

Psychotherapy as a “structured immediacy”

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Abstract

We discuss ways of including circumstances systematically in the analysis of social interactions, providing an example of how psychoanalytic child psychotherapists establish the occasion of group therapy. We use the work of Austin (1961, 1962) and Anscombe (1957) to take on board the fact that social interactions happen in “the here-and-now” and yet are also situated in participants’ lives and social arrangements at large.

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1. Introduction

The fact that language is irreducibly indexical was of great importance for emerging ethnomethodology, so much so that Garfinkel initially defined it as an examination of the rational properties of indexical expressions (Garfinkel, 1967:11). Since its inauguration, however, ethnomethodology has paid relatively little, and certainly no systematic, attention to *language* and the forms that its indexicality takes. We consider one way in which linguistic form avails sensitivity to context, which is through action identification, or, more plainly, the matter of saying what people are doing.

We draw upon two prominent sources in ‘ordinary language philosophy’, John Austin and Elizabeth Anscombe. Austin sought to show how the identification of the actions done in and by ‘saying things’ is connected to circumstances. Anscombe’s notion of identifying actions ‘under a

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description’ draws attention to the way in which formulations of action identities incorporate reference to context. A single action can be identified in different ways, depending upon the connection to the world at large that is being made. This draws attention to what is ‘built into’ action identifications made by parties to social interaction as well as those who would analyse them. Austin and Anscombe both stress the reciprocal identification of a doing and its context. Both analyse how doings fits their contexts *and* what their effects on their contexts are.

Attempts to understand the conduct in the ‘here-and-now’ face two problems. First, in what respect is context external to ‘here and now’ and can it be identified independently of it? Second, how is what happens in the ‘here and now’ related to anything located other than within the same locale? We argue that Austin and Anscombe’s complementary efforts bypass the dualism of action and context, enabling the identity of the here-and-now to be found within and relative to occasions, with the ‘context’ being no catalogue of independent identified external features. ‘Structured immediacy’ relates to the way that matters of context are made immediate to the doings in and identity of an occasion, with relevant contexts being actualised in and through those doings.

To make our position more tangible, in the second part of this paper, we analyse the first five minutes of a psychotherapeutic encounter which took place in a school. We show how therapists removed the encounter from the ‘in school’ context through their talk, and re-formed it as a therapeutic occasion, by modifying categorical relations of adult and child, pupil and teacher to enable them to actualise their kind of psychotherapy. The paper is part of our exploration of how the professional understandings of therapists articulate vernacular forms of psychotherapeutic expressions.

1.1. *Performatives and circumstances*

Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words* introduced a framework that most subsequent studies of language-mediated interactions follow, yet his handling of “circumstances” has been neglected and deserves a new look. The concept central to his analysis of how people “do things with words” is “performative”. Performative utterances involve not merely saying something (“locutionary acts” in his terms) but, partly or altogether, *also* doing something “*in* saying something” (illocutionary acts) or “*by* saying something” (perlocutionary acts). The problem is how does saying something become in addition doing something else? And how can saying “I do” be sometimes a marital vow, at other times a declaration of love, and at yet another time be nothing more than murmuring to oneself? Austin’s initial distinction between “constatives” (expressions which only “say something” and “represent facts”) and “performatives” (utterances which “do” something) turned out not to be intrinsic to language. That provisional distinction could not withstand scrutiny, for the class of “performatives” is, in a sense, all embracing—“statements” on which the philosophy of language traditionally focused are also illocutionary acts with felicity conditions of their own (Austin, 1962, lecture XI; cf. Searle, 1968; Warnock, 1989).

How to Do Things with Words initiated a revolution in the study of language—from thinking of sentences as representations with “sense and reference”, philosophers and psychologists – some of them at least – moved to thinking of utterances (rather than sentences and propositions) as conventional activities with conventional effects (Austin, 1962:3–4). Yet Austin’s problem – “how does saying something amount to doing something?” – was not simply created for and through his polemic about what the primary function of language is. Rather, it was, and still is, an instance of a more general problem—how does one activity become another activity in addition?

This problem has been addressed elsewhere in philosophy at the time (cf. Ryle, 1954; Wittgenstein, 1958; Anscombe, 1957), and subsequently (e.g. White, 1979) as a problem of how an action is understood in varying circumstances and identified “under descriptions”, but curiously, the two frameworks were kept apart. Austin, Ryle, Anscombe and White were all interested in establishing that any given action can, in fact, have many identities.

We document our approach by examining some of the ways that psychoanalytic child psychotherapists manage the environment of interaction with children, so that this affords psychotherapeutically appropriate and relevant descriptions and identifications of activities. We ask how psychotherapists change circumstances of imaginative play so that play activities become therapeutically significant. The change in circumstances is not something that happens *to* participants but it is instead accomplished in and through their joint activities.

Our first concern is then with the roles Austin assigned, in turning words into deeds, to “circumstances” (including concomitants such as participants’ desires, beliefs and intentions). Our aim is to provide an alternative to the cognitive understanding of performatives, current in the contemporary ‘theory of mind’ paradigm (see e.g. Wellman, 1990; Leudar et al., 2004), according to which they are behaviours – linguistic or otherwise – attended by mental states that cause them, explain them and give them meaning. We aim to put performatives back on track by thinking of them as “actions under description”.

The problem for our project is to bring together Anscombe’s and White’s observations, with Austin’s analyses. The former apply to actions in general and have the advantage of being able to accommodate cultural variation and historical change (see Hacking, 2002; Sharrock and Leudar, 2002), whereas Austin focuses on linguistic actions. He distinguishes conventional linguistic acts, illocutions, and non-conventional linguistic acts, perlocutions, from each other and other activities. Can Austin’s locutions, illocutions and perlocutions be treated as one performative under different descriptions with each retaining the distinct properties revealed in Austin’s analyses?

We are working towards formulating a concept of “structured immediacy” to account for the observation that interactions *both* take place in the “here-and-now” and are locally managed, but also, and in addition, social practices constituted by exophoric circumstances managed by participants (see Leudar et al., 2008). The concept of “structured immediacy” is intended as a counterweight to the intellectualist view according to which the immersion in the occasion is something to be overcome, the stance obvious in the Piagetian account of development that invites us to think of the “the here-and-now” as a restrictive tyrant. We do not accept that the “here-and-now” is a primitive sensory experience equivalent logically to behaviour conceived as “a mere physical movement”. We argue that “here-and-now” occasions are indexical and structured by design, through participant’s activities both individually and collaboratively. The initial idea to be fleshed out in the analysis is that every interaction takes place in a concrete environment but that environment can be understood under varied descriptions through being connected by participants to wider ranges of circumstances. Such circumstances range broadly and may include aspects of culture, institutions and personal histories of participants as well as the happenings that more immediately envelop activities.

