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Mapping Institutions as Work and Texts¹*Susan Marie Turner*

MAPPING ACTUAL SEQUENCES of work and texts extends ethnography from people's experience and accounts of their experience into the work processes of institutions and institutional action. It is a formulation and application of institutional ethnography that treats quite literally its central concepts of text-based social relations and texts as essential coordinators of institutions. It recognizes the extraordinary capacity of texts to produce and to organize people's activities and extended and general relations in local and particular sites. Mapping institutions as work and texts is unlike other forms of graphical mapping of organizations and institutions. It does not produce, for example, a chart of organizational structure, map of job descriptions, work flow analysis or diagram of a social network. Rather, the analytic procedure results in an account of the day-to-day text-based work and local discourse practices that produce and shape the dynamic ongoing activities of an institution. Such an account extends from the accounts and observable work of people engaged in it who may not be aware of just how their routine textual work puts together the large scale institution and its outcomes. Texts (as reiterated by Dorothy Smith in this book) are the material forms of words, images, and sound that we can see, hear, and touch. At the same time that they are integral to local practices, they connect what individuals are doing to processes going on and organized elsewhere. I began mapping text-based work processes as a resident wanting to understand just how municipal planning organizes land development and sidelines residents' and other environmental interventions (Turner 1995, 2003). How planning texts operated in decision-making was

particularly of concern for novices who wanted to intervene in governing and policy processes. The problematic for ethnographic inquiry emerged as residents including myself were drawn into these routine activities. In order to understand how governing and policy works, we had to track the work people do with texts that is generally understood to put “policy” into action and that produces what happens as “routine.”

As part of my ethnography of municipal planning, land development, and environmental interventions (Turner 2003), I mapped a coordinated complex of institutional sequences of work and texts into which multiple actors, including developers, lawyers, banks, real estate agents, residents, government officials, and land surveyors are drawn to participate. What became visible were the standardized working relations and forms of language and text-based sequences of action through which democratic planning and governing processes operate. Ethnography draws on people’s actions in specific settings in time and space, in such places as a public city council meeting where texts or talk alone can seem powerful and controversial things are said and done (Turner 1995). But, unlike conventional accounts of politics, public policy and governing, these moments are not the focus. Nor are the texts or talk alone. Institutional ethnography broadens its view to the replicable forms of social action that actual situated textual activities produce. When they are put together, they *are* the acts of the institution.

The focus of institution mapping is first on individuals’ observable activities with texts in particular settings. One can begin with a particular text—such as a report, memo, letter, or legislation—but the analytic goal is to situate the text back into the action in which it is produced, circulated and read, and where it has consequences in time and space. Observing what people do with the text is next. The focus of inquiry and analytic description is on how individuals take up the text in unique yet standardized ways, reading, writing, and speaking—doing something. The work is to see these textual practices as temporally located in *sequences of action* that are happening, so the text is made present in a setting, and *occurs*. It is also to see how individuals produce their acts as standard—located in and constituent of *the sequence* and accountable in *its* terms. The focus of the research is always the institutional, so it is how individuals take up texts and coordinate their actions so they produce *the particular institution’s standard sequences*, *its* decisions, policies, and outcomes. In land use planning as other large-scale institutions, these are complex sequences that coordinate individuals’ diverse consciousnesses and activities into *institutional action*. They go on in surprisingly ordinary ways. They can be mapped graphically.

In this chapter, I describe the kind of discoveries mapping can make and illustrate ways I’ve opened up settings and texts into translocal *text-based work*

sequences to map coordinated institutional action. The illustrations are drawn from my study of planning that began with a developer's plan to build in a wooded ravine near where I lived. Mapping produced a working knowledge of these forms of activities as they were going on. I was not mapping these processes based on my own experience alone. I learned from participant observation in several settings where city work goes on; talking with city officials, planners, engineers, developers, agency and ministry officials, clerks and others, and examining the texts they were reading and using routinely. I wanted to produce an account that was useful to anyone to grasp what people do routinely when "doing planning" and that would make visible how those activities produced the "planning system" as people talked about it.

Analyzing Institutional Texts

I mapped what came to hand in the course of participating in a municipal planning process. The Notice of Public Meetings (Notice), circulated to property owners near the site, presented a peculiar "municipally known" world and organized how the reader could think to act next (Turner 2001). Analysis was oriented to how it operated in an ongoing course of action with seemingly inevitable results. The text implied that the significant event for what happened on the land would be city council's "decision." In this sequence the Staff Report was the text occurring in the setting that the Notice announced—located in the action where elected members of councils read and talk about what is in it when they make decisions in public. I thought at the time as other neighbors did, that the problem was the planners and politicians. Then I talked to planners and councillors who shared residents' concerns and wanted to make good decisions for the city. But, things were going on outside their purview. I asked questions about their work with texts and began to track and map the sequences of action and texts embedded in them that connect the work people, in multiple positions and physical locations, do day-to-day. I did not undertake formal interviews or focus groups as many institutional ethnographers do. Rather, I talked to people as a resident—in such public processes a "concerned citizen," "ratepayer" or "neighbor" and legitimate "stakeholder"—who is interested in how the process goes on and its outcomes. I wanted to discover people's work and how the process was put together in what each did. The resulting mapped sequences were not visible in the official accounts of the planning process, including how texts represented it and how planners and the news media talked about and described what went on. But these sequences shape the ground for individual actions and how participants can develop and display competence in the "system."²

Institutional ethnography views the social act as an extended dialogic sequence among actual people.³ Doing so enables the kind of “micro” level analysis of text-talk-text activity within settings that can display the articulation of local language practices to “macro” processes. This view of extended social acts also enables us to take analysis outside of a particular setting and across settings so the organization of *translocal work processes can come into view*. Examined as an actual sequence of activities coordinating people’s mind, text and talk, events that are the focus of scholarly and activists’ attention like a government’s “decision” or “policy” appear as they are—actions in which people prepare and read texts, talk, rework or reword them and, or, produce new texts that build upon prior texts. My ethnography aimed at creating an accurate map of the textual practices and local sequences *as they went on* that produced land development *decisions* and brought the institution—the so-called land use planning system—into existence. While analysis of a public hearing or decision as an extended work sequence can be done the way conversation analysis and studies of representational practices do so beautifully,⁴ I wanted to also make visible the work going on outside the public setting that seemed to make the council’s approval so inevitable. I wanted to understand just how something happened textually. I mapped the texts and what people did with them, the bits of texts people activated and what they said that was of consequence. This is a shift from viewing the text itself as doing something or as powerful in a situated text-reading to analytic description of its coordinative power translocally. Residents wanted answers to their questions: “what happens next?” “where?” and “who does it?” and to see just what “it” was they would be doing and did. I also wanted to see just how and what texts or parts of texts could be activated, how and by whom, to produce the characteristic power in these relations, and move “the process” along so inevitably.

