

One Step Forward and Two Steps Back: Woolgar, reflexivity, qualitative research and a line dancing class

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Abstract

This paper attends to two issues. Woolgar seems to be concerned with the danger of relativism in doing ethnographic studies. Given Woolgar's distinction between *benign introspection* and *constitutive reflexivity*, what can be done with an ethnographic study of a Line Dancing Class.

The discussion focuses on a subcultural account-as-object-reality as one way of presenting the account in contrast with following Garfinkel's policy for doing studies, ethnomethodology. The concern is with how categorisation is accomplished by members who attend at a Line Dancing Class. Distinctions are drawn by members between Cowboys, Accomplished Dancers, Regulars and Visitors. Categorisation is achieved by everyday practices involving dress and attire, greetings, banter and performing on the dance floor. The argument follows that Woolgar's doubts are either overstated or premature, that work can and should go on until a time might be reached when sufficient work has been done to warrant these kinds of concerns and discussions associated with them.

Introduction

Probably the first use of the notion of reflexivity in modern Sociology can be attributed to Charles Horton Cooley:

That the "I" of common speech has meaning which includes some sort of reference to other persons is involved in the very fact that the word and the ideas it stands for are phenomena of language and the communicative life. It is doubtful whether it is possible to use language at all without thinking more or less distinctly of someone else, and certainly the things to which we give names and which have a large place in reflective thought are almost always those which are impressed upon us by our contact with other people.¹

George H. Mead's version of the same notion reads:

This process of relating one's own organism to the others in the interactions that are going on, in so far as it is imported into the conduct of the individual with the conversation of the "I" and the "me", constitutes the self.²

Reflection or reflexivity, then, involves some idea of thinking, or 'reflective thought' (Cooley), and some notion of 'constitutive of the self' (Mead), and is fundamental to being a social being.

It is one thing to take this ontological position. It is quite another to work it out as an epistemological stance and to apply this stance as a research method.

The students of Cooley, Mead and, the Symbolic Interactionist, Herbert

Blumer,³ were, however, confident in their application of research methods which are generally connected under the heading, 'Qualitative Research'. Some were sufficiently confident that they produced what are taken as authoritative texts in 'qualitative research methods'.⁴ The focus of these texts is to take up the Cooley-Mead-Blumer position, to focus on the individual as the source of 'data', to focus on interaction between individuals as the 'representation' of that data – the epistemological position – and to focus on 'observation' interaction as the method for 'displaying' that data. The 'qualitative' lies in the epistemological criterion of 'validity-for-the-individual' rather than the opposed criteria of 'reliability-from-the-method' and 'precision-of-the-data' espoused by the quantitative researchers.⁵

The test of validity lies in the 'reflexivity' of the researcher being validated by the 'observed' reflexivity for the individual-in-interaction⁶.

If there is a debate within qualitative research about reflexivity, then the opposing position would be attributable to Harold Garfinkel, Harvey Sacks and Ethnomethodologists.⁷ Schwartz and Jacobs characterise Garfinkel's 'The Principle of Reflexivity' in the following way:

Many of these reasons can be summarized by a principle Garfinkel has emphasised: the principle of reflexivity.

[Studies, pp. 7-9]

This states that descriptions about some aspect of the social world are simultaneously within (part of) the very world that they describe. As a result, there is no room in the social world merely to describe anything. Descriptions in the social world, since they are within that world, simultaneously affect social relationships, execute moral evaluations, produce political, moral and social consequences, and so on. Descriptions are almost always "doing" many more things in a social situation than simply "reporting a set of facts".⁸

We can summarise the 'debate, then in the following form:-

For the Cooley/Mead/Blumer position, the process of reflexivity can be seen to be going on by an observer who, in some sense, participates in the actions or activities of the actors s/he is observing. For Ethnomethodology, reflexivity is solely a members' accomplishment in 'his accounting practices the member makes familiar, commonplace activities of everyday life recognisable as familiar, commonplace activities'⁹ and access requires a different methodological 'policy', namely Ethnomethodology. Members talk (as in Conversation Analysis¹⁰ or documentary accounts (video, tape, written records, compiled statistics)¹¹ are offered as sources of members' accounts if treated according to the 'policies'.¹²