The concept of structured immediacy is designed to move the study of social activities beyond epistemic action-context dualism and should provide an account of how representations operate in practice, but without introducing a non-natural inferential and ontological gap between physical behaviours, meaningful activities and circumstances as the concept of “mediation” used in socio-cultural psychology sometimes does (Vygotsky, 1934/1962; see Leudar, 1991).

1.2. Circumstances in “Doing things with words”

Circumstances are essential in Austin’s account of “performatives” as is documented by the following:

(1)

“Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which words are uttered should in some way, or ways, be appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions.” (Austin, 1962:8; italics in the original).

So circumstances matter both in understanding performatives and in issuing them. But this has surely become a commonplace—since Austin wrote *How to Do Things With Words* much work has been done on the role of context in language production and comprehension (see e.g. the still engaging summary in Goffman, 1983), and many debates have taken place on how context should be thought about. It is reasonably clear now that:

- context (of an occasion) is not a “container” but rather like a “ground” in the “figure/ground” relationship, and as such the ground can become the figure;
- context is not something distinct in kind from the activities that it frames but something that is produced in acting, and yet it constitutes the activities in turn; and
- context is not simply and always merely a constraint on possible inferences—it can be instead something that obviates the need for inference or makes inference possible.

Austin foregrounds the circumstances of performatives through analysis of their infelicities: classifying infelicities is his method to determine what roles diverse circumstances play in performatives:

(2)

“Before the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types of the case in which something *goes wrong*” (Austin, 1962:14, italics in the original)

One subtle point to note is that the circumstances required for doing performatives are ordinary:

(3)

“performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood in ordinary circumstances.” (Austin, 1962:22, our emphasis)

Ordinary circumstances are not in the foreground, but are discernible by participants, and in consequence manageable. Circumstances are ordinarily presupposed – seen but not noted – but they can be topicalised in talk. Through his analysis of different infelicities (i.e. misfires, abuses, etc.; Austin, 1962:18–19) Austin points to different kinds of circumstances and also, but less directly, to the role these circumstances play in “happy” performatives.

What kinds of circumstances did Austin’s analysis of infelicities reveal and what functions do circumstances have in performatives? The central division among performatives is according to

whether a performative depends on an “accepted conventional procedure” (Austin, 1962:26)—illocutionary acts do, perlocutionary acts do not. From Austin’s examples, conventional procedures range from social institutions such as marriage ceremonies, making bets and naming objects or people, to more circumscribed doings, such as “promising”, “threatening” and “advising”, “stating” and “describing”. Austin does not define what conventional procedures are in general and instead notes that different performative procedures are “designed” for different circumstances and with different purposes in mind.

Austin then attempts to distinguish between infelicities produced by trying to effect illocutions without supporting conventional procedures and those occasioned by wrongly applying existing procedures. Take Austin’s example of marriage. In our culture one can only get married to somebody of the opposite sex. It is easy to imagine “same sex marriage” and desire it, but one can only get married to a same sex partner if that institution is in the society. The point is that performative procedures are social institutions, not thoughts or desires or intentions.

Having a legal “institution” is, however, not enough. There have to be, in addition, recognisable and accepted ways in and through which the procedure is carried out. For instance, if saying “I do” is to be a vow, it has to be uttered in a marriage ceremony by the right person (e.g. the groom, not the best man), in answer to the immediately preceding question “Will you . . .?”, put by the right person (e.g. a registrar) in the right place (e.g. registry office). The adjacency pair “Will you . . .? I do.”, however, only does its job in the ceremony if certain preconditions obtain (i.e. the groom is not married, the bride is present, etc.) and certain consequences follow (the bride also answers the question “Do you . . .” in affirmative.) The locution “I do” is a performative – the making of a marital vow – in just those circumstances.

The important point is that Austin’s “conventional procedures” are neither abstracted conceptions nor behaviour routines—rather they are unities of these two, and in effect conceptions inscribed and existing in practices. These performative procedures turn locutions into performatives, and, not intending to belittle language, in their absence locutions are just words.

Another kind of circumstance on which illocutionary acts depend is the “uptake”. (In the marriage example, the groom’s “I do” is an uptake with respect to the registrar’s “Do you . . .” as is the bride’s.) Moreover, the registrar/bride exchange is an uptake on the registrar/groom uptake. The groom is not married unless the bride says “I do” too.) Austin notes that if a performance of an illocutionary act is to be felicitous, the conventional procedure has to be executed correctly and in full. Illocutionary acts are however social and designed for the involvement of more than one person. Procedures designed for several participants to complete the procedure require the appropriate engagement of all of them—that is the appropriate uptake by participants other than the speaker. Without such uptake the performance of an illocutionary act “does not come off”. The uptake is then likely to be consequential in the vast majority of performatives but in different ways and it may not always be criterial of the illocution.

Does Austin include participants’ feelings, beliefs and intentions in amongst circumstances criterial to performatives? He declines the possibility that a performative could be thought of as

(4)

“an outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward spiritual act.” (Austin, 1962:9)

He considers such “inward acts” to be “fictitious” (Austin, 1962:10). Yet he acknowledges that thoughts, feelings and intentions, taken in their mundane sense rather than as technical constructs of psychology or philosophy, play a role in performatives. He writes

(5)

“where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts and feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves.” (Austin, 1962:15)

Austin, however, separates psychological “concomitants” from other circumstances: they give rise to different *kinds* of infelicities—the consequences of carrying out a performative without a procedure or in inappropriate circumstances, or incompletely or without an uptake are different from doing so without the expected thoughts, feelings and intentions. In the former case, “the act in question, e.g. promising, is not successfully performed at all, does not come off, is not achieved” (Austin, 1962:16). In such cases (e.g. promising without intending to follow through), the procedure is “abused”, the act is “hollow” (Austin, 1962:18, see also lecture 4). I borrow some money from you and say “I shall pay you tomorrow”, knowing well that I will not be in a position to do so. Do I fail to promise, or do I promise but *insincerely*? Austin opts for the latter—an “insincere promise” is still a promise, and this is surely right, otherwise I would not have entered into a commitment, and could not be held accountable for deceiving the other person. And likewise, ill considered advice is still advice. In general, intentions, beliefs and feelings are indicated by performatives and their absence on occasion is morally accountable and consequential. The feelings, beliefs and intentions however do not define the performatives. Conventional social procedures are constitutive of illocutionary acts; psychological concomitants are not (but their absence makes illocutions “hollow”). The point has important methodological implications—the analyst of a practice not only has to track what range of circumstantial particulars participants make relevant in a situated interaction but also how these contribute to the constitution of activities.

It is, however, also important to note that in (5) Austin is only referring to thoughts, feelings and intentions stipulated by conventional performative procedures, and by illocutions in particular, but not to those involved in producing locutionary aspects of performatives. Austin analysed locutionary acts into “phonetic”, “phatic” and “rhetic” acts (6) and in *How to do things with words* he does not consider the intentionality of these (7).