Locating Textual Practices in Translocal Work Processes

Tracking and mapping actual text-based sequences avoids the analytic trap of categorizing or typologizing events such as “government decisions”—common analytic strategies that close down the analysis. As standard ways of work, speaking, and hearing, the mapped connected sequences of action are the actual conditions of people’s work, the “context” that constrains their actions. This conceptualization of institutional forms of action is based on how institutions actually operate. Their discovery via ethnographic mapping stands apart from such notions as “institutional arrangements” or “formal organizations and the environments in which they act.” As people read, write, and speak with others in their work routines, they produce their ac-

tions as accountable in the terms of the particular process and institution. How they produce the particular “context” and orient to it in setting-specific local practices is discoverable. Ethnography of institutions is possible because people’s actual practices that put institutions together—the daily replicable textual work practices that produce routine, standard, repeatable and teachable procedures—are observable. How you would utilize such a map is dialogic, working with others to extend one’s own and others’ situated work knowledge that is produced and operates in different sites.

Multiple forms of texts are produced and read in sequences that organize a particular institutional function. How the function is carried on, the institution’s social existence and its organizational change, rely on specialized mundane textual practices often taken for granted by those who work with them. My study analyzed these observable aspects of organization:

1. the work an individual reader does to activate a standard text (Notice of Public Meetings) in order to orient to the institutional process;
2. the coordination of several individuals’ work in talk and text in a setting (the council meeting) that produces an authorized body (“the city”) and its accountable decision;

From these settings where institutional textual practices are available to experience and observation, I mapped the translocal sequences in which they are located, identifying the discursive forms associated with the text-based work that accomplish them:

3. the local practices linking multiple individual acts via texts across settings in a legislated institutional process (consulting with agencies and boards) that connect organizations and public and private spheres of work (fig. 8.3);
4. the specialized local discourse practices or “speech genre” practices that sequentially produce such recognized steps of a planning or governing process as “consultation” (fig. 8.4)

Carrying out these analyses of coordinative organization relies on the concepts of texts and work specific to institutional ethnography’s social ontology (see Smith 2001a, 2001b) and the conception of *text-based work processes* (Turner 2003) that is central to this mapping method. I tracked sequences of text-based work and local discourse practices and indicated graphically different aspects of standardized textual organization thus:

- Solid lines indicate a direct connection of activity taking place in time and space. The lines generally indicate a chronological and temporal

sequence and organized relation left to right. Where texts and circles of activity stack vertically they occur relatively at the same time in different locations.

- Curved, horizontal oblong shapes with bottom shadow indicate the numbered steps identified in the official government brochure.
- Tinted boxes indicate texts that are produced in the action, are the product of previous work, are present in the setting, present physically in some form for the work to be done as part of the process and are the basis of the next sequences.
- Broken line boxes indicate texts that are activated, talked about, oriented to by speakers, writers, and readers in their work activities. Not physically present in the local work settings I focus on, they are *made present* by the work that people do in talk and texts as individuals refer to them or sections of them. They include legislation, policy texts, sections of official plans and so on.
- Clear circles indicate the activity performed as people take up and do something with texts is represented in the circles. These are moments where different parties are at work with the texts.

Mapping's Discoveries and Analytic Description: Figures 8.1 and 8.2

The Notice of Public Meetings—the initial text that drew me into a particular zoning process for a particular piece of land—occurs prior to the council meeting where the Notice says “a decision will be made.” I discovered in the course of my ethnography that by the time the Notice had arrived and council’s discussion of the development was scheduled, the developer, planners, engineers, and agencies had already done significant work preparing the multiple documents that accompany the developer’s application. When you go to a municipal office or look online at the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing brochure *The Subdivision Process*, you see the official representation of what goes on as a sequence of steps: “before applying,” “the application,” “consideration-consultation,” “draft approval/refusal,” “final approval and registration,” and “sale of lots.” Residents are drawn into a moment where “consideration-consultation” takes place.

My map, figure 8.1 “Processing Development Applications: a sequence of institutional action as work and texts, the residents’ participation” illustrates the actual extended work processes that accomplish the six steps represented in the brochure and locates the residents’ experience of the public process in them.

The longer I was involved in planning activities for the ravine site project, the further I got into planning relations and the more complicated I saw “the

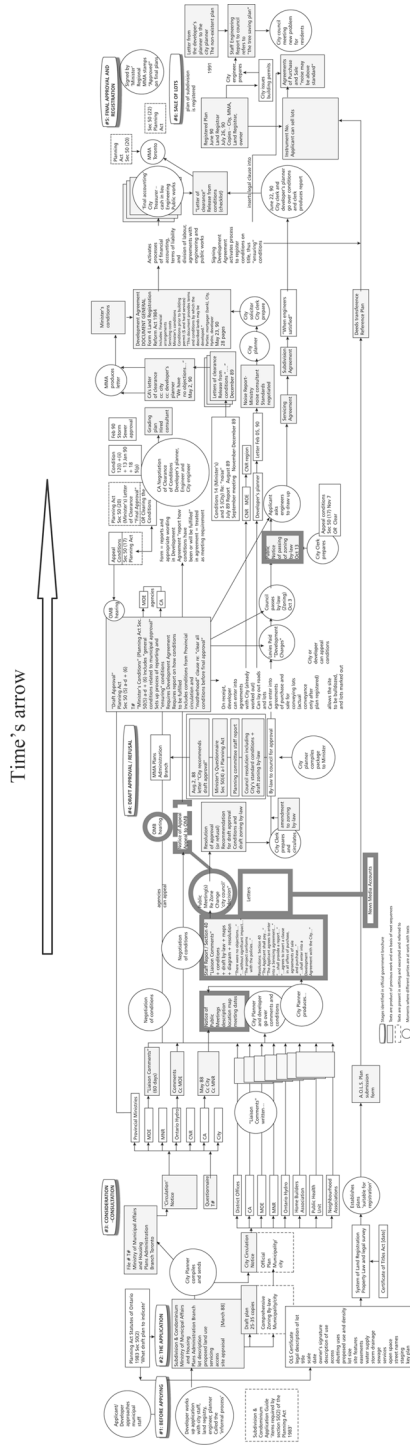


FIGURE 8.1.
Processing Development Applications: The Residents' Participation

process” actually to be. The developer’s application is a standardized simple form, but several texts are required by the provincial Planning Act to accompany it. *Its* “submission”—a municipal and provincial file made for it and a number assigned to it—formally activates the complex of work procedures constituting “the public process.” For residents entering the process only when they receive the Notice and attend the council meeting, it is difficult to find out and follow what is going on and to anticipate, and prepare to engage with, the texts and activities that actually produce the consequences to the land.