The Woolgar Problem

Woolgar distinguishes these two positions as *benign introspection* ('reflection - entails loose injunctions to "think about what we are doing"')¹³ to *constitutive reflexivity* ('The establishment of a connection between document and underlying reality (in the present case, between representation and object of study) is a back-and-forth process.')¹⁴ The argument revolves around the notions of 'the *distinction* (or *distance*) between representation (image) and research object (reality); and the *similarity* of these separate entities.' Benign introspection (*qua* Cooley/Mead/Blumer) is represented as resting on a greater distance of the observer-as-ethnographer from the cultural object (primitive peoples and other exotica) compared with the constitutive reflexivity (*qua* Garfinkel/Sacks) where the constant interchanging 'amounts to a denial of distinction and a strong affirmation of similarity; representation and object are not distinct...' ¹⁵ The major concern of the Woolgar text seems to be 'tensions at the heart of social science over the relationship between observation (image), observer and observed (subject/object). The pretensions of social science to scientific ideals makes reflexivity seem, at best, a self indulgent luxury; introspection - the disengaged reflection upon the use of observational methods - is tolerated as a way of improving research.'¹⁶ Woolgar seems concerned to avoid a destructive charge of relativism, arising out of reflection/reflexivity while castigating those making the charge to apply the same methodological criteria to their own reading of the 'doing science' that

ethnography (and other qualitative methods) represents.¹⁷ He concludes that 'doing an ethnography' of the text produced by the ethnographer is the nearest sociology might get to giving 'authority' to the research materials or knowledge claims being produced.¹⁸

I propose to rebut Woolgar's scenario by pointing out some fundamental errors in the assumptions upon which his argument rests and, using an example, demonstrate ways that a piece of qualitative research could be used in doing sociological work to demonstrate the points being made. The example is just the kind of "first time through"¹⁹ ethnographic text for which Woolgar proposes an "ethnography of the text." It is a simple ethnographic account of members' categorisation and recognition practices embedded in the context in which they take place. It seeks to demonstrate how ordinary people engaged in an everyday, leisure activity go about solving the problem of locating themselves in a 'career' or 'trajectory'²⁰ which constitutes the 'locally produced, naturally organised, reflexively accountable phenomena of order'²¹ that is an American Line Dancing Class. Or so might an ethnomethodological account of the type described by Woolgar do its sociological work.

Alternatively, what ontological, epistemological and methodological work is Woolgar proposing in the position that he takes? Where and how might an observer (methodological account) look for the representation (epistemological account) or the object-reality (ontological account) to avoid the "self indulgent luxury" of intro-

spection and the more feared charge of relativism likely to be levelled by "Scientists" or quantitative sociological researchers?²²

An American Line Dancing Class : Accounting for members' categorisation practices - Some Fieldwork Notes:

1. Role: Either "Participant as Observer" or "Member-as-sociologist-doing-sociological-inquiries."

2. Reason : got bored actually watching the dancing, decided to scribble some notes on scraps of paper. Then got more and more involved in observing rather than participating.

3. Place: Out of town, out of the way theme-park (Fort San Antone). But not generally known about. Seems to want to attract aficionados only. Came across it originally, by accident while attending a Car Boot Sale in its grounds. Comprises a number of buildings including shops for buying C&W clothing and attire, stables, caravans and chalets for weekenders, and the main dance hall. This is an oblong building entered at one corner. The stage (as in performing) fills the other corner at this end. Across the far end of the oblong is a bar with a standing area with one of its corners given over to a food serving area (beef burgers, spare ribs, and all that). The dance floor (of wood) is surrounded on three sides by tables and chairs although the long side is raised to a kind of balcony. Opposite this is a walkway with access to the dance floor and to toilets, although access to the dance floor can be gained from the three non-balcony sides. Adjacent to the Stage is a set of sound equipment manned by an elderly man who plays the music (and is often

overwhelmed by the technology).

4. The staff :

- a doorman who collects the entrance fee and wears the requisite cowboy hat and boots, with jeans and an appropriate shirt. He sometimes wears a six-gun with belt and holster.

- two bar staff and a cook, not in cowboy gear and one or two young men (C&W gear optional) who collect empty glasses. Dancing when not busy.

- a woman dance instructor who wears cowboy hat and short skirt with cowboy boots but also has a mobile microphone attached to a head band and fitted to sit in front of the mouth. This operates through a belt pack to the sound system operated from the Stage.

- The Sheriff, an elderly man with long tresses of silver hair and drooping silver moustache. Generally fully attired in cowboy gear with holster, guns and Sheriff's star.

- two elderly women, at least one of whom appears to be related to the Sheriff (who owns the establishment) and who pass around in the evening selling raffle tickets.