(6)

“We may agree, without insisting on formulations or refinements, that to say anything is (A.a) always to perform the act of uttering certain noises (a “phonetic” act), and the utterance is a phone; (A.b) always to perform the act of uttering certain vocables or words, i.e. noises of certain types belonging to *and as* belonging to a certain vocabulary, in a certain construction, i.e. conforming to *and as* conforming to a certain grammar, with a certain intonation, &c. This act we may call a “phatic” act, and the utterance which is the act of uttering a “pheme” (as distinct from the phememe of linguistic theory); and (A.c) generally to perform the act of using that pheme or its constituents with a certain more or less definite “sense” and more or less definite “reference” (which together are equivalent to “meaning”). This act we may call a “rhetic” act, and the utterance which it is the act of uttering a “rheme”.” (Austin, 1962:92–93)

(7)

“since in uttering our performatives we are undoubtedly in a sound enough sense “performing actions”, then, as actions, these will be subject to certain whole dimensions of unsatisfactoriness to which all actions are subject but which are distinct – or distinguishable – from what we have chosen to discuss as infelicities.” (Austin, 1962:21)

Austin's project in *How to do things with words* is restricted to pragmatics—he focuses on performative acts and uses infelicities to classify them. He does not consider “whole dimensions of unsatisfactoriness” of locutionary acts. He has provided an analysis of actions that can be made relevant elsewhere, in papers entitled “A plea for excuses” and “Three ways of spilling ink” published in his collected philosophical papers (Austin, 1961). In these he analyses “doing of actions” in general rather than focusing on doing things with words (Austin, 1961:178). The method he uses is very similar to analysing infelicities—he thinks through “breakdowns signalled by the various excuses” (Austin, 1961:180). In *How to do things with words*, however, he does not analyse intentionality of phonic, phatic and rhetic acts or how exactly these “intrude into any case we are discussing”. In this respect his account of doing things with words is incomplete and needs to be extended.

1.3. Action under description and doing things with words

We have seen so far that in defining performatives Austin distinguishes a variety of acts. The question is how these acts are related to each other in his system. This question is important to any student of social action who would avoid pitfalls of dualism in accounting for complex social activities. Cognitive pragmatists, purportedly developing Austin insights, tend to assume that physical behaviours and intentional actions, for instance, are ontologically different, each possibly processed by different modules in the brain and related to each other through inference, with behaviours being used as evidence to infer intentional states (see Leudar and Costall, 2004). This is, however, not what Austin had in mind. He did split “doing things with words” into components but making connections between them is not a matter of psychological inference but of changing their circumstances—performatives are done in saying something and illocutionary acts are locutionary acts done in right circumstances (Austin, 1962:Ch. VIII).¹ This is important for our formulation of “structured immediacy”—performatives do not cease to be locutionary acts (i.e. phonic, phatic and rhetic acts) simply because in the right circumstances they are also and focally illocutionary acts. They are both, and are individuated indexically by reference to different ranges of circumstances. Austin's account of doing things with words therefore offers a way round dualism implicit in many theories of communication and social interaction (see e.g. Costall and Leudar, 2004). When one wants to consider intentional states of others, one looks into circumstances not into those people's brains.

The circumstances noted by Austin vary from those that are proximal (interactive antecedents and the uptake) and distal, that include biographical details of participants as well as the socio-cultural milieu at large. Austin's account then contains a kernel of what we refer to as “structured immediacy” – the “here-and-now” is not an independent absolute locus of an action, but is defined circumstantially and in interaction. It is a persistent theme in the social and human sciences that concentration on specific situations, as the “here-and-now” occasions of action and interaction, excludes attention to the indispensable “external” environment within which any “here-and-now” must be situated, and to which it is related. We do not suppose that our resort to the idea of “actions under a description” deals with all of those problems directly, but it does address some of them. “Here and now” features deictic expressions and the understanding of

¹ The point implicit in Austin is that since performatives depend on circumstances for their felicity, their structure is partly in their circumstances. Performatives cannot be analysed internally without keeping specific circumstances in play.

“where and when” is indexical to the orientations and understandings of the participants. The “here and now” is assuredly not self-sufficient but has an interactional moment.

If the “here” and “now” is indexical, then so is the identity of the actions being performed in the “here and now”: what an action is depends on the “here-and-now”. There is a plurality of ways in which the actions may be correctly described, but does this mean that there is a plurality of actions? According to Elizabeth Anscombe’s analysis there is only the *one* action.² Anscombe (1957) wrote:

(8)

(i) “Are we to say that the man who (intentionally) moves his arm, operates the pump, replenishes the water supply, poisons the inhabitants, is performing *four* actions?” (§26)

(ii) “We cannot say that since at some time he poisoned them, there *must* be actions which we can label ‘poisoning them’, and in which we can find what it was to poison them. For in the acts of pumping poisoned water nothing in particular is necessarily going on that might not equally well have been going on if the acts had been pumping non-poisonous water. Even if you imagine that pictures of inhabitants lying dead occur in the man’s head, and please him—such pictures could also occur in the head of a man who was *not* poisoning them, and *need* not occur in this man. The difference appears to be one of circumstances, not of anything that is going on then.” (§24)

(iii) “For moving his arm up and down with his fingers round the pump handle *is*, in these circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it *is* replenishing the house water-supply; and in these circumstances, it *is* poisoning the household.” (§26)

(iv) “So there is one action with four descriptions, each dependent on wider circumstances, and each related to the next as description of means to an end.” (§26)

Anscombe points out that any action can be identified in a plurality of ways—under different descriptions. In what respects, however, do such descriptions differ? (8) indicates that the consequential variation is that in the information that descriptions provide about the actions, especially with reference to circumstances of action that are incorporated into the description, rather than in physical characteristics of acts mentioned or in their psychological concomitants. In fact, Anscombe’s teacher, Wittgenstein had the following to say about telling of intentions:

(9)

“Why do I want to tell him about an intention too, as well as telling him what I did? . . . because I want to tell him something about myself, which goes beyond what happened at the time. I reveal to him something of myself when I tell him what I was going to do.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §659)

Telling intention situates the activity in the biography of the agent (cf. Blum and McHugh, 1971) Anscombe’s phrase, action under a description, was intended to show that an action and its identifying description are wedded in such a way that there can be more than one correct description of the action.³ Hence, it was a corrective to the long standing philosophical puzzle: if

² In shooting somebody there is not an action of moving your finger, and another action of pressing trigger and yet another of shooting someone. In talking to one’s spouse, there is not one action of uttering the word yes, and another of answering a question, and yet another action of confessing.