I originally did the mapping work by hand. I taped together large sheets from newsprint drawing pads and taped them to the wall in my living room. I added texts, activities, syntactical moves and phrases as I encountered them—as planners, councillors, developers, and others talked about them, they were read or at hand in public settings or they were referred to in some other text and so on—and as they went on in time. I included texts people talked about, produced, read, and wrote. The map was approximately twelve feet long by five feet high. This diagram is of course not exhaustive. There is always more that goes on than we can see and make visible in this kind of textual representation. This map is based on ethnography of the rezoning, condominium, then subdivision processes for one piece of land. But in the processes governing land use planning these mapped sequences are standard sequences of action in which people’s experience is located and they bring their activities into relation. They are required by legislation. Even those who do the work badly or with different intentions or motives must reproduce the textually standardized outcomes and operate in the same text-based work processes. “Good” and “bad” planning, so-called “green,” “sustainable,” and otherwise, all must produce the textually standardized sequences of action and outcomes in intertextual work in order for what is done to be counted as doing “planning.” The standardized texts mapped are the essential regulatory devices that bring into existence the activities constituting and organizing the multisite institution of land use planning. They organize standardized forms of action and procedures of an institution that transcends the local activities of individuals.

We can treat the complex of work processes that figure 8.1 makes visible as an institutional field of action that is organized and reproduced in these multiple coordinated work processes. Figure 8.2 “Institutional Texts and the Social Relations of Planning” could then be produced. It shows key consequential moments where texts operate outside public settings and view. Governing and ruling relations come into view as specialized translocal sequences of action involving multiple actors in multiple settings sometimes unknown to each other. The map makes visible the work processes of these diverse actors whose diverse interests are coordinated through, and in, the language practices and textual products of their work.

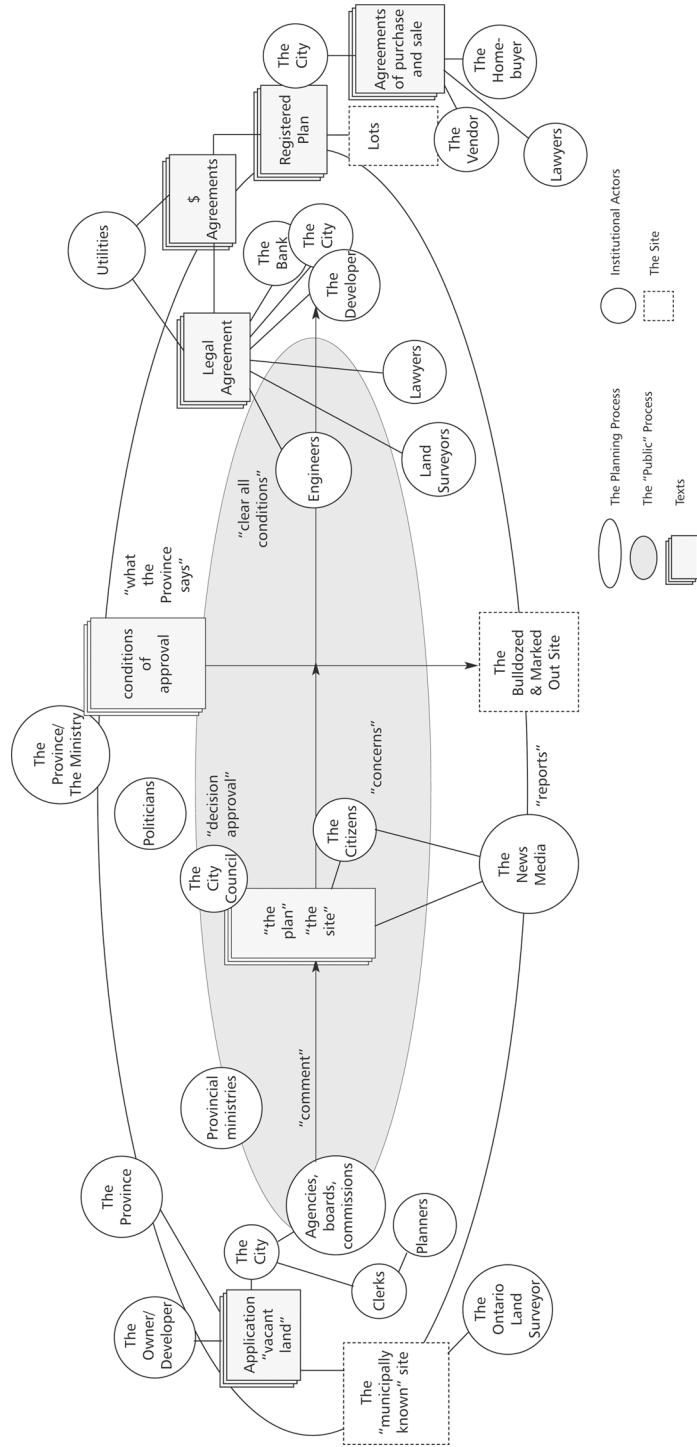


FIGURE 8.2.
Institutional Actors and the Social Relations of Planning

In figure 8.2, the larger clear oval indicates schematically the extensive complex of institutional work processes explored and mapped in figure 8.1. The shaded smaller oval indicates the public process that draws in provincial government ministries, agencies, boards, residents, and other actors into these relations as part of a democratic governing. Governing land development is carried out primarily at the municipal level. While local governing bodies have been given the responsibility for planning land use within their boundaries and for “balancing interests” in land, the work of provincial ministries plays a part and legislation is a participant in these relations. But just how is to be discovered.