1. The Participants:

- the Cowboys, whose highlight of the evening is the Shoot-Out with blank bullets and a sound-triggered timing machine. (One or two women occasionally participate). Full cowboy attire including guns and holsters is de rigeur. Each is known by an appropriate name (as in Slim Jim, the High Plains Drifter, and the like). These do not generally participate in the line dancing but stand around, proudly, cleaning their weapons and discussing matters of interest to them. They have no particular space in the Hall but tend to congregate towards the

bar-end. Towards the end of the evening, a Salute to the Confederate and US flags involves raising and lowering the flags to the tune of "Dixie", ending with a three-shot salute. Participation in the Salute, often kneeling, is also de rigeur for the Cowboys. Most are men aged between 25 and 60. One or two sport complete authentic American Indian outfits but do not participate in the Shoot-Out.

- The Accomplished Dancers - a small band of regular attenders who engage in displays of quite complex step combinations that make up 'line dancing'. Although of varying ages, this group divides roughly in two: a younger element in their teens and twenties who perform with gusto and verve adding extra spins and flourishes to demonstrate their competence, and the older group mostly in the forties and fifties who demonstrate their abilities competently but with a more physically economic and less energetic style. Some younger people participate more with this second group as they are recent 'graduates' and are still nervous of their abilities. One or two of the older women attempt to 'mix it' with the younger group only to demonstrate the obvious physical restrictions that attend ageing. The younger group is predominantly male with one or two younger women and teenagers. Although with varying membership this group normally totals about ten. Also equal in size and with revolving membership the older group is predominantly woman who gather around two or three 'cool dudes' who were accomplished dancers in their youth and have moved on to this new interest. Various of the accomplished dancers are 'corralled' into assisting, by demonstration, the learners during

teaching sessions. This group tend to wear cowboy hats and boots with appropriate shirts, T-shirts and jeans, or C & W dresses. In direct contrast to the Cowboys who seek authenticity (e.g. the recent genre of Western movies which focuses on the arduous and primitive life-style of the California Gold-Rush, the Texas Range Wars and the 'real' life of the Mountain Hunters or Cattle Drive cowboys), the accomplished dancers wear attire common to a more recent generation of popular Country and Western singers of the USA and Canada (e.g. Garth Brooks or Reba MacIntyre). Their dress is more colourful and 'in fashion' with decorative adornments of feathers, leather tassels, metal studs, buttons and motifs. This is in direct contrast to the cowboys who must look worn, 'distressed' and authentically 'used'. This is resonant of the Mod-Rocker, Scooter Boy-Biker contrast which marked the youth of the older members. Accomplished dancers will own and wear several different sets of 'smart gear'.

Occasionally individual males who have won competitions (British or European Championships) are given the floor, without formal ceremony, to 'strut their stuff'.

- The Regulars - the fifty to sixty people who regularly attend the 'lessons' and who divide more or less equally into 'beginners' and 'intermediates'. Since lessons are described as beginner dances or intermediate, all regulars participate in the beginner dance lessons but the less experienced, less accomplished or slow learners do not take the floor for an intermediate lesson. The regulars are aged anywhere

from about 10 years old to some in their sixties and seventies. Women outnumber men about 3 to 1. The longer attending the more likely they are to sport the cowboy/cowgirl uniform but they are obvious in the group because their attire looks very new or recently acquired. Much show is involved in appearing for the first time in 'new gear'. Generally the participants wear T-shirts. Newest regulars wear an assortment of everyday going-to-the-pub gear. No-one 'dresses up' for an evening out. Women's make-up and hair-styles are restrained and everyday men's attire is similarly subdued rather than showy.

- Visitors divide into three groups and complete the ensemble. Visiting parties make up this group on Fridays and Saturdays coming in coaches from related clubs and dancing classes. Their attendance also includes a meal served before the evening dancing lessons get under way and they tend to fill the balcony tables and chairs. They can be excitable and rowdy. Other assorted odds and ends come in and may simply sit and watch or sometimes participate in the dancing lessons. No-one seems to pay much attention to this small fringe. A group of Country and Western musicians, who can be quite famous and are attended by a small 'fan following', perform in the second half of the evening. They are usually setting up their equipment while dancing lessons are in progress.

6. The dancing lesson: after an initial half hour of appearing, drinking and chat, the instructor, using the microphone, calls the dancers to the floor. After some authoritative remarks about dance floor etiquette (pairs around the edge, no elaborate stuff during lessons) and safety warnings about unregulated children who

may get their feet stomped, all learners face the front where the instructor stands facing away from the group talking through the microphone and being watched by the first row, or two, who can see her feet. Line dancing is, basically, different and increasingly complex combinations of steps (e.g. the Grapevine - walking sideways while crossing the feet, left in front or behind right, and vice versa; heel-toes and so forth). Turns (quarter and half) mean that the dancer probably uses no more than a square meter of the floor to complete a dance sequence.

