified largely through their assumptions about increased productivity in a system of private property. But it is quite a step to move from common property to private property. Their accounts of consent seem inadequate, and questions are left regarding, in particular, those unable to work, the lazy, and the unlucky.

Word count: 2,468.

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