Figure 8.2 maps the sphere of relations in which its key texts—replicated across the province and its municipalities—sequentially operate to pull in certain individuals to do certain kinds of work with texts and to standardize those activities in text-based sequences of work. The gray-tinted, layered oblong shapes indicate key texts that draw in particular institutional actors. The texts are produced in people’s activities in the sequences. Their titles reflect how they are spoken of by practitioners in the process. Small clear circles indicate institutional actors doing something with the texts. There is a temporal sequence of activities that is coordinated, recognizable, and reproducible as “the planning process.”

Sequentially a variety of texts stand in for the objectified “site.” Institutional actors, rather than individuals, are *positions* that are produced in the action and texts as separate from the individuals that occupy them. The “owner”/developer or his hired planner who works on his behalf, works with city employees who act as “the city.” Clerks, engineers, planners, and others work up “the developer’s application” that activates the temporal, legislated process which is this complex of text-based sequences. The application can be seen to standardize data collection and application procedures in municipal offices across the province. It draws in the prior work procedures of land surveyors, land registry, and municipal clerks. That constitutes the physical land as the “site” as it is “municipally known” for the process that follows. The textual reality of “the site” stands in for the physical land. In the application to develop the wooded Howitt Park ravine, the physical land is described as “vacant land.” The forms of “municipal knowing” already exist, are already constituted, and have their peculiar textual technologies. The forms are activated and reproduced each and every time, in every site development planning process. The land is described and becomes known in language, by numbers and mathematically drawn lines that stand in for the size and shape and contours of the physical land. This textual reality makes present the work of the licensed Ontario land surveyor who has measured and made visible the property with its boundaries.

The application pulls in the property owner, staff for the city, clerks, surveyor, ministry officials, planners and engineers in agencies and boards, among others in producing the required texts. The Staff Report, a text standing in for “the plan” and “the site,” hooks participants including those who work as reporters in the news media into the public setting of the council meeting. In a next significant “step,” what is in local discourse practice spoken of as “what the Province says” about a particular application, is produced in a text called “the Minister’s conditions.” That text relies on prior work in several sites that produces legal clauses called “conditions.” This local textual work is consequential to what happens on the land. “Minister’s conditions” in the municipal planner’s file stand in for provincial oversight and “draft” approval that allows the site to be bulldozed and lots marked out.

On the right in the figure is the “legal agreement” that is required by legislation. In local practice it is called the development agreement. Practitioners talk about it as “ensuring the conditions.” Local discourse practices observably operate the notion that legal agreements act as a mechanism to constrain developers’ private interest to profit through use of land. The development agreement, when signed and filed in the Land Registry Office, is said to register the plan and conditions “on title,” that is, attach them through the legal title or deed of ownership to what happens on the property. Having the “Registered Plan” in hand allows a municipal official to issue building permits to the developer for each of the lots that are “for sale.” A closer look at the general development agreement reveals that one of its clauses requires the developer to enter into further agreements with different city departments, utilities, and banks. Clauses can be seen to specifically authorize and activate work processes of building contractors, accountants, solicitors, and so on. All along the way in the process, the development agreement is the prospective text to which experienced participants orient. All prior activities can be seen to project into and be building the particulars of the legal agreements. Municipal land use planning is a powerful form of governing, and it is not to be thought of as simply “local government.” Nor should it be thought of as a specialized professional activity.

Mapping’s description of the organization of institutions and institutional action via their actual text-based work sequences is analytically powerful. A process that would usually be treated as a “case” dealing with an individual site, rather is opened up to map the institution’s work practices. Since development agreements are a standard textual product, reproduced across the province by the hundreds in each municipality, standard wordings of clauses are produced and kept on file and inserted into agreements routinely by clerks in municipal offices. These routine forms of action are the unseen power of large-scale organization. Descriptive particulars for each individual piece of

land as a site to be developed are inserted at the planner's request to clerks. But the particulars connecting each piece of land to its textual reality are subsumed to the operation of the sequences and forms of action. The legislated legal development agreement preauthorizes prior particular courses of action in which they are constituted, and not others. It preauthorizes for example, the negotiation of the wordings of legal condition clauses with agencies, the negotiation of costs and legal liability with ministries and municipal departments, and the negotiation of agreements with banks and not with residents. It is the operative prescriptive text, routinizing the production of its legal clauses as what gets done and is negotiated and put together in the planning process. The text's format—a set of numbered legal clauses with prefatory directional statements—organizes planners' and agency representatives' work, and the work of Ontario land surveyors, lawyers, and Land Registry Office clerks to produce the Registered Plan. Thus the function of the process and the institution is realized. It coordinates and shapes *institutional relations* via the processes and procedures for building up the text.

Mapping makes a significant finding. Where residents and agencies are drawn into a public process, the negotiation of this private agreement and its contents goes on elsewhere, outside the public view. Preliminary versions of the text's contents—legal clauses—are present in the public council meeting in the Staff Report. They pass through the public setting on the way to becoming component parts of the developer's agreement with the city. They cannot be changed or rewritten by residents here. Compiled by the municipal planner and inserted into the staff report for reading and decision in the council setting, the council may amend them but would rarely do so. They are *the city's* clauses.⁵ The clauses approved by council in the Staff Report are reworked by a Ministry official, compiled with others into a text, and sent back to the municipality as "Minister's Conditions."⁶ Back in the municipal offices, these "conditions of draft approval" hook directly into and organize the work of public employees into the subsequent production of private developers' for-profit business.

This finding is politically significant and powerful as well. The text-based moments of action identified within the shaded oval area in figure 8.2 hook institutional actors into the development of a local economy. The activities are required by law as part of the public land use planning process. But, the legal "development agreement"—that so powerfully coordinates the work of lawyers, clerks, people representing the banks, utilities, and land surveyor with the work of the developer and his private consultants—is primarily a textual product of extensive work by municipal planners.⁷ Tracking how texts operate in local practices and organize diverse actors' working relations can make visible the private processes that are invisible in the public process. On the

right in figure 8.2 are financial agreements, the registered plan, agreements of purchase and sale—legal texts that are required to be produced in the process. There is often speculation about how private land “deals” are made. Mapping brings to view how the legally required texts order and link the productive work practices of diverse institutional actors. My study focused on the work practices of planners, councillors, agencies, and residents. Among others, institutional actors include the banks, lawyers, real estate agents and the vendor of the land, as well as a category of actors who are indirectly implicated—the future home buyers of the houses that are one of the products of a development process.