There is no division of the floor space by age or gender, although regulars tend to gather at the front or rear, usually in the central area. Instruction involves slowly building the complete sequence by attempting one or two steps, cumulatively. When the complete sequence has been talked through and tried in this way, two sequences are talked through, then the sequences are 'danced' to music with continuous spoken instructions. The instruction finishes with the dance to music being repeated without talk. Difficult steps or step sequences are repeated in response to a general acclaim for more instruction, or for progress, at the request for confirmation of the instructor. The instructor will intersperse instruction sequences with banter with one or more of the regulars regarding their accomplishment, lack of, or any other matter that comes to the instructor's attention (new clothes). In particular regulars who try to sit out a dance lesson may be identified from the floor and called to account ("Have you brought a sick note?"). The banter is friendly but the language is sometimes

crude probably associated with the cultural origins of the instructor. Regulars rarely return these 'attentions' although when directed at accomplished dancers they often occasion replies in kind. Mild 'insult exchanges' are common. Teaching dances are interspersed with short breaks when the accomplished dancers take the floor to demonstrate. Learners who stay on the floor attempting to 'imitate' their peers are not looked upon kindly. Although nothing is said, the non-verbal language

7. Sociological notes:

a) Attire is obviously a key to group membership and categorisation. This distinguishes, particularly, the Cowboys from the accomplished dancers and the more renowned regulars. These groups are fairly discrete with inter-group interaction kept to a minimum, although the Instructor, the Sheriff and the Raffle Ticket Sellers traverse the prominent participant groups.

b) Becoming a regular : this first involves frequent and/or noticeable attendance (as, for example, in being the subject of banter during instruction). Membership categorisation among regulars, while sometimes marked by the acquisition of more appropriate membership attire, especially as the dancer appears to be near graduating to accomplished dancer when they participate competently in the between-teaching dancing, is actively marked by the instructor. Greeting-kissing occurs at any time during the evening where the instructor can mark a regular as she makes first direct interaction with that participant. At sometime in the evening all accomplished dancers and regulars will be 'greet-kissed' by the instructor although accomplished dancers will also greet-kiss each other. Man-to-Man is

marked not with a greet-kiss but with verbal greetings, handshakes or hugging and back-patting. This is notably different from the greeting and member recognition of the Cowboys. c) Being a Cowboy: Cowboy-to-Cowboy recognition, claimed in the authenticity of the attire, is achieved with an intricate left-handed handshake. The left hand (not the 'gun-hand') is generally covered with a fingerless glove associated with pulling the 'gun-hammer' in the Shoot-out. The gloved hand is offered and held in the greeting by grasping the base of the extended thumb and/or wrist. In this way, Cowboy visitors are recognised as category members and can participate in the Shoot-Out. It would appear that this form of hand-shake greeting is common to Cowboys throughout the network of Country and Western venues and is the recognition and categorisation device for all 'competent' members. Aspirant 'Cowboys' (particularly teenagers or young boys) may possess all the attire attributes necessary for membership, although without the 'distress' of full authenticity, but are not proffered the hand-shake by full members.

d) Visitor membership can generally be recognised by contrast (and, consequently, self-exclusion) from the 'rituals' associated with being a competent member of other established categories. Occasionally 'outsider' status is marked by forms of sanction where visitors transgress the operating social order in attempting to participate in rituals or activities where their 'competent membership' has not been recognised. For example, accomplished dancers proscribe learners in the between-classes dancing. Regulars, in

contrast, when they have the floor, will accommodate learners and assist them in 'practicing' the dances. Occasionally, 'showy' visitors may be 'marked' by clearing the floor leaving them exposed to scrutiny by 'members'. Visitor groups who 'take the floor' can call up a competitive member-group, including accomplished dancers with regulars, who perform a 'different' dance and compete for control of the dance-floor space. These conflicts are rarely resolved because dances are relatively short (a few minutes per CD track) but the 'sanction' is clear. However, in the busy fervour of a Friday or Saturday night event, such 'sanction signals', although repeated can be ignored and disputes are resolved by separation of the competing dancing groups into separate areas of the floor.

e) A footnote on ethnicity: all Cowboys are white, all accomplished dancers are white, all regulars are white. No black or Asian people have ever attended. Two women of oriental origin are visitors.