³ Participants may intend the action to be taken under any of the correct alternative descriptions, depending on circumstances. What Anscombe is working out what is *possible* and *logically correct*, and her analysis constrains the possible empirical cases.

a description identifies an action, and if there are multiple descriptions of “that action” does this mean that there are as many actions as there are descriptions: if someone is shot, wounded and killed, then do these three descriptions signify the occurrence of three distinct actions? Anscombe’s answer was: no, there is one action only, which is amenable to – at least – three different descriptions. Alan White’s way of explaining this possibility is to point out that one thing can be of many kinds, and that it can be correctly identified as any one (or more) of the many different kinds that it can be—a shooting is one kind of event, a wounding is a different kind of event than a shooting, and a killing yet another kind of event than a (mere) wounding (White, 1979). Anscombe’s further clarification draws attention to the way in which the descriptions vary in respect of the range of circumstances that they encompass. There is thus only the one action, which is a shooting, but which is also a wounding and a killing, the descriptions differing in the range of circumstances they encompass—the “squeezing of the trigger” informs how the shooting was done, the “wounding” identifies a consequence of the shooting, the “killing” identifies a further consequence of the wounding. The description “assassination of the Emperor” would invoke the identity of the one injured and killed in the shooting.

There are clear similarities between Austin’s analysis of doing things with words and Elizabeth Anscombe’s analysis of how acts are identified “under description”. Austin’s attempt to disentangle the ways in which we do things with words draws out the variety of ways in which an action can relate to the circumstances which are its context, enumerating some of the contextually sensitive forms of action descriptions.⁴ In Austin’s terms, the same locutionary act will be a performative in the right circumstances and a different performative in a different range of circumstances and this despite the absence of normative psychological concomitants.

It is traditional to treat the problem of the relationship between act and context as a causally puzzling one; how is “the context” to be identified such that its effect on the events for which it is the context may be understood? The notion of “action under a description” shows that this is to misunderstand the extent to which action and context are *internally* related – how an action is to be identified depends upon how its context is identified – and that a relationship is made between an action and its relevant context in the very way in which the action is identified. Thus, a shooting is for instance the ending of an imperial regime if the context is the regal identity of the shooting’s victim. Austin and Anscombe taken together say something about the structural organisation of what are often termed the ‘linguistic resources’ that are drawn upon in social interactions, with Austin talking about the way in which utterances have the force of actions, and of the bases, location in convention and practices, on which they derive that force, whilst Anscombe sketches the way in which the action identification is informatively varied, depending upon the contextual relations it invokes.

What are the implications of this theoretical formulation for how the analysis of social interactions should be conducted? In documenting specific institutional interactions such as psychotherapy we should determine exactly what kinds of circumstances are established or made relevant. We need to take on board *how* circumstances of interactions are established and maintained in interactions. And we need to do this so that the logical relationships between particular kinds of circumstances and the participants’ activities become clear. One specific circumstance that Austin stresses in *How to do things with words* is the “conventional procedure”. Our analysis should establish how circumstances combine in conventional

⁴ This notion of actions as identified “under a description” is very much akin to Ryle’s idea of “thick description” (Ryle, 1949).

procedures so that participants' activities – in language and nonverbal – can be understood under interaction specific descriptions. Our analysis should document how generally available “conventional procedures” are made relevant in situ and other “conventional procedures” are established in and for specific circumstances. In doing this, we need to bear in mind Austin's insight that the conventional procedures may be “designed for use by persons having certain thoughts and feelings”. What does this mean for analysing psychotherapeutic practices?

2. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy as a “structured immediacy”

We argued elsewhere that the organisation of psychotherapy is only partly revealed through the methods of sequential conversation analysis (CA) (Leudar et al., 2008). Such analysis provides understanding of how therapeutic interactions draw on the interaction resources of participants, and are locally managed and sequentially structured. Yet we also concluded that CA does not provide a complete picture of psychotherapies as practices, because it steps away from circumstantial particulars inconsequential to sequential analysis.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy of children done in the Kleinian tradition involves children playing with toys provided by the therapist and revealing things about themselves through play. The problem for the therapists is to convert the children's spontaneous play into psychotherapy. The play in a group is not organised like a conversation—children do not take turns at play, but play in parallel whilst the therapist is talking. The therapist has to form focused therapeutic interactions from children's play, doing this with the resources the interaction provides. What interests us is how therapists create and maintain an occasion in which they can interact with the children as psychoanalytic psychotherapists rather than, say, teachers or childminders.

The therapists typically see each group of children four times for about 25 min each time. The extracts (10) to (15) cover the first 4 min of the first session for one group, and document how circumstances begin to be established. What does not show in the transcripts is that the sessions take place in a classroom in the children's school. The children enter not a ‘consulting room’ but a classroom, and the therapists' task is to change this sense of the place. Children sit with two therapists round a table, as they would normally do with their teacher. There are, however, two cameras recording the sessions, controlled by a cameraman (Tom here). A trainee therapist, (Tess here) sits at the edge of the room taking mental notes on the session. The children always start the first session by sitting still and quietly listening to the therapists. Yet the occasion is not a class and is new for the children and the therapists need to address the hanging question “what are we doing here?”.

2.1. Starting up the occasion

So how did the therapists individuate the interaction into one where elements of therapeutic work would be possible? The individual therapy sessions were brief, and so the therapists needed to make things happen early in each session. In (10) the therapist ST arranges the children in space round the table—what she manages are the physical aspects of the occasion.

(10) Settings 1 (0:00–0:23)

1. **ST:** Come and sit down and choose a place
2. *((the children are milling around and sitting down))*
3. **KB:** >come=and sit down<
4. **ST:** the big chair's for me because I'm >bi(h)g=and fat<

5. and I need a big chair
6. (0.8)
7. ((*everyone is seated apart from ST, KB and Lucy*))
8. °and=we need: d° >two people to sit over that side.< ((*points*
9. *to the other side of the table*)) (0.4)
10. ((*to Gemma*)) Sorry, can I just push thr:ough? ((*ST squeezes past Gemma*
11. *to her own chair*))
12. (4.0)
13. Oh:::ah ((*ST sits down*)) (0.4) °there we are° (0.4)

This arranging is, however, not simply a physical manipulation of people in space, and the accomplished arrangement has a normative aspect and is ‘right’ for the occasion (cf. Schegloff, 1972:81). This conclusion is indicated by two features of (10). First, ST formulates the directive as warranted by ‘need’ (lines 8–9). Second, she closes the episode by ‘there we are’, thus making salient that the arrangement has a purpose and is as it should be (line 13).

Note, moreover, that in managing the physical aspects of the occasion, ST works on her situated identity—referring to herself by way of her looks, as being “>bi(h)g=and fat<” (line 4) as a first step towards establishing herself as the person that she will be. The therapist KB’s initial contribution is also identity-constitutive – in echoing ST (lines 1 and 3) he indicates their (ST’s and KB’s) relationship – ST has the initiative, he follows. (Both are, however in the same position with respect to the children.) There was no *verbal* uptake by the children at this stage, but they took their places as directed and listened.

In the less than a half of a minute of the interaction, the therapists arranged the parties into a partially thought-out spatial arrangement. The seating arrangements – adults sitting together, being a pair and acting as a pair, and a female and male pair at that – have a therapeutic significance for psychoanalytical psychotherapists, evoking families and the parental duo. The participants – the children and the therapists – face each other and the interaction is spatially closed and focused around the table and the art materials. This constitutes a ‘therapeutic circle’ which encloses and focuses the participants on the space in which the children will play – draw and make things out of play dough – and thereby ‘show’ things about themselves to the psychotherapists (cf. Koschmann et al., 2007).