The broken-lined boxes in figure 8.2 indicate what is happening to the land known as “the site.” At application we see the municipally known site made visible as text. Appropriately worded and formatted texts shape and order the talk-text practices. An institutional functional complex is put together. It is reproduced in people’s activities in the routines of “the planning process.” These are the generalized relations that are activated in individuals’ actual local practices. They are represented in official discourse as neutral and as driven by publicly produced and sanctioned policy. Mapping the text-based work that productively move the process along shows how individuals’ routine local textual practices produce a powerful coordinated complex of work sequences and the *acts of* a large scale *institution* with irrevocable consequences on the land.

We begin mapping text-based work processes in text or talk that is observable, available to experience. Institutional text or talk operates at the intersection of the translocal institutional work organization and everyday experience. The focus on text-based work can begin in the observation of talk—in conversation or interviews. (See McCoy in this book for illustration of identifying the institutional in experiential accounts.) This is the situated point of entry into the institutional relations. Attention is directed to the language that is central to social organization here. Language practices carry out the organization of the social. Language practices—oral and in text—give direct evidence of the organization that is happening and how to go forward with inquiry. We analyze the text at this intersection. For example, my analysis of the Notice of Public Meetings was undertaken some time after we residents had gone way past it in our rush to go to council. We read it “for information,” unaware of how it had organized our own action. Later I located it in the institutional processes in which it is required by law, situating the text in a sequence of action and analyzing how it organizes a readers’ attention to municipal processes and how residents formulate their intervention strategies in them (Turner 2001). This is how I’ve opened up local sites via individual text-reader interaction. In the next sections I describe mapping from texts in institutional work sequences.

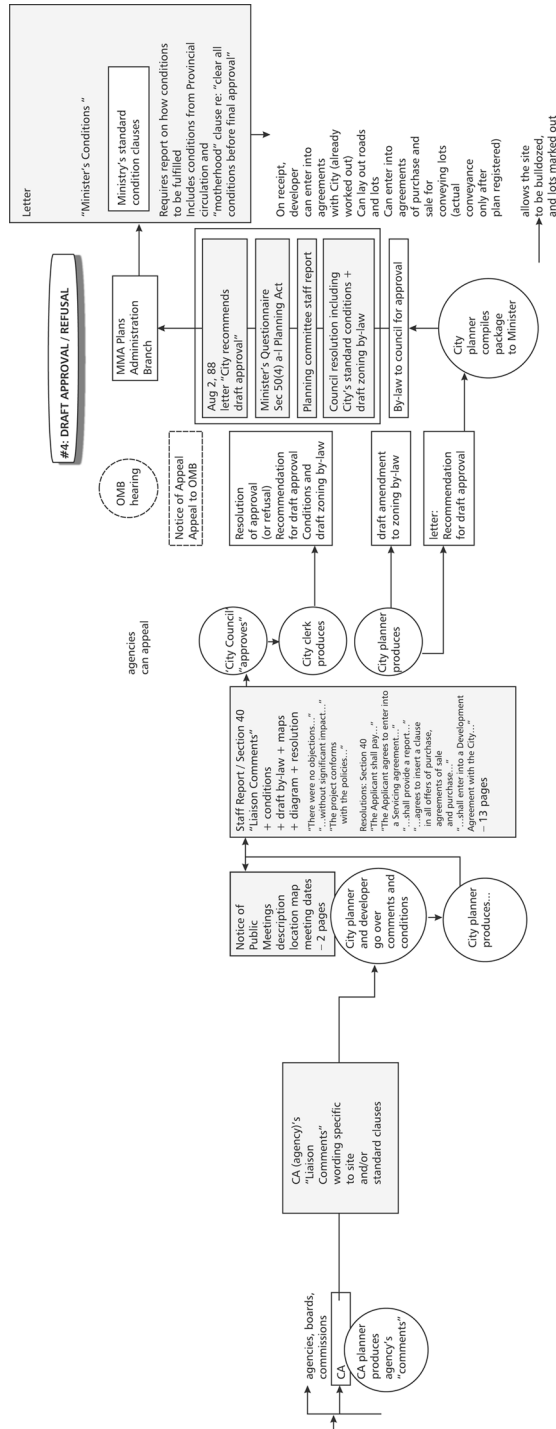


FIGURE 8.3. Consultation Sequence, Layer 1: Work and Texts "Resolving Concerns through Conditions"

Tracking a Governing Work Process via the Texts: figure 8.3⁸

An analytic strategy in institutional ethnography is to take up how a text organizes an in-common object of knowledge and the consciousnesses of individuals in a setting through their talk-text interaction. For example, I've analyzed diverse individuals' readings of a diagram called a *site plan* that is part of the Staff Report and the talk-text interaction that produces the accomplishment of the council's "act" constituting *its* decision.⁹ I am illustrating a different analytic strategy here, tracking the conservation agency's *comments* and what happens to them in a text-based work process that coordinates diverse actors' work into institutional action. Tracking text to next text in a governing sequence involves making visible people's activities with texts as they project to next settings and the work of particular actors. Planning processes are often talked about by practitioners as a *conversation* or *consultation* where different actors *have something to say*. *Consultation* is a peculiar governing work process. In land use planning consultation sequences, agencies acting "in the public interest," are asked to comment on developers' plans and their concerns taken up and resolved in the process. These sequences go on outside public view. Texts stand in for what a formal body *has to say* in the process. The residents thought the conservation agency could protect the ravine and looked for what the conservation agency *had to say* and how it could have an effect in the public process. In a city council meeting the Staff Report is the text that stands in for *the developer's plan* and includes *the city's conditions* for the council's approval of the plan. As a product of municipal staff it is a product of complex work, including that of agencies who've commented on the developer's plan.

Figure 8.3 illustrates the standard sequence of text-based interchanges required between the municipal and agency planners that accomplish commenting and conditions produced from consultation in a planning process. Different kinds of textual entities are treated as comments. A municipal planner receives diversely formatted texts from numerous agencies, city departments, and so on. Following a work sequence internal to the conservation agency, the agency planner produced a letter on agency letterhead containing these statements:

There is a ravine running along the rear of the Lots 1 through 7, and Lots 4 through 7 (inclusive) have slopes greater than 1:2.

Based on the above, we would recommend that this plan not receive draft approval until such time as the applicant *submits a satisfactory grading plan which shows the proposed building envelopes, proposed slopes and methods of controlling erosion of these slopes*.