Line Dancers as Dancer Subcultures

One sociological *object-reality* which might be sought and found, as an example, would be the "subculture", as in "delinquent subculture."²³ This is to treat the piece as a participant *observer* reflecting on the 'data' (*representation*) uncovered. Line dancing is treated ironically as a form of adult deviance or as sociologically exotic.²⁴ In the example, the participants could be broken down into various 'subcultures' – e.g. The Cowboys with their authentic attire, ritual Shoot-Out, Salute to the Flag and 'gun-talk'. The banter between individuals or representatives of groups can be cast as a kind of 'argot' or subculture-specific language. Dance-

floor etiquette and the sanctioning of Learners taking the floor at inappropriate times can be seen as examples of subcultural norms. The exclusion of juveniles from the Shoot-Out and the various stages of qualification required to become an Accomplished

Dancer can be seen as rites of passage, "status graduation"²⁵ or subcultural socialisation processes. A Mertonian²⁶ cast can be given to the "deviants" by casting them as "innovators" or "ritualists" to identify their "modes of adaptation" arising from societal dysfunction (anomie)²⁷ to which the Line Dancing and Country and Western Subculture is a "reaction formation".²⁸ The Visitors might even be cast as "contraculture"²⁹ or "informal sub-system" attempting to subvert the dominant culture and calling down sanctions on the deviants-within-the-deviance.³⁰

Woolgar's object-reality can be readily found and demonstrated. Actions fit patterns, the "cultural dopes-as-social-actors" have been explained.³¹ Ethnography as the search for an "object-reality" can continue to be done and meet those methodological criteria necessary to Woolgar's prescription. The research is not negated by doubts about the methodological consequences of reflexivity.

But the very errors charged against the accounts of delinquent subcultures can be levelled at this account. First, the subjects are not uniform possessors of measurable externally applicable sociological attributes (as in lower, working-class youth).³² The account offers few such characterisations, or 'facts', and only in so far as they

appear relevant to members. These characterisations for the purposes of description are far short of the statistical precision necessary to the epistemological criteria specifiable for the measurement of determining factors necessary to “object-reality”³³ Commonalities of individual, personal social histories are not obviously relevant, or sought out, for those attending the Line Dancing Class. The noted exception could be race-ethnicity.³⁴ Equally, this could be a consequence of chance or serendipitous (biased) sampling of the sessions observed. At the level of “top-down” theorising, the dysfunction or anomie necessary to characterise the “fundamental” cause is also not obvious from the observation. The analysis classically accounts for “too much deviance.”³⁵ The danger is not being overwhelmed by doubts about the “self-indulgent luxury” but resides in the very process of doing it in the first place. The reflexivity attending this account brings into the account more dubious “theoretical” baggage than the “observation” warrants or authenticates. The theoretical work might be more or less elegant³⁶ – the academic footwork is more complex than any Line Dancing sequence – but the link between the methodological work and the theoretical work as “proof” of “inference” is dubious, at best.³⁷

An Ethnomethodological Account

If the approach taken to the Line dancing Class is ethnomethodological, what questions ought to be asked and what might such an account look like? How and in what ways might we avoid, if that is the preference, the relativism of reflexivity that Woolgar seems to fear?

The analysis could proceed simply to record the “just-thatness” of the event. The problem for attenders is to “attend” to the social order, to identify the groupings they might wish or be able to join, to identify the significations of membership, to understand the taken-for-granted rules involved to “become a line dancer”. The first problem to attend to seems to be the “dress code”, what to wear. One of the buildings associated with “Fort San Antone” houses a shop which is announced as being open at the end of the Line Dancing Class. Working out how to join progressively involves understanding the dress code and choosing to fall in with it, or not. Adopting the attire is a membership claim and members seem to take some time in “learning” how to make this claim appropriately before investing in the expensive dress of one or other of the groups. This decision is also contingent on making the requisite progress towards competence in dancing or showing interest in the authenticity requirements of Cowboys, showing curiosity and engaging in “gun-talk”. The progression toward becoming a Regular, and then an Accomplished Dancer would seem to be easier, or at least more obvious, than toward being recognised as a Cowboy.³⁹ Being constantly aware of how others, especially visitors, breach rules and avoid rule breaking while participating *seriously* in learning to dance by regularity and frequency of attendance, attracts the attention of the Instructor and other Accomplished Dancers and Regulars who assist in giving the Class. Accomplishing this effectively while a Learner will invite Banter from the Instructor and

accepting that invitation by competent 'responding' occasions progressive recognition, the move from Learner to Regular. Visitors or Others breach rules, do not competently recognise Banter and are not 'seen' to be regular attenders or to take seriously learning Line Dancing. The transition marker for recognition as a Regular is to 'accept' the kiss-greeting of the Instructor, and for recognition as an Accomplished Dancer, to participate in kiss-greeting with other Regulars and Line Dancers. The big move seems to be the moment for confidently and competently, without breaching rules, joining the dancing that goes on in the breaks between Lessons. Membership moves are occasioned, often by invitations from other Accomplished Dancers to 'take the floor'. This is how becoming-a-Line-Dancer seems to be done.