In (11) ST continues to formulate the occasion for the children by addressing another prominent initial noticeable: the presence of the cameras.

(11) Settings 2 (0:24–0:42)

14. **ST:** now first of all, (0.6) can you see? There is a camera there, (0.3)
15. ((*ST points to one camera, the children follow her gaze*))
16. °and a camera there°. ((*ST points to the other camera, the children look*))
17. (0.4) and those are just going to film us, (0.5) so that we
18. can th:ink about what you’ve sh:own=us (0.5)
19. a:nd how we’ve talked to you, >and think
20. “is there a way we can do it even better next time.”< (0.6)
21. okay?, so don’t worry about them.

The therapist presents the cameras to the children as potentially worrying and obviates the need for worry by providing the cameras with a *raison d’être*. Interestingly, in doing this ST also indicates what sort interaction she expects to ensue. First, the children will show

something to the adults (*show*, not *say*) and the adults will take this seriously—think about it after the event.

The therapists' assumption is that security will be an issue and from the start the occasion is presented as one that is safe. The children can show things to the adults, be taken seriously, and they do not need to worry about the consequences of such showings. At this point, none of the children says anything – they simply look at ST and listen attentively – they act as they might in their classrooms. Most children, however, fidget with the playdough.

In (12) ST introduces participants to each other and does this in a way that structures the group in situ.

(12) Settings 3 (0:43–1:32)

22. **ST:** Now (0.6) what I want to do (0.7) is say hello to everybody
 23. and=I'm (0.3) v:er:y slow at learning names
 24. so you're gonna have to help me (1.2)
 25. yes? (0.6)
 26. My name's=Shirley. (0.9) ((*door bangs*))
 27. Kevin. ((*ST points to all the adults in turn. The children look*))
 28. (1.7)
 29. Tess (0.6) >who's just going to be watching and
 30. writing things down for us.< (.)
 31. Tom, who is in charge of the cameras.
 32. (1.0)
 33. and now we need to know your names. (0.3)
 34. ((*looks at Lucy*)) Will you tell us your name please?
 35. **Lucy:** Lucy
 36. **ST:** that's Lucy, (0.3) hello Lucy. (0.6)
 37. ((*ST looks at Ronan*))
 38. **Ronan:** my name's Ronan↑ (0.4)
 39. **ST:** that's Ronan, hi:.
 40. (1.5)
 41. ((*everyone looks at Talal*))
 42. **ST:** °and what's your name?°
 43. **Talal:** °Talal°
 44. **KB:** Talal↓
 45. **ST:** Talal↑, (0.7) hello Talal (0.9)
 46. ((*everybody looks at Dave*))
 47. **Dave:** °er, my name is Dave°
 48. **ST:** hello Dave
 49. **Gemma:** Gemma
 50. **KB:** Gemma
 51. **ST:** hello Gemma

ST could have gone round the table allowing each person to introduce themselves as they sit. Instead she divides the participants into adults and children. She does this by introducing the adults first (lines 26–32) and the children second (lines 34–51). The two lists are in fact separated—there is a second-long pause and the connective “and now” explicitly separates the set of adult and child participants in the list of introductions (lines 33–34). Moreover, the set of

adults is also structured. ST's round of introductions and the way in which she does them, serve to identify her as the lead adult. (She does the introductions, does them on behalf of the other adults and regulates the order in which the children self-identify.) ST does not designate herself or KB as therapists. Instead she identifies herself and KB by first names, and so differentiates the occasion from a classroom where the adults would be addressed more formally. In the cases of Tess and Tom, however, ST explains their roles in the interaction—spatially and organisationally they are on the periphery of the interaction and, as we shall see will participate only in a very passive way.

ST moreover continues to establish her personal identity through listing her qualities—remember that she is already somebody who declares herself “big and fat”, now she is in addition somebody who is “slow at learning names” (line 23). What is notable with respect to her ‘bad memory’ is that the children are put in a position of informal helpers, this effect being accomplished through the informal formulation of the request for help (line 24). This identity work further differentiates the occasion for the children from the classroom – ST is unlike teachers, whose expertise is presumed in school, and she is also a person who is open about her problems (here at least). The introductions are devised to ensure that, at the very beginning of the session, the parallel between adult/child and teacher/pupil is disabled and a different from usual relationship set up, one which is therapeutically useful.

The occasion is, moreover, formulated as one in which, despite being in the group as they might be in the classroom, each child is addressed with care as an individual—ST greets each child following each introduction and though this does not come through in the transcript, the greetings are notably ‘warm’, offering a positive emotional engagement to the children (lines 35–52). The participants’ identity as children and adults is omnirelevant (cf. Sacks, 1995:515) and they are certainly not yet therapists and clients. The membership category pair child/adult has, however, been already situated. The contingent aspect of their relationship is that the children can show things to the adults and the adults will listen with empathy. So, a modification of the usual adult–child relationship is being offered to the children, wherein adults take children’s imagination seriously.

It is less than 2 min into the first session and yet the proffered transformation of the school classroom into a place in which aspects of psychoanalytic psychotherapy can happen is well on the way. The “here-and-now” of the school is being transformed towards the “here-and-now” which affords at least an approximation to a fully fledged therapeutic encounter. The therapists are producing a setting for therapeutic immediacy. So far they have created the spatial arrangements for the occasion, structured the group into adults and children and indicated that the occasion is one where the children can show things about themselves to the adults who will listen.

But what do the adults want to hear from the children, and how are the children to figure that out? And why should they tell them anything—after all the adults are still very much strangers? One thing to notice is that ST is establishing herself as a puzzling older woman who invites the children to adopt a more informal relationship than that which they likely have with teachers. Moreover, she starts orienting the encounter to therapeutic themes that her school of therapy would assume are appropriate to the occasion—for example, the theme of safety.

(13) Settings 4 (1:02–1:54)

52. ST: Now we know all know each other, at least the names. (.)
 53. It will take a while to feel at home here (0.7) and to feel safe.
 54. Yes? that's a bit like starting big school isn't it?
 55. (1.0)
 56. Some of you are new. I know Ronan was here last year.

57. Who=else was here last year? in the nursery?
 58. ((KB points to Lucy))
 59. (1.8)
 60. no=one? Were you here in the nursery Lucy?
 61. **Lucy**: °yes°
 62. **ST**: Ye:s. and you↑ (0.5) Gemma you were, weren't you↑ (0.6)
 63. But you are new. ((to Dave))
 64. (1.0)
 65. and that's hard and Talal is new and that's hard. And
 66. all the other kids know each other and you are in a new place
 67. (0.3) with new teachers.
 68. (1.0)
 69. and you don't know all the other kids.
 70. (1.2)
 71. it makes it reahllly hard
 72. (1.0)
 73. °yes° (0.4)
 74. **KB**: °and you don't know us°.
 75. (1.0)
 76. and you don't know what's happening here
 77. (2.4)
 78. it's very worrying.