Upon receipt of satisfactory plans, we may be in the position to recommend draft approval subject to certain conditions.

Such *comments* that diverse agencies send in various forms to the city planner hold details pertaining to the physical land as well as negotiative terms in an ongoing conversation between the agency and the city. These are not present as such in the text that elected councillors read. How the councillors “consider” a plan and are made aware in-text of the particulars of agencies’ comments, can be identified as a site for potential change in textual practice. Here, the conservation agency’s recommendation to hold back approval until a satisfactory grading plan is in hand, for example, made based on its professional expertise and provincially delegated mandate to regulate steep slopes, is not present in its original textual form in the council meeting. It thus cannot readily be visible to councillors nor be treated by them as at issue.

What produces the issue I’m pointing out is the seeming ‘sameness’ of the texts. “Submitting a satisfactory grading plan,” a future-projected act by the developer, is present in both texts and appears to be the main focus. Left out is the indication of timing of the submission in the sequence of events (the agency would have it prior to their recommending draft approval, which should come prior to council approving the plan), and at the same time, to whom the grading plan must be satisfactory becomes ambiguous. The text of this clause renders invisible its power: to shift the assessment of the grading plan from the public conservation agency and outside public purview to a private engineering consultant hired by the developer; and to move the timing of its submission and approval to later on in the process, after draft approval and after bulldozers are in the ravine (Turner 2003). In the council meeting however, clause (p) in the Staff Report compiled by the city’s planner seems to address the conservation agency requirements:

- (p) The Subdivider shall meet all requirements of the [. . .] Conservation Authority including *submission of a satisfactory grading plan which shows the proposed slopes and methods of controlling erosion on the slopes and ravine*, and shall receive a full clearance for these requirements from the [. . .] CA, prior to registration of the plan.

A closer look at how the clause operates within the text in this setting and in a translocal sequence gives us a different view. Clause (p)’s insertion in the Staff Report is consequential. Its inclusion authorizes the entire wording to be treated as a *condition*. In the council meeting, as well as in multiple future texts and settings, the clauses can be read as *the city’s* conditions. Selection and insertion is the work of the municipal planner, who has extracted the phrase I’ve italicized from the conservation agency’s letter and embedded it into the (p) format. This work is done with each letter received from “liaison circulation,” producing thirty or more clauses for the Staff Report. The clause stands in for what the agency *said*. But, operating in the organization of municipal eco-

conomic development, they are *the city's clauses*; they orient to and anticipate the city's future work processes with the developer.

In this process and similar municipal processes the developer, in this case “the subdivider,” is the active agent. “. . . shall meet” and “shall receive” projects into future activities of the developer and the city. In particular, “. . . receive full clearance” is a private work process called “clearing the conditions” that will involve the city clerk or solicitor and the developer or his representative agreeing, via a checklist not yet produced, that listed requirements are met. The standard format of the Staff Report enables the completion of the council's task in the meeting in which the text is read—councillors will perhaps not in fact actually read it in its entirety—and thus enable the process to move along via a particular textual mechanism. The legal clauses themselves are subsumed under the formal language of a *resolution*—recognizable as such and selectively read by councillors as what they can take up and upon which they can act *as a council*:

THAT the application. . . *be approved and recommended* to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, subject to the following conditions: . . . (emphasis in original)

The Staff Report to council regarding the ravine project—three legal-size pages plus a diagram titled “. . . PLAN OF SUBDIVISION”—has the resolution, *the city's standard* conditions for subdivisions and the diagram. The typeface of clauses is uniform. They can be treated uniformly, as standard, and as “covering” diverse *agencies' requirements* and *the city's standard requirements*.¹⁰

In textual analysis, we attend to both what is in the text and what individuals can be seen to do with it. Residents oriented to clauses (i) and (j), and (p, previously listed) that seem to orient to, and be able to produce, outcomes on the actual physical contours of the ravine:

- (i) The Subdivider shall grade the subdivision to the satisfaction of the City Engineer and shall ensure that sideyard slopes on each lot do not exceed 2 to 1 and that rear yard slopes do not exceed 4 to 1, to the satisfaction of the City Engineer.
- (j) The Subdivider shall retain a Professional Engineer to design and supervise the construction of any retaining wall deemed necessary by the City Engineer, and shall build any required retaining wall in the subdivisions, to the satisfaction of the City Engineer, prior to the issuance of any building permits for any of the lots in the plan.

These city clauses seem to attend to the entities “slopes” and “ravine.” However there is nothing that attends to their protection as physical terrain

intrinsically. Even where councillors agree in the public council meeting that protecting the physical ravine is a valid concern (Turner 1995), “guaranteeing” environmental protection gains cogency not in terms of the actual physical features of land that the residents are orienting to, but in the terms of these other projected sequences and relations which go on outside public view and in which we see the conservation agency’s intervention is limited and diverted.

The agency’s intervention *to protect slopes of the ravine*, represented as the produced condition clause (p), is *incorporated into* the business of building structures, not environmental protection. The shift made in the text from steep ravine slopes with contours to “side yard slopes” and “rear yard slopes” of a residential lot held up by a professionally designed retaining wall, is not just a shift from one text to another order of texts. The text provides a sufficiently standardized format and wording that makes further organizational action possible. Here, it allows the council to make decisions, passing a resolution enfolded clauses that give the appearance of providing the local government a semblance of control over what happens on the land. At the same time the move from the text to courses of action outside the setting is built into this text. Figure 8.3 also illustrates the limited action of the elected council.

Council’s approval of the resolution in the Staff Report authorizes the lifting of decision and authority out of council’s public hands and inserts it, legally, into what is preserved in governing discourse as a private relation—that between the developer and the city. *The city’s conditions* can be treated in multiple connected settings as “the same” interactional objects. Treated as “the same,” clauses can coordinate the work of people in multiple sites and move an institutional sequence along. Indeed, in the talk in the public meeting, the City Engineer can assure the council—his employer—that, as clauses (i) and (j) state, what happens on the land will be “to *his* satisfaction.” The work of the city clerk subsequent to a council meeting produces on city letterhead a text of “the city’s approval” and “the city’s conditions.” Circulated to settings of its reading outside the municipal office, the clerk’s letter enables these clauses to be treated as institutional entities, as the recognizable products of the city’s consideration, consultation, and decision. *The council’s act* and *its conditions* can be thus taken up by others in other sites—such as the developer’s consultant planner in a sequence that goes on outside public view, faxes the text of the clerk’s letter in order to pressure the conservation agency to change its comment because “the city decided”; someone in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs will receive them as the acts and products of “the city” and to be treated as what is required for producing the text that will stand in for provincial draft approval; and in subsequent municipal settings of work they will activate courses of action.