Concluding Discussion

So the methodological work is done. How well?, or badly?, is difficult to judge except to say that every effort has been made to follow the policy Garfinkel sets out.⁴⁰ The reflexivity, here, is attached to the attenders. Members go about doing the everyday-taken-for-granted-things that members do in doing a Line Dancing Class. Any formal structures identified are identified in and as member's phenomena:

.. by formal structures we understand everyday activities (a) in that they exhibit upon analysis the properties of uniformity, reproducibility, repetitiveness, standardization, typicality, and so on; (b) in that these properties are independent of particular production cohorts; (c) in that particular-cohort

*independence is a phenomenon for members' recognition; and (d) in that phenomena (a), (b) and (c) are every particular cohort's practical, situated accomplishment.*⁴¹

How far this placates Woolgar's fears is, again, a question that we can turn to. The ontological need for "object-reality" is not attended to in those terms. Sharrock and Button argue:

*This is undoubtedly a bonus for sociology in the sense that it is certainly eye-catching to deny that 'society' or 'the individual' exists, but the truth about such controversies is that they usually boil down to rather less than meets the eye. Those who deny the existence of society or of the individual are, if taken at their word, found to be implausible, but as often as not their actual ontological claims prove far less drastic than they sound – apparent denial of reality to society or individual turns out to be rather less than that.*⁴²

They go on to argue for their preference to treat the issues as methodological problems because they see no work for the "social actor" or "social structure" to do and that persons are no more nor less than the ways they are treated. Woolgar, I think, would need further convincing that this was not a deadly decline into relativism. While Sharrock and Button may express their disinterest or preference in this way and while Garfinkel and Sacks propose "ethnomethodological indifference"⁴³ to such matters, Garfinkel's doctoral dissertation clearly does not disavow these concerns.⁴⁴ He clearly adopts in

the dissertation the phenomenological position of Alfred Schutz and Edmund Husserl, that the “social world” can only be found in “intersubjective understanding”⁴⁵ Perhaps Garfinkel is prepared to leave the issue there as being of no further real interest at that time and before more ethnomethodological work has been done. The Respecification paper⁴⁶ begins to attend to epistemological matters ending in an eight-part account of the studies and their results. In particular he states:

*Fourth, the reported phenomena are only inspectably the case. They are unavailable to the arts of designing and interpreting definitions, metaphors, models, constructions, types or ideals. They cannot be recovered by attempts, no matter how thoughtful, to specify an examinable practice by detailing a generality. Fifth, they were discovered. They are only discoverable and the cannot be imagined.*⁴⁷

And it is this statement that ends the debate about reflexivity, and about suspending qualitative research work for fear of the lapse into relativism. What Garfinkel demonstrates clearly here, is that Woolgar misunderstands the ethnomethodological position with regard to ethnography and other qualitative methods and in respect of epistemological and methodological questions. Garfinkel eschews the “arts” of those sociologists trying to “do science”. The “respecification” is for a different sociology where the work must go on because much has yet to be done “in ethnomethodological inquires of discovering the identifying issues of the problem of social order, and ground my claim in the real-world practices of their

craft.”⁴⁸ For the ethnomethodologists, doubts about reflexivity are not crucial. The work must go on and doing that work is, for Garfinkel, “doing sociology”.

So the problem posed is a problem for Woolgar but not for either versions of reflexivity, for *benign introspection* or for *constitutive reflexivity*. Each wishes and can do its own work in its own way. What is clear is that these two versions are not either end of some continuum of reflexivity wrapped around a problem of relativism.

For the Participant-Observer-doing-subcultural-theory, the object-reality is the theoretical grounding for the analysis. For the ethnomethodological account, relativism is not at this time an issue because the work is not far enough advanced and because they are less interested in accounting for their work in that sort of way. Unlike a Line Dancer, Woolgar would seem to want to take two steps back. The work to be done demands that the sociologists take at least one step forward.