The children are encountering adults whom they do not know and ST indicates that this may make children feel insecure (extract 13, line 53). The therapy is, however, not unique in this respect—in line 54, speaking to the group, ST likens the problem in the circle to what happens at school. The problem *at school* is explicitly formulated by ST in lines 63–69. It is a new place, with new children and new teachers. So the “budding” therapeutic occasion has to be both distinguished from and related to school. Here it is tied to the school by analogy and it can represent it, not in every respect but in one that is crucial—problems with new places and new people, especially new adults. This idea seems to catch the attention of the children—when ST mentions school at line 54 Talal and Gemma who were previously looking around the room shift their gaze towards ST, Ronan and Dave also look and only Lucy looks ahead of her at the table. (The problem noted both at school and in the therapeutic here-and-now is not a chance one—Kleinian child psychotherapy expects children to be anxious in strange places with new adults.)

The anxiety theme is not dealt with at the group level only – it is taken up with individual children and ST divides the children into those who are new to school and those who are not. This documents for participants another aspect of the situation – the two focal adults there are willing and have time to pay attention sympathetically to each child. It is important to the therapists that they are doing group therapy, and that, therefore, their relationship is with the group, and with the individual children in and through that group. The therapist directs attention to individuals, but very much in the presence of the group. What ST says engages Dave who nods when ST describes his situation of being completely new, and the other new child, Talal, also watches ST closely. But the rest of the group are also listening; Ronan is looking at ST intently throughout, and Lucy and Gemma look from ST to Talal and Dave.

The second therapist, KB, returns the interaction to the circle (lines 74–78)—by analogy with school, he identifies their meeting as an occasion that is itself worrying, using the opportunity to

provide assurances. The result is that the children and therapists will be able to address in the safe and supportive here-and-now problems that children encounter in the school, whereas in school they are usually left to face such problems by themselves and without support.

In (14) KB continues to differentiate the current local setting from that of school and home for all the children.

(14) Settings 6 (3:38–4:05)

115. **KB:** the other thing we need to say (0.2)
 116. (1.0)
 117. is that, what we talk about here
 118. (1.0)
 119. will be between us.
 120. (2.4)
 121. >we don't need to talk to your parents about=it↑ (0.5)
 122. and we don't need to talk to: your teachers about it.< (0.9)
 123. except if there's something where we think,
 124. somebody needs to be kept safe.
 125. (1.2)
 126. okay?
 127. **Ronan:** I'm already safe↑(0.7)
 128. **KB:** well the:n
 129. (0.3)
 130. **ST:** that's how we like it to be.

KB builds up the therapeutic character of the occasion. The norm is that therapeutic encounters are confidential, and KB is offering children confidentiality with respect to what they might reveal (lines 115–119). If his offer is accepted, what is said in the “therapeutic circle” will be a ‘therapeutic secret’, private to participants and excluding teachers and parents (with the confidentiality circumscribed only by the safety of the children). The language KB uses is significant. Rather than using I/you pronouns that would separate the children and the therapists, he uses the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ that strengthen collective aspects of the occasion.

Establishing therapeutic immediacy then involves managing the connections between the therapeutic occasion, school and the home settings, but this has to involve both the therapists and the children. The question is, do the children take up his offer? After all, an unknown adult is offering children a private place in which they need not be afraid that what they say or show will be passed on to the teachers and parents whom they *do* know (lines 121–122). The uptake varies. Ronan is the first child to speak, and he declines emphatically KB's offer to talk to parents to ensure his protection if need be (lines 123–124). He does this by making the offer irrelevant to himself—he is “already safe↑” (line 127). (It is not clear whether he is also rejecting the offer of a private place to talk). Ronan speaks for himself and not for the group—his uptake temporarily individuates KB's offer addressed to the group in general. How do the rest of the children respond? Talal, Dave and Gemma look from Ronan to KB during this exchange, Lucy looks down at her playdough. All of the children are listening but no more—they do not accept or reject the offer. The two therapists pick up Ronan's rejection of the offer in a somewhat different way. KB's response is rather indeterminate but ST converts the rejection into agreement by confirming the primacy of safety (rather than of privacy).

The “therapeutic circle” is assuredly an interactional moment, involving these adults and children together in this room at this point in today’s transactions. But the adult parties have available in addition a plurality of ways in which their location inside the therapeutic circle may be understood—*inter alia*, as placed in the series of past and prospective encounters with groups of children, as located in the domain of post-Kleinian child therapy, as a current project under the sponsorship of the school and the local authority, as an intervention (however brief and limited) in the educational experience of the children, and as part of a strategy providing the therapy group’s way of addressing problems of social exclusion (making child therapy available to those who, otherwise, would have no prospect of this). What goes on within the circle is referenced to such understandings, in, *inter alia*, the pacing of the occasion to compensate for its (relative) brevity, the presence of transference as the basis for the reactions from the children that the therapists provoke, the need to keep things consistent with the ‘safety’ theme, attunement to the ways in which children’s reactions manifest possible problems in home and school, and sensitivity to possibility of therapeutic missteps, of making the wrong move, of misconstruing the significance of something until too late, of missing an opportunity to open up a valuable therapeutic opportunity.

The issue now is how exactly the children can “show” adults their problems. In a recognizably Kleinian fashion the therapists provide objects that children can play with—drawing materials and playdough (extracts 15, 16).

(15) Settings 5 (1.55–2.15)

79. **KB:** What we want you to do (0.7) is we want you
 80. to te:- to tell us and teach=us (0.8) by showing us,
 81. using the play:dough ((*points to playdough*)) (0.3)
 82. and the draw:ing (.) equipment—the paper,
 83. pens, and pencils ((*points to this*)) (0.7) what it’s
 84. like to be (0.7) a five-year old (0.4) and in the
 85. reception class.

((*Talal, Dave, Gemma and Ronan are sitting still and looking from KB to the playdough and pens on the table. Lucy is looking at the playdough on the table in front of her.*))

These are, however, not treated merely as physical objects but put under therapeutically relevant descriptions—they are not just play objects but *also* means through which children can show the adults something about themselves that is relevant in the setting. The general problem has already been specified—what it is like to be new in the school with strangers. Note that children are not just invited to show something but also to *teach* adults something. The situation is such that play can come under unusual descriptions—it is playing but also in addition *showing something* about one’s psychological life, and also *teaching*. The attempt is made to equalize and even reverse relationships, the setting aside of the usual relationships to adults as teachers or parents. The latter term significantly contrasts the “therapeutic” setting to the school—there only the adults do the teaching. What is happening is that ST and KB offer an environment in which playing with objects can come under therapeutically useful descriptions.