Figure 8.3 “The consultation sequence” maps a standard sequence tracked from the moment the agency submits a text to the city planner, through *its* insertion into the Staff Report in the council setting, to the textual modification and production of *it* in “Minister’s conditions”—a text that accomplishes “draft approval with conditions.” This is the text that allows the developer to proceed to bulldoze the site and mark out lots for sale while conditions are still being negotiated. Figure 8.4 “An Institutional Form of Action and Speech Genre,”¹¹ illustrates the text-based discourse sequence and the forms of language that operate in the legal agreement that links the work of the city to the private business of the developer in the subdivision agreement and, as utterances that when present in-text and read and “heard”, enable the next action and move the process along.

These are specialized local practices of the land use planning discourse. The multiple processes hooking the work of the city into that of the developer’s private profit making are present and projected in the text in the public meeting. So are these local discourse practices that are temporally located in the sequence. They are observable. The staff report orders these procedures of negotiating, accounting, and constructing and so on. The specialized discourse practices visible in this talk-text-talk sequence authorize and ensure that, according to law and planning discourse, conditions of development are imposed on developers, they are monitored, met, then cleared.

In the Staff Report in the public setting, there are several condition clauses that are requirements “to pay.” They begin in a standardized way: “The subdivider shall pay to construct. . . .” “. . . shall provide services . . .” “. . . shall pay the actual cost of installing. . . .” “. . . shall pay the cost of erecting. . . .” “. . . shall pay the city a flat rate charge. . . .” and so on. All of these clauses are anticipated by the developer and by councillors. This is the projected work of private negotiation processes as they appear in public. Each clause will activate negotiations, and calculations of “actual costs” are central items that will be negotiated. A key clause—that projects ahead to the future general development agreement document—recommends that “the city” enter into multiple legal agreements with the developer to carry out the works listed. Readily recognizable for approval by a council, this standard clause authorizes and activates sequences of negotiations involving staff in several municipal departments with outside bodies including utilities. These negotiations and financial dealings are routine matters that are already going ahead and that link the developer’s investment and the internal financial management of the municipality. They establish ongoing working relations. Mapped as actual text-based work processes, planning processes for formulating conditions of development approval and inserting them into legal agreements can be seen to tie individual developers’ business into municipal management and sideline environmental interventions.

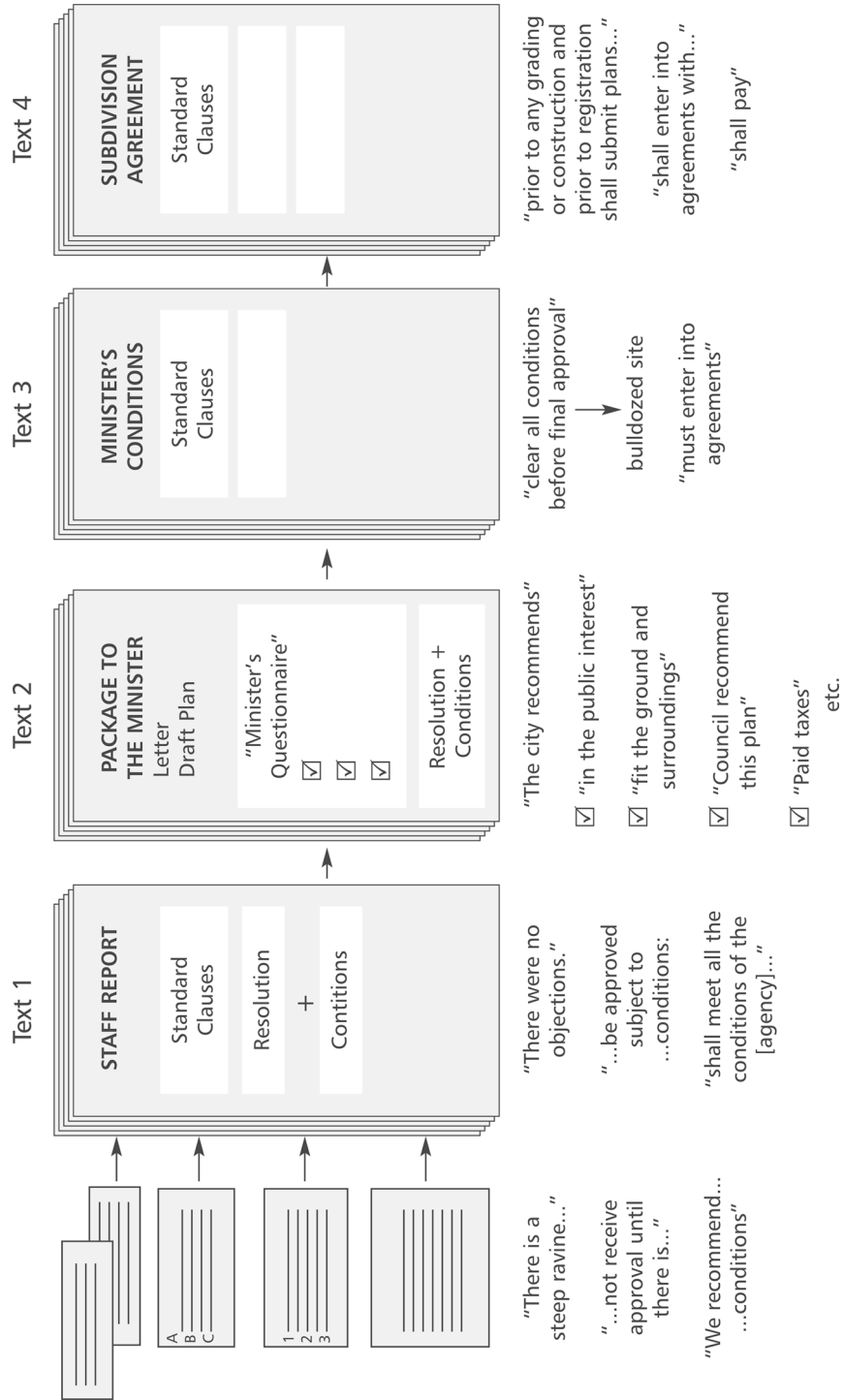


FIGURE 8.4.
An Institutional Form of Action and Speech Genre: Layer 3

Conclusion

Operationalizing in inquiry the conception of the significance of texts in the organization of standardized sequences of work and institutions is central to institutional ethnography. It is a move that cannot be overemphasized. Tracking a sequence of text-based work gives us a way to not just map position locations within an institution but to make visible the power of texts to organize what is getting done and how. We sociologists would ordinarily begin with a concept of an institution—such as a notion of “the planning system” or “the economy” or “political decisions” and their actors, sites and policies that may be known to us. We would take for granted what we know about governments, resident groups, and developers and what happens in development or policy processes. Or we would engage with land planning discourse in such a way that its mundane local practices as they go on and residents would encounter them in public settings, would not appear.