Notes:

¹ Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York: Scribner's, 1902, p.179.

² George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934, 179.

³ See J. C. Verhoeven, *Methodological and Metascientific Problems in Symbolic Interactionism*, Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit, Department Sociologie, 1995. Verhoeven has interviewed Blumer and a set of his doctoral students and colleagues, including Anselm Strauss, Norman Denzin, John Lofland, Tamotsu Shibutani, Eliot Friedson and Howard Becker. Although many of the interviewees were uncertain of the ‘label’ (Symbolic Interactionist) as it is applied to them individually, Verhoeven argues that all were heavily influenced by Blumer and by Blumer's interpretation of Dewey, James and

Mead.

⁴ Notably, B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, **The Discovery of Grounded Theory**, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, Norman K. Denzin, **The Research Act**, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 3rd ed., 1989, and Howard Becker, **Sociological Work**, Chicago: Aldine, 1970.

⁵ C. A. Moser and G. A. Kalton, **Survey Methods in Social Investigation**, 2nd ed., London: Heinemann, 1971.

reference been made to Harvey Sacks, **Max Weber's ANCIENT JUDAISM** (unpublished undated) where such a technique is elegantly demonstrated.

⁶ Howard S. Becker, problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation, **American Sociological Review**, vol. 23, December 1958, pp. 652-660.

⁷ The 'if', here, refers to a problem of categorisation. The two groups, Symbolic Interactionists and Ethnomethodologists, present problems of categorisation in that they were not always mutually exclusive. Edward Rose, for example, offers a list of topics and 'members' to be involved in the work associated with the "Decision-Making" grant awarded by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. This list includes Harold Garfinkel, Craig McAndrews, Egon Bittner, Lindsay Churchill, Omar K. Moore, Allen Anderson, Sol Markowitz, Evelyn Hooker, Anselm Strauss, Harvey Sacks, Anitol Holt, David Sudnow, Harry Stack, Henry Lennard, Erving Goffman, Talcott Parsons and Marion Cummins. See Edward Rose, **Making Society Out**, Unpublished Manuscript, Department of Sociology University of Manchester, June 6-7th 1963.

⁸ Howard Schwartz and Jerry Jacobs, **Qualitative Sociology: A Method to the Madness**, New York: Free Press, 1979, p.51.

⁹ Harold Garfinkel, **Studies in Ethnomethodology**, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967, p. 9.

¹⁰ Harvey Sacks, An initial investigation of the usability of conversational data for doing sociology, in David Sudnow (ed.), **Studies in Social Interaction**, New York: The Free Press, 1972, Harvey Sacks, **Lectures on Conversation** (ed. Gail Jefferson), Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

¹¹ Harold Garfinkel 91967) op. cit., especially pp. 76-207 and, for example, Aaron V. Cicourel, **The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice**, New York: John Wiley, 1968 and Aaron V. Cicourel, **Theory and Method in a Study of Argentine Fertility**, New York: John Wiley, 1974.

¹² Harold Garfinkel 91967) op. cit., p. 11.

¹³ Steve Woolgar (ed.), **Knowledge and Reflexivity**, London: Sage, 1988, p. 22.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 31

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁸ "This suggests the interrogation of the nature of textual representation in the course of research: the ethnography of the text" (Woolgar, *ibid.*, p. 31). Interestingly, Woolgar focuses the discussion on photographs used by 'anthropologists'. A different light might have been thrown on the conclusions about the possibilities of the proposal had

¹⁹ Harold Garfinkel, Michael Lynch and Eric Livingston, The Work of a Discovering Science Construed with Materials from the Optically Discovered Pulsar, **Philosophy of the Social Sciences**, vol. 11, 1981, p. 134.

²⁰ Anselm Strauss, Shizuko Fagerhaugh, Barbara Sucek and Carolyn Wiener, **Social Organization of Medical Work**, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

²¹ Harold Garfinkel, Respecification; evidence for locally produced, naturally accountable phenomena of order, logic, reason, meaning, method, etc. and as of the essential haecceity of immortal ordinary society (I) – an announcement of studies, in Graham Button, (ed.) **Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 10ff.