The therapists are licensing the ways in which they will transform the children’s play through the descriptions they bring it under. They are supplementing understandings of what the play is doing – making a mask, shaping a dinosaur – with understandings of what the play says about the ones that are doing it: attributing feelings as attached to particular forms of play product (aggression to a dinosaur, defensiveness to a keep-like construction) and rendering children’s play moves as revelations to the group.

2.2. How to mean things by “squishing”

We now concentrate on how child’s play activity in the circumstances can show something about her feelings or indeed teaching the adults something. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb “to squish” as “to squeeze, to squash” and as “to proceed or make *one’s way* with a squishing sound.” How does “squishing” of playdough say something about oneself? The dictionary present squishing as a physical act and this is indeed how ST uses the term initially (extract 16, line 110). Squishing there is compressing the playdough to fit it in the container.

(16) squish 1 (3.34–4.07)

97. **ST:** but some of you may want to (0.4) do↑ pic↑tures
 98. (1.2)
 99. with the pens and the pencils
 100. ((puts out pencils))
 101. and you can do
 102. (1.2)
 103. which=ever you want.
 104. **Ronan:** °mm::°
 105. ((Dave and Ronan start squashing the playdough))
 106. **ST:** but we’ll want to keep the pictures for us to think about
 107. (0.6) between now and next week. Okay?↑
 108. So the pictures will stay here for th:inking about. (0.6)
 109. but what we make with the playdough >will have to be
 110. squish:ed back-up and put back in the pots I’m
 111. afraid< (0.3) because otherwise by next week it will be
 112. all h:ard and horrible.
 113. (3.1)
 114. °mm?↑°

Eventually, squishing the playdough becomes an activity with a psychological meaning: the children themselves are being ‘squished’ as persons. How does ST transform the setting so that squishing playdough *can* have both these meanings? In (17) squishing refers to what a child is doing but not simply as an instrumental physical activity. Squishing can be done and understood in different ways—Gemma’s she squishes “hard”.

(17) Squish 2 (4.08–4.45)

128. **ST:** ((turns to Gemma)) you gonna squish that?
 129. (2.0)
 130. you gonna squish it really hard Gemma?
 131. **Gemma:** ((nods))
 132. **ST:** ((whispering)) °Go-on then!°

((At line 128 the other children look towards Gemma. Lucy is grinning with her playdough in her hand. Talal has his head resting on his hand and does not touch his playdough. Dave is holding his playdough and Ronan, grinning, begins also to squish his playdough.))

Doing things with the playdough is already possibly “telling” or “teaching” the adults something. Squishing hard is singled out as notable and so implicitly meaningful. But what could squishing *hard* be saying? This is not clear and ST does not offer an interpretation.

The meaning of what squishing might mean becomes clear as the interaction proceeds. In (18) ST formulates for the children her understanding of children's problems and so what they may want to tell her through their play.

(18) Squish 3 (6.06–6.50)

184. **ST:** >and=other days you can feel so small you
 185. don't want to do interesting things.<
 186. (1.0)
 187. And you can think ((*ST puts on a grumpy voice*)
 188. < "I don't like them">
 189. (1.5)
 190. "I don't like all these new things"
 191. (2.0)
 192. Mm::? "I want things I know about, an' feel safe with"
 193. (6.0)
 194. >and it's hard because all the time you've got to be big.<
 195. (2.5)
 196. ((*whispering hoarsely*)) its ha:::r:d.
 197. (1.0)
 198. ((*ST's body tenses, and she gestures and speaks as if she's*
 199. *been squeezed and squashed*)) you feel ↑all squi:shed!↑(0.2)
 200. >every which way<
 201. (1.0)
 202. **Gemma:** heh!
 203. **ST:** ↑squi:shed↑ into being big. (0.2) ↑squi:shed↑ into sitting still on the mat.
 204. (2.0)
 205. ↑Squished↑ into doing your work like a good girl
 206. (0.2)
 207. or a good boy.

The problems she mentions include feeling small, not wanting to do new things, having to be big, having to be a good girl, having to sit still, etc. Note how ST does the formulation—she does not simply factually list the problems. Instead she puts herself into the position of a child and speaks as a child—the display of understanding is empathic and again offers a warm emotional bond. The formulation is also dramatic—ST is playful and invites the children into the play, having already established that doing things with playdough can be telling things. Here ST delimits what the children may want to tell and in doing this offers an engagement with specific emotional and imaginational qualities. She expresses the effects of these impositions on the child as “being squished” (15–16). So the squishing can now refer to moulding of playdough but in these proto-psychotherapeutic settings also to the effects of school on a child. “Squishing” becomes changing of a child by force to fit it in the school, and this can now be expressed through play.

What do the children make of this idea? Again the uptake varies. As soon as ST utters the word “squi:shed!” ST turns her body towards Gemma, who begins squishing her own playdough much harder, mirroring ST. Ronan also starts to squish his playdough harder, and starts to grin. Lucy and Dave are also smiling slightly at ST, watching her closely. Talal simply watches ST with his playdough on the table in front of him.

One of ST's ways of getting therapeutically relevant issues "on the floor" is to propose to the children what they must be concerned about, familiar with, and puzzled by. The sequence (18) is ST's commentary on the squishing, one which projects "how it is for the children", how they can recognise in their treatment of the playdough the nature of their own experience, how they are treated, and how they treat others. ST is displaying that she sees things from the children's points of view, and is preparing/developing the thematic continuity of the session, that the children are – as is only to be expected – uneasy about beginning a new school, moving from one class to another, especially where they are amongst the smallest participants. This "thematic unification" is, however, not an imposition on the occasion, since the therapist's actions are more like a provocation, designed to get the children responding to the therapists, getting them talking to/with the therapists, as well as playing.

The children's non-verbal actions – drawing and making objects out of play dough – are "converted" through formulation by ST into direct responses to ST's comments (extract 19, lines 216–220 and 222–228).

(19) Squish 3 (6.51–7.44)

208. **ST:** sq::w:ished! (0.5)
 209. **Ronan:** ((*smiling*))
 210. **ST:** >ever so hard.<
 211. **Ronan:** ((*grinning*))
 212. **KB:** Ronan likes that idea.
 213. (1.6)
 214. **ST:** ((*grinning, and miming the squish with her hands*))
 215. < sq:::w:ished!>
 216. ((*whispering hoarsely*)) >it looks like Ronan's saying,
 217. "sometimes its fun and sometimes I get so cross, I
 218. squish with my teeth showing!"<
 219. (1.0)
 220. Arr:::gh!
 221. (3.6)
 222. ((*whispering*)) °and Lucy says, (1.0), >"I'm not going to squish, cos
 I'm not sure
 223. about this"° but her fingers are ALMOST going for a squish!<
 224. ((*Lucy and other children are looking at ST*))
 225. (3.0)
 226. **ST:** °and Talal is still thinking °
 227. (2.0)
 228. ° "this is a very odd woman, she talks in a very odd way." °
 229. all sorts of different feelings that all of you have
 230. (1.5)
 231. **KB:** a very odd woman who asks us to squish playdough

The occasion is offered to the children as one where they can express their problems through play activities that remain just ordinary play but which can be fed back to them under therapeutically relevant descriptions. It is not, however, that the children play with the playdough and express their problems *compulsively*; not everything they do with playdough is put under psycho-analytical description by ST and KB. Following Austin, the occasion is partly structured as a

conventional procedure that the children can take up or leave. The therapists are clearly sensitive to how individual children “take up” what is offered, as (19) documents. In (19) ST and KB comment on each child’s uptake. Ronan likes the idea (line 30) and he is grinning at ST; Lucy is not sure about what is offered but tempted (40–41), she is looking at ST and smiling but not touching her playdough; Talal stands back and reflects on the situation and on ST. However ST does not comment on every child but these children are still participating; Gemma is squishing her playdough very hard, and Dave is looking around and moulding his.