Institutional ethnographers, however, bring into question what is commonly known, and examine the conceptual and textual work that in actual local practices bring commonly known institutional entities into existence and coordinate large scale organization. “Work” is a concept that orients us to the action as it goes on and to texts as situated constituents in and of that action, *occurring* as part of actual local practices. The illustrations I’ve given of the examination of institutional texts and their operation in text-based work sequences were extracted from a larger study and its accounts of how an institution works as people’s observable practices in talk and text in multiple sites. Opening up inquiry into governing processes via texts situated in the actual action as it goes on, and mapping what one discovers as *text-based work sequences*, can make visible the current dynamic forms of institutional action and their discourse practices so that we may anticipate them and better develop intervention strategies that can work in them. I’ve presented an overview of what mapping translocal processes looks like and how texts are examined in an ethnographic practice that understands them as integral to the action and coordination of diverse work across settings and in time.

The maps, as accounts of how texts are integral to institutional action as the particular organization of text-based work processes, are useful for those whose work is organized in these work processes and for others who intervene in them. The dialogic process of working with the maps to account for large-scale work organization and local policy consequences, engages various participants in inquiry and exploration of their work knowledge and its constraints on activities. In the context of economic and political restructuring, and their concomitant reorganization of specialized work processes, collaborative institution mapping may bring into view the specific aspects of

institutional changes that are being planned and are taking place and their consequences for people's work and institutional outcomes. It is the particular forms of institutional action and how they carry out in observable ways the institutional function across localities with multiple peculiar, and sometimes devastating consequences, that demand our attention as inquirers.

Notes

1. This work was originally presented as a plenary talk entitled "Mapping an Institutional Field of Action" to the Annual Institutional Ethnography Conference at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, June 1–3, 2001. Thanks to Marjorie DeVault for the opportunity and to those who have commented on this work. It is also part of a larger study (Turner 2003). Many thanks to Dorothy Smith and Tim Diamond who read an earlier version of this chapter and provided helpful editorial suggestions.

2. A city planning director told me that one of the biggest problems in municipalities was that new graduates of planning schools did not have a grasp of the essential work required of municipal land use planners—processing developers' applications.

3. This view follows and extends the theoretical work of George Herbert Mead (1962), M. M. Bakhtin (1986) and V .I. Volosinov (1973) whose work develops a social ontology at the level of individual interaction, where we can observe, and thus examine and make visible, people's actual temporal coordination of consciousnesses and other practices. This social ontology is advanced through the posing of a distinctive *inter-individual territory*.

4. See Bogen and Lynch (1989), Lynch and Bogen (1996) for excellent examples; also see Lynch's (1983) analysis of the textual practices and graphic technologies that take up and measure natural phenomena and produce them through a series of graphical renderings as scientific objects; and Lucy Suchman's treatment of whiteboards in the constitution of an in-common scientific knowledge, and as embedded in a network of activities (1988). My 1995 is an ethnographic analysis of the decision-making process in a city council meeting that aims to open up the setting beyond the boundaries of analyzing the accomplishment of discourse and social order within it.

5. Municipalities and agencies commonly have a database of legal clauses from which appropriate clauses can be selected and inserted into reports. They will be readily accessible to planners and planning clerks for their compilation and clerical work, and recognizable by councillors who must "consider" them as part of their routine work.

6. In Ontario this process has been severely streamlined by the delegation of responsibility for draft approval to independent cities and municipalities. At the same time, the number of municipalities has been reduced through amalgamations.

7. The restructuring of municipalities in Ontario continues to shift the burden of work in these processes and their successful approval to the municipal planning staff. At the same time as the provincial government guidelines require that the municipali-

ties assist developers by providing “early consultation” to “ensure . . . early dispute resolution” with agencies (<http://www.mmah.gov.on.ca/business/plansys/chap-03-e.asp>), municipalities themselves set out their own forms of being “open for business” and providing “streamlined” services and incentives to developers, industry, and businesses.

8. Figure 3 and 4 titles mention a “layer”—1 and 3 respectively. This was relevant in a longer analysis (Turner 2003), where the consultation sequence is mapped in three layers. Layer 1, figure 3, maps the sequence of activities known in planning discourse as “resolving concerns through conditions.” Layer 2, whose representation I have not included in this chapter, shows the actual textual formats and work that transforms the agency’s “comments” into texts that are treated as “conditions.” Layer 3, figure 4, begins to map the discourse moves, as in-text utterances, that comprise an institutional form of action and practices of a specialized speech genre.

9. I have analyzed this accomplishment as an extended sequence of coordinated work-text-work that has a standard form, drawing on some of the conventions of conversation analysis in order to analyze selected portions of a transcript of a city council meeting discussion. I placed emphasis on the operation of the text in coordinating the diverse participants’ consciousnesses and utterances into the single action of ‘the council.’ This included the accomplishment of *its* act via a vote and other clerical practices constituting *its* decision, as well as the particular language practices that connect the present action to a larger active discourse of planning and to simultaneous and future activities happening outside the council setting (Turner 1995, 2003).

10. The description offered here is a much abbreviated version. See Turner 2003, chapter 8 for a full treatment.

11. This illustrates how we might observe practices that have been addressed by V. I. Volosinov’s concept of *reported speech* and the problem of *hybrid utterances* according to M. M. Bakhtin. Dorothy Smith addresses the dynamics of *hierarchical intertextuality* in this volume. All three highlight for us the power of complex, organized everyday language practices that subsume, while making present, the “voices” and “utterances” of others. Each theorizes and emphasizes the necessity for social researchers to inquire into the particularity of these forms of action in different social, or institutional, spheres of action.