²² See Woolgar (1988) op. cit., Here Woolgar is treated as an 'exemplar' for a growing movement of proponents of Harold Garfinkel's work whose confidence in ethnomethodology has weakened requiring some 'object-reality' to ground such work. See also James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, **Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology and Interpretive Practice**, in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, (eds.), **Handbook of Qualitative Research**, Thousand Oakes: Sage, 1994, pp. 262-272 and Paul Drew and John Heritage (eds.) **Talk at Work**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

²³ I propose to employ the theoretical sources laid out in Russell Kelly (ed.), **Criminology: Subcultures and Crime**, **Criminology Open Learning Project**, vol. 4, Preston: Open College Federation of the North West, 1984, for example, Albert K. Cohen, **Delinquent Boys**, Glencoe: Free Press, 1955; Richard Cloward and Lloyd C. Ohlin, **Delinquency and**

Opportunity, Glencoe: Free Press, 1960; and Richard Cloward et al, **Theoretical Studies in the Social Organization of the Prison**, New York: Social Science Research Council, 1960.

²⁴ The Sociology of Deviance movement tended to deal with 'exotica': dance, musicians, drug users, queers and peers, check forgers, pool hustlers, Skid-Row alcoholics, transvestites, prostitutes, card sharps – all of the aforementioned have been sociologically 'treated'.

²⁵ Albert J. Reiss, The Social Integration of Queers and peers, **Social Problems**, vol. 9, No. 2, Fall, 1961, pp. 102-120.

²⁶ See Robert K. Merton, **Social Theory and Social Structure**, New York: The Free Press, 1957, pp. 131-160.

²⁷ Emile Durkheim, The Normal and the Pathological, in Marvin E. Wolfgang, Leonard Savitz and Norman Johnston (eds.) **The Sociology of Crime and Delinquency**, 2nd ed., New York: John Wiley, 1970, pp. 11-14.

²⁸ A. K. Cohen (1955) op. cit.

²⁹ M. Yinger, Contraculture and subculture, **American Sociological Review**, vol. 25 No. 5 1960, pp. 625-635.

³⁰ Cloward et al, (1960) op. cit.

³¹ Wes Sharrock and Graham Button, The social actor: social action in real time, in Graham Button, (ed.) **Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 137-175.

³² A. K. Cohen (1955) op. cit., and Walter B. Miller, Lower class culture as a generating milieu of gang delinquency, **Journal of Social Issues**, vol. 14, No. 3, 1958, pp. 5-19 criticised in Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young, **The New Criminology**, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 133ff.

³³ See for contrast, Terence Morris, Delinquency and the culture of the criminal area, in W. G. Carson and Paul Wiles, (eds.), **Crime and Delinquency in Britain: Sociological Readings**, London: Martin Robertson, 1971, pp. 78-98, where precise statistical accounts of the characteristics of delinquents are offered. It is interesting to note that Morris based this work on Clifford R. Shaw and Henry Mackay, **Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas**, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942, one of the notable products of the Chicago School of Social Research from where much qualitative research originates.

³⁴ The note on race-ethnicity at the Line Dancing Class can only be clarified in subsequent 'run-throughs' of the observations made for the

purposes of this essay. No judgement or implication of racism, or ethnic prejudice, is intended by this observation. Simply, for a sociologist-engaged-in-sociological-inquiry at this time, it seemed a matter worthy of note.

³⁵ David Matza, **Delinquency and Drift**, New York: John Wiley, 1964.

³⁶ Sharrock and Button (1991) op. cit., p. 138.

³⁷ Compare the claims made with the proscriptions in Howard S. Becker (1958) op. cit., pp. 652-660.

³⁸ Michael Lynch, Method: Measurement – ordinary and scientific measurement as ethnomethodological phenomena, in Graham Button, (ed.), **Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 98.

³⁹ There is potentially an account available, here, but the "observation" so far has not made that account "visible" and it looks like much more time and attention would need to be devoted to looking to see what would be there. Getting inside enough to engage in talk with the Cowboys seems to involve a more elaborate process than that of joining the Line Dancing Class.

⁴⁰ Garfinkel (1967) op. cit., pp. 1-11.

⁴¹ Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, On Formal Structures of Practical Actions in John C. McKinney and Edward A. Tiryakian (eds.) **Theoretical Sociology: Perspectives and Developments**, New York: Appleton-Century Crofts 1970, p. 346.

⁴² Sharrock and Button (1991) op. cit., p. 141.

⁴³ Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) op. cit., p. 345.

⁴⁴ Harold Garfinkel, **The Perception of the Other: A Study in Social Order**, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1952.

⁴⁵ Alfred Schutz, **The Phenomenology of the Social World, (Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt)**, Vienna: Julius Springer, 1932, trans. George Walsh, London: Heinemann, 1972.

⁴⁶ Garfinkel (1991) op. cit., pp. 10-19.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.16

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 17.