2.3. *General methodological implications*

The point of this section of the paper was to demonstrate what interaction analysis taking on board Austin’s work on circumstances and Anscombe’s treatment of action identities would look like. The first minutes of a psychotherapeutic interaction showed how the therapists initiated circumstances in which interactional engagements appropriate to psychoanalytic psychotherapy became possible, where children and adults were in a specific therapeutic relationship, and the children’s play activities were being organised so that they could be brought under psychotherapeutic descriptions.⁵

Such circumstances were not established in a vacuum, and they never can be. The interactions took place in a school with children who were adept at playing together imaginatively. That the therapeutic sessions took place in a classroom had a bearing on the children’s conduct—they initially acted as if they were in the classroom, sitting quietly and listening to the adults but this changed subsequently. The therapists’ problem was to individuate the therapeutic situation by establishing relevant differences and similarities between the two. Both situations shared problems that children experience in starting school. Unlike the classroom, the therapeutic situation was focused on providing the children with an opportunity to “tell” these problems. How did the therapists accomplish this? In the first 5 min of the interaction the therapists offered the children a local “conventional procedure” through which children’s play might tell things. This procedure had the following aspects:

1. Membership categorisation. The relationship between adults and the children was never that between teachers and pupils. Rather, it was a limited inversion of this relationship in that the children could tell things to the adults and teach them. The relationship further transformed the adult/child relationship where the adults were attentive to children’s imagination and the problems this reveals, enabling children to play with their play being taken seriously.
2. Embodiment of interaction. The membership categorisation was not abstract but inscribed in the physical arrangements of the interaction and implicit in activities. The therapists organised the occasion as a “therapeutic circle” with participants arranged in space according to their membership, the group surrounding the working surface so that everyone could see everybody and what they did. This arrangement supported the interactions between the therapists and the children, where the therapists’ pairing could invoke family and parental situations and they could act in concert towards the group and individual children. The therapists provided the means of imaginative expression (the implements) and stipulated that these were not just objects to play with but also the means of telling things to the adults.

⁵ See Schegloff (1963) for an account of how therapist’s contributions to therapy are organised to provide future possible interpretations under conditions of transference.

3. **Intentionality.** The therapists thematised the interaction, guiding the children towards relevant interpretations. These included their feelings, thoughts, and problems accompanying starting school. In Austin's terms, the procedure was designed for children with such thoughts, feelings and problems. In these circumstances, children's' play and its products *could* be understood as expressions of certain kinds of feelings and thoughts. The telling through the play, however, always remained a play with the playdough or drawing. It was a part of the therapists' problem not only to find how the children's play behaviour was psychologically expressive, but also to work out whether, and in what ways, that behaviour was responsive to or affected by the therapists' contributions. The interaction can be thought of as a structured immediacy—the local environment of the interaction was structured in and through the activities of participants.
4. **Uptake.** The procedure was a conventional one in that the children could take up or decline the procedure offered to them and indeed the uptake by different children differed. The procedure was asymmetric with systematic divergences in understanding between therapists and the children. The children were not expected to be able to fully understand the nature of the activity in which they were to participate, and were recruited to the activity indirectly, through the setting up of the occasion as different from regular schooling, and its framing in ways which created a situation in which it was safe to express feelings, especially insecurities.

3. Are practices interactions under description?

The working mode of ethnomethodologists is to apprentice to a practice, to understand it from within and narrate it without irony and in ways which capture the idiom of the practice. One of their primary aims is to recover the sense a practice has for participants, and in so doing elucidate the way the practice is realised in and through the organisation of participants, actions. Ethnomethodologists moreover seek to appreciate the specificity of participants' activities, and the extent to which the production of occasions of interaction resist reduction to condensed formal schematics. Conversation analysis shares these concerns but it is a more technical and systemic undertaking. It analyses the organisation of talk as talk-in-interaction, and is focused on the way in which turns at talk are distributed amongst speakers and the constraints that turn distribution impose upon the organisation of utterances. Many of the materials that it works with are substantially intelligible to the analysts by virtue of being relatively ordinary interactions that can be understood by anyone with generalised interactional competence. Because everyone is adept at everyday interactions, the apprenticeship in a variety of mundane activities is not required. Even where the talk under consideration is relatively less "ordinary" (maybe of a highly technical nature) many of the organisational features of an utterance in relation to its implications for turn-distribution are identifiable without concern for the technical identity of those actions. In many contexts, for the purpose of analysing turn-taking organisation, the exclusion of contextual information is an advantageous move, allowing clarity in discerning the form of turns and the strict sequential relations between them. In a case like ours, however, there are limits to the degree to which the actions that a turn or a sequence of turns may be performing can be understood without a grasp on circumstantially relevant information. In psychotherapy, saying what a given action is doing – for instance returning the talk to the client, or summarising prior remarks, or making an evaluation – are all characterisations that can be made of talk-in-psychotherapy on the basis of common sense understandings of how psychotherapy is done. Other observations can be made without much or any understanding of the species of therapy in play—one can identify "therapy characteristic" utterance types and turn relations independently of their 'doctrinal' affiliations. If one is, however,

interested in the specific *therapeutic work* that the turns are doing, then one cannot begin to say what a given turn is doing in this sense without reference to the therapist's therapeutic orientation and how this is introduced into the occasion in structured immediacy.

The use of exophoric information in the analysis of interaction has, in fact, been controversial in CA. Our finding is that if the analyst altogether ignores the circumstances which are “seen but not noticed” by participants, the problem is that the sense in with which the participants endow their contributions to the activity is likely to escape the analyst. Emanuel Schegloff insisted that external circumstances be used in the analysis only when they can be shown to be consequential to the participants (Schegloff, 1972, 1991). As we noted elsewhere, this principle creates a problem of its own: how is the consequentiality to be established and what kind of consequentiality is it? How do we decide that an exophoric particular is consequential to the participants, and consequential to which specific aspect of interaction and in what way? Our analysis takes on board those exophoric particulars that enter actions in the here-and-now of interaction and accounts for how participants manage this, without introducing cognitivism—according to which contextual information is knowledge that becomes locally effective through participants' individual cognitions.

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